



## Gender Mainstreaming in Local Governments

by Sonja Greckol

Canada signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1980, and then, in 2002, signed the Optional Protocol that provides a communication vehicle (i.e. a complaint and review mechanism). Signing CEDAW commits governments to promoting equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life, as well as education, reproductive health, employment, family law, child care, and social security (FAFIA, 2004). The Protocol is an equivalent to the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, and the *Convention against Torture and other Forms of Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*. Following the creation of CEDAW, *gender mainstreaming* and *gender budgeting*, also known as *gender responsive budgeting* and *gender budget analysis*, developed as central methods of analyzing and implementing gender equity. This paper outlines some of the key definitions, strategies, and challenges of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting, and provides a brief overview of the initiatives developed by the cities of Ottawa and Montreal to address gender and diversity at the municipal level.

### Gender Roles in Global Economies

Gender can be defined as the set of characteristics, roles, and behaviour patterns that distinguish women from men. These

roles are social and cultural, not biological—except for maternity—and are generally understood as the product of nurturing, conditioning, and socio-cultural roles and obligations. Roles change over time and from one culture to another. They shape the behaviour and experience of men as well as women. Gender also refers to the power relations between women and men. These relations of power are continuously negotiated as political, economic, social, and cultural changes occur locally, nationally and internationally (Sen, 1999). In the past three decades, the global restructuring of economies has had an impact on the relations of power between women and men around the world.

### Gender Mainstreaming brings women and men, girls and boys into the picture

*Gender mainstreaming* is a methodology for tying the gender equality goals of governments to their political and administrative processes. It is a transformative methodology in that it assesses, develops, implements, and evaluates political and policy-making processes in order to make visible, and to account for, gender differences. Its process and tools ensure that everyone involved in decision making applies a gender equality perspective. Gender mainstreaming must reflect the complexity of groups within nations and regions, and must ensure the identification of equality goals for racialized and immigrant women, poor women, older women, women of different faiths, women



with disabilities, lesbians, and queers.

*Gender budgeting* is the application of gender mainstreaming to the budget process. Budgets are the key instruments by which governments shape a city's infrastructure of social and physical planning and services. Gender budgeting assesses the impact and outcomes of budget proposals on women and men, girls and boys, and assesses revenue and expenditure with a view to promoting gender equality. Three core areas of government spending are often identified for review (Bakker, 2002). Specifically, they include, gender-based expenditures such as women's anti-violence and health initiatives, equal opportunities expenditures such as training and child care, and general or mainstream budgets, i.e. employment support programmes, policing, and security services.

In the European Union, the arguments that have been used successfully to encourage cities to adopt gender budgeting (Havnør, 2003) include:

- 1) Compliance with international conventions.
- 2) Fairness. Women and men, and girls and boys, would be able to influence equally, and benefit equally from, common resources. Gender budgeting reflects a concern for all residents, restores women and girls to visibility, and focuses resources in marginalized communities.
- 3) Gender budgeting is good governance and good economics. It supports objectives such as efficiency in resources management and service delivery, enhances evidence-based policy decisions, and supports customer-focus or user-friendliness of governments.

Gender analysis of budgets has the potential to transform institutional culture because it systematically examines the outcomes and impacts of revenue generation and expenditure on women and men.

### **Gender Equality and Local Governance**

States and national boundaries come and go; cities remain a primary unit for the organization of populations and services. In urban centres, women and men, and girls and boys, do not share the same quality of urban life. And further, women with disabilities, and immigrant and racialized women do not benefit equitably from resources and opportunities. These inequalities reproduce themselves from one generation to the next.

The World Bank, for example, has found that gender inequality reduces productivity in the next generation. The probability of a child being enrolled in school increases with his or her mother's educational level. Also, extra income going to the mother has a more positive impact on household nutrition, health, and education of the child, than extra income going to the father (Sen, 1999).

Through the application of its Gender Policy Objectives in local government projects, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has found that women's role in municipal decision-making can be supported by encouraging their participation in formal electoral and local community processes. Municipal services can support actions to end violence against women and can provide services to victims. Municipalities can promote non-discrimination in the design and access of services that respond to the different needs of women, men, boys, and girls. CIDA has



found that, for example, in local government projects involving consultation with men and women, men identify roads and transportation as priorities, while women identify schools, water, and domestic violence. These differences reflect the organization of men and women's day-to-day lives (Bazinet, 2004).

### **Gender Mainstreaming Requires Political Leadership, Senior Commitment and Resources – Two Examples**

Gender mainstreaming requires, on the one hand, programs and policies that address the specific needs of groups of women and, on the other hand, programs and policies that address the needs of both women and men. For example, safety and anti-violence measures are crafted to respond to the specific needs of women, but overall security and policing must address the needs of both women and men and girls and boys. Token efforts at gender mainstreaming, i.e., those that do not have senior political and administrative commitment, a strong and visible political champion, resources, methodology, or community engagement, can serve to make women invisible through neutral policy language. For example, youth anti-violence interventions that do not specifically target both young men and women are likely to only identify young men as criminals, without dealing with the impact of community violence on young women. Gender mainstreaming requires an institutional, systemic policy commitment at the senior level, as well as the resources and tools to analyse, implement, and monitor its outcomes and impact.

### **City of Ottawa**

In 1999, the City of Ottawa established the Working Group on Women's Access to Services (WAMS) in order to assess the extent to which the City met the spirit of the International Union of Local Authorities Women and Local Government Declaration.

#### **EXCERPTS FROM INTERNATIONAL UNION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (IULA) DECLARATION ON WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Local government as a service provider and enabler of sound living conditions.** Women have the right to equal access to the services of local governments, as well as the right to be treated equally in these services and to be able to influence the initiation, development, management and monitoring of services. The provision of services such as education, welfare and other social services by local governments, should aim to see women and men as equally responsible for matters related both to the family and to public life, and avoid perpetuating stereotypes of women and men. Women have the equal right to sound environmental living conditions, housing, water distribution and sanitation facilities, as well as to affordable public transportation. Women's needs and living conditions must be made visible and taken into account at all times in planning. Women have the right to equal access to the territory and geographical space of local governments, ranging from the right to own land, to the right to move freely and without fear in public spaces and on public transport. Local government has a role to play in ensuring the reproductive rights of women and the rights of women to freedom from domestic violence and other forms of physical, psychological and sexual violence and abuse.



**EXCERPTS FROM INTERNATIONAL UNION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (IULA) DECLARATION ON WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Local government as an employer in a strategic position to influence local society.** Women have the equal right to employment in local government and equality in recruitment procedures. As employees in local government, women and men have the right to equal pay, equal access to benefits, promotion and training, as well as the right to equal working conditions and treatment in the evaluation of their work. Women's often heavy workload of paid and unpaid work is a barrier to their ability to take part in decision making. Local government has an important role to play in providing affordable, professional and safe care services for children, older people and people with disabilities, be that directly or in partnership with the private or the voluntary sectors, and in promoting the sharing of household tasks by women and men on an equal basis. Men have the equal right and responsibility to care for their children and relatives and should be encouraged to do so (IULA declaration).

This partnership between Ottawa city staff, community women's groups, and the two universities focused on four goals:

- 1) To evaluate women and men's equal access to municipal services;
- 2) To ensure that the diversity of women was fully recognized;
- 3) To focus on the idea that the more inclusive a City is of marginalized women, the better it will be for all women; and
- 4) To make recommendations to Council.

WAMS conducted about 20 focus groups with diverse women and held a Community Forum to discuss the research results and to prepare recommendations. Its key findings

include:

- 1) Better communication on availability of programmes and services is needed;
- 2) Good public transport is centrally important;
- 3) Services at appropriate venues with appropriate combinations are needed; and
- 4) Services need to be accompanied by appropriate supports.

WAMS identified several key success factors and obstacles. These included:

- 1) All partnerships were central to success;
- 2) No buy-in from senior staff;
- 3) No funds for monitoring implementation; and
- 4) Downloading and amalgamation without adequate resources creates competing demands on time and money that threatens to squeeze out the consideration of women's access needs (Klodawsky, 2002).

In 2004, the Working Group focused on empowering women from various local communities by providing training in lobbying and political processes. It developed a gender budget analysis entitled *Eyes on the Budget* to review five areas—housing; jobs; safety; victimization that leads to criminalization; and, French language services—and presented these to council committees. In 2005, WAMS is working in partnership with the largest city department, Community and Protective Services, to incorporate a gender perspective



into the department's strategic plan. With the collaboration and support of senior managers, WAMS will provide training and tools to incorporate gender analysis into the department's three-year plan from the outset (Greckol, 2005).

### City of Montreal

The City of Montreal's *Femmes et Villes* (Women in the City) programme, in collaboration with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), developed a report card that assesses a city's infrastructure for implementing gender equality. The key dimensions that need to be in place to enable women's equality include gender action plans, data disaggregated by sex, training in gender mainstreaming, and gender impact assessment. These are identified among the Administrative Structures and Mechanisms below. Similarly, these measures reflect key findings across jurisdictions about the need for consultation strategies that specifically encourage women's participation.

#### City of Montreal's *Femmes et Villes* (Women in the City) Report Card

##### Political Structures and Mechanisms

National laws on women's rights and gender equality;  
National laws on gender quotas or parity at the municipal level;  
Affirmative action policies in municipal parties;  
Parity in committees, commissions and para-municipal enterprises;  
Network of elected women representatives;  
Council-adopted policy on gender equality (developed through public consultation and carried out via annual municipal plan of action);  
Public consultation policies that provide mechanisms for participation of female citizens;  
Policies and commitments to fight violence against women and increase their safety;  
Gender perspective in all programmes (including

annual municipal budget and sectoral budgets);  
Support of national and international municipal associations (training, networking, etc.).

##### Administrative Structures, Mechanisms and Resources

Gender Equality/Women's Office (with adequate human resources and budget within central administration, in charge of gender mainstreaming);  
Annual gender equality action plan (with specific goals, indicators, budget);  
Training in gender mainstreaming (for elected officials and staff, men and women);  
Access to disaggregated data on all urban issues;  
Gender impact assessment of urban policies, programmes and service delivery;  
Equal opportunity programme for hiring (with specific targets for different types of jobs);  
Information service in boroughs, neighbourhoods or districts;  
Process to handle citizen requests and complaints from women and men.

### Racialized and Immigrant Women and Poverty in Toronto

In Toronto, in 1996, a study revealed that the majority of racialized female lone parents lived below the low-income cut-offs. The rate of home ownership for racialized single parents was very low, ranging from 4.5 percent for African, Black Caribbean women, to 12.1 percent for Latin American women, to 13.1 percent for Arab and West Asian women. The majority of racialized women were employed in low-skill manual and non-manual occupations (Ornstein, 2000, as cited in Khosla, 2003).

*The City of Toronto 2003 Report Card on Homelessness and Housing* indicates that the number of one-parent families using shelters increased by 51 percent between 1990 and 2002. Approximately 2,300 one-parent families used shelters during 2002. While both of these studies reflect the research conducted by the City of Toronto,



the contrasts in the two data analysis are striking. While the first makes visible the economic disadvantage of racialized women and racialized female lone parents, the second renders the depth of the vulnerability of racialized lone parent women invisible by obscuring the fact that lone parents are women, and by not detailing the shelter use by racialized lone parent women. The latter is more typical of the recent reporting from city departments.

### **Women with Disabilities and Poverty**

As with other levels of government, women with disabilities, and specifically racialized and immigrant women with disabilities, are marginalized in municipal processes and services. While services such as accessible transportation, housing, and homecare are available, they are not constructed on a platform of inclusion and equity. Instead, they are based on a medicalized definition of disability and create new forms of marginalization.

Two examples of existing specialized care services underscore the need for adaptation to meet more particular needs. First, attendant care programmes supporting care activities in independent households need to be adapted to support care in extended family households in order to better support those who are disabled and living in ethno-cultural living arrangements. Secondly, accessible transportation services need to be adapted to support women with disabilities fleeing abusive households. This disability service needs an emergency component that is mostly women-specific.

### **Identifying Specifically Coordinated Strategies**

A systemic commitment to gender mainstreaming could holistically address the issues of disadvantaged groups of women by raising questions about how housing/shelter needs are related to employment disadvantage. It would raise questions about how this disadvantage can be addressed in the economic development strategies targeting sectors such as media and entertainment, construction, etc. In turn, the analysis raises questions about the built environment, and the integration of transportation and neighbourhood planning, including child care, schools, and recreation services.

For example, gender mainstreaming economic development, planning, transportation, and employment in order to make poor women with children visible requires:

- 1) Disaggregating the routine reporting data for job creation, incubation projects, employment development, housing accessibility, location and waiting lists, and transportation use patterns. Doing so requires new methods for assembling data to identify the spaces in which there would be opportunities to impact the lives of poor women. Existing data sources, like Census databases and operational databases, require integration so that waiting lists for social housing, job creation, and the attendant earnings for complex categories of women and men, for example, can be examined. Needs assessment and intake tools can be adapted to provide disaggregated data for policy development and service planning.

- 2) Developing a comprehensive set of interventions in consultation with racialized lone parent women, and women with disabilities, to meet a range of needs.



- 3) Targeting funds to ensure that these groups benefit from the resources.
- 4) Integrating ongoing monitoring of the implementation of this holistic strategy.

#### **Conclusion: Addressing the Lives of Girls and Women through Gender Mainstreaming**

The discussion above addresses developing coordinated strategies for an identified group(s) of women who face the greatest disadvantage. More generally, gender mainstreaming and gender budget analysis require policy makers, planners, and implementers to continuously assess the relevance of gender in their policy and service practice decisions.

Gender mainstreaming requires both tools and training in order to develop the basic steps:

- 1) The unpacking of assumptions from neutral language. Women and men need to be made visible in “households,” and “families,” and among “people,” “poverty,” and “homelessness.”
- 2) The unpacking of the words “women” and “men” to understand the communities of women and men in a given city. While “intersectionality”—the recognition and analysis of identity and experience that is shaped by the interaction of race, sexual orientation, disability, language, and economic status—complicates the analysis, it is vital in order to ensure that mainstreaming and/or budgeting addresses these complex equality issues.
- 3) Bringing into policy discussions the activities where women predominate, such

as domestic work, non-standard work, and family care. It also involves unpacking “jobs” and “work” to understand who holds the jobs, who does the work, who spends the time, and who has the money.

- 4) Disaggregating and gathering new data to reflect the above, facilitating an analysis of the situations and experiences of women and men, and girls and boys.

- 5) Gathering input from women and men.

- 6) Identifying the means of supporting equitable distribution of resources and benefits.

- 7) Providing input on options for women and men in different communities.

- 8) Identifying action plans for activities, resources, and timeframes.

- 9) In collaboration with community consultation, monitoring and adjusting action plans, including outcomes and impacts.

The tools of gender mainstreaming—disaggregating data, transparent analysis, consultation of stakeholders, care for all segments of communities, integration of evidence-based practices into policy development and implementation, accountability through monitoring outcomes and impacts—are the tools of good governance.



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