

FES Uganda Mainstreaming Gender: The Concept

FES Uganda's commitment to mainstreaming gender is rooted in its value base. FES is a public interest institution, committed to the ideals and basic values of social democracy and pursues the promotion of democracy as a major objective. Hence, among other things, FES Uganda has a vision of society based on the values of fairness and social justice. We recognize that both women and men's contribution is equally necessary for the growth and development of society. There cannot be development without equity. While we recognize that women/men and girls and boys are different and have different needs and interests, we assert that they can perform equally given equal opportunities. This is the basis for our advocating for gender mainstreaming, which in this context refers to a way of working that takes gender into account in all organizational and programme practices.

However, FES Uganda does not look at gender mainstreaming as an end in itself. Rather we perceive it as a means to an end. It is part and parcel of a complex process of building democracy and a means to attaining a rights based form of governance.

The Gender Situation in Uganda

In Uganda, many people perceive gender within socially constructed roles. As a result, people tend not to think independently from the process of socialisation they have undergone. Considering that a socialization process conditions governance, gender roles in governance are also socially constructed. This has resulted in a situation whereby the following gender issues prevail in Uganda: -

- Men dominate planning and decision making
- Women and girls have less opportunities for education, career advancement and they are predominantly found in jobs with low pay and status
- Men predominantly own access and control to resources and benefits more than women do
- Women have more domestic and agricultural production chores than men
- Women who are socially, politically and economically successful are seen as a threat
- Women are more vulnerable to violence in conflict situations, yet they are not involved in conflict resolutions

On the other hand, the above notwithstanding, conditions do exist in the Ugandan context, which if taken advantage of, could go along way to ensure more positive gender practices becoming part and parcel of many Ugandan's way of life.

Opportunities: Factors in the Ugandan Context that Favour the Promotion of Gender Mainstreaming

1. A Gender Sensitive Constitution

The Constitution of Uganda contains the following gender related provisions:

Chapter 4: Protection and Promotion of Fundamental and other Human Rights And Freedoms

- 21.** (1) All persons are equal before and under the law in all spheres of Political, economic, social and cultural life and in every other respect and shall enjoy equal respect of the law.
- (2) Without prejudice to clause (1) of this article, a person shall not be discriminated against on the ground of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, or social or economic standing, political opinion or disability.
- (3) For the purpose of this article, 'discriminate' means to give different treatment to different persons attributable only, or mainly to their descriptions by sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, or social or economic standing, political opinion or disability¹

Affirmative action in Favour of Marginalized groups

- 32.** (1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, the state shall take affirmative action in favour of groups marginalized on the basis of gender, age, disability or any other reason created by history, tradition or custom, for the purpose of redressing the imbalances which exist against them.
- (2) Parliament shall make relevant laws, including laws for the establishment of an equal opportunities commission, for the purpose of giving full effect to clause (1) of this article.
- 33.** (1) Women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men.
- (2) The state shall provide the facilities and opportunities necessary to enhance the welfare of women to enable them to realise their full potential and advancement.

¹ Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995, p. 20.

- (3) The state shall protect women and their rights, taking into account their unique status and natural maternal functions in society.
- (4) Women shall have the right to equal treatment with men and that right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities
- (5) Without prejudice to article 32 of this Constitution, women shall have the right to affirmative action for the purpose of redressing the imbalances created by history, tradition or custom.
- (6) Laws, cultures, customs or traditions which are against the dignity, welfare or interest of women or which undermine their status are prohibited by the Constitution.²

2. Uganda Government's Commitment to the Beijing Platform of Action

The Beijing Platform of Action to which Uganda is committed states:

'The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are matters of human rights and conditions for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue. They are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society. Empowerment of women and gender equality are prerequisite for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among all peoples.'³

3. Uganda's Ministry of Gender and Community Development National Gender Policy

Uganda's National Gender Policy aims at guiding, and directing planning, resource allocation and implementation of development programmes in such a way that emphasizes a gender perspective. It also states that sustainable development necessitates maximum and equal participation of both men and women in economic, political, civil and cultural development.⁴

4. The Emergence of Gender Advocacy Civil Society Groups

Besides an enabling political environment, Uganda is endowed with a growing number of NGOs and Women's groups that advocate for equal opportunities for women and men.

Challenges of Mainstreaming Gender

² Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995, p.30

³ Beijing Platform for Action Fourth UN World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995 para. 41

⁴ The Republic of Uganda, The National Gender Policy, Ministry of Gender and Community Development, Kampala, 1997 p.1.

There are many challenges that confront an undertaking of this nature. These among others include: -

- ***An unprepared ground:*** Whereas the implementation of gender equality must be a policy decision it, nevertheless, requires that the ground must be prepared for it, both in the societies concerned and the respective FES Country offices. While on the one hand FES Uganda office is staffed with personnel who have a good understanding of the gender concept and are committed to ensuring that it is applied across both intra and extra-organisationally, the same situation cannot be said to be obtaining in the overall country context or among all the FES partners organisations.
- ***The value based nature of the concept:*** Gender Equity as a concept is difficult to operationalise unless it is grounded in values. Established male dominance and cultural traditional beliefs and attitudes compound the problem. The positive constitutional and legal provisions notwithstanding, gender in Uganda is still largely perceived by many sections of society as an elite affair. Some perceive it as one of those social concepts driven by foreign ideas of feminism that have not been contextualised locally.
- ***The multiple cultures due to the multiplicity of tribes in Uganda:*** Gender roles being products of society vary with cultures. Uganda being composed of many tribal units with attendant sub-cultures does not make the gender implications any less complicated.
- ***Lack of political will:*** The apparent lack of political will to implement some of the gender related Constitutional provisions. A case in point is Section 32 (2) of the Uganda Constitution which provides for Parliament to establish an Equal Opportunities Commission which to date has never come up for debate in Parliament. This would have given full effect to the spirit of Section 32 (1) which commits Government to implement affirmative action in favour of groups marginalized on the basis age, disability and gender among others, created by history, tradition or custom.
- ***Absence of Institutional/Organisational Leadership on Gender Mainstreaming:*** Presently most of the institutions with gender labels, both local and international, are working under the assumption that women are socially, economically and politically disadvantaged and are accordingly actively engaged with women empowerment. They are using a strategy of providing targeted assistance for women to enable them achieve equal rights and status with men. While this is a very worthwhile approach, attaining equal rights for both genders is the more sure way to attain equal rights for both genders. Makerere University's Department of Gender and Women Studies who would be expected to be among those institutions to take a lead role in demonstrating best practices in gender has only recently established a gender mainstreaming division.

- ***Finding the Right Intensity:*** In a zeal to address the gender imbalances affirmative action has tended to focus too much on women and sometimes overlooked the disadvantages that equally affect men. In the context of an economically poor country like Uganda it is often a very tantalising task making decisions on who should/should not be empowered where both men and women are disempowered. Ensuring the right balance or intensity, in front of the socio economic and socio political disadvantages facing Uganda as a developing country, remains a big gender mainstreaming challenge.

These kind of challenges call for an urgent need to deal with the systemic causes of the continued lack of delivery on the noble ideals of gender equity. Hence in pursuit of its gender mainstreaming agenda, FES Uganda undertakes to do the following: -

- Conduct intra-organizational gender awareness activities including but not limited to staff training
- Consciously apply gender considerations in staff recruitment, internship placements, compilation of mailing lists
- Provide strategic support to partners to interpret and analyse laws for gender sensitivity as a cross cutting issue alongside other key concerns
- Support dialogue/campaigns on legal, cultural and religious practices that enhance gender equality
- Strategically support media partners to come up with innovative interventions that will break up the gender stereo types and promote the emergence of a new form of journalism that discourages gender insensitive behaviour among Ugandans
- Work jointly with the FES partners in Parliament to mainstream gender sensitivity in parliamentary day-to-day practices in order to institutionalise a culture of gender awareness among top level policy makers
- Establish/maintain contacts with organizations that focus on gender equality at donor, national and regional level

FES Uganda believes that equal participation by both men and women in all spheres cannot be deemed to be complete until the conditions exist that will allow women to make visible and meaningful interventions in social, cultural and economic arenas. Hence gender mainstreaming has to be a critical aspect of our organizational planning and programme activities. It is hoped that our partners will not only share our gender aspirations but also incorporate these social justice practices into their own programmes. A just society cannot be without gender equality in political power relationships. Gender Equity in Governance means not only an equitable representation but also meaningful representation at all levels, of men and women in political processes for ensuring social justice.

Thus the type, quality and levels of participation of both women and men need particular attention. Equally important, in the long run, is an assessment of the justification for continued participation through reservation vis-à-vis participation through competition.

To facilitate the fostering of a systematic application of the gender concept in our work, FES Uganda has developed a checklist to be used for planning and implementing of all activities with our partners. Additionally, an Evaluation Questionnaire, to be filled out by participants in all our activities, has been developed. This is intended to assist us evaluate the extent to which gender concerns, among other values, are incorporated across the board in the various activities we carry out with our partners.

These guidelines and tools, however, should not be perceived as ends in themselves. They are intended to facilitate the achievement of the gender-mainstreaming goal, but not to restrict possible additional innovations.