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Implementation of gender mainstreaming

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Gender mainstreaming in Finland

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1. Introduction

Although gender mainstreaming entered the Finnish political language and debate in the aftermath of the Beijing Conference and Platform 1995 it has a long history in the country. Since the 1980 governmental gender equality plan, it was known as 'equality permeation principle'.

It is mentioned as a key gender equality policy tool both in the country's gender equality legislation and in governmental programmes and gender equality programme's that bind the actions of the government.

The Gender Equality Act includes a general clause on the responsibility of public authorities to promote gender equality and for them to nominate both women and men in an equitable manner to various representative bodies (Law 609/1986). This binds all decision-making at the national and sub-national (municipal) levels.

The first more comprehensive reform of the Gender Equality Act in 1995 introduced for public authorities the legal obligation to ensure the balanced representation of women and men (numerical gender quotas) in various indirectly elected or nominated bodies (Law 206/1995, see below). Together with a later reform in 2005 (Law 232/2005) the amendments made the obligations of employers to promote equality much more extensive. A gender equality plan must be prepared annually in all work-places with more than 30 employees. This includes most of the work-places within the public sector. Moreover, the responsibility of public authorities to promote gender equality were made more detailed in the law, for example, by stating, that they must create and establish practices that ensure that gender equality is taken into account in all policy preparation and decision-making. This was one of the legal instruments which were used to aid gender mainstreaming.

Gender equality policies have become more visible and effective at the central state level in the 2000s. The Government Programmes and Gender equality programmes constitute the key tools for formal gender equality policy. Gender mainstreaming was in central position in the Government's Gender Equality Programme 1997-1999 the aim of which was to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. It has since been included not only in different Governments' gender equality programmes but also in Government programmes. For example, the Centre-Right Government Programmes 2004-2007 and 2007-2011 state that the 'promotion of gender equality is the responsibility of the whole government' which 'aims to mainstream gender equality throughout the whole public administration'.

Gender budgeting has been included since 2006 to the Finance Ministry's regulation about plans of action and budget planning to all ministries. There are no specific guidelines about how to do this.

In terms of the institutional structures, the Gender Equality Unit placed within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health coordinates gender mainstreaming within the government ministries. Its tasks in relation to gender mainstreaming include to plan,

coordinate and support gender mainstreaming in public bodies, the governmental ministries in particular. It trains civil servants, produces guidelines and information about gender mainstreaming. The Ministries have the responsibility of implementing gender mainstreaming in their own work and structures. The Government's Gender Equality Programme requires that all ministries establish a gender equality working group. One of the responsibilities of these groups is gender mainstreaming. There are some horizontal ministerial working groups that address gender mainstreaming, for example the evaluation group of the Government's Gender Equality Programme and the network of the ministries' gender equality working groups that started in 2010. The Centre for Gender Equality Information Minna, established in XX and placed within the XX, provides knowledge about gender equality to aid decision- and policy-making.

Monitoring and gathering information about gender mainstreaming at a general level is the responsibility of the Gender Equality Unit. It monitors gender mainstreaming at legislative preparation and in budgeting annually.

2. Transferability issues

The Centre-Right Government (2007-2011) gave the first ever Government Report on Gender Equality (2010) that evaluates the past governments' policy and outlines policy objectives for future (until 2020). In the report, the Government evaluates the success of gender mainstreaming policy in the following way:

- Gender mainstreaming has made significant advances in the 2000s in governmental decision-making and preparation processes.
- Public authorities have the duty to take gender into account in policy preparation and decision-making (duty to gender mainstream).
- During the past five years the Government has made progress in mainstreaming gender in the process of preparing laws and in budgeting.
- However, the impact of law proposals on the lives of women and men continues to be rarely evaluated and there are no established practices on how to do this.
- There is a need to make implementation of gender mainstreaming more efficient at the local and municipal levels.

The Government Report on Gender Equality (2010) lists the following policy objectives for future in relation to gender mainstreaming:

1. The legal position of gender mainstreaming is specified in the Gender Equality Act
2. Gender mainstreaming practices are strengthened and clarified and gender is mainstreamed too all governmental actions.
 - Gender mainstreaming in legislative preparation is based on clear and binding guidelines.
 - Each ministry explains better its own practices and ways of working in order to make gender budgeting possible and more effective. Finance ministry has a central role in co-ordinating the efforts. Gender is accounted for also when budgets are monitored.

3. Institutional structures for implementing gender mainstreaming are strengthened and developed.
 - Permanent structures require resources for developing tools, practices and training.
 - Implementation and monitoring is moved from the Gender Equality Unit to the ministries. The resources, power to influence and shape policies, and the continuity of ministerial gender equality working groups is ensured.
4. Gender mainstreaming training and knowhow continues to be developed.
 - Statistics are disaggregated on the basis of gender.

In sum, many of the issues identified in relation to Belgium and Sweden are present in the Government evaluation and objectives for the future. These include:

- The need to have firm regulations and laws rather than soft governance and soft law (both countries).
- The importance of specific guidelines on for example how to do gender impact assessment or gender budgeting (Belgium).
- The importance of monitoring and follow-ups (Sweden).
- The importance of support structures (Sweden) and co-operation between different ministries (Belgium).

What has received less attention is the importance of including a gender theory and a perspective on power to gender mainstreaming as in the case of Sweden. Hence the whole question of what form gender mainstreaming takes (is it integrationist, agenda-setting or transformative) and how this impacts on the success of the policy making tool is missing from the government policy and assessment. Gender scholars in the country, by contrast, would emphasise the need to understand gendered power structures in order to advance gender equality. This debate on gender and power is missing from Finland. This could also be compared to the Belgium case that suggests that it is important to have a vision of gender equality rather than carry out gender mainstreaming mechanically.

3. Policy debate

More critical observations about the problems relating to gender mainstreaming in Finland include¹

- Implementation problems remain.
 - Although gender mainstreaming legislative preparation has been an explicit goal only about 10 percent of government proposals contained some gender impact assessment (6 percent in 2004). 85 percent of government proposals made no reference to gender. In 2009, budget planning proposals only half of the ministries named some gender impact or gender equality goals (Information in the Background material of the Government Report on Gender Equality p. 87). Little or no progress in the actual policy content.
 - Gender equality perspective not there from the beginning but often remembered towards the end of the process as in the case of the government's policy programmes. I was part of the team that evaluated the Citizen participation policy programme from a gender perspective in 2004. Impossible.
 - Misunderstandings of what gender mainstreaming is. the requirement to do gender mainstreaming in all of their actions and policies was relaxed so that each ministry chose one project (in addition to policy programmes) where gender mainstreaming was undertaken. For example, the one of the Ministry of Justice had nothing to do with gender.
 - There's little systematic knowledge about implementation of gender mainstreaming at the municipal level. The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities that consists of the towns and municipalities in Finland has signed the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men that will act as a tool to advance gender mainstreaming at the municipal level.
- Systematic monitoring is undeveloped
 - The Gender Equality Unit has insufficient resources for the task. It monitors the final outcome of the legislative preparation and not the whole process.
 - Gender mainstreaming is also monitored when the government's Gender Equality Programme is evaluated. Reporting on this is however delegated to the ministries themselves and there are no common practices or guidelines.
- There is a chronic lack of resources
 - Not a main task of civil servants, do gender mainstreaming in addition to their other work, sometimes based on their personal interest in the topic.
 - Gender mainstreaming is often done in terms of projects: outside the ministries, short term.

¹ See Anne Maria Holli and Johanna Kantola (2007) 'State Feminism Finnish Style: Strong Policies clash with Implementation Problems' in Joyce Outshoorn and Johanna Kantola (eds.) *Changing State Feminism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan); Brunila, Kristiina (2009) *Parasta ennen. Tasa-arvotyön projektitapaistuminen*. Kasvatuksen laitoksen tutkimuksia 222, Helsinki 2009 and the Background material of the Government Report on Gender Equality.

- Gender mainstreaming is misunderstood or defined in ways antithetical to gender equality goals
 - Gender mainstreaming often becomes complicit with neoliberal goals that may be antithetical to gender equality. For example, gender mainstreaming of performance management is one of the key areas where gender mainstreaming is applied in Finland. Gender mainstreaming may thereby legitimate neoliberal governance practices.
 - There is little focus on more participatory forms of gender mainstreaming where for example civil society organisations (women's organisations) would be involved in the policy making process.