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# **Gender mainstreaming in the Danish international development agency (Danida) - a panacea for development?**

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# **Gender mainstreaming in the Danish international development agency (Danida) - a panacea for development?**

Diana Højlund Madsen

## **ABSTRACT**

In 1995 with the Beijing Platform for Action (BFA), gender mainstreaming was adopted as the main strategy guiding development work – also for Danida (Danish Development Assistance). However, after more than twenty years, few results of gender mainstreaming can be identified. Combining theoretical insights from the feminist literature on gender mainstreaming and the new institutionalist turn, the gendered institutional structures inside Danida are analysed and the ‘black-box’ within which processes of gender mainstreaming take place opened up. It is argued that despite of the introduction of a new strategic framework or changes at the formal level, the underlying informal institutional barriers in Danida are not being addressed – the organisational culture is characterised by a widespread gender (mainstreaming) fatigue and negative personal attitudes towards gender issues (by some), and the same institutional barriers can be identified over time indicating that very little learning actually takes place. The solutions proposed seem to be more of the same – new gender equality strategies / frameworks and the development of new tools for gender mainstreaming; a somewhat ‘technical’ stance on gender mainstreaming which seems to have lost its political edge in translation.

**Key words:** Danish International Development Agency (Danida), development aid, feminist institutionalism, gender equality, gender mainstreaming and transformation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gender mainstreaming and gender equality are promoted in the work of the Danish International Development Agency (Danida) through development aid, and is therefore of great importance. With its goals of transformation, gender equality and women’s empowerment, gender mainstreaming is a central axis in the Danish development discourse, policy and practice. With the release of the 2004 gender strategy, gender mainstreaming has become fully integrated in the development language of Danida and is expected to guide all policies and the implementation of all programmes and projects. In addition, the work on a new strategic framework on gender for Danish development aid has sparked a debate about gender mainstreaming and its ability to promote gender equality and

women's empowerment. Generally, the actual implementation of gender mainstreaming has left much to be desired (Moser & Moser 2005) – gender mainstreaming has proven difficult to translate from theory into practice and much lip service has been paid to it with very limited results, if any at all. The lack of gender mainstreaming results also seems to apply to the Danish development aid and Danida; this is evident in evaluation reports (Cowi 2008; Danida Evaluation Study 2013) and other studies (Højlund Madsen; 2010).

The strategy of gender mainstreaming and its ability to bring about transformation are widely contested. Recent work on gender mainstreaming (Parpart 2013) suggests that the failures of gender mainstreaming could be attributed to the failure to address underlying institutional norms and opposition and an overtly optimistic view on what 'policy' and political strategies, including gender mainstreaming, can do. Thus, there is a need to not only address the processes of evaporation of gender mainstreaming but also to address the concept itself and its basic underlying assumptions or, as it has been formulated by Van Eerdewijk and Davids, to "look beyond the mythical beast" of gender mainstreaming (Van Eerdewijk & Davids 2014; 3). Through combining theoretical insights on gender mainstreaming and institutional development, the background for this evaporation is explored; however, the paper also addresses the gendered institutional structures inside Danida and opens up the 'black-box' within which processes of gender mainstreaming take place. As stated by Krook and Mackay: "On the one hand, formal and informal institutions shape and constrain gendered political behaviour, defining the parameters of what action is possible and intelligible. On the other hand, political institutions are themselves constituted by these embodied social practices of 'doing gender' on a daily basis" (Krook & Mackay 2011, 7).

The main research questions to be scrutinised in this article are: What are the gendered institutional barriers for gender mainstreaming? And, in relation to this, how can institutional learning and institutional change take place in a pro gender mainstreaming manner? The main argument is that despite the introduction of a new strategic framework or changes at the formal level, the underlying informal institutional barriers are not being addressed – the organisational culture is characterised by a widespread gender (mainstreaming) fatigue and negative personal attitudes towards gender issues (by some). Moreover, from a number of contradicting results of evaluations carried out since the first gender policy paper was launched in 1987, the same institutional barriers can be identified over a period of time; this indicates that very little learning actually takes place, thus leaving few possibilities for institutional change. The solutions proposed seem to be more of the same – new gender equality strategies / frameworks and the development of new tools for gender

mainstreaming; a somewhat ‘instrumental’ and ‘technical’ take on gender mainstreaming.

The analysis will take its point of departure in the new strategic framework on gender equality, but I will draw on historical perspectives on the introduction of gender mainstreaming and the gendered institutional barriers. The article is based on reports by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Danish Ministry for Gender Equality from 2003 and onwards, women’s / gender strategies from The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Danida) (1987; 1993; 2004 and 2014) - mainly focusing on the more recent one from 2014, evaluations of gender mainstreaming in Danida (Danida; 2008; 2013 and 2016), and my own interviews with six Danida employees in Copenhagen who worked with gender mainstreaming and gender equality during two periods – 2007/2008 (when the 2004 gender equality strategy had just been launched) and 2013 (when the work on the new strategic framework on gender equality took place).

The article is structured into five sections. The first section is the introduction. The second section (re)conceptualises gender mainstreaming and institutional change. The third section focuses on the historical context of gender mainstreaming and gender equality in Danida. The fourth section is the analysis of gender mainstreaming and the new gender equality framework. The final section has some concluding comments.

## **(RE)CONCEPTUALISING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**

In this section, the concept of ‘gender mainstreaming’ will be defined, and different approaches to gender and institutional development will be introduced. The central concept of opposition to pro-gender-equal changes is presented, followed by a discussion as regards the extent to which bureaucracies are actually able to facilitate changes in a more gender-equal direction. The UN defines gender mainstreaming as: “Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality” (ECOSOC July 1997, Chapter IV). However, the concept was coined by Jahan in more theoretical terms and defined in an ‘integrationist’ and ‘agenda-setting’ version (Jahan 1995). The ‘integrationist’ approach incorporates gender in existing development paradigms without

transforming the development agenda; the strategy informing this approach is one of extending women's issues and gender into a broad spectrum of sectors and programmes. Thus, gender issues are integrated in as many sectors and programmes as possible without changing the priorities as regards the choice of sector or programme. This approach to gender mainstreaming seems to be inspired by the thinking of WID (Women-In-Development); this is seen in its focus on 'integration' or women in development – a form of infusion of women and gender which may promote incremental change from within.

The 'agenda-setting' approach, on the other hand, implies a transformation of the development agenda from a gender perspective. The participation of women in the decision-making processes about priorities is seen as fundamental for bringing about change and reorientation of existing priorities or of the mainstream. This approach is rather inspired by the GAD (Gender-And-Development) thinking which aims at transforming the gendered structures. This calls for changes at the discursive as well as the institutional level and aims at bringing about the desired transformation. Jahan herself advocates for the latter version of gender mainstreaming (Jahan 1995). The first version of gender mainstreaming could be described as a more 'technocratic' and perhaps also 'bureaucratic' version, whereas the latter seems to be moving in a more 'participatory' and 'democratic' direction. In the latter version, the voices of women's organisations are part of the 'agenda-setting' process. However, research on gender mainstreaming have demonstrated (Arnfred 2003; Højlund Madsen 2010, 2011, 2012; Jahan 1995; Poulsen 2006) that the 'agenda-setting' version of gender mainstreaming is more ideological and more difficult to implement as opposed to the more pragmatic model of the 'integrationist' version which can often be identified in practice in development institutions.

'Feminist institutionalism' embraces different versions. This article applies a more eclectic approach by combining different versions – mainly organisational but to some extent also historical versions. The organisational version emphasises the double-sided relationship between institutions and individual action and understanding institutions as formal as well as informal rules and procedures – the latter with a specific focus on "symbol systems, cognitive scripts and moral templates that provide the frames of meaning guiding human behaviour" (Krook & Mackay 2011; 9). The historical version adds a perspective of time and emphasises the development of institutional change over time or sometimes the lack of institutional change. Despite the differences in feminist institutionalisms, studies within the field acknowledge the difference between formal and informal institutions. In her work, Waylen refers to the definitions of Helmke and Levitsky on understanding institutions as "rules and procedures (both formal and informal) that structure social interaction by constraining and enabling actors' behaviour" (Waylen 2013; 114). Furthermore,

she defines (again with reference to these authors) informal institutions as “socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels” in opposition to formal rules defined as “rules and procedures, that are created, communicated and enforced through channels which are widely accepted as official”, (Waylen 2013; 114). In aiming to explain why informal rules exist: “...some hypothesize that informal rules emerge when formal institutions are incomplete; when actors prefer, but cannot achieve, a formal institutional solution; or when actors are pursuing goals that are not publicly acceptable, either because they are unlikely to stand the test of public scrutiny, or will attract international condemnation”, (Krook & Mackay 2011; 11). This suggests that informal rules will often work against or parallel with formal rules as they often attempt to preserve the status quo and maintain existing power structures. This suggests a high degree of institutional inertia and that gendered institutional barriers might be very persistent and difficult to change. These particular types of gendered institutional barriers will be explored in detail in the article.

However, it is important to bear in mind the possibilities for institutional change. In their work Mahoney and Thelen (2010) introduce a framework for models of gradual institutional change in line with the thinking of feminist institutionalism. This model has four types of institutional change – ‘displacement’, ‘layering’, ‘drift’ and ‘conversion’. Displacement refers to the replacement of existing rules with new ones either abruptly or as a more slow process where new institutions compete with existing ones. Layering occurs when new rules are attached to existing ones in the form of revisions, attachments and amendments and is therefore a less radical model of change. Mahoney and Thelen state that “Processes of layering often takes place when institutional challengers lack the capacity to actually change the existing rules...They instead work with the existing system by adding new rules on top of or alongside old ones. While defenders of the status quo may be able to preserve the original rules, they are unable to prevent the introduction of amendments and modifications” (Mahoney and Thelen 2010; 17). Mahoney and Thelen also argue that with ‘layering’ veto possibilities are high, as there are actors with access to the institutional means to block change and possibilities for discretion in interpretation and enforcement are low with this type of change. Drift involves when rules remains the same but their impact changes due to external factors, and conversion when the rules are formally the same but are interpreted and enacted in new ways (ibid).

An article on gender mainstreaming in a UN office in South Africa (Joseph, Gouws & Parpart 2011) combines the ‘gendered archaeology’ with ‘deep structures’ and advocates for a ‘transformative gender mainstreaming model’. The model is based on a strong mandate for transformation and intends to address the masculinist institutional structures, the establishment of

transformational structures within the institution – a transformation unit and a gender mainstreaming unit – and the setting up of “safe places’ where people can explore and practice new ways of thinking and being” (Joseph, Gouws and Parpart 2011; 17). This should form a basis for a ‘gendered archaeological investigation’ and for tackling the ‘deep structures’. In the South African case any positive institutional changes were hampered by a rather sexist discriminatory culture practised by (some of) the male senior staff. ‘Getting the Institutions Right for Women’ is the phrase coined by Goetz (Goetz 1995) to underline the need for addressing the needs of women within different institutional contexts. Goetz argues that there is a need to ‘work backwards’ from the gendered outcomes produced by institutions and study the gender (mainstreaming) processes and gender interests within the institutions. She is one of the pioneers of feminist institutionalism and introduced the notion of ‘gendered archaeology’. The phrase was later (Højlund Madsen 2010) adjusted or adapted into ‘Getting the institutions right for gender mainstreaming’, indicating its present relevance for the notion that approaches to development work may change, but institutions and the need for institutional development in more women and gender-friendly directions persist. Rao and Kelleher (Rao & Kelleher 2005) have also made a significant contribution to feminist institutionalism with their notion of gendered ‘deep structures’ meaning the “...collection of taken-for-granted values, and ways of thinking and working, that underlie decision making and action” (Rao & Kelleher 2005; 64). The factors believed to hamper equal participation by women in institutions are: (lack of) political access, (lack of) accountability systems, cultural systems (the gendered division of labour) and cognitive structures (gender biased norms and understandings). When addressing the discriminatory structures within institutions, the formal rules are only the ‘tip of the iceberg’. However, Rao and Kelleher argue that these structures can be changed by a “web of five spheres in which power can be generated to move an organisation towards transformation. These five spheres are: general politics; organisational politics; institutional culture; organisational process and programmatic intervention” (Rao & Kelleher 2005; 65).

Other works focus more specifically on opposition and question to what extent bureaucracies as institutions are in a position to promote gendered transformation or in other words are “...drivers or followers of change” (Standing 2004; 83). Previous research (Lotherington 1991) on the UN organisations FAO and ILO<sup>1</sup> set up a typology of individual ‘bureaucratic responses’ towards (at that time) WID policies; this might also be of relevance to gender mainstreaming. The typology of bureaucrats and their related responses include: ‘Innovators’; ‘Loyal Bureaucrats’; ‘Hesitators’ and

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<sup>1</sup> FAO is the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and ILO is the International Labour Organisation of the United Nation.



‘Hardliners’. The first two groups are supportive of WID policies. The ‘Innovators’ are at the forefront and contribute to the development of alternative policies that may lead to substantial changes, and the ‘Loyal Bureaucrats’ are the Weberian ideal bureaucrats and potentially also supporters of WID policy on the conditions that a policy is in place and the right tools are made available. The last two groups are of a more dubious nature in their support or rather in their lack of support. The ‘Hesitators’ are unwilling to implement WID policies for a vast number of reasons for example lack of expertise or prestige and / or encountering opposition, whilst the ‘Hardliners’ are in opposition to WID policies and potentially feel threatened by these. This work indicates that bureaucracy is a diverse structure and not a monolith which can only facilitate change under certain circumstances – that is, with the ‘take-over’ of ‘Innovators’ and ‘Loyal Bureaucrats’ – or using another terminology: femocrats.

Benschop & Verloo (Benschop & Verloo 2006) also deal with the role of bureaucracy in gender mainstreaming. In the article entitled “*Sisyphus’ Sisters: Can Gender mainstreaming Escape the Genderedness of Organizations?*” (ibid) they describe how a process of the gender mainstreaming of a Flemish ministry in Belgium, which they facilitated, proved to illustrate that in essence mainstreaming is a political process and as such a battle of competing interests and a site of opposition. In this context, it became clear that the initial definition of a ‘gender problem’ was not shared by everybody, and that there was an attempt to select the apparently least controversial goal, ‘gender neutrality’, and topic, ‘representation’, to deal with and to refusing to debate the analysis of the topic offered by the facilitators. The answer to the question posed in the title of the article is clearly ‘No’, but it is also clear that as Sisyphus’ Sisters, it will be possible to start from a slightly improved position and not end up like Sisyphus himself (Benschop & Verloo 2006).

In other work by Roggeband & Verloo (Roggeband & Verloo 2006) on gender impact assessments in the Netherlands, they concluded that contrary to the common reference to the need for ‘top’-commitment on gender mainstreaming, (more) ‘ground’-commitment is needed. Although civil servants also commented on some positive aspects of gender impact assessments in the evaluation, as referred to in the article (ibid), the fact that that policy makers neglected the gender impact assessments as they saw them as “uncomfortable, costly and of little use” (Roggeband & Verloo 2006; 627), was not urging the civil servants to make these. In addition, since Dutch top bureaucrats are often exchanged, creating a lack of stability within bureaucracies, Roggeband and Verloo launched the notion of ‘liquid bureaucracy’, which refers to “rapidly changing actors, positions and competences” (Roggeband & Verloo 2006; 628). On the one hand, this ever changing condition might be a window of opportunity for ‘Innovators’, but on the other hand, this ‘liquidity’ or ever-changing

bureaucracy makes it more difficult to hold bureaucrats accountable for the (lack of) achievements on gender mainstreaming and to accumulate learning and ‘best practices’ on gender mainstreaming (Mergaert; 2012). As a consequence, according to Roggeband and Verloo, it becomes difficult to facilitate change from within bureaucracies within the existing ‘rules of the game’ of these bureaucracies.

Development institutions, including Danida, are important actors to look into since they inevitably play a role in translating central concepts such as gender mainstreaming. The feminist institutionalist perspective advocates for a focus on both formal and informal rules and norms whereas the latter – in the case of Danida – is working against the introduction of new gender equality strategies / frameworks and gender tools in the form of negative attitudes towards gender perspectives. Although institutions matter, people within institutions also matter, and as a consequence the role of bureaucracies like Danida and different responses to the introduction of new gender equality strategies / frameworks and the opposition towards these call for closer scrutiny.

## **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND GENDER EQUALITY**

Any study of gender mainstreaming in Danida should pay attention to the historical trajectories on women / gender in line with the feminist historical institutionalism. This section elaborates on the historical background of the introduction of gender mainstreaming in Danida<sup>2</sup> – with a specific emphasis on the gendered (historical) institutional barriers and possibilities for change. The adoption of gender mainstreaming in Danida should not be seen in isolation but as part of a historical context in which focus is shifted from Women-In-Development (WID) to Gender-And-Development (GAD) and gender mainstreaming. In Danida, the first policy paper on women in development was introduced rather late – namely in 1987, following the end of the UN decade for

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<sup>2</sup> In 1962 Denmark started its first bilateral development cooperation. In 1971 it was named Danida. In the 1980s, cross-cutting issues such as gender equality were put on the agenda in Danish development cooperation. In the 1990s, Danida became an integrated part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Danish development aid became a part of Danish foreign policy and in time development aid has played an increasingly larger role in Danish foreign policy, for example in relation to conflict areas such as Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, issues of women and gender have also played a role in the Danish development aid. In 2012, a new strategy for Danish development aid “The Right to a Better Life” was launched with a main focus on four areas – human rights and democracy, green growth, social progress and stability / protection. Thus, issues of women / gender and gender mainstreaming are related to these areas, particularly the first area.

women in 1985 (19 years later than in Sweden and 12 years later than in Norway). Already from the beginning, it is stated that "...it seems to have been a tiresome affair to get women's conditions on the aid agenda" (Engberg-Pedersen 2004; 7). Engberg-Pedersen does not provide a clear explanation for this, but states that this might be explained by a lack of interest and expertise from the north (Danida) and from the south (the recipient countries); moreover, focus was on other (more important) economic and political goals than the role of third world women in development. However, the WID policy did not include any specific reference to mainstreaming.

The gender mainstreaming vocabulary first appeared in a discussion paper from 1992 preparing the ground for the development of a new Danida strategy in 1993 within an overall Women-In-Development (WID) framework. The 1993 version stressed that mainstreaming is a part of a two-pronged strategy and that mainstreaming within the WID framework was to be understood as the mainstreaming of women's interests within development aid in general but also in relation to specific women-centred project activities: "mainstreaming means that women must be accorded a place in aid on a par with that of men, in addition to rather than marginalising women's interest in minor projects or project components" (Danida 1993; 13). In 1994, evaluation of the Danida WID policy was initiated. The results of the evaluation pointed towards serious shortcomings – which generally pointed at "slow" changes in the internal structures of Danida, a general "lack of integration of WID and gender analysis", a limited focus on "women as beneficiaries" (only), the lack of available data on monitoring and evaluation and a call for the inclusion of gender expertise, although it is mentioned that this in itself would not be sufficient to promote change (Danida; 1994).

The elaboration of a new gender strategy in 2004 might be explained by two factors. One of these was the changes related to the international development which placed a stronger emphasis on gender mainstreaming with the Beijing Platform for Action from 1995 and the Beijing +5 conference in 2000 and the formulation of women's empowerment and gender equality as one of the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015. The second factor was the seemingly poor results achieved by Danida within the area of gender mainstreaming and gender equality. In the gender equality strategy of 2004 it was stated that "...good policy intentions in the area of gender equality are often not implemented satisfactorily in practice. This may be a result of insufficient planning, inadequate technical expertise, insufficient follow-up, inadequate support from the middle and upper management in donor organisations, and insufficient resources", (Danida 2004; 27). All barriers similar to those mentioned in the 1994 evaluation resulted in a call for an improvement of the statistical basis for intervention, the establishment of strategic partnerships and

coordination with relevant partners, increased competence development and the development of tools and methods within Danida and at national levels - initiatives included in the 2004 gender strategy.

With the launch of a new Danida strategy on gender in 2004, “Gender Equality in Danish Development Cooperation”, gender mainstreaming was fully adopted in the Danida development language. In the 2004 strategy, mainstreaming is considered to be a methodological approach and is defined as “considering men’s and women’s wishes, needs and experiences in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and efforts. At all levels, an assessment of men’s and women’s rights, access to resources and decision-making can provide guidance for mainstreaming efforts” (Danida 2004; 11). Gender mainstreaming was adopted as part of a two-pronged methodological approach which included a focus on “special interventions” (ibid) in line with the introduction of gender mainstreaming in the 1993 Danida strategy.

The notion of gender mainstreaming presented in the strategy is somewhat ‘neutral’ and presents gender mainstreaming as ‘instrumental’ and ‘technical’ with a focus on gender mainstreaming as a “methodological approach”; the guiding question formulated is “how do we secure the maximum possible benefit for the (poor) women and men from a given effort”, and not as a political strategy. A political strategy which by its very nature includes dealing with the power relations between women and men and the gendered institutions producing these power relations to ensure the institutionalisation of gender, which is the very essence of gender mainstreaming. In this version, adopting the GAD thinking has become synonymous with the inclusion of both men and women as beneficiaries of development aid in development processes. Since 2004, a strong rhetorical commitment for gender issues has been expressed in publications and at official occasions. An example of this escalation (at least at the rhetorical level) is the Africa strategy from 2007, indicating a “focus on gender equality to secure women’s rights and create growth” and a commitment to strengthening the involvement of women in the economic, political and social spheres, an increase in development aid earmarked for promoting gender equality and the need for stressing the support for work on gender equality in relation to the political dialogue and the poverty reduction strategies. Other examples are publications on the priorities of Danida set forth in the development policy from 2006 (and onwards) which mentions that focus is on “women - a driving force for development” and also allocates economic resources for the work on women and gender equality. However, the focus on women seems to have more to do with a WID approach and a focus on ‘efficiency’ in relation to (economic) development with an emphasis of “growth” and “development”, inspired by the World Bank rhetoric and the notion of ‘smart economics’.

## **GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND THE NEW GENDER EQUALITY FRAMEWORK**

The analysis focuses on the institutional set-up in Danida and the barriers for institutional development in Danida. Drawing on the theoretical insights from feminist institutionalism, I argue that gender mainstreaming is embedded in an institutional straitjacket from which it needs to escape before the promised transformation of gender relations may occur.

A new strategic framework on gender has recently been launched in Danida. It was presented to the programme committee on 27 June 2013; however, due to political changes it has been somewhat delayed<sup>3</sup>. In this framework, the main emphasis is on a human rights-based approach and a more “strategic approach”, which implies selecting intervention areas within country programmes in which the greatest gender impact is envisaged. The framework emphasises that “the strategic approach does not replace gender mainstreaming” (Danida 2014; 12); however, mainstreaming should be combined with other strategies using a “mix of mainstreaming, targeted measures and policy dialogue on gender equality with national governments” (Danida 2014; 13) based on a gender analysis on how gender equality may be tackled most effectively in the partner country. However, a working paper on gender mainstreaming in the Nordic development agencies refers to Danida and states that “according to a gender adviser [in Danida], there are even questions as to whether gender mainstreaming is an effective approach to be adopted in the subsequent strategy” (UNU-WIDER 2012; 12). This seems to be related to the poor results in gender mainstreaming. The gender (mainstreaming) language in Danida offers some possibilities for tapping into existing discursive frameworks, although the language itself has its shortcomings and seems to be somewhat watered down with the less ambitious goals for gender mainstreaming set forth in the new strategy. With the new strategic framework, gender mainstreaming will be in line with the ‘integrationist’ version and WID thinking, somewhat working against the core of gender mainstreaming with a focus on a gender perspective at all levels, and all phases adopted by all people. However, according to Danida’s staff, the new strategy is more realistic, as mainstreaming is supposed to be carried out in a more “intelligent and selective way” (Danida 2013; own interviews), taking a more focussed approach. However, the gender (mainstreaming) language does seem to represent a change, as focus is now on a broader understanding of gender linked to gender and diversity, and as, for the first time, it includes perspectives on sexual orientation.

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<sup>3</sup> The Minister for Development has been replaced a few times (at the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014) as two new Ministers for Development were appointed within a short time span.

In practice, the actual adoption or implementation of gender mainstreaming seems to be quite patchy. As stated in an evaluation report: "...The overall evidence of results has been found to be quite scattered. Achievements that can be attributed to mainstreaming efforts often have to be derived indirectly because they are not systematically documented" (Cowi 2008; 41). Referring to this review, the new strategic framework on gender equality explains that there was "a recurring lack of specific objectives, and indicators for gender equality and progress were therefore not monitored consistently during programme implementation and were poorly documented", (Danida 2014; 10). This was also underlined in 2012: "...Gender mainstreaming has not been systematically implemented, the root cause being obstacles relating to institutional organisation" (UNU-WIDER 2012; 10). In a review of existing evaluations of Danida programmes, it also became apparent that there were "Uneven levels of integration of gender equality" (Danida Evaluation Study 2013; 8), and a word count of selected evaluation documents revealed that the word 'mainstreaming' (560 times) was not mentioned often compared to 'women' (4056 times), men (404 times) and 'gender' (2505 times). This seems to suggest that most of the development activities in this field were related to women (only). However, gender may be mainstreamed without an actual mentioning of the word 'mainstreaming', thus, this word count alone does not indicate that gender mainstreaming has not occurred. The initiation of specific initiatives for women may be a result of gender analysis. However, this does not seem to be the case, as Danida gender staff mention that the background for trying to re-orient mainstreaming is the fact that in many cases the programme document states: "Gender is mainstreamed throughout"; and this is not followed by an elaboration or a detailed description of the actions involved. At a meeting in Danida, (Danida 28/10 2013) Danida staff stressed the difficulty involved in documenting any results of gender mainstreaming, which is a requirement within all areas of development aid; moreover, they pointed to the fact that gender mainstreaming seems to be 'drowning' in the competition with other - apparently more important - agendas. In a new evaluation study (Danida Evaluation Study 2016) of the new strategic framework on lessons learned from promoting gender equality in Danish development cooperation, gender mainstreaming is not mentioned at all. Instead, focus is identifying best practices within the areas of representation, recognition and redistribution – or what was formerly labelled as targeted interventions.

A contradiction seems to exist between Danida as a champion of gender equality in its activities and in its own internal structures. A Danida staff member rhetorically asks, "We are being presented as champions on gender equality and what are we doing ourselves?" and "How are we represented worldwide if we only have a male face? We would probably get some positive attention if we also showed a female face" (Danida 2013; own interview). Since Danida's top-

level management is male dominated, an on-going initiative in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs addresses the question of women in leadership positions. In 2011, the proportion of women employed at top level in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was 24.1 %. However, only 2 women and 13 men were employed at the highest level (report for the Ministry of Gender Equality 2011). The initiative is promoted by a relatively young male permanent secretary, which might add more clout to it, and it includes the appointment of 12 ‘gender equality agents’ in leadership positions at the Danida headquarter in Copenhagen who are to come up with suggestions for change<sup>4</sup>.

At an institutional level, some attempts have been made to ‘upgrade’ the set-up by establishing a ‘Team Gender’ and a network of ‘Gender Desk Officers’ at embassy level in accordance with the decentralised nature of Danish development aid. Currently (December 2013), two full-time employees work with gender and gender equality in a broad sense, one full-time employee works on the issue of sexual and reproductive rights and a handful of (gender) interested staff are employed in different sections of Danida. Furthermore, a gender tool box has been produced, a gender e-learning course has been developed, and procedures have been strengthened and provided with an added focus on gender screening notes and gender rolling plans (an internal obligatory gender mainstreaming plan related to the sector programmes). However, despite all these attempts, Danida still seems to fail to tackle the overall institutional barriers within the ministerial framework and to address an institutional culture which does not seem to work in a pro gender (mainstreaming) way.

The institutional culture in Danida seems to be characterised by associating questions of gender and gender mainstreaming with negative connotations – a certain ‘*gender (mainstreaming) fatigue*’. This is not a new development trend as it can be traced back to 2001 (Hasz-Singh Bryld 2001). In an article on gender and development aid, one of the respondents from Danida states that “poverty and human rights are a higher priority [than women and gender issues] because of the organisational culture – the leaders are men and associate mainstreaming with ‘women again’ and the ‘women’s liberation movement’ (Hasz-Singh Bryld 2001; 65). In 2007, a Danida staff member states that “...people are tired of listening to feminists who were running around and demanding their rights in different areas in the 1970s” (Danida 2007, own interview). In the recent interviews from 2013, this ‘fatigue’ is also expressed:

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<sup>4</sup> Some of the barriers for employing specific measures in this field is the fact that (some of) the women underline that they do not want to be promoted on the basis of their gender but rather on their qualifications (which in practice do not necessarily exclude each other) and, the prejudice that some sort of fast track exists for women to get leadership positions (or perhaps a concern that this will be the outcome of this initiative) despite the statistical evidence (Danida 2013; own interview).

“There is a tiredness related to gender mainstreaming – it is not a ‘winning case’” (Danida 2013, own interview). Gender and gender mainstreaming are also associated with “...a lot of guidelines which should be followed – there is a need for shorter, clearer and simpler guidelines”, (Danida 2013; own interview). As such, the institutional environment does not promote gender mainstreaming and related gender equality. On the one hand, working with gender and gender mainstreaming is closely linked to (negative) personal attitudes and experiences (by some) and, on the other hand, working with gender and gender mainstreaming is linked to applying a number of existing technical guidelines which require some professional expertise. Some Danida staff members might not have a professional attitude towards working on gender on gender mainstreaming, and thus might be characterised as ‘Hesitators’ or ‘Hardliners’ in line with the typology; moreover, some members of staff might not possess the knowledge required to act in accordance with the ‘Loyal Bureaucrats’ and the Weberian ideal. Therefore, the actual implementation seems to rely on the (relative) few ‘Innovators’ or femocrats within Danida (Richey 2001; Højlund Madsen 2011).

In addition, the solutions proposed by Danida seem to be of a ‘technical nature’ focusing both on the development of (more) gender mainstreaming tools and on an e-learning course. Thus, when launching the new gender equality framework, it was mentioned that Danida might benefit from developing new guidelines for gender mainstreaming in relation to budget support. Manicom (Manicom 2001) emphasised how gender mainstreaming is linked to a ‘managerial discourse’ involving gender experts, gender screening notes, gender rolling plans, a gender tool box, etc, and consequently this has become another item to tick off the check list. Gender mainstreaming seems to become a burdensome duty which employers need to ‘get over with’ as fast and easily as possible. This does not harmonise with the nature of changes in power relations between women and men or gender transformation, which requires a long-term commitment and as such a large amount of “flexibility, patience and determination” (Parpart 2014; 19). Moreover, the demand for more ‘technical’ solutions might be attributed to the conception of gender mainstreaming being a ‘quick fix’, thus disregarding the fact that in essence it is a political strategy, and as a consequence, its practical implementation will also involve a battle of competing interests and a notion of gender and gender mainstreaming being a site of opposition (see also Benschop & Verloo 2006). The introduction of more gender frameworks and gender tools could also be characterised as ‘layering’ where new ‘formal’ norms and rules are laid out on top of the existing ones.

In addition, the methods and tools used for establishing a network of gender focal points and producing a gender tool box, gender screening notes and gender rolling plans may be characterised as positive ‘soft instruments’ or ‘weak



incentives' (see Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2009<sup>5</sup>) which aim at 'capacity-building' within the bureaucracy. This might prove to be useful, since gender mainstreaming also demands skills and knowledge on gender issues, however, it might not be the most effective or efficient way of promoting gender mainstreaming or at least not the only initiatives which could be employed. In order to ensure that bureaucracies may be held accountable on gender mainstreaming (or lack thereof), the gender rolling plans might then be made explicit. During the years around 2005, reporting requirements in the form of annual reports submitted to the programme coordinator were made public on the homepage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs / Danida. However, these reports did not provide very detailed information about gender mainstreaming processes, and they were only available on the homepage for a few years. Thus, no negative sanctions are in place for blocking change. The network for gender focal points might potentially serve as a forum for the exchange of best practices and as a forum for providing feed-back on the status of gender mainstreaming for Danida.

As indicated by the lack of gender mainstreaming results, the systematic follow-up and actual related learning from the gender mainstreaming processes are insufficient. At times, gender mainstreaming takes place in a rather hostile ministerial environment, which is hierarchically structured. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including Danida, is one of the 'old' traditional ministries and as such constitutes no exception from this case. However, the processes of learning require the existence of a cross-cutting sharing of experience and reflection – or, in other words, horizontal, instead of (or as a supplement to), vertical institutional structures. Furthermore, Danida is characterised by a rotational principle in which the bureaucrats alternate between working 'at home' and 'abroad', which might be comparable to the 'liquid bureaucracy' described by Roggeband & Verloo (2006) which allows limited possibilities for accumulative learning. As a result of this rotational principle, the Danida employees working on gender issues have changed within the last decade, and at no time have the interview respondents been the same. During the course of an interview, it becomes evident that Danida is "not a strong learning organisation" as regards sharing the many supposedly good examples (Danida 2013, own interview). In Danida, no 'safe places' for reflecting, sharing and experimenting on gender mainstreaming have been established. As a consequence, the same barriers have been identified over a decade (or perhaps even more), and several

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<sup>5</sup> In an article entitled "Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union: Getting the incentives right" (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2009) they argue that mainly soft instruments and weak incentives have been used to promote gender mainstreaming and gender equality. According to them a 'hard' gender mainstreaming programme should include "...a) binding provisions entailing b) precise responsibilities and commitments backed by c) strictly enforced positive and negative sanctions for compliance and non-compliance" (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2009; 123).

evaluation reports point to the lack of documentation and apparently also to the lack of results as regards gender mainstreaming.

At the same time, a type of optimism is surrounding the attitudes towards the new gender strategic framework among the Danida gender staff. This relates to Eyben's statements on the role of booklets or in this case a new gender strategic framework: "While for most senior managers the booklets could placate a lobby without influencing their own practice, for social development advisers (the gender specialists in the ministry) the booklet's stories were statements of aspiration, potential instruments for changed behaviour and attitudes" (Eyben 2007; 67). However, in the case of Danida, there are no grounds for optimism and for trusting new gender strategies and policies if the underlying institutional shortcomings are not being addressed – if Danida does not escape its current institutional strait-jacket and address the informal institutional barriers, a new strategic framework or policy or changes at the formal institutional level will not in itself promote change in a positive gendered direction.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

The tendencies described point at severe institutional shortcomings. However, the institutional shortcomings seem to go a long way back – or at least so do the poor results. The solutions to the evaporation of gender mainstreaming seem to be merely adding (more) gender mainstreaming tools and (new) strategies on gender and gender mainstreaming without addressing the fundamental masculinist institutional structures (re)producing these failures. The fact that gender mainstreaming also concerns gender and institutional development in Danida does not seem to be acknowledged. If the masculinist institutional structures are not addressed, a transformation of existing gender relations will not occur – calling for more of the same will not promote change in the (right) gendered direction.

The development of a new gender equality framework might be a window of opportunity for re-launching gender mainstreaming in Danida's development work by referring to the 'newness' (as it has actually been attempted in other settings). However, there seems to be no indications that this will be the case. Danida might simply have to do away with gender mainstreaming as a concept and a strategy for development work, since it has failed to live up to its promises of transformation (which in fact seems to have been a suggestion at a certain stage during Danida's work with the new strategic framework). However, new concepts and strategies are very likely to be co-opted in a similar way by the 'development machinery' and its gendered institutional set-up. In addition, gender mainstreaming is closely linked to the achievements of the Beijing

conference and the Beijing Platform for Action from 1995, and therefore is part of the international normative gender framework which would be difficult to discard in a global era while advocating for its implementation in the partner countries (see also Engberg-Pedersen 2014).

Moreover, it is very likely that the institutional shortcomings of the north will also affect the processes of introducing gender mainstreaming in the development work conducted in the south. The work of the author (Højlund Madsen 2010) indicates that the gender mainstreaming model identified in the south is the integrationist version, and that the existence of dedicated femocrats at the level of the embassy and in the partner institutions made a big difference in relation to promoting gender and gender mainstreaming. However, more work needs to be done on these processes of translating gender mainstreaming and the formal and informal institutional set-ups and barriers for translation.

Using the theoretical insights from feminist institutionalism combined with the experiences from development praxis may be a step in the right direction for development institutions such as Danida. The establishment of safe places combined with a transformation and a gender mainstreaming unit for carrying out a ‘gendered archaeological investigation’ and tackling the ‘deep structures’ might be a good starting place for preparing institutions properly for gender mainstreaming. In Danida, the network of gender focal points could be an example of such a ‘safe place’. However, it will be important to set up ‘safe places’ with representation of both gender staff and general programme staff, and to mix staff from different working areas to facilitate cross-cutting institutional learning and develop an institutional memory on gender in Danida.

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