

## **GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN POLICYMAKING PROCESSES: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

**S. Vyas-Doorgapersad**

University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Email: svyas-doorgapersad@uj.ac.za

### **—Abstract —**

The policy analysis aspect of Public Management is associated with the formulation and implementation of public policies. A review of the official documents indicates that most public policy implementation processes lack gender mainstreaming. In addition, policy-making processes lack gender-based representation and participation resulting in the ineffective implementation of gender equality. Post-apartheid South Africa has established various legislative frameworks to eradicate the restrictive developmental policies of the past. One of these is to promote gender equality in the workplace. However, socially, economically and politically, there is still a gap between women and men who hold decision-making portfolios and this leads to suppression of women's capabilities. To examine the status of gender equality and the empowerment of women in public service departments and municipalities, this article follows a qualitative approach to provide greater, deeper and more comprehensive understanding of gender phenomena.<sup>1</sup> Underpinned by Feminist Theory, the article utilises a gender-sensitive research approach as its theoretical framework.

**Key Words:** *Gender, gender mainstreaming, policymaking processes*

**JEL Classification:** Z00

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, governments in Africa have been under increasing pressure to demonstrate their relevance because citizens are demanding better delivery of public services. In response to these numerous calls for an enhanced level of efficiency and a general improvement in service delivery, governments are designing and implementing a number of new and/or amended public policies. While these aim to address service delivery problems, the issue of how gender dynamics can be used to shape public policy management is not as a rule well understood because it has not been subjected to scholarly attention from policy analysts (Basheka & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2015:208).

Post-apartheid South Africa has established various frameworks and development targets in order to extricate the public service from the restrictive policies of the past. One of these aspirations is to promote gender equality in the workplace. Socially, economically and politically, there is still a significant gap between the number of women holding decision-making portfolios compared to men, and the outcome of this is the suppression and under-representation of women's competencies. This article aims to make a qualitative assessment of the research conducted in selected South African government departments and municipalities, emphasising the status of gender mainstreaming in policymaking processes. The study utilises a gender-sensitive oriented research approach, which according to Auriacombe (2015:87) is "strategically planned and executed research that takes into account women's and gender issues resulting in more thorough, participatory and relevant results". Undeniably, women are equipped to make a significant contribution to development processes. Development, writes Auricambe, (2015:87) "impacts and is impacted by women and men in different ways". This article focuses on several crucial issues regarding gender analysis. As Auriacombe (2015: 88) so succinctly puts it, these are reflected in questions such as "Who controls what in the society? Who has access to what in the society? Who is responsible for what in the society? Who earns what in the society? Who does what in the society? Who inherits what in the society?"

In addition to the above, this article seeks answers to concerns such as: What is the status of gender in policymaking processes in South Africa? Is gender mainstreaming considered in policymaking processes and does it emphasize equal participation by men and women? Debates of this nature are raised and an assessment is made of the significance of a normative approach that supports public participation as a form of transformation (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2014a). It is

imperative to find answers to these questions and to understand the level of gender mainstreaming that exists on professional, societal and personal levels.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

*Gender* is defined as the “array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis” (Esplen & Jolly, 2006:3). These personality traits regulated by feminine/masculine characteristics, deserve equality at professional and personal levels. *Gender mainstreaming* is the process of assessing the implications for women and men respectively in any planned action including legislation, policies and programmes in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making sure that women and men benefit equally in all political, economic and societal spheres and that inequality is not perpetuated but reduced (Rai, 2007:97). Women empowerment is about improving women’s confidence and status in society, increasing their opportunities and facilitating improved control over their livelihoods. Gender mainstreaming programmes and strategies often include women’s empowerment issues (United Nations Human Settlement Programme [UN-Habitat], 2008:2).

## **3. FEMINIST MOVEMENTS AND IDEOLOGIES**

According to Rai (in Bari, 2005:2-3; also refer Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2014a:102), the study of historical, philosophical and political texts written in earlier centuries shows that based on outdated perceptions on the ‘appropriate’ role of women, some texts by revered political thinkers and philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Georg Hegel reflect that women are fit only for domestic roles in the private sphere and maintained that there was no place for women in politics. Their talents, it was said, were far better utilised in “caring roles as mothers and wives”. However, over time there has been an emergence of feminist approaches and new trends in gender ideologies have developed. The Liberal Feminist approach “focuses on women’s ability to show and maintain their equality through their own actions and choices” (Hooks, 1984:1-5). While the Anarchist approach gives preference to patriarchy, another ideology has emerged combining anarchy with feminist approaches to form what is called Anarchist Feminism, an ideology that views the “anarchist struggle as a necessary component of feminist struggle and vice versa” (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2002:9). Brown (1990:208) argues that “anarchism is a political philosophy that opposes all relationships of power, [and this being so] it is inherently feminist”. Another

feminist trend has also emerged and is labelled Socialist Feminist ideology, propagating that “unequal standing in both the workplace and the domestic sphere holds women down...[.]” (UK Essays, 2015:2). Furthermore, Karl Marx opined that when “class oppression” was overcome “gender oppression” would disappear (Marx, 1990) and this ideology is appropriately called Marxist Feminism. As shown in Vyas-Doorgapersad (2014a:102), Liberal Political theory raises the concept of free citizenship and can be perceived as an individualistic approach, bringing the gender aspect to politics and society as a whole. Bari (2005:3) also supports this view of liberal ideology claiming that “it is not ... gender-neutral”, and that “despite women having the right to vote”, in many cases they are not given the opportunity to exercise a significant impact on public policy.

These ideologically driven measures paved the way towards the realisation of gender equality initiatives by feminist movements. These developments, in retrospect, are the Women in Development (WID) approach; the Women and Development (WAD) approach; and the Gender and Development (GAD) approach. The review of these approaches leads to the conclusion that “gender inequality is highly linked with the power struggle that hinders the recognition of women as significant actors and negotiators of the development processes” (cn2collins, 2013:3). This claim is substantiated in a document entitled ‘Africa Gender Equality Index’ released by the African Development Bank in 2015 which stresses that “African women still live under traditional belief systems and outdated legislation that treats them as less than full citizens and prevents their voice from being fully heard in the governance of African societies” (2015:23). To address conditions such as this, the African Union has declared 2016 the ‘African Year of Human Rights, with a particular focus on the Rights of Women’.

#### **4. FEMINIST THEORIES AND POLICY FRAMEWORK IN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

There are important differences between so-called Western feminism and African feminism (Rust, 2007:64) that demand comprehensive exploration. Mama (1996: 2) writes that before the 1980s, “most studies of African women were essentially studies of ‘other’ women, if not studies of ‘woman as other’”. While it is clear there are links between so-called Western feminism and African feminism, there are particular issues at play in Africa – notably the impact of industrialisation, the emergence of national and regional politics, and, importantly, “the crisis in African education, the emergence of state feminism, and [the aftermath of] colonialism”. It is understandable that in Africa, “the historical legacy of

suppression of women rights paved the way towards feminist movements, questioning the status of women in the democratization process” (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2014a:103).

There are also feminist theories such as the Welfare Approach, outlined by Moser (1993:58) that addresses the contribution of women “almost solely in their roles as wives and mothers”, which restricts their usefulness to “social welfare concerns such as nutritional education and home economics” (Razavi & Miller, 1995:6-7). The Equity Approach as discussed by Buthelezi (2001:41) and others allows women to “meet strategic gender needs through direct state intervention, giving political and economic autonomy to women and reducing inequality with men” (Moser, 1993:62). The Efficiency Approach (Buthelezi, 2001:43) states that women “bear heavy economic responsibilities [and that] increasing their productivity would logically lead to economic growth and hasten development activities” (Snyder & Tadesse, 1995). Related approaches include one that focuses on changing Social Relations (Luis, 2012); the Economic Development approach (Ferber & Nelson, 1993); the Welfare, Equity and Anti-poverty approaches (Buvinic, 1983); and the Empowerment approach (Moser, 1989).

Notably, it is not feminism that is divisive in African societies, but patriarchy. Furthermore, feminism is not a betrayal of African values. Rather, dismissing feminism as un-African is a betrayal of African women (Rust, 2007:66). These feminist approaches have been evaluated below in the South African context and it can be deduced that feminist movements have indeed had a positive result in that legislative and policy frameworks have been introduced that incorporate women’s issues for empowerment.

In South Africa the need for gender equality is laid down in the South African National Policy Framework for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality (2001). This policy document stresses that in order “to achieve gender equality, government must embark on a rigorous gender mainstreaming strategy” and that “much of the responsibility for planning and implementing effective and innovative strategies for the promotion of women’s empowerment and gender equality will rest equally with key structures of the National Machinery and with individual government departments at the national, provincial and local levels” (SA National Gender Policy Framework, 2001:40). However, despite this legislative directive, Gender Mainstreaming (GM) practitioners are still faced by significant challenges in promoting “‘new masculinities’ that require men to support gender equality” (Rippenaar-Joseph, 2009:90). A Women’s

Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill was published in the Government Gazette No. 37005 of 6 November 2013. The aims of the Bill are “to give effect to Section 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, in so far as the empowerment of women and gender equality is concerned; to establish a legislative framework for the empowerment of women; to align all aspects of laws and the implementation of laws regarding women empowerment, and the appointment and representation of women in decision making positions and structures” (RSA, 2013:1).

However in practice, the situation remains challenging. According to a recently published report in *The Star* of 19 October 2015, the controversial Traditional Courts Bill is on its way back to parliament after months of disagreement between the government and various interest groups with regard to its discrimination against women. Gender groups criticised the original version of the Bill as being oppressive towards women. This reflects the scenario as explained by Rangan & Gilmartin (in Ramoroka, 2010:62) that “human rights and the equality clause in the South African Constitution are ignored when the places of power have to be shared and the historical role that a patriarchal society has designated to men is threatened”. Despite the fact that the constitution entrenches equality, there are still those who harbour “beliefs, attitudes, myths and traditional practices that continue to inhibit the freedom of women”. This situation requires serious commitment as emphasised by Susan Shabangu, the Minister of Women in the Presidency (2015: 2) that the country is affected by “the triple challenge of unemployment, poverty and inequality of which women are at the receiving end”. She went on to say that in her view, “nothing should be done for women without women”. She added that the empowerment of women is by no means “an act of charity, or the result of humanitarian or compassionate attitude. The empowerment of women is a fundamental necessity of development, the guarantee of its continuity and the precondition of its victory”.

In order to examine the above challenges, the author conducted several desktop studies utilising qualitative, descriptive and analytical approach to explore gender mainstreaming in public policies. These are crucial areas that demand that there be equality for women. In the public procurement sector, research revealed that “women are not equally benefited on a large scale due to practical challenges that include lack of access to information regarding public procurement processes and practices; lack of understanding of tenders; ownership; and access to financial resources, to state a few” (refer Vyas-Doorgapersad & Kinoti, 2015:96). In the field of water resource management, it was found that “needs analysis, impact

surveys and baseline research are not explicitly conducted to incorporate gender disaggregated data and to identify the gender-based need for water” (refer Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2013:12). In 2014 and 2015 the scope of the research was expanded to include South African municipalities such as the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality; the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality; the Sedibeng District Municipality; the Bojanala Platinum District Municipality; the Emfuleni Local Municipality; and the Ndlambe Local Municipality (refer Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2014a,b; and 2015 a,b,c). In 2016 further research on gender mainstreaming in public policies was undertaken in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (CoJMM). Here the researcher/author of this article offered a certificate course to 72 young learners in the age-group 18 to 26 years, of whom 21 were males and 51 females. Structured interviews were also conducted to obtain responses on whether there were gender-based clauses in the CoJMM’s Integrated Development Plan (IDP).<sup>2</sup> An IDP is the strategic policy applied in a municipality. The responses are discussed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Recorded Perceptions of IDP Processes in CoJMM**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>Participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25% male and 64% female learners do not participate in the IDP processes in the municipality</li> </ul>
<b>Gender-based participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50% of the learners support the gender-based participation in the IDP processes in the municipality</li> <li>• 50% of the learners do not support the gender-based participation in the IDP processes in the municipality</li> <li>• Of the 50% of learners who support gender-based participation in the IDP processes in the municipality, 18% are males and 32% are females</li> <li>• Of the 50% of learners who do not support the gender-based participation in the IDP processes in the municipality 11% are males and 39% are females</li> </ul>

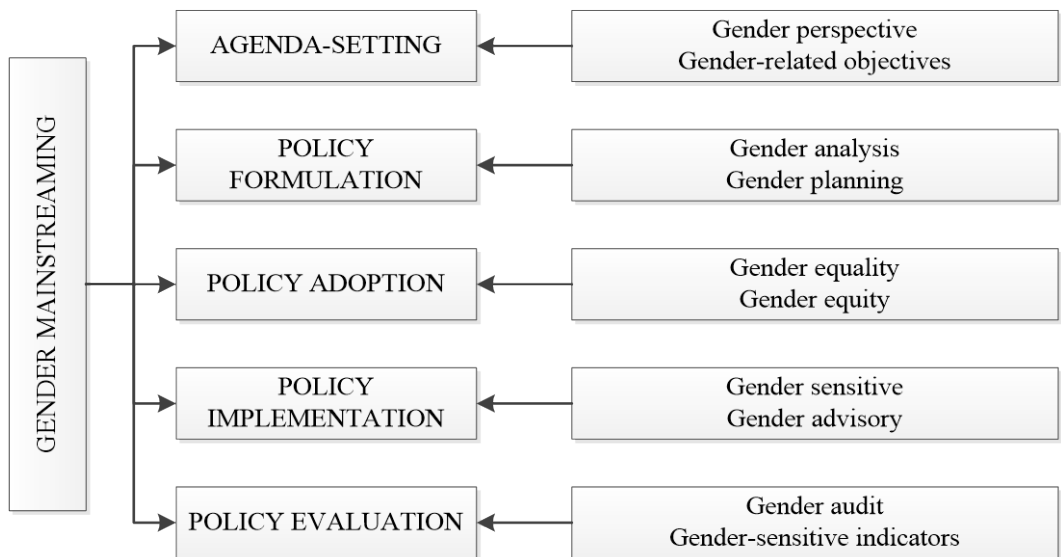
Source: Author

These responses indicate a challenging situation. Clearly, a lack of understanding and awareness; geographical and timely restrictions; and work/ home responsibilities all hamper participation in the policymaking processes. Based on the research conducted (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2013, 2014, 2015a,c, and 2016), the author deduced that a “stereotype mentality that it is acceptable for men to dominate women in society still exists” and that gender mainstreaming in policy formulation still requires political determination. “This situation can have a ripple effect whereby lack of ‘gender-based’ tasks and responsibilities, participation and decision making eventually lead to ‘gender-biased’ policy outcome(s)”.

## 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The literature points to the ‘failure’ of gender mainstreaming as a means of establishing ‘lessons’ for the implementation of gender policy in the future, but little is mentioned on what actually happens when policy is implemented. Beyond gender mainstreaming’s ‘failures’, what are the changes that arise or the individual strategies that are used in attempts to turn gender policy into practice? (Mannell, 2012:60). This article attempts to fill this gap and proposes a model for improvement called Gender-based Policy-Making Processes (G-bPMP), see Figure 1. This model suggests that in the agenda-setting phase of policymaking it is imperative to incorporate a gender perspective. According to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, this is “a way of understanding how gender may be addressed or related to a particular issue” (2006:2); and that gender-related objectives are the “aims of a policy, programme or activity that function particularly to promote gender equality” (2006:3).

**Figure 1: Gender-based Policy-Making Processes (G-bPMP)**



Source: Author.

The policy formulation phase must provide gender analysis that entails “the systematic gathering and examination of information on gender differences and social relations”, which will then make it possible to “identify, understand and redress inequities based on gender” (Reeves & Baden, 2000:4). This should be followed by gender planning, involving “the selection of appropriate approaches



to address not only women and men's practical needs", but will also identify appropriate "entry points for challenging unequal relations (i.e., strategic needs) and for enhancing the gender-responsiveness of policy dialogue" (World Bank, Undated:1).

The policy adoption phase calls for the establishment of legislative frameworks that promote gender equality and gender equity. To meet the demands of gender equality there must be equal participation, representation and opportunities available for both men and women. Closely integrated and interactive with gender equality, gender equity "entails the provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men" (World Bank, Undated:2).

The policy implementation phase must be gender-sensitive. In other words, it must "acknowledge and highlight existing gender differences, issues and inequalities and incorporate these into strategies and actions" (Committee on the Status of Women, Undated). According to this same source this implementation phase also requires that gender advisors be appointed to "promote and support gender-sensitive approaches to policy and programme work within a given mission, office, team, etc". Such advisors are then in a position to "provide strategic advice in planning and policy making processes, in coordination meetings and task forces, as well as through existing gender units or gender focal points" (UN Women Training Centre, Undated: 2). Their responsibilities should include the training, awareness and capacity-building required for the effective implementation of policies.

Policy evaluation incorporates a gender audit that "considers whether internal practices and related support systems for gender mainstreaming are effective and reinforce each other, and whether they are being followed". Furthermore, the evaluation process "establishes a baseline; identifies critical gaps and challenges; and recommends ways of addressing them, suggesting possible improvements and innovations". It maps the way forward and defines the good practices necessary to achieve gender mainstreaming in policymaking processes at organisational level (UN Women Training Centre, Undated:3). Organisations can also utilise gender-sensitive indicators that according to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) (1997:5) indicate whether indeed gender equity is being achieved. The CIDA claims that using such indicators and other "relevant evaluation techniques ... will also feed into more effective future planning and program delivery".

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In order to understand the significance of gender mainstreaming in policymaking processes, it is imperative to conduct comparative research at national, regional and continental levels. Therefore policymakers must develop networks with researchers, academics, policy and decision makers inside and outside the boundaries of South Africa. It is indeed a continuous process requiring broader collaboration.

### END NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> The article is loosely based (in a much reduced form) on the author's professorial lecture delivered on 10 November 2015. The source is acknowledged in the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> The interviews were also conducted to obtain responses regarding gender-based representation and participation in the Local Economic Development processes within the CoJMM. The findings are provided in an article entitled 'Gender mainstreaming in Local Economic Development processes: a South African Perspective', and this source is acknowledged in the list of references.

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