

Gender mainstreaming

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Gender

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Gender mainstreaming is a buzzword which one keeps on hearing now days. Gender mainstreaming is the term that has been coined by the feminist scholarship. International development agencies have started using the term lately in the development discourse instead of using the term gender integration which remained central to the women and development approaches during 80s and 90s. However, the shift from gender integration to gender mainstreaming is more at the rhetoric level than at the conceptual level. Thus the term "Gender Mainstreaming" has given the new meanings by International Development Agencies which robs it from its transformative potential.

Gender mainstreaming is a political rather than a technical concept which demands a systemic change through a complete restructuring in the socio-cultural, economic and political order of the society by removing the gender as a principle category of social and economic exploitation in the social organization of the society. Presently the mainstream is actually a 'malestream', which builds itself on public-private dichotomies, and creates and recreates gender hierarchies. Therefore, the concept of gender mainstreaming within the existing malestream is farce.

However, some of our so called "gender experts" who hardly have any intellectual understanding of Gender, as most of them have no academic training in the field of Gender and their knowledge on gender issues has mostly come from attending gender training domestically and internationally, have started echoing the term in exactly the same manner as the donor agencies do. They are unwisely contributing to strengthen the new meaning given to gender mainstreaming that depoliticises the concept as it also happened in the case of a "conceptual" shift from Women in Development (WID) in 70s to Gender and Development (GAD) in 80s and 90s. Again it was feminist scholarship that challenged the sexual division of labour between men and women as given and natural and laid the conceptual basis for understanding the gender as a socially constructed category. The WID paradigms that viewed women essentially as a passive category that have roles in reproductive spheres only and as the recipient of development gains was contested by the GAD framework that highlighted women's agency and the role they play in the field of development. GAD shifted an

isolated focus on women to gender social relations.

With the increasing popularity of GAD paradigm, International Development Agencies appropriated the term GAD, depoliticised it by giving it new meaning which is commonly understood as equal focus on both men and women. Women's subordinate positioning in social relations that demanded special focus on women in GAD approach was watered down. The common sense today is that Gender is about men and women. So men are happy with the use of Gender as oppose to women because the meaning of the term is drawn from development discourse of international agencies which is non-threatening rather than the feminist discourse. Thus, the paradigm shift from WID to GAD as claimed by development agencies was at the level of rhetoric and not substantive in nature.

Due to lack of gender expertise, our 'gender experts' are bent upon mainstreaming gender in malestream. The efforts to mainstream gender in Poverty Reduction Strategy; Institutional Reforms; Judicial Reform, Governance Reforms etc. are currently underway. These experts fail to understand the fundamentals of reform processes, which is about enhanced efficiency and effectiveness of the existing systems through the introduction of reforms and are not meant to change the very nature of systems and structures. Consequently we have plethora of report on gender mainstreaming in various areas which neither question nor challenge the limitation of the context and processes which itself is a patriarchal construct in which gender concerns are expected to be mainstreamed. Therefore, the recommended actions in various engendering reports lack strategic focus and do not go beyond scratching the surface of gender politics of institutions.

It is vital to understand the difference between gender integration and gender mainstreaming. In the former we need to add women and reform institutional rules and procedures to be more responsive towards women's practical needs which arises out of their existing status and condition. In the later concept we need to transform and bring structural changes for gender equality which is far more complex issue and a challenging project.

Adding women in public policies and institutions through affirmative measures and engendering of institutional rules and procedures have been part of the gender integration strategies which is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the gender mainstreaming. Women's physical presence in the public

domain is a matter of democratic rights, as women constitute half of the world population; they should have corresponding share in decision-making in the public sector. However, women's sheer physical presence in public domain will not automatically lead to gender mainstreaming as women themselves are divided by class, race, ethnicity, religion and rural urban background. It is the feminist consciousness, which is a necessary condition for men, and women both to effectively work towards gender mainstreaming.

It has been witnessed globally that in those countries where women are physically present in public institutions and at the policy level, they have negotiated better conditions and greater allocation of resources for women. Gender equity has been achieved to a large extent in the malestream of these countries. Women have higher social and economic status in those societies where their integration in public domain is officially recognized. This has happened despite the fact that these societies continue to organize themselves along gender lines. Gender remains the basis of economic exploitation in production processes along with the exploitation of working class and other marginalized groups. As a result of this women in developed societies are unable to achieve equality because of institutionalised patriarchy in all socio-economic and political sphere, however, they have achieved gender equity which is essential and a first step for women to move forward toward achieving equality. The space created to realize gender equity could be incrementally stretched toward achieving gender equality.

It is a disservice to women on the part of 'gender experts' to misuse the concept of gender mainstreaming. They are simply promoting a liberal agenda of gender equity in the name of gender mainstreaming. In the context of Pakistan where we have massive gender disparities, it is equally important to promote the liberal concept of gender equity as a first step. However, it should not happen at the expense of discrediting the radical concept of gender mainstreaming. If the notion of gender equity is promoted in the name of gender equality, then it blurs the vision of gender justice. It disempowers people intellectually and retards their potential to strategically strategise to transform the system for complete gender equality.

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