

Mainstreaming as a knowledge process: new lessons from mainstreaming gender, disability and sexual diversity

Saskia van Veen, Petra Staal and Rob van Poelje

Athena Institute VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Mainstreaming is a strategy to enhance citizen participation of marginalised groups. In development practice, various mainstreaming issues have caught the attention of development organisations that shows their commitment to initiate inclusive development practice. However, influencing societal change by inclusive practices is difficult and requires a knowledge process to co-create socially robust knowledge. This paper brings together the knowledge and experiences from existing literature and from three cases on mainstreaming, namely from gender, disability inclusions and sexual diversity. We show how capacity development and knowledge co-creation at non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can be a lever for the inclusion of marginalised groups in society. The lessons learned may help development practitioners to reinforce and strengthen their emancipating work.

Keywords: mainstreaming; development practice; gender; disability inclusion; sexual diversity; capacity building

Over the last decades, the concept of mainstreaming has been applied by scholars and practitioners to counteract the exclusion of marginalised groups in society. Mainstreaming can be applied as a strategy for organisations to include the needs of marginalised groups in policies and programmes (Moser & Moser, 2005; Squires, 2005; Waal, 2006). For instance, disability mainstreaming has been defined as a process which includes ‘concerns and experiences of persons with disabilities as an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes’ in order to create an inclusive society (Albert, Dube, & Riis-hansen, 2005: p13). From an organisational perspective, it also means that all parts of a development organisation are taking the issue into account, instead of having a separate unit which is responsible for focused programmes and projects (Bruijn et al., 2012; van S. C. Veen, 2014). Although mainstreaming has been translated into policies in some areas and is an important issue on the development agenda, its implementation remains problematic (Moser & Moser, 2005). To translate mainstreaming policy into practice, a knowledge process and capacity development is required to enable new

practices in development cooperation (Cavaghan, 2013; S. van Veen, Bunders, & Regeer, 2013; Waal, 2006; Woodhill, 2010).

This paper harvests experiences on mainstreaming marginalised issues in development. By combining knowledge from academia and practice, socially robust knowledge (Nowotny, 2000) can be formed that is relevant for science and society. We will start by introducing the experience with mainstreaming in development practice over time, based on an overview of the literature. Then we will show how international development organisations can be supported in a process of knowledge co-creation to promote the interests of marginalised groups and including them in their programmes, based on three cases of mainstreaming gender, disability and sexual diversity. These cases are then considered at four levels of capacity development: individual capacities, organisational capacities, building networks and alliances, and influencing the environment.

Mainstreaming in international development

Since the 1990s, development actors have embraced the principle of inclusion and the need for an inclusive society. This is also visible in the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that have explicit references to inclusiveness and equality in seven goals (UN, 2015). Mainstreaming is a strategy to build a more inclusive society for women (Mukhopadhyay, 1997; Waal, 2006), for people living with disabilities (Albert et al., 2005; Coe & Wapling, 2010), HIV/ AIDS (Else, Tolhurst, & Theobald, 2005) and for those excluded because of their sexual preference (Squires, 2005). Mainstreaming of gender and HIV/AIDS has been quite successful, e.g. by their incorporation into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Other mainstreaming issues have since this success received greater recognition on the international development agenda (Else et al., 2005).

The process of mainstreaming in development practice has evolved over time. In 2005, a review of gender mainstreaming practice in development was undertaken (Moser & Moser, 2005). First, it identified a dispute between the concepts of inclusion and integration, both of which are concerned with building an inclusive society. Inclusion of marginalised groups in society was criticised because it focuses on the greater good for all and not on affirmative action to address the special needs of the most disadvantaged people, necessary for real integration (Moser & Moser, 2005; Nussbaum, 2003). Second, they found that most major development institutions translated the principle of gender equality into policies rather than practice. Despite the commitment for the process of mainstreaming, evidence of successful implementation of inclusion of marginalised groups into practice remains inconsistent and most gender initiatives involve only a few activities, rather than a coherent and integrated process (Moser & Moser, 2005; Mukhopadhyay, 1997).

The greatest challenge mainstreaming initiatives face is the translation of the principle of inclusion into effective practice. This phenomena of dissonance between policy and practice is described as an implementation gap (Shields, 2013; van S. C. Veen, 2014). In order to overcome the implementation gap, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can play an important role by mainstreaming the issues of marginalised groups in development programmes through innovative practices (Albert & Harisson, 2006; van S. C. Veen, 2014). According to Zachariassen (2012), mainstreaming represents change processes that require a long-term perspective, including support for the capacity development of all actors concerned. Herein, knowledge development is necessary at different levels of development cooperation. Systematic agenda setting is important, including the ultimate target group, to include mainstreaming issues at the Global development agenda (Moser, 1995). Management systems of development organisations need to become inclusive for all, to ensure equity as a basic value in all principles and policies (Bruijn et al., 2012). Practical programmes need to address the needs of marginalised groups to ensure fruitful participation in development practice (Zachariassen, 2012). This shows how a change process is necessary at different levels to support the successful development of an inclusive society. In the paragraphs below, we describe the experiences if three mainstreaming issues that relate to the cases presented in this paper.

Gender mainstreaming

By the early 1990s, development organisations began to understand that, contrary to the then prevailing theories of change, benefits of general development efforts did not tend to trickle down to women. This led to a range of programmes specifically targeting women (Waal, 2006). However, these efforts did not bring the expected benefits of equal opportunities and rights and may have resulted in further exclusion of women in development (Mukhopadhyay, 1997). This led to the understanding that gender issues could not be tackled in isolation and that interventions needed to be grounded in a comprehensive analysis of their specific context and in a multi-sector approach (Mukhopadhyay, 1997). In response, a large number of gender mainstreaming initiatives were launched from 1995 onwards.

From 2000, gender mainstreaming has been heavily criticised for being too theoretical and having too much of a top down orientation with little empirical impact (Moser & Moser, 2005). These criticisms disregard the positive experiences with gender mainstreaming, such as empowering women, increasing understanding and respect between men and women, strengthening women's self-confidence and inclusion of gender issues into organisational policies (Zachariassen, 2012). In the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) gender is identified as both a specific area of focus and one interlinked with several others, such as poverty eradication, food security, water, energy, health, education, employment and economic growth, since the progress on MDG 3 showed that a more integrative approach to equality is necessary (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; UN, 2015). However, the ultimate outcomes and impact of gender mainstreaming on gender equality remain largely unknown.

Disability mainstreaming

Disability was originally seen as residing in individuals who require special medical attention. However, as in gender mainstreaming, this approach led to unintentional segregation in which persons with disabilities were seen as objects of pity (Bickenbach, Chatterji, & Badley, 1999). During the 1990s the perspective on disability shifted from the individual to the environment's role in defining, amplifying, and ameliorating the effects of impairments, ultimately leading to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted by the General Assembly on 13 December 2006 (Stein & Lord, 2010).

Attention for disability mainstreaming in development practice started in 2000, triggered because the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did not address disability issues. Disability activists started to stress the importance of inclusion of persons with disabilities if the MDGs were to be attained (Mwenda, Murangira, & Lang, 2009). Since then, many initiatives for disability mainstreaming have been undertaken, focusing on accessibility of education, employment, and aid programmes etcetera. Despite these initiatives, experiences of disability mainstreaming are scattered, and the majority of international development agencies do not recognise disability as a legitimate focus of mainstreaming (Bruijn et al., 2012). The main challenge herein remains in integrating the two seemingly contradictory requirements of inclusion and special needs.

Sexual diversity

Phenomena of sexual diversity are often labelled as 'unequal'. However, they are not yet seen as a focus of mainstreaming initiatives (Squires, 2005). The initial misinterpretation of HIV/AIDs as a disease of the homosexual community in the late 1980s gave the emancipation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) communities an important boost over the past decades. Given the high impact of HIV/AIDS in developing countries, mainstreaming this issue was soon added to the development agenda wherein LGBT communities were considered as one of the target groups. However, this process of 'mainstreaming' HIV/AIDS was often too narrow and reductionist to be effective for the sexually diverse target group. In response to this ineffectiveness, movements and interest groups organised by LGBT communities started taking responsibility for getting their HIV/AIDs response organised. In this process, they widened their perspective by getting LGBT communities recognised as marginalised groups, and not only as affected health target groups. Given that this development is recent and highly sensitive, not much is known about successes, challenges and impact (Elsej et al., 2005).

From this brief review of three different strands of mainstreaming, we conclude that the impact of mainstreaming topics has not been systematically documented, despite the fact that mainstreaming has been on the development agenda for over 20 years. Fragmentary case studies suggest that the inclusion of marginalised groups remains extremely difficult in practice. In literature, a number of possible, interlinked explanations are given for the

difficulty of inclusion of marginalised groups in development practice: 1) the gap between policies and practice, 2) the lack of a comprehensive capacity development approach to mainstream issues in a sustainable way, and 3) extreme sensitivity and diversity of the issues in their context which do not allow for a blueprint approach (Albert et al., 2005; Elsey et al., 2005; Moser & Moser, 2005; Zachariassen, 2012). The cases presented in this paper experiment with strengthening and contextualising capacities at different levels through a process of shared, socially robust, knowledge development. This was new type of knowledge, based on evidence, professionalism and experience, is necessary to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

Methodological considerations and frame of analysis

Before discussing the results of the three cases, we will explain how we compared and analysed their experiences. Furthermore, we will discuss the model of capacity development we used in analysing how the cases strengthened and contextualised the capacities at different levels to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

Methodological considerations

In 2010, the Dutch membership organisation for development organisations, PSO, developed an approach, the Thematic Learning Programme (TLP) that brings together different organisations to systematically and collectively learn from their practices around a central theme. A TLP is a focused and collective capacity development support programme that explores practical solutions, embedded in their context, to thematic challenges in development practices (Hiemstra, Faber, Maarse, te Velde, & van Poelje, 2012). The three case studies that constitute the material for the present analysis were all based on the TLP concept as described above. They focused respectively on mainstreaming gender, disability, and sexual diversity into development practice. The programmes were developed independently without the purpose of drawing generic lessons. However, in the knowledge development process, interesting similarities in the mainstreaming of the three thematic areas became apparent. At the PSO conference in November 2012, the three TLP representatives were invited to take a bird's eye view of their own TLP from a mainstreaming perspective, resulting in a cross-case comparison through inter-subjective analysis. This information, together with output and evaluation reports of the TLPs, was analysed and compared by the authors. The generic insights developed during the workshop and the analyses were merged into the present paper, which has also been reviewed by programme coordinators of the three concerned TLPs.

Frame of analysis

In order to move towards an inclusive society, development organisations can lead change by developing their capacities to include marginalised groups (Waal, 2006). There are numerous definitions of capacity development, ranging from defining capacity development as an

approach or process to defining it as a development objective (Bolger, 2000; Kaplan, 2000). Despite the differences in defining capacity development, all definitions stress the importance of understanding the context in which development programmes occur and agree on the notion that there are different inter-related levels of capacity development (Bolger, 2000). Furthermore, learning and adaptation is a central issue in capacity development (Bolger, 2000; Kaplan, 2000)

Inspired by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1997) and Bolger (2000), the figure below shows the framework of capacity development used to analyse the three cases presented here. The triangle in figure 1 shows that capacity exists when individuals can perform within a functioning organisation that is well-linked to alliances and networks, which together operate within a sufficiently enabling institutional context. The arrows depict the possible points of entry to support capacity development at these four levels.

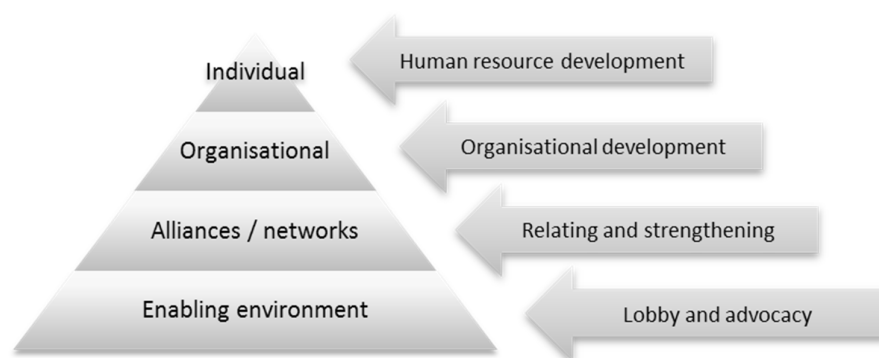


Figure 1: Frame of analysis for capacity development, adapted from UNDP 1997 and Borger 2000

In the context of this paper, we assume that the creation of a society with the capacity to include and empower marginalised groups has to work on the identities, attitudes and behaviours of individuals; the structures, cultures and processes within organisations; the quality of partnerships and alliances; and the institutional context.

Harvesting experiences with capacity development in mainstreaming development issues

In this section, we first consider the advantages and disadvantages of mainstreaming as a concept. Then we describe how the TLPs designed their capacity development programme through multi-level mainstreaming interventions in order to bridge the gap between policies and practice. Finally, we will explain per level the strategies applied to build capacity and the results of these efforts on mainstreaming marginalised groups.

Mainstreaming versus inclusion

In our overview of mainstreaming experiences, we revealed the gap between policies on mainstreaming and the implementation of these policies into practice. If successful implementations of mainstreaming have been achieved; the lessons of these initiatives have generally not been documented to make them accessible to practitioners, so knowledge is not captured and translated to make it generally available. It is this gap that the TLPs on gender, disability and sexual diversity aim to address.

Table 1: Main learning questions of the Thematic Learning Programmes

TLP	Main learning question	Sub-goals
Gender Learning in Action Community	How do we ensure that within our organisations, our gender equality policies and gender equality practices are coherent in order to be effective?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give meaning to gender equality in specific contexts - Engage stakeholders in a dialogue about gender equality - Increase knowledge about power relations to improve gender equality - Involve men as agents of change
Inclusion of persons with disabilities	Which organisational change and system innovation processes are needed to include persons with disabilities in mainstream development programmes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitate the process of organisational change in a sustainable way - Define the role of civil society organisations in North and South in inclusion of persons with disabilities
Mainstreaming sexual diversity	How can staff, including management and volunteers of partner organisations, be capacitated to ensure effective inclusion of sexual diversity issues into their policies and programmes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stimulate staff to accept sexual diversity from their individual and professional point of view - Stimulate integration of sexual diversity in the organisational policy and programme activities - Stimulate support and collaboration with organisations that advocate for sexual diversity in a meaningful way

Designing a capacity development programme to enhance mainstreaming of development issues

To understand the differences between the TLPs, we compared their initial learning questions and sub-goals (see Table 1). Interestingly, none of the programmes made explicit reference to

mainstreaming, although the TLPs on disability and sexual diversity refer to *inclusion in practice*. The gender TLP specifically addresses context specific conceptualization and interpretation of gender equality, demonstrating the difficulty of defining mainstreaming. The coordinators of the TLPs were concerned that use of the term mainstreaming would make their planned outcomes less tangible, also described as 'away streaming.' For this reason, they chose to focus on inclusion to build an equal society, and used mainstreaming only as a means to an end.

When we consider the main learning questions of the three TLPs (see table 1), we observe that, initially, the emphasis of capacity development differed. For the Gender Learning in Action Community, the participating organisations already included gender in their policies before the programme started, to a greater or lesser extent. Therefore, the TLP focused the organisational change that is needed to translate attention for gender into practice.

The themes of disability inclusion and sexual diversity are not yet embedded in development practice which means that organisational policies were not in place. For this reason, these TLPs focused on getting the issue on the agenda. For example, the TLP on disability inclusion focused on organisational change in development programmes to get the issue of disability inclusion on the agenda and implemented in practice. As a consequence, the TLP on disability inclusion also intervenes at the level of organisational development, aiming to create an inclusive organisation. In the TLP on mainstreaming sexual diversity, there was more attention for acceptance of sexual diversity as a pre-condition for mainstreaming. Individual capacity development is thereby central to the interventions of the TLP on sexual diversity, as a pre-condition for organisational development. The two other TLPs also pay attention to capacity development at the individual level, although this is not their main point of entry for capacity development.

Attention for individual- and network aspects of capacity building were addressed in all TLPs. Capacity development at the individual level was acknowledged as important, since individuals need to become aware, emotionally affected and inspired to gain new knowledge, and change their beliefs, behaviour and attitudes. When the TLPs aimed to bring about organisational changes, such as the gender and disability inclusion TLPs, individuals also need to be involved to start the change process and develop new knowledge through innovation. The network aspect of capacity development was visible in the alliances that were built among the organisations that participated in the TLPs. They felt a shared responsibility to realise their dream of an equal society for all. Furthermore, the sub-goals show that all TLPs consider multiple stakeholders and their roles in inclusion of marginalised groups, emphasising interventions at the level of networks. This shows how the development of new knowledge through capacity building includes different types of knowledge (experiential, professional, academic) to ensure co-creation of socially robust knowledge.

Capacity development to address mainstreaming in the wider environment was not directly included in the TLP goals. The participants realised that they could only try to stimulate others by demonstrating their ideals of an inclusive society for all. They organised several activities for anyone interested in celebrating diversity. Hereby they contributed to the debate on inclusion of marginalised groups in development practice.

Table 2: Capacity development on mainstreaming in the TLPs

	Capacity development	Outcomes
Individual development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking down prejudices • Stressing the right for inclusion • Involving target group • Involving ‘non-affected’ • Using personal stories • Touching peoples’ heart • Contextualising the issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude change • Ownership • Sense of urgency
Organisational development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy at managers’ level • Appointing change agents • Disseminating lessons • Learning by doing • Focusing on solutions • Reflection • Extracting generic lessons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross cutting issues established • Baseline surveys • Adapted monitoring and evaluation • Adapted policies • Development of tools and guidelines
Networks and alliances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relate to relevant stakeholders • Triangulation of co-created knowledge • Cross country staff exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-creation of knowledge • External publications
Enabling environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging dialogue • Smart use of external events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitizing mainstreaming

An analysis of publications and discussions in the TLPs demonstrate that they use a mixture of strategies that affect outcomes at the four levels of capacity development, as shown in Table 2. The TLP sub-goals (Table 1) and the real practice of capacity development (Table 2) shows that capacity development at organisational level is the most important entry point, followed by the individual level. According to the TLP coordinators, interventions at the organisational level start a process in which individuals are reached, networks are established, bonds are forged and joint advocacy is planned. In this process, the personal, intangible changes on awareness-raising are considered to represent the greatest change in bringing about inclusion in development practice. In the end, the process of change to which these TLPs contribute reveals how transformation of culture and deep structures takes place in

small, varying steps, undertaken by individuals and parts of organisations. These steps may seem small, although for the people involved they may represent huge leaps towards inclusion.

Strategies and results of capacity development in the TLPs

In this section, we explore in more depth the interventions of capacity development that were developed in the three TLPs to mainstream marginalised groups in development practice, as depicted in Table 2. This allows us to understand the knowledge and experiences from the different contexts in which mainstreaming takes place.

- Human Resource development

Capacity development at the individual level relates to development of the human resources in an organisation. In the context of mainstreaming, development workers need to be aware of the rights of the marginalised in society and trained to practice the inclusion of marginalised people in their programmes. In all three TLPs, the images that development workers had of marginalised groups in their contexts were challenged. For instance, gender issues deal with culturally entrenched relations between men and women. Disability issues require approaching persons with disabilities as capable individuals instead of objects of pity. Sexual diversity issues touch the taboo area of sexuality. In the light of this, mainstreaming must start with looking within individual capacities to explore personal perceptions, myths and attitudes (Else et al., 2005). Only when attitudes and prejudices of staff are changing and stereotypes are challenged is fruitful inclusion of marginalised groups possible (as illustrated in Box 1). The right of marginalised groups to take part and contribute to society, according to their full potential, was stressed in all three TLPs.

Box 1: Experience of participant in individual capacity development for mainstreaming sexual diversity

‘I considered it anti-Christian and abusive to my culture to get involved in mainstreaming sexual diversity. As part of the training I was exposed to the personal information and reasons for being Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning from the people themselves. This made me feel able to learn a lot from them... I reformed to come on board to support mainstreaming of sexual diversity in my organisation.’

The TLPs consider that ‘seeing is believing’ when tackling sensitive issues, in order to break down prejudices about marginalised groups. The TLP on disability used persons with disabilities as role models; the TLP on gender involved powerful women and supportive men as role models; and the TLP on sexual diversity used LGBT, Intersex and Questioning people and supportive heterosexuals as role models in their trainings. The TLPs tried to match the role models to the target audience: a blind singer in an X-factor final attracted youth and a

physically disabled priest was influential when relating to a faith based NGO. From the TLPs, we identified three interventions in which role models were helpful: they facilitated awareness-raising sessions, they gave testimonies from their experiences of being segregated and how their lives were changed, and they showed small video clips emphasizing their capabilities. An example of the use of role models is given in Box 2.

Box 2: Example of the use of role models in the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities

‘When Shitaye, from the Ethiopian Centre for Disability in Development, came to us to do the intake assessment, the inaccessibility of our office became very clear. She could not enter with her wheelchair, so we had a meeting in our parking lot. This really shocked me. I felt very sorry about that. This was a huge motivator for me to really change something.’ Manager of a WASH programme in Ethiopia

Cultural- and religious interpretations of gender, disability and sexual diversity vary depending on the different contexts. The TLPs provided room to adapt awareness-raising strategies to the context of execution (see box 3). Furthermore, the TLPs tried to contextualized examples of inclusion in such a way that people became touched by it. Therefore the TLPs worked often with personal testimonies to give individuals of marginalised groups a voice.

Box 3: Example of sensitivity to religious interpretations from the TLP on disability inclusion

One of the facilitators organised an awareness raising session on disability inclusion for a faith based organisation in Ethiopia recalls:

‘When we organised a training programme for a church involved in development work, we asked one of the church members, a famous blind singer, to give a lecture on disability and theology. He delivered a very impressive speech, explaining that some important biblical persons had disabilities: Moses stuttered, Paul was blind for some days. The impact of this speech was enormous. It really touched people’s hearts. During the final prayer, the participants asked for forgiveness for the discrimination they had exercised towards persons with disabilities in the past. We strongly believe that these church leaders will do their uttermost to include persons with disabilities from now on.’

In addition to role models, the TLP on sexual diversity used a ‘learning to unlearn’ approach during which participants were confronted with their prejudices and together explore ways to change themselves. ‘Coming out’ sessions, in which participants openly tell about their sexual preferences and others reflect on their feelings about this, were carefully planned after having built rapport with the TLP participants in sessions providing correct knowledge and correcting myths. This approach was unique in the TLP on sexual diversity since it deals with a very sensitive topic in most cultures.

The impact of the interventions on individual capacity development is mainly related to attitude change. Through attitude change, the participants obtain ownership over the issue and urgency for change is created. High staff turnover is described in literature and experienced by the TLPs as a challenge in awareness-raising initiatives. Possible alternative approaches suggested by Elsey et al. (2005) include mentoring systems which provide key staff with continual technical and personal support, or working groups for staff facing similar issues to exchange ideas and experiences. In addition, it may be important to consider how inputs on various mainstreaming strategies could be combined and integrated in regular training programmes.

- Organisational learning

Capacity development at the organisational level relates to addressing the organisations' culture and processes to become inclusive for marginalised groups in society. Capacity development at the organisational level has been initiated in the three TLPs by appointing change agents in the organisations who are supposed to lead the process. This is a reaction to the supposed pervasiveness of gender mainstreaming in its aim to include all staff in implementation. As has been previously expressed, 'If gender is everybody's responsibility in general, then it's nobody's responsibility in particular' (Pollack & Hafner-Burton, 2000: pg 452).

In the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities, focal persons within each organisation acted as change agents mainstreaming disability in programmes or management. The Gender Learning in Action Community and the TLP on sexual diversity involved 'non-marginalised' people as change agents. In the case of gender, there are, for example, men advocating gender equality. In the case of sexual diversity, the change agents are programme staff, supported by a LGBT or intersexual buddy. Box 4 illustrates the importance of the involvement of 'non-affected' agents of change in the TLP on gender diversity.

Box 4: Involving men as change agents in the TLP on gender diversity

'Women and girls ask for men's participation themselves. They feel empowered through projects that target them, but if the men they live and work with do not change, then who are they to live with? Men can, I would say have to, be partners in change. They are important role models for other men and boys.'

The change agents were responsible for disseminating the lessons on mainstreaming from the TLP alliances in their organisations to management and field staff. They were appointed by their management which means that they were supported in their work. However, they still had to do advocate at all levels, including management, to create urgency to work on inclusion. They acted as lobbyists within their own organisations to keep the mainstreaming issue on the agenda. Moreover, they supervised, defined, and divided further activities for

experimenting and exploring the change process towards an inclusive organisation. This was not always an easy task as illustrated in Box 5.

Box 5: The task of a change agent in the Gender Learning in Action Community

‘We should not assume that all our staff is gender sensitive, or immediately convinced of gender mainstreaming. Engaging project officers and other stakeholders takes much longer than we imagined. I mean, really engaging them to achieve change, not only at the level of paper plans. Anybody can include a result or two on gender. We want to adopt a new way of gender sensitive thinking and acting, not only planning and reporting in this way.’

In the organisational development process, the TLPs stressed the importance of learning by doing with intensive participation of many staff members in the organisation next to the change agents. The organisations in the TLPs experimented with mainstreaming in practice and reflected on their experiences with peers in short reflection loops. To give form to this emerging design, the change agents reflected on their daily practices in logbooks and actively translate these reflections into action plans that focus on solutions. They try to apply new knowledge and experiences from the TLP directly to their own contexts.

Box 6: Example on how generic lessons are formulated from the TLP on mainstreaming sexual diversity

‘From the TLP I’ve learned that individual stories can be broadened to become a common story. Previously many of us felt uncomfortable talking about the sexual diversity, but direct encounters with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex colleagues has improved our perspective.’

From all these experiments, the change agents have extracted generic lessons on mainstreaming their thematic issues in development practices, as illustrated in the example of box 6. This resulted in four outcomes of capacity development at the organisational level. First, mainstreaming has been established as a cross cutting theme in most organisations. Second, baseline surveys were conducted to assess the status of inclusive development and the special needs of marginalised groups. Third, the tension between inclusion and integration was addressed by focussing on inclusive development wherein mainstreaming was portrayed as a means to an end. Fourth, the organisations developed policies on mainstreaming and translated these policies directly into monitoring and evaluation formats, tools and guidelines. In this way, the three TLPs addressed the challenge of translating mainstreaming policy into practice.

- Learning with others in networks

Capacity development interventions at the level of networks may strengthen new and existing alliances. For mainstreaming issues in development this was acknowledged as important, since building a strong network that is committed to inclusion can be the first step towards an inclusive society. In finding the delicate balance between special attention and complete inclusion, inter-organisational learning, either orchestrated or spontaneous, was experienced to be crucial. The three TLPs, therefore, have paid ample attention to the facilitation of learning and reflection to anchor the newly developed knowledge in the process of capacity development. This was predominantly done in a network setting in which change agents from different organisations shared their experiences and formulated generic lessons learned. Strong linkages among change agents and, ultimately, among their organisations led to co-creation of knowledge on mainstreaming. For example, the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities shared experiences of dealing with tough issues related to mainstreaming disability in the organisation. Another advantage of linking to other organisations is the possibility to visit each other to see innovative solutions. For instance, the TLP on mainstreaming sexual diversity initiated an internship programme in the network. Co-creation of knowledge requires matching the different expertise from practice, professionalism and academia together. The TLPs tried to do this by bringing external knowledge sources into their networks, like experts in their field of mainstreaming, experiential experts, and capacity development experts. In this way, they used triangulation of different knowledge sources to validate the created knowledge. For the invited experts, this was also inspirational since it gave them insight into practice of capacity development for mainstreaming. PSO staff members were involved in all TLPs, either as a knowledge source, a broker or a process advisor, or as a combination of the three. In all TLPs, academic institutions were involved. In the Gender Learning in Action Community, the Radboud University Nijmegen and the University of Applied Science Van Hall Larenstein were involved as ‘critical friends’ to bring in external expertise and nurture the learning process. In the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities, the Athena Institute of the VU University, Amsterdam, was involved in giving form to the action research and learning process. The Dutch Coalition on Disability in Development and Enablement consultancy was involved as expert sources. The TLP on mainstreaming sexual diversity involved the University of Amsterdam as a research expert, together with the Great Lakes University of Kasumu, Kenya, and the University of Indonesia. The expert centre on sexuality, Rutgers WPF Netherlands, was involved in supporting facilitation and strategy formulation.

The role of external knowledge actors was twofold. On the one hand, thematic experts provided their academic experiences and thereby helped to nurture the creation of generic knowledge and related the new insights to common understanding of mainstreaming. On the other hand, they formed a vehicle for the TLPs to share their co-created knowledge with the world, for example through scientific publications. Combining knowledge sources for

capacity development is best illustrated by a quote from a facilitator of the TLP on mainstreaming sexual diversity:

Combining evidence from academic research with personal testimonies is a powerful way to demonstrate the need to mainstreaming sexual diversity and for getting entry points for attitude change of staff and for organisational development.

- Institutional environment change

Due to the limited time available for the TLPs, it is unclear whether they contributed to the intended system change of building an inclusive society. Facilitating the wider environment to become inclusive for marginalised groups was not directly addressed by lobby and advocacy interventions of the three TLPs that focussed, instead, on committed organisations in the field of development NGOs. However, they tried to stimulate the system to become more inclusive by engaging stakeholders and beneficiaries in dialogues on inclusion of marginalised groups. Instead of spending much energy on pro-active advocacy in a field that lies beyond their span of control, they increased their success by piggy-backing on emerging trends, issues and events. For instance, in the TLP on sexual diversity, a number of external events boosted capacity development at the individual and organisational level: the death of the Ugandan gay activist, David Kato, in Kenya stressed the urgency for change; a powerful speech by Ban Ki-moon on sexual diversity who called ‘to act now to put an end to violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity’; and US President Barack Obama endorsing same-sex marriages. These events occurred highlighted the importance of sexual diversity in international contexts for the TLP participants.

Conclusions and discussion

This paper considered knowledge and experiences from existing literature and from three practical cases on mainstreaming gender, disability and sexual diversity in development practice. It has focused on different levels of capacity development at individual, organisational and network level and at the level of the wider environment. Overall we conclude that the focus on organisational- and individual capacity development are useful strategies to overcome the difficulty of translating policies into practice on issues related to mainstreaming of marginalised groups. Our main findings for this conclusion are presented below.

First, the context is a crucial factor in mainstreaming. This applies to all three TLPs, and has also been stressed by different scholars of gender mainstreaming (Moser & Moser, 2005; Waal, 2006), disability mainstreaming (Bruijn et al., 2012; Coe & Wapling, 2010), and

inclusion in general (Squires, 2005). The experiences from the TLPs provide examples of how to appeal to individuals and organisations in specific contexts.

Second, capacity development experiences from the three TLPs show how tangible (such as policy documents) and intangible changes (such as changes in individual attitude) together support the inclusion of marginalised groups in development practices. Activities aimed at intangible changes, like awareness-raising, attitude change and influencing cultural and professional values relate to concrete tangible activities, like formulating organisational change strategies, development of training of trainers' curricula and adapting planning monitoring and evaluation systems. This is consistent with the findings of Kloosterman et al. (2012) who established that tangible and intangible changes are needed to achieve an equal society, in which both types of changes strengthen each other.

Third, the TLPs show the importance of involving multiple actors in capacity development. Reflections on organisational development in a network setting, where experiences were compared with an existing knowledge base from expert and academic sources, created fertile ground for the development of new knowledge related to real world practices. The advantage of this co-creation of knowledge is that it is solution focused and includes the participation of the marginalised groups themselves. In this context, it is important to avoid exclusive language, such as the term 'mainstreaming', but instead focus on the ideal of an inclusive society for all.

Last, the commitment of the participants, the richness of the results and the relevance of the outcome for the practitioners confirm that the structural provision of space and time for reflection and joint learning is a precondition for addressing complex issues, like the inclusion of marginalised groups, in development. This is a finding that donors should take to heart.

We hope that the experiences of the three TLPs on mainstreaming gender, disability and sexual diversity can help others to set up effective capacity development programmes to include marginalised groups into development practice. We highlighted the experiences of the organisations involved to provide practical examples for other organisations that try to bridge the gap between policies on mainstreaming and practice. Since all TLPs approach mainstreaming through capacity building, we can conclude that shared knowledge development is an important condition for realising an equal society for all. However, implementing a capacity development programme will always be affected by interrelationships and unpredictable, unintended events in their contexts, and the three cases discussed in this paper do not show the full picture yet. Therefore, it would be beneficial when other organisations embarking on the same process also share their experiences to sharpen and test the new knowledge that was developed in the TLPs. Together, the development sector can shape a new approach to the inclusion of marginalised minority groups, ensuring the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Acknowledgements

We want to acknowledge the contributions of the TLP representatives in discussing and reviewing several phases of brainstorming, writing, and finalisation of this article. From the TLP on sexual diversity: Jo Reinders and Sanderijn van der Doef (Rutgers WPF); Colin Dixon and Kate Pruce (Dance4Life). From the Gender Learning and Action community: Tessa Roorda and Gerard Wieffer (PSO); Sophie Kesselaar and Joni van de Sand (WO=MEN). From the TLP on inclusion of persons with disabilities: Paulien Bruijn (LFTW); Barbara Regeer (VU University Amsterdam); Huib Cornielje (Enablement); and Roelie Wolting (DCDD).

References

- Albert, B., Dube, A. K., & Riis-hansen, T. C. (2005). Has Disability Been Mainstreamed into Development Cooperation ?, (July), 1–107.
- Albert, B., & Harisson, M. (2006). Lessons from the Disability Knowledge and Research Programme. The Disability Press.
- Bickenbach, J. E., Chatterji, S., & Badley, E. M. (1999). Models of disablement , universalism and the international classification of impairments , disabilities and handicaps, 48, 1173–1187.
- Bolger, J. (2000). Capacity development: why, what and how. Capacity Development; occasional series (Vol. 1). Quebec.
- Bruijn, P., Regeer, B., Cornielje, H., Wolting, R., Veen, S. Van, & Maharaj, N. (2012). Count me in; Include people with disabilities in development projects. Retrieved from <http://www.lightfortheworld.nl/en/news/news-detail/2012/11/30/count-me-in---a-practical-guide-towards-inclusion>
- Cavaghan, R. (2013). Gender mainstreaming in the DGR as a knowledge process: epistemic barriers to eradicating gender bias. *Critical Policy Studies*, 7(4), 407–421.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2013.804330>
- Coe, S., & Wapling, L. (2010). Practical lessons from four projects on disability-inclusive development programming. *Development in Practice*, 20(7), 879–886.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2010.508109>
- Cornwall, A., & Rivas, A.-M. (2015). From “gender equality and ‘women’s empowerment’ to global justice: reclaiming a transformative agenda for gender and development. *Third World Quarterly*, 36(2), 396–415. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1013341>
- Else, H., Tolhurst, R., & Theobald, S. (2005). Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in development sectors: Have we learnt the lessons from gender mainstreaming? *AIDS Care*, 17(8), 988–98. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09540120500102250>
- Hiemstra, W., Faber, K., Maarse, A., te Velde, J. v, & van Poelje, R. (2012). Thematic Learning Programmes - a primer. The Hague. Retrieved from https://partos.nl/webfm_send/34296

- Howard, P. L. (2002). Beyond the “grim resisters”: Towards more effective gender mainstreaming through stakeholder participation. *Development in Practice*, 12(2), 164–176. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09614520220127685>
- Jahan, R. (1995). *The elusive agenda: mainstreaming women in development*. London: Zed books.
- Kaplan, A. (2000). Capacity building: Shifting the paradigms of practice. *Development in Practice*, 10(3-4), 517–526. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09614520050116677>
- Kloosterman, J., Benning, E., & Fyles, R. (2012). “Measuring the unmeasurable”: gender mainstreaming and cultural change “Measuring the unmeasurable”: gender mainstreaming and cultural change, (February 2013), 37–41.
- Moser, C. (1995). From Nairobi to Beijing: The Transition from Women in Development to Gender and Development. In A. Leonard (Ed.), *Seeds 2: Supporting Women’s Work Around the World*. New York: The Feminist Press.
- Moser, C., & Moser, A. (2005). Gender mainstreaming since Beijing: A review of success and limitations in international institutions. *Gender & Development*, 13(2), 11–22.
- Mukhopadhyay, M. (1997). Mainstreaming Gender or “Streaming” Gender Away : Feminists Marooned in the Development Business, 95–103.
- Mwenda, T., Murangira, A., & Lang, R. (2009). Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in National Development Frameworks. *Journal of International Development*, 21(5), 662–672.
- Nowotny, H. (2000). Re-thinking Science : From Reliable Knowledge to Socially Robust Knowledge. In *Jahrbuch 2000 des Collegium Helveticum* (pp. 1–19). Zurich.
- Nussbaum, M. (2003). Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice. *Feminist Economics*, 9(2-3), 33–59. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1354570022000077926>
- Pollack, M. A., & Hafner-Burton, E. (2000). Mainstreaming gender in the European Union. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 7(3), 432–456.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/13501760050086116>
- Shields, L. S. (2013). *Understanding the Complexities of the Health System in India: Strategies for an Accessible, Integrated, rights-based approach*. VU University.
- Squires, J. (2005). Is Mainstreaming Transformative? Theorizing Mainstreaming in the Context of Diversity and Deliberation. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 12(3), 366–388. <http://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxi020>
- Stein, M. A., & Lord, J. E. (2010). Monitoring the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Innovations, Lost Opportunities, and Future Potential. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 32, 689–728.
- UN. (2015). *SDGs & Topics*. Retrieved October 13, 2015, from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics>
- UNDP. (1997). *Capacity Development*. New York.
- Veen, van S. C. (2014). *Development for all: Understanding Disability Inclusion in Development Organisations*. Retrieved from

<http://www.narcis.nl/publication/RecordID/oai%3Adare.ubvu.vu.nl%3A1871%2F51289>

- Veen, S. van, Bunders, J., & Regeer, B. (2013). Mutual learning for knowledge co-creation about disability inclusive development programmes and practice. *Knowledge Management for Development Journal*, 9(2), 102–122.
- Waal, M. de. (2006). Evaluating gender mainstreaming in development projects. *Development in Practice*, 16(2), 209–214. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09614520600562454>
- Woodhill, J. (2010). Capacities for Institutional Innovation: A Complexity Perspective. *IDS Bulletin*, 41(3), 47–59. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2010.00136.x>
- Zachariassen, H. H. (2012). From the bottom up : lessons about gender mainstreaming in the Andes from Digni ' s Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) programme From the bottom up : lessons about gender mainstreaming in the Andes from Digni ' s Women Empowerment and Gender E, (February 2013), 37–41.

About the authors

Saskia van Veen has a background in physiotherapy and international public health. This combination resulted in her interest for disability, development cooperation and multi-stakeholder processes. Saskia has been working as a researcher at the Athena Institute since July 2008. She has been involved in several research projects and enjoys teaching in different courses that concern research methodology, international development, innovation, disability and ethics in health and life sciences. Her PhD thesis reflected on lessons learned within the Thematic Learning Programme on inclusion of persons with disabilities in development, coordinated by Light for the World. Email: s.c.van.veen@vu.nl

Petra Staal has considerable experience with strengthening local partner organisations in Africa. Her focus is on the search for joint relevance and added value in change or capacity development processes. Processes in which people; their perspectives, their wishes and their capabilities are central. It is her aim to link people's practical experiences to more generic knowledge generation and vice versa. Email: petrastaal@yahoo.co.uk

Rob van Poelje trained as a social scientist and, over the past twenty-five years, has developed from an intercultural communication trainer into an organisational development advisor into a facilitator of organisational change and multi-stakeholder processes. His experiences in both health, agricultural and local economic system development in Asia, Africa and the Netherlands have led to many lessons learnt and fingers burnt. As an institutional development adviser and project manager from 1999 to 2007, he learnt that the heart of development lies in action-learning processes. He worked as the Head of the knowledge and learning department at PSO from 2007 to 2012. Most recently, he managed an emergency and risk management department. His main focus is: how to link lessons learnt to new organisational practice and to new forms of inter-organisational collaboration. Email: poelje007@kpnmail.nl