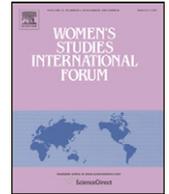


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## Gender mainstreaming and climate change

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### SYNOPSIS

Gender mainstreaming refers to the process of incorporating a gender perspective to any action, policy, legislation or action in order to ensure that the concerns of all are addressed and that gender inequalities are not perpetuated through institutional means. However the implementation of gender mainstreaming across the globe has not necessarily resulted in advances for women, as it is usually associated with a winding back of women-focused policies and programs. Emerging research indicates that climate change has significant gendered impacts and yet policies and practices designed to address and shape mitigation and adaptation strategies have failed to incorporate gender mainstreaming. Further the scientific and technological focus of many of these institutional responses has led to a lack of attention to social outcomes more generally. This has resulted in a lack of attention to the vulnerable groups, including women. This paper outlines an argument not only for gender mainstreaming of climate policy but also for policy focused specifically on women's empowerment. Gender mainstreaming is essential in ensuring that not only climate policies and programs are comprehensive, but so too are women-focused policies designed to ensure that women are supported and empowered to take action on their own behalf.

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### Introduction

Writing on the complex links between gender-based violence and climate change in an earlier publication (Alston, 2012), I argued for greater attention to gender in climate change discourse, policies, actions and strategies. This paper takes this argument further calling for gender mainstreaming to be introduced into emerging policy areas related to climate change. However it would be unwise to imagine an uncomplicated process that passes a gender lens over all climate responses with the result that gender vulnerability is addressed and gender equality achieved. This paper takes an in-depth look at gender mainstreaming, its history and manifestations and discusses ways that gender mainstreaming might create the space for transformative change in gender power relations in post-disaster situations.

Climate change is a major factor in twenty-first century global experience with a rise in catastrophic and slow-onset climate events. Irrefutable evidence is emerging across the globe in sites subject to climate variability and climate catastrophes

that disaster experiences are gendered and that women are particularly vulnerable during and after climate events (Enarson, 2009; Lambrou & Piana, 2006; Lambrou & Nelson, 2010; Neumayer & Pluemper, 2007).

In this paper I draw attention to the gendered experiences of women in relation to climate change and call on governments to recommit to gender mainstreaming in the policies, institutional and legislative frameworks designed to address climate issues. An analysis of gender mainstreaming is essential in understanding ways transnational, national and local bodies might usefully address climate challenges with gender-sensitivity. A failure to do this risks cementing gender inequalities in post-disaster and reconstruction efforts because of the inherently inequitable power relations, resource allocations and underpinning assumptions on which responses to climate disasters are based. Conversely climate change experience gives the context and capacity to re-interrogate gender mainstreaming and its radical potential to provide transformative changes in gender relations in the emerging and volatile climate and post-disaster space.

## History of gender mainstreaming

Over 50,000 women gathered as delegates and observers at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The number of attendees was bolstered by the perception of many women across the world that, despite twenty years of activity since the first UN Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975, there had been no significant shift in women's disadvantaged position. A Declaration and Platform for Action was released at the conclusion of the conference (see [UNWomen, 2012](#)) calling on governments across the world to recommit to gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Beijing Conference marked a watershed between policy frameworks as delegates urged governments and other institutions to move from a more limited policy focus on women and their perceived failings, to one focusing on gender equality ([Walby, 2005](#)). Governments and transnational organizations were challenged to move from viewing gender inequality as a women's issue, to be addressed through women's policy units and policy directed at women, to a broader acceptance that gender disadvantage required a whole of government/organization response across all areas of policy and practice to expose the inbuilt and traditional economic, social, cultural and political biases against women.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, following the 1975 Mexico World Conference and the subsequent UN declared Decade for Women, many countries had established and enacted women-focused instrumentalities and policies. It is important to note that these had built dedicated sites and discourses exposing women's disadvantage and empowering women. However, the institutional, legal and cultural customs that established relations of power and gender inequalities were largely left un-interrogated ([Alston, 2006](#); [Walby, 2005](#)). Delegates urged a more substantive approach that analyzed all areas of policy, program formulation and structures for gender bias.

The groundswell of support in Beijing for a new gender mainstreaming framework was surprisingly successful and has had global implications. [True and Mintrom \(2001,27\)](#) note how gender mainstreaming spread quickly across the world in a process of 'global diffusion' that led even those countries with a poor record on gender equality to establish institutional gender mainstreaming structures. One of the critical factors in this spread has been the international non-government organizations (INGOs) and transnational women's networks working to expose inequalities and empower women.

What is also clear nearly twenty years on from Beijing is that gender mainstreaming holds a significant promise for addressing inequalities but has failed to deliver substantive change. Gender mainstreaming has become an 'empty signifier' ([Council of Europe, 1998](#)), heavily dependent on cultural context. Gender inequalities persist and women are disadvantaged against almost all socio-economic indicators including education, health, employment, income and experiences of poverty. They are over-represented amongst the poorest of the poor, are largely excluded from ownership of land, agricultural resources and from decision-making bodies, undertake a vast majority of the caring and unpaid work, are vulnerable to gender based violence, and are subject to customs that significantly oppress them. Across the world women and girls are disadvantaged simply because they are female. Climate

change opens up a new area of inquiry into the way gender inequalities are experienced and addressed during and after a catastrophic event providing a space that allows a reexamination of gender mainstreaming.

## Climate change

Climate change refers to the buildup of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere causing major changes in climate and catastrophic events ([IPCC, 2007](#)). Debate has focused on the extent to which anthropogenic causes are responsible for climate variations or whether they are part of natural cycles ([IPCC, 2007](#)). This debate has led to a fixation on scientific and technological solutions at the expense of detailed analysis of social and gendered outcomes ([Alston, 2012](#); [Alston & Whittenbury, 2012](#)).

Nonetheless evidence is increasing that climate variability has major global consequences and that these include melting of the polar ice caps, sea and air temperature rises, and an increase in catastrophic events such as storm surges, more frequent and violent cyclones, rainfall events and droughts ([IPCC, 2007](#)). Research is emerging that these events and climate changes are causing major disruption to food and water security, to food production cycles and to how and where food is produced ([FAO, 2007](#)). They are also having major effects on individuals, households and communities affected by catastrophic events in the areas of health, housing, access to clean water, food security and sanitation ([Dankelman, 2010](#); [Pelling, 2011](#)).

Global uncertainty about climate change and resulting food and water security is heightened by rising world populations (predicted to increase from 7 to 9 billion by 2040), widening wealth differentials within and between countries, wars and conflicts, a looming peak oil crisis, a rise in fundamentalism and changes in power relations between countries and regions ([United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, 2012](#)). While climate change is not the only factor causing major disruption, in concert with others it constitutes a major global challenge, and one that exacerbates gender inequalities.

Gender is recognized as a significant indicator of vulnerability during and after climate events. [Dankelman \(2010\)](#) argues that gender vulnerability is compounded by a loss of control over natural resources, including water, the means of production, information, and decision-making; time poverty; a breakdown of educational and employment opportunities; increased exposure to unsafe conditions; and reduced capacity for local organizing. Women are much more likely to be living in poverty, to have no ownership of land and resources to protect them in a post-disaster situation, to have less control over production and income, less education and training, less access to institutional support and information, less freedom of association, and fewer positions on decision-making bodies. Women are more constrained by their responsibilities for the aged and children, and during and after a climate event are more likely to die and or be exposed to violence ([Alston, Whittenbury, & Haynes, 2011](#); [Dankelman & Jansen, 2010](#)).

[Dankelman \(2010: 59\)](#) argues that women have less access to resources that are essential to disaster preparedness, mitigation and rehabilitation, and that their workloads increase not only because men are more likely to migrate to look for work

but because of a lack of energy sources, clean water, safe sanitation and health impacts. Heavy workloads often result in girls dropping out of school to assist.

Evidence from our own research indicates that men's mental health may suffer during prolonged period of drought (see for example Alston and Kent 2008; Alston 2010), and women's increased morbidity and insecurity following disasters is demonstrated in a number of studies, including our own in the Murray-Darling Basin area of Australia (Alston & Whittenbury, 2010; Alston et al., 2011), in the Pacific (Alston & Vize, 2010) and Bangladesh (Alston et al., 2011). This work supports that of others, including that of Neumayer and Pluemper (2007) who note that women are significantly more likely to die in a catastrophic climate event; Enarson (2006, 2009), who reports the significant vulnerability of women to violent attack following Hurricane Katrina in the United States; Lynch (2011) who noted the increase in the numbers of women seeking refuge from violence in the earthquake region in Christchurch in February 2011; and Women's Health Goulburn North-East (2011) who have documented women's experiences of violence following Australia's 2009 Black Saturday bushfires.

Women do not lack agency in the environmental space; they hold critical local knowledge that can enhance climate adaptations and assist the development of new technologies to address climate variability in areas related to energy, water, food security, agriculture and fisheries, biodiversity services, health, and disaster risk management. Women's traditional knowledge and practices have the potential to add enormous value to the development of new technologies and adaptations to address climate change (Lane & McNaught, 2009). Yet accessing this knowledge and expertise is hampered by a lack of attention to gender equality and an often unquestioned acceptance of existing power and gender relations.

UN WomenWatch (2011: 1) notes that in many contexts,

*women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men [and] are especially vulnerable when they are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood. Those charged with the responsibility to secure water, food and fuel for cooking and heating face the greatest challenges [and] when coupled with unequal access to resources and to decision-making processes, limited mobility places women in rural areas in a position where they are disproportionately affected by climate change. It is thus important to identify gender-sensitive strategies to respond to the environmental and humanitarian crises caused by climate change.*

This call for gender-sensitivity in climate strategies is timely. If a gendered division of labor is normalized in disaster responses, if gender-based violence is accepted as traditional, and therefore unchangeable (Zalewski, 2010), if women are viewed as essentially mothers and carers and men as land-owners, fishermen and workers, then interventions can lead to increased gender-based violence, inequitable resource distribution and a lack of commitment in empowering strategies for women. Gender mainstreaming would seem to provide a focus to ensure that women's rights and needs are addressed and that inequitable gender relations are challenged during and after climate disasters.

## Gender mainstreaming

Walby (1997) notes three stages of gender equality policy – the first being equal treatment for women through, for example, legal statutes that deliver rights to women; the second being positive actions for women such as leadership training; and the third being gender mainstreaming – a commitment to a comprehensive assessment of organizational structures, policies and practices for gender bias. These match Rees's (1998) typology of gender equality strategies which she describes as 'tinkering', 'tailoring' and 'transforming' – the latter being the original feminist intent of gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming is defined as:

*the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (ECOSOC, 1997)*

Essentially gender mainstreaming is designed to bring about gender equality, by exposing gender as a socially constructed phenomenon and making transparent new possibilities for reshaped, and more equitable gender arrangements. However the process of exposing and reshaping has not been a linear one, leading a number of feminist researchers to analyze the *radical potential paradox* (Wittman, 2010, 51) – that is, why, despite the rapid adoption of gender mainstreaming across the globe, do mainstreaming processes and practices not produce greater gender equality?

### Theorizing the radical potential paradox of GM

There are several over-lapping explanations posited by feminist researchers to address this paradox. For clarity I have divided these, but readers should note that they are not discrete. The first is that gender mainstreaming was developed by INGOs and women's lobby groups operating from a radical feminist framework at transnational level. Yet the translation of mainstreaming occurs at the local level where national contextual realities may clash with the original feminist conceptualization (Walby, 2005). Prugl (2010) identifies the transnational origins of gender mainstreaming by committed feminists and organizations at Beijing and its rapid diffusion as both a strength and a weakness, a view supported by other feminist writers.

*The sheer diversity of mainstreaming, possibly attributable to its rapid ascendancy and 'lack of ownership' ... renders the concept somewhat vague in practice. (Squires, 2005, 368 quoted in Payne, 2011, 526)*

Many governments and institutions have coopted the original radical feminist intent of mainstreaming causing 'feminist policies to evaporate' (Moser & Moser, 2005, 15; Prugl, 2010, 448). While there has been a widespread adoption

of gender mainstreaming rhetoric, there has also been a lack of understanding of its goals.

Thus a second explanation concerns the lack of clarity about the vision of gender mainstreaming. While the origin was transnational, gender mainstreaming practices are designed within a cultural context, with the result that the goals are interpreted in diverse ways. This may be to achieve sameness (fostering women to enter male domains where male norms prevail); difference (working to ensure that the differing contributions of women and men are valued in gendered societies) or transformative actions (where a transformation of inequitable gender relations is undertaken) (Daly, 2005; Walby, 2005). Thus as Walby (2005) succinctly puts it – is the goal sameness, difference or transformation? Further, is it about integrating women into male normative systems or about transforming those systems to achieve radical change?

A third explanation for the inability of gender mainstreaming to achieve radical changes in gender/power relations can be found in Bacchi and Eveline's (2010) work on *Mainstreaming Politics*. They call for a return to a political conceptualization of gender arguing that we must understand what the problem is before we can address it fully. Bacchi and Eveline's nuanced point is that policies, rather than being gendered are actually *gendering* (2010, 336). That is that policies can in fact reinforce gender inequalities by the way they define the issue being addressed. Because policies can reproduce gender inequality, Bacchi and Eveline suggest that before we undertake a gender analysis of policies and outcomes, we should ask *what is the problem being solved?* In post-disaster work we would ask what are the differential gendered experiences, how are women and men viewed in this space, what are the factors creating gender inequality and inequitable power relations and, therefore, how do policy and interventions reinforce or break down these inequalities?

A fourth explanation for the failure of gender mainstreaming to make a critical difference is the reluctance or inability of key players to commit to gender equality outcomes. This translates at state bureaucratic levels to *procedural* processes being the outcome of gender mainstreaming policy rather than *substantive* change (Meier & Celis, 2011, 475). These processes include providing gender-disaggregated data, gender auditing, gender budgeting and greater transparency on factors such as the numbers of women in leadership positions. While this counting is useful, it fails to transform gender inequalities. Thus while governments have been quick to adopt gender mainstreaming, they are slow to define goals, to resource institutional structures and to deliver radical change outcomes.

This links with a final explanation concerning the local contexts and institutions through which gender mainstreaming practices and processes are developed and delivered, as these bodies are themselves highly gendered. It is here that the radical goals of gender mainstreaming become technocratic exercises. Gender mainstreaming occurs at local levels in a diverse range of cultures and contexts through institutional structures that have traditionally supported male privilege. Wittman (2010, 66) points out that gender mainstreaming goals conflict with bureaucratic processes and norms which are often conservative, and linked to the patriarchal values underpinning the personal relations of male bureaucrats; that these norms relating to what is understood as gender reduce the ability of advocates to create radical change; and that the use of 'soft' measures such as

gender statistics leads to a de-prioritizing of gender equality goals.

Further, both Wittman (2010) and Prugl (2010) observe that the underlying practices of institutions include impartiality, objectivity and neutrality, all of which subvert the feminist gender mainstreaming project, aid the retention of male norms and remove individuals from the need to address radical change. Wittman (2010) concludes that the radical potential paradox of gender mainstreaming is corrupted by the *intent, implementation and institutionalization* of the processes that together act to restrict the transformational potential of gender mainstreaming. Payne (2011) refers to the *pragmatic, conceptual and political* barriers to describe the same processes of resistance. Payne (2011) concludes that therefore gender is *outside the norm of institutional thinking*.

Summing up, theorists argue that the state has 'coopted' the original feminist intent of gender mainstreaming, decoupling it from its radical feminist origins and potential, to reinforce male normative structures in localized settings (Prugl, 2010, 448). Many countries are engaged in ensuring that gender mainstreaming occurs, but that an unreflective and unsophisticated conceptualization of gender is incorporated in a series of gender mainstreaming tools that do little to change deep cultural oppressions. Thus in cultures where patriarchy is institutionalized, masculine hegemony dominates and feminist challenges are contained (Alston, 2006; Prugl, 2010). Prugl notes that there is the insidious possibility that gender mainstreaming can reproduce rather than destabilize patriarchy. 'The state is often Janus-faced, engaged in the reproduction of gender inequality while simultaneously challenging it in the form of state feminism' (453).

Wittman (2010, 55) refers to the process of gender mainstreaming as inherently deradicalizing, supporting McRobbie's (2009, 110) view that gender mainstreaming is *not really feminism*, and Zalewski (2010, 25) who describes it as a *faux-feminism*, a process that leaves unchanged and un-interrogated the very gender inequalities it was designed to address. More disturbingly Zalewski (2010, 26) notes that feminism has become absorbed and a new form of *patriarchal ownership of feminism* has emerged, one that is *saturated with anti-feminist sentiment*. Payne (2011, 518), noting the inability to challenge gender power relations within and beyond institutions, quotes Woodward (2008, 289) in asking *can gender survive mainstreaming?*

### Resistances

Thus if gender mainstreaming is undertaken through organizations and agencies that unquestioningly accept women's subordination and view gender-based-violence as normal or part of traditional culture, then the possibility of gender equality is illusory. The revolutionary potential of gender mainstreaming is lost, resistance is heightened, and implementation of empowerment projects is limited. Gender mainstreaming becomes 'procedural' (Meier & Celis, 2011, 470), in many cases a tick the box exercise where gender analysis is reduced to gender statistical analysis and gender budgeting at the expense of transformative change. As Zalewski (2010) notes state bureaucracies move gender mainstreaming from a radical theory to a mainstreamed practice. We are left with tinkering and tailoring if we are left with anything at all.

Gender mainstreaming can also meet with resistance if it is viewed as coercive. For example, many INGOs, committed to the principle of gender equality, deliver programs through local organizations whose staff may be embedded in cultural contexts that are highly gendered. These staff may not view the complexities of gender inequalities as problematic (or may, in fact, normalize them), but feel coerced to deliver limited attention to gender mainstreaming. The result may be a shallow transfer using simple gender auditing tools, with no underpinning rationale or goal, leading to a limited or non-existent focus on the radical feminist intent. Meier and Celis (2011, 470) refer to this as the difficulty of aligning the horizontal strategy with a vertically structured policy context. Payne (2011) uses this argument to explain why UN country reports can note the introduction of significant gender mainstreaming institutional structures but these same countries report poor socio-economic and health outcomes for women.

It could be argued that many countries have used gender mainstreaming rhetoric as an excuse to cut resources to women's policy units and to downgrade women focused infrastructure (Alston, 2006; Prugl, 2010). Studies of women's instrumentalities in state organizations indicate that women's policy units are marginalized and coopted to support the goals and power relations of organizations. Evidence for this is found in my own research with heads of national and state rural women's units in Australia undertaken in the early 2000s before many were disbanded (Alston, 2006). Women in these organizations noted that their work was trivialized, ignored, ghettoized and largely left outside departmental core business. Yet many bureaucrats in these departments argue that gender goals have been achieved, or that gender equality is no longer a 'problem'. Another Australian researcher Connell (2006, 444) reinforces this view noting that, 'across much of the public sector, gender is regarded as a non-problem'.

It would appear that gender mainstreaming has become a tool of governance with neoliberal objectives rather than a radical option for change (True, 2003; Wittman, 2010), supporting a market based society, individual rather than collective responsibilities for inequality (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010) and a limited view of equity (Lessa & Rocha, 2012). In the process it has lost touch with its social justice objectives and the complex nature of gender (Wittman, 2010, 57).

### Gender mainstreaming in the climate change space

This lengthy critique of gender mainstreaming suggests that only an optimist might see a bright future for gender equality using this policy framework. However I agree with Lessa and Rocha (2012) that there is a reluctance to give up on gender mainstreaming because of its transformative, revolutionary potential. The critique outlined in this paper is necessary to unmask barriers and to recommit to the radical social justice objectives of gender mainstreaming and its critical transformative potential. Further the climate change space is an emerging site of significant change, one where women's vulnerability is enhanced. The need for urgent action is obvious and provides the context for a radical reintroduction of gender mainstreaming. It is also a site where INGOs work alongside national and local actors with a common purpose to address significant crises.

The introduction of gender mainstreaming has been fractured along fault lines between the transnational conceptualization, state instrumentalities, policies and practices and local implementation. Climate change spaces blur these fault lines as transnational actors are engaged at local levels and work alongside and through state institutional arrangements. There is a greater connection between local and global actors and actions and a non-linear spiral between these levels. In the immediacy of disaster through the implementation of post-disaster policies and practices, through the allocation of resources, the reconstruction of communities, the development of decision-making bodies and the dissemination of information lies the possibility of either a cementing of existing inequalities or significant transformation in gender equality. Post-disaster areas provide the possibility to pursue short-term equity goals while also working on the long term equality and transformation agenda (Kirton & Greene, 2004; Lessa & Rocha, 2012).

However barriers to local implementation that must be addressed include:

- a lack of political will at state and local levels;
- institutional structures that foster male norms and processes;
- a lack of understanding of gender and therefore of the goals of gender mainstreaming;
- a lack of understanding of the radical intent of gender mainstreaming;
- a cooption of the feminist conceptualization of gender mainstreaming to further neoliberal objectives;
- gender mainstreaming being reduced to technocratic processes;
- a reduction in women focused machinery and personnel thereby reducing gender knowledge and expertise;
- poor treatment of gender personnel in organizations; and
- an overall lack of progress towards gender equality.

What this reveals is that there are a number of factors required to support the underlying intent of gender mainstreaming and to reimagine the original gender mainstreaming project in the climate change space. These can be articulated as follows:

- Most transnational organizations remain firmly committed to gender mainstreaming. The UN and other organizations view the link between gender equality and the achievement of social justice objectives encapsulated, for example, in the Millennium Development Goals to be critical. The role of transnational organizations in fostering and diffusing the feminist project remains the most significant factor in global gender equality. This is evident in forums where UNWomen and transnational INGOs have rearticulated the links between gender equality, poverty alleviation and global sustainability. Speaking at Earth Summit + 20 in June 2012, the Head of UNWomen, Michelle Bachelet, noted

*We cannot afford to leave women marginalized, this is not sustainable. This social exclusion of women is not only hurting women, it is hurting all of us.*

- Therefore transnationals have a role to play in fearlessly opposing gender inequality in climate change actions, resource distribution and reconstruction and with various institutions

and local organizations on the ground. This may require training of local level organizations and personnel in gender awareness, gender equality and gender justice, and a questioning of policies and practices within countries that significantly disadvantage women in post-disaster situations.

- In country, many UN affiliated nations have a commitment to, if a poor understanding of, gender mainstreaming. They report to the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) and to the Commission for the Elimination of Discrimination of Women (CEDAW). These reporting processes provide space for discussion and dissemination of gender mainstreaming material and provide a forum for education. UNWomen has an overarching role to ensure that the interests of women are addressed globally. The significance of UNWomen should not be overlooked or downplayed.
- Many nations have a Ministry for Women or some institutional architecture addressing women's advancement. These units may be poorly resourced and ghettoized. Nonetheless they provide a basis for in-country dissemination and development of gender equality principles and processes. These state based units have the capacity to work with local partners through information dissemination and training. They also have the capacity to organize local women's action groups to develop local area organizations representing women and their interests at grassroots levels.

Thus in the climate change policy space, there are a number of points of contact where transnationals, state based and local area levels come together. These include in the development of climate change policies at transnational and national levels, for example through the Committee of the Parties (COP) process (the union of those committed to the Kyoto Protocol who meet annually to discuss climate change information and to develop transnational strategies), the annual Commission for the Status of Women (CSW) meetings and other transnational opportunities. UNWomen has been very active in developing responses and introducing gender equality discourse to these forums.

INGOs and foundations established to address gender justice in the climate change space are growing and are also critical in keeping gender equality issues at the forefront of global policy and actions. These include GenderCC, established in 2003, to address gender equality issues in relation to climate justice; the Global Climate Change Alliance established by the European Commission in 2007 to ensure that adaptations to climate change did not affect achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; the Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice, established by former Irish President, Mary Robinson; the Green Belt Movement founded by Nobel Peace Prize 2004 winner, Wangari Maathai; and Navdanya International Organisation, set up by Indian activist Vandana Shiva to focus on human rights and the environment.

These international forums, organizations and activists give a focus to gender equality in the environmental and climate change space. They can and do enunciate definitions of gender equality, expose power relations and disseminate information. These critical organizations keep gender on the agenda and provide a lead in the development of global awareness of gender inequalities in the climate space. It is in the transnational arena that the goals and practices of gender mainstreaming will continue to develop. An understanding of local context and intersection with local spaces is critical in

addressing the global complexities of gender inequality and climate change.

At state based level the fostering of a new awareness of gender mainstreaming is overdue. A commitment to gender equality has been developed in a number of quarters including in Ministries for Women and instrumentalities established to advance gender equality. Although marginalized, these organizational structures provide the vehicle for the transmission of gender equality understanding and the building of in-country avenues from local to global. These institutional structures can be fostered through linkages with transnational organizations to develop the critical links to local women affected by climate disasters. To assist these organizations it is essential that policy makers understand gender mainstreaming, the impacts of gender inequality and the rewards for national commitment in empowering women. It is at this level that gender mainstreaming can be developed in a meaningful way or remain a convenient tool for continuing masculine privilege.

At local levels there is a critical need for women's empowerment strategies to include the resourcing of local women's organizations to ensure that women have the space, resources and vehicle through which to express their needs and views on climate actions. It is in the local spaces that change must occur and it is here that women have traditionally been most powerless. The development of channels from transnational activism through to local empowerment is the key to change.

## Conclusion

Climate change gives a renewed urgency to the need to revisit and revitalize gender mainstreaming in policy and actions designed to support those affected by climate catastrophes. Increasing evidence is emerging that women are especially vulnerable during and after climate disasters. Because post-disaster policies and actions are so integral to building resilience in individuals and communities, this paper suggests the need for a critical reappraisal of these policies and actions to ensure that they do not reinforce or create new gender inequalities based on assumptions or expectations of gender roles. There is an urgent need for gender mainstreaming to be part of the appraisal of all actions in post-disaster work but also a danger that the limited understanding of this concept or its uncritical application will result in technocratic exercises rather than genuine gender assessment. The local knowledge and capacity of women are fundamental in reshaping and restoring communities. However their vulnerability in post-disaster spaces risks a failure to capture this knowledge, to support women and to reinvigorate gender equality measures.

This paper provides a critical assessment of gender mainstreaming. It focuses on explanations for the *radical potential paradox* identified by Wittman to explain why the rapid global diffusion of gender mainstreaming failed to meet the expectations of women across the globe for greater gender equality. This analysis has been undertaken not only to understand the complex interactions at transnational, state and local levels that have led to a failure to achieve significant changes in women's socio-economic status; but also to provide insights into ways the radical feminist intent of gender mainstreaming can be reimagined in post-disaster sites.

What emerges from this analysis is an understanding of the erosion of the feminist intent and indeed the *faux-feminism* identified by Zalewski (2010), and a need for constant vigilance. As Bacchi and Eveline (2010, 337) note *there can be no sunset clause on gender analysis*. More prosaically we need to heed Walby's (2005) call to separate the vision of gender mainstreaming from the strategies adopted to achieve gender equality. Thus if gender equality is the goal, what are the strategies that must be adopted at the various layers of intervention and non-linear processes? Critical to this process is avoiding the tick a box approach that has emerged as a sop to gender equality, the counting and measuring that has done little to challenge cultural beliefs and human rights abuses against women.

Post-disaster sites may provide the focus for a renewed commitment to gender mainstreaming, not least because of the interactions between transnationals, state and local actors in sites where gender inequalities are transparent, where actions and resource allocations can inhibit or enhance gender equality and where the world's women wait.

As Prugl (2010, 468) reminds us:

*[Gender mainstreaming] needs the flanking of agents working on behalf of feminism – activists, experts, parliamentarians and powerful feminist staff in bureaucracies – and it needs this flanking in all state spaces, at all levels of politics, and in all functional issues areas. ... the failure of gender mainstreaming ... derives from a dearth of feminist politics in ...state spaces as much as from patriarchal rule and bureaucratic masculinism.*

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