

GENDER MAINSTREAMING: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To be effective, a gender mainstreaming strategy should initiate and sustain change processes at multiple levels.

- The **organisation** itself – its policies, procedures, culture and people.
- The **development interventions** supported by the organisation, which lie within the intersection of its own work with the work of its partners.
- The **larger national context**, including the socio-economic, cultural and political environment in the country; the policies and programmes of development partners; and the perspectives and strategies of the women's movements and other civil society actors.

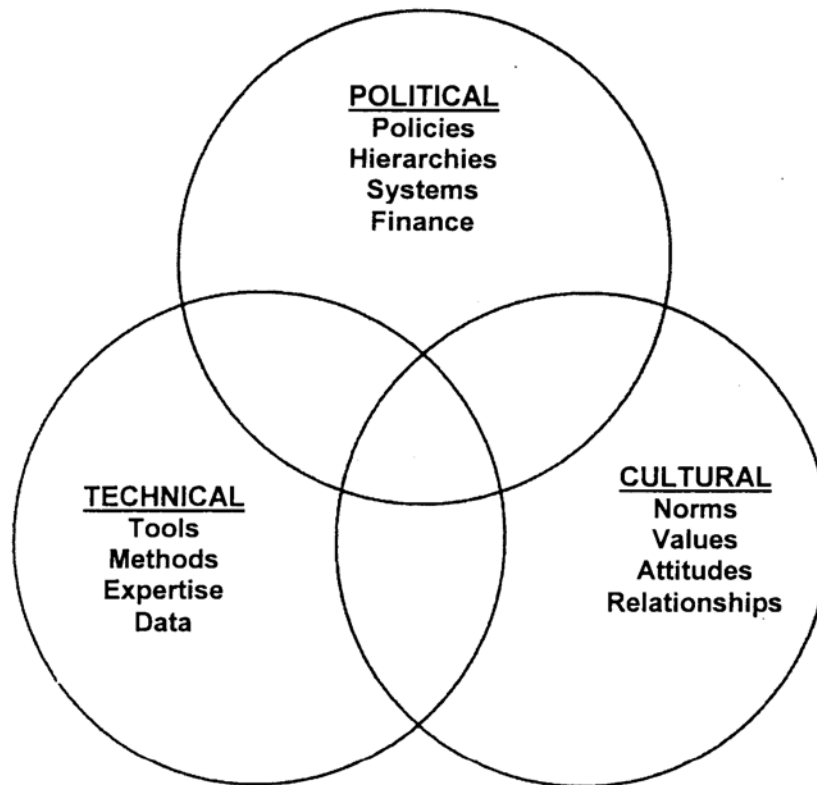
Within the organisation as well, gender mainstreaming can be conceptualised as playing out in different domains.

- The **technical domain** is constituted of the capacities, tools and instruments for gender mainstreaming. Gender experts, guidelines and tools for integrating gender into the project cycle, gender training modules and materials are all located within this domain.
- The **political domain** is the site for integration of gender equality concerns into processes of planning and decision-making within the organization. This is the domain within which hierarchies are institutionalised, which in turn determine access and control over resources and decision-making in the organisation.
- The **cultural domain** is the arena in which the environment and daily practice of the organisation are defined, shaped, and validated. While processes in this domain may not be guided by clearly articulated rules and procedures, they are nonetheless critical to gender mainstreaming. Since it is in this domain that the gap between policy and practice is created, it is also the space where it can be negotiated and contested.

Each of these domains is intricately linked to the other. In turn, each domain and the system as a whole are influenced by multiple factors in the external environment – national development agendas, global discourses, civil society, women's movements, donor priorities and geo-political processes and issues.

Power relations are woven into each domain and are manifested in different ways. In the **political** domain power is visible in forms of leadership, in the ability to influence processes of decision-making, in the creation and maintenance of hierarchies and the control of resources and priorities. In the **technical** domain, unequal power relations are reflected in the ways in which concepts, discourses and methodologies are defined and shaped – in deciding what is “valid” and what is not, what is ‘sound’ and what is not, what is ‘objective’ and what is not. In the **cultural** domain value systems, attitudes, and relationships all reflect power relations that perpetuate gender inequality. The

implications and impacts of each of these, as well as the ways in which they intersect, should ideally be factored into strategies for gender mainstreaming.



The areas where the three domains overlap is the space for organizational transformation

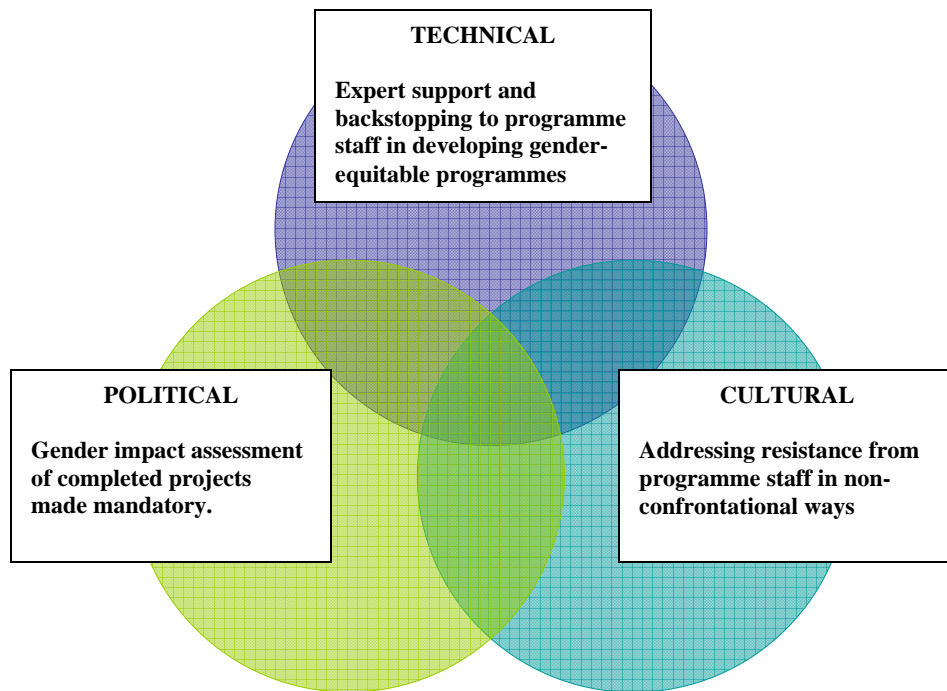
Changes in the **technical** domain are generally easier to bring about and encounter comparatively less resistance than changes in other domains. These are also activities that yield quick and visible outputs such as policy documents, data sets and programme guidelines.

There is now a large volume of data on global gender issues and a considerable collection of analytical frameworks and tools on gender and gender mainstreaming. Almost all development agencies have gender policy statements, gender advisors and gender toolkits. Despite this, development programmes continue to produce gender inequitable outcomes, underlining the fact that mainstreaming is a political process requiring transformation of organisational goals, cultures and ways of functioning.

Organisational change and transformation must therefore lie at the core of any gender mainstreaming strategy. The greatest potential for re-alignment of gender-inequitable relationships in all three domains lies in changing the processes of planning and decision-making within the organisation. Re-arrangement of institutionalised hierarchies through interventions in the political domain, and in attitudes and behaviour

through impacting the cultural domain are necessary to sustain and take forward changes in the technical domain.

The diagram below shows a possible set of interrelated interventions for mainstreaming gender equality concerns into the project cycle.



Source: Kalyani Menon-Sen, JAGORI, New Delhi. December 2005.