

# GENDER MAINSTREAMING AS INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION? GENDER BUDGETING, VELVET TRIANGLES, AND (GOOD) PRACTICES

Giovanna Vingelli  
Universidad de Calabria

## ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the understanding of gender mainstreaming as an institutional innovation, examining the case of gender budgeting. It begins, in section one, by identifying themes in existing gender mainstreaming literature, and then in section two considering the potential of gender budgeting to tackle institutional innovation in Australia and Great Britain. Underlying both sections are questions about the subjects involved in the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies. In order to answer to those questions, the last section deals with the concept of velvet triangle as analytic lens to understand how strategic alliances among actors might result in gender sensitive public policy.

KEYWORDS: gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting, velvet triangle, innovation.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo considera la transversalidad de género como una innovación institucional, y se centra en el análisis de los presupuestos destinados a género. Comienza identificando los temas más recurrentes en la literatura sobre transversalidad para tomar luego en cuenta el potencial de la presupuestación para innovar institucionalmente, según los análisis de los casos australiano y británico. Ambos temas descansan sobre consideraciones en torno a qué sujetos están implicados en la ejecución de las estrategias correspondientes. Para enfocar dichas cuestiones, la última sección trata el concepto del triángulo de terciopelo como lente analítica desde la que entender cómo las alianzas estratégicas forjadas por diversos actores podrían llevar a una política de sensibilización pública con respecto al género.

PALABRAS CLAVE: transversalidad de género, presupuestos de género, triángulo de terciopelo, innovación.

## GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND GENDER SENSITIVE BUDGETS

In the 1990s, *mainstreaming* has become a dominant theme in gender equality policies worldwide. Equality of treatment between women and men has also become a prominent part of the EU agenda. Member States have agreed that a gender equality



perspective should be integrated into all policy areas, an approach referred to as «gender mainstreaming». Gender mainstreaming or «*the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making*»<sup>1</sup> is the fundamental principle for equal visibility, empowerment and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life.

Gender mainstreaming involves not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilizing all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account at the planning stage their possible effects on the respective situation of men and women (gender perspective). This means systematically examining measures and policies and taking into account such possible effect when defining and implementing them. (European Commission, 1996)

#### THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE DEFINITION HAS BEEN WIDELY ADOPTED:

[...] because it accentuates gender equality as an objective, and not women as a target group, and because it emphasizes that gender mainstreaming is a strategy. [...] The essential element in this definition of the strategy of gender mainstreaming is its accent on what needs to be changed, targeting policy processes as the main change object. Gender mainstreaming, according to this definition, is about (re)organizing procedures and routines, about (re)organizing responsibilities and capacities for the incorporation of a gender equality perspective<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, gender mainstreaming can be understood as a transformative strategy/approach<sup>3</sup> and a set of tools and processes which help to integrate a gender perspective into all policies.

As a strategy for achieving gender equality, gender mainstreaming involves a process of incremental change in policies, strategies and activities. The long term objective is that attention to gender equality will pervade all policies, strategies and activities so that women and men influence, participate in, and benefit equitably from all interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Gender Mainstreaming. Conceptual Framework, Methodology and Presentation of Good Practices*. Final Report of Activities of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming [EG-S-MS (98)2], Strasbourg, 1998, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> M. VERLOO, *Another Velvet Revolution? Gender Mainstreaming and the Politics of Implementation*, IWM Working Paper No. 5, Vienna, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Many authors have debated the theoretical premises of gender mainstreaming, with a special attention devoted to its «transformative potential»: Jahan; Rees, Squires, Verloo, Beveridge and Nott, Shaw, Booth & Bennet, Ferree, Daly, Lombardo. Interest has also been directed to the relationship between gender mainstreaming and feminist claims: Bacchi & Eveline, Daly, Hankivsky, Walby, Verloo, or Lombardo & Meier. See J. SQUIRES, *The New Politics of Gender Equality*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 45.



Gender mainstreaming has been gaining momentum during the last decades. Since its introduction in key documents such as the Beijing Conference or the IV Communitarian Action Programme, it has become part of gender policies in a wide variety of countries and institutions. This means that the dual-track strategy (specific actions + gender mainstreaming) is commonly accepted. Gender mainstreaming is, thus, both a political concept and a challenge, in terms of range and the nature of change required<sup>4</sup>: «Gender Mainstreaming is a gender equality strategy that aims to transform organizational processes and practices by eliminating gender biases in existing routines, involving the regular actors in this transformation process»<sup>5</sup>. As many authors point out, its transformative approach is the main strength connected with gender mainstreaming<sup>6</sup>. In fact, this strategy announces the transformation of gender relations as the core objective. As opposed to the previous types of policies, it does not try to eliminate the symptoms of the problem but the roots. Scholars have paid also attention to some weaknesses linked to gender mainstreaming. Some argued that there is a primary contradiction between its transformative aims and its bureaucratic means, with a strong prevalence of technocratic procedures over the structural aims<sup>7</sup>. In addition, despite this outstanding diffusion, gender mainstreaming is far from being actually embedded in policy-making: when it comes to implementation, gender mainstreaming has been rarely put into practice<sup>8</sup>. Being not a compulsory procedure, its implementation actually relies on the will of each structure as well as on the power of persuasion of the promoters<sup>9</sup>. Finally, «Mainstreaming should not be pushed in relation to gender alone»<sup>10</sup>, while «the relationship of gender mainstreaming with other complex inequalities is one of the major issues in current gender mainstreaming analysis»<sup>11</sup>. Intersectionality is an approach to understanding the differences among women and

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<sup>4</sup> E. HAFNER-BURTON & M. POLLACK, «Mainstreaming gender in the European Union». *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 7.3 (2000), pp. 432-56.

<sup>5</sup> Y. BENSCHOP & M. VERLOO, «‘Sisyphus’ sisters: Can gender mainstreaming escape the genderedness of organizations?» *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 15.1 (2006), pp. 19–33, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> M. DALY, «Gender mainstreaming in theory and practice». *Social Politics: International studies in Gender, State & Society*, vol. 12.3 (2005), pp. 433-450; F. BEVERIDGE, S. NOTT & K. STEPHEN, «Mainstreaming and the engendering of policy-making: A means to an end?» *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 7.3 (2000), pp. 385–405; A. WOODWARD, *Gender mainstreaming in European Policy: Innovation or deception?* Discussion paper FS 01-103, 2001; M. VERLOO, *op. cit.* (2001).

<sup>7</sup> H. CHARLESWORTH, «Not waving but drowning: Gender mainstreaming and Human Rights in The United Nations», <http://www.law.harvard.edu/students/orgs/hjr/iss18/charlesworth.shtml>, 2006; A. WOODWARD, *op. cit.* (2001).

<sup>8</sup> Y. Benschop & M. Verloo, *op. cit.* (2006); J. Squires, «Is mainstreaming transformative? Theorizing mainstreaming in the context of diversity and deliberation». *Social Politics*, vol. 12.3 (2005), pp. 366-388; L. Móssessdóttir & R. Erlingsdóttir, «Spreading the word across Europe. Gender Mainstreaming as a political and policy project». *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 7.4 (2005), pp. 513-531; J. Rubery, J., «Gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the EU: The impact of the EU employment strategy». *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 33.5 (2002), pp. 500-522.

<sup>9</sup> Y. BENSCHOP & M. VERLOO, *op. cit.* (2006); Staudt, 2003; Mazey, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> J. SQUIRES, *op. cit.* (2007), p.46.

<sup>11</sup> S. WALBY, *op. cit.* (2005).

among men and the ways that these differences interact to exacerbate marginalisation. It identifies subordination not solely as an issue of gender or race or class inequalities, but as a location where there are often simultaneous and compounding relationships of subordination. The fact that multiple inequalities are not independent means that diversity mainstreaming cannot be a simple extrapolation of gender mainstreaming<sup>12</sup>.

In advancing a programme of mainstreaming equality across the policy process, gender impact analysis of budget systems and spending proposals proves a useful and effective tool. Gender-responsive budget initiatives are thus a gender mainstreaming strategy/tool that directs attention to economic policy by focusing on government budgets<sup>13</sup>. Gender-sensitive budgets (or gender budgets), refer to a variety of processes and tools aimed at facilitating an assessment of the gendered impacts of government budgets. In the evolution of these exercises, the focus has been on auditing government budgets for their impact on women and girls<sup>14</sup>. It is important to recognize that *gender-sensitive budgets* are not separate budgets for women, or for men. They are attempts to break down, or disaggregate the government's mainstream budget according to its impact on women and men—and different groups of women and men—with cognizance being given to the society's underpinning gender relations. As such, gender budgets can make significant contributions in terms of equity, equality, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and transparency<sup>15</sup>. A key characteristic of gender budgets is that they go beyond specifically targeted programs for women and girls and seek to increase awareness (or visibility) of the gender impact of all programs and their resource allocations. In doing so, gender budgets seek to challenge long-held assumptions of «gender neutrality» of the budget impact on women and men as well as men and women of different socio-economic classes, ages, locality, sexuality, ethnicity, and so on.

To date, more than 60 countries worldwide have conducted some kind of gender budgeting initiatives. These initiatives have been carried out at the national, sub-national and local levels, and are based within the government or outside of it, sometimes seeking to bridge the two. Mainly they have involved a multilayered and multi-stakeholder process, blending together research, analysis and advocacy<sup>16</sup>.

There are many diverse players that are crucial in taking, promoting and implementing gender budgeting initiatives. The government ultimately must incorporate gender among the criteria that drive the allocation of resources. It's a matter of political will, as well as bureaucratic procedures. However, civil society (and women's/ feminist movement), in its many diverse forms, plays a crucial role in opening up debates and advocating for issues that are usually covered with secrecy, such as the budget. Consequently, gender budgeting can be based within the government—either in the executive or the legislature— or outside of it, in initiatives emanating from

<sup>12</sup> See: J. RILEY, *op. cit.* (2004); S. WALBY, *op. cit.* (2004); O. HANKIVSKY, *op. cit.* (2005); A. WOODWARD, *op. cit.* (2004); J. SQUIRES, *op. cit.* (2005 y 2007); M. VERLOO, *op. cit.* (2006).

<sup>13</sup> R. SHARP, *op. cit.* (2003).

<sup>14</sup> M.M. RUBIN & J.R. BARTLE, *op. cit.* (2005).

<sup>15</sup> R. SHARP, *op. cit.* (1999).

<sup>16</sup> D. BUDLENDER *ET AL.*, *op. cit.* (2002).

civil society. In both cases, by seeking to redress existing inequalities, gender-sensitive budgets actually challenge the structures and dynamics of power.

## 1. GENDER BUDGETING IN AUSTRALIA AND GREAT BRITAIN: FEMOCRATS AND EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES AT STAKE

Australia was the first country to introduce a gender-sensitive budget analysis. An assessment of the budget for its impact on women and girls was undertaken by the Federal Government for 12 years (1984-1996)<sup>17</sup>. The form that women's budgets took in Australia established a model whereby each government agency was required to provide an audit of the annual government budget of the government's achievements in relation to women and girls. The exercise was a comprehensive one with respect to government expenditures. It was strongly emphasized to departments that all the agency's programs and expenditures were relevant, not just those expenditures directly allocated to women and girls.

Another important feature of the Australian women's budget model has been the critical role the central women's policy offices have played in coordinating and driving the women's budget exercises. This has been crucial in shaping the politics of the Australian women's budget model. The strategic relationship developed between Australian women's movements and the Labor Government in the 1970s is called *the femocrat strategy*<sup>18</sup>. This version of state feminism incorporated, into the policy-making structures at the *centre of government*, feminist bureaucrats who considered themselves spokeswomen for, and responsible to, the women's movement. A definition of a femocrat as a feminist bureaucrat working for social change might sound like a contradiction in terms. However, in Australia in the 1970s, a femocrat was a feminist taken into the bureaucracy to work on programs that would advance the cause of women. Formally, her responsibilities were defined by the male bureaucrats or politicians who appointed her. Informally, she held herself answerable to feminists outside the bureaucracy, and they, in turn, could regard her either as accountable to the women's movement. Structurally, this institutionalization took the form of the Women's Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister and the Women's Policy Unit within the Office of the Prime Minister. The Unit had access to all cabinet documents prior to their disposition and could comment freely on any policy. The Unit was also responsible for the production of the Women's Budget—a public document which analyzed and critiqued the government's financial policies for their impact on women<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Women's budgets were introduced in South Australia (1985), Victoria (1986), the Australian Capital Territory (1989), Queensland (1991), Tasmania (1992) and the Northern Territory (1993). New South Wales conducted a budget exercise focusing only on new expenditure initiatives for women and girls in the early 1980s. It introduced a comprehensive women's budget in 1991.

<sup>18</sup> M. SAWER, *op. cit.* (1990).

<sup>19</sup> L.P. RANKIN & J. VICKERS, *op. cit.* (2001).



The origins of Australian femocrats go back to 1972, the year a highly effective non-party organization called Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) was created and succeeded in placing the policy demands of women centre-stage during the federal election of that year. WEL was regarded as the «reformist» wing of the new women's movement but attracted many women who believed, like its founder, that it was time to move on from talk to practical action. The femocrats followed the feminist insight that no government activity is likely to be gender neutral: therefore, for them it was important to go beyond specific «women's» programs to ensure that all government policy and activity were monitored and audited for gender-specific effects<sup>20</sup>. The network of femocrat structures grew at both state and Commonwealth levels, and included a network of femocrats around the country who consider themselves «the voice of the women's movement»<sup>21</sup>. This is the paradox of «sisters in suits», who acted as the internal advocates for the women's movement<sup>22</sup>, but often distrusted by traditional bureaucrats. In the image provided by Anne Summers, femocrats were suspected as «missionaries» by traditional bureaucrats, while at the same time women in the women's movement often believed they had sold out to become «mandarins» (Summers, 1986), where «Mandarin is the sardonic characterization for bureaucrats: elite, inaccessible, guardians of government secrets. Missionary is the bureaucratic term for an uncompromising promoter for a political cause, someone who is discredited by virtue of 'having an agenda'»<sup>23</sup>.

In Great Britain, the gender budgeting process was started from civil society in 1989, and it has extended to the regional level although the main initiative remains national. The Women's Budget Group (WBG), the think tank (working as an epistemic community)<sup>24</sup> that is mainly in charge of the initiative, is made up a variety of women activists and other organizations with similar equality goals, many of them academic. It has gained extensive consultative access to policy-makers, especially within H.M. Treasury, offering officials and ministers constructive feedback on consultative documents and proactive advice on pertinent issues such as childcare provision, tax credits, productivity and work-life balance. The WBG also offers comments on major policy decisions such as the Spending Review and the annual Budget, and provide guidance on methodology and practice, for example the gender mainstreaming of policy and the selection of targets and indicators. The entry of the New Labour Party has facilitated the contact of

<sup>20</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, femocrats were exercising considerable power throughout state and federal bureaucracies, since all government departments had to prepare 'gender impact statements' in the process of preparing their bids for the annual budget.

<sup>21</sup> The absence in Australia of representative women umbrella organizations, actually facilitated this representational claim by femocrats.

<sup>22</sup> M. SAWER, *op. cit.* (1990).

<sup>23</sup> Z. EISENSTEIN, *op. cit.* (1996), p. 87.

<sup>24</sup> An epistemic community is a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area. See P.M. HAAS, «Introduction. Epistemic communities and international policy coordination». *International Organization*, vol. 46.1 (1992), pp. 1-35.

the group with the Treasury officials as well as the possibility of introducing the concerns of women in the policy agenda.

In addition to the WBG with focus on Great Britain, there are also now groups in Scotland, Ireland and Wales with similar activities. The WBG has been able to influence government policy, draw attention of government to new issues and keep matters yet unresolved active on the table. Consequently, members of WBG meet regularly throughout the year to discuss the key work areas and to formulate responses to the Budget and Pre Budget statements. They have also been behind some gender budget pilot experiences that H.M. Treasury has undertaken in some government Departments.

## 2. GENDER MAINSTREAMING AS INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION AND VELVET TRIANGLES

Mainstreaming signifies a push towards systematic procedures and mechanisms within organizations for explicitly taking account of gender issues at all stages of policy-making and program design and implementation. It also represents a call for the diffusion of responsibility for gender issues beyond small and underfunded women's units to the range of sectorial and technical departments within institutions<sup>25</sup>. However, it has been noted that organizations are reluctant to put gender equality high on their agendas and that the existing equality infrastructure is often too weak to influence that agenda<sup>26</sup>. For this reason, to make gender mainstreaming truly successful, it should be embedded in institutional procedures, as well as transforming them from a gender perspective. This institutional innovation should be promoted by different actors working in synergy: technocratic expertise, social movement participation (political will) and institutional involvement.

In my analysis I use the concept of «institutional innovation» as «creating a new institution within a pre-existing, intact institutional and cultural context»<sup>27</sup>. The goal of institutional innovation is to create new routine-reproduced, taken for granted behavior patterns. At the same time, institutional innovation implies that some actor has to trigger institutionalization by connecting the institution to (new) values.

Traditional debates have tended to cast the relationship between gender interests and the state in either/or terms; those who see the state as either inherently patriarchal and oppressive of women or as gender-neutral and beneficial to women's emancipation. A dominant attitude of one strand of «second wave» women's movements was the distrust for official politics. However, in Australia (and New Zealand) a strong pattern of interaction has emerged between women's movements and governments, by the activity of femocrats (see § 2).

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<sup>25</sup> S. RAZAVI & C. MILLER, *op. cit.* (1995).

<sup>26</sup> D. MCBRIDE-STETSON & A. MAZUR, *op. cit.* (1995).

<sup>27</sup> K. INHETVEEN, *op. cit.* (1988), p. 404.



In the course of the 1980s, feminist scholars increasingly viewed the state as a possible arena for action, against the dominant feminist viewpoint that Feminism and institutions were irreducible enemies. This new approach was conveyed by the term of «state feminism»<sup>28</sup>, a concept that refers to the «activities of government structures that are formally charged with furthering women's status and rights»<sup>29</sup>.

The literature on feminist policy coalitions has especially drawn the attention to the blurring boundary between social movements and mainstream institutions with respect to feminist debate<sup>30</sup>. Consequently, several concepts have been coined to refer to «women's co-operation constellations», which Holli broadly defines as «any kind of actual co-operation initiated or accomplished by one or several groups of women in a policy process to further their aims or achieve goals perceived as important to them»<sup>31</sup>. Among these conceptualizations, the metaphor of the «triangle» has been particularly successful. An early conceptualization of a feminist triangle was Haalsa's «strategic partnership» in the Norwegian case<sup>32</sup>. Haalsa argued that women's achievements in Norwegian public policies could be partly accounted for by the development of alliances between women politicians, women bureaucrats and women activists from women's organizations on pragmatic and specific issues. This kind of strategic partnership worked as a «triangle of empowerment» for women.

The concept of the «velvet triangle» was coined by Woodward (2004), and it refers to the factual or the possible interaction between feminist bureaucrats and politicians («femocrats»), academics and formally organized voices in the women's movement with regard to gender equality, a field that is traditionally characterized by informal relationships. Woodward thus redefines the corners of the triangle: her «velvet triangles» are made up with women coming from the organizations of the state (politicians, bureaucrats), of civil society (organizations, grassroots movements, NGOs) and universities and consultancies (think tank, epistemic communities). In this definition, party women, public office women and women bureaucrats are conflated in the same corner, while academics / experts appear as a new category of strategic participants. Velvet triangles thus make the case for fully recognize the existence of an *intersection* between movements and institutions, including the state<sup>33</sup>.

The velvet triangle let us focus on the way feminists have, through their engagement with political institutions, been able to take advantage of existing political opportunities to challenge certain gender dimensions within institutions and, through

<sup>28</sup> H.M. HERNES, *op. cit.* (1987).

<sup>29</sup> D. McBRIDE-STETSON & A. MAZUR, *op. cit.* (1995), pp. 1-2. It is not my intention to debate here whether or not feminists should engage with the state; instead, I want to consider what effect feminist claims have on shaping political institutions. It is not only the 'top-down' influence of political institutions on feminist activists that is important in the analysis; a second, equally important point, involves researching how feminist activists could themselves influence the nature of political institutions, through their strategies.

<sup>30</sup> A. MAZUR, *op. cit.* (2002); A.M. HOLLI, *op. cit.* (2008).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 169.

<sup>32</sup> B. HAALSA, *op. cit.* (1998).

<sup>33</sup> M.F. KATZENSTEIN, *op. cit.*(1998); L.A. BANASZAK, *op. cit.*(2010).



their engagement, create new opportunity structures through which they can pursue their aims. The concept of velvet triangle might thus suggest the presence of an interaction between gender interests and the institutions as dynamic and co-constitutive.

The success of femocrats in Australia show how specific *political opportunity structures* can be used to transform institutions. A definite bureaucratic approach (advocacy based), a central location into the institutional structure, and government responsiveness offered the possibility to promote and implement the gender budget analysis in Australia, and become a point of reference worldwide. Sidney Tarrow developed the concept of a political opportunity structure in his work on the relationship between social movements and the state<sup>34</sup>. The term refers to the institutional arrangements and ideological climate of political systems at any one time and is useful in identifying the limitations and opportunities that confront movements which attempt change through state-directed action. In the Westminster model (such as Australia and Great Britain) bureaucracy is a privileged location for direct participation of women's movement inside institutions, being the culture in civil service not hostile to internal advocacy. The Australian movement has been the first one to profit of this «window of opportunity» to reach its goals, through its central location inside institutions, with a privileged access to information and the capacity of monitoring the policy making process. The key role played by women's policy machinery and femocrats within government led to Australian women's budgets being described as 'an example *par excellence*' of a bureaucratic-led strategy rather than a community-based strategy<sup>35</sup>. In the 1970s and 1980s femocrats were recruited directly from women's organizations or had feminist credentials and so enjoyed considerable legitimacy. However, in the 1990s the women's movement was weaker, and femocrats were not able to keep engaging with women from the grass roots movement. In practice, nongovernment women's groups participated little in the gender budget process. For example, the published results of the women's budget exercises were often presented to women in the movement largely as a communication exercise as to what the government had achieved. This political role of community voices is important, and an irreplaceable corner of the triangle. Since femocrats' management of the process weakened participation by women in civil society, there were very few complaints when the Women's Budgets were allowed to wither away: the Annual Women's Budget Statement that has played a crucial role since 1984 in monitoring the gendered effects of government policies and programs was discontinued in 1996. Partly due to weak political pressure from outside, and being utterly nested within government, the initiative was vulnerable on a shift in the political opportunity structure: the introduction of a conservative government and neo-liberal policies: the neo-liberal turn in domestic and international politics precipitated a dramatic contraction of the welfare state, while the new government demised most women's units<sup>36</sup>.

In Britain, the women's movement has encountered greater resistance to assert its political agenda through the bureaucracy. The Women and Equality Unit was estab-

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<sup>34</sup> S. TARROW, *op. cit.* (1998).

<sup>35</sup> A. SUMMERS, *op. cit.* (1986).

<sup>36</sup> The Office of the Status of Women in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, first established in 1975, had its funds cut by 40% in 1996, and had to diminish its input to Cabinet.



lished in 1997, after the election of the Labour government. As a matter of fact, British femocrats face different *political opportunity structures*, and the gender budgeting initiative has been promoted by a think tank, which potential, however, increased dramatically when the Labour Party was elected in the mid-1990s. This was a result both of scientific acknowledgment and because the new government was more open to addressing a gender mainstreaming strategy, given the pressure from the European Union. Extending gender mainstreaming to new policy areas needed more specific knowledge on gender in all policy areas. The New Labour was also open to consultations, to the extent that it produces a pre-budget consultation paper in November each year that outlines the main policies and proposes changes. This innovation has allowed the Budget Group and others to make formal submissions that should, theoretically, have more chance of influence.

The WBG built the capacity of feminist civil society to engage with the budget process and macroeconomic policy. It also expanded the grassroots movement understanding of gender and socio-economic policy in areas outside their expertise. To pursue its goals, the WBG has taken a particular organizational form, such as a non-governmental, voluntary organization. However, its main focus has been on working through government. For this to work, certain conditions have been helpful and perhaps necessary: a group of policy experts has been available and interested in the gender dimensions of their area of expertise. In the 1990s they have faced a government - previously an opposition - at least formally sympathetic to gender equality. To promote institutional innovation, the WBG combined research with advocacy in order to be effective. Some reasons can be mentioned to underscore the importance of research: the knowledge of technical «facts and figures» is a powerful tool for making government officials take arguments about gender more seriously instead of discarding them as *ideological*. The UK Women's Budget Group recognises as a definite strength their ability to speak to public sector officials in their own technical language<sup>37</sup>. Furthermore, the knowledge of technical facts grants gender advocates the confidence and leverage needed to push forward their arguments.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Activists, researchers, and gender policy advocates confronting institutions might adopt a variety of strategies to influence institutional agendas and bring about institutional innovations from a gender perspective. How women can act politically in the realm of official politics is a matter of choice. How they can act *effectively* is shaped by the structure of the political opportunities they face and by the synergies they create. Synergies (velvet triangles) and strategies have to confront with the *nature* of political institutions and identify specific windows of opportunity. The different institutional contexts of each country are a key variable influencing the promotion of gender issues. Activists could adopt different strategies to advance their objectives.

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<sup>37</sup> D. ST. HILL, *op. cit.* (2002).

Whereas Australian feminists have looked primarily to bureaucratic institutions, British feminists have emphasized lobbying the government through umbrella organizations and epistemic communities. The institutions provide openings and constraints that operate to encourage activists to pursue particular strategies in order to advance their political agenda. When the synergy among actors is broken (and the windows of opportunities close down), transformative issues are likely to remain outside, while institutions have still the power to decide what an acceptable agenda for change is. This means that the agenda for gender equality may be watered down.

A central theme in much mainstreaming literature has been the distinction between *integrationist* and *agenda-setting* or *transformative mainstreaming* established by Jahan (1995). Integrationist approaches address gender issues within existing policy paradigms, whereas agenda-setting approaches imply the transformation and reorientation of the agenda. Consistently, velvet triangle models can be broadly divided into two types, not mutually exclusive: *expert/bureaucratic* approaches (which focus on the use of experts and/or the establishment of mainstreaming *routines* within state bureaucracies, as in the Australian case); *participatory/democratic* approaches (which emphasize the inclusion or empowerment of outsider groups in relation to policy-making), and *consultive* approach (which focus on the role of experts and the creation of knowledge in policy-making). As in the British case, gender experts have often been identified as playing a key role in advancing gender politics<sup>38</sup>, and the role of experts may therefore be regarded as a key factor in the assessment of mainstreaming policies<sup>39</sup>. This is also due to the fact that gender mainstreaming is a strategy to be used as a long-term process. If located within the executive, and relying on a bureaucracy committed to gender equity, intersecting with civil society is a way of building up public pressure and gaining attention and monitoring. In most countries, women's machineries - which are one of the actors inside government potentially driving gender mainstreaming initiatives, are generally weak in comparison to sectorial and finance ministries. Their ability to push gender issues forward can greatly benefit from working with the organized women's movement. On the part of women's movement itself, coalitions and alliances are crucial as well. Involving NGOs, think tanks, research institutions and grassroots organisations can result in increased leverage for the initiatives. Research institutions alone might focus on too many technicalities and too little political impact, but have a deeper understanding of relevant facts and a widely recognized expertise and competence. Grassroots movements alone would seldom engage in detailed technical analysis, but have the power of mobilisation which plays a crucial role in influencing politics. Consequently a combination of government officials, grassroots movements, activist NGOs, research institutes and epistemic communities can indeed be a powerful mix to drive institutional innovation forward.

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<sup>38</sup> D. McBRIDE-STETSON, D. & A. MAZUR, *op. cit.* (1995); C. HOSKYNYS, *Integrating Gender: Women, Law and Politics in the European Union*. London: Verso, 1996.

<sup>39</sup> A. WOODWARD, A., *op. cit.* Discussion paper FS 01-103, 2001.

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