



**The politics of gender in Danish foreign aid**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the mid-1980s women and gender equality have constituted a major priority in Danish foreign aid. For many years the issue has been one of three cross-cutting concerns ranked just below the overall objective of poverty reduction. This paper describes the development of gender policies in Denmark's official foreign aid and analyses the degree to which they reflect domestic politics and circumstances and to what extent organisational concerns in Danida and global norms on gender influence the policies. The tentative conclusion is that global norms play an important (and perhaps increasing) role, together with the normative environment in Denmark, while direct stakeholders seemingly have had a declining influence on the policies.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the creation and development of gender equality as a priority in Danish development policies and, in particular, to analyse a number of explanatory variables in relation to the policies. Foreign aid has often been explained with reference to donor countries' foreign policy concerns and sometimes with reference to altruism and solidarity (Lumsdaine, 1993). In recent years, some attempts to specify in more detail the motives driving aid policies have been undertaken, and the importance of domestic politics in shaping foreign aid has been highlighted (Lancaster, 2007, Lundskaar, 2013, van der Veen, 2011). Other contributions have instead focussed on global norms (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004, Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, Swiss, 2011) and organisational interests and characteristics of donor agencies (Quarles van Ufford, 1988).

This paper focuses on gender policies in development cooperation because gender is a contested issue internationally and cannot be explained satisfactorily by referring to foreign policy concerns or altruism. Gender policies appear to lend themselves much more to domestic political explanations, but may also be influenced by global norms and organisational concerns. In this paper domestic politics is deconstructed into three different issues and, accordingly, five different explanatory variables are explored: first, the *normative environment* in terms of the cultural and social values characterising Danish society, which are likely to encourage particular policy objectives and orientations (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, Meyer and Scott, 1983). Second, *political opportunity structures* (McAdam et al., 1996) shaped by formal and informal political conditions (laws, policies, political elites), which encourage, discourage, regulate and otherwise affect

organisational activity (Campbell, 2005: 44), setting the boundaries for Danida's opportunities to pursue particular gender policies and practices. Thirdly, *direct stakeholders* (Mittchell et al., 1997) exert pressure on Danida by assigning or withdrawing financial and political support. Interest groups and civil society organisations have had institutionalised possibilities for influencing official Danish policies and development programmes since the infancy of Danish aid in the early 1960s, and this may have shaped Danida's gender-related work. Fourth, *global norms* are encountered at international conventions, within international organisations and at international conferences, and these may provide legitimacy to certain initiatives. Fifth, *organisational concerns and characteristics* unrelated to external factors may have a distinct bearing on the policy formulation of an aid agency.

The paper contributes to the research programme *Global Norms and Heterogeneous Development Organisations* (GLONO) which explores how the international norms on gender equality translate into the policy and practice of seven different donor agencies, including the South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA), the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (Danida), the World Bank, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Oxfam International and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. On the basis of multi-sited case studies, the research programme seeks to provide a contribution to the understanding of the relationship between the homogenisation of global norms and the increased heterogeneity of donor organisations in development cooperation. In its present form the current paper concentrates on the analysis of Danida's various gender policies, but it will be supplemented by interviews with central actors at a later

stage. Until recently Danida had issued three policies on women and gender equality (in 1987, 1993 and 2004), but a new policy has just been published. This paper, however, focuses on the three first policies and refers to some other Danida publications as well.

## DANIDA'S GENDER POLICIES

### Early days

A big national campaign in 1962 was a major impetus behind the creation of Danish bilateral development assistance the same year. One of the organisations behind the campaign was the Women's Council in Denmark which initiated the construction of an education centre for women in Ibadan, Nigeria, in the first half of the 1960s. Another early initiative was the Karen College established at Karen Blixen's farm outside Nairobi in connection with Kenya's independence. However, neither of these initiatives was very successful and they reflected a somewhat patriarchal approach to gender, emphasising family planning and domestic work (Bach et al., 2008: 171-76).

It was only as a consequence of the social changes and the anti-authoritarian movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s that more emancipatory ideas gained a foothold. Still, not much happened in Danish aid until the World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City in 1975, the United Nations Decade for Women 1976–1985 and, notably, the mid-decade world conference in Copenhagen in 1980 reviewing the progress in achieving the goals established in Mexico. The conference in Copenhagen was a big event counting some 10,000 participants, with an official event and a parallel NGO conference. Despite the ambition to address the marginalisation of women, glob-

al politics entered the conference with full force putting the Israeli–Palestinian conflict centre stage. Also in relation to gender issues, there were clear disagreements between those (from the North) who concentrated on equality between the sexes and those (from the South) who were more concerned about development (Bach et al., 2008: 323-28).

In relation to gender, civil society organisations were the first movers. KULU – Women and Development, an umbrella organisation for women's organisations working with development cooperation, was established in 1976 and has since combined concrete development activities with campaigns and development education in Denmark. Danida was slower to put gender on the agenda, but published a study in 1978 which had the purpose of supporting aid practitioners in planning and implementation of activities relevant to women in developing countries (Bramsen et al., 1978). The study challenged a number of then widespread ideas, including the assumptions that women do not perform economically productive work and that women naturally benefit from activities targeted at men (ibid: 66–67). Moreover, a major conclusion was that too little was known about the socio-economic conditions of women in developing countries.

In 1985 Danida presented its 'women-related' policy and activities in a small publication entitled *Danish Development Assistance to Women* (Danida, 1985). The framework for doing so was partly the end of the UN decade for women, which was referred to in the very first sentence of the document, partly the deteriorating economic situation, notably in Africa. Danish aid had:

...been reoriented to put more weight on rehabilitation of existing projects and on production-oriented projects, es-

pecially in the agricultural sector [...] As women play a crucial role in food production, it is necessary that they are relieved of part of their domestic workload, e.g. easing access to water and fuel and providing better childcare facilities. (Ibid: 1)

This quote clearly reflects that women were seen as an instrument to reigniting growth and agricultural production. However, a distinction was drawn between women as a direct target group and women as part of a target group. When women were directly targeted the purpose of the activity was described as being to “increase the right of women to influence their own lives.” (Ibid: 2) It was also noted that women are not a homogeneous group and that they need to be involved in project planning to avoid negative unintended consequences. Overall, the document reflected a growing awareness that women have to be taken seriously, but the instrumental reasons for doing so were at least as important as the normative.

In terms of policy, gender mainstreaming appears to have been anticipated to some extent, although only in the form of a focus on women; men were not part of the concern with gender. The document notes that special consideration should be given to the role of women in all projects including those where not only women constitute the target group. Moreover, appraisal guidelines, project checklists and terms of reference for evaluation missions now emphasised the need to consider women (ibid: 2-3). Also, female advisors were recruited to the largest embassies and a position as coordinator of women’s activities at the head office was established. This was partly in response to criticism that only one out of the 26 directors in Danida in 1987 was a woman (Bach et al., 2008: 329-30).

The early 1980s saw some changes to Danida’s approach to gender. While family planning and population programmes had used rather forceful instruments on women and neglected the role of men, it was increasingly recognised that women had a right to control their own bodies and could not be seen as an instrument to reduce population growth. Still, it seems to have been a tiresome affair to get women’s conditions on the aid agenda (ibid: 330-32). One explanation given is that Danish aid projects were negotiated with recipient countries which did not take much interest in the gender issue. However, it is also argued that the limited attention to women in Danish aid was due to a lack of interest and expertise in Denmark and a lack of relevant experts in Danida.

A very important contextual factor was, however, the economic and political crises in Denmark from 1973 onwards. The oil crises in 1973 and 1979 and the resultant stagflation came as significant shocks, given the long period of steady and significant growth since the end of WWII. At the same time the political landscape was transformed by the election of several new political parties to parliament in 1973. The electoral earthquake shattering the political establishment produced ten years of rapidly changing minority governments. In the end, and following strong criticism from all parts of society including the unions, a frustrated social democratic government handed over power in 1982 to a conservative-liberal minority government without elections. This government stayed in power throughout the 1980s, partly because a majority in parliament supported its economic policies, partly because it did not bother too much when a majority outside government pushed through particular policies, and this was notably the case in the field of foreign policy. Most famously and con-

roversially, the majority outside government created a footnote politics in relation to several NATO agreements, but it also decided in 1986 – against the government’s wish – to increase development assistance to one per cent of GDP by 1993.

Moreover, and specifically in relation to foreign aid, the call for a New International Economic Order put forward in the UN in 1974 by the developing countries received increasing attention in Denmark after an initial repudiation (Bach et al., 2008: 261ff). This was in line with the general perception in the 1960s and 1970s that Danish development assistance should help decolonised countries to gain independence and, like the other Nordic countries, Denmark was somewhat reserved when the IMF and World Bank pushed for Structural Adjustment Programmes in the early 1980s. However, this changed gradually and the conservative-liberal government’s charismatic Minister of Foreign Affairs, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, became increasingly assertive and in 1987 declared his support for structural adjustment and for a political dialogue with recipient countries emphasising Danish priorities (ibid: 302-304). All in all, the domestic political opportunity structures and normative environment did not favour significant policy initiatives on gender in development cooperation in the 1970s and early 1980s. Normatively, using aid to promote particular values and policy priorities was not accepted in this period, and the changing governments and parliamentary majorities did not perceive the promotion of women in development as a political opportunity. This may go some way to explaining why gender was seriously addressed by the Danish aid administration only much later than was the case in Sweden and Norway (19 and 12 years later, respectively).

There was, however, a clear recognition of

the issue. A commission established by the social democratic government in 1980 published its report almost two years later and noted:

...that the female aspect needs to be integrated in all forms of assistance wherever it is relevant. Projects directly addressing women are seen as necessary in a transitional phase. But the commission cannot recommend earmarking of funds for projects focussing on women as this may counter the efforts to integrate the female aspect generally in development cooperation and undermine the overall objective that women are accepted and treated on a par with men, also in the context of development cooperation. (Bang-udvalget, 1982: 119, my translation)

The ambition of mainstreaming gender was, thus, voiced relatively forcefully, but it was not picked up by the conservative-liberal government which came into power only one month after the publication of the report. Moreover, it seems that whatever the policy interest in the issue, concrete activities had a poor impact on women’s conditions. An evaluation concluded that Danish projects did little, if anything, to increase women’s access to the means of production and to cash incomes, to mitigate women’s increasing workloads or to build on women’s own views (Whyte et al., 1987: 3-5).

### **Developing a policy**

The first policy paper on women in development, the *Plan of Action for Development Assistance to Women*, was published in 1987. It consisted of three parts: a general strategy, sector plans with guidance for how to include WID

in support to specific sectors, and the setting out of country programmes with a focus on women in the then four main recipient countries of Danish aid, namely Tanzania, Kenya, India and Bangladesh. The plan of action explicitly stated that it had been drafted in response to a decision by parliament on 26 November 1985 on how to follow up on the UN conference reviewing the Decade for Women in Nairobi, June 1985 (Danida, 1987: 3). Main points from the conference were discussed and used as a platform for the Danish action plan. This clearly suggests that UN conferences and global norms had an important bearing on the development of the Danish WID policy (Swiss, 2011). The strategy also emphasised that Denmark would try to strengthen the importance of WID and the promotion of the conclusions of the Nairobi conference in international forums and in cooperation with recipient countries. Accordingly, the plan of action reflected an ambition to live up to international norms, but it also underscored that Denmark should be a norm broker internationally. Moreover, the action plan stated that the strategy had been developed in cooperation with Danish women's organisations working in developing countries (Danida, 1987: 3) and it called for active cooperation with women's organisations to ensure that more women engaged in technical assistance (ibid: 12). Whether this mirrored a significant influence of these organisations on Danish aid policies, or a lack of capacity within Danida to formulate and implement a WID policy is not clear, but it does suggest a relatively close cooperation at that time between Danida and civil society organisations working in the field of gender.

Generally, the plan of action seems to have been a thorough attempt to put WID on the agenda, partly because it sought to integrate the matter horizontally in all the various

forms of assistance provided by Danida (bilateral projects, technical assistance, scholarship programmes, financial assistance, NGO support and multilateral assistance), partly because it was organised around a vertical focus on the matter at the policy level and in specific sectors and country programmes. In complete agreement with the conclusions of the commission mentioned above, the strategy argued in favour of both integrating 'the female aspect' in all projects and of initiating particular projects targeting women (ibid: 10). The latter were seen as a temporary activity, to be carried out until women's interests and needs were fully integrated into all development projects.

The major concern in the strategy was to emphasise the role of women in production. Moving on from having focused on the role of women in the social sectors and in relation to the satisfaction of basic human needs in the 1970s and early 1980s, the strategy suggested increased attention to women's access to land, technology and capital. However, the reason for doing so appears to have been instrumental: "Women's economic independence is an important means to promoting general development." (Ibid: 8, my translation) While the strategy noted the importance of securing women's political and judicial rights and of strengthening women's organisations, such concerns were not presented as goals in their own right, but rather as intermediate objectives facilitating a broader development. This is reflected in the following sentence (which is highlighted in the original document):

The female aspect should not be regarded as an appendage or an add-on to the project, but rather as the key to the solution of concrete problems. (Ibid: 10, my translation)

At the same time, the sector plans contained numerous important observations on how women's interests and needs differ from men's and how specific aid activities have to be reorganised in order to address women's particular challenges (Danida, 1988a). So, although the main strategic aim of the action plan seems to have been to add women to all parts of existing development cooperation, it also pointed towards a rethinking of the cooperation, at least in specific sectors.

In 1988 Danida developed a strategic action plan with four quantitative and six qualitative goals. Alongside the promotion of social, humanitarian and political ideals, lasting improvement of poor people's conditions, the use of a partnership approach, the endeavour to create sustainable development, and the promotion of human rights, was the stated ambition to ensure aspects related to women a central and fully integrated role in the development process (Danida, 1988b: 2-3). This was the first attempt to situate gender equality in relation to other Danish development priorities.

### **A Political Policy**

The WID (Women in Development) policy was revised in 1993, partly on the basis of a discussion paper issued one year earlier. This paper analysed the limited improvements of women's conditions during the 1980s, their lack of political influence, and the role of foreign aid. Although it acknowledged that many initiatives had been taken, the paper argued that WID activities were often marginalised and suffered from weak funding and staffing (Skjønsberg, 1992: 16). Furthermore, it called for a reconceptualisation, criticising the WID approach of the 1980s for:

... 'adding on' women as an afterthought or a residual category, sidelining women in the process. Women were furthermore often treated as a homogeneous group and their situation analysed in isolation from and unrelated to that of men. Class-, ethnicity- and intra-household gender differences were rarely taken into account in connection. Women continued to be viewed as passive recipients (target groups) of development initiatives generated in the North. The missing connection between women's rights and human rights, and the fact that women make out a large majority of the world's poor, was rarely problematized. (Ibid: 23)

The policy paper also accepted this analysis in relation to Danish development assistance (Danida, 1993: 8) and called for the mainstreaming of women's needs and priorities in development as well as a redefinition of development objectives in consonance with women's interests. Both of these points are significant. Although the 1987 policy talked about integrating the 'female aspect' in all projects, 'mainstreaming' only became the buzzword for how to address gender in development cooperation with the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Nanivazo and Scott, 2012), but it was stipulated as official Danish policy a little earlier. The second point was developed in the following statements:

The issue is thus not how to integrate women, but how to transform the system so that dominant social and economic structures promote and secure women's basic human rights, including their economic rights. [...] Consequently what is needed is a new approach where women's

subordination and poverty is seen as a global issue closely linked to international debts handling, military spending, trade in drugs, arms and women and North-South economic inequality. [...] Closing gender gaps is imperative, but not sufficient when also men suffer from global political and economic inequalities. A new agenda for world development must include new solutions to the world's unsolved social, ecological and economic problems. Hitherto the traditional recipe has been more of the same old medicine. The gender analysis provides an opportunity to redefine old problems and old theories. Women's perspective, sharpened by women's subordinate status, key position in the reproductive sphere and lack of economic resources and political power, may provide a new understanding of old societal ills, cut edges and bring forth a more humane social order. (Danida, 1993: 11, 12, 15)

This was a fairly radical departure from the 'adding on' approach of the 1980s as it not only addresses gender instead of women, but it also questions contemporary development paradigms and conditions. Women are not only forgotten in development practice, global conditions effectively marginalise them and, by implication, gender equality is not just about creating fairer relations between women and men, but also about changing the structures that create inequalities and poverty. Interestingly, this framing of the gender issue could be said to draw both on the 1970s questioning of the international economic order and on the emerging political understanding around 1990 that Danish development assistance should promote Danish priorities.

The policy linked a focus on women with the concern for poverty reduction, and this reflected the growing attempt to create a coherent development policy which could be interpreted as an organisational concern in Danida. The early 1990s have been described as the "creative period" (Bach et al., 2008: 407-408) where many new visions were formulated, and this was not least due to creative thinking within Danida. The ministry has been described as the major actor shaping Danish development policy in this period (Martinussen, 1989, Olsen, 2005). In 1994 the first general development policy was published in which gender was one of three cross-cutting concerns to be considered in all Danish development cooperation (*A World in Development*, (Danida, 1994). Together with the environment and democratisation, gender was placed in a position just below the overarching objective of poverty reduction.

It is also noteworthy how the updated WID policy of 1993 is based on references to WID activities of other donor agencies and of international organisations:

Within aid organisations WID units and initiatives have been established, but, generally speaking, most WID offices lead a marginalized existence, with limited influence, small staff and modest funds. [...] While the establishment of national WID machineries was the answer to the increased awareness of women in development of the 1980s, women's groups and national and international organisations and networks are the major change agents within the gender-framework. The approaches these and similar groups are promoting are mainstreaming, empowerment and agenda setting. (Danida, 1993: 10, 11)

The language of this paragraph was partly aimed at appealing to international norm entrepreneurs, and drew on an emerging international consensus, possibly in order to legitimise the policy. Global norms and tendencies evidently had a bearing on the policy, and being at the forefront of international thinking seems to have been important. This may also be a reason why the policy was published in English and not in Danish as the 1987 plan of action had been.

Early in 1993 a new government led by the social democrats took over after ten years of conservative-liberal government. As part of this change the first ever creation of a position as minister for development assistance was created. The new minister, Helle Degn (soon to be challenged inside the government and the victim of a newspaper campaign), did not put a significant stamp on Danish foreign aid in her short period in office, but the political opportunity structure for a more activist Denmark in development cooperation now existed. In addition to providing 1% of GNI for development assistance, the government created a fund for environmental and humanitarian support which was planned to reach 0.5% of GNI by 2002 (Bach et al., 2008: 400). Though the money set aside for this fund was initially spent almost entirely on refugees in Denmark, development cooperation was a strong priority of the government, and this provided a political environment conducive for creative thinking within Danida.

In the years around 1990 Danida employed a number of people to work on WID issues. A WID adviser was responsible for policies, guidelines and training in the head office, while WID counsellors were appointed at the Danish embassies in programme cooperation countries. In addition, four embassies hired national WID advisers to strengthen their work and, finally, a position as special adviser

on international equality affairs was created in 1991 (Danida, 1993: 7). On top of this, the 1993 policy suggested a number of initiatives including the use of quotas determining a minimum of female representation at different levels, earmarking of funds, indicators, checklists and a manual. This call for administrative procedures was explained in the following way:

The lack of cost-effectiveness and accountability is a major problem in development aid. Failure to meet targets has rarely any consequences for policy, leadership or organisational structures. As a result legally binding conventions and political declarations remain paper tigers and WID efforts continue their marginalized existence while structural adjustment policies, environmental devastation and low rawmaterial prices continue to undermine the living conditions of women and other poor people.” (Ibid: 21)

While this may be very true, the resulting control approach may not have been conducive for effective development cooperation. With its range of cross-cutting concerns and changing political priorities, which is the reality of donor agencies like Danida, staff in country offices can easily drown in the procedure, guidelines, checklists, indicators and the like that are developed in relation to each of these concerns and priorities (Engberg-Pedersen, 2007).

The emphasis on Women in Development was clear in the first general development policy adopted in 1994 (Danida, 1994) as well as in the second from 2000 (Danida, 2000) which described the concern in this way:

Denmark’s development policy shall promote equality between men and

women and help to ensure equal participation of both genders in the development process. The promotion of women's status and position is a key element in poverty reduction and an important goal for development co-operation. In order to attain development goals it is vital to draw upon the resources of both women and men. (Danida, 2000: 30)

Gender had become a more important concern and men were explicitly mentioned. Still, the focus was on women, and the combination of mainstreaming and special initiatives was maintained. There was emphasis on strengthening women's opportunities to gain political influence, but the policy also embraced the traditional concern with "*education of women* as the best means of promoting political, social and economic opportunities for women and the welfare of the family." (Ibid: 31) Compared to the 1993 WID policy the ambition to "transform the system" so that women's interests and needs are better catered for, had vanished. Semantically, it is interesting that the general policy talked about the "gender aspect" which resembles the term "female aspect" used in the 1987 WID policy, but which was completely absent from the 1993 WID policy. Phrases like "integrate the gender aspect in all elements of development co-operation" (ibid.) tend to depoliticise and obscure the precise content of the initiative. In this sense, the 1993 WID policy stands out as a clear attempt to engage with the political conditions of gender inequalities compared to the other policy papers.

### **A policy without resources**

In 2004 a new policy on gender equality (Danida, 2004) was issued. The objective of the policy was to contribute, for women and men,

to equal rights, equal access to and control of resources, and equal opportunities to achieve political and economic influence (ibid: 10). The Gender and Development (GAD) approach obviously played a role in the policy in the sense that women and men were repeatedly mentioned. Gender equality was now the primary concern, and the policy acknowledged that this was a political issue: "The implementation of the strategy will demand changes to existing power structures, the status and roles of women and men. Therefore, working with gender equality will in many contexts be conflictual." (Ibid.) Developing this line of thinking, the policy called for special interventions "aimed at creating fundamental structural changes in institutions, policies, legislation and allocation of resources to promote gender equality between men and women" (ibid: 11). The policy set the framework for this kind of work, but emphasised the need to adjust the policy to meet the specific conditions in individual societies. Thus, whether the policy would be able to create "fundamental structural changes" depended heavily on country programmes and initiatives carried out by Danish embassies.

In addition to the special interventions, mainstreaming (defined as 'sex-disaggregation in all phases of project, programme and policy cycles') was maintained as a central ambition. As issues of particular concern the policy mentioned violence against women, sexual and reproductive rights, and access to resources. However, quotas and earmarking of funds were no longer mentioned, and the policy limited itself to suggesting equal opportunities for women and men. In societies with significant institutional and normative barriers to women's influence, formal equal opportunities may help little in creating gender equality as an outcome. In this way the policy was less ambitious than the 1993 WID

policy. This may partly be explained by the change of government in 2001 when a liberal-conservative government took over after the social democrats. The new government cut development assistance, closed three country programmes and abolished the position of development minister, partly as one element in an ideological showdown with the social democratic welfare state, partly to finance increasing health expenditure. Internationally, the government was primarily concerned with the War on Terror and establishing close relations to the US. In this context gender equality in development assistance was not at the top of the agenda, and the renewed policy was likely to be the result of an organisational initiative by Danida. The political opportunity structures were, however, of a nature that did not permit more radical suggestions such as those proposed in the 1993 policy. At the same time, the 2004 policy was somewhat influenced by the increased focus on security in its highlighting of the issue of violence against women.

The implementation of the policy was envisaged at three levels: interventions at country level in the then 15 programme countries, international cooperation, and strengthening of the capacity of Danida. Of the subsequent eleven pages developing this, five were set aside for each of the two first levels and just one (actually, ten lines) was devoted to the capacity issue. Most interesting is the emphasis placed on international norms. These constitute the legitimate basis for engaging in dialogue with governments in individual programme countries, and the 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action were referred to as central for identifying special interventions aimed at structural change (ibid: 19). In the chapter on international cooperation, the policy emphasised that Denmark wanted to defend and strengthen inter-

national norms on gender equality, notably in the UN but also in relation to the World Bank, OECD/DAC, international NGOs and regional organisations (ibid: 21-24). Accordingly, the policy presented Denmark not just as a 'norm-taker' responding to international ideas and agreements, but also as a 'norm entrepreneur' seeking to set the international agenda. The overall emphasis on the international level in the policy indicates that this was seen to be as important as providing a frame for country-level activities, and this suggests that organisational interests significantly influenced the policy because exerting pressure on organisations such as, for example, UNIFEM and OECD/DAC was hardly a major political or public concern in Denmark at the time. Moreover, the policy hardly mentioned Danish stakeholders. In one sentence Danish women's organisations were presented as "useful advisors to the government" (ibid: 21), but the impetus for focussing on gender equality was squarely located in UN conventions and conferences, not in pressure from Danish actors.

The context of aid and staff cuts emerges clearly in the laconic and meaningless ten lines on capacity strengthening in Danida. The text referred to best practices and a vague strengthening of competence development, despite the fact that two pages later the policy highlighted the difficulties of turning good policies into action:

Good policy intentions in the area of gender equality are often not implemented satisfactorily in practice. This may be the result of insufficient planning, inadequate technical expertise, insufficient follow-up, inadequate support from middle and upper management in donor organisations, and insufficient resources. Therefore, there is a need for

focus, priority setting, development of indicators and follow-up based on performance assessments of the development interventions, as well as sufficient resources to secure the impact of the interventions. (Ibid: 27)

There were no indications of how Danida planned to ensure such a strengthened focus, and given the observation in the DAC Peer Review that the “decreasing trend in administrative resources [between 2001 and 2004] raises the question of how far Danida can reduce its resources without negatively affecting quality and its ability to adapt to new modalities” (OECD/DAC, 2007: 16), the few lines on competence development appear to reflect an acknowledgement that not much would be done in this field.

## CONCLUSIONS

The role of the *normative environment* is relatively difficult to ascertain in relation to the different gender policies. There is little doubt that the general normative environment in Denmark has been conducive for adopting gender equality as an important priority in Danish development assistance, and it is somewhat surprising that such a priority was not clearly established earlier than 1987. This could indicate that norms on gender equality have had little influence on development policies. However, one reason for this may be another norm or widespread political understanding in the 1960s and 1970s; namely a *non-interference* norm. The developing countries were regarded as decolonised societies that had a right to political sovereignty, and development assistance should not only support the economic development of these nations, but also strengthen their political inde-

pendence. It was only in the course of the 1980s that this norm was gradually eroded by the view that many of these countries had pursued irresponsible macro-economic policies. As the barrier to adopting more specific political priorities to be pursued in development cooperation was dismantled, gender equality became a significant concern and has remained so ever since. It is unlikely that women and gender equality would have constituted one of three cross-cutting concerns for twenty years, closely linked to the overall objective of poverty reduction, had it not been for a normative environment that supported it. This conclusion is buttressed by the fact that the gender equality policy and its two major modalities of mainstreaming and specific interventions, have remained the same despite changes of government.

The *political opportunity structures* also appear to tell us something. The comparatively late adoption of a policy on women and gender equality is partly due to the continued economic and political crisis from 1973 and into the 1980s. As a gender policy would have had to confront the non-interference norm prevalent at the time; a window of opportunity was needed, but the political agenda was saturated with issues believed to be much more important than the details of development assistance. With increasing political and economic stability in the mid-1980s and the closing of the United Nations Decade for Women marked by the Nairobi conference, Danish politicians seemingly felt a need to do something and asked the government to establish a follow-up. Once the first policy was adopted in 1987, it appears that the two subsequent policies have, to some extent, been less dependent on the political opportunity structures. The 1993 policy was adopted under a government led by social democrats while the 2004 policy came into being under

a liberal-conservative government. Even the differing contents of these two policies may not have had much to do with the changing political opportunity structures, as the social democratic government took few steps to realise the ambitions of systemic change expressed in the 1993 policy.

The present analysis cannot document a significant importance of *direct stakeholders*. Danish women's organisations are mentioned here and there and they may have had some influence on the 1987 policy, but the policies are not legitimised with reference to pressure groups or other societal actors. On the contrary, the 2004 policy notes that it also applies to Danish civil society organisations receiving public funds. Thus, it seems that the formulation of, at least, the 1993 and the 2004 policies was undertaken relatively independently of stakeholders in Danish society. However, the present paper does not include an analysis of the formulation processes of the policies in which various stakeholders may have taken part.

*Global norms*, on the other hand, seem to have played a very important role with respect to the development of Danish gender policies. The motivation for creating the first policy was strongly driven by the Nairobi conference in 1985, and all three policies refer in depth to international discussions and experience. The international move from WID to GAD is reflected in the policies and so too is the emphasis on mainstreaming where the 1993 policy actually predates the official UN adoption of the term at the conference in Beijing in 1995. Being quick to sense the latest international ideas appears to have been an important concern. Moreover, all three policies reflected a desire to influence normative discussions at the international level, and the last two policies (in English) may actually be seen as attempts to do so. Notably

the 2004 policy, which does not refer to new human and financial resources to boost the bilateral engagement, could be read as an update intended to document the progressive nature of Danish development assistance and as an attempt to promote particular views on women and gender equality.

The particular way that the emerging global norms have been translated into Danish policies seems to be influenced by *organisational concerns and characteristics* of Danida. Again, this is a tentative conclusion based as it is only on an analysis of policy papers, but both the 1993 and 2004 policies seem to be the results of initiatives taken within Danida. Moreover, the 1993 policy was more radical than contemporary official discussions internationally. All three policies also referred to women's rights which are a disputed issue in international forums. These are indications of the specific Danish flavour added to the global norms as they are expressed in the policies.

On the basis of the policy documents, the tentative conclusion is that global norms and the normative environment in Denmark have stimulated and shaped Danish gender policies, with the political opportunity structures and Danida's organisational concerns and characteristics playing a secondary, though not unimportant, role. Direct stakeholders in Danish society seem to have had a fairly small and diminishing influence. To substantiate this conclusion, the analysis should be supplemented by interviews with participants in the policy formulation processes, and by the collection of data on the financial and human resources set aside for gender activities.

There is little doubt that gender is a particular theme in development cooperation, and other themes may be influenced differently by the explanatory variables. Private sector development, for example, is likely to be the object of stronger pressure from stake-

holders in Danish society and less influenced by global norms. Another point, which may be analysed in relation to the recently published new gender policy, has to do with the changing influence of the respective variables. It seems, for example, that norm entrepreneurial ambitions have not diminished, and it will be an interesting observation to notice if gender in Danish development policies become more and more decoupled from Danish society.

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