Briefings

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Untangling Gender Mainstreaming: A Theory of Change based on experience and reflection

1. Introduction

This paper, produced by the Gender and Development Network (GADN) Gender Mainstreaming Working Group, explores the concept and practicalities of gender mainstreaming. It draws on learning from staff with responsibility for gender mainstreaming in nine UK based international Non Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and their Southern based partner organisations; wider discussions with GADN members and women's rights activists; as well as the personal experiences and reflections of the authors. It elaborates a Theory of Change setting out the component parts of gender mainstreaming, how these relate to each other, and how they collectively contribute towards the wider goal of gender equality and women's and girls' rights.

Throughout, the paper argues for complementarity between gender mainstreaming and targeted support for women's organisations and projects for women and girls. The cutting edge of advocacy for women's and girls' rights and gender equality[1] will – and should - always lie with activists, women's organisations and projects promoting women's and girls' rights and gender equality in its own right. Our experience is that effective gender mainstreaming results in *more*, not less resources for women's organisations and projects for women and girls - as well as in promoting attention to gender equality and women's rights in "mainstream" policy and spending. Further to this, our experience is that gender mainstreaming is most likely to be effective and sustained when it is grounded in, and driven by, local movements for change, with external and internal champions of women's and girls' rights and gender equality working together.

This paper is designed to contribute to debates on gender mainstreaming. Whilst there is considerable academic literature on this[2], our focus is on gender mainstreaming in practice. Our aim is to support staff in NGOs, Community Based Organisations, and

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[1] We recognise that the terms "equity" and "equality" are sometimes used inter-changeably, and sometimes one or the other is considered more appropriate. In this briefing we use the term "equality" as gender equality is an enshrined human right, used in the CEDAW, and recognised in international human rights law.

[2] For further reference see Eyben. E. and Turquet, L. (Eds), (2013) 'Feminists in Development Organisations – Change from the Margins,' Practical Action

donor agencies to better understand gender mainstreaming, learn from experience, to implement and scale up impact more effectively. A further aim is to assist communications and complementary working relationships between women's rights and gender equality advocates inside mainstream development organisations and those campaigning for change in wider society.

The paper focuses on gender mainstreaming processes *within* development organisations such as changes to policies, plans and spending; recruitment practices; and staff knowledge and skills. The quality and extent of these internal changes impact directly on what development agencies do, and contribute to the impact they have on women's and men's lives. As with the impact of development policy and practice on any complex issue of long-term institutional change, the impact of gender mainstreaming on women's lives is not a direct or linear process of change and attribution. Impact depends on the inter-relationship between programmes to promote change and many complex contextual factors influencing women's and men's opportunities, choices, and expectations. Effective gender mainstreaming plays an essential role in securing the commitment, funding, skills and programmes needed from mainstream development organisations to initiate, support and, where appropriate, adapt or scale up processes of change towards the realisation of women's and girls' rights and greater gender equality.

Background on gender mainstreaming

The rationale for gender mainstreaming is that the overwhelming bulk of government and NGO spending on development is not – and never will be - focused on women's organisations and on projects for women and girls. Women's organisations and women and girl focused projects *on their own* will always be limited in their ability to bring about fundamental change. Gender mainstreaming is about bringing attention to gender equality and women's rights into the "mainstream" of policy making and spending.

However, 20 years after gender mainstreaming was agreed as a strategy for achieving gender equality and women's rights at the UN International Conference on Women in Beijing, the global development community and women's movements are still struggling with its implementation. Whilst there have been some successes – most development organisations today engage in some form of gender mainstreaming - the critique, particularly from some members of the women's movement, has been harsh. Gender mainstreaming is criticised for diverting resources away from women's organisations and women and girl focused projects, and for weakening and depoliticising processes of campaigning and change. Some go as far as to suggest that gender mainstreaming has been a complete failure and should be abandoned.

Background to this paper

In 2011, GADN set up a Gender Mainstreaming Working Group as a support and learning network for people responsible for mainstreaming gender in the UK based headquarters of INGOs. In 2012, we analysed the nine case studies of gender mainstreaming our members had presented and discussed up until that time for emerging trends and learning.

Our experience was that the gender mainstreaming efforts we were analysing *were* making a significant difference to the culture and functioning of the INGOs where they were taking place. Whilst progress could be slow, halting and sometimes in the wrong direction, in all nine organisations we were seeing important changes in organisational commitment to and action on gender equality and women's and girls' rights. In several instances, as a result of mainstreaming efforts over many years, gender equality and women's rights were being strongly championed from the highest levels of our organisations. This was resulting not only in attention to gender equality, women and girls being promoted in mainstream policy, spending and programmes, but also an increase in targeted support to women's organisations and projects for women and girls. We wrote up this analysis in an article, "Gender Mainstreaming: Recognising and Building on Progress: Views from the UK Gender and Development Network" that was published in a special issue of the Oxfam *Gender and Development Journal* "Beyond Gender Mainstreaming" in November 2012[3].

Our participation in discussions with feminist activists and development practitioners leading up to publication of "Beyond Gender Mainstreaming" demonstrated that gender mainstreaming remained confusing to many and extremely challenging in diverse contexts, and that it generated strong feelings of disappointment and hostility from many highly committed activists. Informed and constructive debate was at times inhibited by misapprehensions and strikingly different conceptualisations of gender mainstreaming between those directly engaged in it and those campaigning for gender equality and women's rights in wider society. To a large extent gender mainstreaming appeared as a sort of "black box" of activity taking place within development organisations which was opaque and alienating to those outside. Our participation in these discussions highlighted a need both to unpack and clarify the concept and practice of gender mainstreaming, and to more effectively bridge the work of activists campaigning for gender equality and women's rights inside and outside development organisations.

Following and inspired by these discussions, we spent time reflecting on and distilling our own conceptualisations, practical approaches and experiences into a coherent

Theory of Change designed to be applicable in all contexts. We found this exercise immensely useful for our own thinking and practice. This paper shares our Theory of Change, reflections and learning.

2.   The history and definition of gender mainstreaming

History

Up until the late 1980s, government, donor and NGO support to poor women in developing countries was provided entirely through women's projects. These had very small budgets in comparison to aid programmes as a whole, and their impact was limited and isolated. They left the 'mainstream' of development policy and spending – which often affected women's lives far more – wholly untouched.

In response to this situation, in 1995, at the UN International Conference on Women held in Beijing, women's organisations, feminist academics and development practitioners successfully campaigned for 'gender mainstreaming' to be established as one of the key strategies for governments and development organisations to promote gender equality. This was about moving gender equality and women's rights from the margins of development to the mainstream, as a complement to strategic projects for women and girls addressing specific gender gaps and promoting women's and girls' rights.

Definition

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defines gender mainstreaming as follows:

"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 any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part 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 of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality."

Location

Our experience is that gender mainstreaming is a set of activities to promote gender equality and women's and girls' rights that happen within mainstream development organisations i.e. organisations which don't have women's and girls' rights and gender equality as their primary goal. Gender mainstreaming relates to mainstream development organisations of all kinds and scales – from governments and multi-

national organisations with programmes in many countries, to community level service providers such as primary schools and clinics. It relates to all sectors and activities which impact on people's lives, and all aspects of these organisations' work including their policies, programmes and projects, and support services including fundraising, procurement, and communications.

The implication of this definition – and our experience supports this – is that organisations working exclusively for women's and girls' rights do not do gender mainstreaming, as their entire focus is to promote women's and girls' rights and more equal gender relations. Gender mainstreaming is also not a strategy for direct engagement with women and men at community level.

3.   The GADN Gender Mainstreaming Theory of Change

Our Theory of Change has 3 related parts:
>   1) Gender mainstreaming - vision and results
>   2) Gender mainstreaming - technical processes
>   3) Gender mainstreaming - organisational commitment

Gender mainstreaming – vision and results

Gender mainstreaming is a means to an end and not an end in itself.

The ultimate vision is realisation of women's and girls' rights, and equal power relationships between women and men and girls and boys, in society as a whole. Clearly many factors – planned and unplanned – influence progress towards this ambitious goal.

As gender mainstreaming is a strategy employed by mainstream development organisations to improve the lives of women and girls, tangible short-term and medium-term results focus on the particular contribution of development organisations' policies, programmes and projects towards this ultimate vision of change. This contribution will vary with context, but will generally encompass aspects of one or more of the following:

- Women's and girls' (as well as men's and boys') lives and experiences visible and counted (e.g. improved systems in national statistics offices for systematic collection and analysis of sex and age disaggregated data)

- Women's and girls' (as well as men's and boys') voices heard, listened to and exercising influence (e.g. a higher percentage of women elected to parliaments

and councils, more women in senior positions in government and in private sector companies)

- Women and girls getting equal access to and benefit from resources, services and opportunities supported by the organisation (e.g. women getting more equal access to employment and business development opportunities with action to remove gendered barriers)

- Women's and girls' needs and rights upheld through complementary, strategic, targeted interventions supported by the organisation (e.g. reduction in the incidence of gender based violence against women, and improved support services for those experiencing gender based violence)

Gender mainstreaming – technical processes

The above development organisation results are achieved through a set of gender sensitive and transformative technical planning processes, which should be systematically integrated into the organisation's regular mainstream policy,programme, project and departmental planning cycles.

These technical planning processes – set out below - apply to *all areas* of an organisation's work. This includes externally facing policies, programmes and projects – as well as internal functions and processes such as fundraising, communications, human resources and finances. GADN members reflected that it is often easier to integrate gender equality concerns into programme work (where the relevance and importance can seem more obvious) than it is to integrate them into internal functions and processes.   However, it is very important that both externally focused and internally focused gender mainstreaming should progress hand in hand, to ensure that female and male staff both thrive, and the organisation 'practices what it preaches'.

- **Sex and age disaggregated data**: systematic collection and analysis of sex and age disaggregated data to understand if and how any particular issue or process affects women and girls and men and boys differently and/or unequally

- **Gender analytical information**: systematic gender analysis to explore and explain gender differences and inequalities in relation to any particular issue or process

- **Consultation and advocacy processes**: efforts to understand women's and girls' (as well as men's and boys') experiences, concerns and priorities in relation to any particular issue or process, through consultation with women and girls (as well as men and boys) and engagement with groups representing their interests

- **Gender sensitive/transformative policy, project and process design**: policy and project design processes that draw on the above information, to promote gender equality and uphold women's and girls' rights in policy/ project/ programme interventions and internal processes. These should consider *mainstream and targeted interventions* (a "twin track" approach), and *gender sensitive and gender transformative action* (see below), backing up planned action with budgets and appropriate indicators of change

- **Implementation: action, budgets and indicators to promote gender equality and women's rights:** implementation of plans designed to promote gender equality and uphold women's and girls' rights

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Systematic monitoring and evaluation of results – examining intended and unintended impact on women's and men's lives, including impact on gender equality, and women's rights

Box. 1 A twin track approach[4]

- Mainstream action (more likely to be gender sensitive – see box 2): Ensuring that women and girls get an equitable share of all services, opportunities, resources and influencing opportunities supported by the organisation (e.g. action to promote equal access and equal achievement for girls and boys in school; action to extend credit and financial and business support services equitably to female as well as male entrepreneurs; action to ensure equal visibility for women and girls and men and boys in the organisation's communications and fundraising initiatives)

- Targeted initiatives and programme components (more likely to be gender transformative – see box 2: Strategic targeted initiatives or programme components to promote particular aspects of women's rights or address specific gender gaps (e.g. A targeted support programme for female head teachers, recognising and addressing their severe under-representation in school management; a credit programme targeted at women recognising their exclusion from formal banking services; a targeted campaign focused on women's experience of violence)

Box 2. Gender sensitive and gender transformative action

Gender aware/gender sensitive

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[4] We use the term "twin track approach" to refer to the use of both mainstream action and targeted initiatives as strategies to achieve gender equality in development programming

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These interventions provide practical support to assist women in the context of their existing roles, drawing on information about divisions of labour and responsibilities between women and men and girls and boys.

Gender transformative
These interventions seek to promote women's rights and greater equality in women's and men's roles and responsibilities, status, and access to and control over resources, services and influence – drawing on analysis of unequal power relations between women and men.

Both kinds of intervention are important, and priorities should always be determined in consultation with the women and girls who are intended to benefit

Figure 1: Gender mainstreaming: technical planning processes, results and vision of change
The figure sets out the technical processes of gender mainstreaming, short and medium term results, and the longer term vision of change as described above.

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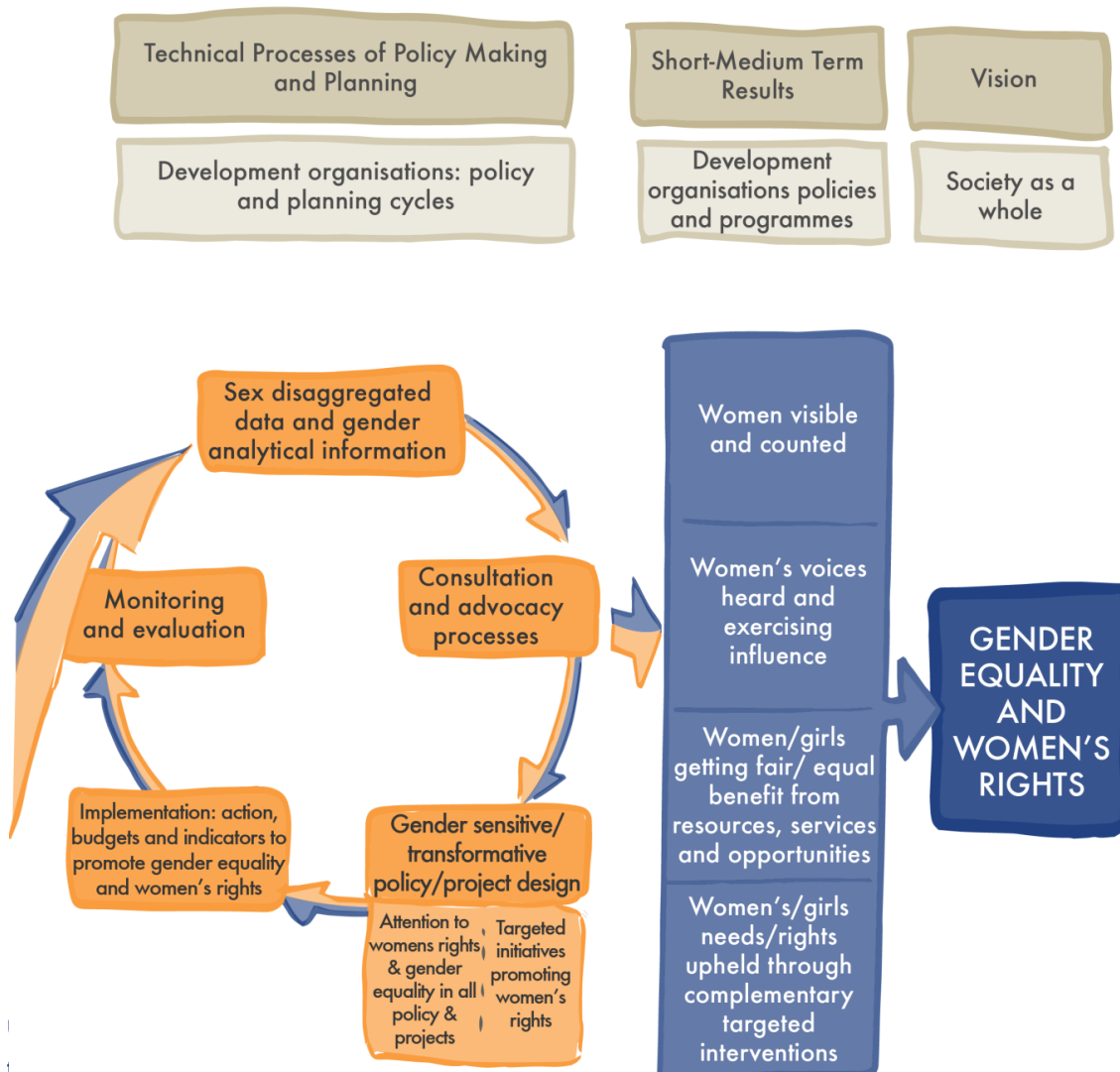
Gender mainstreaming – organisational commitment

The technical processes of gender mainstreaming set out above are not in themselves difficult. The challenge lies in promoting and sustaining sufficient organisational commitment to the vision of gender equality and women's rights to ensure that these technical processes happen in any particular development organisation effectively, systematically and sustainably.

The ideal is for gender equality and women's and girls' rights to be championed actively by senior management, and for technical mainstreaming processes to be promoted through a sufficient flow of resources for staff awareness raising, skills development, monitoring and accountability processes. The role of "gender staff" in this context is provide technical support, and to ensure that the organisation's gender work maintains a radical edge and political roots. .

Spearheading, supporting and sustaining this level of organisational commitment to gender equality and women's rights – and all the steps along the way - is a complex, long-term and ongoing process. Progress is all too easily lost as well as hard gained.

Influencers of organisational commitment

Three key factors inter-relate to influence organisational commitment to gender equality and women's and girls' rights: the enabling environment of the organisation, internal champions of change and external champions of change.

i) The enabling environment of the organisation

Development organisations vary enormously in the extent to which they constitute a positive or negative enabling environment for the promotion of gender equality and women's and girls' rights. There can be huge variance even within the departments, country offices and programmes of the same organisation.

Development organisations often reflect discriminatory norms and negative gender stereotypes found in their wider cultural contexts. Consequently, organisations, offices and programmes based in contexts where more progress has been made on rights and gender equality, and those with more equal staffing between women and men with at least some women in leadership positions, tend to constitute a more conducive enabling environment for the promotion of gender equality and women's and girls' rights, than those which are not.

The attitude and commitment of management and senior staff to gender equality and women's rights is critically important. If the management – of whole organisations,

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their departments, country offices or particular programmes - consider gender equality and women's and girls' rights to be a priority, staff will take these issues seriously. On the other hand, if management is not on board, promotion of gender equality and women's rights tends to be confined to individuals with a personal interest.

The extent to which development organisations constitute a positive enabling environment for gender mainstreaming changes over the course of time in response to planned and unplanned internal and external influences.

ii) Internal champions

Planned internal influence is the role of internal gender champions, who are known by different names in different organisations such as gender focal points, gender advisors, women's officers, equity and inclusion officers and gender champions. Their role is to influence their organisation to prioritise gender equality and women's and girls' rights through their policies, programmes and internal processes. This involves supporting staff to understand and reflect on gender inequality and discrimination, reflect on gendered ways of thinking and behaviours which are embedded in the organisation's culture and staffing, and identify ways to promote gender equality and women's and girls' rights through policy making, planning and monitoring processes.

In some organisations, internal champions are volunteers taking on this role in addition to their "day job". In some, the internal champion role is a designated staff position or positions, with a budget. In organisations where there is a strong commitment to gender equality and women's rights, the championing function tends to be moved up into the senior management tier of the organisational hierarchy, and split from a more junior technical support role.

Typical internal influencing activities include:
- Conducting and commissioning gender reviews and audits to understand areas of strength and weakness in the technical processes of gender mainstreaming, determine blockages and where efforts might best be focused

- Activities to raise staff awareness of gender inequality and discrimination, and to develop staff knowledge, skills and confidence to promote gender equality and women's and girls' rights through their own behaviour and work

- Facilitating the development of gender policies, strategies and action plans for whole organisations or for particular departments and programmes

- Developing understanding and skills in the technical processes of gender mainstreaming

iii) External champions

There are two key external influences on development organisations:

- Targeted advocacy from activists, women's organisations, women's movements and gender equality advocates, including direct training and influencing in conjunction with internal champions

- Changes in the wider cultural environment relating to gender equality and women's rights, including public, political and media engagement and debate

The promotion of gender equality and women's and girls' rights is a continuing process of influencing, struggle, break-through and set back which takes place uniquely in every cultural and organisational context. Effective, institutionalised and sustainable organisational commitment to gender equality and women's rights is fostered by influencing processes from the local cultural context - driven by internal and external champions working together, fully understanding informal as well as formal aspects of organisational culture, and promoting the responsiveness and accountability of development organisations to their own people.

Donors, including bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies and international NGOs, constitute a third and often overwhelmingly influential external champion in the context of international aid. Donors can play an important and positive role in championing gender equality and women's rights, but at times too much focus on short-term results and technical planning processes can undermine the kind of ownership and commitment in partner organisations that is essential to sustainable change.

Stages of organisational commitment

There are discernible stages in processes of building and achieving organisational commitment to gender equality and women's and girls' rights, which are, in our experience, principally defined by and reflected in who or what is championing change internally.

Progression through these stages can be quick or can take many years. Organisations move backwards as well as forwards, and many never progress beyond Stage 1. In effect, these stages are a continuum, and the positioning of particular organisations ebbs and flows over time.

Stage 0

Stage 0 is the status quo in many development organisations prior to the initiation of gender mainstreaming activities. At this stage, mainstream programming tends to be

"gender blind", with benefit to women assumed rather than planned for and measured. Women's and girls' issues are addressed, if at all, through separate projects which tend to be ad hoc, small-scale, separate from mainstream sectors, and often based on a traditional image of women's and girls' perceived roles and contributions. There are no internal gender champions promoting attention to gender equality and women's and girls' rights. Women's organisations and gender equality advocates may be trying to influence the organisation through external advocacy and research activities.

Stage 1

Stage 1 is the initial phase of gender mainstreaming in many organisations. Attention to gender equality and women's rights, and the need for gender mainstreaming, is championed by internal advocates taking on this role in addition to their existing job responsibilities. These staff may be volunteers - personally motivated to promote greater attention to gender equality and women's rights – or volunteered.

Championing activities at this stage are generally designed to influence staff "hearts and minds" (their personal understanding of and commitment to gender equality and women's rights) and to develop staff technical skills and understanding of gender sensitive planning processes. Championing activities typically include formation of internal support and advocacy networks, gender policy development, staff training/awareness raising, and the development and dissemination of gender guidelines.

Stage 1 organisations often constitute an extremely challenging enabling environment for internal champions. Internal champions are required to exercise great skill in identifying appropriate entry points to build a constituency of support for gender equality and women's rights. For volunteer champions, lack of time and resources and lack of status within the organisation can be a major constraint on the extent and impact of influencing activities.

The impact of influencing activities on programmes (i.e. on mainstreaming gender into technical processes) and, through programmes on women's and girls' lives tends to be barely discernible. Success at this stage is indicated through some individual attitude and behaviour change, and organisational progression to Stage 2.

Stage 2

Stage 2 indicates some level of organisational commitment to increasing attention to gender equality and women's rights – and this in turn indicates and reflects a more conducive enabling environment. This Stage is indicated by the organisation funding and resourcing a "gender officer" post or posts, or possibly regular consultancy

support, responsible for promoting attention to gender equality and women's rights through the organisation's work.

As in Stage 1, internal championing activities focus on "hearts and minds" as well as technical processes of gender sensitive planning in programmes. Paid gender officers have a mandate as well as at least some time and resources to engage in more systematic and sustained championing activities.

The impact of Stage 2 influencing activities on programmes (i.e. on mainstreaming gender into technical planning processes) and, through programmes on women's and girls' lives tends to be patchy. Performance on gender sensitive planning in programmes and departments tends to reflect the personal motivation of individual members of staff, and the extent to which internal advocates have been able to influence practice. Gender sensitive planning systems tend to be somewhat ad hoc, with many staff still not taking action to promote gender equality and women's and girls' rights in a comprehensive way.

Success at Stage 2 is indicated through building the constituency of support for gender equality and women's rights within the organisation, some examples of good gender sensitive policy making and planning, and some examples of positive impact for women and girls evident in programme work – and organisational progression to Stage 3.

Stage 3

Stage 3 represents a significant step change in the organisation's commitment, with management directly championing the importance of gender equality and women's and girls' rights, and gender staff shifting to more of a technical support role. Typical Stage 3 activities include management embedding commitment to gender equality and women's and girls' rights in corporate strategic objectives, possibly designating senior gender champions across all departments, and requiring programmes and departments to set their own gender equality objectives.

At this stage, mainstreaming gender into technical planning processes becomes much more widespread and embedded, with more examples of positive impact for women and girls.

Stage 4

Stage 4 is the advanced stage of embedding attention to gender equality and women's and girls' rights in all aspects of the organisation's culture and staffing, policy making, planning, implementation of programmes as well as monitoring and evaluation - with management continuing to provide leadership. Typical Stage 4 activities include

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introducing incentives and accountability mechanisms for all staff; embedding commitment to gender equality and women's rights in staff recruitment, performance objectives and appraisal; paying systematic attention to gender equality and women's and girls' right in results and monitoring; and promoting gender equality and women's rights in all aspects of the organisation's own culture and staffing.

By this stage, the organisation constitutes a very positive enabling environment for promoting gender equality and women's and girls' rights, and gender sensitive programming is accepted practice. There are many examples of positive outcomes for women and girls as well as positive influencing of partner development organisations.

Figure 2 (pg. 15) sets out the organisational commitment aspects of gender mainstreaming – the drivers of change and the stages of change – as described above.

Figure 3 (pg. 16) sets out our whole Theory of Change on gender mainstreaming: the long term vision of change; the kinds of short and medium term results that development programmes contribute towards this vision; the technical planning cycle of gender mainstreaming; and the drivers and stages of organisational commitment required for these technical planning processes to take place effectively and systematically.

Figure 2: Gender Mainstreaming: organisational commitment

Drivers of Change in Development Organisations

Stages of Organisational Commitment to Gender Equality and Women's Rights

Enabling Environment of the Organisation

Internal Champions of Gender Equality and Women's Rights

External Champions of Gender Equality and Women's Rights

STAGE	0	1	2	3	4
Internal Champions of Change	No internal champions. External champions only	Volunteer internal gender champions	Paid gender champions	Management. Gender champions providing technical support	Management. Senior gender champions. HR Dept. Gender champions
Internal Influencing Activities	External research and advocacy	Gender networks. Gender policy. Gender training	As Stage 1 + Gender audit / review. Action plans. Systems development	As Stage 2 + Corporate objectives and results frameworks	As Stage 3 + Incentive & accountability mechanisms
Focus of Influencing Activities	ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR				
	TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES				
Impact on Technical Processes of Gender Mainstreaming	None. Ad hoc women's projects	Extremely limited to very limited	Very limited to patchy	Patchy to widespread	Widespread to substantial

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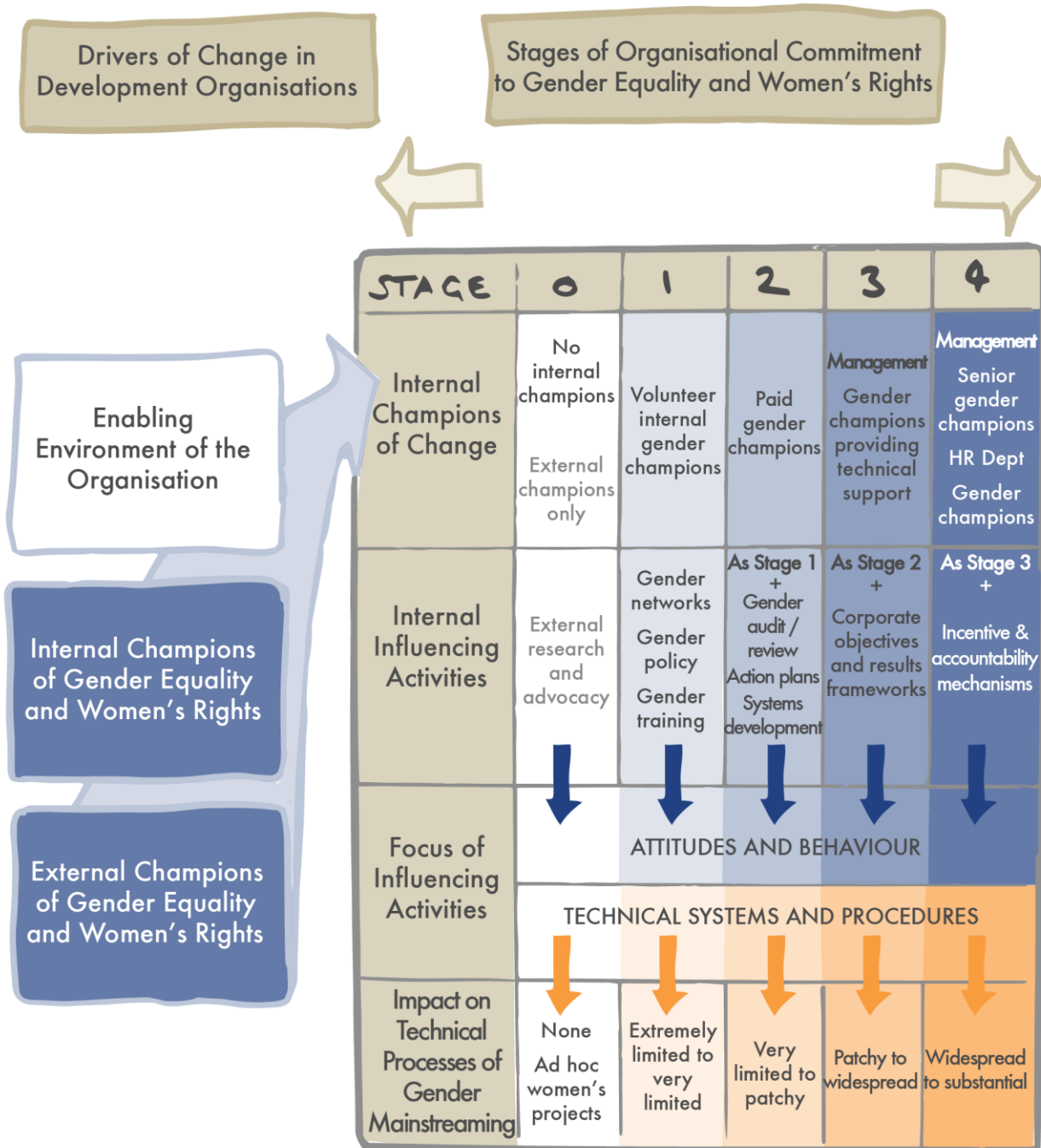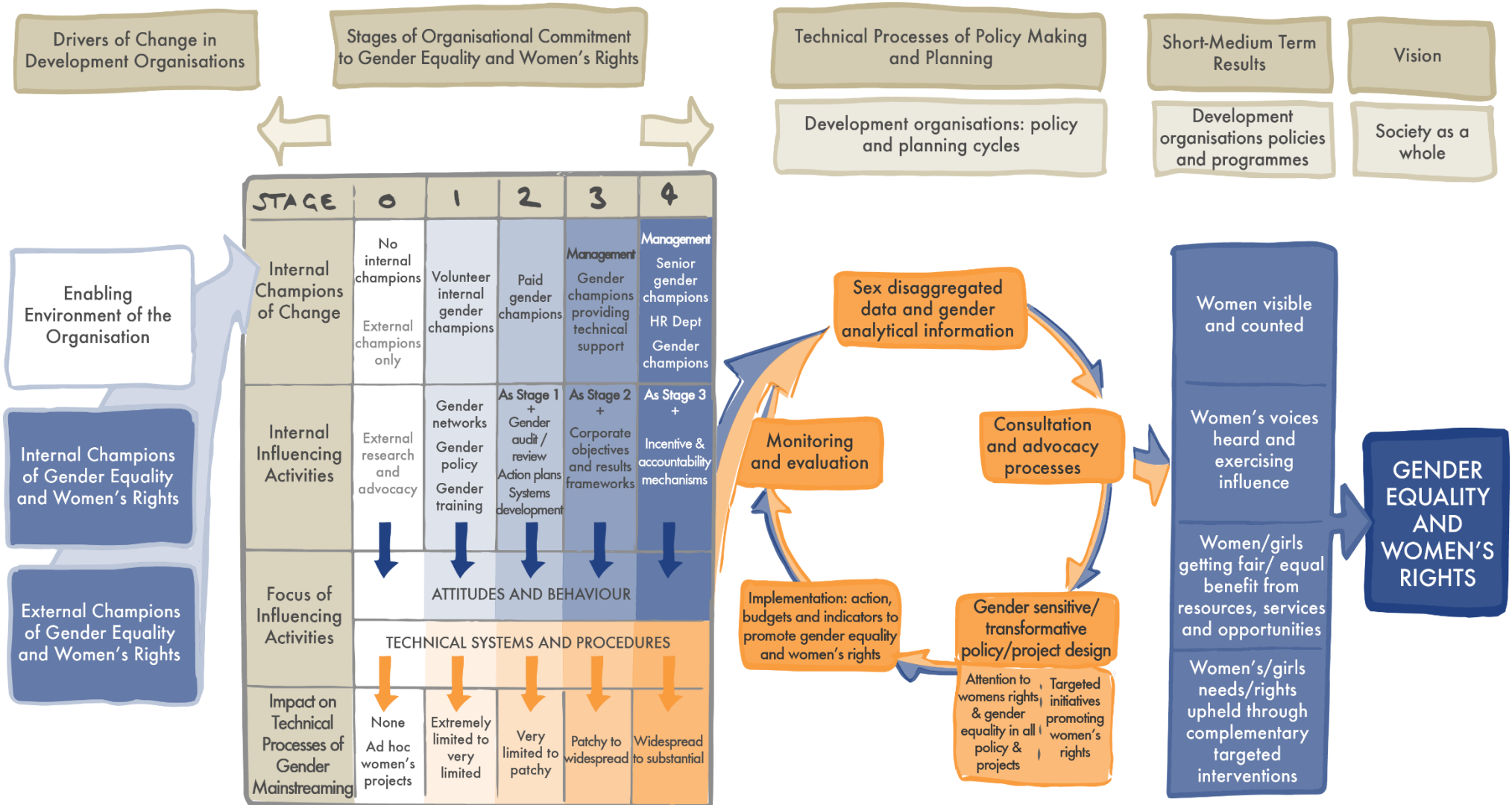
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Figure 3: Gender Mainstreaming: Theory of Change. This diagram sets out the relationship between the 3 components of gender mainstreaming: organisational commitment, technical processes and vision and results.

Drivers of Change in Development Organisations

Stages of Organisational Commitment to Gender Equality and Women's Rights

Technical Processes of Policy Making and Planning

Short-Medium Term Results

Vision

Development organisations: policy and planning cycles

Development organisations policies and programmes

Society as a whole

Enabling Environment of the Organisation

Internal Champions of Gender Equality and Women's Rights

External Champions of Gender Equality and Women's Rights

STAGE	0	1	2	3	4
Internal Champions of Change	No internal champions / External champions only	Volunteer internal gender champions	Paid gender champions	**Management** Gender champions providing technical support	**Management** Senior gender champions HR Dept Gender champions
Internal Influencing Activities	External research and advocacy	Gender networks / Gender policy / Gender training	As Stage 1 + Gender audit / review / Action plans / Systems development	As Stage 2 + Corporate objectives and results frameworks	As Stage 3 + Incentive & accountability mechanisms
Focus of Influencing Activities			ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR		
			TECHNICAL SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES		
Impact on Technical Processes of Gender Mainstreaming	None / Ad hoc women's projects	Extremely limited to very limited	Very limited to patchy	Patchy to widespread	Widespread to substantial

Sex disaggregated data and gender analytical information

Monitoring and evaluation

Consultation and advocacy processes

Implementation: action, budgets and indicators to promote gender equality and women's rights

Gender sensitive/ transformative policy/project design

Attention to womens rights & gender equality in all policy & projects

Targeted initiatives promoting women's rights

Women visible and counted

Women's voices heard and exercising influence

Women/girls getting fair/ equal benefit from resources, services and opportunities

Women's/girls needs/rights upheld through complementary targeted interventions

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

4. Learning and recommendations

Unpacking the term "gender mainstreaming"

The term "gender mainstreaming" is a confusing one – amounting to a sort of "black box" of activity taking place within development organisations to promote gender equality and women's and girls' rights.

We recommend unpacking the term gender mainstreaming and referring instead to its constituent parts, as described in our Theory of Change.

- The **vision of gender equality and realisation of women's and girls' rights**, and associated development organisation results demonstrating some progress towards this long-term vision.

- Continuing **processes of organisational influencing** designed to build organisational commitment to and leadership on the vision of gender equality and realisation of women's rights.

- The **technical processes of gender sensitive planning** designed to "mainstream" gender equality and women's and girls' rights into all areas of work including policymaking, programmes, and internal processes, as well as to provide targeted funding for women's organisations and programmes for women and girls.

This unpacking would serve multiple purposes. It would aid communications and facilitate constructive debate and joint work between internal and external champions; it would facilitate planning and implementation of gender mainstreaming overall; and it would enable much more precise identification of what is blocking and what is enabling progress.

Results and expectations of change

Typically, evaluations of gender mainstreaming have taken the vision of gender equality and women's rights and the technical processes of gender sensitive planning, as the starting point, and examined shortfall from these ideals. With most development organisations at Stage 1 or 2 of commitment to gender equality and women's and girls' rights, inevitably impact and practice generally falls far short of these expectations. All too easily, gender mainstreaming appears to have failed.

Our Theory of Change should assist in developing a more sophisticated approach to defining appropriate results, and measuring effectiveness. Defining achievable and meaningful results is about understanding not only what is desirable, but also what is possible and achievable in a specific context. Each organisational context will need a different combination of 'carrots and sticks' to nudge it into the next stage, and it is

important not to celebrate progress and not expect organisations to 'run before they can walk'.

Our experience is that at each stage of organisational commitment, there is, in effect, a "glass ceiling" on the extent of gender mainstreaming practice. Until and unless management come on board, it is simply not possible for internal and external champions to establish gender mainstreaming practice across the board. Recognising this helps us to be realistic about what change is possible at these various stages, set realistic targets, measure progress against this baseline, and value achievement. This requires planning to be based on gender analysis not only of gender difference and inequality in women's and men's lives – but also of the development organisations enabling environment. This also helps to focus efforts on the real obstacles to progress on gender equality and women's and girls' rights - organisational commitment and leadership.

Internal and external champions working together

The critical factor determining the extent, effectiveness, institutionalisation and sustainability of gender sensitive planning processes – and positive impacts for women and girls – is the level of organisational commitment to gender equality and women's rights. This is about political will and leadership.

The promotion of organisational commitment to gender equality and women's and girls' rights is a continuing process of influencing, struggle and negotiation which takes place uniquely in every cultural and organisational context. Progress derives from influencing processes embedded within the organisation and its wider culture, driven by internal and external champions working together, fully understanding informal as well as formal aspects of organisational culture, recognising and making use of entry points appropriate to local contexts, and promoting the responsiveness and accountability of development organisations to their own people.

The role of donors

Donors, including bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies and INGOs constitute an often overwhelmingly influential external champion of gender equality and women's and girls' rights in the context of international aid.

Some donors play a critical role in supporting gender equality and women's and girls' rights. This includes providing support and funding for local champions; holding government and NGO partners to account for their international commitments; creating entry points and space for internal and external advocates to influence development decision making, debates and spending; supporting sex disaggregated information systems and research – as well as funding mainstream and targeted initiatives promoting gender equality and women's and girls' rights.

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However, in their requirement for short-term tangible results, it is all too easy for donors to be heavy-handed and overly interventionist in their championing of gender equality and women's and girls' rights. This can lead to focusing on technical planning processes at the expense of longer-term processes of organisational change; using international consultants and sub-contractors to drive change as opposed to supporting and building on culturally embedded internal and external champions and networks; and focusing on short-term short-lived results as opposed to longer-term and sustainable trends. This approach can undermine ownership and commitment in partner organisations and provoke backlash and resistance not only from partner development organisations, but also from the local women's organisations and gender equality advocates who should be natural allies.

To promote sustainable change, donors need to support locally-owned and locally-driven processes of change. They need to support women's organisations and gender equality advocates representing the interests of their own citizens to work with internal champions, facilitating a "home grown" dynamic of social change. In terms of our theory of change, this means donors standing behind and supporting the internal and local external champions championing change in partner organisations, as well as directly influencing the "enabling environment" of partner organisations to create entry points and leverage.

Attitudes and behaviour v. incentives and accountability

At Stages 1 and 2, internal champions tend to focus on influencing attitudes and behaviour to build a constituency of support amongst staff and management for gender equality and women's and girls' rights – and at these Stages, examples of good practice tend to be driven by staff with personal commitment.

At Stages 3 and 4, mechanisms are often introduced by management which require and incentivise staff to promote gender equality and women's and girls' rights through agreed technical procedures. This leads to more widespread activity, but there is a danger of token gesture responses if staff are not personally convinced of their need and importance. Incentives and accountability mechanisms are important, particularly when they operate at management level and create an improved enabling environment for motivated staff to promote gender equality and women's and girls' rights through their work. But effective practice requires continuing support to staff to build their understanding of the issues even when incentives, mandates and accountability mechanisms are in place.

5. Concluding remarks

In this briefing, based on our extensive direct experience of gender mainstreaming and campaigning for gender equality and women's and girls' rights, we have demonstrated that the main driver to implement gender mainstreaming successfully is organisational commitment - political will to prioritise gender equality and women's and girls' rights,

demonstrated in leadership and allocation of resources. Technical tools on their own - even the most brilliant ones - are simply not enough By extension, the main challenge is mobilisation of the required political leadership to promote women's and girls' rights and gender equality as a means to reduce poverty and strive for social justice. This is best achieved by those championing gender equality and women's rights within governments and development organisations working closely with activists and women's movements campaigning for change in society as a whole.

Only by combining these two - *political will and technical processes* – do we see the necessary re-focusing of the efforts of the development sector. This combination is necessary to ensure that women and girls are brought in from the margins of international development co-operation to benefit equally with men and boys from development – and to ensure that international development co-operation doesn't reinforce the gender based-discrimination that holds back progress.

Untangling Gender Mainstreaming: A Theory of Change based on lessons from the experience of 9 UK based international NGOs

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The Gender & Development Network (GADN) brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women's rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women's and girls' rights. Our role is to support our members by sharing information and expertise, to undertake and disseminate research, and to provide expert advice and comment on government policies and projects.

For more information or to join the Gender & Development Network,
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Working groups
GADN brings together development practitioners, experts and academics working on thematic issues through working groups. The Gender Mainstreaming Working Group, supports our members to promote gender equality and women's rights in the UK-based headquarters of international NGOs. Through members presenting to the group case studies of their own experiences, the group aims to facilitate mutual learning and support; share strategies, challenges and resources; and build knowledge through collecting a body of evidence on good practice.