

Learning about Mainstreaming Gender in Knowledge Intermediary Work

This paper is prompted by our own gender review of Knowledge Services (KS) and the Mobilising Knowledge for Development (MK4D) programme at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). We realised that while gender has been dealt with as a strategic issue by some within IDS (particularly BRIDGE¹ and some of the IDS Fellows), gender equality has not been an explicit focus in the overarching strategies of KS, MK4D or IDS to date. We decided to undertake a gender review as the first step in a broader gender mainstreaming process to measure what we are doing on gender equality, and more specifically, what we do well and where we can improve. Having explored our own foundations for a gender mainstreaming process, we are sharing these early findings and practice, to enable others within the intermediary sector and beyond to see what the practicalities of a gender mainstreaming process are.

Introduction

IDS's global Knowledge Services work draws on the work of the Knowledge Services department, the British Library for Development Studies (BLDS) and the Impact and Learning Team (ILT). The aim of our work is to facilitate and inform debate, advocacy, research and policy to stimulate action for positive social change. We do this in a number of ways, including, for example:

- By working in partnership and sharing capacities to increase access to development information from diverse perspectives;
- By influencing those in positions of power to make better-informed decisions;
- By supporting those with less power to amplify their voices.

Our flagship projects and brands include:

- The BRIDGE gender information and advocacy programme – stimulating collaborative, groundbreaking thinking on key issues related to gender and development.
- The Eldis research portal containing a range of knowledge, co-produced with Southern partners.
- The Eldis Communities networking platform – connecting over 10,000 members and hosting online learning and events.

In each Practice Paper published, we share our experience and learning. We are presenting ideas that we are exploring and that others in the intermediary sector might like to explore.

Our experiences contribute to the body of knowledge, but rarely if ever contain incontestable insights. This paper should not be read in isolation, however, and should be seen as complementary to other work conducted on related issues of capacity development, knowledge management, and policy influence.

The knowledge and information intermediary sector comprises those who seek to improve flows of knowledge between actors in decision-making and change processes in order to generate better development outcomes. Intermediaries act in a range of ways: enabling access to information; helping people to make sense of it; and facilitating connections that enable knowledge to be shared between stakeholders. It is a practice sector which cuts across other sectors.

1 BRIDGE is a gender information and advocacy programme based within IDS Knowledge Services.

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- The IK Mediarly network – an emerging global network of organisations that play a knowledge and information intermediary role in development.
- The Human Development Resource Centre and the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre – providing high quality advice, expertise and knowledge on health, education and nutrition, and governance, conflict and social development.
- The Open Application Programming Interface and Open Data/Access advocacy work.
- The BLDS Information Literacy programme – working with Southern partners to develop a series of materials and strategies to strengthen information literacy skills.

The second phase of the MK4D programme, a coordinated package of work funded by the UK Department for International Development, supports some of IDS's most prominent knowledge-sharing activities. It spans the KS, ILT and BLDS teams and has the following stated goal and purpose.

Goal: Research knowledge makes a greater contribution to poverty reduction.

Purpose: Strengthening the emerging global network of information intermediaries increases the sharing and effective use of research knowledge by development actors.

And it has three major outputs:

1. Improved access to credible research knowledge through profiling and synthesis;
2. More effective platforms for sharing research knowledge globally;
3. Improved capacity of intermediaries to stimulate demand for research knowledge.

In order to achieve the goal and outcomes of both MK4D and our wider knowledge services programmes and projects, it is essential that we mainstream gender across our work. Positive social change and poverty reduction cannot be achieved while gender inequality exists. Recognising this, our gender review was done for several compelling reasons, set out below.

The moral imperative

- At IDS our work is all about helping people fight poverty. Gender inequality constrains progress on *all* aspects of poverty – men, women, girls and boys all lose out while gender inequality persists.
- Gender is not just about women – it's about everyone: women, men, boys and girls and their relative positions in society – so we all need to be a part of the solution to addressing gender inequality and promoting social justice.
- In every area of progress that has been made in international development, being female remains a disadvantage. For example:²
 - 70 per cent of those who live on less than a dollar each day are women. Women own only 1 per cent of the world's property.
 - Every minute a woman dies from complications in pregnancy or childbirth; over 500,000 deaths each year
 - Women work two thirds of the world's working hours yet receive only 10 per cent of the world's income.

The practical arguments

- Poverty reduction measures that incorporate gender equality are more likely to be successful and sustainable over time.
- Donors expect all the programmes they fund to tackle the causes and impacts of gender inequality and include a clear gendermainstreaming approach.
- BRIDGE, and IDS more widely, have been producing evidence for a number of years that demonstrates the links between gender inequality and poverty and encouraging development practitioners and policymakers to mainstream gender³. It is important that our own work on this is visible and that we lead by example.

2 Sources: UN Women www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/facts_figures.php, Oxfam www.oxfam.org/en/about/issues/gender

3 For example, the BRIDGE Cutting Edge Programmes and the Pathways to Women's Empowerment project.

The gender review took place between March and June 2011. The purpose of the review was to explore the extent to which the KS department and the MK4D programme are promoting gender equality across their work, assess where the gaps are, and identify what actions can be taken to address any gaps and build on existing good practice. The terms of reference envisaged that the review would 'provide the foundations for a gender mainstreaming process in Knowledge Services and MK4D.'

Our vision

The review builds on existing foundations of gender awareness within KS and MK4D. However, like all programmes of work, organisations have to revisit their vision and purposes regularly to see if they are on track. This is of course the heart of monitoring and evaluation, where reflection on the current situation leads to formative data that can enhance or redirect the programme. In our reflection we revisited our vision for the gender mainstreaming. As a part of the review we broke it down into clear visions for three different levels.

At an individual level:

- Staff are more aware of the centrality of gender equality to achieving our goals;
- Staff feel personally confident about integrating and addressing gender issues in their work.

At an organisational level:

- Gender issues are reflected in what IDS Knowledge Services, ILT and BLDS does and what its partners do.
- Learning on gender issues is shared and is used to mobilise others more widely.
- Gender is no longer 'compartmentalised' but seen as everyone's responsibility.
- Our work is consistently viewed through a range of equality lenses, including a gender lens, while recognising that in the short to medium term we should focus on strengthening our work in one specific area, that is, gender.
- The learning produced by the review and longer term gender mainstreaming is useful for the wider organisation.

Externally:

- KS/ILT/BLDS have a strong external reputation for integrating gender issues into knowledge and information management and sharing.

Methodology – practice and limitations

So what did this review mean in practice? The methodology used included: a literature review of a sample of internal strategic documents, human resource policies and external communications materials; a staff survey (completed by 35 members of staff); three focus groups with staff working in KS and MK4D and one with managers; and interviews with a number of key staff within the wider Institute and external partners.

The process was coordinated and facilitated by a working group made up of five staff members, representing different teams within KS and MK4D, and an external facilitator with expertise in organisational gender mainstreaming⁴. One member of the working group took on a coordinating role for the whole process.

The emphasis of the process was on promoting organisational learning and stimulating thinking among all staff about how to integrate gender equality into the work of individuals, teams and the MK4D programme as a whole.

This was a substantial piece of work that took time and resources. Each working group member spent around eight days on the review. The coordinator spent around 20 days and the external facilitator was contracted for 20 days. Leadership was also required. Organisational review and change is not always welcomed by all staff, and it was essential to get senior buy-in to the process so that as many staff as possible could be encouraged to join in.

The participatory methodology produced a significant amount of qualitative data. However, there are a number of limitations and qualifications that need to be borne in mind when considering the findings. Limitations of time and staff availability meant that the sample of documents reviewed (15) and the number of people interviewed (8) was relatively small. Not all staff participated in the focus groups (30 out of 43). Only one partner organisation was available for interview.

4 The facilitator was Ceri Hayes, of Gender Matters: www.gendermatters.co.uk/

It was often impossible to separate out departmental from wider IDS organisational issues and priorities, although the initial remit was to focus on how KS and MK4D specifically are addressing gender issues. These wider findings are included in the report, although it would be good practice to make human resources and other areas with wider organisational implications the subject of a further, fuller organisation-wide review to substantiate some of the initial findings outlined here.

Findings

Despite the above limitations, it is important to remember that this was an opportunity to reflect. It was a time to ensure that our rhetoric about gender had some grounding in practice. And indeed we found that it did.

We found that there is generally a positive level of commitment to the promotion of gender equality in KS and MK4D, demonstrated by:

- Commissioning the current review;
- Attention to gender equality and non-discrimination in the principal human resources policies;
- A strong body of work on gender equality that is internationally recognised and respected and constitutes a valuable internal resource;
- A majority of staff believe that gender equality is important to their work and the work of the department;
- A significant number of women in senior decision-making positions in KS and MK4D.

However, there is always room for improvement. The review identified a number of challenges, including:

- The absence of a clear organisational or departmental policy on gender equality and its links to the work of IDS, leading to varying interpretations of what gender equality really means in the context of the work of KS and MK4D (for non gender-specific work), an assumption that 'gender is being done' by programmes like BRIDGE, and some resistance by a smaller number of staff who see it as an extra to the normal workload.
- A wider absence of IDS and KS values, in which commitment to gender equality would be part.
- A failure to collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data that would ensure project planning, implementation and evaluations factor in the different needs of women and men and are not based on incorrect assumptions and stereotypes.
- A tendency to describe population groups in strategic documents as the 'poor and vulnerable', leading to an analysis of poverty that does not take into account the differences between women and men and their unequal access to opportunities, resources and information.
- Significant gaps in addressing gender issues across monitoring and evaluation (M&E), learning, human resources, partnerships and in project planning and implementation.

Many of the participants said they valued the opportunity to discuss these issues and were open in their views. The focus groups were particularly successful in this way, provoking lively debates and discussion.

Organising the findings

With something as broad as gender, it can be difficult to organise findings and conduct a sensible analysis. In our case the findings are grouped by 12 areas of enquiry, which were discussed and agreed by working group members at the beginning of this process. These 12 themes were shared with managers at this stage for their comments and suggestions.

The focus areas were designed to capture both the project (external) elements and organisational characteristics (internal) of the work of KS and MK4D, in recognition of the role that organisational structure and culture play in the design and delivery of gender-sensitive⁵ programmes and projects.

5 This report makes reference to 'gender-sensitive approaches' and 'gender-sensitive programmes' on a number of occasions. To clarify: gender-sensitive programming is understood as programmes that recognise women and men's roles as equally important in addressing development issues. It acknowledges that, because they have different roles, women and men may have different needs, which must be addressed in order to achieve sustainable development. A project or programme is gender-sensitive when the gender dimension is systematically integrated into every step of the process, from defining the problem, to identifying possible solutions, in the choice of partners, in defining outcomes and activities, in the composition of the management team, in budgeting, and in monitoring and evaluation.

They integrate the four components that gender mainstreaming analyses consistently highlight as essential for transforming gender-blind organisations into gender-responsive ones: *political will; technical capacity; accountability; organisational culture*.

Under each area we have noted positive developments, challenges and recommendations. Wherever possible, we have tried to integrate recommendations into other organisational processes and systems. The recommendations are a combination of suggestions by staff (collected during the survey, focus groups and interviews), members of the working group and the external consultant.

In the table we set out each of the 12 areas and give some typical findings. Please note that these are not our complete findings, although as an organisation seeking transparency, our complete findings are available on request.

Area of enquiry	Typical positive finding	Typical negative finding	Typical recommendation
Project planning and design	Examples of staff involving internal gender experts in project design and planning, such as the <i>Joto Africa</i> publication on gender and climate change adaptation in Africa.	The existing approach to designing projects did not routinely identify, consider and integrate the practical and strategic needs of women and men.	Support staff to identify targets and indicators for mainstreaming gender equality in their projects and activities to enable KS and MK4D to capture progress and challenges in the inclusion of gender equality.
Project implementation	A majority of staff think that gender equality is important to their area of work.	Staff do not ensure a gender-balance of participants when delivering training courses, and data from feedback forms is not sex-disaggregated.	Support and incentivise staff to integrate gender equality issues in their project implementation activities, including delivery of training, producing workshop materials, creating websites, setting up networks etc, and encourage the equal participation of women and men in different stages of project implementation.
Communications	Almost all IDS-produced publications reviewed use images, case studies and quotes that are gender-balanced and inclusive.	A random sample of materials and stories from the KS pages of the IDS website shows that web stories and online publications and products do not routinely analyse or reflect the gender dimensions of the issue they are addressing.	Develop our editorial guidelines to include information on how to reflect the different needs of women and men in web stories, publications and other products. Provide staff with training on how to use these guidelines.
Monitoring, evaluation and learning	ILT members see the value of incorporating gender issues into M&E, learning and capacity development (but as it is not an explicit objective of the department or a directive from managers they have not included it routinely in M&E).	Only 41.2% of staff responding to the survey currently take gender issues into account when monitoring and evaluating projects.	Senior management should commit to making the promotion of gender equality a specific objective of the MK4D project and other KS work – this will make it easier for the ILT to support staff to capture gender equality issues in their M&E and learning.

Partnerships	The partner organisation interviewed said they found the Eldis Gender Resource Guide a helpful tool and welcomed the practical support IDS has provided in the past e.g. sharing materials on how to integrate gender concerns into work on information communication technologies.	There are currently no criteria or guidance in place on how to address gender issues in partnerships.	MK4D should use the opportunity of the gender review to: open a dialogue with existing partners about what it has learned from this process; explore their own challenges and successes ⁶ in promoting gender equality at organisational and project level; and share lessons learned internally and with other partners.
Staff knowledge and understanding	A majority of the men working within KS and MK4D indicated their commitment to and interest in gender equality, suggesting there is space within KS for developing broad consensus on gender equality issues which are typically seen as being of interest to women only.	With some exceptions, there is generally a gap in staff understanding of gender equality concepts and how these can be applied to their work. For example, gender equality is often equated with equal participation of women and men, which is necessary but not sufficient for promoting gender equality.	Support staff, particularly men, to become visible advocates of gender equality within the department. This could involve creating opportunities for men to talk to other men about the personal, political and organisational aspects of gender issues.
Technical capacity and skills	Within KS and the MK4D programme there are a number of staff with excellent technical capacity and skills on gender issues that is a hugely valuable internal resource.	Only 40% of staff surveyed feel they have the training, knowledge and skills they need to make gender equality issues part of their work.	Explore opportunities to promote capacity-building and training based on experiential learning e.g. mentoring, team-building and cross-team working groups involving internal gender specialists.
Human resources	There is broad agreement that IDS: makes good provision for balancing work and family life; has policies to promote fairness and equal opportunities; has procedures in place to prevent and address inappropriate behaviour; and treats staff with and without caring responsibilities equally.	Performance appraisal guidelines and job descriptions (other than those of individuals with a specific mandate to work on gender equality) do not specify knowledge of or sensitivity to gender equality issues as a key competence or prompt for discussion of equality issues.	Promotion of gender equality should be included as a specific objective in job descriptions and performance objectives, once there is clarity on how gender fits within MK4D and departmental objectives and staff awareness on this issue is increased.

⁶ For example, the partner interviewed said they would welcome an opportunity to share learning with IDS and other organisations on how to address the gender dimensions of access to information; in turn, they would also like to share a gender evaluation methodology they have been using in the design, implementation, access and use of ICTs and in the frameworks that regulate them.

Responsibility	Staff with gender expertise are invited to input into projects run by other teams, such as the recent <i>Joto Africa</i> publication on women and climate change adaptation, although this tends to happen on an <i>ad-hoc</i> basis.	Gender is 'siloed' as one of a number of thematic areas. As a result, some staff attending focus groups tended to view those working on gender-related services and products as responsible for the promotion of gender equality, rather than seeing it as the responsibility of everyone.	Clarify areas of responsibility for gender equality as part of a broader discussion and visioning of how gender equality is relevant to the work of KS and MK4D. It should not be assumed that responsibility for the promotion of gender equality across the department and the MK4D project lies only with staff working on gender-related products and services.
Leadership and political will	The political will for promoting learning and change is a key aspect of organisational culture and the managers have shown leadership on this issue by commissioning and supporting the gender review.	Most staff (95%) participating in the survey said they would like to see senior management taking a firmer lead in promoting and modelling gender equality at departmental and organisational level.	Senior managers should take a visible and proactive lead on this issue by: raising awareness of the importance of gender equality to the work of KS and MK4D; mobilising adequate human and financial resources to address gender issues; countering resistance to change; promoting opportunities for sharing experience and organisational learning on gender issues; and monitoring progress.
Organisational culture	Staff are generally very positive about the workplace culture at IDS with over half agreeing that gender-sensitive behaviour is used in the workplace in terms of language used and comments made.	The majority of staff participating in the focus groups felt that internal communications could be strengthened to break down the pattern of working in silos.	Discuss and agree the values that lie at the heart of the three departments related to MK4D and how these translate into personal responsibilities for promoting equality.
Resources		It is not clear what funds KS and MK4D have committed specifically to gender equality work to date.	Managers should clarify what funds are available for gender equality work and whether this is for both specific gender-related projects and for mainstreaming gender equality across the work of KS and MK4D.

Overall, the initial findings from the gender review revealed that there is a lot of staff interest and commitment to promoting gender equality in their work and the work of the department, despite the absence of a written commitment and strategic objectives at departmental and organisational level to date. Overall, the recommendations made in the review report fall into the categories below:

1. **Increase staff knowledge and understanding** of gender equality and gender mainstreaming concepts in theory and practice and **strengthen their skills** to address and integrate gender issues in their work.
2. **Strengthen internal systems and structures** to address the different roles and needs of women and men across the different stages of project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
3. **Work with partners** to share learning and best practice around promoting gender equality in knowledge and information-sharing services and products.
4. **Clarify areas of responsibility and promote ownership** for the promotion of gender equality within KS/ILT/BLDS.
5. **Strengthen political will and leadership** on the importance of integrating gender issues across the work of KS/ILT/BLDS, including in departmental goals and objectives.
6. Continue to **build and promote an organisational culture** that champions gender equality and promotes the equal participation of women and men in all organisational activities.
7. Ensure **adequate resources** are available to accomplish external and internal gender equality goals.
8. Regularly **review and evaluate** progress on promoting gender equality in KS/ILT/BLDS work.

And at the time of writing this practice paper, a gender action plan has been put in place and is being implemented. It contains a series of 24 actions that fall into the eight recommendation areas above. Each action has been assigned a lead person and indicators to measure progress are being developed. Ultimately, all staff members are responsible for implementing the action plan, but the working group will continue to monitor its progress, and senior managers will continue to support and drive its implementation.

How to apply this learning to the intermediary sector?

We recognise that some of the findings illustrated above are quite specific to the IDS KS department and the MK4D programme. However, we hope that there are some general lessons to be learned from the gender review that might assist readers to apply a gender review to their own situation.

Reflection needs to be a part of our work. Although this is a case of reflection on gender, it illustrates that all organisations need to 'take stock', to stop and reflect, to monitor their progress – not just on project specific deliverables, but on overarching themes, or cross-cutting themes.

Get clarity on a vision of gender awareness. In our case we disaggregated the vision to the various levels found within the organisation. A simple vision where 'the whole of our organisation and the world are gender sensitive' is not that helpful. Be specific.

Our vision seems always out of reach but worth working towards. IDS is a gender champion. In our work we regularly write about gender issues, and recognise that gender equality is at the very heart of poverty alleviation. Nevertheless while we found many positive attributes among our staff, the review was able to identify challenges within our organisation. If we are to champion gender in our work, we need to consider our own organisation and our own way of working.

You can do very little if there is no 'political will'. All gender mainstreaming texts will suggest or state explicitly – if the leadership is not supportive then gender mainstreaming is almost impossible. We are fortunate that the managers of the KS department and the MK4D programme are 'on board' and the review indicated that there is 'political will'.

Involve staff from the outset so that mainstreaming is participatory. Involve and consult staff from the beginning, in order to get their buy-in. Conducting the review and mainstreaming via a working group made up of a mixture of staff members, and supported by managers, is an excellent way to ensure the process is 'owned' by staff and is relevant and appropriate. It is also an opportunity to build staff capacity and create gender 'champions' for the future.

Ensure that adequate time and resources are set aside for gender mainstreaming. It is essential that those coordinating the process are allocated sufficient time in their workloads, and that all staff have enough reflection and learning space for gender issues. If this space and time is not allowed for, mainstreaming risks becoming a tick-box exercise only, with no lasting transformative impact.

Goodwill needs to be embedded into organisational systems. While our staff are generally gender aware, many of the challenges were around the 'systems'. Disaggregated data was not a pre-requisite for project approval. Who has the responsibility for gender promotion was not clear. There were no criteria or guidance in place on how to address gender issues in partnerships. Embedding gender issues into organisational systems enables staff to regularly incorporate gender issues into their work.

Turn findings and recommendations into an action plan. Such a review and analysis is pointless if action is not taken. The reflection–action cycle is a key driver – stop, reflect, consider, take action. Make sure the action plan is resourced, has clear responsibilities and is time bound.

Regularly measure progress. An initial gender review should not be a one-off – it's really just the beginning. It can act as a baseline, and then be repeated at regular intervals to measure change and determine future action plans.

Ultimately, mainstreaming gender equality is a process that takes time. It is challenging and no organisation can claim to be perfect at addressing gender inequality. But, as a global, internationally-respected institution that has a commitment to tackling poverty at its heart, IDS (and, in this instance, KS and MK4D), is well placed to be at the forefront in modelling gender sensitive policies and practice across its work.

Learning about Mainstreaming Gender in Knowledge Intermediary Work

About the Impact and Learning Team (ILT)

What makes development research accessible, relevant or appropriate for people outside the research community? Does development research get its due in policymaking and practice? What would be value for money in research communication?

The Impact and Learning Team at IDS are interested in how communication of research brings about change - in particular, what happens when people and technology mediate between researchers and decision makers. We use the term 'intermediary' to describe people and technology acting in this way. We think they play a critical role in making knowledge accessible, relevant and responsive to demand.

The work we are doing in the Impact and Learning Team (ILT) is exploring and testing this assumption using action research. We support people to think about the difference they want to make as well as how they are going to go about it. We draw insights and approaches from IDS's history of research, and the fields of marketing, strategic planning and evaluation, and capacity development.

This Practice Paper is an output from our work.

Full list of papers in this set

Batchelor, S. (2011) 'Learning about Analysing Networks to Support Development Work?,' *IDS Practice Paper In Brief 1*, Brighton: IDS

Batchelor, S. Gregson, J. and Crooks, B. (2011) 'Learning about an Alternative Approach to Strategic Discussions,' *IDS Practice Paper In Brief 2*, Brighton: IDS

Ishmael Perkins, N. and Okail, N. (2011) 'The Large Conference Re-Imagined and Re-visited,' *IDS Practice Paper In Brief 3*, Brighton: IDS

Evangelia, B. (2011) 'Learning About New Technologies and the Changing Evidence Base for Social Science Research and Decision Making in International Development,' *IDS Practice Paper In Brief 4*, Brighton: IDS

Hogan, C. (2011) 'Learning about the Role of Culture in Research Policy Intermediary Work,' *IDS Practice Paper In Brief 5*, Brighton: IDS

Batchelor, S. and Hogan, C. (2011) 'Learning about "Learning Styles" in Getting Research into Policy Use and Practice?,' *IDS Practice Paper In Brief 6*, Brighton: IDS

Birchall, J. Batchelor, S. and Hayes, C. (2012) 'Learning about Mainstreaming Gender in Knowledge Intermediary Work,' *IDS Practice Paper In Brief 7*, Brighton: IDS

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