

Twenty-five years of mainstreaming gender in development: A review

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Abstract

Purpose: This review examines the global progress and challenges of gender mainstreaming in development from 1999–2024. It evaluates how gender perspectives have been integrated into policy, institutional frameworks, and sectoral development efforts to achieve gender equality and sustainable development outcomes.

Research Methodology: This study employs a systematic literature review to analyze scholarly articles, policy reports, and institutional documents. It categorizes findings based on policy frameworks, institutional mechanisms, sectoral impacts, and regional variations, while drawing insights from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, and North America.

Results: The review identified significant progress in adopting gender-sensitive policies and institutional mechanisms worldwide. However, challenges persist, including policy implementation gaps, sociocultural barriers, inadequate funding, and varying regional effectiveness. While some regions have advanced gender equality in governance and economic participation, others still face systemic constraints on women's participation.

Conclusions: Although significant strides have been made in integrating gender perspectives into development frameworks since 1999, persistent structural and institutional challenges continue to hinder the full realization of gender equality and sustainable development goals.

Limitations: This study did not account for the detailed country-specific challenges of all countries worldwide.

Contribution: The findings highlight the need for more intersectional and localized gender-mainstreaming strategies, stronger monitoring and evaluation systems, and enhanced collaboration among stakeholders to bridge policy-practice gaps.

Keywords: *Feminism, Gender Analysis, Gender Mainstreaming, Intersectionality, Inequalities*

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1. Introduction

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy that has been employed to achieve gender equality and sustainable development over the past few decades (Caywood & Darmstadt, 2024). At its core, gender mainstreaming involves the systematic consideration of gender perspectives in all policy, program, and project phases, ensuring that both women and men benefit equally and that inequality is not perpetuated (UN, 2002). This approach is rooted in the recognition that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. The concept of gender mainstreaming was significantly advanced at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at this conference, called

for the integration of gender perspectives in all areas of societal development (United Nations, 1995). This landmark framework outlines critical areas of concern and strategic objectives to address gender inequality. This emphasizes the need for comprehensive and coordinated efforts across sectors and levels of governance. Thus, the Beijing Platform for Action provided a robust foundation and stimulus for gender mainstreaming initiatives globally.

This review aims to examine the global progress and challenges of mainstreaming gender in development over the past 25 years (1999–2024). This review aims to provide a summarized understanding of how gender mainstreaming has been implemented in various contexts and its impact on gender equality and development outcomes. The objectives of this review are as follows: to identify the policy and legal frameworks that have been established to support gender mainstreaming at the international, national, and local levels; to identify the institutional mechanisms and practices that have been put in place to facilitate the integration of gender perspectives in development planning and implementation; to assess the outcomes of gender mainstreaming efforts across key sectors; and to explore regional variations in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, and North America.

2. Literature Review

Gender mainstreaming is defined as the process of assessing the implications of any planned action for women and men, including legislation, policies, and programs, in all areas and at all levels (Fofack, 2014). The ultimate goal is therefore to achieve gender equality by ensuring that gender perspectives, as well as attention to the goal of gender equality, are central to all activities, from policy development to the allocation of resources and planning of programs and projects. This approach moves beyond addressing gender inequality through isolated, women-specific initiatives to embedding gender considerations into the fabric of decision-making processes across sectors.

The principles of gender mainstreaming are rooted in several key concepts. First, it emphasizes the need for gender analysis, which involves the systematic examination of gender differences and social relations in a given context to inform policy and practice (Hannam, 2022). Second, gender mainstreaming advocates equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, recognizing that their perspectives and experiences are crucial for shaping effective and inclusive policies (Mehra & Gupta, 2006). Third, it calls for institutional transformation, which involves modifying organizational structures, cultures, and practices to support gender equality (Shackleton, 2007). Finally, accountability mechanisms must be established to ensure that commitments to gender equality are translated into actions and measurable outcomes (Alemany et al., 2008).

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Development

To fully appreciate the intricacies of gender mainstreaming, it is essential to engage with the theoretical perspectives that have shaped the discourse on gender and its development. Feminist theories provide a critical lens through which gender inequalities can be examined and transformative change advocated (Dill & Kohlman, 2012). These theories challenge traditional notions of gender roles and highlight how patriarchal systems perpetuate power imbalances and discrimination. Different strands of feminist theory, such as liberal, radical, socialist, and postcolonial feminism, offer varied insights into the root causes of gender inequality and the strategies needed to address them.

Liberal feminism focuses on achieving gender equality through legal reforms and policy changes that ensure equal opportunities for women and men in the workplace. It advocates for removing structural barriers that prevent women from fully participating in economic, political, and social life. In contrast, radical feminism emphasizes the need to dismantle patriarchal systems and structures that oppress women. This calls for a fundamental reordering of society to eradicate gender-based power imbalances. Socialist feminism combines insights from Marxist theory and feminism to analyze the intersections of gender, class, and economic exploitation, arguing for systemic changes to achieve both gender and economic justice. Postcolonial feminism highlights the specific experiences of women in postcolonial contexts, emphasizing how colonial histories and global power dynamics shape gender relations (Delmar, 2018).

Intersectionality is another crucial theoretical perspective for understanding gender mainstreaming. Intersectionality refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations, such as race, class, and gender, which create overlapping systems of discrimination and disadvantage. This framework is essential for analyzing how multiple identities intersect to shape women's experiences, particularly those of marginalized groups. Intersectionality challenges the one-size-fits-all approach to gender equality and underscores the importance of addressing the diverse and complex realities faced by women (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013).

These theoretical perspectives, together with the conceptual framework for gender mainstreaming, provide a basic understanding of the principles involved in promoting gender equality in development. This underscores the need for holistic and inclusive approaches that account for the diverse experiences of women and men and the structural changes required to achieve meaningful and sustainable progress. This framework serves as a guide for the subsequent analysis of global progress and challenges in mainstreaming gender in development over the past 25 years.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a systematic literature review to evaluate the global progress and challenges of gender mainstreaming in development over the past 25 years (1999–2024). A multi-step methodology was followed to ensure a structured and comprehensive analysis. The first stage involved data collection, where a thorough search was conducted using academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, along with institutional repositories from the United Nations, World Bank, and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The focus was on peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and evaluation studies published within the specified timeframe.

The search terms included gender mainstreaming, gender equality in development, the Beijing Platform for Action, gender-sensitive policy, institutional mechanisms for gender equality, and regional gender equality trends. The inclusion criteria required studies published in English that examined gender mainstreaming initiatives at the global, regional, or national level, particularly empirical research, policy analyses, and program evaluation reports. Documents discussing gender mainstreaming efforts in various sectors, such as education, healthcare, governance, and economic development, were prioritized. Conversely, non-peer-reviewed sources with limited empirical backing, theoretical discussions without policy implications, and studies outside the review timeline were excluded.

After data collection, the literature was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Thematic categorization was used to classify the key findings. A triangulation approach was employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Cross-validation of sources was performed by analyzing multiple references for consistency in the conclusions. Expert consultations with gender specialists and policymakers provided additional verification of the interpretations. Furthermore, a longitudinal assessment was conducted to track policy evolution and shifts in gender-mainstreaming effectiveness over a 25-year period.

Despite its comprehensive approach, the focus on English-language publications may have resulted in the exclusion of relevant studies from non-English-speaking countries. Additionally, variations in data availability across different regions and sectors pose challenges for comparative analyses. Future research could benefit from incorporating primary data collection methods, such as interviews and case studies, to deepen the contextual understanding of the impacts of gender mainstreaming.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Global Progress in Gender Mainstreaming

The past 25 years have witnessed significant strides in gender mainstreaming across the globe, driven by a combination of international agreements, national policies, institutional mechanisms, and sectoral achievements. This progress emphasizes the concerted efforts to integrate gender perspectives into

development policies and practices, ensuring that both women and men benefit equally and that gender inequalities are comprehensively addressed.

4.2 Policy and Legal Frameworks

One of the key drivers of progress in gender mainstreaming is the establishment of robust policy and legal frameworks at both the international and national levels (Hannan, 2022). International agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have provided a critical foundation for promoting gender equality. CEDAW, often described as an international bill of rights for women, has been instrumental in obligating signatory countries to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal access to opportunities for women. Similarly, the SDGs, particularly Goal 5 on gender equality, have galvanized global efforts to mainstream gender across various sectors and development agendas (Fredman, 2018; Koehler, 2016; Nanda, Nayak, & Goldstein, 2020).

Many countries have enacted policies and legislation to support gender mainstreaming at the national level. These include gender equality laws, national gender policies, and action plans that mandate the integration of gender considerations into all areas of governance and development in the country. For instance, Rwanda and Sweden have implemented comprehensive gender policies that have significantly advanced gender equality in various spheres of life. These national frameworks often draw from international commitments, adapting them to local contexts to address specific gender-related challenges (Kagaba, 2015; Levto, Barker, Contreras-Urbina, Heilman, & Verma, 2014). In Ghana, reference can be made to Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) spearheaded by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection with support from the Ministry of Finance (Asiedu, 2023; Bans-Akutey, 2025).

4.3 Institutional Mechanisms

Effective institutional mechanisms are crucial for translating policy commitments into action. Over the years, numerous countries have established gender focal points, commissions and ministries dedicated to gender equality. These entities play a vital role in coordinating and monitoring gender mainstreaming efforts, ensuring that gender perspectives are systematically incorporated into all stages of policy development and implementation in the Philippines. For example, gender ministries in countries such as Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa have been pivotal in driving national gender agendas and promoting gender-responsive budgeting (Asiedu, 2023; Kagaba, 2015; Levto et al., 2014).

Moreover, the integration of gender into governmental and non-governmental organizations is a significant achievement. Such organizations now have dedicated gender units or specialists who work to mainstream gender in their programs and operations (Aina, Ogunlade, & Ilesanmi, 2015). The institutionalization of gender mainstreaming helps create a supportive environment for gender equality initiatives, fostering collaboration and accountability across different sectors and levels of governance.

4.4 Sectoral Achievements

Gender mainstreaming has yielded notable achievements across various sectors, contributing to improved outcomes for both women and men. In the education sector, efforts to close gender gaps in access and outcomes have led to significant progress (Aina et al., 2015; Khaneghahi, Sefatgol, & Siyasar, 2022). Countries such as Bangladesh and Kenya have implemented policies to promote girls' education, resulting in increased enrollment rates and reduced gender disparities in primary and secondary education (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). These initiatives often include measures such as scholarships for girls, gender-sensitive curricula, and community engagement to address cultural barriers to education.

In the health sector, there have been substantial improvements in maternal health and access to reproductive services (Baron, 2022; Dingle, Powell-Jackson, & Goodman, 2013; Snow, Laski, & Mutumba, 2015). Initiatives such as the Safe Motherhood program and increased investments in healthcare infrastructure have reduced maternal mortality rates and enhanced women's access to prenatal and postnatal care (Barker, Bird, Pradhan, & Shakya, 2007; Pathak et al., 2000). Countries

such as Nepal and Ethiopia have made remarkable progress in expanding healthcare services to remote and underserved areas, ensuring that more women receive the care they need.

Economic participation has also progressed, with more women entering the workforce and engaging in entrepreneurship. Policies aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment, such as microfinance programs and skills training, have enabled women to contribute more significantly to their economies (Mayoux 1998; Nguse et al. 2022). For example, microfinance initiatives in countries like India and Nigeria have provided women with the financial resources and support to start and grow their businesses, improving their economic status and livelihoods (Babalola, Mhlongo, Obinyeluaku, Oladayo, & Daraojimba, 2023; Ganzon & Edig, 2022; Hammawa & Hashim, 2016; Samineni & Ramesh, 2023; Sulistio & Hutagalung, 2022).

In the area of political participation, there has been an increase in women's representation in decision-making roles. Gender quotas and other affirmative action measures have been implemented in various countries to ensure that women have a voice in political affairs. Rwanda stands out as a leader in this regard, with women holding a significant proportion of parliamentary seats, demonstrating the impact of targeted policies and strong political will (Bauer and Burnet, 2013). These achievements provide a solid foundation for continued efforts to mainstream gender in the development sector. This will ensure that all individuals, regardless of gender, can contribute to and benefit from sustainable development efforts.

4.5 Regional Analysis

4.5.1 Africa

Africa has made notable strides in gender mainstreaming, driven by regional and national initiatives. Key achievements include the adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the establishment of the African Union's Gender Policy (faolex.fao.org, 2009; Mujuzi, 2008). Countries such as Rwanda and Uganda have implemented progressive gender policies, resulting in significant improvements in women's political participation and economic empowerment (Chouchou Lyliane, 2022). Rwanda, in particular, has achieved gender parity in its parliament, setting an example globally. However, persistent challenges remain, such as entrenched patriarchal norms, limited access to education and healthcare for women, and economic disparities (Sarwar & Farid, 2024). These issues are compounded by conflicts and political instability in some regions, which disproportionately affect women and girls in these regions.

4.5.2 Asia

In Asia, progress in gender equality and women's empowerment varies widely across countries and regions. For example, nations such as Bangladesh and the Philippines have made commendable advances in closing gender gaps in education and health while improving women's economic participation through targeted policies and programs (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). Microfinance initiatives and vocational training programs have empowered many women economically, which is remarkable. However, cultural and structural barriers continue to impede progress. Deep-seated patriarchal attitudes, gender-based violence, and discriminatory practices such as dowry and early marriage persist in many parts of the region (UNICEF, 2019). These deep-seated practices impede further progress in the fight for gender equality in the country. Additionally, women often face significant challenges in accessing leadership positions and participating in decision-making processes (Islam et al., 2023).

4.5.3 Europe

Europe has extensively institutionalized gender mainstreaming, particularly within the European Union (EU). The EU's gender equality policies and directives have fostered significant progress in areas such as employment, education, and political representation (Porumbescu & Pogan, 2021). Countries such as Sweden and Norway are leaders in gender equality, with comprehensive policies and high levels of women's participation in the workforce and politics. However, variations among member states exist, with Eastern and Southern European countries lagging behind in some aspects of gender equality in

areas such as political representation, labor market participation, wage equality, and social attitudes towards gender roles (Rubery, 2013). Economic disparities, cultural differences, and varying levels of commitment to gender mainstreaming contribute to these inconsistencies.

4.5.4 Latin America and the Caribbean

In Latin America and the Caribbean, significant success has been achieved in policy implementation aimed at promoting gender equality. Countries such as Argentina and Brazil have enacted robust gender policies and have seen improvements in women's health and education (Piscopo, 2014). Efforts to combat gender-based violence and promote reproductive rights are noteworthy. Despite these advances, social and economic inequality remains pervasive. High levels of poverty, gender-based violence, and limited political participation for women are persistent challenges. Indigenous and rural women face multiple layers of discrimination and exclusion (Franceschet, 2010; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008).

4.5.5 Middle East and North Africa

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has seen advances in women's rights, often driven by international pressure and domestic advocacy (Kelly, 2010). Countries such as Tunisia and Morocco have implemented legal reforms to enhance women's rights and protections. However, the region is characterized by significant gender disparities influenced by cultural and political factors (Mojtahedi, 2015). Patriarchal norms, restrictive laws, and limited access to education and employment opportunities for women continue to hinder progress. Additionally, political unrest and conflict in several countries exacerbate the vulnerabilities of women and girls, thereby impeding efforts toward gender equality.

4.5.6 North America

In North America, gender mainstreaming trends reveal both progress and ongoing challenges. The United States and Canada have made significant strides in promoting gender equality through policy measures, workplace reforms, and advocacy for women's rights (Sweigart, 2012). Canada, in particular, has a strong record of gender mainstreaming in public policies and international development programs (Brodie, 2008). However, policy shifts and societal impacts in the United States, especially in recent years, have shown a diverse picture. Issues such as the gender pay gap, reproductive rights, and representation in political and corporate leadership positions remain areas of concern (Mandel and Semyonov, 2014). Social movements such as #MeToo have drawn increased attention to gender-based violence and harassment, prompting calls for further action and reform (González-López & Cabrera, 2021).

4.6 Persistent Challenges and Barriers in Gender Mainstreaming

Despite significant global progress in gender mainstreaming, persistent challenges and barriers hinder the full realization of gender equality. These challenges involve structural, political, institutional, and intersectional dimensions that require comprehensive and sustained efforts to address.

4.6.1 Structural and Systemic Barriers

One of the most pervasive barriers to gender mainstreaming is the persistence of patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes in society. These deeply entrenched beliefs perpetuate the notion of male superiority and female subordination, affecting all aspects of society, from the family unit to the workplace. Such norms dictate gender roles and expectations, often limiting women's opportunities and reinforcing discriminatory practices. For instance, in many cultures, women are still primarily seen as caregivers, which restricts their participation in the labor market and governance issues (Blaydes, Gengler, & Lari, 2021). Efforts to challenge and change these norms are crucial, but they require long-term commitment and societal transformation.

Economic inequality and resource allocation also pose significant barriers to gender mainstreaming. Women generally have less access to economic resources, including land, credit, and income-generating opportunities than men. This economic disparity is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. Limited access to resources hampers women's ability to invest in education, health, and entrepreneurship, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and dependence. Furthermore, resource allocation in

many countries remains gender-biased, with insufficient investment in programs that specifically target women's needs and empowerment (Babalola et al., 2023). Addressing economic inequalities requires policies that promote equal access to resources and opportunities for both women and men.

4.6.2 Political and Institutional Challenges

A lack of political will and leadership is another critical barrier to effective gender mainstreaming. While many countries have adopted gender equality policies, their implementation often falls short due to insufficient commitment from political leaders (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021; Lowndes, 2020). Gender equality frequently competes with other policy priorities, and without strong advocacy and leadership, it is sidelined. Political will is essential for enacting and enforcing laws that protect women's rights and ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into all areas of governance. Building political commitment involves engaging leaders at all levels, fostering accountability, and promoting the value of gender equality as fundamental to sustainable development. Without political will, outcomes will always fall short of expectations.

Insufficient funding and resources further exacerbate the challenges of gender mainstreaming. Gender equality initiatives often suffer from inadequate financial support, limiting their scope and effectiveness (Asiedu 2023). Budgetary constraints hinder the development and implementation of gender-responsive programs, from healthcare and education to economic empowerment and political participation. Ensuring that sufficient resources are allocated to gender equality requires not only increasing overall funding but also adopting gender-responsive budgeting practices that prioritize women's needs and contributions in national and local budgets.

4.6.3 Intersectional Discrimination

Intersectional discrimination represents a complex layer of challenges in gender mainstreaming. Women from marginalized groups, Indigenous women, and women with disabilities often face multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination (Hankivsky & Hunting, 2022). These intersections exacerbate their vulnerability and exclusion, making it even more difficult to achieve gender equality in the workplace. For example, Indigenous women might experience discrimination not only based on their gender but also their ethnicity, leading to compounded barriers in accessing education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Similarly, women with disabilities face discrimination and societal acceptance, further limiting their participation and visibility.

Several cases highlighting intersectional challenges illustrate the diverse and interconnected nature of these barriers. For instance, in India, Dalit women face caste- and gender-based discrimination, resulting in severe social and economic disadvantages. In the United States, women of color experience higher poverty rates and limited access to healthcare, reflecting the intersection of race and gender (Hankivsky & Hunting, 2022). Addressing intersectional discrimination requires an inclusive approach that recognizes and addresses the specific needs and experiences of all women, particularly those from marginalized communities (Anzari, Ikhwan, & Syukriah, 2024). Policies and programs must be designed to address the multiple dimensions of inequality, ensuring that no one is left behind.

In conclusion, the persistent challenges and barriers to gender mainstreaming highlight the need for comprehensive and intersectional approaches to achieve gender equality. Structural and systemic barriers, political and institutional challenges, and intersectional discrimination must be addressed through coordinated efforts involving policy reforms, increased resources, and societal change. By recognizing and addressing these multifaceted issues, the global community can make meaningful progress towards a more equitable and inclusive world.

4.7 Case Studies of Successful Gender Mainstreaming

Successful gender mainstreaming cases provide valuable insights into the strategies and outcomes that have contributed to gender equality in different contexts. Three notable examples are Rwanda's gender-responsive policies, Sweden's gender equality model, and India's self-help groups for women's empowerment. These case studies highlight effective approaches and lessons learned from their implementation, offering models that can inform global gender mainstreaming efforts.

4.7.1 Rwanda's Gender-Responsive Policies

Rwanda stands out as a remarkable example of gender mainstreaming, particularly after the 1994 genocide. The genocide had a devastating impact on the country, leading to a significant loss of life and severe social and economic disruption. During its rebuilding process, Rwanda recognized the critical role of women in national development and adopted gender-responsive policies to promote gender equality. Key strategies included establishing a strong legal and policy framework that mandated gender equality in all spheres of life. The Rwandan Constitution of 2003 enshrined gender equality and required women to occupy at least 30% of positions in decision-making bodies. Additionally, the government has implemented gender budgeting, ensuring that national and local budgets address the specific needs of women and promote their empowerment (Niyonzima & Bayu, 2023).

The outcomes of these strategies are impressive. Rwanda boasts one of the highest rates of female parliamentary representation in the world, with women holding over 60% of the seats in the national legislature. This political inclusion has translated into gender-sensitive legislation and policies that address issues such as gender-based violence, reproductive health, and economic empowerment. The success of Rwanda's gender-responsive policies underscores the importance of strong political will, legal mandates, and inclusive governance in advancing gender equality (Niyonzima & Bayu, 2023).

4.7.2 Sweden's Gender Equality Model

Sweden is often hailed as a global leader in gender equality, with a comprehensive policy framework and effective implementation strategy. Norway's approach to gender mainstreaming is characterized by the integration of gender perspectives into all aspects of public policy and a commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for women and men (Larsen, Moss, & Skjelsbæk, 2021). Sweden's policy framework includes the Gender Equality Act, which mandates equal treatment in employment, and the Discrimination Act, which addresses gender-based discrimination in various sectors. Additionally, Sweden has adopted a gender-mainstreaming strategy that requires all government agencies to integrate gender perspectives into their operations and policies.

The success factors in Sweden's model include strong institutional mechanisms, such as the Swedish Gender Equality Agency, which coordinates and monitors gender equality efforts. Public awareness and educational campaigns have also played a crucial role in shifting societal attitudes towards gender roles and norms. Furthermore, generous parental leave policies and affordable childcare services have facilitated women's participation in the workforce and promoted more balanced sharing of domestic responsibilities. Sweden's experience highlights the importance of comprehensive legislation, institutional support, and societal buy-in for successful gender mainstreaming in the military. The country's proactive approach demonstrates that sustained political commitment and inclusive policies can lead to significant advancements in gender equality (Larsen et al., 2021).

4.7.3 India's Self-Help Groups for Women's Empowerment

In India, self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged as powerful tools for women's empowerment, particularly in rural areas. These groups, which typically consist of 10-20 women, provide a platform for collective action and mutual support, enabling women to access financial resources, skills training and social networks (Anand, Saxena, Gonzales Martinez, & Dang, 2020). The development of SHGs has been supported by government programs and non-governmental organizations that facilitate the formation and functioning of these groups. Key strategies include providing microcredit to SHG members, offering training in entrepreneurship and vocational skills, and fostering a sense of solidarity and collective bargaining power among women in the community.

The impact of SHGs is profound. Women involved in SHGs have reported increased income, improved access to healthcare and education, and greater participation in community decision-making processes. SHGs have also contributed to changes in gender norms, with women gaining more confidence and respect within their families and communities than before. The replicability and scalability of SHGs are significant issues. The model has been adapted and implemented in various states across India, demonstrating its potential to empower women on a large scale in India. However, the success of SHGs

depends on sustained support, including access to credit, continuous training, and the creation of an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship (Anand et al. 2020). The cases of Rwanda, Sweden, and India illustrate diverse, yet effective, approaches to gender mainstreaming. They highlight the importance of strong legal frameworks, institutional support, and grassroots initiatives in advancing gender equality.

4.8 The Case of Ghana

Ghana presents a compelling case study in the context of gender mainstreaming, showcasing both progress and persistent challenges in pursuing gender equality. The country has made notable strides in recent years, driven by a combination of government policies, international commitments, and grassroots activism (Asiedu, 2023). However, significant barriers remain, necessitating ongoing efforts and innovative approaches to achieve gender equality.

Ghana's commitment to gender equality is evident in its legal and policy framework. The 1992 Constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women, and subsequent legislation, such as the Domestic Violence Act (2007) and Human Trafficking Act (2005), further stresses this commitment. The country is also a signatory to international agreements such as CEDAW and the African Union's Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. These frameworks provide a solid foundation for promoting gender equality and protecting women's rights in Saudi Arabia. (Madsen, Gouws, & Chiweza, 2021).

Institutional mechanisms have been established to support gender mainstreaming. The Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MoGCSP) plays a central role in coordinating and implementing gender-related policies and programs. Additionally, the establishment of gender desks within various governmental departments and the formation of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Gender and Children highlight Ghana's efforts to integrate gender perspectives across different sectors (Madsen et al., 2021).

Ghana has made significant progress in closing the gender gap in education. Policies aimed at increasing girls' enrolment and retention in school have yielded positive results. The implementation of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) program and initiatives such as the Ghana School Feeding Program have contributed to higher attendance rates among girls. However, challenges such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and cultural attitudes towards girls' education continue to affect educational outcomes for women and girls (Madsen et al., 2021).

Health is another sector in which Ghana has seen improvements, particularly in maternal health. Efforts to increase access to antenatal care, skilled birth attendance, and reproductive health services have led to a decline in maternal mortality rates. Programs such as the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) have played a crucial role in making healthcare more accessible to women in South Korea. Nevertheless, disparities in healthcare access between urban and rural areas, as well as issues related to sexual and reproductive health rights, remain significant challenges (Madsen et al., 2021).

Economic participation and empowerment of women in Ghana have also been areas of focus. Women's involvement in the labor force has increased, and there are numerous initiatives aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs, such as the Microfinance and Small Loans Center (MASLOC). Despite these efforts, women still face barriers such as limited access to credit, land, and other productive resources. Informal sector work, where many women are employed, often lacks social protection and adequate wages, perpetuating economic vulnerability (Asiedu, 2023).

The political participation of women in Ghana has gradually improved, with women occupying various leadership positions at the local and national levels. However, the representation of women in parliament and other decision-making bodies remains below the desired threshold. Efforts to promote women's political participation include advocacy campaigns and capacity-building programs for female candidates. Societal attitudes and structural barriers, such as the high cost of running for office and political patronage systems, continue to hinder women's full participation in politics (Madsen et al. 2021).

Despite the progress made, Ghana faces persistent challenges in achieving gender equality. Patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes continue to influence social and cultural attitudes, affecting all aspects of women's lives. Economic inequality, inadequate funding for gender-related programs, and intersectional discrimination further complicate efforts to mainstream gender. Additionally, more comprehensive data collection and analysis are needed to inform policies and effectively track progress (Madsen et al., 2021).

In conclusion, Ghana's experience with gender mainstreaming highlights both its significant achievements and ongoing challenges. The country has established a strong legal and institutional framework and made notable strides in education, health, economic participation and political representation. However, overcoming deeply rooted cultural norms and economic barriers and ensuring sustained commitment and adequate resources are crucial for advancing gender equality. By addressing these challenges and leveraging innovative approaches, Ghana can continue to build on its progress and move towards a more equitable and inclusive society.

4.9 Future Directions and Recommendations in Gender Mainstreaming

As the world continues to strive for gender equality, future directions and recommendations for gender mainstreaming emphasize innovative approaches, policy and advocacy efforts, and the importance of research and data collection. These areas are essential for sustaining and advancing progress made thus far and addressing the persistent barriers that hinder full gender equality.

4.10 Innovative Approaches and Best Practices

One promising avenue for advancing gender equality is leveraging digital tools and technology. Digital platforms can provide women with access to information, education, and economic opportunities that were previously unavailable. For instance, mobile banking and e-commerce platforms enable women, especially in remote areas, to participate in the economy by starting and growing businesses through these platforms. Additionally, online education and training programs can empower women with the skills required to compete in the modern workforce. Thus, the integration of digital tools in gender mainstreaming initiatives can play a transformative role in bridging gender gaps and fostering inclusion.

Community-based and participatory approaches also hold significant potential for advancing gender equity. These approaches involve engaging communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of gender-related programs and policies. By involving women and men at the grassroots level, these initiatives ensure that interventions are culturally relevant and address the community's specific needs and priorities. Participatory approaches empower women by giving them a voice in decision-making processes and fostering a sense of ownership and agency among them. Successful examples include community-led health programs, gender-sensitive education initiatives, and local economic empowerment projects that have demonstrated positive outcomes in various contexts.

4.11 Policy and Advocacy Recommendations

Strengthening political commitment and accountability is crucial for the sustained success of gender-mainstreaming efforts. This involves ensuring that gender equality remains a top priority on national and international agenda. Governments and organizations need to demonstrate political will through the adoption and enforcement of gender equality laws, policies, and action plans. Additionally, establishing mechanisms for accountability, such as gender audits and regular progress reports, can help maintain momentum and ensure that commitments are translated into tangible outcomes.

Increasing funding and resource allocation for gender mainstreaming is an essential recommendation. Adequate financial resources are necessary for the effective implementation of gender-sensitive programs and initiatives. Governments and development partners should prioritize funding for gender equality and ensure that budget allocations reflect the needs of both women and men. Gender-responsive budgeting, which integrates gender perspectives into the budgeting process, can help achieve this by ensuring that resources are allocated equitably and used to address gender disparity.

4.12 Research and Data Needs

Enhancing gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis is fundamental to informed decision-making and effective gender mainstreaming. Reliable data distinguishing between the experiences and outcomes of women and men are critical for identifying gender gaps and measuring progress. Governments and organizations should invest in robust data collection systems that capture gender-specific information across various sectors, including health, education, employment, and political participation. These data can inform the development of targeted interventions and policies that address the unique challenges faced by women and men.

Future research should explore the intersections of gender with other forms of identity and discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, and disability. Understanding how these intersecting identities impact individuals' experiences can provide a more comprehensive view of gender inequality and inform more inclusive and effective gender mainstreaming strategies. Additionally, research should examine the long-term impacts of gender equality initiatives to identify best practices and lessons learned, which can guide future efforts.

Future directions and recommendations for gender mainstreaming highlight the need for innovative approaches, strengthened policy and advocacy efforts, and robust research and data collection. By leveraging digital tools, engaging communities, ensuring political commitment, allocating sufficient resources, and enhancing data systems, the global community can continue to advance gender equality and create a more inclusive and equitable world.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

The past decade has witnessed remarkable progress in gender mainstreaming. Major achievements include the establishment of comprehensive legal and policy frameworks at both the national and international levels, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which explicitly call for gender equality. These frameworks have facilitated improvements in various sectors, including education, health, economic participation, and political representation. Despite these advancements, challenges and barriers remain. Structural and systemic barriers, such as entrenched patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes, continue to limit women's opportunities and rights.

Economic inequalities persist, with women often having less access to resources and opportunities than men. Political and institutional challenges, including a lack of political will and insufficient funding for gender equality initiatives, hinder progress in this regard. Additionally, intersectional discrimination affecting marginalized groups, such as Indigenous women and women with disabilities, complicates efforts to achieve comprehensive gender equality. These challenges highlight the need for continuous and enhanced efforts to address the multifaceted nature of gender inequality in Saudi Arabia. The findings from the analysis of global gender mainstreaming progress have significant implications for development policies and practices. Sustained efforts and innovation are crucial for overcoming the persistent barriers to gender equality.

Governments, organizations, and stakeholders must remain committed to gender equality as a fundamental goal and integrate gender perspectives into all aspects of policy-making and program implementation. This includes ensuring that gender equality initiatives are adequately funded and supported by robust legal and institutional frameworks. Innovation plays a vital role in advancing gender equality in the workplace. Leveraging digital tools and technology can provide new opportunities for women and help to bridge existing gaps. Community-based and participatory approaches can ensure that gender mainstreaming efforts are culturally relevant and address the specific needs of various communities. Continuous learning and adaptation are necessary to respond to emerging challenges and changing contexts of the field.

In conclusion, while significant progress has been made in gender mainstreaming, the journey towards full gender equality is ongoing and requires concerted efforts from all sectors of society. The

achievements thus far demonstrate the potential for change, but persistent challenges underscore the need for sustained commitment and innovative approaches. By working together, leveraging new technologies, and ensuring inclusive and participatory processes, the global community can advance towards a more equitable and inclusive future for all.

5.2 Limitation

The study is limited to published articles, which do not provide a detailed state of affairs of the countries represented in the study.

5.3 Suggestion

A call to action by governments, organizations, and stakeholders is essential to drive further progress. Political leaders must demonstrate a strong commitment to gender equality by setting clear targets and accountability mechanisms to track progress. International organizations and development partners should prioritize gender equality in their agendas and provide the necessary support and resources to implement effective initiatives to this end. Civil society organizations and grassroots movements must intensify advocacy for gender equality and hold governments accountable.

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