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Changing Aid Policies through a Gender Lens: an International Perspective and the Case of the Dutch Development Cooperation

By Nathalie Holvoet¹ and Liesbeth Inberg²

Abstract

Since the turn of the century changes in aid policies and modalities have been proposed with the aim to promote aid effectiveness. This article is a study on the ongoing reform processes within partner and donor countries as seen through a gender lens. It explores more closely how changing aid policies unfold opportunities and challenges for gender mainstreaming policies and gender equality objective. The article analyses in particular how donors are handling gender concerns in the realm of the ongoing changes and zooms into the case of Dutch Development Cooperation, one of change champions. Such a gendered analysis of aid reform processes is of paramount importance as changes in gender and development policies have always largely been influenced by shifts in general aid and development policies.

Keywords: gender mainstreaming, aid policies, gender equality, Dutch Development Cooperation

Introduction

Since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women organized in Beijing many countries in the world have endorsed gender mainstreaming policies to promote goals of gender equality and women's empowerment. According to one of the most widely used definitions gender mainstreaming is:

“The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, 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 programs 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, 1997: 2).

The landmark Beijing conference has also impregnated gender and development policies adopted by donor agencies. More specifically, most agencies adhere to a two-track approach which combines elements of an *agenda setting* and *integrationist* approach (see also OECD/DAC, 1999). While the integrationist angle aims at integrating

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a gender dimension throughout the various sector policies and throughout various phases of development interventions, the agenda setting –transformative- angle includes interventions which are specifically targeted at women and men (Mukhopadhyay, 2009). The agenda setting approach is often a necessary first step and complement to the integrationist approach, particularly in policy areas that are strongly regulated by gender norms.

If anything, gender and development policies are never implemented in a vacuum but they tend to be largely dependent upon general aid and development policies and changes therein. Since the turn of the century the aid architecture has been seriously under discussion and donors and recipients have rallied behind the 2005 Paris Declaration (and the 2008 follow up Accra Agenda for Action and the 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation) which sets out a reform agenda for donors and recipients centred on five key principles: ownership, alignment, harmonisation, management for development results and mutual accountability (OECD/DAC, 2005). In brief, from recipients it is expected that they elaborate country-*owned* national poverty reduction policies and systems which are based upon a broad consensus in their countries. These poverty reduction policies should be clearly *results-oriented*; i.e. they should clearly set out objectives and targets which are translated into indicators that can be easily monitored. Recipient countries should as well elaborate systems to plan, implement, budget, monitor, and evaluate their policies. From donors it is expected that they *harmonise* amongst each other and *align* to countries' policies and systems. Finally, donors and recipients are *mutually accountable* for the progress in the reform agenda. In order to promote and monitor the implementation of the Paris Declaration a set of 12 indicators has been developed. The three progress reports that have been produced to date (OECD/DAC 2007a; 2008a; 2011) suggest the presence of considerable variation among donors and recipients with regard to the ways in reform processes are being implemented on the ground.

As historical records point out that changes in gender and development policies have always largely been shaped by changes in aid and development policies (Molyneux & Razavi, 2005; Moser, 1993; Razavi & Miller, 1995), it is of utmost importance to see how gender issues have been and are being handled in the context of these aid reform processes.

Browsing through the text of the 2005 Paris Declaration highlights that gender issues are largely absent with only one passing reference to gender equality. The 2008 Accra Agenda for Action (3rd High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2008) and the 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2011) devote slightly more attention to gender equality without however really integrating a gender dimension throughout the documents. In the meantime some efforts have been done at the level of the OECD/DAC which has endorsed the 'DAC Guiding Principles for Aid Effectiveness, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment' (OECD/DAC, 2008b), a set of concrete issues briefs (see OECD/DAC, 2008c; 2008d; 2008e) has been elaborated to make them operational and an (optional) Gender Equality Survey including three gender performance indicators³ has been added to the 2011 Paris Declaration Monitoring Survey.

³ The three gender equality indicators are: i) gender equality and women's empowerment are grounded in a systematic manner in national development strategies (ownership); ii) data is disaggregated by sex

Moving from discourse to actual behaviour on the ground highlights that thus far existing research about the actual degree of gender-sensitivity of the implementation of the Paris Declaration has mainly focused on the recipient's side of the reform agenda (see Holvoet, 2010; Van Reisen with Ussar, 2005; Whitehead, 2002; Zuckerman & Garrett, 2003). While a focus on recipients reflects the shift in responsibilities propagated under the Paris Declaration, a study of how donors are dealing with gender concerns in the era of the Paris Declaration is just as relevant.

The Paris Declaration imposes an ambitious reform agenda upon donors that involves changes in aid instruments, staff expertise, organisational structures and operational guidelines. The first phase of the Evaluation of the Paris Declaration (Wood et al., 2008) has illustrated that progress is fragmentary and strongly diverging among aid agencies. The evaluation is entirely silent on gender issues. While this gender-blindness is easily understandable, it is highly unlikely that the currently changing context will generate gender-neutral effects. Against this background, it is of paramount importance to explore how gender concerns are currently dealt with within the ongoing change processes in donor agencies and to unravel factors that stimulate or impede the integration of a gender dimension.

Our study contributes to this underexploited area of research and explores more closely the opportunities and challenges unfolded by the different Paris Declaration key principles. It documents how gender concerns have been captured in the processes taking place in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the period July 2002-February 2010⁴. This focus is deliberate as the Dutch Ministry is one of the agencies that is '*ahead of the crowd*' when it comes to the implementation of the Paris Declaration and it is traditionally also known as gender-sensitive. While it is difficult to extrapolate findings to other agencies, experiences in the Netherlands might be interesting for other agencies that thus far have a more modest track record in Paris Declaration implementation.

Our study is based upon secondary data and primary data collection. Secondary data consists of academic as well as 'grey' literature related to the Paris Declaration, its review processes and the broader aid effectiveness agenda. In order to get more insight into underlying processes, we have complemented secondary data with semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews with key stakeholders engaged in Paris Declaration related processes, including staff of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, staff of Dutch Non-Governmental Organisations and international women organisations (including amongst others AWID and WIDE⁵). In our sample of interviewees, we have deliberately included actors who have a specific 'gender' mandate and others who do not

(managing for gender equality results); iii) mutual accountability for gender equality and women's empowerment (OECD/DAC Network on Gender Equality, 2010: 4).

⁴ The previous Dutch government resigned in February 2010. We thus limit our analysis to the legacy of the previous two ministers for Development Cooperation.

⁵ The Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international network of researchers, policy makers, development practitioners that organizes various initiatives (including surveys, capacity building, networking, etc.) to promote gender equality and women's empowerment (see www.awid.org). Women in Development Europe (WIDE) is a European feminist network of women's organisations, development NGOs, gender specialists and women's rights activists which specializes in monitoring and influencing international economic and development policy and practice from a feminist perspective (see www.wide-network.org).

have one. One of the limitations of the Dutch case study is its focus on actual experiences and insights registered at headquarters, which does not necessarily adequately capture practices, challenges and insights at the level of embassies.

The structure of this article is as follows. Section two unpacks the different key principles of the Paris Declaration through a gender lens, while section three documents how the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been dealing with the gender dimension in the era of aid effectiveness related changes. Section four concludes.

The Paris Declaration Key Principles through a Gender Lens

The implementation of the Paris Declaration five key principles is thought to generate significant improvements in aid processes, ultimately increasing development effectiveness on the ground. When it comes to the implications for gender equality and women's empowerment, most of the sources agree that the reform processes might entail both opportunities and challenges (Van Reisen with Ussar, 2005). Exploring more closely opportunities and challenges is not only interesting from a theoretical point of view, it is also policy relevant as it may feed into suggestions on how to grasp opportunities and counterbalance risks (Chiwara & Karadenizli, 2008; Gaynor, 2006, 2007; OECD/DAC, 2008c; UNIFEM 2006). In what follows, we structure the discussion alongside the different Paris Declaration key principles.

Harmonisation

With the aim to reduce transaction costs and improve aid delivery, the harmonisation principle stimulates coordination among donors through common arrangements for funding, reporting, monitoring and evaluation. From a gender perspective, harmonisation could be fruitful in discussing and clarifying notions of gender mainstreaming, gender equality and empowerment, which are often being interpreted and used differently leading to confusion and policy evaporation on the ground (see e.g. Whitehead & Lockwood, 1999). This sharing of information could also stimulate an exchange of experiences among donors about good practices for gender mainstreaming and strengthen investment in joint analytical work. In cases where individual donor agencies do not have their own gender expertise on the ground, harmonisation and coordination might ensure the presence of gender expertise among a group of donors.

Yet, experiences so far highlight that opportunities do not seem to materialise, to the contrary. Harmonisation seems to have induced a reduction of funds for gender equality work and a marginalisation of gender-related objectives. As emphasised in UNIFEM (2006: 6), 'donor harmonisation already demands an unprecedented level of consensus between a large variety of stakeholders, which often leads to sidelining gender concerns as to reach consensus on other issues'. In reality, harmonisation and coordination often follows the principle of the largest common denominator, which often entails the adoption of the policies and practices of the least gender-sensitive donor and a general pressure towards 'over-simplification' and 'reductionism'.

Ownership and Alignment

Under the changing aid architecture, donors are expected to align with partner countries' policies and systems as it is mainly through the use of existing national

policies and systems that weaknesses and strengths may be diagnosed and improved over time. The belief is that support and alignment with country-owned and country-led policies and processes avoids de-contextualised donor-driven interventions and increases the probability of effective implementation and results. This also holds true when it comes to national policies, programmes and systems put in place to stimulate gender equality and empowerment. However, while most of the partner countries do have national gender policies in place, more often than not, these are neglected in national poverty reduction policies, sector policies and plans (see e.g. Holvoet, 2010; Zuckerman & Garrett, 2003).

In addition to a neglect of existing national gender mainstreaming policies and plans within national poverty reduction policies, there is also hardly any participation of national actors with a mandate towards objectives of gender equality and women's empowerment, including national women's/gender machineries, gender focal points in line ministries and women's and gender organisations within civil society. When gender actors do participate, they face difficulties in moving their issues on the agenda as they mostly have a low track record in the issues which are discussed, such as socio-economic policy-making and public finance management. Conversely, actors (such as the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economic Development) who are around the table anyways when it comes to national development policies and systems often do not excel in gender expertise or commitment to objectives of gender equality and women's empowerment.

It is obvious that, as long as existing national gender mainstreaming policies and structures are not included in national development policies and systems, or where they hardly exist, donor alignment risks reinforcing the already existing male bias in national policies and systems. While donor agencies do have room of manoeuvre to counterbalance this risk, it seems that so far 'ownership' and 'alignment' principles rather tend to be misused by key aid staff to easily evade their own responsibility in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment (see OECD/DAC, 2007b; Van Reisen with Ussar, 2005).

One of the ways in which donor agencies could create a more enabling environment for national gender actors and structures while at the same time escaping the trap of old-fashioned donor gender conditionality, is through the inclusion of a gender perspective in aid modalities such as sector and general budget support. Budget support, which matches most closely the alignment principle, involves disbursement of aid into national or sector budgets and the use of new 'entry points' to influence policies and processes. These entry points include ex-ante appraisal of policies and systems, policy dialogue, capacity building, monitoring and evaluative exercises such as joint (sector) reviews. While so far no tailor-made handbooks exist on how to mainstream a gender dimension in these entry points, there are interesting ongoing experiments, using amongst others, insights and approaches of gender budgeting (see Budlender et al, 2002; Chiwara & Karadenizli, 2008; Holvoet, 2006; OECD/DAC, 2008c, 2008d; UNIFEM & EC, 2010; www.gender-budgets.org).

Results-orientation

'Results-orientation' involves broadening the focus from 'implementation' phases of interventions (inputs, activities and outputs) to results (outcomes and impact) on the ground. In practice, results-orientation necessitates the selection of outcomes, elaboration

of causal chains, transition into indicators, data collection, target setting, monitoring, evaluation and feedback (Kusek & Rist, 2004). A move towards results and performance-based budgeting might in principle open opportunities for gender budgeting as gender budgeting also involves a confrontation of inputs with results, but existing opportunities have so far remain underexploited.

A higher focus on results might stimulate the effective implementation of gender policies and thus lower the problem of 'policy evaporation'. This is of course conditional upon the inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment in the outcomes and targets selected. However, the inclusion of gender equality targets is not straightforward as 'gender equality' and 'women's empowerment' often do not figure high on a country's priority list and they are also not easily captured in simple indicators. A focus on results also often leads to a selection of outcomes which are rather easy to achieve in the short run. Such a focus on 'quick wins' often leads to the exclusion of objectives as gender equality and empowerment, which often entail long-term changes. It also explains the bias towards gender equality in primary education (which is relatively easier to achieve) when making the construct of gender equality and women's empowerment operational, which is e.g. also obvious in the case of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (see e.g. Saith, 2006).

Finally, in the context of budget support there is a move towards the inclusion of broad and aggregate targets and indicators in policies and performance frameworks on the basis of which the amounts of budget support are decided upon. This focus on the 'aggregate', combined with donors' growing distance from realities on the ground, may conceal exclusionary policies and practices and deserves special attention from a gender perspective. The integration of a gender perspective in monitoring and evaluative exercises and poverty and social impact analysis is of utmost importance to disclose a potential strengthening of the male bias in results on the ground.

Mutual Accountability

The principle of 'mutual accountability' is currently mainly being interpreted as the extent to which government and donors have addressed national spending priorities, and improved transparency and predictability of donors' disbursement of funds (Chiwara & Karadenizli, 2008). In principle, this also includes accountability of governments and donors for spending on gender equality and empowerment objectives. If gender equality and empowerment objectives are, however, not included in national policies, systems, targets and indicators, it is unlikely that this focus will be taken on board in accountability mechanisms. If the focus of mutual 'accountability' exercises is broadened from 'aid effectiveness' to 'development results', there might be renewed opportunities for the inclusion of a gender dimension.

Non-state actors such as civil society organisations are often pointed at as an important mechanism of 'downward' accountability. However, it is naive to assume that the gender dimension or gender actors will be automatically taken on board in the accountability exercises of non-state actors (see e.g. Guijt & Shah, 1997). It necessitates the presence of a strong 'gender demand' side among non-state actors. Donors could obviously play an important role in fostering women's and gender actors' voice and agency through financial and technical support as well as through the creation of a more enabling political environment. Particularly interesting in this regard are gender budget initiatives

in hands of civil society organisations that track whether planned initiatives in the area of gender equality and empowerment have also been adequately budgeted for; assess (potential) gender-bias in results on the ground; and, more fundamentally, increase leverage of non-state actors over policy-making and budgeting processes.

Another pressing issue related to the role and participation of non-state actors is the complex question of 'representation' (Cornwall et al., 2007; Marchand, 2009; Molyneux & Razavi, 2005; Moser & Moser, 2005). 'Women' are obviously not a homogeneous group but subdivided on the basis of income, age, race, class, location, ethnicity. This implies that women or gender actors who are around the table in national-level processes are not necessarily representative, nor do they necessarily defend interests beyond their own. Previous research has for instance highlighted that rural women's land issues are not high on the agenda when urban middle-class women are around the national negotiation table (see e.g. Ansoms & Holvoet, 2008).

At the international level, the most obvious gender equality donor accountability mechanism is the DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker, which is developed to facilitate monitoring and co-ordination of activities in support of gender equality⁶ (OECD/DAC, 2008f). While the marker is a good basis for international comparison among bilateral donors, there are also obvious shortcomings: scores are based upon intended inputs and activities and do not reflect actual budgets or realised activities, let alone results on the ground. While the marker is currently being revised and refined to better accommodate changes in aid modalities (OECD/DAC, 2008f), it is so far not applicable to budget support. Other existing donor accountability mechanisms that could include a gender dimension are the donor peer reviews, the Monitoring Surveys of the Paris Declaration as well as the more in-depth evaluations of the implementation and effects of the Paris Declaration.

A Focus on one of the Paris and Accra Champions: The Netherlands

The Paris Declaration key principles set out a reform agenda for aid agencies which demands changes in policies and guidelines. One of the agencies that is considered '*ahead of the crowd*' is the 'Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Netherlands scores relatively well in the 2006 and 2008 Paris Declaration monitoring surveys (OECD/DAC 2007a; OECD/DAC, 2008a; OECD/DAC, 2011). The Netherlands case study report of the 2008 Evaluation of the Paris Declaration Implementation concludes that the Ministry is highly *committed* to the Paris Declaration, that *capacity* to implement the Paris Declaration is adequately available at headquarters and embassies and that no specific *incentives* for staff are needed (IOB, 2008). In fact, the Netherlands is one of the agencies which spearheaded the changes promoted in the Paris Declaration. As harmonisation and alignment principles were already anchored in Dutch Development Cooperation since the 1990s, no revolutionary changes were needed in terms of policies and procedures. The Netherlands, for instance, already complemented projects with (sector) budget support and devolved substantial responsibilities to the embassies in partner countries. The most

⁶ The marking system uses three values: 'principal objective'; 'significant objective' or 'not targeted to the policy objective'. Principal policy objectives are those which can be identified as being fundamental in the design and impact of the activity and which are an explicit objective of the activity. Significant policy objectives are those which, although important, are not one of the principal reasons for undertaking the activity. Not targeted to the policy objective means that the activity has been screened against, but was found not be targeted to, the policy objective (OECD/DAC, 2008f: 2).

visible investment at organisational level since 2005 has been the instalment of the Effectiveness and Quality Department (DEK), which stimulates implementation of the Paris Declaration through support and advice to other departments (IOB, 2008).

Not entirely to our surprise, the evaluative study on the Netherlands remains silent on gender issues, except for two instances. It is highlighted that the gender unit (DSI/ER) 'is keen to ensure that the attention to gender issues does not get lost in the new aid architecture' (IOB, 2008: 21), while also the more general concern about the technical nature of the Paris Declaration is raised. This section fills the gap and documents and explores how gender concerns are being dealt with in the context of the implementation of the Paris Declaration. We distinguish among *commitments*, *capacity* and *incentives* and draw upon insights from the political process approach. As highlighted in Roggeband and Verloo (2006), a political process approach tries to explain policy success or failure in terms of political opportunities, mobilising structures and strategic framing⁷.

Commitment

A quick review of policy papers of the past two Ministers for Development Cooperation⁸ shows that the declining interest in gender equality discernible during the first legacy (July 2002-February 2007)(OECD/DAC, 2006) has been reversed during the second period (February 2007-February 2010). The renewed commitment towards gender equality at the highest political level up to February 2010 is also visible from the importance attached to gender concerns in the minister's evaluation of the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action. In his reaction to the Dutch parliament on the evaluation of the implementation of the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action, the Minister, for instance, explicitly highlighted the importance of integrating a gender perspective and gender actors in 'results-orientation,' in sector approaches and in support for domestic accountability functions.

Bureaucratic commitment towards a more gender-sensitive Paris Declaration is clearly more uneven: there are differences among departments and embassies, among staff members within departments and embassies while there is also a more general evolution discernible over time. As highlighted in the evaluation of the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), commitment is notably high in the ministry's gender unit. In other units of the Ministry, commitment in the area of gender equality and empowerment in general and towards a gender-sensitive Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action in particular, is more uneven. Some staff members vigorously defend that the Paris Declaration has a purely technocratic 'aid' effectiveness focus and should not be watered down by considering thematic issues such as gender equality. This position is also obvious from the fact that gender experts or gender concerns were not really taken on board in the positioning of the Netherlands with respect to the Paris Declaration. However, there seems to be a growing awareness within the ministry and

⁷ See Roggeband & Verloo (2006) for an application of the political process approach to the analysis of the elaboration and use of the gender impact assessment in the Netherlands.

⁸ Whereas 'Mutual Interests, Mutual Responsibilities: Dutch development cooperation en route to 2015' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Development Cooperation, 2003; Minister A.M.A. Van Ardenne) does not refer at all to gender equality and women's empowerment (even though sexual and reproductive health and rights are identified as one of the five priorities), in 'Our Common Concern, Investing in development in a changing world' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Development Cooperation, 2007; Minister B. Koenders) the commitment to gender equality and women empowerment is more pronounced.

more particularly within the Effectiveness and Quality Department (DEK) of the importance of gender equality for the aid effectiveness agenda on the one hand and of the need to exploit Paris Declaration's opportunities for gender equality and counterbalance potential risks on the other hand.

This relatively quick change in positions at ministerial level and within the ministry is typical for the Netherlands. As highlighted by Roggeband and Verloo (2006: 631), the assumption of stability in the 'opportunity-network-framing' constellation does not match the reality of Dutch policy-making, which is in general highly dynamic and characterised by a strong 'process' character. Changes in frames and values are common; opportunities that previously existed may disappear overnight, while new ones are easily created. Similar to what happened at the international level, femocrats within the ministry used strategic framing to put gender issues on the agenda. More particularly, they used gender efficiency arguments and referred to the fact that an inclusion of a gender dimension in the Paris Declaration would stimulate the fulfilment of its final development objectives. As highlighted by interviewees, many policy-makers and aid administration staff easily accept that a gendered approach might enrich the human rights and good governance approach, yet you need strategic framing when you want to convince them of the fact that the economy as such is essentially a gendered structure and that aid and development interventions, will not be effective, let alone efficient, when gender concerns are not taken on board throughout. While some of the 'hardliners' within the ministry seem to have made some movements, it remains of utmost importance to closely monitor and evaluate whether the use of more 'instrumentalist' strategic framing also leads to effective changes.

Turning to non-state actors, a first observation is that Dutch Parliament has shown so far relatively little interest and commitment to the Paris Declaration and its review processes, let alone to its gender-sensitivity. Second, while there are substantial differences within the Dutch developmental Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) community, Dutch NGOs generally take a more critical stance towards the Paris Declaration. They consider it at best interesting for the ministry, but not necessarily applicable to their own organization. The most important concern of Dutch NGOs is the technical nature of the Paris Declaration (Wildeman, 2008) and also within the NGO community, there is so far relatively little in-depth debate or thinking about gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of Paris Declaration. This apparent negligence of the topic may to a certain extent be linked to the fact that gender experts within the NGOs are mostly dealing with specific gender projects and less involved in the more policy oriented debates on aid effectiveness, while reversely, those few NGO staff members who are involved in the Paris Declaration related discussions have little gender expertise or commitment themselves.

Capacity

Studies of other (development) institutions have highlighted that commitment to gender equality and a gender-sensitive policy discourse does not automatically lead to gender-sensitive practice (see CIDA, 1994; Hafner-Burton & Pollack, 2002). In order to avoid 'policy evaporation', commitments and general policies need to be translated into adequate human and organisational capacities and clear-cut incentives.

The gender policy of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is generally in line with the two-track mainstreaming approach including an integrationist and agenda-setting angle (OECD/DAC, 1999). The ministry's policy is coordinated by a special gender unit, which consists of six full-time staff equivalents. Since the turn of the century, expertise within the gender unit has gradually evolved from the more micro (project) level to the macro (policy) and (public finance) management level. The gender unit focuses on human and women's rights while there is also considerable attention for issues of 'accountability', 'aid effectiveness', Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action. However, when it comes to the integration of the gender dimension in the Paris Declaration related reform processes within the donor agency, mandates and division of responsibilities between the gender unit and DEK are not entirely clear.

This unclear division and confusion about responsibilities is not unique to the Dutch case and not to the specific topic at hand, but related to the implementation of 'gender mainstreaming' within organisations in general (Mukhopadhyay, 2009). When an organisation adopts a gender mainstreaming policy, the assumption is that diffusion of expertise and responsibilities takes place across the organisation, while specialist gender resources focus on the catalytic, advisory, supportive, horizontal (across sectors and aid modalities) and vertical (across different phases of the 'intervention' cycle) oversight functions. However, prototypes of such fully mainstreamed organisations are hard to find. In reality, the integration of the gender dimension mainly remains within the portfolio of the specialised gender unit without, however, assigning the necessary resources to fulfil this broad mandate. This scenario also seems to materialize within the ministry: when it comes to mainstreaming a gender dimension in the implementation of the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action, both DEK as well as the gender unit have oversight functions, but neither is really responsible for the actual realisation. So far, the gender unit has taken the issue on board, but without, however, being able to fully invest in it. In practice, DEK consults the gender unit whenever gender issues are on the agenda and the gender unit tries to influence DEK, amongst others, through the dissemination of publications that are related to the topic. This dialogue and communication between both units is rather intensive and fruitful at the overall policy level. Gender concerns have, for instance, been included at several instances in the Accra action plan of the Ministry and efforts will be done to integrate a gender perspective in those areas where the Netherlands wants to focus on i.e. alignment, accountability and statistical capacity. In their support of the national statistical capacity, for instance, special attention will be given to sex-disaggregated data and analysis and when strengthening local accountability mechanisms, participation of women and gender actors will be stimulated.

However, when moving from the more general policy level to the more operational tools, instruments, guidelines, directives and trainings related to the Paris Declaration, the gender dimension disappears and also responsibilities. In fact, responsibilities for the integration of gender issues at the more operational level remain unclear. It is neither a straightforward undertaking; whereas nowadays more guidelines are available and approaches such as gender budgeting have become better known and documented, the application to the own organisation remains a matter of experimentation which needs the necessary human and financial resources as well as authority.

An issue that deserves specific attention is the way in which gender issues are dealt with in the devolution of responsibilities to the field. A first critical observation is that the

number of gender experts has been significantly reduced at embassy level. Whether gender issues are effectively captured has mainly become dependent upon the commitment and capacity of the heads of development cooperation and the ambassadors. While the gender unit has tried to foster the gender dimension at the embassy level through e.g. the dissemination of a 'good practices' document (see Stegge, aan de et al., 2007) and gender training sessions of heads of cooperation and gender focal points, the integration of a gender perspective at the embassy level is very uneven and at best fragmentary. Interestingly a similar observation has been made by a local representative from a Dutch non-governmental organisation who highlighted that gender issues have become totally invisible when specific gender expertise was reduced. In order to redress the situation at the embassy level, there are currently proposals to share gender experts amongst a group of like-minded donors in order to ensure that within all Dutch partner countries donor gender expertise is present.

Besides a change in the number of gender experts present at embassies, the substance of their work has also changed. While they used to be mainly responsible for women's empowerment projects financed through Dutch embassies, their work currently entails more internal and external lobbying, networking and analytical work (Stegge, aan de et al. 2007). This mainly involves convincing other experts, within and outside the embassy, to pay more structural attention to the position of girls and women in the analyses and diagnosis, policy-making, planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Stegge, aan de et al. 2007). While this is obviously not straightforward, there are some examples of successful initiatives, such as the Donor Gender Platform in Burkina Faso, initiated by the Dutch Embassy. This platform created in 2005 a joint Gender Fund which aims at increasing access of local women's organisations to financial resources in an attempt to foster accountability in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment (Stegge, aan de et al. 2007).

The decrease in specific gender expertise on the ground as well as the shift in their responsibilities confirms the concern raised by gender experts in aid agencies that it has become less obvious to finance interventions which are specifically targeted towards the objectives of gender equality and women's empowerment. Interestingly, at the end of 2008, the Dutch Minister of Development Cooperation set-up an MDG-3 Fund 'Investing in Equality' in response to a 2006 AWID study, which reported decreasing resources for projects targeted at women and women's empowerment. The Fund of about 70 million euros finances 45 projects that aim to improve rights and opportunities for women as stipulated in the MDG-3 goal on gender equality.

Incentives

There is currently no incentive structure of 'sticks' and 'carrots' to stimulate headquarters, embassies or individual staff members to integrate a gender perspective in the implementation of the Paris Declaration. There exists a system whereby the gender unit assesses the yearly action plans of departments and embassies on gender-sensitivity and assigns a score on a three-point scale (satisfactory, limited attention, absence of gender issues). Yet, the most important incentive during the 2007-2010 legacy was the visible commitment of the then Minister of Development Cooperation. As discussed above, Paris Declaration key principles of 'results orientation' and 'mutual accountability' could easily add to the existing incentive structure, at least when they are

interpreted in a gender-sensitive manner. When narrowly interpreted they will, however, rather act as ‘disincentives’. While it is too early to judge its functioning, one of the initiatives launched during the previous legacy was the need for embassies to report on their results in the area of the four policy priorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of which ‘rights and opportunities for women and girls’ was one. The danger is, however, that in the translation from policy priorities to results indicators, there will be a reductionist focus on gender disparity in education (see also OECD/DAC, 2006).

In addition to the absence of clear incentives within the ministry, so far few external incentives exist. As highlighted above, there is currently little external pressure from Dutch non-state actors such as the Parliament, Dutch NGOs or the independent evaluation department. At the international level, incentives are neither thick on the ground and mainly limited to soft ‘sermons’ such as the system of donor peer reviews and the DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, changes in aid policies and instruments have been propagated to promote aid effectiveness. The Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action set out a reform agenda for donor and partner countries with a focus on five key principles: ownership, harmonisation, alignment, results-orientation and mutual accountability. The Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action are not inherently counter to gender equality and women’s empowerment; instead, each of the five key principles simultaneously develops opportunities and challenges.

With regard to the actual realisation of opportunities and challenges in practice, however, current evidence is relatively scarce. If anything, research on the praxis has thus far been largely limited to reviewing the gender-sensitivity of the poverty reduction policies of the partner countries. While this focus is in line with the propagated shift in responsibilities, it is equally important to document and analyse ongoing reform processes within donor agencies from the perspective of gender, as these processes are highly unlikely to generate gender-neutral effects. Given the fact that changes in gender/women & development policies have always largely been shaped by changes in general aid policies, it is of paramount importance to explore how gender concerns are currently dealt with within the ongoing change processes, to unravel factors that stimulate or impede the integration of a gender dimension.

This approach makes the Netherlands an interesting case, as it is generally acknowledged for being ‘ahead of the crowd’ in the implementation of Paris Declaration reform processes. While not all of our findings can be generalised to other bilateral donors, evidence suggests a number of issues for broader discussion and further research.

First, in light of the current emphasis on the effectiveness of aid, ‘strategic’ framing in terms of increased development effectiveness and efficiency has proven crucial for forging gender and empowerment concerns on the Paris Declaration agenda. Because such strategic instrumentalist framing is generally not without risk, as it easily devolves into myth creation and essentialism, it is necessary to monitor and evaluate its effects.

Second, it has been observed that the agenda-setting and transformative angles of the two-track gender policies of donors are at a particular risk for being curtailed. In order to reverse this tendency, some bilateral donors (e.g. the Netherlands) have earmarked

funding or invested in specific budget lines to safeguard interventions that are specifically targeted towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. With regard to the more integrationist angle (the second gender-policy track of donors), the currently 'preferred' aid modalities (e.g. general and sector budget support), which target the broader levels of policy and systems apparently have a comparative advantage over isolated projects. It would be short-sighted, however, to believe that these opportunities can be realised automatically. In fact, they have yet to be grasped systematically, as donor agencies have not yet adopted the necessary institutional apparatus and practices. To date, many bilateral donors have made few changes in terms of the capacities, mandates or location of their gender expertise in order to trigger their systematic involvement in discussions and implementation of changing aid modalities and instruments. Conversely, the gender expertise of staff members who are involved in these discussions and implementation (most of whom are experts in public finance management and macroeconomics) has also not increased. This lack of gender expertise that matches the changing aid agenda results in missed opportunities to exploit ways to increase the gender-sensitivity of budget support and to increase the leverage of recipient countries' national gender policies and actors.

Third, in the context of changing political and uneven bureaucratic commitment towards gender equality and empowerment goals, combined with the presence of few internal carrots and sticks, policy evaporation is obviously a real possibility. In such a context, external incentives become all the more important. For example, consider the role of mobilising networks and triangulation among gender actors within various arenas (e.g. civil society, bureaucracy, academia, parliament) at the national and international levels. Thus far, however, traditional non-state actors within the Netherlands (e.g. parliament, non-governmental organisations or women's movements) have shown little interest in the Paris Declaration at all, and even less in its relative gender sensitivity. It is not that non-state actors within donor and partner countries have no instruments with which to hold their governments accountable for the realisation of gender equality and empowerment objectives. For example, the insights and approaches of gender budgeting might be particularly useful for tracking whether the budgets for planned initiatives are adequate. Gender budget analysis tools are also particularly powerful for revealing the gendered impacts of policy changes on the ground. In combination with disaggregation according to income, class, location or other locally relevant categories, these instruments are likely to highlight diverging impacts on different groups of women.

Finally, changing aid modalities are usually accompanied by a process in which major responsibilities are devolved towards donor field offices. The manner in which gender issues are addressed in these processes of decentralisation and, more particularly, within the wide diversity of field offices deserves more in-depth study.

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