

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the latest strategy, gender mainstreaming, in advancing the status of women with the ultimate goal of attaining equality and equity between women and men, and how the strategy differs from the previous women in development (WID) approach. It briefly looks into the situation of women in Southeast Asia and worldwide. A deeper look into Indonesia's experiences will be taken to learn that, in spite of the country's strong legal backing to equality between women and men, it is a long endeavor and full of challenges to pursue these ideals, particularly in the current dramatic period of transition towards democracy mandated by the reform movement. Crucial issues such as women's participation in the democratization process, impacts of the economic crisis on women, revival of patriarchy and resurgence of religious conservatism along with the political decentralization are some of the challenges Indonesia is facing in enforcing its commitment to gender equality. Some ideas to set the agenda for change will be proposed and conclude the paper.

Global Mandate for Gender Equality and Equity

In spite of remarkable advances in the economic, health, and educational sectors, the development process worldwide has not led to reducing disparities between rich and poor people within nations and between rich and poor nations. After half a century of development efforts, with increasing global demands for more equitable opportunities for all people and all nations, the most striking disparity in opportunities remains between men and women.

Commitments to increasing opportunities and choices for women, with the ultimate goal of gender equality and equity, were made by 189 states signing the Platform for Action (PFA) of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The PFA identified 12 critical areas and set priority actions to achieve the advancement and empowerment of women, *inter alia*, on women's rights as human's rights; women's freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief; women's access to power and their participation in all levels of decision-making; women and men's equal share of family responsibilities; and women's access to economic resources and the world of education.

In the 23rd UN Special Session in 2000, the state parties reviewed and appraised progress and identified obstacles and current challenges in the implementation of the PFA. They recognized that the goals and commitments have not been fully implemented and achieved. They have agreed upon further actions and initiatives at local, national, regional, and international levels to accelerate its implementation and to ensure that commitments for gender equality are fully realized.

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Gender Mainstreaming: A Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality and Equity

Gender³ mainstreaming is a strategy to attain gender equality and equity. The objective of gender mainstreaming is to integrate gender concerns into programmes and policies to ensure that both women and men are impacted positively by development, through equal access to resources, equal participation in and control of decision making and equal benefits from implementation of development activities.

The concept of gender mainstreaming has developed out of a historical background of efforts to advance equality and equity for women. Mainstreaming gender is different from the previous approach, women in development (WID), whose focus is to increase women's participation in development. Instead of focusing on 'roles' of women and men, gender and development (GAD) focuses on the 'relationships' between women and men. The understanding behind GAD is that improving women's position and status cannot be done without changing the unequal political, social, and economic relations, from one where the power lies with men alone to a more egalitarian sharing of decision-making and resources. This equilibrium has been a crucial consideration for the shift in focus from WID to GAD; the latter more clearly encompassing the importance of equal gender relations.

While WID addresses women's immediate, practical needs such as clean water, health care, family planning and income generation, GAD is geared toward women's more long-term, strategic needs of gender equality. A WID approach by itself is not sufficient as it does not address the fundamental questions of the subordination and discrimination of women. By introducing the GAD approach a new awareness has been introduced, acknowledging that inequalities in status and position between women and men are the primary cause for women's inability to fully participate in and benefit from development.

The differences between WID and GAD are illustrated in the following Table, which was developed by the Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA).

	WID	GAD
Approach	▪ Views women as the problem	▪ An approach to development
Focus	▪ Women	▪ Relations between men and women
Problem	▪ Exclusion of women from development	▪ Unequal relations of power
Goal	▪ More efficient, effective development	▪ Equitable development with men and women as decision makers
Solution	▪ Integrate women into the development process	▪ Empower the disadvantaged and women; transform unequal relations
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Women's projects ▪ Women's components ▪ Increase women's productivity and income ▪ Improve women's ability to manage the household 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify and address practical needs of men and women to improve their condition ▪ Identify and address strategic needs

³ Gender is a socially constructed definition of women and men and can be thought of as culture-specific or time-specific definition of what it means to be female or male. It describes those behaviors and characteristics that society expects from them, not characteristics that are biological. These expectations include the roles women and men play in the family and in social life.

Dimensions of Inequalities

In Southeast Asia, gender inequalities are depicted in the figures in the following Table. The human development index (HDI), developed by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), ranks 162 countries worldwide based on the overall achievements in three basic dimensions: longevity, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. Inequalities in achievements between men and women are captured in the gender-related development index (GDI) and gender empowerment measure (GEM). While GDI applies the same three basic dimensions as HDI, GEM reveals whether women can take active part in economic and political life. It focuses on participation, measuring the percentage of women in parliament, among legislators, senior officials and managers among professional and technical workers – and the gender disparity in earned income, reflecting economic independence. The table also shows the countries' achievements in health and education represented by infant mortality rate (IMR) per 1000 live birth, maternal mortality rate (MMR) per 10,000 live birth, literacy rate (% age 15 and above), life expectancy at birth, and percentage of seats in parliament.

Selected Social Indicators of ASEAN Countries

No	Country	HDI	GDI	GEM	IMR	MMR	% Prlment Seats	Literacy rate		Lfe expectancy	
								Fml	Male	Fml	Male
1.	Brunei	32	30	--	8	--	--	87	94	78	73
2.	Cambodia	121	109	--	86	470	9.3	57	80	58	54
3.	Indonesia	102	92	--	38	450	8.0	81	91	67	63
4.	Malaysia	56	55	38	8	39	14.5	82	91	74	69
5.	Myanmar	118	107	--	79	230	--	80	88	58	53
6.	Philippines	70	62	46	31	170	--	94	95	71	67
7.	Singapore	26	26	35	4	6	6.5	88	96	79	75
8.	Thailand	66	58	--	26	44	--	93	97	72	67
9.	Vietnam	101	89	--	31	160	26.0	91	95	70	65

Source: *Human Development Report 2001*

The problems women in Southeast Asia are facing reflect similar issues at the global level. *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics* (UN 1995) presents figures portraying women's lagging behind status worldwide, among others as follows:

- Women accounted for only 5.7% of the world's cabinet ministers in 1994;
- In business, women rarely account for more than 1 or 2% of top executives;
- Access to work is unequal. Women almost always get lower status and pay;
- The illiteracy rate of young women is at least 25% higher than among young men.
- Women spend 30 hours or more on housework per week, while men around 10 hours;
- Between 17 – 38% of women have been physically assaulted by an intimate partner. Women assault their partners, too, ... usually in self-defense;
- In the health and teaching professions, women are well represented ... but 90% occupy the bottom levels of the status and wage hierarchy. As salaries and prestige

increase further up the hierarchy, the number of positions decreases and men's participation increases.

Women's backwardness is deeply rooted in the entrenched patriarchy prevailing in almost all cultures worldwide. One source of women's disadvantage is the pervasive ideology of male superiority, physical and intellectual, which apparently shapes women's view of themselves and their capacities. Women lack confidence in advancing themselves and often are content with their status as secondary to men. Another source of women's disadvantage is men's control over valued political, economic and social resources, and thus over the distribution of power. Power, in the family, in the society, and in formal institutions, is dominated by men. Male hegemony has placed women in a marginalized position.

From the above perspective, giving women training, credits, etc. is not a solution but only a useful first step in women's empowerment. The structures and processes that give rise to women's disadvantage are to be dismantled and replaced by more egalitarian, equal and equitable relations. It is a tremendous struggle involving both women and men as they negotiate and adapt to changes in the nature of gender relations.

Reflecting on Indonesia's New Challenges

Under leadership of the visionary president Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia gives a strong legal support toward attaining gender equality through the Presidential Instruction (*INPRES*) no. 9/2000 on Gender Mainstreaming in National Development. The Instruction specifies that to realize gender equality and equity in the family, the community, the nation and the state, it is necessary to implement a gender mainstreaming strategy into all national development processes. Backed by technical details, it calls for the attainment of gender equality and gender justice through policies and programmes that include the aspirations and needs of both women and men. This presidential instruction reinforces Indonesia's already existing commitments to equality between women and men reflected in the 1945 Constitution and in a number of conventions it has ratified.

Notwithstanding Indonesia's explicit legal backing to gender equality and equity, disparities between women and men persist as reflected in the Table, and women remain to become targets of male subordination. A BAPPENAS/UNICEF survey on husband-wife relations in 1997 (HDR 2001), for example, reported that about 11% of the 339 male respondents admitted having abused their wives; 19% admitted to psychological intimidation. The 362 female respondents reported on being beaten (16%), kicked (9%), spat on, or burned by a cigarette. Besides the high maternal mortality rate, women also face high risks of maternal morbidity due to inadequate access to health facilities and poor maternal nutrition. Pregnant women also face discrimination at the workplace. The study also notes that working women and girls face harassment and abuse, low wages and occupational health and safety risks.

Over the past five years, Indonesia has been going through a dramatic period of transition. The outbreak of economic crisis in 1997 followed by the downfall of the Suharto regime in 1998 and the elections in 1999 have triggered a comprehensive reform program. The country faces enormous and diverse challenges mandated by the reform movement: establishment of democratic governance, political and economic decentralization, and regeneration of the economy. Can Indonesia cope with gender mainstreaming while undertaking these three major agenda in a simultaneous and interwoven series of reform measures? To answer this question, several overarching conditions will be briefly discussed.

a) Political reform and women's participation

The idea that politics is not for women has been aged-long socialized in such an effective way that women themselves are hesitant to enter this arena. The public-private dichotomy closely related to the concepts of gender, gender roles and stereotypes has perpetuated inequalities between men and women. The immediate impact of such socialization is the marginalization of women from formal politics. Women are deprived from their political rights and political world has, therefore, been dominated by the males. Women's 'typical' issues like reproductive roles, domestic violence, rapes, sexual harassment, and child nutrition are not viewed as political issues, although they clearly have important political dimensions, i.e. unequal power relations between men and women.

The reform movement has brought greater freedom in political life. Political parties are now allowed to organize and stand for elections and up to 48 parties were represented in the June 1999 elections. However, this promising measure has not promised much hope to women. Most political parties have no sensitivity and awareness of gender and women's issues, and do not consider them as an important agenda to be addressed. They are not backed up by politicians with knowledge and skills in gender analysis and in identifying gender-biased policies that lead to discrimination against women. Affirmative action, which has become a consensus at the global level, remains debatable in reality. Since women are very much under-represented, it is important that efforts be made to promote women's participation in politics.

b) Impact of the economic crisis on women

The immediate impact of the crisis has been women's longer working hours and extra work to make ends meet due to increasing poverty. For example, the red-district area in Jakarta absorbed 50 to 100 new comers every month in 1998. Retrenchment mostly took place at the upper level of employment, mostly occupied by men; and women appeared as sole breadwinners for the family, in spite of their low wages. Women earning below poverty line doubled, and their real wages were a third lower than men's.

Poverty means more than lack of income; it is also reflected in malnutrition, poor health, higher maternal mortality, higher infant mortality, and high drop-outs from school, especially for girls. These all have long-term effects. Poverty has also curtailed women's purchasing power for contraceptives. As a result, unwanted pregnancies as well as unsafe abortions have increased, leading to more maternal deaths. The loss of social

capital such as education, social harmony, and positive attitudes towards smaller families was not easy to quantify. The entire social fabric was impacted by unemployment and rising poverty. Crime, violence, racial tension and illegal activities increase, with women being in large number among the victims.

c) Decentralization and revival of patriarchy

The ambitious plans to give greater authority, decision-making and financial powers to the districts and, partially, to the provinces are reflected in the regional autonomy law (22/1999) and the fiscal balance law (25/1999). Under these laws, the central government continues to have authority in certain areas of concern which are defense, foreign affairs, justice, monetary policy, and religion; while the rests, including gender, fall under local parties. The districts, then, have an enormous amount of autonomy to utilize their resources.

While this is a potentially positive step for local development, this may not necessarily be beneficial to gender relations. Gender, being a new concept in Indonesia, is hardly well understood even by planners and policy makers who are supposed to integrate it in their programmes and policies. As a result, a lot of the programmes are not geared towards attaining gender equality. Programmes such as micro credits and income generation are not unimportant as they do address women's practical needs, but they do not touch the core of the problem, which is inequality in man-woman relations. It takes a lot of investment in terms of time, finance and energy to conduct gender planning training for thousands of planners from more than 400 districts and provinces throughout the country.

Lack of understanding of the concept of gender has also led to the confusion between women's issues, gender issues, and women. One province, for example, took pride in its REPETADA (Regional Annual Development Plan) which, in its opening, boldly stated that there are no gender issues in the province; equality between men and women has been achieved as proved by the fact that Indonesia is now led by a woman president! This simplistic thinking, as a matter of fact, runs the risk of overlooking the real problems women are facing, especially when it is men, rather than women, who define the notion of 'women's problems.' Not all male planners and policymakers have the sensitivity and empathy for capturing women's needs and aspiration, and, hence, the ability to design gender responsive programmes. Instead of promoting women's status towards equality with men, they may end up designing programmes that even add to women's already heavy double and triple burdens and sustain their stereotypical roles.

d) Religious conservatism and its impact on women

Along with the reform movement, in which greater freedom of expression has been enjoyed by the majority of Indonesians, there have appeared demands for more rigid implementation of Islamic teachings. This tendency caught its momentum in the decentralization process, which has stimulated a revival of local cultures including the enactment of Syariat Islam (SI) in some districts and provinces. Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD), for example, is a province that declared itself to be based on SI and commemorated the 1424 Islamic New Year by initiating the enforcement of the law. Starting with the Islamic dress code, the law is to be followed by a set of by-laws

currently being deliberated to set out more detailed provisions. Syariat police are being recruited to enforce the law.

Other regions, although not legally based on SI, have in fact imposed it, more on the ground of morality and with women appearing to be the main target. In West Sumatra, a bill on social diseases was submitted which, in the framework of banishing prostitution, banned women from being outside the house during the night. In a district in the province of Riau, women wearing ‘un-Islamic’ outfits in public places were arrested and detained, also for a similar reason of eliminating prostitution. Similar trends of objectifying women appear in several other districts. It may be inferred from these actions that the essence of Islam has been reduced to physical attributes with women being the primary target of the policies.

While women and girls lag far behind in basic social indicators in Indonesia, as in many other Muslim societies: percentage of girls in school, illiteracy rates of adult women, infant and child mortality rates, maternal mortality rates, access to sanitation and clean water, etc. women have been victimized and more rigidly controlled in the democratization process during this reform era. What a tragic contradiction! The question to be raised, then, is, whether this backwardness amongst Muslim women is simply a coincidence or whether interpretations of Islam have been holding them from enjoying their rights as full human beings as guaranteed by Islam itself.

Various studies on gender and Islam point out the gaps between Islamic teachings and their realization among Muslim societies. Islamic ideals of gender equality and equity and Islamic fundamental values of justice and freedom for both men and women, in many cases, turn out to be the opposite. Women in Muslim societies are frequently deprived from their basic rights recognized by Islam due to misogynistic and male-biased interpretations of religious texts. Entrenched patriarchy pervasive among Muslim societies has perpetuated male dominance which is often misunderstood as being Islamic. It is important, therefore, to put a distinct borderline between Islamic basic values which reflect justice, freedom, and equality, and man-made interpretations which may be biased and discriminatory.

Setting the Agenda for Change

An agenda for attaining equality between women and men requires the dismantling of the institutions and ideologies that perpetuate old-aged women’s subordination and that justify inequality in terms of the distribution of power and political, social, and economic resources. To this end, stakeholders of development: government, non-government organizations, political parties, the private sector, the media, the academics, religious and civil society groups in general can work together, among others, to:

- develop a woman-friendly culture in all our environments: in the family, in the school, at the workplace, in the media, and in the society at large. Making a woman-friendly culture involves challenging male dominance. Men and also women have to

be convinced that equality between them is beneficial not only for women but also for both men and women and for the society at large. Stereotypes and gender-biased cultural values socialized since one's childhood are to be replaced by more woman-friendly expressions.

- invest for the promotion of institutional and individual learning on gender, especially for those with greater multiplier effect such as policy makers, development planners, public opinion makers, religious leaders, classroom teachers, etc. Awareness and sensitivity of gender and women's issues are crucial for these individuals and their institutions;
- promote dialogues for the education of male and female on women's and gender issues. Changing society's and individual's attitudes to become gender sensitive is a long term endeavor requiring collaboration and synergies of men and women. Relations between men and women should be mutually supportive and complementing, rather than competing with or opposing to each other;
- promote emancipating and progressive interpretations of Islamic teachings so as to reflect the Islamic mission of justice, equality and freedom. Make clear distinction between universal, basic values of religious teachings and patriarchal cultural phenomena. Stop the processing and production of stereotypes and gender biases in the name of religion;
- advocate for the acceptance of affirmative action or positive discrimination policy to accelerate the participation of women at the decision-making level. Affirmative action is meant to catch up on women's lagging behind condition and under-representation due to personal and cultural constraints or discrimination. Affirmative action is legitimate because women's experiences need to be involved in politics and representation is one of the principles of democracy.

The above are points that may be discussed in pursuing gender equality and equity. Priorities can be set based on the prevailing conditions.

Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming as a strategy for the achievement of gender equality and equity has been adopted as a follow up to the Beijing Conference in 1995. Instead of focusing and putting the blame on women, it focuses its intervention on man-woman relations and, hence, men's involvement in the process becomes inevitable. A well-orchestrated effort needs to be performed to move women's position from the margin to the mainstream of development. A major indicator is that positive impacts of development be equally and equitably shared by both men and women. While Indonesia's commitment to gender equality and equity is supported by legal backing, the country has yet to show its political will in realizing its commitment. Faced by enormous and diverse challenges arising out of the transition period and the reform agenda, the country is struggling relentlessly to pursue the goal of equality between men and women. Will it succeed? Only time and history can answer.

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