



**PARLIAMENT**  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

*Women's Roundtable: Accelerating Women's Empowerment  
and Development, through Engendering the National  
Development Plan and Financing for Gender Equality*

South African Parliament  
Cape Town

**Parliamentary Tools for  
Ensuring Gender  
Mainstreaming**

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## 1. Introduction

Gender mainstreaming has been identified as a key strategy for achieving gender equality. Following the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, there has been a call to states to ensure that policies and practices meet the needs of women and men equitably.<sup>1</sup>

The Inter-Parliamentary Union notes that *"Parliament is the place where a country's policy direction is set. A democratic parliament reflects the views and interests of the society from which it is drawn and allows those perspectives to shape the society's social, political and economic future. When women are involved in all aspects of political life, including as Members of Parliament, societies are more equitable and democracy is both strengthened and enhanced. Furthermore, parliaments and their members must become gender-sensitive; and defining and implementing a common platform for gender equality can only be done through a partnership between men and women."*<sup>2</sup>

To this end the process of gender mainstreaming becomes integral to the decision-making processes within Parliament. This paper will highlight what gender mainstreaming is, why it is important and provide an overview of Parliament's responsibility in this regard, as well as identify tools for the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies.

## 2. What is Gender Mainstreaming?

The United Nations defines gender mainstreaming as "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."<sup>3</sup>

Gender mainstreaming is a process of ensuring that programs and projects in all institutions reflect the important priority of achieving equal opportunity for all people and acknowledge the existence of gender inequality. It is a deliberate effort to reverse the level of inequality through the allocation of resources and policies in order to provide greater benefits to the disadvantaged groups<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Palmieri, n.d.

<sup>2</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008, Equality in Politics: A survey of Women and Men in Parliaments, pg 61.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, 1997, Coordination of the Policies and Activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system

<sup>4</sup> Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality Handbook, 2006

In practical terms, gender mainstreaming therefore means taking the respective situations of men and women into account when planning programmes and strategies by assessing their different conditions, situations and needs, and examining measures and policies and taking into account possible effects on gender differences when defining and implementing such measures and policies. It is the integration of a gender perspective into every stage of policy processes from design to monitoring and evaluation.

Gender mainstreaming involves a few key activities<sup>5</sup>, namely:

- Forging and strengthening the political will to achieve gender equality and equity at all levels, from local to global;
- Incorporating a gender perspective into the planning processes of all ministries and departments of Government;
- Developing systems for the institutionalised collection and use of sex-disaggregated data in statistical analysis to review how policies impact on men and women respectively;
- Increasing the numbers of women in decision-making positions in Government, the public and private sectors;
- Providing tools and training in gender awareness, gender analysis and gender-planning to decision-makers to ensure that they understand the importance of and know how to integrate a gender perspective into their work; and
- Forging linkages between Government, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders to ensure a coordination of efforts and resources.

Gender mainstreaming is not simply aimed at the advancing women. Instead it represents a dual approach: it is both a general principle and it comprises specific actions and methods of applying gender-equity principles. It considers the developmental and equity needs of both men and women and the relationship between these needs and the social context in which they are located.

### **3. Why is Gender Mainstreaming important?**

Gender mainstreaming significantly contributes to closing the gap in economic development between men and women. All citizens benefit when governments promote a democracy that seeks to address gender inequity in society and mandates equal opportunities and equitable rewards. Businesses benefit from gender mainstreaming by using the full potential of both women and men, and thereby gaining quality, efficiency, and profit in their organisations. The world benefits, also, as gender mainstreaming contributes to improving adherence to human rights for everyone<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Chinkin, 2001

<sup>6</sup> Thege & Welppe, 2003

Gender plays an important role in creating effective and sustainable development. Equal participation of both genders in development is more an issue of equality than purely a focus on one gender or another. The relationships between men and women, the impact on families, existing inequities and the role of an ever-shrinking globalised world also need to be considered when addressing issues of equal participation in economic development.

In essence, to effect real change in participation in social and economic development practices, the process of gender mainstreaming must occur. Gender mainstreaming refers to men and women having equitable access to, and benefit from society's resources, opportunities and rewards, and equal participation in influencing what is valued and in shaping directions and decisions.

#### **4. Monitoring and Evaluating Gender Mainstreaming**

Although the inclusion of a gender perspective is vital in policy development, as well as in the development of programmes and strategies, there are often numerous challenges which impact on the implementation of gender mainstreaming. These include the following:

- Lack of the inclusion of the gender mainstreaming approach in the conceptual and developmental phase of policy processes.
- Limited and uncoordinated institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming at all levels of government.
- Lack of information and knowledge, for example, no specialised skills and no disaggregated data.

Monitoring and evaluating gender mainstreaming would therefore have to assess the extent to which for example, gendered considerations have been considered in planning processes and the development of data collection systems.

One way of assessing the progress and challenges in implementing gender mainstreaming is by considering the "3 R's"<sup>7</sup>, namely representation, resources, and realities.

- Representation refers to how women and men are represented in all groups that participate in decision-making in the area in question.
- Resources refer to how resources are, in terms of money, time and space, allocated or distributed between girls/women and boys/men.
- Realities refer to what values, standards, and quality benchmarks exist which influence an activity, and who sets up the standards?

This "3R approach" enables an analysis of the distribution of power from a gender perspective, about the role of gender in the establishment of structures and

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<sup>7</sup> Thege & Welpé, 2003

organisational solutions, and about gender standardisation within the different areas of activity.

### 5. Institutional Mechanisms for Supporting and Promoting Gender Mainstreaming

The overall responsibility for implementing gender mainstreaming should rest with the highest levels within Government for it to be successfully executed. In 2000, the Government of South Africa adopted the *National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* (henceforth "the Gender Policy"). The Gender Policy sets out the country's vision for gender equality and details the means by which this vision is to be achieved. The Gender Policy also proposes a process that no longer regards gender issues and gender equality as being peripheral, but which places gender issues at the very centre of the transformation process within all structures, institutions, procedures, practices and programmes of Government, its agencies and parastatals, civil society and the private sector. This, in essence, is the goal of gender mainstreaming.

Several structures and mechanisms have been put in place at various levels of State and civil society to promote and advance gender matters. These include:

- ***The Ministry/Department for Women in the Presidency*** - Following the national elections in May 2014, a new Ministry for Women, located within the Presidency, was created. The aim of the newly established Department is to champion the achievement of women's socio-economic empowerment and rights through mainstreaming women's socio-economic empowerment in the formal economy, and promoting change in social attitudes to women and girls.
- ***Portfolio Committee on Women in the Presidency*** - The mandate of the Committee broadly is to monitor and evaluate progress with regard to the improvement in the quality of life and status of women in South Africa, and achieving improved quality of life and status of women and gender equality across the social and racial spectrum in South Africa. Moreover, the Committee is tasked with oversight over the Department of Women in the Presidency, but also engages with other Government departments given that gender issues permeate all departments.
- ***The Multi-party Women's Caucus*** – The functions of the Multi-Party Women's Caucus includes creating forums in which women in Parliament can discuss and debate gender issues and initiating and monitoring capacity building initiatives for women in Parliament. It furthermore creates an access point for advocacy by civil society and provides a focal point for women Parliamentarians to communicate with women's organisations in civil society.

- **Constitutional Institutions** - Within the South African context, mechanisms to monitor the extent to which Government is effectively addressing the needs of women in society have been established through provisions made in the Constitution of South Africa. These instruments include the Commission for Gender Equity, which has been established in terms of Chapter 9 of the South African Constitution, and the Gender Focal Points in each Government department. Their main task is to ensure the effective implementation of the Gender Policy at an operational level. This in effect means that the Gender Focal Points are responsible for the formulation and implementation of effective action plans to promote women's empowerment and gender equality in all policies, programmes and projects of Government Departments.

It is therefore clear that in terms of the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming, Parliament as the overarching legislative body, has the responsibility to acknowledge that policies, programmes and strategies have differential impacts on men and women and as such ensure that gendered considerations are taken into account. The above-mentioned departmental and institutions established in terms of the Constitution are directly accountable to Parliament. Parliamentary committees must therefore regularly ascertain the progress and impact of gender mainstreaming through engagement with these structures.

### **6. Promoting and implementing gender mainstreaming in Parliament**

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) defines a gender sensitive parliament as one which "responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and in its work as a nation's peak legislative institution"<sup>8</sup>.

*It further highlights that "in ensuring gender is mainstreamed, the institution will have implemented changes to promote less aggressive parliamentary language and behaviour; more family-friendly sitting hours; the introduction of childcare facilities and parental leave for MPs; and gender sensitive training programmes for all MPs. The rules of the parliament may also have been changed to ensure they are accessible to all MPs, do not exclude, restrict or discriminate against women, and provide for gender neutral language. More radically, parliaments may change their structures by including a dedicated committee on gender equality or rotating positions of parliamentary authority between men and women so that all MPs are afforded the opportunity to be represented."*

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<sup>8</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011, Gender Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice

Gender equality in Parliament is a prerequisite for effective organisational performance and development, and promotes results that contribute to positive societal change.<sup>9</sup>

Developing a gender-sensitive Parliament must include:

- A review/evaluation of institutional structure, operations and procedures with the aim of identifying where women could face barriers or challenges
- A focus on family-friendly reforms<sup>10</sup>
- An aspiration to reach the 30% benchmark of female participation (recognised as necessary to ensure a critical mass of women so as to enable them to have an impact on the style and content of decision-making).
- A recognition that gender-sensitive reforms benefit both men and women.

Various measures can be employed to ensure that gender, women's participation, equal representation and equality stays at the forefront of planning and decision-making in Parliament. One measure is the use of targeted awareness campaigns and legislation to ensure gender equality is a necessity.

Further measures to ensure the promotion of gendered issues include the following:

- Organising regular (gender) impact assessments to gauge policies and programmes aimed at enhancing women's participation in decision-making bodies,
- Emphasising and re-committing to political equality for men and women
- Support for structures and mechanisms to expand women's participation in State building, for example, the implementation of quotas for women.
- Increased participation of women in international bodies
- Leadership training for women participating in political processes to enhance their effectiveness as members of organisations.
- In addition, the conscientisation and sensitisation of gender issues is necessary for forwarding gender equality.

Key operating/environmental changes and considerations to make the political arena more enabling from a gender perspective include the following:

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.sadc.int/files/5213/5435/0369/SADC\\_Workplace\\_Gender\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.sadc.int/files/5213/5435/0369/SADC_Workplace_Gender_Policy.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The 2008 Inter-Parliamentary Union survey of female and male parliamentarians found that parliamentary work certainly takes up a great deal of time, with sessions lasting from morning until late at night and the many commitments undertaken; this makes it difficult to see one's family. The working hours have to be arranged so that the family occupies an important place on the agenda. The challenge of balancing family life and political commitments, however, applies to men too and changing working patterns in parliaments ultimately benefits all members. The survey highlighted that in South Africa the parliamentary calendar has been reorganized to match the school calendar so that parliamentarians are either in recess or have constituency time when students are on vacation.

- Arranging better sitting hours in legislatures.
- Decreasing the number of late night party meetings or parliamentary sessions.
- Engender rules regulating the work of parliaments, government institutions, and parties.
- Consult both female and male members of Parliament on how to improve work-life balance both for women and men.
- Challenge stereotypes by involving men in domestic responsibilities and make it part of the regular life schedule.

Committee work also offers an important opportunity for mainstreaming gender issues in the work of Parliament, not only in developing legislation but also in terms of oversight of Government action.

In terms of **oversight** members have the opportunity to scrutinise policies and programmes to determine whether they will impact positively on gender equality. In this regard members can ask departments/ entities:

- How does the policy or programme benefit women and men or girls and boys? Does it benefit them equally?
- Does it improve both women and men's access to economic resources?
- Were women involved in the design of the programme?
- Does the programme reinforce the rights of women?
- Does the programme include indicators which will be able to indicate changes over time?

In terms of **legislation**, Members, as previously indicated, should consider the impact of proposed legislation or legislative amendments on women and men, with the aim of ensuring that there is no unfair discrimination or bias towards either women or men during the process of legislative review. Similar questions to those highlighted above can be asked in the legislative review process.

Overall, the following aspects are key for Parliament to consider in effecting and overseeing the promotion of gender mainstreaming:<sup>11</sup>

- ***Creating appropriate infrastructure for gender equity***

The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women cannot be achieved without paying specific attention to the provisions that pertain to creating appropriate infrastructure and an enabling environment needed for the realisation of women's human rights. Without the appropriate infrastructural mechanisms and an enabling environment, efforts to promote gender equity, will encounter significant obstacles. Particularly important are the need for constitutional and legislative review and the establishment of appropriate structures and processes

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<sup>11</sup> Watson, 2007



within Government. This includes the establishment of women's machineries. It is also imperative that legal and structural changes must be adequately resourced.

- ***The allocation of appropriate financial resources***

The promotion of gender equity cannot be attained without appropriate resource allocations. This includes resources that are allocated to creating institutional mechanisms to promote gender equity, resources to implement policies that aim to enhance women's lives and mainstreaming gender as an analytical variable into all Government expenditure. Parliament has a critical role to play in engaging in a gender analysis of all Government budgets. This is essential to ensuring that women and girls benefit from Government policy. This means that all expenditure in relation to the programmes and the policies underlying them should be analysed in terms of how the expenditure specifically targets women and girls or men and boys. The strength of this framework is that it assumes that all Government expenditure, unless proved otherwise, have a gendered impact on society.

- ***Partnerships with civil society***

In order to ensure that they are kept abreast of women's practical and strategic gender needs, committees have a critical role to play in the formation of networks, partnerships and alliances with women's organisations in civil society. Co-operation with civil society ensures that resources are utilised in a manner that is directed at common objectives. Such co-operation ensures that efforts are not duplicated, but that resources are directed in the most cost effective, efficient and strategic way of working towards a common vision.

- ***Monitoring the implementation of international instruments***

One of the most critical challenges in giving effect to international instruments pertains to the development of appropriate mechanisms for monitoring States' progress in this regard. Without adequate monitoring mechanisms, the international instruments will only serve to safeguard women's rights on paper. Parliament therefore needs to engage with the question as to how it will develop key performance indicators for monitoring State progress in implementing international instruments and how it will hold the State accountable where progress is lacking.

- ***Review of legislative frameworks***

Parliament has a role to play in undertaking legislative reviews at periodic intervals to determine the gendered repercussions of all legislation on the lives of women, to repeal discriminatory legislation and to put in place legislation that strives to undo the effects of systemic discrimination.

In order to facilitate effective gender mainstreaming it becomes imperative to review its implementation at all three spheres of government. To achieve gender

equality, Government must embark on a rigorous gender mainstreaming strategy. Much of the responsibility for planning and implementing effective and innovative strategies for the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality will rest equally with key structures of the national machinery and with individual Government departments at the national, provincial and local levels.

The following considerations are key when monitoring and evaluating gender mainstreaming:

- Is there sustained involvement and commitment to gender mainstreaming at all levels of Government?
- Is there an existing policy on gender mainstreaming in all Government departments and is it being enforced?
- Is data from departmental programmes and projects being collected in a disaggregated manner so as to gauge the impact thereof on women and men respectively?
- Is there sufficient gender expertise in all spheres of Government so as to ensure the improved understanding and implementation of gender mainstreaming?
- In terms of Gender Focal Points, are they operational in all Government departments and are they appointed at the appropriate decision-making level?
- Are sufficient financial and human resources being allocated to the implementation of gender mainstreaming (i.e. through departmental strategic and operational plans and budgets)?

## 7. SOURCES

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