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Gender in International Development: A Feminist Institutional Approach to Gender Mainstreaming at the World Bank

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Gender in International Development

A Feminist Institutional Approach to Gender Mainstreaming at the World Bank



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Abstract

The World Bank is the most important global agency involved in international development. This paper looks at the World Bank's efforts in achieving gender equality in developing countries. Despite the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming policies aimed at bringing a gender perspective into every department of the organisation, the gender gap is still present in many member countries, particularly in non-social sectors like agriculture, energy, finance, and transport. Because international organisations like the World Bank derive much of their authority from their expertise, the aim of this research is to investigate the technocratic approach to gender mainstreaming adopted by experts in the above-mentioned non-social sectors, and how such an approach influences the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies. More specifically, the research argues that the adoption of a technocratic approach stems from the gendered nature of the World Bank and its neoliberal nature. The analysis adopts a Feminist Institutionalist framework to test the hypothesis that informal institutions like the technocratic approach adopted by experts hinders the performance of formal institutions, namely gender mainstreaming practices. After an in-depth qualitative discourse analysis of relevant documents, reporting on the Bank's gender mainstreaming efforts since the implementation of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, this research finds that in those sectors where a technocratic approach to gender mainstreaming is predominant, the adoption of technical solutions is privileged to achieve gender equality. However, these solutions significantly limit the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming policies in developing countries.

Introduction

Gender is an increasingly important aspect in the formulation of policies within International Organisations (IOs); however, despite the growing focus on the topic, some gaps on gender and governance are still present in the literature (Waylen, 2018). Feminist scholars argue that the field of International Relations (IR) is “gendered”, meaning that social fabrications of femininity and masculinity that are embedded within institutions shape the interactions that take place inside them (Mackay et al., 2010, p. 580). In turn, this system has led to the current dominant structure, which fosters the systematic simplification of the analysis and explanation of important actors in the global political economy (Griffin, 2014, p. 212), therefore leading experts within international institutions to neglect social issues because of their complexity and incompatibility with standard measurements.

This phenomenon has increasingly gained relevance in international relations after a group of feminist economists at the World Bank (WB) raised the issue, condemning the organisation's conviction that globalisation is ultimately beneficial for men and women overall (Parpart, 2014, p. 386). As sustained by feminist scholars, social factors like gender equality are often marginalised or neglected in development considerations, mainly because of the dominance of universal economic models, namely neoliberalism, consequently resulting in poor outcomes in the reduction of structural inequality in developing countries. Because of this criticism, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank have tried to strengthen the implementation of policies aimed at generating awareness about gender issues within their departments (Parpart, 2014) and, as a result, policies like 'gender mainstreaming' (World Bank, 2016b) have been introduced to apply gender equality standards to all the bureaucratic units involved in development projects.

However, despite the presence of gender expertise within the institution's staff, if they want to see their ideas transformed into policies, social experts within development institutions must adapt their views to economic standards and make them acceptable to economic experts (Vetterlein, 2012). In fact, the presence of gender experts has somehow legitimised the neoliberal approach to development, without making a meaningful difference in terms of gender equality (Ferguson, 2015). Consequently, development institutions' efforts in bringing a gender perspective into their policies have taken a technocratic approach to gender mainstreaming, which privileges technical measurements focused on economic aspects of gender and development and the sole employment of gender experts, who are often isolated from the realities of women in developing countries. Indeed, some argue that this distance between the institutions and the people may stem from a lack of cooperation with external women movements (True, 2014); however, this is not the focus of this research.

Instead, this paper seeks to investigate whether the lack of attention to social issues could be linked to questions of gendered institutions endogenous to the organisation. For instance, because women are socialised into a particular role in society, female leaders have been found to be more likely to focus on social policies than their male counterparts (Barraza Vargas, 2019). However, as Louise Chappell and Georgina Waylen interestingly found, gender regimes within institutions determine the sexual division of labour, such as the larger presence of women in the social departments of the United Kingdom's civil service, rather than in 'hard' departments like the Cabinet Office and the Treasury (Chappell & Waylen, 2013, p. 611). Hence, these findings suggest that structural gender inequality could be linked to the institutions that govern gender relations inside international organisations. In turn, this might make us ask ourselves whether the failure to

mainstream gender in certain development projects could be linked to gendered rules and institutions, which might explain phenomena like the incapacity of the World Bank to bring male economists closer to gender and development (Parpart, 2014).

Consequently, as illustrated above, despite growing literature in the field, this topic has been under-researched, and feminist scholars are still debating on the issues of structural gender inequalities. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to provide a limited contribution to the study of gendered institutions inside development organisations by attempting to answer the following question: *To what extent does a technocratic approach influence the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies at the World Bank?* In order to investigate this question, this research intends to look at the institutions inside the World Bank through the adoption of a feminist institutionalist framework, whose focus is placed on the analysis of gender regimes that characterise the rules and procedures governing our daily social, political and economic life.

Based on the framework mentioned above, the structure of this research paper is the following. In the literature review section, a summary of the role of gender in international relations is given, focusing in particular on the connection between development organisations' neoliberal policies and structural gender inequality. The role of experts in development agencies, whose authority grants them a high degree of influence on the organisations' policies is also illustrated. Then, an overview of feminist institutionalist theory is given, including a conceptualisation of institutions, followed by a synthesis of gender mainstreaming policies implemented by the World Bank. Next, the research design segment provides the theoretical framework for the investigation of the research question, based on feminist institutionalist theory, followed by the formulation of the methodological approach that will be adopted to analyse and study the qualitative material selected for this research in the empirical analysis segment. Finally, the main findings and implications will be reported, and the last segment will draw the final conclusions derived from the findings and will provide suggestions for further research in the field.

Literature Review

Gender in International Relations

Because of the marginal role of feminist theories in IR, issues and discourses of gender are often neglected when it comes to global governance and international organisations. Nonetheless, feminist

scholars' focal point is that gender, and the meaning that we give to it, shapes the current international political system which constructs the way we perceive gender structures in turn (Shepherd, 2014, p. 25), a reasoning that follows the definition of gender as socially constructed feminine and masculine identities (Peterson, 2014, p. 174). Consequently, because discourses of what is feminine and what is masculine can be found in everyday life, gendered bodies are the actors that study, and perform in, the current global political arena (Shepherd, 2014, p. 26). In particular, various feminist authors claim that international institutions represent systems of 'hegemonic masculinity' that dominate governance and institutions at both the global and local level (Chappell & Waylen, 2013; Parpart, 2014; Peterson, 2014; Waylen, 2018). As a result, this masculine hegemony leads to structural disadvantages for women, especially those that live in conditions of poverty (Peterson, 2014, p. 175), which are perpetrated by international agencies mainly through development policies.

Indeed, feminist scholars in academia claim that one of the main factors fostering this asymmetry is *neoliberalism*, an economic paradigm that is being promoted by Western international organisations, in particular by international financial institutions that take part in development projects, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Enns, 2015). These agencies place neoliberal values at the centre of their development strategies, and because of their authority as the most influential and respected sources of financial expertise, they exert an enormous amount of influence on the economic sphere, and not only, of the countries in which they operate (Babb & Kentikelenis, 2018, p. 2). On the other hand, neoliberal policies centred around market-efficiency and privatisation are not always beneficial for those who are subject to them (Enns, 2015); in fact, several feminists authors found in the literature on development argue that the Western model of exporting neoliberal values in developing countries brings racist and sexist elements with it (Griffin, 2014, p. 214), consequently making development structurally gendered.

More specifically, Griffin (2014) argues that one of the ways in which development is gendered is with regard to its "input", namely the underlying economic rationality that stems from neoliberal tenets, meaning that social issues are only included in development considerations if they are compatible with economic growth and efficiency (pp. 216-217). An example of this rationality is given by the fact that unpaid domestic work, which is generally a responsibility of women, is not included in the measurement of developing countries' GDP (DeRock, 2021; Griffin, 2014), therefore resulting in the exclusion of women's contribution to the economic life of a country. In other words, it can be argued that development institutions are gendered because their emphasis on the economic side of development leads to the marginalisation, or even cancellation, of social concerns that are linked to women and their development experience (Goetz, 1994, p. 28). This process of alienation

has been mainly witnessed within expert departments, where various mechanisms determine what type of knowledge is privileged, for instance, through ‘framing contests’ between social and economic expertise, where usually the latter prevails. (Goetz, 1994; Vetterlein, 2012).

The Role of Experts

A wide array of literature can be found on the role of specialised departments within IOs, which mainly bases its findings on the constructivist idea that the expertise inside global institutions influences the way international agencies see and try to shape the external environment. Going from analytic institutions (Broome & Seabrooke, 2012) to epistemic communities (Haas, 1992), expertise and specialised knowledge can exert a great amount of influence on the formulation of policies, thanks to their worldwide reputation as legitimate sources of knowledge, which grants them expertise-based authority among their member states (Avant et al., 2019; Clegg, 2010). The institutions’ main source of authority in terms of knowledge is the creation and use of standardized measurements, which are especially used by development institutions to measure countries’ performance on a series of indicators, also called ‘global benchmarks’ (Broome et al., 2018).

In turn, these standards determine what are valid economic indicators (DeRock, 2021) and perpetrate the imposition of a specific type of knowledge that is considered to be the ‘right’ type in non-Western countries, therefore creating a knowledge divide between Western institutions and the developing world, often under the pretext of promoting value-free expertise (Enns, 2015). In particular, international institutions like the World Bank resist the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into their expertise through “paradigm maintenance”, in order to retain Western neoliberal ideologies as dominant within the institution, thereby having disproportionate negative effects on the women of developing countries (Enns, 2015). Consequently, due to the vast authority expertise has in development institutions, it can be argued that development agencies’ problem of ‘gendered’ structures might have its roots in expert departments.

In fact, as Goetz (1994) argues, because of their authority as producers and spreaders of knowledge, international bureaucracies play a huge role in the construction of women’s interests and experiences in development. For instance, one of the main powers these agencies have is the ability to classify and categorise information and knowledge (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999, p. 710), in this case, knowledge concerning women in developing countries. In particular, Goetz (1994) points to the ability of development agents to frame particular issues as worthy of attention; nonetheless, the author also argues that the source of this knowledge matters, hence, Western feminist knowledge is preferred

over the experiences of women that live in developing contexts (p. 28). In other words, economic experts working in development institutions have acquired a great amount of authority (Goetz, 1994, p. 33), a phenomenon that is now largely supported in the literature. Therefore, being international institutions and their internal procedures gendered, a theory of Feminist Institutionalism could be useful in identifying how gendered rules and procedures within development organisations shape the policies of these agencies (Waylen, 2018).

Feminist Institutionalism

Feminist institutionalism (FI) is a relatively recent approach that stems from New Institutionalism (NI), and it is based on the idea that gender dynamics form a social hierarchy (Mackay et al., 2010, p. 580). FI draws from NI's tools of institutional analysis while compensating for the latter's lack of focus on women as actors inside institutions and on the way gender influences political institutions (Mackay et al., 2010, p. 574). Therefore, despite new institutionalist scholars' expertise on political institutions and their internal workings, feminist institutionalism might be more suited to help us understand how global governance operates in gendered ways (Waylen, 2018). In particular, feminist institutionalist researchers argue that comprehending the mechanisms behind institutional change is fundamental in the fight against gender inequality, a phenomenon that pervades all levels of social, economic and political life (Waylen, 2014, p. 212). Furthermore, FI scholars also recognise the way in which gender can be found in combination with other systems of inequality, such as race and social class (Chappell & Waylen, 2013).

Overall, feminist institutionalism investigates the way in which institutions are gendered, a condition that has implications for the agents that perform within these institutions; more specifically, Lowndes (2014) has outlined three ways in which institutions can be gendered: "identifiable rules about gender; rules that have gendered effects; and the actors who work with rules are gendered" (Waylen, 2018, p. 117). Finally, one of the main tenets of the feminist institutionalist theory is that gendered informal and formal institutions complement each other, consequently, comprehending how both work is necessary to understand the reason why oftentimes the introduction of new formal rules fails to bring desired changes at the institutional level (Chappell & Waylen, 2013; Mackay et al., 2010; Waylen, 2014). Accordingly, being institutions the prime focus of FI, a definition of 'institutions' needs to be clarified.

Mahoney and Thelen (2010) define institutions as sets of rules and procedures that shape and constrain the social and political life of people (Waylen, 2014, p. 213), and they can take various

forms, such as “formal and informal institutions, institutional change and continuity, structure and agency, and power” (Mackay et al., 2010, p. 580). Chappell and Waylen (2013) provide an extensive review of the various conceptualisation of institutions, both formal and informal, mainly in terms of rules and practices. Among the definitions the authors give, we find Helmke and Levitsky’s conceptualization of institutions, which is widely used among scholars. On the one hand, we find formal institutions, which are defined as rules and procedures that are shared and practiced through official channels; on the other hand, informal institutions are socially accepted and unwritten rules that operate outside of the previously mentioned sanctioned channels, and are therefore more difficult to identify (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004).

In addition to formal and informal institutions, we find that there are gendered actors involved in the creation and implementation of these rules (Chappell & Waylen, 2013, p. 606). In fact, evidence suggest that institutional agency is also gendered, mainly referring to the people acting within institutions (Mackay et al., 2010, pp. 582–583). Next, gender power dynamics create situations in which old informal rules, where masculinity is dominant, undermines the implementation and functioning of new formal rules favouring women’s representation in institutions, such as gender quotas and gender mainstreaming policies (Mackay et al., 2010, p. 583). On the contrary, the presence of informal rules in favour of gender equality increases the chance that the introduction of gender equality formal institutions will be successful (Lowndes, 2020, p. 549). Hence, institutional change aimed at improving gender equality might be hindered by the persistence of gendered informal rules, producing undesired effects instead (True, 2014, p. 223), what International Organisations scholar would define as bureaucratic “pathologies” (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999, p. 702).

Gender Mainstreaming

One of the various policies that has been the focus of feminist institutionalist studies because of its relevance in the study of gendered institutions is ‘Gender Mainstreaming’ (GM), which has been largely neglected by new institutionalists studies (Mackay et al., 2010, p. 579). The United Nations (UN) define gender mainstreaming as the operationalisation of “a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively” (True, 2014, p. 228). In other words, the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies is aimed at including gender considerations in every policy aspect, especially for what concerns international organisations. Gender mainstreaming is what FI scholars would define as a formal rule whose goal is to bring institutional change, mainly in terms of gender equality (Waylen,

2014); however, GM policies are institutional rules that might succumb to informal rules and procedures that are institutionalised in the political and social life of people (Waylen, 2018, p. 119). In particular, gender mainstreaming has become a significant part of development agencies, and the World Bank, as the major agency involved in international development, has also made increased efforts to include gender concerns in its policies.

The Bank first adopted the World Bank Gender Mainstreaming Strategy in 2001 (Fofack, 2002) and has since increased its gender expertise staff as well as its gender mainstreaming efforts (World Bank, 2016b). However, feminist scholars have found that despite the increased attention to the cause, the implementation of the Bank's GM strategies have met with scarce success (Moser, 2005; Parpart, 2014). For instance, one finding on the performance of GM policies at the WB states that the organisation's focus on the economic dimension of development has led to the inclusion of gender and women in development economics as external variables, instead of looking at the structural issues behind gender inequalities (Griffin, 2014). In fact, because of the World Bank's neoliberal focus on market-efficiency and economic growth, 'social development', which involves the strengthening of gender equality, is included in the institutions' development policies on condition that it can be transformed into an economic tool (Griffin, 2014), as shown by the World Bank's slogan: 'gender equality as smart economics' (World Bank, 2006).

In addition, the World Bank adopted a technocratic approach to gender mainstreaming, which involves gender training for their bureaucratic units; however, some argue that gender specialists are disconnected from women's interests (True, 2014), therefore implying that the problem might lie with the gendered nature of the World Bank's bureaucratic culture, as shown by the predominance of male economists and their reluctance to get acquainted with gender issues (Parpart, 2014, p. 385). In conclusion, these situations might explain the scarce results of gender mainstreaming policies at the WB; however, the focus of this paper will be placed on the role of informal institutions in influencing the Bank's implementation of GM policies, more specifically, what role the technocratic culture of experts plays in the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies in developing countries.

Research Design

The research intends to make use of feminist theories, more specifically, the investigation will follow the feminist institutionalist theory illustrated above to analyse gender dynamics inside global institutions (Waylen, 2018). The application of this theory allows us to look at how institutional

arrangements concerning expert departments of development institutions maintain particular gender dynamics that hinder the achievement of gender mainstreaming policies, especially in non-social sectors of development projects (Griffin, 2014). This theory is the best suited to study gender within international financial institutions, especially the World Bank, whose implementation of neoliberal economic knowledge has had a negative effect on the women of developing countries, despite the strengthening of gender mainstreaming efforts.

Because the literature on gender mainstreaming in international institutions is still developing, this research seeks to provide an albeit modest contribution to the field, by carrying out a single-N study (case study) of the World Bank, since it represents a typical case of a development institution that has a gender mainstreaming strategy, with evidence pointing to its particularly gendered culture and poor gender equality outcomes (Parpart, 2014; Waylen, 2018). More specifically, the aim of this research is to focus on how gendered informal institutions inside the Bank hinder formal institutional change. In other words, the hypothesis to be investigated is the following: *the technocratic culture (informal institution) of the World Bank's expert departments influences the performance of gender mainstreaming policies (formal institution) in non-social sectors*. Indeed, evidence shows that the departments where gender issues had more difficulty being included are the non-social units of the Bank, such as agriculture, energy, finance and transport (Griffin, 2014, p. 221). Because of the limited scope of this paper the analysis will focus on these four sectors and their relationship with gender mainstreaming policies.

For what concerns the methodological approach, feminist institutionalist scholars would generally privilege ethnographic methods like participant observation to investigate the gendered mechanisms of institutional cultures; however, ethnography goes beyond the scope of this research in terms of time and resources, and studies adopting this method are rarely found in political science (Kenny, 2014). Nonetheless, ethnography must be complemented with other types of methods in order to have a more balanced view of the context under research; therefore, this research offers a thorough analysis that includes various types of textual documents (Chappell & Waylen, 2013, p. 609). The aim of this paper is to investigate documents related to the GM agenda of the Bank, by conducting a qualitative discourse analysis.

Qualitative discourse analysis does not allow for a high degree of generalisation like quantitative methods do, but its ability to go in depth in the investigation of single cases allows for the detection of endogenous mechanisms, a characteristic particularly suited for this type of research based on the 'hidden life of institutions' (Chappell & Waylen, 2013). In fact, based on discourse analysis' goal of uncovering the connection between discursive practices and a specific context,

qualitative discourse analysis is both an interpretative research method, based on the idea that people's actions are shaped by their values, ideologies and beliefs, and a constructivist method of analysis, hence, the language we use socially constructs the meaning we attribute to the subjects of our discourses (Halperin & Heath, 2012). In order to answer the research question presented in the introduction, this method will be used to test the hypothesis that informal rules, identified through the language used to frame women and gender issues, produce gendered mechanism that hinder the effective implementation of formal rules aimed at changing the system from a gender equality perspective.

The informal institution that will be investigated is the technocratic approach to gender adopted by experts at the World Bank, under the form of policy discourses, which mainly derive from the overall neoliberal values of the organisation (Ferguson, 2015, p. 393). This approach focuses on the experts' gendered vision of women in development as isolated actors responsible for solving the problem of gender inequality through their own actions as economic agents (Parpart, 2014, pp. 387–388), instead of dealing with differences in gender treatment at a more structural level (Goetz, 1994, p. 28), consequently leading to poor results in the implementation of GM policies (Moser, 2005, p. 585). Overall, the research will focus on the discourses of experts in the non-social sectors of development through the triangulation of various documents commenting on the gender mainstreaming efforts in those areas. The documents that will be analysed in this paper will be retrieved from The World Bank's website dedicated to the "Research and Publications" on gender (World Bank, n.d.), where the organisation provides an overview of its efforts in dealing with gender inequality.

Because of time constraints, this paper will narrow the scope of the investigation to documents dealing with gender mainstreaming efforts produced in the last five years, since the World Bank has defined the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 a "watershed year in the international communities efforts to advance gender equality" (World Bank, 2016b). Therefore, we are interested in seeing how this goal has been framed based on SDG 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (United Nations, 2015). As a result, eight documents reporting on the gender mainstreaming strategies implemented by the WB in the last five years have been selected. In sum, the analysis will focus on the investigation of discursive patterns of the Bank's policies to understand how women and gender issues are framed by experts.

Empirical Analysis

Building on the theoretical and methodological framework illustrated in the Research Design section, the analysis of this research will focus on eight relevant documents which address gender mainstreaming policies implemented in the context of the four non-social departments mentioned above. The material selected for this investigation includes various types of documents, such as working papers, briefs and reports addressing gender mainstreaming in the agriculture, energy, finance and transport sectors of the World Bank projects, after the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. These non-social sectors have been selected because, according to the World Bank, their implementation of GM policies has met with scarce success compared to the efforts made by social sectors like health and education to mainstream gender in development initiatives (Griffin, 2014, p. 221).

Given the limited scope of the research, two documents per sector have been selected and based on this material, qualitative discourse analysis will be used to look at the effects of patterns of language that produce a neoliberal framing of gender issues in development. In particular, what this paper intends to find and investigate are the following elements of the WB's technocratic approach to gender mainstreaming: the inclusion of women's issues in policy if compatible with the Bank's economic agenda, the treatment of gender inequality as a problem that can be dealt with by targeting women as the only agents of their own empowerment, and the introduction of technical solutions and gender expertise that does not take the experiences of poor women into consideration. The results of this investigation will help shed more light on experts' informal institutions, in this case the technocratic approach to gender mainstreaming adopted by the World Bank, which can determine the success or failure of the implementation of GM policies.

Agriculture and Gender

The first document that tackles gender mainstreaming in agriculture is the working paper "Implementing the World Bank group's gender strategy: From analysis to action to impact" (World Bank, 2017a), which illustrates the World Bank Group's (WBG) goals and methods to achieve the 2016-2023 Gender Strategy in the context of the Food and Agriculture Global Practice (GFADR). The document recognises the scarce results in implementing GM strategies and acknowledges the role of social norms and customary laws in hindering the achievement of gender equality in developing regions. Indeed, the role of men in hindering women's access is emphasised throughout

the paper (World Bank, 2017a, p. 12) and their engagement is sought (World Bank, 2017a, p. 32); however, men are rarely included in the proposed solutions to eradicate gender inequality. Instead, the focus of initiatives is placed on women as key players for their own empowerment, either as the main targets of developing projects (World Bank, 2017a, p. 22) or through the creation of “self-help groups” (World Bank, 2017a, p. 51).

Furthermore, despite the attention to social and cultural barriers women face in developing countries, mainly technical solutions are implemented to deal with social problems, such as “improving access to information, training and finance” (World Bank, 2017a, p. 50). Moreover, the document reiterates the idea that gender equality is ultimately necessary to achieve the WB’s goals of “ending extreme poverty and increasing shared prosperity” (World Bank, 2017a, p. ix), which frames GM as a desirable policy because of its feasibility and economic return (World Bank, 2017a, pp. 3–4). Examples are given by the language used by the World Bank’s (2017a) staff to describe gender issues: they see promoting gender equality as “smart development policy” (p. 31), they talk about violence against women in terms of “loss of productivity” (p. 34) and they argue that achieving gender equality at the employment level means, among other things, a “stronger bottom line” (p. 34).

The WB paper also claims that Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) is “unlikely to be effective [...] without active attention to gender” (World Bank, 2017a, p. 8). This policy is illustrated in a working paper co-produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN and the WB, namely a training module on “How to integrate gender issues into climate-smart agriculture project” (Karttunen et al., 2017). Unlike the previous document, where much of the strategies rely on the training and inclusion of gender staff and knowledge derived from global practices (World Bank, 2017a, pp. 20–21), this training module advocates for the inclusion of indigenous men and women’s knowledge and experiences, together with gender training (Karttunen et al., 2017, p. 12).

Both documents affirm that financial inclusion and access to credit are key characteristics to achieve gender equality (Karttunen et al., 2017, p. 6), and that gender equality increases productivity and efficiency, consequently, both propose the implementation of policies aimed at increasing the legal access to financial services for women (World Bank, 2017a, p. xi). However, evidence shows that customary law trumps over legal frameworks, where present, that ensure women’s rights, like inheritance and ownership rights (World Bank, 2017a, p. 63). Indeed, there is a focus on the social impact of the gender-sensitive approach and attention to women’s access to resources, as well as the recognition of institutional barriers, but effective suggestions on how to change these structures at the cultural level are lacking (p. 27). Overall, it can be claimed that in the agriculture sector, the dominance of a technocratic approach to GM influences the way in which gender equality initiatives

are implemented, namely through the adoption of economic-oriented language, and technical measures focused on women only that do not tackle the normative and social rules that govern gender relations, therefore leading to problems in the implementation phase (World Bank, 2017a, p. x).

Energy and Gender

For what concerns the energy sector and gender mainstreaming, the brief “Energy Access and Gender: Getting the Right Balance” (Dutta et al., 2017), produced by the World Bank with external contributions, looks at how gender is relevant for the energy sector of developing countries. This document provides a narrative of gender mainstreaming policies that goes beyond the generally technocratic approach to gender issues displayed by the World Bank experts. In particular, it recognises the gendered nature of energy and financial institutions, deeply connected to the women’s development in the sphere of energy production and consumption (Dutta et al., 2017, p. 7). It also acknowledges that several energy projects fail to “mainstream gender systematically”, and that a “gender ‘neutral’ approach” to energy access perpetuates and corroborates the differences between women and men in developing countries, like the exclusion of unpaid domestic services from economic data (Dutta et al., 2017, p. 1).

Furthermore, what represents a point of divergence from other reports of the WB is the emphasis on the inclusion of local women in the creation of energy-centred initiatives, such as projects where women, the main users of household appliances, can contribute to the design of cooking stoves (Dutta et al., 2017, p. 2). In addition, the report proposes solutions to the failure of effectively mainstreaming gender in the energy agenda. One of these suggestions is the implementation of “gender audits”, characterised by the participation of locals to promote gender equality, which significantly improved the GM efforts of those who adopted them (Dutta et al., 2017, p. 5). Moreover, because of the fundamental role of economic means in promoting women’s access to energy, the document illustrates how the inclusion of women is deeply dependent on the implementation of gender-sensitive financial programs, such as “financial inclusion, pricing, and subsidies” (Dutta et al., 2017, p. 3).

A similar narrative of gender mainstreaming in energy is found in the report “Getting To Gender Equality in Energy Infrastructure: lessons from electricity generation, transmission, and distribution projects” (Orlando et al., 2018), produced by the Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP), which is administered by the WB. The report starts by framing gender equality as “smart business” (Orlando et al., 2018, p. 3) and as a set of policies that “enhances productivity”

(Orlando et al., 2018, p. 1), and presents a section illustrating how employing women in high wage jobs is linked to “stronger company profits” (Orlando et al., 2018, p. 83). However, the narrative of the document does not exclusively focus on the economic gains of gender equality; instead, it concentrates on the barriers, either social, legal, or technical, that prevent women from joining the energy sector. For instance, the report recognises the need of complementing the introduction of gender expertise with the experiences and opinions of local men and women through consultations, which are necessary to achieve effective results (Orlando et al., 2018, p. 11).

Moreover, Orlando et al. (2018) have emphasised the gender roles and social norms that influence women’s employment (p. 19): in some contexts, women cannot have “morally and socially inappropriate jobs” (p. 29), while men might decide for women about employment matters (p. 20) and may prevent them from taking part in public consultations (p. 43). The proposed solutions for these social barriers are rather technical, such as gender-training, education and employment incentives (Orlando et al., 2018, p. 32), but still necessary to achieve gender equality. However, because they target formal institutions like property rights and quotas, they neglect informal institutions like customary laws, which see men and communities restraining women, therefore allowing oppressive social norms to persist and hinder women’s empowerment. In sum, it can be concluded that the GM efforts in the energy sector, despite being still influenced by technocratic solutions, are gradually shifting towards a more holistic approach, as supported by the report’s attention to issues like social norms, lack of technical skills, gendered occupational segregation, and gender-insensitive work environments, which can improve the implementation of GM practices.

Finance and Gender

Related to gender mainstreaming and finance, the first document to be analysed is the working paper “Women Entrepreneurs and Access to Finance: Program Profiles from Around the World” (World Bank, 2017b). This 2017 working paper gives an overview of the Gender-Mainstreaming-Markets (GEM) unit, whose aim is to apply gender concerns to the International Finance Corporation (IFC) projects, which is the private sector branch of the World Bank (World Bank, 2017b, p. 1). This rather short overview of gender mainstreaming operations in the financial sectors of various countries presents a strong focus on the economic potential of women as agents in the financial market. This emphasis on the economic nature of women is not surprising given the financial character of the unit, especially the paper’s focus on banks that specifically target women for their financial products and

microfinance schemes. Nonetheless, there are elements that are traceable to a technocratic approach to gender mainstreaming.

For instance, despite the training of gender experts to better deliver financial products to women (World Bank, 2017b, p. 6), the report does not mention the unpaid domestic services that these women might be undertaking in their private sphere in addition to the microfinancing initiatives, therefore differentiating them from the “homo economicus” of the neoliberal model (Griffin, 2014, p. 219). Furthermore, while the paper rightly mentions the advantages women derive from participating in financial initiatives, the report also underlines how the inclusion of women in financial initiatives is “good business” (World Bank, 2017b, p. 4) for the banks financing women-owned enterprises. One of the implications we can derive from this type of narrative is that by focusing on the economic gains of women in finance, more banks might be eager to offer services tailored to women; however, this might also imply that the more social and structural issues that preclude women from having more access to financing might be overlooked in the name of market efficiency. In other words, the inclusion of women is mainly based on the economic gains they bring, and not on the achievement of social gains by reducing structural gender inequality.

In addition, a second document reporting on gender and finance analysed in this research is the “FIRST 2016 Annual Report: Strengthening Financial Sectors” (World Bank, 2016a). The Financial Sector Reform and Strengthening Initiative (FIRST), which is managed by the World Bank Group, aids the creation of stable, efficient and inclusive financial system in developing countries through technical assistance (TA) (World Bank, 2016a, p. 6). One of FIRST’s main assets is its access to WB and IMF expertise, who can “draw on their global experience” to assist the construction of business models (World Bank, 2016a, p. 7). In fact, as mentioned in the 2016 annual report, the strategy of this multi-donor program is mainly based on “international standards and best practices” (World Bank, 2016a, p. 18). This might run the risk of implementing a ‘one-size-fits-all’ financial model, which does not take the experiences of indigenous people, especially women, into consideration.

Furthermore, what can be noticed from this report is the focus on financial inclusion as one of FIRST’s main pillars, yet the document’s reporting on projects and activities aimed at the inclusion of women in finance represents a rather small part of the reports’ aims and achievements. Indeed, as illustrated by FIRST Interventions in 2016 – Appendix B (World Bank, 2016a, p. 49), only three countries out of nineteen (Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana) received technical assistance aimed at promoting gender equality in financial access. This might be the result of the program’s 2015 gender mainstreaming approach, which focuses on gender issues “where relevant and feasible, as part of

existing FIRST eligibility areas” (World Bank, 2016a, p. 14), illustrating in turn how the involvement of women in financial projects is curtailed to those initiatives that do not require actions that excessively drift away from the economic aims of the financial program. Overall, GM in development finance is strongly influenced by the technocratic approach adopted by experts in this sector, whose strategies mainly involve the adoption of standardized practices that do not take into account women’s experiences and their non-financial activities, therefore failing to implement GM solutions that effectively tackle gender inequality, as shown by women’s lower levels of financial access (World Bank, 2016a, p. 20).

Transport and Gender

Finally, the analysis will focus on the transport sector, which is often connected to urban planning and infrastructure projects. In fact, the first document to be analysed is the “Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning Design” (Terraza et al., 2020), which focuses on the gender bias of cities and how to make them more inclusive for women. Here, attention is given to women as well as sexual and gender minorities, and people with disabilities, often neglected in development projects. The authors’ main strategy sees women and girls participating actively in project planning and the design of mobility projects (Terraza et al., 2020, p. 8), with a reduced need to employ gender specialists as seen in other sectors. In fact, the WB’s approach to gender in transport and urban planning illustrated in this work represents a change in paradigm from the technocratic approach to gender mainstreaming previously adopted by experts, a shift that might stem from the failure of recent transport projects to commit to gender equality in practice (Orlando et al, 2018, p. 83). For instance, there is an acknowledgement of the inadequacy of gender-inclusive policies that consider “women separately from other beneficiaries and project goals” (Terraza et al., 2020, p. 11), therefore moving away from the popular strategy of targeting women as separate variables in the development equation.

Furthermore, the document moves away from technical solutions for what concerns sexual harassment of women. In addition to improving transport structures, like better lighting and wider pavements, the document also recognises the need to engage men in reducing gender inequality, because social norms must change to make gender violence come to an end (Terraza et al., 2020, p. 75). For example, the document recognises how programs like “Pink Transportation” in Mexico are practical and short-term solutions that are ineffective at tackling gendered social cultures, which must be addressed by changing social beliefs about gender roles (Terraza et al., 2020, pp. 181–183).

Gender-based violence is also addressed in the Bank’s Global Roadmap of Action “Toward Sustainable Mobility: Gender” (Allen & Alam, 2019), which represents one of the major hurdles to women’s mobility and economic safety (Allen & Alam, 2019, p. 14). Indeed, Allen and Alam (2019) point to the social norms and gender culture that affect women in transport (p. 4), yet the solutions they propose are more practical, focused on infrastructure (p. 22) and legal tools (p. 20), therefore displaying a more technocratic narrative in comparison to the previous document. For instance, gender-expertise (Allen & Alam, 2019, p. 38) and quotas (Allen & Alam, 2019, p. 63) are proposed as solutions, and women are described as “agents of change” for their own safety (Allen & Alam, 2019, p. 33). Nevertheless, in addition to the inclusion of women’s voices in project planning (Allen & Alam, 2019, p. 38), Allen and Alam (2019) also advocate for the erosion of stereotypes in the transport industry (p. 25), as well as for the engagement of men and boys to change social norms (p. 40), therefore creating a balance between practical solutions and deeper structural social changes.

However, a strong economic reasoning is also present, which justifies gender equality in terms of economic gains and growth. For example, the document starts by claiming that including women is necessary to create a “dynamic and prosperous economy” (Allen & Alam, 2019, p. 4). This statement is supported by data that links gender equality in transport to higher GDP levels (Allen & Alam, 2019, p. 15). In addition, gender equality is also described as desirable because of its compatibility with, and role in, the achievement of other policy goals (Allen & Alam, 2019, p. 6). Nonetheless, we can argue that overall, GM in the transport sector of developing countries is moving away from a technocratic approach. Experts in this department are increasingly aware of the negative impacts this approach, and their focus is now directed towards policies aimed at changing social norms and rules that hinder women’s development through a more holistic approach to GM.

Main Findings

Overall, based on the analysis presented above, we can argue that the World Bank’s gender mainstreaming policies have recently taken a rather holistic approach to solve gender inequality in developing countries, although some variation between the different sectors is still present. While all the documents that have been investigated in this research advocate for social and economic development of women, by addressing technical, legal, and cultural barriers, the strategies proposed by the various sets of experts differed to a certain extent. For instance, while the finance sector mainly focused on the introduction of gender-experts and standardized practices in financial programs, the

other sectors also emphasised the need to include the voices of local women into the planning and design of the projects, fundamental for the success of the initiatives.

Furthermore, what has also been found is that the empowerment of women and their inclusion in society is a task that is oftentimes left to women themselves, who are then targeted as agents of development separately from men and their communities. This technocratic approach is seen across almost all the documents analysed here, in which the inclusion of both men and women is advocated but then fails to find an adequate policy at the implementation level. The sector in which this issue has been transformed into more practical solutions is the transport department, where a new strategy to implement GM which aims to change gender roles and cultural beliefs about women and men's place in society is proposed.

In fact, the main finding that can be drawn from this limited research is the fact that the type of approach that is adopted by experts in implementing gender mainstreaming policies determines the effect these policies have in solving gender inequalities in developing contexts. In other words, the language that is used in formulating gender mainstreaming strategies sets the focus of the Bank and, consequently, determines to which projects and practices resources are diverted. In practice, if a technocratic approach is advocated, which favours the use of gender experts, sees women as isolated agents of change, and justifies the attainment of gender equality in terms of economic gains, then the strategy adopted to mainstream gender in development will focus on the technical aspects of gender inequality, without addressing the root problems of gendered social norms and cultural beliefs about the role of women in society.

For instance, evidence has been found that formal legal regulations protecting women's rights, despite being necessary, can be ignored and outdone by strong informal customary laws that segregate and oppress women. Formal strategies like gender quotas and women-only initiatives are fundamental to improve their inclusion in society. Nonetheless, it is also important to complement these efforts with initiatives aimed at changing social norms about gender roles, especially by engaging and educating men and boys. In addition, it results from many of the documents under research that more data on women in developing countries is needed in order to improve gender mainstreaming efforts.

Conclusion

Despite being present in all sectors researched here, the degree to which technocratic GM policies are prevailing varies between sectors, going from the most technocratic (finance and agriculture) to the

most holistic (transport and energy). Accordingly, this research found that in those sectors where a technocratic approach to GM is predominant, the adoption of technical solutions is privileged to achieve gender equality. However, these solutions significantly limit the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming policies in developing countries. In fact, the documents that have been analysed in this paper report that the gender mainstreaming agenda that has been followed until now has failed to effectively close the gender gap in developing societies, despite the presence of several projects and initiatives. This phenomenon, as illustrated in the main findings, can be argued to stem from the fact that the implementation of policies aimed at achieving gender equality has been influenced by the technocratic nature of the solutions proposed by the Bank's teams of experts.

Thanks to the feminist institutionalist framework applied to this research, it can be concluded that at the World Bank, an informal institution like the technocratic culture of the institution's expert, which is based on the neoliberal nature of the organisation, has produced a gendered effect by which formal institutions like gender mainstreaming policies are not implemented effectively through adequate initiatives that tackle the gendered structures of developing societies. Nonetheless, despite being insufficient, technical solutions like the introduction of gender experts and the creation of programs targeting only women, are necessary to achieve a more holistic approach to gender mainstreaming. Moreover, it is important to mention that this research provides a limited contribution to the study of gender in international relations and that more research is necessary.

In fact, several other important elements need to be considered for further research when addressing gender inequalities. For instance, a recurrent theme in the documents analysed in here is that of migration (Karttunen et al., 2017, p. 10), which sees men and young boys moving to find better employment opportunities, often leaving women as head of the household in terms of responsibilities, but not in terms of rights, therefore putting them in a much harder position to care for their families. In addition, women's movements and civil society (Allen & Alam, 2019, p. 38) represent an interesting topic for further investigation, focused on how cooperation with these particular groups can improve the inclusion of women in the social and economic development of a country. To conclude, closing the gender gap in development needs a holistic approach that actively engages men and women alike, in a common effort to close the gender gap across all levels of a country's social and economic life. It is in this direction that development agencies like the World Bank must go if they want to successfully implement gender mainstreaming policies and achieve gender equality.

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