



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

IOB Evaluation

Gender mainstreaming in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Beyond 'add women and stir'?

2021

Key Findings

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June 2021

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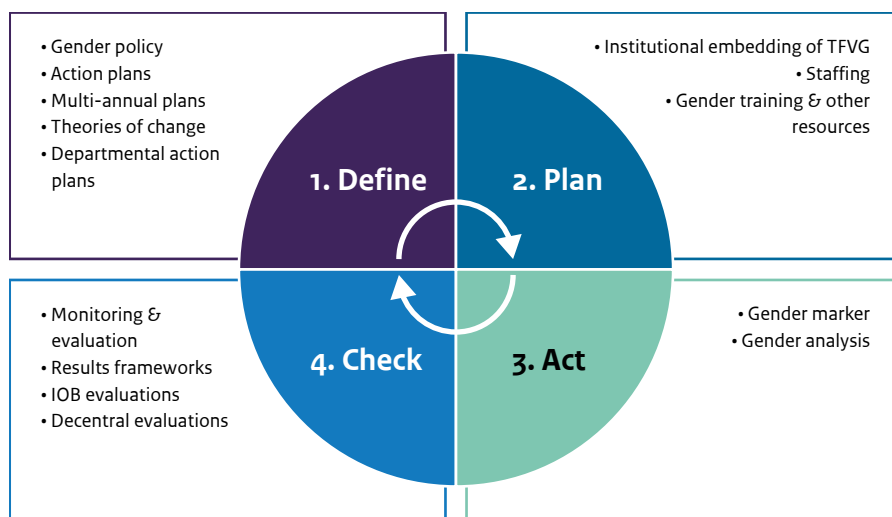
Introduction

In 2015, the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IOB) published its report *Gender sense & sensitivity: Policy evaluation on women's rights and gender equality (2007-2014)*. This policy evaluation dealt with the Dutch international gender policy and its three, mutually reinforcing, components: (i) strengthening women's and civil society organisations that are committed to women's rights and promoting female leadership; (ii) gender diplomacy; and (iii) gender mainstreaming, which integrates a gender perspective throughout the policy cycle, i.e. in the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies, regulations and expenditures to counter unconscious and/or structural inequalities between men and women (see Figure 1). The report concluded, among others, that the ministry had not shown sufficient leadership and had lacked the knowledge, skills and means to really put the Dutch gender mainstreaming policy into practice. Therefore, IOB's first recommendation was that the time had come 'to move beyond rhetoric and to start making gender mainstreaming ... a reality and that gender issues should be included in the design and implementation of all policies, programmes and projects, and not just in those dealing with women or sexual reproductive health and rights'.

Now five years later, IOB has investigated what follow-up has been given to this recommendation. Using the policy cycle as the framework, this document captures the main findings of this evaluation that addresses two main questions: (1) How and to what extent has gender been mainstreamed in Dutch foreign policy and development aid since 2015 and what do we know of the results accomplished? and (2) Which actions does IOB recommend to further enhance gender mainstreaming throughout the ministry?

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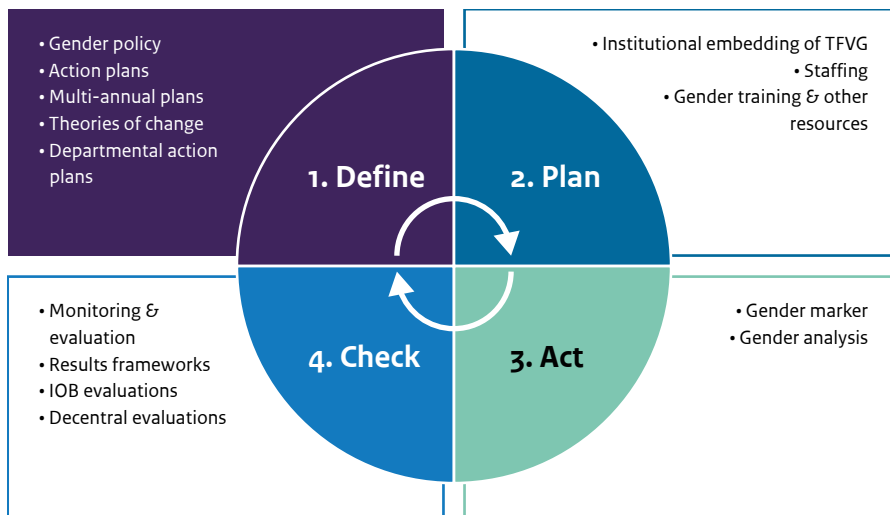
Figure 1. Gender mainstreaming actions in the policy cycle



1.

Define

Policies and priorities



The Dutch international policy on gender equality and women’s rights has not experienced major changes since 2015. It continues to underscore the importance of women’s rights as human rights, and equal opportunities for women and girls in political, economic and societal processes are seen as a condition for sustainable development. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls has remained a crosscutting goal. To achieve this goal, an active effort in all aspects of policy is needed. The gender policy’s aims are: (i) increase women’s participation in political decision-making and other decision-making and female leadership; (ii) increase economic empowerment and improve the economic climate for women; (iii) prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls; and (iv) strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and peace processes, and protect them in conflict situations. Recent documents stress the link between gender equality, women’s rights and inclusiveness. Gender equality and inclusion also have a clear relationship with intersectionality, even though this does not yet figure consistently in the theory of change for women’s rights and gender equality.

The concept of gender

Ministry policy documents and theories of change, including the theory of change for women’s rights and gender equality, use the terms ‘gender’ and ‘women’ interchangeably and primarily refer to the dichotomy of women and men. Gender mainstreaming generally means: getting more women (and girls) on board in decision-making or as beneficiaries. Addressing the power dynamics between men and women, however, continues to be challenging, certainly within a broader agenda of inclusiveness that calls for attention to a broad intersectional spectrum of dimensions of inequality.

It is only within the framework of Dutch human rights and women's rights policies, programmes and projects that the more fluid gender identities such as transgender or non-binary identities receive detailed attention. Though people are generally aware of and subscribe to the importance of such a fluid interpretation of gender, the evaluation shows that it is particularly challenging to apply this in a gender mainstreaming strategy. The notion of gender equality is not operationalised and there are no practical tools or approaches for the implementation of a fluid interpretation of gender within the context of gender mainstreaming.

Action plans

The most recent multi-annual country and regional programmes (2019-2022) pay more attention to gender and gender mainstreaming than their predecessors. They also contain, necessarily limited, gender analyses for the important themes that they address. Attention for women's rights and gender equality, however, does not yet necessarily translate into a gender mainstreaming strategy or specific gender equality goals. Gender mainstreaming remains limited to the preparatory stages of the development cooperation interventions that the Netherlands finances. Also, in the departmental action plans that were drawn up in 2016-2017, gender is by and large synonymous with 'women'; moreover, in the field of humanitarian assistance, women and girls are considered a vulnerable group, and there is little recognition for the knowledge and skills they have.

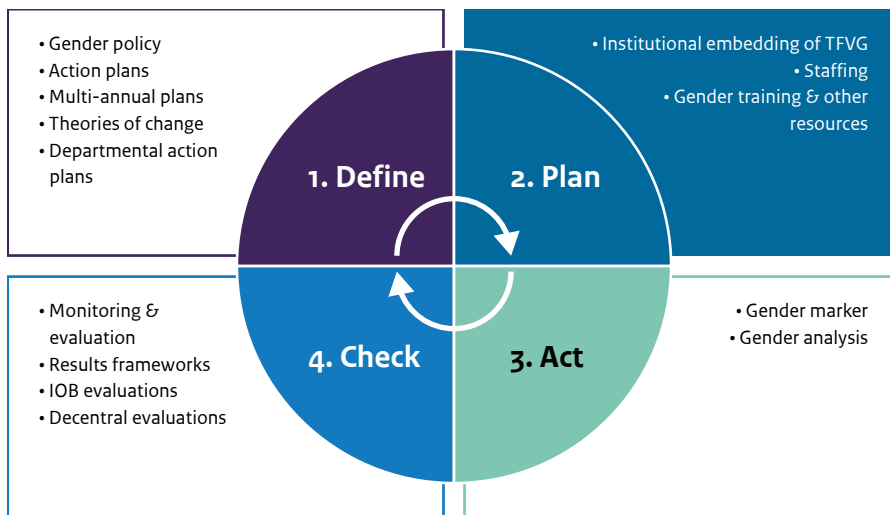
Recommendations

- The TFVG could provide guidance on the optimal use of fluid gender identities, especially for the policy areas in which such a conceptualisation could be meaningfully introduced.
- Departments ought to be more cautious when describing women as a 'vulnerable' group and prevent this from translating into a perception of women as victims only. Instead, move towards more empowering phrasing, which also addresses the roles and responsibilities of men in the development towards gender equality.
- In the design of programmes, the link between gender and intersectionality ought to be addressed more systematically.

2.

Plan

Institutional embedding of gender mainstreaming



In 2014, the ministry established the Task Force Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (TFVG) within the Social Development Department of the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGIS). It has three main areas of responsibility: (i) undertake gender diplomacy, (ii) manage women’s projects, programmes and partnerships; and (iii) promote gender mainstreaming. In addition, there are gender focal points in other thematic DGIS departments and embassies in countries where the Netherlands provides development assistance. Though views on this institutional set-up are positive, the evaluation identified the following issues:

- The current institutional positioning of the TFVG has not been conducive to advancing gender mainstreaming in the ministry’s other directorates general, such as those for foreign trade and political affairs.
- The term Task Force signals a temporary task that is completed at one point in time while gender mainstreaming requires continuous attention – also in the future.
- Since 2015, there have been few changes to staffing in the TFVG: some 10 FTEs plus 2 part-timers in the departments for multilateral organisations and humanitarian aid – while its project portfolio has more than doubled in value. With this staff, the TFVG was designed to manage both gender-specific programmes and engage in gender mainstreaming activities. In practice, most of the policy officers’ time, however, is spent on project management, which results in insufficient capacity to carry out the gender mainstreaming tasks in a meaningful way.
- There is no task description for the (voluntary) position of gender focal point (GFP), nor are there any formal prerequisites for becoming one; indeed, the tasks of GFPs are additional to other responsibilities. There are different interpretations of what the GFP’s role is across the ministry. The position of GFP is mainly held by relatively young female staff. Even though gender mainstreaming is everyone’s responsibility, there is at times a tendency for gender-related work to be assigned to GFPs by default. A WhatsApp group is presently the

main channel to share information and to request input from the GFPs, but there is little to no contact among the embassy GFPs or among the GFPs working in The Hague. All sides expressed a desire for more interaction as this is expected to further improve the ministry's gender mainstreaming performance.

- While the international literature has underlined the importance of accountability for gender mainstreaming, efforts to include it in the appraisal cycle of the ministry's management have not been successful. One reason being that if gender were to be incorporated, this would also be the case for other cross-cutting themes. Moreover, opinions among staff in the ministry differed on the question for what people in the ministry could be held accountable: taking all the necessary steps for making mainstreaming happen – or for results?

Gender awareness and training

Both senior management and ministry staff agree on the importance of women's rights and support gender mainstreaming. The instrumentalist arguments that were used in the past to encourage gender mainstreaming to be taken seriously – i.e. it was good for economic development and poverty reduction (smart economics), for more inclusive decision-making and more stable and sustainable societies (smart politics), and for international security (smart security) – have become less prevalent. A transition towards equity arguments that focus on the intrinsic value of gender equality has taken place, which signals a break from the past.

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The TFGV offers training, guidance materials and external gender expertise to provide ministry staff with relevant background information. At the same time, staff across departments expressed a need for more practical hands-on information and examples. The current courses do not cater to experienced staff who seek guidance on more advanced topics such as the development of gender policy objectives or gender-transformative evaluation methods. Furthermore, since the training is not mandatory, it is questionable whether it contributes to mainstreaming gender awareness among staff who are less familiar with the subject or to changing the attitudes of the few that still remain indifferent.

Ministry-wide recommendations

- Maintain a central entity with gender expertise but consider changing the name of the Task Force to emphasise that gender mainstreaming is an integral part of the Dutch development policy *and* foreign policy that requires a continuous effort, also in the future.
- Consider changing the institutional positioning of the TFGV to extend its reach also to other directorates-general of the ministry. Several options, including a link with the ministry's Strategic Advice Unit, could be explored.
- In an organisation with frequent rotation of staff, make sure that sufficient human resources are available at the Task Force to effectively and continuously perform its gender-mainstreaming task. Building on recent experience, senior gender expertise could also be made available for all of the ministry's individual directorates-general.
- Management support for gender mainstreaming could be made more explicit, for example by appointing gender ambassadors at a managerial level in each of the ministry's directorates-general.

- Draft terms of reference for the gender focal points. Without turning this into a straitjacket, a set of standard advisory responsibilities may also help to create more uniformity in how incumbents interpret and put their gender-related tasks into practice. These tasks can then also be a subject in their annual performance appraisal by senior management. At the same time, ensure that adequate time, conditions and financial resources are allocated so that the focal points can perform the tasks required. Designate more men as gender focal points to enhance diversity.
- Agree on what senior management's commitment and accountability for gender mainstreaming could mean and how this could be incorporated into their annual performance appraisal.
- Consider making the basic gender training obligatory for all new staff and incorporate it into the training programme for new civil servants of the ministry's [Academy for International Relations](#). Provide opportunities for the GFPs to acquire gender-related expertise (in particular in relation to the sector in which they work) and advocacy skills.

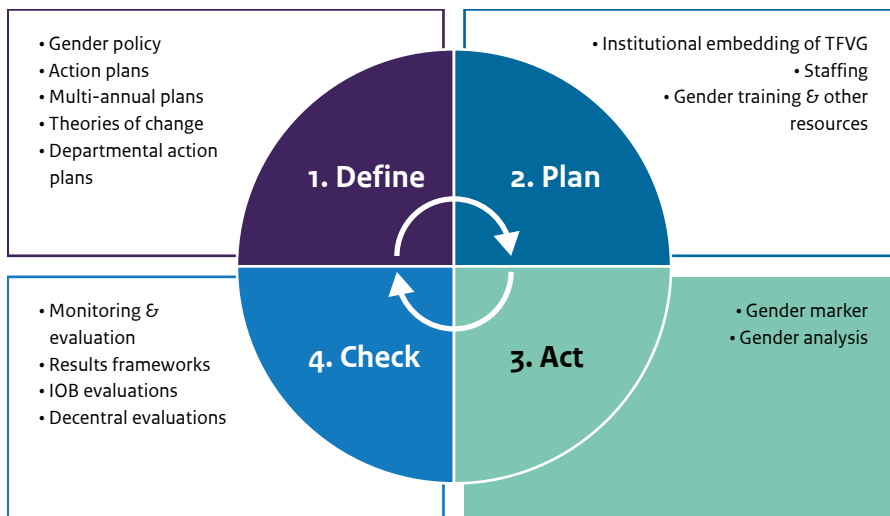
TFVG recommendations

- Maximise the potential of the gender focal point network by clarifying its objectives and facilitating the exchange among GFPs and between the GFPs and the TFVG. Gender focal points at embassies could benefit from exchanges with other GFPs in their region. GFPs should, moreover, be systematically involved in meetings and decision-making processes related to the programming of the Task Force's activities, as they are critical entry points for gender mainstreaming.
- Increase awareness and knowledge of gender equality issues among *other* ministry staff through internal awareness raising, learning events and informal exchange, for example. Examine whether awareness raising on gender mainstreaming can be linked to similar efforts related to the ministry's diversity and inclusion agendas.
- To stay on the ball, the TFGV could undertake regular participatory organisational gender audits. These audits can unravel institutional development and suggest specific measures to further strengthen the ministry's organisational capacity for gender mainstreaming. They could be the basis for developing a ministry-wide, gender-related training strategy that takes into account different training needs of junior staff, gender focal points and senior management as well as different training modalities.
- The Task Force should continue to provide access to thematic information resources and best practices that are tailored to the diverse needs of the gender focal points (and others). Use local expertise, including the GFPs and experts from local partners in the South, to build up these tools and best practices, keeping in mind that 'context matters' for gender as well.

3.

Act

Gender analyses



The format of the assessment memorandum (Bemo) for aid programmes requires a gender analysis. An assessment of a selection of Bemos shows that such analyses are done and ticked off in the memorandum systematically. The quality of the gender analysis strongly depends on the expertise of the individual employee. The TFVG offers advice on how to conduct a gender analysis on its internal webpage. However, it neither systematically monitors the quality of these gender analyses nor reviews what happens as follow-up to the findings of these analyses. Gender focal points indicated that a better understanding is needed of how the gender analysis influences the subsequent stages of the policy cycle, including evaluation design.

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Gender marker

Since 2015, the ministry has made more use of the OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker. This is a statistical tool to record aid activities that target gender equality as a policy objective. The ministry increased the share of projects with gender equality as a significant objective or with gender equality as the principal reason of an intervention to over 75%. In 2019, the Netherlands was among nine OECD-DAC member states that focused 50% or more of their development assistance on gender equality as a principal or significant objective. However, whether this score reflects better and more consistent use of the marker and whether a better score really reflects more attention to gender on the ground is not evident: the gender marker reflects donor intentions at the design stage.

The data for the period 2015-2019 shows that development cooperation sectors such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, social infrastructure and services, water supply and sanitation, business and other services as well as agriculture, forestry and fisheries have scored (well) above the average mentioned above. Scores have improved in the areas of banking and financial services and employment creation, especially in the areas of humani-

tarian aid and emergency response. On the other hand, the area of conflict, peace and security appears to consistently perform below this average and the score has not improved in recent times. Though scores have also improved in the area of human rights since 2015, the score of just over 50% in 2019 in this domain clearly indicates that this is an area that is lagging behind. Given the priority attached to gender in this field, this is difficult to understand.

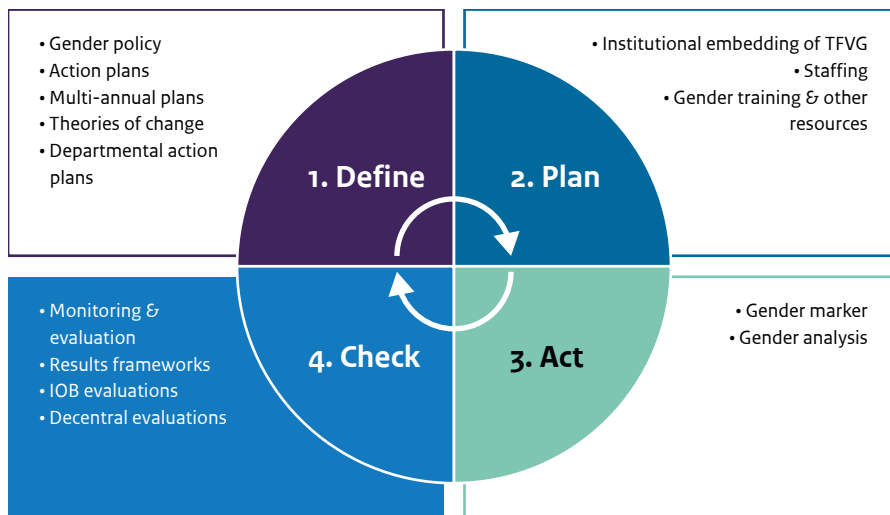
Recommendations for the TFGV

- Offer training and tools and best practices of high-quality gender analyses and hands-on advice on how to conduct gender analysis in priority policy themes. Such training should also address the influence of men and masculinity in creating gender equality and the issue of the influence of the results of a gender analysis for other stages of the policy cycle: intervention design, implementation and M&E.
- Organise a process of quality control of the gender analyses that are done during programme or project appraisal.
- Consider introducing the gender marker as an obligatory element in project and programme proposals submitted to the ministry, making the submitter of these proposals responsible for giving a rating and explaining this rating. Provide clear instructions with examples that illustrate the correct application of the gender marker labels.

4.

Check

Monitoring & Evaluation



Conceptual approaches

A review of evaluations that were conducted in the period 2015-2019 shows that their gender approaches were highly diverse: from 'gender sensitive', 'gender responsive' or 'gender transformative' to 'gender blind' or 'gender positive'. These concepts are usually not clearly defined and are used interchangeably. This is problematic, because different types of project activities, as well as measurements and indicators, are associated with each of these concepts. Gender-sensitive projects and policies, for example, consider the role of gender norms and roles but typically do not foresee remedial action. Gender-transformative policies, on the other hand, aim to address the underlying causes of gender-based inequities and transform the effects of harmful gender norms and relationships. Mixing these terms and their associated implications for measurement therefore leads to confusion about the ways in which evaluations should address gender equality and the types of indicators they are supposed to use.

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Indicators and results frameworks

The different results frameworks that have been drawn up face problems in terms of *inter alia*:

- Complexity and validity of the indicators that are proposed and insufficient elaboration of key monitoring terms (including notions such as women's voice, meaningful participation and people being 'reached'). Gender is often found at the level of outputs, mostly in terms of the number or percentage of women that participated in certain types of activities and/or is expected to profit from these activities.
- There is an almost exclusive focus on women/men with little attention for indicators with a more (qualitative) gender-transformative character. At times, insufficient distinction is made between indicators at the outcome and output levels.
- There is little consideration for how long it generally takes for fundamental changes in gender equality to occur and endure. The fact that the ministry is expected to report

annually on higher policy goals (such as changes in norms and values and changes in behaviour) for example does not take this into consideration. Developments at this level take much longer than the typical lifetime of projects, programmes or partnerships of 4-5 years at most. The same caution is warranted for mid-term and end-of-project evaluations.

- Finally, the benchmarks for the quantitative indicators tend to be donor-driven and frequently aim for objective gender equality with a 50/50 participation of men and women. This may be realistic in some local contexts, but in other situations, a participation of 20% of women could already be labelled as progress if women were previously never included. Second, these indicators do not consider larger questions of gender equity, such as information on the roles or positions that women take on or the obstacles that they need to overcome to participate in a short-term project, which may have longer-term negative effects (e.g. additional costs for childcare).

Evaluations

IOB reviewed 92 evaluations on their findings about gender equality. These evaluations concerned interventions in priority sectors and themes of Dutch foreign policy and development cooperation and the focus of the ministry's mainstreaming efforts (including water, food security, private sector development, peace and security). This review resulted in the following key findings:

- 65 evaluations (71%) reported on the **engagement of women and/or girls** in project activities – or men in the case of women's rights projects – with seven of them finding that the targets for women's participation had not been reached. It is evident that when no activities targeting gender equality were designed, no results could be reported and no outcomes could be evaluated. The evaluations give the following explanations for the lack of reporting on gender outcomes: (i) it was not specifically requested in the evaluation terms of reference; (ii) there was no specific evaluation budget allocated for this purpose; (iii) no gender expertise was involved in the evaluation; and (iv) the demand-driven nature of the project did not allow a topic as sensitive as gender equality to be addressed in the local context.
- Although most evaluations reported that women had participated in project activities, only half of them reported on the use of **gender-disaggregated data**. This is in line with the more general observation that, at times, evaluations give little if any information on whether intended final beneficiaries were actually reached, irrespective of their gender.
- 56 evaluations used a **Theory of Change (ToC)** and 37 of them had gender equality as an outcome. A key finding in this respect is that gender tended to be seen as a cross-cutting theme which was outside the ToC and that, as a result, no specific project activities were designed to actively contribute to this goal and that no specific indicators were developed for the evaluations to track. The fact that, as a crosscutting theme, gender was put outside of the ToC, may contribute to the fact that where a gender strategy was absent, so were activities and the resources to implement them.
- The question of whether the project managed to transform gender norms was only discussed in water-related projects (in 5 out of 8 reports) and evaluations in the domain of women's rights (in 9 out of 11 reports). Where changes were observed, this was often due to strong engagement of traditional, religious and community leaders, or of boys and men more generally. Still, where social norms were discussed, all evaluations call for a stronger

engagement of men and boys and the influence of masculinity on outcomes in the domain of gender equality.

- **Gender analyses** conducted at the time of project approval did not automatically translate into an explicit gender strategy with gender-specific activities to address the findings from the gender analysis. It is therefore not surprising that 58 evaluations (63% of the included evaluations) identified the need for a clearer gender *strategy* and associated evaluation methodology. Positive examples and progress in specific policy areas were found as well, primarily in evaluations in the fields of water and sanitation, and private sector development.
- Evaluations from 2019 and 2020 pay more attention to the topic of gender equality and provide a more in-depth analysis of the way in which the project influenced gender relations (and where progress is yet to be made).
- Similar observations are made in several of IOB's own evaluation reports, which concluded among others, that gender did not receive high priority, a strategy or formal mandate was lacking, working on gender equality exceeded the goals of the project, or sex disaggregated data was not available.

Ministry-wide recommendations

- Make sure that the results of gender analyses translate into activities and resources that are needed to address women's rights and gender equality. Gender expertise needs to be available to do so.
- Ensure that gender-disaggregated indicators are systematically introduced in all relevant policy areas and that data are collected and analysed systematically. This should go hand in hand with a more consistent distinction between outcome/impact and output indicators.
- Ensure that, apart from gender-related questions, a budget is set aside in the design of evaluations for involving gender expertise in the evaluation (including IOB evaluations). Or explain why this is not necessary. Make gender impact assessment a required element of all evaluations.
- Strive for consistency in the use of conceptual approaches toward gender in both the design and evaluation phase.
- True gender mainstreaming goes beyond the 'add women and stir' approach where women are merely invited to participate in interventions, the design of which has not changed, as such an approach fails to be transformative. Similarly, an 'add men and stir' approach should also be avoided.

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Recommendations for the TFGV and thematic departments

- Critically examine whether quantitative and qualitative outcome and impact indicators can be used in annual reports.
- Limit expectations for transformative change in short-term and small-scale projects. Instead, consider country-level evaluations that review a period of 10 to 15 years.
- Provide policy officers with training and best practices to enhance the way in which gender issues are addressed in evaluation design and reporting.

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