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Gender Mainstreaming in Climate Policy: Empowering Women and Reducing Gender Disparities in Post-Disaster Scenarios

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Abstract: ***Gender mainstreaming involves integrating a gender perspective into various actions, policies, legislations, or initiatives to address the concerns of all individuals and prevent the perpetuation of gender inequalities through institutional channels. Despite its global implementation, gender mainstreaming has not consistently resulted in progress for women; often, it is linked to a scaling back of policies and programs specifically targeting women. Recent research highlights the gendered impacts of climate change, yet efforts to develop mitigation and adaptation strategies have largely neglected gender mainstreaming. Additionally, the predominant scientific and technological focus in institutional responses has overshadowed social outcomes, leading to insufficient attention to vulnerable groups, particularly women. This paper argues for the imperative of gender mainstreaming in climate policy and advocates for policies that are explicitly centred on women's empowerment. The essence of gender mainstreaming is crucial not only for ensuring the comprehensiveness of climate policies and programs but also for the development of women-focused policies, ensuring that women receive the necessary support and empowerment to take proactive measures on their behalf.***

Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming, Climate Change Policy, Gender power dynamics, Gender Vulnerability, Gender-based violence, Gender Disparities

I. INTRODUCTION

As we acknowledge the fact that a complex relationship exists between gender-based violence and climate change, prompting calls for increased consideration of gender within climate change discussions, policies, actions, and strategies. This paper extends that argument by advocating for the integration of gender mainstreaming into evolving policy areas associated with climate change. However, it is essential to acknowledge the complexity of this process, as applying a gender lens to all climate responses alone does not guarantee the effective addressing of gender vulnerability or the achievement of gender equality. This paper examines the history and manifestations of gender mainstreaming, exploring how it can create space for transformative changes in gender power relations, particularly in post-disaster situations.

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Climate change has become a prominent factor in the global experience of the twenty-first century, marked by an increase in catastrophic and gradual climate events. Substantial evidence from various regions affected by climate variability and catastrophes indicates that disaster experiences are gendered, with women being particularly vulnerable during and after such events (Enarson, 2009, [15]; Lambrou & Piana, 2006, [19]; Lambrou & Nelson, 2010, [20] Neumayer & Pluemper, 2007, [26]). This paper sheds light on the gendered experiences of women in the context of climate change, urging governments to reaffirm their commitment to gender mainstreaming in policies, institutions, and legislative frameworks addressing climate issues. An examination of gender mainstreaming is crucial for understanding how transnational, national, and local entities can effectively approach climate challenges with gender sensitivity. Neglecting this aspect risks solidifying gender inequalities in post-disaster and reconstruction efforts due to inherently unfair power dynamics, resource allocations, and underlying assumptions in responses to climate disasters. Conversely, the experience of climate change provides an opportunity to reassess gender mainstreaming and its potential to bring about radical and transformative changes in gender relations within the dynamic and uncertain climate and post-disaster context.

A. The History of Gender Mainstreaming:

More than 50,000 women participated as delegates and observers at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. This significant attendance was driven by the widespread perception among women globally that, despite two decades of initiatives since the initial UN Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975, there had been no substantial improvement in the disadvantaged position of women. The conference concluded with the release of a Declaration and Platform for Action, urging governments worldwide to recommit to gender equality and women's empowerment (refer to UN Women, 2012, [36]). The Beijing Conference marked a pivotal shift in policy frameworks, as delegates called on governments and institutions to move beyond a narrow focus on women and their perceived shortcomings towards a broader emphasis on gender equality (Walby, 2005, [38]). Governments and transnational organisations were challenged to transition from regarding gender inequality as solely a women's issue, addressed through women's policy units and targeted policies, to recognising the need for a comprehensive response across all areas of policy and practice.

This shift aimed to expose inherent biases against women in economic, social, cultural, and political realms. In the latter part of the twentieth century, following the 1975 Mexico World Conference and the subsequent UN Decade for Women, many countries had established women-focused mechanisms and policies. These initiatives had dedicated resources to address women's disadvantages and empower them. However, there was a notable lack of interrogation into the institutional, legal, and cultural norms that perpetuated power relations and gender inequalities (Alston, 2006, [1]; Walby, 2005, [38]). Delegates in Beijing advocated for a more comprehensive approach, analysing all areas of policy, program formulation, and structures to address gender bias.

The endorsement of a new gender mainstreaming framework gained substantial support in Beijing and had far-reaching global implications. True and Mintrom (2001, [33]) highlighted the rapid global diffusion of gender mainstreaming, even reaching countries with a poor record on gender equality, thanks to the efforts of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and transnational women's networks working to expose inequalities and empower women.

Nearly two decades after Beijing, it is evident that while gender mainstreaming holds promise for addressing inequalities, it has not delivered substantive change. Gender mainstreaming has been described as an 'empty signifier' (Council of Europe, 1998, [10]), heavily reliant on cultural context. Gender inequalities persist, and women face disadvantages across various socio-economic indicators, including education, health, employment, income, and experiences of poverty. They are disproportionately represented among the poorest, often excluded from land ownership, agricultural resources, and decision-making bodies. Women also bear the brunt of caregiving and unpaid work, are vulnerable to gender-based violence, and face oppressive customs. Worldwide, women and girls continue to experience disadvantage simply because of their gender. The advent of climate change introduces a new dimension for examining how gender inequalities are experienced and addressed during and after catastrophic events, providing an opportunity for a reevaluation of gender mainstreaming.

II. CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change refers to the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere, resulting in significant climate alterations and catastrophic events (IPCC, 2007, [17]). The ongoing debate revolves around the degree to which human activities contribute to climate variations versus natural cycles (IPCC, 2007, [17]), with an overemphasis on scientific and technological solutions at the expense of comprehensive social and gendered analyses (Alston, 2012, [2]; Alston & Whittenbury, 2012, [6]).

Despite this, mounting evidence highlights the global repercussions of climate variability, including polar ice cap melting, rising sea and air temperatures, and an increase in extreme events such as storm surges, cyclones, heavy rainfall, and droughts (IPCC, 2007, [17]). Research indicates that these events and climate changes profoundly disrupt food and water security, alter food production cycles, and impact how and where food is produced (FAO, 2007, [16]). Individuals, households, and communities affected by such events face significant challenges in health, housing, access to clean water, food security, and sanitation (Dankelman, 2010, [12]; Pelling, 2011, [28]).

The uncertainty surrounding climate change and its implications for food and water security is compounded by factors such as rising world populations, widening wealth disparities, conflicts, a looming peak oil crisis, fundamentalism, and shifts in power relations between countries and regions (United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, 2012, [35]). While climate change is not the sole disruptor, it poses a substantial global challenge that amplifies gender inequalities.

Gender emerges as a crucial indicator of vulnerability during and after climate events. Dankelman (2010, [12]) contends that gender vulnerability arises from a loss of control over natural resources, including water, means of production, information, and decision-making. Factors such as time poverty, disrupted educational and employment opportunities, increased exposure to unsafe conditions, and reduced capacity for local organizing further compound gender vulnerability. Women, more likely to live in poverty, lack land ownership, control over production and income, education and training, access to institutional support and information, freedom of association, and representation in decision-making bodies, are disproportionately affected. They are constrained by caregiving responsibilities for older people and children and are at a higher risk of mortality and violence during and after climate events (Alston, Whittenbury, & Haynes, 2011,[7]; Dankelman & Jansen, 2010, [12]).

Dankelman (2010, [12]) argues that women's access to essential resources for disaster preparedness, mitigation, and rehabilitation is limited, leading to increased workloads due to male migration for employment and a lack of energy sources, clean water, safe sanitation, and health impacts. The resulting heavy workloads often force girls to drop out of school to assist.

Research, including our own, indicates adverse mental health effects on men during prolonged droughts, while women experience increased morbidity and insecurity following disasters (Alston and Kent 2008, [4]; Alston 2010, [3]; Alston & Whittenbury, 2010, [5]; Alston et al., 2011, [7]). Women's vulnerability to violent attacks in climate events has been documented in various studies, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive responses (Neumayer and Pluemper, 2007, [26]; Enarson, 2006, [14], 2009, [15]; Lynch, 2011, [22]).

Despite possessing critical local knowledge that is valuable for climate adaptation and technological advancements, women face obstacles in contributing to these developments due to insufficient attention to gender equality and the unquestioned acceptance of existing power dynamics. UN Women Watch (2011: 1, [34]) highlights women's heightened vulnerability to climate change effects when they are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihoods.

Therefore, gender-sensitive strategies are crucial in addressing the environmental and humanitarian crises resulting from climate change. The current call for gender-sensitive climate strategies is timely and well-timed. Normalizing a gendered division of labor in disaster responses, accepting gender-based violence as traditional and unchangeable, and viewing women as primarily caregivers and men as landowners and workers can lead to increased violence, unequal resource distribution, and a lack of commitment to empowering women. Gender mainstreaming emerges as a focal point to address women's rights and needs and challenge inequitable gender relations during and after climate disasters.

III. GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Walby (1997, [37]) outlines three stages in gender equality policy. The first involves ensuring equal treatment for women, often through legal statutes that grant women rights and protections. The second stage focuses on positive actions for women, such as leadership training. The third stage, known as gender mainstreaming, signifies a commitment to thoroughly assess organizational structures, policies, and practices for gender bias. These stages align with Rees's (1998, [30]) categorization of gender equality strategies as 'tinkering,' 'tailoring,' and 'transforming,' with the latter embodying the original feminist intent of gender mainstreaming.

The definition of gender mainstreaming is articulated as follows: "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs, 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 programs 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, [13]).

In essence, gender mainstreaming aims to foster gender equality by unveiling gender as a socially constructed phenomenon and revealing new possibilities for reshaping gender arrangements to be more equitable. However, the journey of exposing and reshaping has not followed a linear trajectory, prompting several feminist researchers to scrutinise the paradox of the radical potential, questioning why, despite the widespread adoption of gender mainstreaming globally, the processes and practices associated with it do not consistently yield greater gender equality.

A. Speculating on the Fundamental Gender Mainstreaming Paradox

Feminist scholars propose various interconnected explanations to address the paradox associated with gender mainstreaming. Although presented separately for clarity, these explanations are not discrete. The initial explanation suggests that gender mainstreaming, originating from radical feminist frameworks promoted by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and women's lobby groups at the transnational level, encounters challenges during its implementation at the local level. The clash with national contextual realities may diverge from the original feminist conceptualization (Walby, 2005, [38]). Prugl (2010, [29]) identifies both the strengths and weaknesses of gender mainstreaming's transnational origins, a perspective supported by other feminist scholars.

The substantial diversity in mainstreaming's implementation, potentially stemming from its rapid rise and a perceived "lack of ownership," introduces ambiguity in its practical application (Squires, 2005, [31] as quoted in Payne, 2011, [27]). Governments and institutions have assimilated the original radical feminist intent of mainstreaming, resulting in the "evaporation" of feminist policies (Moser & Moser, 2005, [25]; Prugl, 2010, [29]). Despite the widespread adoption of gender mainstreaming rhetoric, there remains a lack of comprehension regarding its overarching goals.

A second explanation revolves around the lack of clarity concerning the vision of gender mainstreaming. Originating transnationally, gender mainstreaming practices are moulded within specific cultural contexts, leading to diverse interpretations of goals. These interpretations may emphasize sameness, with a focus on women entering male-dominated domains; difference, valuing the distinct contributions of women and men in gendered societies; or transformative actions, seeking a reshaping of inequitable gender relations (Daly, 2005, [11]; Walby, 2005, [38]). The fundamental question arises: is the goal of gender mainstreaming sameness, difference, or transformation?

A third explanation, drawing from Bacchi and Eveline's (2010, [8]) Work on Mainstreaming Politics advocates for a return to a political conceptualisation of gender. This perspective argues that policies are not inherently gendered but rather gendering, reinforcing gender inequalities through their definitions of addressed issues. Bacchi and Eveline propose a comprehensive understanding of the problem before undertaking a gender analysis of policies and outcomes, emphasizing the need to identify differential gendered experiences and factors contributing to gender inequality (2010, [8]).

The fourth explanation highlights the reluctance or inability of key players to commit to gender equality outcomes. This reluctance translates into procedural processes, such as providing gender-disaggregated data, gender auditing, and transparency on women in leadership positions, becoming the primary outcomes of gender mainstreaming policy at state bureaucratic levels, rather than substantive change (Meier & Celis, 2011, [24]). Governments, quick to adopt gender mainstreaming, are slow to define goals, allocate resources to institutional structures, and deliver radical change outcomes.

The final explanation pertains to the local contexts and institutions where gender mainstreaming practices are developed and delivered, which inherently reflect gendered dynamics. The radical goals of gender mainstreaming may become technocratic exercises, occurring within institutional structures that traditionally support male privilege. Wittman (2010, [39] notes that gender mainstreaming goals may conflict with bureaucratic processes and norms, often conservative and linked to patriarchal values.

This conflict reduces the potential for radical change, as 'soft' measures like gender statistics may de-prioritise gender equality goals (Wittman, 2010, [39]).In summary, theorists argue that the state has co-opted the original feminist intent of gender mainstreaming, detaching it from its radical feminist origins and reinforcing male normative structures in localized settings (Prugl, 2010, [29]). While gender mainstreaming is implemented in various countries, an unreflective conceptualization of gender is often incorporated into tools that do little to address deep cultural oppressions. In cultures where patriarchy is institutionalized, masculine hegemony dominates, and feminist challenges are contained, there is a risk that gender mainstreaming may reproduce rather than destabilize patriarchy (Alston, 2006, [1]; Prugl, 2010, [29]).

Wittman (2010, [39]) characterizes the process of gender mainstreaming as inherently deradicalizing, supporting the view that it does not truly embody feminism (McRobbie, 2009, [23]; Zalewski, 2010, [41]). Zalewski (2010, [41]) goes further, describing it as a faux-feminism, a process that leaves gender inequalities unchanged and uninterrogated. More alarmingly, Zalewski (2010, [41]) notes that feminism has become absorbed, giving rise to a new form of patriarchal ownership of feminism saturated with anti-feminist sentiment. Payne (2011, [27]) questions whether gender can withstand mainstreaming, citing Woodward's (2008, [40]) inquiry into the ability to challenge gender power relations within and beyond institutions. Gender mainstreaming can also face resistance if perceived as coercive. For example, many INGOs committed to gender equality may deliver programs through local organisations whose staff are deeply embedded in gendered cultural contexts. This may lead to a shallow transfer using simplistic gender auditing tools, lacking a clear rationale or goal, resulting in limited or nonexistent focus on the radical feminist intent. Meier and Celis (2011, [24]) refer to this as the challenge of aligning the horizontal strategy with a vertically structured policy context. Payne (2011, [27]) uses this argument to explain why UN country reports may highlight the introduction of significant gender mainstreaming institutional structures. Still, these same countries report poor socio-economic and health outcomes for women. It could be argued that many countries leverage gender mainstreaming rhetoric as a pretext to reduce resources for women's policy units and downgrade women-focused infrastructure (Alston, 2006, [1]; Prugl, 2010, [29]). Studies of women's instrumentalities in state organisations suggest that women's policy units are often marginalised and co-opted to support the goals and power structures of organisations. My research with heads of national and state rural women's units in Australia, conducted in the early 2000s before many were disbanded, revealed that women in these organizations felt their work was trivialized, ignored, ghettoized, and excluded mainly from departmental core business (Alston, 2006, [1]). However, many bureaucrats in these departments argued that gender goals had been achieved or that gender equality was no longer a 'problem.' Another Australian researcher, Connell (2006, [9]), reinforces this view, noting that, 'across much of the public sector, gender is regarded as a non-problem.'

It appears that gender mainstreaming has transformed into a tool of governance with neoliberal objectives rather than a radical option for change (True, 2003, [32]; Wittman, 2010, [39]), aligning with a market-based society, individual rather than collective responsibilities for inequality (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010, [8]), and a limited view of equity (Lessa & Rocha, 2012, [21]). In this process, it has lost touch with its social justice objectives and the complex nature of gender (Wittman, 2010, [39]).

B. Resistance

Hence, if the implementation of gender mainstreaming occurs through organizations and agencies that unquestioningly accept women's subordination, considering gender-based violence as usual or a part of traditional culture, the prospect of achieving gender equality becomes illusory. The transformative potential of gender mainstreaming is forfeited, resistance intensifies, and the execution of empowerment projects is constrained. In many instances, gender mainstreaming becomes merely "procedural" (Meier & Celis, 2011, [24]), reduced to a checkbox exercise where gender analysis is limited to statistical metrics and budgeting, neglecting the pursuit of substantial transformative change. As observed by Zalewski (2010, [41]), state bureaucracies shift gender mainstreaming from a radical theory to a mainstreamed practice, resulting in superficial adjustments and minimal impact, if any. Gender mainstreaming may encounter resistance if perceived as coercive. For instance, specific international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) committed to gender equality principles may implement programs through local organisations with staff deeply embedded in culturally gendered contexts. These staff members may not perceive the intricacies of gender inequalities as problematic (or may normalize them) but may feel pressured to provide limited attention to gender mainstreaming. Consequently, this may lead to a superficial transfer, utilising simplistic gender auditing tools, lacking a fundamental rationale or goal, and ultimately resulting in a minimal or nonexistent emphasis on the radical feminist intent. Meier and Celis (2011, [24]) describe this challenge as the difficulty of aligning a horizontal strategy with a vertically structured policy context. Payne (2011, [27]) employs this argument to elucidate why UN country reports may acknowledge the introduction of substantial gender mainstreaming institutional structures, yet these same countries report unsatisfactory socio-economic and health outcomes for women.

One could argue that many countries exploit gender mainstreaming rhetoric as a justification to reduce resources allocated to women's policy units and downgrade infrastructure focused on women (Alston, 2006, [1]; Prugl, 2010, [29]). Research on women's instrumentalities in state organisations suggests that women's policy units are often marginalised and co-opted to support the goals and power dynamics of organisations. My research with heads of national and state rural women's units in Australia, conducted in the early 2000s before many were disbanded, revealed that women in these organizations felt their work was trivialized, ignored, ghettoized, and excluded mainly from departmental core business (Alston, 2006, [1]).

Despite this, many bureaucrats in these departments argue that gender goals have been achieved or that gender equality is no longer a 'problem.'

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It seems that gender mainstreaming has evolved into a tool of governance with neoliberal objectives rather than representing a radical option for change (True, 2003, [32]; Wittman, 2010, [39]). It aligns with a market-based society, emphasizing individual responsibilities over collective efforts to address inequality (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010, [8]), and adopts a limited perspective on equity (Lessa & Rocha, 2012, [21]). In the process, it has drifted away from its social justice objectives and the intricate nature of gender (Wittman, 2010, [39]).

IV. GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE CLIMATE CHANGE SPACE

This extensive critique of gender mainstreaming implies a rather pessimistic outlook on its potential for achieving gender equality within the policy framework. Nonetheless, I align with Lessa and Rocha (2012, [21]) in their assertion that there is a reluctance to abandon gender mainstreaming due to its transformative and revolutionary potential. The critique presented here serves to unveil barriers and emphasises the need to recommit to the radical social justice objectives inherent in gender mainstreaming, highlighting its critical transformative potential. Moreover, the realm of climate change emerges as a significant arena for change, where women's vulnerability is exacerbated. Urgent action is imperative, creating a context for the radical reintroduction of gender mainstreaming. In this space, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) collaborate with national and local entities, sharing a common goal to address substantial crises.

The introduction of gender mainstreaming has encountered fractures along fault lines involving transnational conceptualization, state instrumentalities, policies, practices, and local implementation. Climate change spaces blur these fault lines as transnational actors engage at regional levels, working alongside state institutional arrangements. This establishes a stronger connection between local and global actors, fostering a non-linear spiral between these levels. The immediate aftermath of disasters, involving post-disaster policies and practices, resource allocation, community reconstruction, decision-making body development, and information dissemination, presents an opportunity for either reinforcing existing inequalities or achieving significant transformation in gender equality. Post-disaster areas offer a chance to pursue short-term equity goals while concurrently advancing the long-term equality and transformation agenda (Kirton & Greene, 2004, [18]; Lessa & Rocha, 2012, [21]).

However, barriers to local implementation must be addressed, including a lack of political will at state and local levels, institutional structures that perpetuate male norms, inadequate understanding of gender and the goals of gender mainstreaming, insufficient comprehension of the radical intent of gender mainstreaming, cooption of feminist conceptualizations for neoliberal objectives, reduction of gender-focused machinery and personnel, subpar treatment of gender personnel in organizations, and an overall lack of progress toward gender equality.

To support the underlying intent of gender mainstreaming and reimagine the original project in the climate change space, several factors are crucial:

- Transnational organizations remain dedicated to gender mainstreaming, with the UN and other entities recognizing the critical link between gender equality and achieving social justice objectives. These organisations play a significant role in promoting and disseminating the feminist project globally.
- Transnationals should fearlessly oppose gender inequality in climate change actions, resource distribution, and reconstruction. This may involve training local organisations and personnel in gender awareness, equality, and justice, as well as questioning policies that disadvantage women in post-disaster situations.
- Many UN-affiliated nations commit to gender mainstreaming, reporting to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Commission on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). UN Women plays a vital role in ensuring global attention to women's interests.
- Nations with a Ministry for Women or similar institutions, despite being poorly resourced, provide a basis for disseminating gender equality principles and processes. They work with local partners through information dissemination and training, and organise local women's action groups.

In the climate change policy space, points of contact occur at various levels, including the development of climate change policies at transnational and national levels, annual Commission for the Status of Women (CSW) meetings, and other transnational opportunities. International forums, organizations, and activists focused on gender justice in the climate change space, such as Gender CC, the Global Climate Change Alliance, the Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice, the Green Belt Movement, and Navdanya International Organization, contribute significantly to keeping gender equality issues at the forefront of global policy and actions.

These entities articulate definitions of gender equality, expose power relations, and disseminate information, playing a critical role in maintaining gender on the agenda and developing global awareness of gender inequalities in the climate space. While the transnational arena continues to shape the goals and practices of gender mainstreaming, an understanding of local contexts and intersection with local spaces is essential to address the complexities of global gender inequality and climate change.

At the state-based level, fostering a new awareness of gender mainstreaming is overdue. A commitment to gender equality has been established in Ministries for Women and similar institutions, albeit in a marginalised manner. These organisational structures serve as vehicles for transmitting an understanding of gender equality and building avenues from local to global levels. Linkages with transnational organisations are crucial for developing critical connections to local women affected by climate disasters.

Policymakers must understand gender mainstreaming, the impacts of gender inequality, and the benefits of national commitment to empowering women to facilitate meaningful development of gender mainstreaming and prevent its reduction to a tool for perpetuating masculine privilege.

At the local level, empowering women's strategies must involve resourcing local women's organisations to ensure that women have the space, resources, and means to express their needs and views on climate actions. Local spaces, where change is most often needed, have traditionally been those where women are most powerless. The development of channels from transnational activism to local empowerment is key to driving change.

V. CONCLUSION

The pressing nature of climate change underscores the urgency to reevaluate and reinvigorate gender mainstreaming in policies and actions aimed at supporting those impacted by climate disasters. Mounting evidence indicates that women, in particular, are exceptionally vulnerable during and after such catastrophes. Given the integral role of post-disaster policies and actions in building resilience within individuals and communities, there is a crucial need for a thorough reassessment of these initiatives. The objective is to ensure they do not inadvertently reinforce or generate new gender inequalities based on assumptions or expectations related to gender roles. Gender mainstreaming must be an essential component of evaluating all post-disaster interventions. However, there is a risk that a limited understanding or uncritical application of this concept may lead to mere technocratic exercises rather than authentic gender assessments. The fundamental local knowledge and capacity of women play a key role in reshaping and restoring communities. Yet, their vulnerability in post-disaster spaces poses a risk of failing to harness this knowledge, provide adequate support for women, and revitalize gender equality measures.

This paper critically assesses gender mainstreaming, focusing on the explanations for the radical potential paradox outlined by Wittman. It explores why the rapid global diffusion of gender mainstreaming has fallen short of meeting women's expectations worldwide for greater gender equality. The analysis aims not only to comprehend the intricate interactions at transnational, state, and local levels that have hindered significant changes in women's socio-economic status but also to offer insights into how the radical feminist intent of gender mainstreaming can be reimagined in post-disaster locations. The analysis reveals an understanding of the erosion of the feminist intent and the identified faux-feminism by Zalewski (2010, [42]), emphasizing the need for constant vigilance. As noted by Bacchi and Eveline (2010, [8]), there can be no sunset clause on gender analysis. In practical terms, we must heed Walby's (2005, [39]) call to separate the vision of gender mainstreaming from the strategies adopted to achieve gender equality. If gender equality is the goal, what strategies must be adopted at various layers of intervention and non-linear processes? Critical to this process is avoiding the superficial checkbox approach that has emerged as a token gesture toward gender equality, merely involving counting and measuring without challenging deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and human rights abuses against women.

Post-disaster sites offer an opportunity for a renewed commitment to gender mainstreaming, particularly due to the interactions between transnational, state, and local actors in locations where gender inequalities are evident. In such contexts, actions and resource allocations can either impede or enhance gender equality, providing a focal point for global attention to women's concerns. As Prugl (2010, [29]) emphasizes, gender mainstreaming requires the support of agents advocating for feminism—activists, experts, parliamentarians, and influential feminist figures in bureaucracies—across all state spaces, political levels, and functional issue areas. The failure of gender mainstreaming is attributed not only to patriarchal rule and bureaucratic masculinism but also to a scarcity of feminist politics in state spaces.

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