



# Mainstreaming gender in an adaptive, politically smart governance programme

## Lessons from Institutions for Inclusive Development in Tanzania

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A teal circular icon containing the text 'Key messages' in white.

### Key messages

- This paper looks at the experience of gender mainstreaming in the Institutions for Inclusive Development (IID) programme – an adaptive, politically smart governance programme in Tanzania.
- When development programmes try to engage with political stakeholders and align with the priorities of wider coalitions there is a danger that gender equality is de-prioritised.
- It is important that formal political economy analysis, as well as other data collection, analysis and consultation exercises, are gender-sensitive. Teams should also look for ways to make gendered political and power analysis part of the everyday routine practice of staff.
- Working politically and adaptively to advance gender objectives calls for staff with a specific skillset, as well as links to appropriate networks and political stakeholders. It also implies establishing checks and incentives to hold staff and partners accountable for gender objectives, and strong and consistent messaging from team leaders.

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## Introduction

This paper looks at the experience of the Institutions for Inclusive Development (I4ID) programme in Tanzania of mainstreaming gender in its programming, objectives and team structure. It is based on a review of programme documents and other relevant literature, observations during two workshops with the team in Dar es Salaam and interviews with I4ID's staff, donors, local partners and advisors.

I4ID's design and theory of change and core elements of its implementation strategy include strong commitments to gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). For example:

- Two out of seven workstreams focus directly on gender objectives, one on menstrual health management and another on urban women vendors.
- All workstreams are expected to demonstrate that they do not have a negative impact on gender relations, dynamics or opportunities (Green and Guijt, 2019). There is also a more ambitious stated goal that all workstreams identify and respond to risks to and opportunities for improving gender equity. This is still a work in progress, for reasons explored below.
- I4ID previously had a part-time GESI advisor on staff; at the time of writing the team was recruiting to fill the position full-time.
- In its first two years of implementation, the team undertook six-monthly GESI 'health checks' looking at workstreams, organisation and culture. As the programme moves into its third year of implementation in 2019–2020, it is carrying out a more in-depth gender review, which will include developing gender strategies for every workstream.
- Efforts are being made to manage the programme in an inclusive way, including by examining the gender pay gap; aiming for a good gender balance in staffing across all levels of seniority; ensuring a flexible working environment; and monitoring the days used by female and male consultants with a view to improving the equity balance every period.

As a programme that is explicitly designed to work in adaptive, locally led and politically smart ways, with a clear mandate to address gender and social inequality, I4ID is in a strong position to use these principles and ways of working to advance gender-related objectives and strategies. Reducing gender inequalities requires altering entrenched social norms, discriminatory laws and unequal power relations between men and women. In any country, these are complex, context-specific and highly political processes, with few tried and tested solutions that can be rolled out in a linear way. This suggests that there are advantages to programming that is based on testing out different approaches, quickly learning from evidence and adapting accordingly. A deeper understanding of power and institutions can also expose the different experiences of diverse groups of women and men, identify structural barriers to more equitable policies and processes and highlight promising reform constituencies and engagement strategies. This suggests there are advantages to development programmes that can support more politically informed and engaged ways of working.

However, there has been criticism of adaptive development discourse and mainstream political economy analysis as gender-blind and not sufficiently attuned to development as social transformation (Green, 2013; 2015; Koester, 2015). While there are important exceptions, most gender-related programmes and organisations have not, as a matter of course, used structured experimentation to facilitate learning (O'Neil, 2016). Moreover, some political economy and adaptive development enthusiasts have questioned whether the pragmatism of politically smart and adaptive approaches makes them ill-suited for pursuing the normative objectives of gender equality (O'Neil, 2016).

Discussions with I4ID programme staff and partners indicate that some of these broader issues resonate with the programme's experience of trying to mainstream gender. The I4ID team has been prompted, in recent gender workshops, interviews for this paper and formal reviews, to reflect on their progress in mainstreaming gender. Through these processes, the team and reviewers have identified three key priorities:

- ensuring that gender is not deprioritised in the course of engaging with political stakeholders and aligning with the priorities of wider coalitions;
- strengthening the team’s approach to gender analysis, at both the issue scoping phase and on an ongoing basis during implementation of workstreams; and
- building the capacity of staff and partners to undertake gender-responsive work.

This short reflection piece elaborates on each of these priorities, identifying key lessons for other development actors looking to apply adaptive and politically smart programming techniques in pursuit of gender goals. While the focus is on gender, these lessons may also be relevant to other social equity outcomes, and for inclusive institutional change more generally.

## Gender equality and working with the grain

### Key lessons

- There is a danger that gender equality is de-prioritised in the course of establishing relationships with political stakeholders, particularly in a policy environment which is becoming more risk-averse as a result of the increased centralisation of power under President John Magufuli.
- However, in all societies there are different ‘threads’ within the grain, and working politically is partly about finding those that align with progressive reform. In other words, going with the grain should not imply an unquestioning acceptance of the status quo, but rather searching for change processes that have local resonance and leadership. This is becoming more challenging in Tanzania as the space for policy deviation and risk-taking narrows under the current administration.
- In these circumstances, starting with clear gender objectives based on rigorous research, then looking for relevant stakeholders to help build a reform coalition, may be the most sensible way of sequencing an intervention.

### Finding the right threads in the grain

One of the prominent criticisms of the move, in recent years, towards more politically informed and engaged development practice is that working with the grain can imply that development programmes and local actors should recognise existing formal structures of power and work through them to achieve change (Ní Aoláin, 2016; Bell, 2015). This raises the obvious risk of reinforcing the inequities of the status quo, including gender inequality. Conversely, by holding firm and being explicit about particular normative commitments and objectives, programmes also risk being left out of relevant policy processes or prevented from forging useful political connections. One I4ID team member articulated a version of this dilemma as follows: ‘we often have to make a pragmatic decision: are we going to try to get our foot through the door and then bring in GESI issues, or will we shout about GESI from the start and risk not being given a seat at the table?’. In other words, there is an overarching ambition to prioritise gender, but there are also challenges in operationalising this ambition.

The team has encountered this tension in several areas of its work, but perhaps most notably in a workstream focused on urban women vendors in Mwanza and Mbeya. The goal of I4ID’s intervention is for urban policies and local economic development strategies in these cities to prioritise livelihood security and development for urban street vendors, and to respond to the specific needs of and opportunities for women vendors. However, particularly in Mwanza, the political context has compelled I4ID to be heavily reliant on the City Council to access vendors, vendor associations and members and higher-level politicians. This has made it difficult for the workstream to pursue the original intention of identifying and addressing the specific challenges faced by women vendors. Instead, the political concerns of the Council and the Regional Administration have pushed the focus of the workstream towards the management of vendors more generally. Although local government is not opposed to pro-women reforms, it has other priorities with regard to vendors that it feels are more pressing. As a result, the original intention behind the

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workstream, to prioritise the specific needs and concerns of women vendors, is at risk of being diluted (I4ID Annual Report, 2019).

I4ID has adapted to this setback by undertaking new research in Mbeya and Mwanza specifically focused on gender issues, with a view to identifying politically feasible gender outcomes (I4ID Annual Report, 2019). In other words, the team has responded by concentrating on finding ‘threads’ within the political grain that are more closely aligned with its underlying normative values and objectives. As part of this refreshed approach, the team has opted for a more ethnographic, human-centred data collection exercise to better understand how cultural and social norms affect individual agency and access to resources.

### Sequencing and delivering assistance

I4ID’s experience in Mwanza prompted the team to reflect on the way it sequences and delivers assistance. I4ID started the urban vendors workstream with a broadly conceived ambition to do something that combined urban development with gender equality, with a predefined approach based on convening and coalition-building. Urban women vendors were identified as a suitable entry-point to do this. The team reportedly focused on gaining sufficient buy-in from key local political stakeholders to work on policies affecting vendors, then tried to bring in gender concerns once certain key political relationships had been established. However, for the reasons mentioned, the team found that bringing gender in as a key focal point once these relationships had been established and coalition-building efforts were under way proved much harder than envisaged. Some I4ID team members are of the view that more time and resources should have been spent at the outset on identifying the key issues affecting women and girl urban vendors, and *then* deciding on the appropriate entry-point and delivery mechanism, and the political stakeholders they would need to engage with in order to make progress.

This example raises questions about whether and how adaptive and politically smart programmes should try to work against or around the prevailing political grain if it is hostile or ambivalent towards gender equality, or if it simply doesn’t place enough importance

on gender to enable reforms at the pace and/or scale that the programme and its donors desire (Green and Guijt, 2019). Of course, in any given society there are different social and political ‘threads’ or ‘patterns’ within the grain, some of which will be more conducive to or aligned with progressive gender reform than others. Power also operates in multiple ways – through formal visible hierarchical structures, but also in less formal and more collaborative ways (Roche et al., 2018). As such, for an organisation working to achieve more equitable gender relations and better outcomes for women and girls, political ‘smartness’ means negotiating barriers and using opportunities within the political system to achieve objectives. It therefore requires understanding how the political and socio-economic system works, who has power within it and why, establishing which groups and individuals have an interest in the reform because they stand to gain or lose from it and experimenting to test what tactics and relationships will lead to change (O’Neil, 2016).

Among a host of skills, capacities and incentives, this kind of work calls for a strong gendered approach to problem analysis and intervention planning, as well as gender sensitivity as a routine part of everyday working practice among programme staff and partners. The following sub-section deals with these points in more detail.

## Gendered analysis and issue mapping

### Key lessons

- Gendered political economy analysis (PEA) explicitly examines how gender and other social inequalities shape people’s access to power and resources, and what this means for feasible pathways for pro-poor and equitable change. This is an important tool, but one that may need to be supplemented by more ethnographic research to understand how gender norms affect agency, opportunities and livelihoods.
- It is important that formal PEA, as well as other data collection, analysis and consultation exercises, are gender-sensitive. Teams should also look for ways to make gendered political and power analysis part of the everyday routine practice of staff.

- Having a dedicated gender adviser on staff is important for building the capability of the team. However, it is also important that this doesn't detract from gender analysis being seen as a shared responsibility across all team members.

### Bringing gender to the forefront of analysis and issue mapping

*Political economy analysis* explores political and economic processes in society, to provide an in-depth analysis of the power relations between groups. *Gender analysis* explores the power relations between men and women, and often frames this as explicitly political. Despite these areas of overlap, gender issues have not featured prominently in applied PEA or in most mainstream PEA frameworks (Koester, 2015). This may be partly because the stakeholder mapping that sits at the heart of much PEA tends to begin and end by mapping the most significant power-holders, who are often men. Whatever the precise reasons, there is a commonly held view that PEA has not (generally speaking) been sufficiently attentive to the fact that women and men experience power, politics and economics differently, or that gender and other socially constructed identities shape people's ideas, interests and actions (Koester, 2015; O'Neil, 2016).

These points resonate with observations that I4ID team members have articulated about their own approach to analysis and issue scoping. Several I4ID staff have identified, as a key priority, building a stronger gender lens into the analytical process of scoping issues, and as part of ongoing PEA within workstreams. During a recent gender workshop, some team members felt that more could be done to understand how women and girls are impacted (positively or negatively) by I4ID's interventions, and that access to more gender-disaggregated data would better enable them to make strategic decisions in terms of GESI objectives. These reflections are mirrored in the programme's 2019 Annual Report, which acknowledges that, while gender analysis has been integrated into some workstreams, this is not systematic or prioritised in sufficient depth. At certain points, I4ID has been confronted quite clearly by the need for better technical resources

and more dedicated staff time to support key analytical processes with regard to gender. For example, during a recent recruitment drive for a new full-time gender advisor, one candidate drew attention to the fact that a standard gender assessment had not been conducted for every workstream. A comprehensive gender review of all active workstreams is now under way.

Some of these issues have come to the fore in workstreams that are not explicitly pursuing gender objectives, but which have clear gender-specific implications. For example, I4ID has a workstream focused on expanding water service access and affordability for low-income customers in Singida municipality. In October 2018, I4ID provided some funding to support an exercise, conducted by the local utility, to survey the willingness of households to connect to water services and pay monthly water bills. However, the mapping did not aim for detailed gender-disaggregated information – for example, survey respondents were not identified by their gender, or asked whether their household was headed by a male or female. As a result, a key opportunity to embed a gender lens into one of the research activities of the workstream was missed.

Another workstream focuses on urban spatial development in Kigamboni, a district to the south-east of Dar es Salaam. I4ID is helping Kigamboni establish an inclusive land-use plan that responds to residents' needs. In an effort to depart from conventional top-down, externally driven approaches to urban planning, between 2018 and 2019 I4ID reached out to Kigamboni residents through various community consultation processes, including a boundary mapping exercise and an inventory of land use (I4ID Annual Report, 2019). According to one I4ID team member, it became clear during these consultations that, although efforts had been made to identify and invite female participants and representatives from other marginalised groups, men often dominated the discussions. As such, this respondent felt that, in future, a better approach would be to create specific fora where local women would feel more comfortable articulating their viewpoints and needs. Again, the sense was that there are opportunities to improve and take a more thorough approach to gender mainstreaming.

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## Everyday gendered political analysis

I4ID is taking clear steps to introduce a stronger gender lens into its PEA and issue scoping work, and is expecting the new full-time gender adviser to play an important role in facilitating this. While this drive to inject new gender-specific capacity into the team is to be welcomed, it is also important that it forms part of a more rounded approach to embedding gender sensitivity across the team and its partners as a whole, to avoid siloing gender in one role. All workstream coordinators are encouraged to consider gender and other social equity outcomes at the start of any issue or workstream scoping process. However, some team members are concerned that, once implementation gets under way, gender awareness can be siloed in the two dedicated gender workstreams as part of a more general tendency for some staff to see certain areas of I4ID's work as more technical than socially transformative. Recent gender-focused workshops involving the whole team, and the comprehensive gender review of all workstreams that is now being undertaken, are two ways in which the programme leadership are trying to address this.

As a way of responding to these concerns, it may also be useful to embed a more 'everyday' approach to gendered politics and power analysis as part of routine practice. In addition to the political analysis delivered through longer analytical pieces by consultants or individual experts on staff, everyday gendered PEA is something that all staff would be encouraged to apply in their daily work. Marquette et al. (2016) have developed a model for this kind of approach, which involves posing a simple set of questions about the interests at play in a given scenario and the space and capacity available to effect change: asking whether someone is acting in line with their core beliefs, what constraints they are under, what the key influences are on them, what other key stakeholders they work with and so on. With some slight adjustments, these questions could be usefully reoriented to focus attention on gendered beliefs, power relations and norms. Naturally, some of these questions will only be answered by drawing on more detailed and thorough stakeholder mapping, ethnographic data collection and PEA exercises. As such, it is important to

emphasise that everyday PEA is a complement to, rather than a substitute for, these other methods.

## Staffing and partnerships

### Key lesson

- Working politically and adaptively to advance gender objectives calls for staff with a specific skillset, as well as links to appropriate networks and political stakeholders. It also implies establishing checks and incentives to hold staff and partners accountable for gender objectives, and strong and consistent messaging from team leaders.

In the process of recruiting for a new full-time gender adviser in 2019, I4ID applied some lessons about the core skills needed to work in adaptive and politically smart ways on gender equality. According to some team members, while the first gender adviser was an asset to the programme in terms of bringing an activist feminist mentality to the role, the team also looked for stronger analytical capabilities as a core competence for the new position. In addition, I4ID recognised that taking gender seriously requires more staff time and resources – hence the decision to convert the gender advisor role from part- to full-time (as was originally intended at the programme design stage).

Alongside everyday political awareness and strong analytical capacity, successful politically smart programming often hinges on staff having the right networks, connections and local partners. This is a strong theme in the case studies of 'development entrepreneurship' in the Philippines by Faustino and Booth (2014). These examples resonate with a number of features of I4ID's approach, particularly the emphasis on contextual knowledge, carefully targeted interventions that start with small investments to see what works and building relationships with local partners, associations and citizens' groups. Partnering with suitable local actors and groups is likely to be important for sustainable change in any area of development. But it may be particularly important for pursuing progressive gender reforms in Tanzania given that the overall policy environment is becoming more constrained and risk-averse. To date, I4ID has tended to partner

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### **Box 1 Reflections and recommendations on key priorities**

- Priority: Ensure that gender is not deprioritised in the course of engaging with political stakeholders and aligning with the priorities of wider coalitions

In all societies there are different ‘threads’ within the political grain. Working politically is partly about finding those that align with progressive reform. In a context such as Tanzania, where there is limited room for policy deviation or political risk-taking, starting with clear gender objectives based on rigorous research, then looking for relevant stakeholders to help build a reform coalition, may be the most sensible way of going about this.

- Priority: Strengthen the team’s approach to gender analysis, at both the issue scoping phase and on an ongoing basis during implementation of workstreams

Formal PEA, as well as other data collection, analysis and consultation exercises, need to be gender-sensitive. But teams should also look for ways of making gendered political and power analysis part of the everyday routine practice of staff.

- Priority: Build the capacity of staff and partners to undertake gender-responsive work  
Partnering with suitable local actors and groups may be particularly important for pursuing progressive gender reforms in Tanzania. As such, teams should consider strategically recruiting staff with strong connections to relevant groups and networks.

with political and private sector actors in work that has been most relevant to gender outcomes. As one interviewee noted, I4ID may profit from branching out further into local civil society and activist feminist networks to find partners with the requisite motivation and commitment to undertake transformative gender work.

Another way of taking the policy entrepreneur approach more seriously as a means of making headway on gender objectives would be to strategically recruit issue or workstream leads and coordinators with strong connections to relevant groups and networks. According to one advisor to the programme, this could feature more centrally in I4ID’s hiring strategy in future. Some current staff members have been adept at building connections with relevant groups and acquiring new skills and competencies relating to gender objectives. But incorporating these features more centrally into recruitment policy would mean that

workstream leads could start facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement immediately, rather than having to invest time and resources in building these networks from scratch.

## **Conclusion**

As a programme explicitly designed to work in adaptive, locally led and politically smart ways, with a clear mandate to address gender and social inequality, I4ID is in a strong position to advance gender-related objectives and strategies. The I4ID team has been prompted, in workshops, formal reviews and interviews for this learning brief, to reflect on their progress in this area. Through these processes, the team and reviewers have identified three key priorities. This short learning review has identified some lessons that may be useful in achieving these objectives, which are summarised in Box 1.

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