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Gender Mainstreaming Challenges and Opportunities in Government Agencies in Selected Government Offices in Fogera District, Ethiopia

By Asrat Dagne Kelkay¹

Abstract

The main objectives of this study were to assess current gender mainstreaming practices and to identify opportunities and challenges in mainstreaming of gender issues in selected government offices in Fogera district, Ethiopia. The specific objectives of the study were to assess and analyze the practice of gender mainstreaming, to identify the existing opportunities for gender mainstreaming and to examine the major practical problems that inhibit gender mainstreaming. The study used qualitative research methods and case study research design. Consequently, purposive sampling was used to select the informants and discussants of the study. The findings showed that most participants of the study who are currently working in study offices are clear with the concepts of gender and gender mainstreaming, but they did not have clear understanding on the point that promoting gender equality. Besides, the study offices did not fully employ different tools and techniques for gender mainstreaming practice. The finding also showed that the participants of the study offices have less access to training and retraining opportunities of gender and gender mainstreaming. Lack of commitment and attention on the part of decision-making bodies, lack of continuous access to gender awareness and sensitivity training were identified as the major challenges.

Keywords: Challenges, Gender, Gender mainstreaming, Government agency, Opportunities

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of gender mainstreaming has been widely accepted by national governments, international institutions, and development agencies in most parts of the world as an international approach not only for attaining gender equality, but also as a pre-condition for sustainable socio-economic development of society as a whole. That is why gender mainstreaming has been promoted by the United Nations, the World Bank, and by many bilateral aid agencies, national governments, human rights, and development organizations as a common means of achieving diverse goals like reducing maternal mortality, increasing literacy, and slowing the spread of HIV/AIDS (Adams-Alwine, A. (2009).

As part of global movements, the federal democratic government of Ethiopia has declared (Emebet, M. (2010), its unequivocal commitment to the development of women and to addressing the issues of gender inequalities that deter long lasting changes with the announcement of the national policy on women in 1993, and, consequently, support structures for policy implementation have been put in place. The promulgation of the new constitution (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2004) guarantees all citizens' equality before the law, equality of access

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to economic opportunities, prohibits any discrimination on the ground of gender, overall review of family law and penal codes, identifies and changes any discrimination provision against women.

Besides, Ethiopia has ratified relevant continental and international instruments pertaining to gender. At the continental level, Ethiopia has signed the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Globally, the Ethiopian Government is signatory to most international instruments, conventions and declarations on gender equality, including: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Millennium Development Goals Declaration (MDGS), and is party to commitments such as the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the Beijing platform of Action, which clearly demonstrate the existence of the political will and of an enabling environment for pursuing the objectives of gender equality in the country (MOWA, 2010).

However, Negesse, A., et al. (2020) argued that the speed with which these are put into practice to ensure women's and men's equal access to resources, opportunities and treatment so critical to equitable, participatory and sustainable development has not been as expected. In the same context Topia, (2001) supports the above argument that although men and women are always assumed to be part of the development process, the latter has sometimes remained invisible to development planners and policymakers.

As a result of this, gender inequality still widely exists in the study area in particular and our society in general. In this regard (MOWA, 2006 and MOFED, 2004) explained that gender inequality is one of the features of Ethiopian society, and there is unequal power and economic relations between women and men. Hence, women are more disadvantageous than men in almost all spheres of life. Addressing gender mainstreaming in any actions is not only about equity but also about social justice. It is also about development and poverty reduction (MOFED, 2004). An official document released from the Ministry of Beyene, H. (2015), further stated that countries will not be able to combat poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic and ensure sustainable development without a deliberate attempt to overcome gender inequality.

To these effects, to what extent gender activities are mainstreamed in any development sphere and activities, particularly in government institution is an important question that needs further investigation. Thus, the aim of this study was to assess existing gender mainstreaming practices in line with the current opportunities and challenges in their attempt to mainstream gender issues in the selected government organizations in Fogera district: Education, Health, Agricultural Development and Women, Children, and Youth Affairs Offices. Despite these commitments, gender mainstreaming has been slow to be translated from policy into action in most developmental societies (Topia, 2001). The reason for the slow pace for the implementation of gender mainstreaming is that it is still a new strategy which calls for significant changes to the status quo. Such far reaching changes require time, training, and significant resource allocations to achieve the goal of gender mainstreaming, i.e., gender equality (Allison, 2009).

In supporting this idea, Emebet (2010) in her report on selected practices on gender mainstreaming in Ethiopia, explained that though encouraging efforts are being made in Ethiopia in the sphere of gender mainstreaming, there are also a number of limitations like the lack of a comprehensive and coherent process of gender mainstreaming and absence of appropriate institutional mechanisms. She also argued that most Ministries usually deal with revising draft documents and providing comments instead of actively involving in the implementation of gender mainstreaming in their activities.

The researcher also heard complaints and grievances from women (Beyene, H. (2015), as they are unable to exercise their economic and social rights provided by the constitution, policy and legal context due to pervasive gender imbalances, ways of thinking and restrictions in activities in society in general, and governmental institutions particularly. This situation clearly shows that gender mainstreaming is not put into practice in the study setting as expected by the government though there are policy and legal contexts as well as strategic documents pertaining to gender mainstreaming. These gender discrepancies, grievances, and the subsequent disadvantaged position of women in socio-economic conditions initiated the researcher to conduct a study which aims to assess opportunities and practical challenges of gender mainstreaming in some selected government institutions in the study setting. The following basic research questions have been designed to be addressed in this study:

1. What does the practice of gender mainstreaming look like in selected government agencies of the Fogera district Ethiopia?
2. What are the recognized opportunities in the mainstreaming of gender in those concerned agencies?
3. What are the challenges experienced in mainstreaming of gender in selected governmental sectors in the Fogra district of Ethiopia?

The general objective of the study is to examine the existing gender mainstreaming practices in line with opportunities and challenges prevailing in selected government organizations in the case of the Fogera district administration, Ethiopia. Accordingly, this study focused on the following specific objectives that examine the current gender mainstreaming practice in selected governmental offices, assess the opportunities to mainstreaming gender issues in selected governmental institutions, and identify the major challenges of gender mainstreaming in selected governmental institutions in Fogera district.

Materials and Methods

In order to achieve the pre-defined objectives within the specific time and budget a cross-sectional qualitative research design was employed. This is because qualitative research is said to be more effective to explore attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of the study subjects in depth (Dawson, C. 2009, Denscombe, M. 2014). With this rationale in mind, the researcher conducted a qualitative case study which is more appropriate to explore opportunities and challenges in their actual context and thereby obtain a holistic and in-depth understanding (Kikwawila Study Group, 1994; Denscombe, M. 2014). Another argument that convinced the researcher to employ a case study approach is not only that it allows researchers to use a variety of methods (in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews, etc.) depending on the circumstances and the specific needs of the situation but also findings from a typical instance of the case study are generalizable.

Sources of Data

In this research, both primary and secondary data were used as a source of information. Primary data were collected by interviewing the heads and deputy heads, process owners and team leaders of the selected governmental offices who are currently working in their respective sectors. As part of primary sources, a focus group discussion (FGD) was also conducted with experts and planners.

To supplement the primary data, secondary data was collected through extensive review of published and unpublished documents (Teyegne, 2007). Opportunities and challenges of gender mainstreaming in selected sector bureaus in Addis Ababa, gender mainstreaming guidelines, gender training manuals, and workshop proceedings were utilized as secondary sources. Besides, documents like national policies, strategic plans, and annual plans, monthly, quarterly, and annual reports were also incorporated as secondary sources for the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

As far as sampling techniques and sample size, probability sampling has set the standard for social research (Denscombe, M. 2014; Claudia & Jonathan 2004). The expected reason behind such a tradition is that probability sampling follows statistical laws and that it is well suited to select representative samples in large scale survey studies designed with the aim to produce quantitative data (Denscombe, M. 2014). However, it is not an intrinsic nature of social research. Researchers in the area of small-scale qualitative research find it difficult to adhere and follow the principles and procedures of probability sampling in the process to select their study subject or events concerned (Denscombe, M. 2014; Ten Have, P. 2003; Kikwawila Study Group, 1994; Frost, N. 2011). Some researchers have strongly criticized the principles of probability sampling. From such extensive arguments, the researcher has taken the important lesson that probability sampling may not always be required for all kinds of research and by all researchers as a standard in the areas of social science research. To put it in another way, non-probability sampling is another sampling technique in small scale qualitative research designs with the same significance level of the former one.

Firstly, the researcher selected Woreta district at large based on the criteria of convenience as discussed above. The units of analysis were governmental sectors in this district which are ahead of implementing mainstreaming of gender issues in their comprehensive program. Secondly, district women, children and youth affairs, education office, health office, agriculture and rural developments office were purposely selected cases to be included in this study. These sectors were the main references in which the study subjects for in-depth interview and focused group discussions were selected and from which primary and secondary data for analysis were generated. In this regard, heads, deputy heads, process owners, planners and experts from these sectors were purposely selected as participants of this study. In this way, six focus group discussants from each study office and two key informants from the Women, Children & Youth (WCY) Affairs office and three in-depth interviews from each of the other study offices serve as study participants.

Instruments of Data Collection

The researcher developed and utilized two main instruments of data collection tools to increase the depth of information obtained from the respondents, namely semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The total numbers of the interviewees were twelve (10 males and 2 females) that were purposely selected from the study offices. The interviews were conducted in the office of the respective discussants from half an hour to one hour. The focus group discussion was another qualitative data collection method that the researcher employed in this study. To these effects, four separate FGDs were held from the selected offices. There was a total of 24 discussants (16 males and 8 females). Each focus group had six discussants. The FGD participants were those planners and experts currently working in their respective organizations. Before the discussion begins, information on the need of the discussion and procedure of discussion was informed for the participants.

Methods of Data Analysis

The data that were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed in thematic analysis method. In organizing the primary data, the researcher read thoroughly the written information obtained from notes, interviews, focus group discussion and documents that were helpful for the study. Furthermore, the researcher listened again and again to the recorded information obtained for the study prior to the transcription.

After that the researcher transcribed the data into his mother tongue and then to English. After the preparation of full written transcripts of the recorded data, the researcher reviewed the transcripts to sort data and identify patterns based on the questions in the interview guide, grouping them into themes based on the general and specific study objectives. Finally, the data were analyzed by using thematic analysis method by carefully transforming the qualitative data into textual form.

Results

Demographic Profiles of Participants

Participants were representatives of government employees who were currently employed in the government offices that were selected in the study setting. The total number of participants in the study was thirty-six, of whom twenty were males and sixteen were females. Six FGDs participants from each study office and ten interviewees from women, children, & youth (WCY) affairs and three interviewees from the rest of the study offices have taken as participants of this study on the basis of purposive sampling. The sex composition, age structure, educational level and work experiences of both the in-depth interviewees and focus group discussion participants are displayed in the following table.

Table -1: Characteristics and Profile of the Informants

No	Description	Interviewees	FGDs	Total
1	Sex	30	24	54
	Female	10	8	18
	Male	20	16	36
2	Age	30	24	54
	24-29	8	11	19
	30-39	12	8	20
	40-49	6	4	10
	Above 50	4	1	5
3	Work experience	30	24	54
	1-5	5	10	15
	6-10	10	7	17
	11-20	10	4	14
	Above 20	5	3	8
4	Level of education	30	24	54
	Diploma	10	5	15
	First degree	20	19	39
	Second degree	-	-	-

FGDS=Focus Group Discussions

WCY= Women Children Youth affairs

MDGS=Millennium Development Goals

The table above shows the total numbers of respondents in the in-depth interview as thirty with twenty males and ten females. Regarding the educational level, ten participants were diploma holders while the rest were first degree holders in different fields of study. Their age ranges extended from twenty-four to fifty years old. The range of their years of work experience also varied the minimum being five and the maximum twenty.

There were twenty-four participants grouped into four FGDs in their offices, sixteen males and eight females. Regarding the educational level, five were diploma holders and the rest were first degree holders. The age structures varied from twenty-four to to fifty-five years old in which most of them were in the age categories of young. The range of their work experience also varied from three to twenty-five.

Gender Mainstreaming Practices Study Sector

One of the predefined objectives of the study was to assess and analyze the practice of gender mainstreaming in some selected government offices in the Woreta district administration in the aspects of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phase of their activities pertaining to their duties and responsibilities. In order to assess the practice of gender mainstreaming key informants and focus group discussants were asked different questions. This might help to assess the knowledge, understanding and skills of the actors pertaining to gender mainstreaming. It was empirical evidence for the extent of gender mainstreaming practice, tools and techniques that were employed in gender mainstreaming practice and nature of capacity and gender awareness training in their areas of work. In line with the questions that were posed to the participants, the response of the interviewees, and the focus group discussants were explored and presented in the following strategies.

Knowledge of Gender and Gender Mainstreaming

For effective implementation of any new perspective, including gender mainstreaming, positive attitude towards the issues and comprehensive knowledge and skills in the area are very important. Particularly, the underlying ideas, concepts, merits and demerits of the new approach should clearly be understood by those actors who involve in decision making, planning, implementing of gender mainstreaming in the selected government sectors. In view of this, interviewees and focus group discussants from the selected offices were asked questions that might enable them to assess the knowledge and level of their understanding regarding the concepts of gender and gender mainstreaming in the study setting. Accordingly, opinions, perceptions and understanding of the interviewees and focus group discussants were explored and presented in the subsequent paragraphs.

As it is evident from the response of the participants, the majority of interview respondents and focus group discussants have clear ideas on the concepts of gender and gender mainstreaming. In respect to the concept of sex and gender, they replied that sex is biologically determined whereas gender is a social construction or interaction between male and female which is different from place to place, culture to culture. On the other hand, sex is biogenic whereas gender is sociogenic. However, some respondents and discussants didn't have clear ideas on the concepts of sex and gender. According to these informants, gender means women and women mean gender. Still some other participants of the study were not confident in explaining the discrepancy between sex and gender.

Activities Performed in the Study Areas Pertain to Gender Mainstreaming

Responses from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussants indicate that they were performing different activities pertaining to gender mainstreaming in accordance with the duty and responsibility of their workplace required by the law. Most participants had prepared gender responsive planning, conducted gender analysis, assembled sex-disaggregated data, given feedback, conducted review meetings with the stakeholders, assessed and conducted action research on gender mainstreaming, and implemented affirmative action.

Techniques and Tools used by Selected Offices for Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming cannot be realized without the effective utilization of tools of gender mainstreaming in the organization as well as in the society as whole. To this effect, the techniques and tools such as statistics, gender surveys, sex disaggregated data, gender analysis, gender auditing, gender responsive budgeting and planning, gender mainstreaming guideline and checklists are important devices for gender mainstreaming. To assess how the study offices employed such tools of gender mainstreaming, the researcher posed different questions to the participants of this study pertaining to techniques and tools of gender mainstreaming.

Almost all the key informants, mainly from the offices of health and agricultural development were not able to mention techniques and tools used to apply in the process of gender mainstreaming in their offices. However, some key informants from the Women, Children, & Youth (WCY) Affairs and Education offices responded that they used gender responsive planning, sex-disaggregated data, checklist, and gender analysis as tools of gender mainstreaming among the other tools of gender mainstreaming. Accordingly, gender responsive planning, gender analysis, sex-disaggregated data are the most common gender mainstreaming devices that are mainly applied in the education office.

Current Opportunities for Gender Mainstreaming Practice

The second predefined objective of this study was assessing the existing opportunities of gender mainstreaming practice in some selected government offices in the study area. In view of this participants /in-depth interviewees and FGD discussants of the study were asked questions that may possibly assess the recognized opportunities in their own offices. To these effects, eligible informants and focus group discussants were asked to enumerate and explain the recognized opportunities of gender mainstreaming in their work place. The response of the in-depth interviews and focus group discussants were explored and presented in the subsequent paragraphs.

Accordingly, the response of the participants pertaining to the opportunities of gender mainstreaming can be categorized into national instruments or documents and the upcoming technical and practical opportunities for gender mainstreaming practices.

On the other hand, increasing of gender awareness, the improvement of gender responsive planning, and willingness of other office to accept the technical supports of gender experts from the Women, Children & Youth (WCY) Affairs office, the existence of quarterly review meeting with the stakeholders that attempt to mainstream gender issues in their activities, the existing good practice pertaining to gender equality in the adjacent district , the onset of evaluation of gender mainstreaming practice by the council of the district administration were some of the practical opportunities of gender mainstreaming in the study sectors.

Major Challenges for Gender Mainstreaming Practice

The third predefined objective of this study was to examine the major practical challenges that inhibit gender mainstreaming practice in the study offices. In this regard, informants and discussants were requested to point out and explain the practical challenges that they encountered in their respective offices. To this effect, both of the informants and discussants identified a number of challenges or constraints that deter the implementation of gender mainstreaming in their respective offices. The major challenges include lack of gender awareness and sensitivity training, attitudinal problems, lack of conceptual clarity and technical capacity, lack of accountability, problem of financial and material resources, lack of co-ordination among the concerned bodies, child marriage and dropout of female students, imbalanced division of labors, financial dependence of women on men, lack of authority from the facilitator's office, inappropriate uses of techniques and tools of gender mainstreaming, and so forth .

First and foremost, lack of commitment and attention among the concerned body was one of the major challenges that was constantly mentioned and explained by all participants in all sessions. These are needed at the highest levels for the allocation of space and resources for mainstreaming gender in development plans and programs. It is commitment that would motivate program managers and experts to take on gender mainstreaming in their work and ensure that competence in gender mainstreaming reaches into different aspects of development.

In addition, lack of continuous assessment of gender mainstreaming and the inability to understand the vitality of gender equality were also mentioned as a formidable challenge. In this regard, all of my interviewees from the Women, Children, & Youth (WCY) Affairs office argued that there was a scarcity of financial and material resources. Moreover, the interviewees claimed that lack of responsibility and accountability, lack of a thorough understanding of gender issues and its importance were the fundamental challenges of gender mainstreaming practice.

Analysis of the Major Findings

Meanings of Gender—lack of clarity

Findings revealed awareness of the value of gender mainstreaming across all sectors--governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations and other concerned bodies. However, in my interviews, I also noted that participants used the terms women and gender interchangeably, indicating lack of awareness that gender also includes masculinity. Thus, the majority of discussants did not have clear ideas on the concepts of sex and gender and gender mainstreaming in spite of asserting the need for it. Some other participants were not clear on the distinctions between sex and gender.

Current Opportunities for Gender Mainstreaming Practice

Opportunities include policies, strategies and plans, institutional machinery, etc. The national instrument of gender mainstreaming should be incorporated into legal instruments, policies, strategies and development documents. The country's Constitution, National Policy on Ethiopian Women, Agricultural Development Policy and Strategy, Education and Training policy, Health policy, Women's Development Package, the five-year growth and transformation plan, should all appeal to government Ministers to mainstream gender issues in their all activities.

Challenges for Gender Mainstreaming Practice

Participants mentioned several challenges or constraints that hamper gender mainstreaming work in their respective offices. Some of the major challenges include, as previously mentioned, lack of commitment and attention among the concerned bodies, lack of continuous access to gender awareness and sensitivity training, attitudinal problems, lack of

conceptual clarity and technical capacity, problems of financial and material resources, lack of coordination among the concerned bodies, child marriage and dropout rates of female students, imbalanced division of labor, financial dependency of women on men, lack of authority from the facilitator's office, inappropriate uses of techniques and tools for gender mainstreaming and so forth.

Conclusion

With regard to knowledge and understanding of gender and gender mainstreaming, the findings of this study revealed that most of the participants of the study are not clear about the concepts of gender, gender equality, gender mainstreaming, and justifications behind why promoting gender equality has become a crosscutting and global issue. However, most of the interviewees and almost all the focus group discussion discussants did understand that promoting gender equality was one of the Millennium Development Goals and is related to the success of all the other Millennium Development Goals.

Although many of the offices in the study were engaged in assembling sex-disaggregated data, preparing gender responsive planning, providing technical support for gender mainstreaming, arranging review meetings, offering affirmative action, and so forth, they were not consistently or regularly performed. Thus, gender mainstreaming was not realized. Therefore, national instruments of gender mainstreaming must include the following:

- legal instruments,
- policies,
- strategies and development documents
- The Constitution of Ethiopia
- The National policy on Ethiopian Women
- Other policy initiatives such as the agricultural development policy and strategy, the education and training policy, health policy, women's development package, the five year growth and transformation plan (GTP, 2003-2007), the proclamation of 691/2003 that obliges each minister and their branch office to mainstream gender issues.

However, most of the informants and discussants strongly questioned the practical considerable interventions taken by the government. They further affirmed that unless it is put into practice, the mere presence of policy and strategic documents alone do not make sense as far as the issues of gender mainstreaming practices are concerned. Even some of the respondents and discussants further claimed that such aforesaid opportunities have only paper value and are paid lip services by public officials. Implementation of the empowerment of women suffers from the practical challenges of gender mainstreaming elucidated above, which required a new and systematic approach to achieve an equitable and just society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusions I offer the following recommendations:

- In every activity that may help disseminate information to the public, the organization should be integrate egalitarian gender roles that emphasize equal participation of men and women in those tasks traditionally considered appropriate for one or the other gender.
- Gender equality should be integrated into all processes at the district level linked to the development of national action plans and other policy guideline documents.
- Seek to achieve balanced participation of women and men in government decision-making.
- Recognize the increased danger faced by environmental defenders, including women, and support them.
- Include a gender equality perspective when raising awareness in government offices.
- Encourage governmental organizations to seek gender equality in their environmental work.
- Sex-disaggregated information on office participants and achievements regarding gender mainstreaming should be included.
- Include the participation of women's and feminist organizations in the implementation and monitoring process.
- Gender equality should be included in all project objectives to encourage the commitment of all stakeholders.
- Gender mainstreaming should be included at all stages including the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluating of program and activities.

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