Gender! Where? Rethinking geographical scale and gender in SDIP

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[Slide 1] I would like to first acknowledge that we are meeting and talking on what is still the land of the Ngunnalwal people. I would like to pay my respects to elders past, present, and forthcoming, and in particular, pay my respects to anyone of Indigenous descent whom may be with us today.

[Slide 2] The goal of this seminar is to take a critical look at gender mainstreaming in CSIRO's involvement with the Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio, henceforth SDIP. SDIP aims to improve the integrated management of water, energy and food in three major Himalayan river basins. CSIRO's contribution to this is the development of water models in these basins, so that precise and informed policy can be created to increase livelihood outcomes in the region. Within this, a key goal of the project is to improve livelihood outcomes for women and girls. This is because women and girls receive disproportionately less benefits from development and water policy, and are often excluded from decision making. Since it is our role to ensure that development is equitable, it is too our role to amplify the voices of women.

However, after four decades analysis around the role of women in development projects, we're still struggling to come up with the answers as to how to make these projects gender equitable. SDIP is confronting many of the problems that development internationally has been confronting.

[Blank] I will start by providing a clear background as to what 'gender mainstreaming' even means, as well as the historical background that led to its popularity in modern policy making. I will then talk about the noted drawbacks of the policy discussed in the discipline, before talking about the concept of 'geographical scale', a key mechanism that causes gender policy to be unimplemented in projects. I will then compare how gender mainstreaming and a consideration of scales has been done by two other key institutions in this space. This will lead us to some key conclusions that can be used to guide SDIP, and other development programs', work in gender.

I would also like to give thanks to CSIRO and the SDIP team for giving me the opportunity to so closely examine their practice. It is to CSIRO's credit that I have been supported to ask the

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difficult questions and given the freedom to provide honest constructive critiques around the practice of gender in this project, especially given it's such a cutting edge and contentious field. I hope that my observations prove of use.

[Slide 3] The first move towards gender analysis in development projects was a paradigm called Women in Development (WID), which criticised how women were painted as mostly domestic water carriers, baby-rearers, and housekeepers - very trivialising. This paradigm designed programs that attempted to increase female participation in the workforce, so women gained access to equal power to purchase and participation. We know now that this is not an optimal approach – really we should have known better to start with – because women are often exploited or underpaid at work, whilst still being expected to fulfil unpaid household labour, and can be excluded from decision making on, say, boards, if their opinion is valued less. Additionally, this approach constantly cast women as victims of violence and subjugation, which provided little avenues for positive reform.

As a result, a new approach, Gender and Development (GAD), emerged. This cast an eye to the nature of women's subordination relative to men, that is, the relative deprivation of resources women had access to in comparison to men in their household or community.

To keep it simple, WID is distinct as it focuses on efficiency over equity, and considers women in isolation, whereas GAD focuses on a social transformation of women's role in the spaces they work in and occupy. This approach required broader policies to tackle, its goal was transformation of gender *relationships*, after all. However, GAD still have various issues, it assumed men and women did not have common interests, and it did not explore the *ways* in which masculinity and femineity could be expressed.

[Slide 4] Gender mainstreaming emerged from the struggle of GAD to apply itself in development practice, becoming particularly prevalent after the UN Beijing Declaration on gender equality in 1995. Mainstreaming was presented as a *mechanism* to broaden the concept of development to respond to women's lives. Mainstreaming is distinct from GAD as it is also analysing *the role of institutions* in causing gender transformation. This approach requires institutions to reflect on the effect of gender in its own structure and projects, with the intention of transforming both the outcome of gender goals in projects, and the culture of institutions implementing the projects.

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Sounds like a pretty good idea, right? If you can't get gender equality in the office breakroom, it's a tall order to get gender equality in South Asia. The lessons mainstreaming has for SDIP is that further, explicit reflection around what is informing our practices around gender needs to take place.

[Blank] I will make a brief note about some of my methodology within this analysis. When I talk about gender relationships, I do not expect that gender works in isolation. What gender is to different people is affected by a wide variety of other social factors – class, race, cultural background, history. Called *intersectionality* in gender theory, this acknowledges that what it means to be female for, say, a wealthy Australian, would be quite different to what it would mean to be female for a poor Bangladeshi. I have no time to go into further detail – but note that this makes large generalisations about gender across nations, countries, and classes, near impossible, and specific, thoughtful policy necessary.

Gender mainstreaming is great because it provides avenues for institutions to concretely adjust their practice. The key problem, however, is that it hasn't worked. Institutions internationally have begun to write great gender mainstreaming policies that takes on the key principles of gender equality. But when it comes time to implement the policy, gender concerns almost always evaporate.

What a mess. Theories, thoughts, money, time, but we can't seem to make it work. What's going on here? Why isn't gender mainstreaming working as planned?

There is a diversity of explanations as to the challenges gender mainstreaming is facing, but I will summarise some of the key ones here.

[Slide 5] On a whole, the reason provided for gender mainstreaming has been that it is good, modern policy practice, as opposed to it being informed by a theory as to why gender equality matters and its relationship to the organisation. This means that gender mainstreaming can end up being generic, and policy unsuited to the needs and values to the organisation implementing it.

On top of this, implementation of gender mainstreaming is often bureaucratic, instead of participatory. This means that implementation is headed by human resources or executive departments with little participatory involvement from ground staff. This 'check box'

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approach allows little space for critical reflection on gender practices, which gender mainstreaming requires to be successful.

The result of the previous factors is that the language of gender mainstreaming becomes hollow. Sparing the technical details, we want 'gender mainstreaming' and 'empowerment' to refer to real practices and changes to ideas. Often it ends up as window dressing to existing policy, and meaning very little.

On a more pragmatic point, often there is not adequate budgeting for gender mainstreaming policy. It will obviously take resources to change institutional knowledge and to do the proper research into gender practices, but because of the perception that the gender analysis doesn't constitute 'real' research, it is not given priority compared to the 'core' work of the institution. This is ironically more wasteful, as this leads to gender mainstreaming efforts not having the resources to actually fulfil its purpose, and for the positive benefits of gender mainstreaming, such as higher quality participation and better science, to not eventuate.

On a final note, women are still primarily the ones who 'do' gender. I have yet to meet another man whose job it is, or who is given the adequate resources, to think about gender dynamics. This leads to the perception that gender mainstreaming is women's work, or that it is strictly a women's issue. This isn't to understate how clearly gender dynamics disadvantage women and those with other gender expressions, but to argue that, since men are the invisible power holders in gender dynamics, they too need to be engaged and take responsibility for upturning the gender order. I will expand on this point later.

SDIP's work has been confronting some of the challenges that gender mainstreaming has presented to international institutions. Broadly, the rationale for gender mainstreaming in the project has not been clearly articulated and mainstreamed into the work. This had led to the implementation of gender concerns primarily approached from a technical angle, whereas concerns around values or the theory of change around gender is often not stressed. SDIP has the opportunity to strengthen these gaps in its work, and through that, work through some of the key issues plaguing gender mainstreaming theory today.

The above is a rundown of why gender mainstreaming has not been implemented where it should. What I found, however, is that these articles and reports did not explain in detail *how* gender mainstreaming did not get implemented. That is, they do not explain the mechanism

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that turns a bureaucratic approach to gender, the invisibility of masculinity, and non-participation of staff, to poor implementation. After all, all of these factors could be true, but that doesn't require gender mainstreaming to fail to be implemented. I'm sure we all have experiences, for comparison, of really awful policy and practices, somehow delivering results. My research focused on uncovering a particular mechanism that reinforces gender dynamics and presents a barrier to gender mainstreaming: the use of geographical scales. The reason I focused on scales is that, with my discussion with CSIRO colleagues, they often noted that they struggled to understand how to integrate gender concerns 'across' scales, that is, they did not know how to convert national gender targets to local gender change.

I will save a technical explanation of the underlying process, but instead talk about some of my key findings and their consequences.

[Slide 6] When I talk of 'scale', I mean descriptions such as 'national', 'regional', 'basin'. For projects, we create diagrams and relate certain policy points, ideas, and actors to particular parts of a scale. These scales are designed to denote a specific geographical space, and relate that to other geographical spaces. For example, we say that 'regional' is 'below' 'national'. In this way, we say that a classical definition of scale is 'hierarchical', to say that there is a vertical relationship between different geographical scales. Furthermore, these scales are discussed as if they were *essential*, that is, there is a clear truth of the matter about what each scale represents, and it is the role of a scientist to find that appropriate truth.

So, we often have a concept of scale that is both hierarchical and essential. This is not the most shocking discovery.

What is interesting is the discussions around this conception of scale in the field of political geography. In her groundbreaking article 'The social construction of scale', Marston discovered, the title reveals the shock, that the concept of geographical scale is socially constructed. Ok, what does that actually mean? That mountains disappear when we close our eyes? That if we stop talking about Pakistan that it will sink into the ocean? Thankfully not. What this means is that, when we talk about a *scale*, we also talk about the social and political process that result from that scale – not just space. For example, when we talk about a 'national' scale, we also assign to it actors (such as government bodies, international institutions, local officials), as well as policies, ideas, and norms, associated with what that

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space represents. This is true even in biophysical cases, as the designing of biophysical projects for certain scales then involves the engagement with certain actors at that scale, and talks about certain resources as if they belong to certain people. This engagement is a political and social engagement that cannot be avoided if we want to apply projects.

The key issue for concern is that, by using certain scales, we give consent to certain actors in this scale to make decisions. These actors may make these decisions in a gender inequitable way, and the way in which certain actors are made legitimate may be done in a way that is not gender equitable, often by simply not considering the gendered nature of choosing particular actors to work with. Scale, in this way, requires an institution to express its social and project priorities through who it is engaging, and why it is engaging them, and in what way they are being engaged.

[Blank] I promise that is as technical as I will get. I'll now discuss how other institutions have attempted to implement gender mainstreaming, and compare them to SDIP. What this will show is that, as it should already be clear, this is a difficult area, but there are some signs of positive change.

I will first briefly discuss the work of WorldBank in gender mainstreaming. WorldBank, as a global project funding and implementation body, has released a series of gender papers and policies over the last decade. I go into further detail in my report, but WorldBank has had similar problems with mainstreaming gender across the diversity of its programs. It's policies have not quite translated into practice as much as they'd hoped. To their credit, WorldBank is a large organisation, and will require different approaches, both its own projects and its funding, to be successful. It shows that CSIRO is not the only organisation paying attention to, and occasionally struggling with, gender mainstreaming.

[Slide 7] I want to draw attention to the work of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, henceforth ACIAR, an Australian project funding organisation focusing on international agricultural research, much of which is conducted in South Asia. They have been faced with a similar requirement to gender mainstream their work over the last two years, with little previous work to back it. To their enormous credit, they have undergone a significant gender transformation in that time. Their recent gender policy, released last November, is some of the strongest policy in the field. It clearly defines its gender

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terminology, and applies them surgically. It is worth noting that ACIAR is a project funding organisation, different to SDIP's direct project work. I was originally suspicious that this policy could not translate to an analysis of the work of their partners, but their additional documentation about how to engage their partners on gender is admirable. This targeted, specific policy around why gender is important and what that means to the organisation is refreshingly specific, and demonstrates good practice for SDIP to adapt. This is not to say there isn't room for some improvement - The policy still struggles to think of how to engage and challenge men in the process of reforming gender. However, in terms of the gender policy currently functioning in development institutions, it is certainly exemplary, and I'm sure I'll see movement in the direction I've indicated as we learn what ways to improve our practice.

How did ACIAR manage to have such a successful launch to their gender mainstreaming efforts? A frustrating conclusion is that they are a smaller organisation – under 100 staff – which makes engaging all staff on gender much less difficult than larger organisations such as WorldBank or CSIRO. However, there are a few factors that carry across that are worth noting and reflecting on. Strong team leadership, with leaders who were genuinely interested in re-examining their science and participating enthusiastically with training, has helped set the tone for other team leaders and team members to take gender mainstreaming seriously. Gender experts provided targeted advice and information at the proposal stage of projects, which reduced the cost of reconsidering gender later down the path of implementation. Additionally, the approach to gender mainstreaming is such that it is sensitive to the values and desired outcomes of the organisation. There are hundreds of generic gender mainstreaming guidelines and frameworks, but these do little to make gender mainstreaming work for an organisation. What is needed is a commitment to making gender mainstreaming make sense for the scientists and experts working on policy, without reinventing the wheel. ACIAR shows us that there is no one size fits all to gender mainstreaming – and that is worth remembering for decisions around gender for SDIP.

[Blank] So what should SDIP do? I suggest, among other things, that we have to question and reflect in the right way. Gender justice is a process that will take long adjustment by institutions, projects, and people to fully realise. Because the process is personal and institutional, I cannot provide the answers by pointing to a framework to be hastily applied

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and forgotten about. However, I can point to some fruitful avenues of thought given our current challenges and circumstances:

[Slide 8] Institutions need to have a genuine gender theory of change, one which is derived not from the thoughts of people higher up in an institutional hierarchy, but from the people participating in these institutions and projects. Think: Why is gender equality important for this project, beyond efficiency? What are our key principles behind gender? Do people feel responsible for speaking up about gender?

We need to be conscious too of which actors we're engaging in what area and how. Scales can legitimise certain actors and social processes that have gendered dimensions in the spaces we're working in. We must critique, limit, and question the use of scales and their social implications. Ask: Who are the actors whom claim legitimacy over decision in the scale we are using? Do they use their power in gender-blind or gender transformative ways? What kind of actor are we in the scale we are analysing? Are there any other stakeholders, particularly those who are marginalised, whom may need their voice to be amplified?

[Slide 9] I'll touch on a point I otherwise had little space to elaborate on. One of the key critiques throughout the development of gender theory in development has been the way in which women have been framed as passive actors, or purely productive, or subordinate. Recent trends in gender theory has reoriented gender analysis to think about, alternatively, how men gain their power through privilege, rather than how women are disadvantaged by it. We need to critique and understand the role of scientists and science in reinforcing masculine norms, particularly in an institutional context. Gender change is going to require men to engage with their own masculinity; gender is not women's work.

I thus challenge in particular the men in the audience: take the time to question what role masculinity has in your work, and the culture of where you work. Challenge the behaviours of your peers when they unwittingly fall back on masculine norms. This follows my own experiences of being someone who 'does' gender in the science field. I have not been, and still am not, the kind of person who totally gets gender relationships – I've never met anyone who has been comfortable with the term 'gender expert' when it's thrown at them. I think people are surprised too that a man would be interested in gender, because maybe they think there's nothing 'in it for me'. I can tell you more confidently now than I ever could,

because of the work I've done at CSIRO, why gender relations are so important to me: it's important because I think justice is important, important because I think fairness is important, and important because I think it's <mark>important</mark> to make the world a better place for everyone. To that end I want to understand where I stand in this story of justice and injustice, and what I can do to alleviate some of the most fundamental inequalities that exist across societies today. This is not to start on the emotional, social, and scientific benefits, of making our practices more inclusive and understanding. This has required me to reflect on how I act towards my friends, my colleagues, and, yes, why and how I'm doing the work I'm doing. From this I implore everyone to think: Does the gender policy and projects we design engage men about their gender? Is gender seen as a women's job? Why should men engage with gender justice beyond women increasing their productive output? What position do I have as a scientist in perpetuating the power of masculinity in my institution?

[Slide 10] It should be clear that targeted, project and institution specific policy is required for mainstreaming to be successful. I have found that this requires specific, personal reflection about what values are guiding institutions and projects, and how that is impacting our work. I have been lucky over the last few months to have been working with a colleague who has been taking the step further – thinking about how to integrate gender into the modelling practices SDIP itself uses, to provide specific places where this abstract visioning can ground itself in the modelling work we are doing. I hope that the combination of our work should provide the rationale and approach behind making CSIRO a leader in gender mainstreaming. And I'm sure you'll be as impressed with the explorations behind Evie's work as I have been.

Thank you very much.

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