

Enabling organisational environment

An enabling organisational environment refers to factors that will make it easier or more difficult for successful mainstreaming. If some factors are not present – or if others are negative – it will result in mainstreaming being more difficult and, perhaps, unsuccessful or outright impossible.

There are a number of core factors, constituting an enabling environment.

1. Political buy-in and commitment

Strong political buy-in and commitment is necessary to operationalise and sustain mainstreaming. Political office bearers should have knowledge and understanding of gender and the concerns of vulnerable groups, as well as why mainstreaming is important. In much the same way, the political leadership should have clarity about the goal of equality and development and should be committed to pursuing it. In order for the commitment to be visibly implemented, there must be clear criteria guiding mainstreaming. Political support and will for awareness-raising and the dissemination of information about mainstreaming is also required. Gender equality must be defined as a main development objective, and there should be a “mission statement” that states clearly the intention of the organisation to mainstream. In order for the abovementioned to be possible, there must be willingness to question current practices, structures and other factors that perpetuate inequality and the exclusion of women and vulnerable people.

2. Senior management buy-in and commitment (including sponsors and champions)

There must be senior management buy-in and support for mainstreaming in order for it to be successfully implemented. Senior management must have knowledge and understanding of gender issues and the concerns of vulnerable groups, as well as why mainstreaming is important. As with political office bearers, they should have clarity about the goal of equality and development and must be committed to pursuing it. Pursuing mainstreaming as a strategy must be on the agendas of the top committees and management meetings. There must also be willingness to look critically at the quality and function of management in issues of mainstreaming as a means to give effect to gender equality and the concerns of vulnerable groups. In order to implement mainstreaming successfully, there must be a specific person (or people) in top/senior management responsible for mainstreaming, and such people should have the support of a dedicated team, some of whom have specialist expertise in mainstreaming. In addition, the presence of sponsors or champions who drive mainstreaming, and advocate for the allocation of adequate resources, are very important, as a strategy. Such sponsors and champions should develop and implement supporting practices to enhance mainstreaming.

3. Community/public support

The existence of broad community support for mainstreaming as a strategy to effectively take gender into account will go a long way to ensure successful implementation, and to generate and maintain the necessary political commitment to the process. Therefore, both top-level (political and management) and grassroots approaches to mainstreaming should be adopted. As such, organisational structures and mechanisms should be in place to ensure the participation of women and vulnerable groups in decision making about policy, programme/project formulation, evaluation etc. Ideally, there should be insurance that the community also has the relevant advocacy skills to participate directly in decision making in order to ensure that their concerns are adequately represented.

4. Overall organisational functioning

Overall, the organisation must be effectively functioning to create a conducive for mainstreaming. This is possible when:

- there is good leadership and coordination at management level to enable mainstreaming as a strategy;
- there are institutional strategic plans for mainstreaming practices that are agreed to and formally reported on at the highest levels;
- there is an institutional mission statement that asserts mainstreaming as a priority;
- it is a requirement to include mainstreaming as a strategy in all plans and budgets;
- assessing mainstreaming outcomes is a mandatory part of performance appraisals at all levels;
- mainstreaming outcomes considerations are included in all reviews;
- officials monitoring mainstreaming are on all significant committees;
- there is a rights-based equality policy;
- there is a specific gender policy;
- there is general capacity to work efficiently with and for stakeholder groups;
- there is willingness to assess structures and mechanisms to determine if they creates opportunities for or constraints to equality;
- there is a positive attitude to learning and change;
- there are structures and transparency to ensure that officials comply with policy directions, and there is accountability;
- there is recognition for a wide range of professional skills, including those associated with mainstreaming;
- there are good general development practices such as clear planning, solid monitoring and reporting procedures, consultations with target groups among others;
- there are effective organisational structures and mechanisms to ensure that gender concerns and the concerns of vulnerable groups are raised within planning and decision making processes;
- there are organisational structures and mechanisms to make inter-sectoral linkages, to monitor progress, and to hold the organisation accountable with regards to gender; and
- there is institutional infrastructure, including structures with clearly defined roles and mechanisms to support equality, collaborative mechanisms, and mechanisms for information exchange in order to support mainstreaming.

5. Organisational culture

The overall organisational culture must favour mainstreaming as an implementation strategy. This means that there should be a clear and explicit link between the focus of the organisation and the goal of gender equality. Staff must be aware of how and why equality concerns are relevant in their areas of work, and there must be a significant number of staff committed to gender equality and to addressing the concerns of vulnerable people. Supportive organisational culture for the implementation of mainstreaming implies that:

- there is clarity about the goal of gender equality and development at both senior decision making and operational levels of the organisation;
- there is commitment to pursuing goals associated with gender equality and development;
- the organisation tries to provide equal opportunities for women within its own ranks;
- there is an internalised alertness to, knowledge of, and a desire for equal opportunities for women and vulnerable people;
- the general thinking in the organisation about empowerment is positive;
- there is a positive policy environment such as a clear legal foundation for the development of policies supporting gender equality and a clear political commitment to a systematic and cross-sectoral development approach;
- the organisation is, in general, flexible and open to new ideas; and
- the organisation is willing to change and incorporate input from diverse stakeholders.

6. Available resources

The resources required to implement mainstreaming must be available, and such resources must be attached to specific gender equality and mainstreaming outcomes. Funds and physical resources should be available to implement mainstreaming as a strategy, and there must be commitment to provide the resources for developing techniques and tools, establish new channels of co-operation, consultation and communication and to provide expertise and training for policy-makers so they can deliver on mainstreaming. There must also be willingness to consider the reallocation of existing funds in order to implement mainstreaming as a strategy. This means that the organisation will not only consider the immediate costs of mainstreaming, but also take the long-term benefits into consideration when deciding on short-term costs for implementing the strategy.

7. Internal expertise and knowledge

A killer assumption for creating an enabling environment for the implementation of mainstreaming is that the organisation has the necessary internal expertise and knowledge to implement the strategy successfully. It implies that the organisation has strong analytical, communication, advocacy, planning and management skills and capacity to use to enable mainstreaming. It also means that relevant research on gender and the concerns of vulnerable groups and adequate disaggregated data to support policy and programme formulation are all available. An effective flow of information within the organisation is necessary for mainstreaming. Analytical inputs for policy decision making that supports gender equality (including guidelines and analytical frameworks for policy analysis, policy research to support more informed debate and developing gender equality indicators to assess progress) should be available. Successful mainstreaming will be dependent on the

availability of accurate data on the current gender situation. It also implies that the organisation is committed to acquiring effective skills to deal with mainstreaming through long-term training and capacity building, and it also means that the staff directly mainstreaming has a good knowledge of the socio-economic and political context within which the organisation functions. The organisation must have internal expertise to support policy development, awareness raising, training and other skills needed for mainstreaming, as well as comprehensive knowledge of the issues concerning the various vulnerable groups.

8. External partnerships

Successful mainstreaming is dependent on whether or not the organisation has adequate external partners that are also concerned about gender. The organisation should have work relationships with other organisations (e.g. non-governmental and community-based organisations) representing women and vulnerable groups, and should also have work relationships with organisations that have mainstreaming skills and expertise that can be utilised for filling in the gaps of the organisation. The organisation will need the consistent, continuous commitment of key partners, for collective solidarity and skills sharing.

9. Policy framework

Without a formal policy in place – such as a specific gender equality policy, plan or statement – success with mainstreaming will often be by chance. Such a policy should clearly articulate the organisation's commitment to gender equality and identify the broad mechanisms it will use to pursue this goal. A policy framework may also include references to international and regional commitments (see Annexure 1.)

10. Organisational structures, mechanisms and processes

The operations of the organisation should be consistent with the goals of gender mainstreaming and contribute to the integration of gender perspectives within processes such as planning, priority setting, resource allocation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The organisation should also recognise and use existing gender structures as advocates and expect them to provide leadership in gender mainstreaming, gender analysis, co-ordination and monitoring.