



Considerable inequities still exist for Canadian women and women around the world. Gender concerns need to be addressed by process in planning. **BY REBEKAH MAHAFFEY**

## Add women and stir?

### A young female planner looks to the future of gender in planning

AS A YOUNG FEMALE planner about to enter the field planning, I have been considering the role and ‘place’ of women within planning. What, how, and where do women plan? How are women’s needs and concerns addressed within planning? It has been my experience and observation that women, and women’s needs, are rarely explicitly considered in the planning processes or highlighted as worthy of particular attention. There is often the assumption that having ‘a’ woman on the team is sufficient to represent women’s needs, thereby ignoring the way in which process-related factors contribute to gender inequality in how programs, policies, and projects are both planned and implemented.

Gender Mainstreaming (GM) is a process-

based tool that seeks to address continuing gender inequality within planning. GM is defined by the United Nations as “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 programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.”<sup>1</sup> With an ultimate goal of complete gender equality,

GM is a planning tool that tackles gender inequality by changing the *processes* of how policies, programs, and projects are developed.

The term ‘Gender Mainstreaming’ was first used at the 1985 United Nations Third World

*continued on page 14*

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations (2002). *Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview*. New York: United Nations Press. p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Rai, Shirin M. (2003). “Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women,” In *Mainstreaming gender, democratizing the state?* Edited by Shirin M. Rai. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Woodward, Allison. “European Gender Mainstreaming: Practices and Pitfalls of Transformative Policy.” *Review of Policy Research*. v. 20,1 (2003): p. 66.

continued from page 13

Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya, coalescing into the Beijing Platform for Action at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China.<sup>2</sup>

As an approach, GM seeks to integrate gender as a key variable into the planning process.<sup>3</sup> It provides a matrix for these changes by stating that *all* programs, policies, and procedures should be analyzed for gender sensitivity at *all*

stages, including goal formation and evaluation. To this end, Clara Greed suggests a set of questions as a starting point:<sup>4</sup>

1. Who is doing the planning?
2. Who are perceived to be the planned?
3. How is information gathered and whom does it represent?
4. How is the staff team chosen and is it representative of men and women?
5. What are the key values, priorities, and objective of the plan?
6. Who is consulted and who is involved in the plan?
7. How is the plan evaluated and by whom?
8. How is the plan implemented, monitored, and managed?
9. Are adequate resources, funding, personnel, and priority given to the plan?

Countries such as Norway, Sweden, and Germany, as well as transnational organizations such as the European Union, have embraced GM as an approach to try and make their policies, programs, and projects more responsive to women.

GM is a potentially powerful method of achieving gender equality. However, if it is used without an acute awareness of power dynamics and difference, such as class, education, ethnicity, ability, orientation, and other modes of identity, *between* individual and groups of women, GM may actually reinforce rather than address existing inequalities. In practice, GM approaches

## THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CANADA

- Women hold approximately 21% of local government positions.
- Even when employed full-time women earn on average 73% of men's salaries.
- Approximately 2.8 million women, 19% of the total female population, are living in low-income situations, compared with 16% of the total male population.
- On average, 56% of lone-parent female-headed families live below the poverty line.

Source: *Women in Canada 2000: A Guide to Understanding the Changing Roles of Women and Men in Canada* (2000). Statistics Canada. Excerpts available online at: [www.statcan.ca/english/ads/89-503-XPE/hilites.htm](http://www.statcan.ca/english/ads/89-503-XPE/hilites.htm)

## THE GLOBAL STATUS OF WOMEN

- Women earn on average 78% of men's wages for equal work and with equal education.
- Women, especially alone with children, experience greater instances of poverty.
- Women hold approximately 14% of total representative government seats worldwide.

Source: *Progress of the World's Women 2000* (2000). United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). [www.unifem.org/resources/item\\_detail.php?ProductID=9](http://www.unifem.org/resources/item_detail.php?ProductID=9)

often fail to properly analyze these existing power structures *between* women, thus ignoring the personalized side of gender inequality.<sup>5</sup> As a result, GM largely conceives of gender equality as an impersonal force that can be simply integrated into planning processes in order to increase the inclusion of women. GM, if it is to be an effective planning tool in incorporating a gender lens into planning processes, needs to be implemented within a difference-responsive framework.

Despite these critiques, however, GM is a comprehensive and theoretically viable approach for achieving gender equality within social planning.<sup>6</sup> GM is the only systemized planning tool in specific relation to gender that also addresses the *process* of planning. I believe it is important to address gender inequality within planning, particularly in *how* programs, policies, and projects are planned, not only because of the equity issues at stake but because it is also symptomatic of a larger problem within the profession. Further, contemporary planning processes remain largely unresponsive to differences of all kinds, including gender, particularly on aggregate scales. The planned are generally consid-

ered as a generic and undifferentiated group, where the effects of difference, inequality, discrimination, and race are ignored or unaddressed. Difference is seen as an exceptional cir-

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cumstance rather than the norm. GM, even though it addresses only one aspect of difference, is an attempt to integrate difference into social planning processes as the norm rather than the exception.

It is my hope that as I enter the world of professional planning practice, that planners will continue to work to pay increased attention to the way that *process* affects the incorporation of difference variables, such as gender, into an equitable planning process. We need to be able to recognize, and be willing to work with, variables of difference if our programs, policies, and projects are to be both responsive and genuinely helpful in the context of the social world in which they are implemented. ■

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4 Greed, Clara. “Gender Mainstreaming,” *Women & Currents International Magazine*. v. 62 (2004):p. 2.

5 Howard, Patricia L. “Beyond the ‘grim resisters’: towards more effective gender mainstreaming theory in stakeholder participation,” *Development in Practice*. v. 12,2 (2002). p 165.

6 True, Jacque. “Mainstreaming Gender in Global Public Policy,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. v. 5 no. 3. p. 368.