



Netherlands International Gender Policy Whither the two-track strategy

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1. Introduction and approach

This paper is a response to the recent evaluation of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) international policy on women's rights and gender equality.¹ The response is the initiative of the Gender Resource Facility (GRF) that provides support to the Ministry's Taskforce on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (TFWG). The purpose is to make sense of the main findings of the evaluation. This will be done by contextualizing the findings and thinking through possible guidance for the TFWG, based on additional evidence from literature and earlier evaluations. The reading of the evaluation is also informed by the long-term engagement of the specialist, currently GRF programme manager, with the MFA on women's rights and gender equality as a civil society stakeholder as well as the experience of the GRF consortium (KIT and Femconsult) in stand-alone women's rights and gender equality work and gender mainstreaming.

¹ The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the MFA was responsible for the evaluation. It covered the years 2007 – 2014.

2. Policy and evaluation characteristics

The international gender policy of the MFA during the period 2007 – 2014 consisted of a two-track strategy. The first, stand-alone track provided support to women’s (rights) organisations and gender equality initiatives with earmarked funding from the stand-alone gender budget line. The second track of gender mainstreaming is the systematic integration of gender issues in the priority areas of foreign policy and development cooperation. The Netherlands was an early adopter of the two-track strategy, way before the global adoption of the dual strategy in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (IOB 2015: 214). Since 1999, the focus of the Netherlands international policy was more on gender mainstreaming, at the expense, however, of stand-alone attention for gender equality and women’s rights. In 2007, under a new Cabinet, the MFA reintroduced the two-track strategy. The new 2011 international gender policy also reaffirmed the dual approach, assuming the tracks would reinforce each other.² Table 1 presents the main features of the international gender policy of MFA between 2007 and 2014.

Table 1 Main features international gender policy 2007 – 2014

International Gender Policy	
Stand-alone track	Gender mainstreaming track
Earmarked budget -line 2007: €3.9 million 2014: €44 million Total period: €292.6 million	Total budget development cooperation: 2007: €4.65 billion 2014: €3.9 billion 2007 – 2012: average €435 million/year for SRHR and HIV/AIDS ³ No gender earmarked budget ⁴
82% centrally managed and channelled to: - Civil Society Organisations (CSOs): MDG3Fund/FLOWI (50% of budget) - CSOs: NAPs 1325 (10% since 2012) - UN: UNIFEM/UN Women, UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (15%) 18% via embassies (on the decline) to: - CSOs, other recipients not specified	Gender mainstreaming via: - Aid channels : bilateral, multi-lateral, CSOs, public private partnerships, private sector, knowledge institutions, No data on budgets by channel in IOB (2015) - Political Dialogue, Diplomacy and Foreign policy at large
Thematic focus Violence against women, Political participation and representation, Employment and equal opportunities on labour market, Property and inheritance rights, Peace, conflict and security	Priority themes for gender equality and women’s rights Violence against women, Political participation, Economic development, Education (abandoned in 2010), Food security, Water, Sanitation, Energy, Climate, Peace and security, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

Source: IOB (2015), IOB (2015a), IOB (2015b) see note 5, IOB (2013) see note 3

The IOB evaluation aimed to assess the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and efficiency of the implementation of the international gender policy and to generate lessons for future policy making. It covered both tracks of the gender policy (see Table 2).⁵ For the first track IOB assessed the

² Parliamentary Paper 32735-39 (2011), Human rights in Dutch foreign policy. No 39 Letter of 15 November 2011 of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for European Affairs and International Cooperation to the House of Representatives, on international gender policy.

³ IOB (2013), *Balancing ideals with practice, Policy evaluation of Dutch involvement in sexual and reproductive health and rights 2007-2012*, 43.

⁴ OECD/DAC Gender marker is used for tracking gender specific commitments of sector-allocable aid as principle or significant objective. This percentage varied with 2.5% in 2007 and 23% in 2014. Data are however not reliable due to inconsistent use of the gender marker (IOB 2015: 65-66). Therefore no theme specific data on application of gender marker were included in the synthesis evaluation report. The evaluation of the National Action Plans 1325 could establish 27% gender marked commitments in peace and security country projects in Afghanistan, Burundi, DRC (IOB 2015b: 91).

⁵ The evaluation consists of four reports:

IOB (2015), *Gender sense & sensitivity, Policy evaluation on women’s rights and gender equality (2007-2014)*;

IOB (2015a), *Evaluation of the MDG3 Fund, ‘Investing in Equality’ (2008-2011)*;

IOB (2015b), *Gender, peace and security, Evaluation of the Netherlands and UN Security Council Resolution 1325*;

MDG3 Fund and the National Action Plans (NAPs) to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The latter also looked into the extent of gender mainstreaming in peace and security at large. IOB also undertook a synthesis study, which further expanded the gender mainstreaming analysis thematically. IOB also assessed the interaction between the two tracks. Finally, a literature review looked into the premises underpinning the instrumentalist arguments to support women's rights and gender equality that IOB found in various Dutch international policies. Table 2 presents an overview of the IOB studies.

Table 2 Key characteristics evaluation design

Stand-alone MDG3 Fund (2008-2011) Report IOB 2015a	Stand-alone NAPs 1325 (2008-2014) and mainstreaming role of NAPs Report IOB 2015b	Literature review premises in Dutch international policies Report IOB 2015c
<p>Desk study with scan of all 45 projects (€77 million) Document analysis 17 projects (45% of total Fund expenditures) Criteria: thematic coverage, diversity of organisations including re-granting, regional diversity, 3 countries, multi & single country</p> <p>Interviews: Fund management team, staff from 5 projects (no field visit)</p> <p>Field visits/interviews 8 projects: Bangladesh, Egypt, Mozambique to validate findings of document analysis and collection of country specific results</p> <p>Reconstruction of generic result chain for the MDG 3 Fund</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inputs: resources provided - outputs: policy influencing, lobby & advocacy, service delivery by grantees - outcomes: empowerment of end beneficiaries and changes in enabling environment <p>Thematic focus: Gender based violence, Political participation and representation, Employment and equal opportunities on labour market, Property and inheritance rights</p>	<p>Desk study of documents</p> <p>Interviews MFA staff, signatories, Dutch NGOs active in Afghanistan, Burundi, DRC, external experts, no field visits</p> <p>Focus evaluation NAPs as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multi-stakeholder cooperation framework - Women, Peace and Security 'project' - Incentive for gender mainstreaming (NAPII) <p>Project and mainstreaming analysis: Afghanistan, Burundi, DRC, criteria part of NAPs and recipients of mainstream funding (Stability Fund, Reconstruction Fund)</p> <p>NAPII project focus: €8 million to 1 non-Dutch and 9 Dutch NGOs €8 million not yet allocated</p> <p>Mainstreaming assessment of MFA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - policies (fragile states, peace, security & rule of law) - funding mechanisms (Stability Fund, Reconstruction Fund, UN Peacebuilding Fund, bilateral support Afghanistan, Burundi, DRC - assessment memorandums Afghanistan, Burundi, DRC, Multi-Annual Strategic Plans fragile states 	<p>Desk study of research, academic publications, reviews, grey literature, evaluations (oldest publication 1998, most recent 2015)</p> <p>Focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - what is known of premises underpinning instrumental arguments, found in various international policies, including the 2011 gender policy - international experiences with institutional factors of relevance to gender policies and gender mainstreaming <p>Themes covered: Violence against women (VAW), Educating women and girls, Women as economic actors, Women and land rights, Women and water and sanitation, Women's political voice, Organisational matters related to gender mainstreaming</p>

IOB (2015c), *Premises and promises, A study of the premises underlying the Dutch policy for women's rights and gender equality.*

**Synthesis (2007-2014) Report
IOB 2015**

Main **concepts**: gender, gender equality, gender mainstreaming, empowerment, power to, power within, power with

Methodology and scope

Desk study:

- (i) general, sector, theme specific policies, letters to Parliament, financial data, annual plans, reports MFA departments and embassies, relevant project documentation
- (ii) existing independent evaluations by IOB, World Bank, UN Women, FAO, UNDP, Dutch NGOs, centralised organisations in charge of economic development programmes
- (iii) academic and other literature

Interviews MFA and embassy staff, Dutch and international NGOs, organisations contracted to manage centrally financed programmes, staff UN Women, staff national women's machineries/ministries, external experts

Visits Bangladesh, Burundi, Egypt, Mozambique:

Criteria (i) substantial level bilateral funding for women's organisations; (ii) projects in areas of land rights, VAW, political participation; (iii) presence bilateral and MDG3 Fund projects

Thematic, channel, fund and instrument focus and sources of evidence:

- (i) VAW: UN/EU/Bilateral diplomacy, MDG3 Fund, UN Trust Fund to End VAW, 20 evaluations Dutch NGOs, projects Human Rights Fund, MDG3 Fund and bilateral projects in Bangladesh and Mozambique
- (ii) Education: evaluations IOB basic education and of 4 countries, evaluations of Dutch NGOs, Global Partnership Education, UNICEF, higher education programmes
- (iii) Economic development: IOB and other evaluations/documents of 4 out of 5 private sector development clusters: - infrastructure, - financial services, - knowledge & skills, - market access & value chains, evaluation international trade-union programmes, MDG3 Fund
- (iv) Food security: Support for Producer Organisations programme, two multilateral land rights programmes, bilateral and MDG3 Fund projects in Mozambique
- (v) Water and sanitation: IOB sector and country evaluations, subsidy framework Sustainable Water Fund
- (vi) Politics: MDG3 Fund and projects in Egypt and Mozambique, NAPs, bilateral support to UN Women in Egypt, Women on the Frontline programme, Fund for Political Parties II, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
- (vii) Peace & security: (see above) evaluation of NAPs and gender mainstreaming at large
- (viii) Institutional factors influencing gender mainstreaming: expertise, tools & instruments, monitoring & evaluation, financial resources, senior & middle management commitment, accountability, review of TFWG by central Audit Service, interviews MFA and embassy staff Bangladesh, Burundi, Egypt, Mozambique, IOB internal review of memorandums, GRF reviews

Excluded: themes SRHR, renewable energy, humanitarian aid, given recent/current IOB evaluations

Financial data only for MDG3 Fund and NAPs, no theme specific OECD/DAC gender marker data for mainstreaming

Source: IOB (2015), IOB (2015a), IOB (2015b), IOB (2015c) see note 5

3. Putting the main findings into perspective

The 2015 IOB evaluation is a timely review of the MFA's international gender policy and its implementation. The last comprehensive IOB evaluation on the subject dates from 1998. The new evaluation deserves a better fate than the previous one. Many of the 1998 conclusions were largely ignored when new policies were developed, with the new 2003 policy for development cooperation mentioning the word women only twice and gender mainstreaming not at all.⁶

The 2015 evaluation contains, as expected, a mix of positive and critical findings that provide a good opportunity for renewed strategizing, both for the MFA, and the TFWG in particular. This paper aims to contextualize some key findings with affirming some and questioning others. It will first discuss each track separately, and then address the assumed synergy between them. A summary of the main findings of the IOB evaluation is included in Annex A and B.

3.1 Agenda setting role of the first track

IOB's choice to evaluate the MDG3 Fund and the NAPs 1325 is obvious. Combined they represent over half of the first track budget, allocated exclusively to civil society organisations (CSOs). IOB assessed the MDG3 Fund as relevant, with proven value and necessary. It confirmed the main role of grantees in the agenda setting of women's rights and gender equality. The Fund enabled grantees to widen the scope of their work with new themes, experimenting with new approaches, increased outreach, new target groups and countries. This is an important recognition of the crucial role that civil society organisations, in particular women's rights organisations, play in demanding accountability for women's rights and gender equality. These findings resonate with evidence in academic literature: a global study with data for seventy countries over three decades, confirmed the critical role of women's autonomous organizing in civil society for progressive social policy changes in the field of violence against women.⁷

The evaluation is critical of grantees results at the outcome level. Weaknesses on their part and the set-up of the Fund management are held responsible. IOB made the suggestion to address these in future set-ups between grantees and the MFA to enable a more meaningful engagement. The observed absence of outcome level results deserves questioning. Outcome results are defined by IOB as sustainable changes in the enabling environment and changes of social and cultural norms. The Fund had a time span of three years. Legal and policy change seldom happen within three years, especially for contentious issues of gender equality. Changes of norms and values should therefore be considered impact not outcome level results. One could therefore argue in favour of long-term and sustained support of civil society actors working towards these changes. Even when non-discriminatory laws have been adopted, civil society will have to continue the effort to demand compliance and implementation by governments and private sector stakeholders, to live up to the potential imagined by its demands (Htun and Weldon 2012: 564). It can be agreed with IOB that the aspired changes in the field of women's rights and gender equality require multiple stakeholder actions and multi-dimensional approaches, and can never be achieved by civil society actors alone. This is where the second track of gender mainstreaming is of relevance, in responding to the claims for accountability made by the first track.

3.2 Gender mainstreaming role of the first track

The stand-alone evaluation of the NAPs 1325 focused on the NAPs in their own right *and* their relation to the overall Dutch policy on fragile states, peace and security. As gender mainstreaming was one of the objectives of the NAPs, IOB therefore assessed the NAPs also as an incentive for gender mainstreaming. According to IOB, NAPII gained gender mainstreaming status in the MFA beyond its original focus on UNSCR 1325. This and the perception of NAP as an isolated undertaking of the stand-alone track and the gender unit, according to IOB, were the reasons for MFA peace and security staff not taking responsibility for gender mainstreaming in all other peace and security policies, programmes and funding modalities. This finding is important as it points to a

⁶ Tijd voor Actie! Initiatief Beijing+10 Nederland (2005), *Zijn de verwachtingen van Beijing uitgekomen? Nederlandse NGO-Schaduwrapportage*: 58-60.

⁷ Htun, Mala and S. Laurel Weldon (2012), 'The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975-2005', *American Political Science Review* Vol 106 (3): 548-569.

stand-alone intervention that became an excuse for not undertaking gender mainstreaming in the broader sense. That is contrary to the intention of mutual reinforcement of the two-tracks of the gender policy.

Although the Terms of Reference for the MDG3 Fund did not include an assessment of its gender mainstreaming relevance, the evaluation did observe a lack of interaction between the Fund's projects and those supported by the embassies. The synthesis study *Gender, sense & sensitivity* looked at the synergy between the two-tracks, as assumed in the 2011 gender policy; it could find no evidence for such synergy. IOB sees the outsourced management of the Fund as one of the reasons that stood in the way of enhancing interaction and strategic collaboration between the two-tracks. This observed absence of synergy merits some further reflection, however.

First, the Fund never had a direct gender mainstreaming role towards the MFA from the onset. It was set up for a specific purpose, to enable the scaling up of efforts of civil society actors, who faced difficulties in resourcing their work in the area of women's rights and gender equality.⁸ Over the years grantees, including those of FLOWI, have not been made aware of the MFA's mainstreaming expectations. The outsourced management of the Fund, as rightly acknowledged by the IOB, did not facilitate a more strategic partnership with knowledge sharing and feedback loops between grantees and the MFA (Roggeband 2014: 341).⁹ A direct mainstreaming influence will require a different explicit strategy as well as specific management and funding modalities. Yet, it is questionable whether civil society organisations, in particular Southern based CSOs, are necessarily the best equipped and best located to exercise a direct gender mainstreaming influence on the policies of the Netherlands MFA. Moreover, it is also questionable whether the MFA and the embassies will allow foreign partners to influence their policies (Roggeband 2014: 341). Second, while the MDG3 Fund grantees might not have had a direct gender mainstreaming role towards the MFA, they do contribute to gender mainstreaming in their *own* local, national, regional contexts and internationally. Eighty percent of the grantees undertook lobby and advocacy work. They engaged with agenda setting, influenced policies of their respective national and local governments, as well norms and standards at regional and global governance levels. To hold different stakeholders to account, by asking for the integration of gender equality in a diversity of policies, programmes, projects and budgets, is a critical part of a gender mainstreaming role. GRF sees the role of CSOs in agenda setting therefore in the contexts that are of primary relevance to the MDG3 grantees, and as such as an impetus for gender mainstreaming in a wider sense; this is in essence aligned to the international gender policy of the Dutch MFA but not necessarily to all other MFA policies. So the claim of little synergy between the two tracks within the MFA due to a lack of explicit strategy and mechanisms is understandable, but this cannot be assumed in partner countries.

3.3 Accountability to women's rights and gender equality of the second track

The evaluation of the second track looked at the extent of gender mainstreaming in the thematic areas prioritised by the MFA for women's rights and gender equality during the period. This is an obvious choice as evidence could only, if at all, be established for those areas where gender mainstreaming was supposed to focus on. IOB's findings confirm those of many other gender mainstreaming evaluations held during the past two decades.¹⁰ IOB assessed gender mainstreaming in the MFA to be uneven, inconsistent, and at times absent in major mainstream domains of policy, portfolios and operational cycles. This paper will further discuss three categories of shortcomings observed by IOB.

⁸ The international women's rights network AWID has been taking stock of the funding landscape for women's rights and organisations from 2002 onwards through the action research 'Where is the money for women's rights?'. This research was financially supported among others by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hivos and Mama Cash.

⁹ Roggeband, Conny (2014), 'Gender mainstreaming in Dutch development cooperation: the dialectics of progress', *Journal of International Development*, Vol 26 (3): 332-344.

¹⁰ African Development Bank (2012), *Synthesis Report, Mainstreaming Gender Equality: A Road to Results or a Road to Nowhere?* The synthesis looked at 26 thematic and country evaluations by bilateral or multilateral agencies, undertaken between 1990 and 2010, that focused on gender and/or women, including the one by IOB in 1998.

(i) Absence of conceptual and analytical clarity

The distinction between 'women' and 'gender' is not or insufficiently understood with MFA. The implication is that the need to address underlying root causes of the unequal power relations between women and men is not taken into account. The dominant focus in much MFA mainstreaming efforts has been on getting more women on board, whether in schools, governance bodies, the labour market or water user groups. Yet, it can be argued, increased numbers of female participants cannot support the claim that women's participation in itself has been contributing to progress towards gender equality. Lack of conceptual clarity is persistent and recurring in much foreign and development policy. Bringing men into the equation, as is often suggested, also by IOB, is only a partial solution. The relational differences between women and men of power inequalities - in the division of labour and responsibilities, access to and control over resources, participation and voice, norms and values, issues of bodily integrity, sexuality and freedom from violence - have to be brought into the equation as well.

(ii) Instrumentalism in support of gender mainstreaming

IOB identified a frequent use of instrumentalist arguments to convince MFA's mainstream of the need to pay attention to women's rights and gender equality. The 2011 international gender policy states that promoting gender equality will make policy more effective. IOB rightfully points to the weak and contradictory evidence of instrumentalist arguments, with the risk of being counterproductive. Earlier the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy, in its advice on the future of development cooperation, warned for the hyperbolic claims about untapped female potential, whereas it also ironically, pointed to the evidence of low wages for women workers being beneficial for realising economic growth and profits.¹¹ Batliwala and Dhanraj point to 'gender myths' about the benefits of access to credit and women's political participation and the instrumentalisation of women.¹² Mythical expectations are not only unrealistic, they also put the responsibility for development outcomes exclusively on women's shoulders. Instrumentalist frames tend to essentialise and homogenise women and men; women with innate qualities of being trustworthy, responsible and non-violent and men as corrupt, unreliable culprits and perpetrators of violence. In conclusion, instrumentalisation of women, irrespective evidence or not, cannot and should not replace the principle of compliance with non-discrimination and equal rights as enshrined in international treaties and norms.

(iii) Organisational and institutional deficits

IOB identified a number of organisational and human resource capacity challenges in the MFA (for details see Annex B). Similar deficits were identified ten years ago in the Dutch Beijing+10 Shadow report and the 2006 study by Tjoelker et al.¹³ The 2007 government-wide assessment of gender mainstreaming also recommended the MFA to expand its internal gender capacity and expertise, beyond the gender unit and to pay attention to gender issues in all areas of foreign policy.¹⁴ IOB 2015 findings do indicate that earlier recommendations for organisational change were not followed-up sufficiently, if at all. IOB advises MFA to start making gender mainstreaming a reality and to strengthen its capacity to do so.

A major internal challenge MFA will face in addressing this finding is to allocate resources to strengthen the track of gender mainstreaming. In fact, the IOB itself faced difficulties to reconstruct/track the gender mainstreaming spending/budget. In view of recent budget cuts and reallocations, the fact that the stand-alone budget line has not been affected as yet is an achievement, according to GRF. The lobby undertaken by the Dutch gender platform WO=MEN has

¹¹ van Lieshout, Peter, Robert Went and Monique Kremer (2010), *Less Pretension, More Ambition, Development policy in times of globalization*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: 78-79.

¹² Batliwala, Srilatha and Deepa Dhanraj (2004), 'Gender Myths that Instrumentalize Women: A View from the Indian Frontline', *IDS Bulletin* Vol 35 (4): 11-18.

¹³ Tjoelker, To, Annette Evertzen, Ellen Sprenger and Annemieke Stoppelenburg (2006), *Verankering van "Gender" in toekomstig buitenlandbeleid, Een onderzoek naar ervaringen, inzichten en uitdagingen binnen het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken*.

¹⁴ Visitatiecommissie Emancipatie (2007), *Emancipatie en Gender Mainstreaming bij het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Eindrapportage visitatie 2005-2006, VCE-07-02*.

played an important role in this respect. Up-front strategies for resourcing gender mainstreaming have to be developed in a context that resources are more likely to become less than more. Even when resources were available in the past, the lack of follow-up to the 1998 IOB evaluation, points to the impact of shifting priorities due to changes in Cabinet and parliamentary composition. In general, and unfortunately, the Dutch political context tends not to be in favour of long-term commitments that women's rights, gender equality and gender mainstreaming efforts require. Evaluation after evaluation reflects a failure to prioritise, and underfund, women's rights and gender equality work¹⁵. These evaluations also show a recurring interval of eight to ten years between peaks of attention and resources for women's rights and gender equality in many development agencies. Notwithstanding the unfavourable context, addressing the MFA capacity challenges will require a reallocation of resources with assurance of a more long-term commitment.

¹⁵ African Development Bank (2012): 55, see note 10.

4. Guidance for the Task Force Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Based on the IOB 2015 evaluation, earlier insights about MFA's implementation of the gender policy, and additional literature, this section aims to provide guidance for choices to be made by the TFWG. The pretext of this guidance is: 'strategic realism' given the slippery path of promoting women's rights and gender equality.

4.1 Dual approaches of complementarity and differentiation

Expectations of what can be achieved by each of the tracks of the gender policy need to be realistic. Neither can achieve transformational change in the short **time span** of policy, programme and project cycles of the MFA. The **complementarity** of the two-tracks is based on the single and shared objective to contribute to the realisation of women's rights and greater gender equality, with the MFA having to be **accountable** to this objective. First track (stand-alone) interventions should and cannot replace the need for gender mainstreaming and vice versa. Both tracks need resources, human and financial.

In many institutions gender units are given the responsibility to take the lead and provide strategic direction for both tracks, very similar to the MFA and its establishment of the TFWG. The two tracks, however, require **different capabilities**, with different languages being spoken, engagement with different sets of stakeholders, and different needs for thematic gender expertise. Such expertise should be located within the main policy areas that are prioritised for gender mainstreaming. The TFWG has begun to spread its wings into different departments of the MFA. Its network deserves expansion whilst maintaining a visible group of strategic and competent TFWG **core staff**. There is no ultimate answer to what is the optimal institutional location of gender units.

4.2 Building and cultivating relationships

The building of **internal** and **external allies** is important for both tracks of the gender policy. Without internal allies gender mainstreaming is bound to fail. External allies are important for achieving results on the ground, for holding one's organisation to account and for learning and knowledge building. Gender specialists working in different large development bureaucracies confirm the importance of effective alliances.¹⁶ 'It involves establishing and cultivating personal relationships, tapping into networks within and beyond the institution, including collaborating with other gender advisers in the development sector and, importantly, with feminist movements, external lobby groups, and civil society grantees' (Eyben and Turquet 2013: 198).

4.3 Navigating contestations

The challenge for gender mainstreaming efforts is to be skilful in being political and realistic. Gender mainstreaming scholars argue for breaking away from the utopian vision of change, and to consider gender mainstreaming as part of a slow revolution with 'steps forwards, backward and sideways in a very, very slow revolution and process of change' (Davids et al. 2014: 405).¹⁷ Gender mainstreaming is inevitably a contested process with **tensions** and **contradictions** between the agenda of gender equality and mainstream agendas. In many institutions, as the MFA, gender equality more often than not ends up on the lower end in the order of policy priorities. The challenge will be to seek out **room to manoeuvre** that at times will likely partly subvert and partly comply with existing power relations.

Realistic politics imply the acknowledgement of the presence of competing priorities, with gender mainstreaming pursuing for convergence with the gender policy, and the acknowledgement that this cannot be realised throughout. Gender mainstreaming will always be a process of contestation, with **negotiation** and **compromise**. Instrumentalism might not necessarily be the best route as 'win-win' situations or 'making the business case' are often neither possible nor straightforward.

¹⁶ Eyben, Rosalind and Laura Turquet (2013), *Feminists in Development Organizations, Change from the margins*, Rugby: Practical Action.

¹⁷ Davids, Tine, Francien van Driel and Franny Parren (2014), 'Feminist change revisited: gender mainstreaming as slow revolution', *Journal of International Development*, Vol 26 (3): 396-408.

4.4 Realistic priority setting

Gender mainstreaming requires priority setting given its infinite scope and finite resources. Priorities concern (i) questions of thematic coverage, (ii) procedural instruments in policy, programme and funding cycles (iii) need for capacity building, and (iv) generation of knowledge and evidence. The IOB evaluation does not propose any specific priorities.

A way forward for the TFWG could be undertake an institutional mapping of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (**SWOT analysis**) based on:

- knowledge of potential for convergence, potential for outcomes
- the strategic influence of a particular mainstreaming effort
- availability of internal and external expertise
- presence of internal and external allies
- extent of receptiveness/resistance to gender mainstreaming
- gender issues at stake if no mainstreaming effort will be undertaken

Irrespective its scope, the effort of gender mainstreaming has to be **specific** – not generic – with gender related content and procedural specific knowledge, to avoid the situation of creating a 'missing middle' for MFA staff between competing policy objectives and accountability for results.¹⁸

4.5 Organisational analysis

For addressing the organisational deficits identified by IOB, priorities are also key, as not all issues can be addressed at the same time. It has proven beyond the evaluation report to shed light on some of the underlying reasons for these deficits. As gender mainstreaming scholars argue, it is not simply a matter of filling the 'technical deficits', and providing better tools for gender mainstreaming based on identified critical areas such as leadership, commitment, resources, training and policies.¹⁹ Participatory **organisational gender audits** can assist in unravelling why specific measures to redress organisational shortcomings will be helpful or not to improve the organisational capacity for gender mainstreaming.

4.6 Knowledge and capacity building

Organisational capacity for gender mainstreaming can be strengthened through knowledge development, knowledge sharing and capacity building strategies. The challenge will be to design strategies that facilitate organisational learning, drawing from both internal and external knowledge and experience, that is ongoing and built into organisational cycles and practices. What is required is an openness by MFA and staff to acknowledge their strengths, challenges and comparative advantages for gender mainstreaming. Organisational gender audits are one approach to assist in identifying the specific organisational needs for knowledge and capacity building. Often **organisational learning and capacity building** is complementary to and includes more than training and capacity building of individual members of staff.

¹⁸ van Eerdewijk, Anouka and Ireen Dubel (2012), 'Substantive gender mainstreaming and the missing middle: a view from Dutch development agencies', *Gender & Development* Vol 20 (3): 491-504.

¹⁹ Milward, Kirsty, Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay and Franz F. Wong (2015), 'Gender Mainstreaming Critiques: Signposts or Dead Ends?', *IDS Bulletin*, Vol 46 (4): 75-81.

5. Conclusion

The TFWG should use the momentum of the IOB evaluation, to take the opportunities to strengthen the implementation of the two-track gender strategy. There is no need to reinvent the wheel, as there is a legacy that the TFWG can build on, both within the MFA and externally. It is time to anchor and further build knowledge with safeguards for institutional memory. Being strategic in this regard is key. The TFWG needs to have capacity and time to engage with both tracks of the gender strategy.

Relationships have to be (further) build and cultivated, internally and externally.

Skilful negotiation of gender equality priorities in policies, programmes and operational strategies needs to be grounded on an understanding of the potential for converging *and* conflicting interests. A SWOT analysis as well a participatory gender audit can assist in setting the priorities and time-line for specific institutional measures that are crucial for implementing the two-track gender strategy.

Annex A IOB main findings of the stand alone track (MDG3 Fund, NAPs 1325)

IOBs main findings of the evaluation of the MDG3 Fund, 2008 – 2011, include (IOB 2015a: 11-17, 121-124):

- IOB assessed the Fund as relevant, with proven value, as a stand-alone facility for women's and human rights organisations fighting for equal rights and opportunities for women and girls;
- The majority of MDG grantees were found to engage with agenda setting of women's rights and gender equality. The main focus was on (political) decision-makers, civil society organisations, media and the general public. Grantees contributed to changes in the enabling environment, such as new legislation, ratification and application of international conventions;
- Stakeholder collaboration focused on civil society organisations, the media, universities and research institutions. IOB found less evidence of collaboration with parliaments, political parties and hardly any with projects supported by the Dutch embassies;
- IOB identified the following results in the four thematic areas: enhanced knowledge and awareness on rights and violations among beneficiaries, in civil society and among policy makers. The watchdog role of civil society organisations was enhanced. Women's leadership at local governance levels was strengthened. Concerning economic issues women's degree of organisation and their claim-making capacity increased;
- IOB found limited evidence of societal changes of people's attitudes and behaviour. Few projects effectively challenged social norms and root causes of women's discrimination;
- In IOB's assessment issues of outcome orientation posed major challenges. The Ministry opted for a 'monitoring light' approach, overestimating the M&E capacity of grantees. Many organisations had difficulty to provide evidence beyond the description of activities, outputs and outreach;
- IOB sees the sustainability of results, especially in the enabling environment, still as a risk given the project orientation and time span of the Fund. It does acknowledge that effective change in the field of women's rights and gender equality is complex, long-term and beyond the time frame of the Fund and evaluation;
- IOB assessed the outsourced management of the Fund efficient. But it also observed that the management focused on administration with a project orientation. This did not contribute to grantees organisational and institutional sustainability, development of their capacity and strategic collaboration between the Ministry, embassies and Fund grantees. It also did not enhance the Ministry's knowledge base on gender equality and women's rights.

IOBs main findings of the NAP evaluation, 2008 – 2014, include (IOB: 2015b: 9-16, 121-130):

- Assessed by IOB as a framework for multi-stakeholder cooperation, the partnership resembled a donor-implementer relationship at the expense of the critical monitoring role of the civil society actors towards government, and with debatable effectiveness and efficiency;
- Signatories of the NAPs did not seize opportunities for engagement with relevant embassies and the Knowledge Platform on Security and Rule of law;
- Assessed by IOB as a women, peace and security 'project', funded projects have focused on the participation pillar, focusing on women rather than underlying gender dynamics that inhibit it. IOB had difficulty to assess effectiveness and efficiency of projects funded;
- IOB found evidence of more strategic collaboration in joint lobby and advocacy around Sudan and Syria, and at the UN between signatories of the NAPs;
- Assessed as an incentive for gender mainstreaming, the IOB observed that the NAP gained policy status in the Ministry for both implementing UNSCR 1325 and for gender mainstreaming into peace and security at large. Civil society stakeholders had a much more limited perspective. They saw the NAPs mainly as a framework for joint cooperation in one area of the resolution: participation;
- Within the Ministry the NAPs were seen as an isolated undertaking of the Ministry's gender unit. According to IOB the specific policy orientation of the NAPs on UNSCR 1325 has been to the detriment of gender mainstreaming efforts into overall policy on peace and security and its prominent financing instruments. IOB assessed the effectiveness and efficiency in terms of gender mainstreaming as limited. The focus was on women instead of underlying gender relations and the organisational embedding of the NAPs was found not conducive for mainstreaming;
- IOB concluded that so far a separate gender-relevant peace and security policy is absent and gender concerns are ignored in mainstream projects and programmes.

Annex B IOB main synthesis findings

IOB's synthesis report *Gender sense & sensitivity* assessed the main characteristics of the Dutch international policy as reasonably consistent throughout the period 2007-2014. These main characteristics are (IOB 2015: 15):

- The policy focus has been more on women and less on the issues of gender equality, with the interchangeable use of gender and women. Men and the underlying unequal power relations between women and men were insufficiently taken into account. The dominant approach has been to get women 'on board'. The focus was foremost on women's practical needs;
- A human rights perspective was the starting point and a consistent feature of the government's international policy and diplomacy.
- This rights-based approach was combined with another consistent feature, instrumentalist arguments for gender mainstreaming, such as gender is 'smart economics', 'smart politics' and 'smart security';
- IOB could not confirm evidence for instrumentalist arguments in the literature review. It assessed the evidence as being weak, contradictory, and possibly counterproductive.

IOB's main findings concerning gender mainstreaming are (IOB 2015: 16-22):

- The Ministry's mainstreaming efforts at policy level were assessed as not consistent. They were minimal or absent in major policy areas of private sector development, corporate social responsibility and international security;
- IOB found no evidence of synergy between the first stand-alone track to support women's organisations and second track strategy of gender mainstreaming. There has been little interaction between similar initiatives, thematic and geographic, funded by the MDG3 Fund of the NAPs 1325 and those funded bilaterally;
- During the period the Ministry prioritised women's rights and gender equality within certain themes: violence against women, education (abandoned in 2010), politics, economic development, food security, water and sanitation, peace and security and sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- The Ministry's gender mainstreaming into programme and project cycles and major funding mechanisms, such as the Dutch Good Growth Fund, Stability Fund, Reconstruction Fund and UN Peacebuilding Fund, were assessed as inconsistent or absent;
- IOB assessed the Ministry use of international channels for norm setting in women's rights as relevant. The Ministry has used international norms on women's rights for its bilateral political dialogue;
- IOB had only limited insight into the effectiveness of the gender policy due to lack of gender disaggregated data in design, implementation, and M&E, with rare or anecdotal information on outcomes and impact. This finding is irrespective of the channels, instruments used, interventions implemented, or themes covered. Evidence-based research findings are still too few, except for the theme of women's education;
- IOB could not determine the budget spent on gender mainstreaming, given inconsistent use of the tool of the OECD/DAC gender marker. IOB limited the assessment of efficiency to the first track through the evaluation of the MDG3 Fund. It also had difficulty to assess the efficiency of the Fund;
- IOB identified organisational and human resource capacity limitations at the level of the Ministry. This included mixed commitment at leadership levels, limited accountability mechanisms, little gender training, limited in-house gender expertise and its insufficient use, weak M&E with respect to gender, and unclear positioning of the gender unit for quite some time, yet with emerging potential as Task Force Women's rights and Gender equality.