



Negotiating meanings of gender justice: Critical reflections on dialogs and debates in a non-governmental organization (NGO)



Parul Sharma^{a,*}, Geeta Verma^a, Aditi Arur^b

^a CARE India, India

^b University of Minnesota, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Capabilities approach
Gender training
Gender and education
Public dialog
NGO
Translation

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we reflect upon how dialogs and debates in a non-governmental organization (NGO) – CARE India in the context of a girls' education project shaped staff members' understandings of gender justice. As CARE India staff shared their experiences in the field, in the organization, and in domestic spaces during gender training sessions and other forums, their different politics in these spaces shaped how they translated global discourses of gender justice to produce fluid, contested, and contextual understandings. While these dialogs included the voices of diverse social actors in identifying the capabilities needed for gender justice in education, they were often reframed by local NGO actors.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

This paper is a critical reflection of development workers' participation in dialogs and debates on gender justice in the context of enacting a transnational project on girls' education in one particular non-governmental organization (NGO) – CARE India. Drawing from the capabilities approach, we seek to understand the dialogic processes by which NGO actors make sense of gender justice in terms of the capabilities needed for girls and boys to achieve their goals in and through education. Given the significant role that NGO actors play in influencing public discourse in the development process, we are also keen to understand how they include or not the voices of diverse social actors while negotiating different meanings of gender justice. We address these questions by analyzing the stories that CARE India staff members articulate in gender training sessions and other forums as they bring in their experiences from different spaces and contexts, specifically in the field where programmatic work on girls' education occurs, in the organization (CARE India) where men and women negotiate the work assigned to them, and in domestic spaces where they negotiate gender relations. These stories provide insights into the complexities of how NGO actors understand gender justice depending upon their differential positionings in different spaces. We suggest that although the voices of diverse social actors are included in these dialogs and debates, they are mediated and reframed by local NGO actors.

We begin by providing a brief background of CARE India and the programmatic context in which dialog on gender justice took place. We then situate the paper in the literature on gender mainstreaming in development organizations followed by a discussion on the role of public dialog, as discussed in the capabilities approach, in advancing gender justice agendas in education internationally. Later, we draw from the concept of translation to suggest that different understandings of gender need not be read as 'failures' of gender mainstreaming in development work, but as meaningful interpretations of globally produced discourses that are constantly being translated and contested by differently situated actors in 'local' spaces. We then briefly discuss the methodology before presenting our analytical reflections of gender training and mainstreaming practices within CARE India.

1. Background of the PCTFI program in CARE India

This paper focuses specifically on CARE India staff members working on the Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative (PCTFI), a research project on girls' education currently being implemented in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. This initiative funded by CARE USA is a longitudinal quasi-experimental research study that is committed to enhancing educational opportunities for the most marginalized girls across eight countries in Ghana, Malawi, Cambodia, Honduras, Mali, Bangladesh, Tanzania and India.

In India, PCTFI is being implemented through CARE's Girls' Education Program (GEP) unit in Shravasti district of Uttar Pradesh (UP). It supports 60 government primary school teachers to develop gender-sensitive and inclusive pedagogical practices in their classrooms. Using CARE USA's Common Indicator Framework

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +91 930 534 9990.

E-mail addresses: emailparulsharma@gmail.com, xyzpuja@yahoo.com (P. Sharma).

(CIF) as a guiding framework (see [Miske et al., 2010](#)), CARE India is measuring, in particular, teachers' gender-sensitivity in their pedagogical practices from data collected through individual interviews and classroom observations. In order to construct and revise tools to measure gender-sensitivity, several discussions took place amongst the PCTFI team and the larger GEP team within which it is situated. The CIF has therefore been deemed as a gender mainstreaming process at the programmatic level ([Miske et al., 2010](#)). As we argue in this paper, it has also shaped dialog, although not in predictable ways, on the gendered nature of organizational practices, and on the gendered contexts in their homes. In the next section, we situate these dialogs in the literature on gender mainstreaming.

2. Gender mainstreaming in organizations

The World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 gave an impetus to gender mainstreaming initiatives that had begun during the UN decade for Women in the 1980s. In partnership with national governments, feminist agendas in development sought to challenge the gendered nature of public policies, the structures of organizations involved in development, and the implementation of policies at all levels and across sectors to alter them in ways that would improve women's lives significantly. Since gender mainstreaming was advocated largely as an organizational strategy, much of the literature on the experiences of gender mainstreaming has focused on organizational processes and the constraints in bringing about institutional change ([Subrahmanian, 2004](#); [Moser and Moser, 2005](#); [Unterhalter and North, 2010](#)).

Amongst these organizational processes, gender training is considered to be one of the most crucial components "to help organizations think more deeply about gender relations, away from the earlier 'add women and stir approach'" ([Subrahmanian, 2004](#), p. 89). Organizations have invested in training, in particular, to sensitize staff about gender issues, to provide an understanding of basic gender concepts, and above all to use a 'gender lens' in all their work ([Moser and Moser, 2005](#); [Mukhopadhyay et al., 2006](#); [Rao and Kelleher, 2005](#); [Tiessen, 2004](#)).

Evaluations of training experiences in the context of gender mainstreaming, however, present a narrative of failures where negative attitudes to gender issues persist at all levels of the organization in the forms of 'male resistance' and 'cultural resistance', along with a continuing lack of conceptual clarity with regards to the differences between sex and gender ([Moser and Moser, 2005](#); [Tiessen, 2004](#)). Further, these trainings have been perceived by staff members as irrelevant and unrelated to their work or ironically as additional sources of income through per diems allocated to attend gender training workshops ([Tiessen, 2004](#)). While the need for more and better training is recognized for its potential in creating spaces for dialogs and debates on gender issues, in effect it has minimally affected organizations, and programmatic work let alone social change, although the rhetoric of organizations might suggest otherwise.

This narrative of 'failure' has come in for much criticism. [Mehra and Gupta \(2006\)](#) have highlighted that the literature on gender mainstreaming implicitly expects an optimal level of organizational change with staff members being conversant and knowledgeable about gender issues before changes at the level of field operations can be attempted. Such an expectation, they argue, is both unreasonable and undesirable as it serves to defer goals of transforming the lives of women in marginalized communities in favor of organizational change. They, therefore, stress upon gender mainstreaming as a process which cannot be expected to yield instant changes in norms and values. Rather, they insist that "the gradual accretion of such changes over time is much more likely to result in the bigger goals of cultural and social change, and

empowerment and equality" (p. 14). [Subrahmanian \(2004\)](#) has also suggested scaling down the mammoth expectations produced by the 'monolithic', and 'mystical beast' of gender mainstreaming (p. 92), which not only unduly burdens development workers but the negative assessments produced also tend to discount and devalue the small positive changes that they do bring about through their work. While some scholars have suggested to focus on gender mainstreaming at the level of field operations where it matters most ([Mehra and Gupta, 2006](#); [Miske et al., 2010](#)), [Subrahmanian \(2004\)](#) has suggested to break down the 'beast' into smaller organizational processes with the goal of understanding them in the contexts that they are being played out. In this paper, therefore, we break down the monolith of gender mainstreaming to reflect upon dialogs and debates occurring during training sessions and other forums in the context of operationalizing a girls' education program.

The tendency of gender mainstreaming practices to not take into account the sociocultural contexts of institutions is a persistent concern amongst scholars ([Subrahmanian, 2004](#); [Unterhalter and North, 2010](#)). Institutional change is often conflated with social change without considering the political economy and local contexts within which gender mainstreaming practices occur ([Subrahmanian, 2004](#)). Hence, gender mainstreaming needs to be contextualized for realistic social change to occur. There is a tension, however, between gender mainstreaming taking into account local contexts and practices while also not producing hegemonic meanings. Implicitly, training is expected to produce a common understanding of gender concepts with that understanding frequently framed by discourses in the global north. Such an expectation tends to close the spaces for dialog and debate on gender justice as it privileges one understanding of gender ([Unterhalter and North, 2010](#)). One way to explore this tension is to examine the debates that happen in transnational organizations such as CARE where local meanings meet international frameworks and norms. In the next section, we discuss the role of public dialog from a capabilities approach in the negotiation of meanings on gender justice.

3. Public dialog for gender justice in education: the capabilities approach

The capabilities approach places much importance on how justice can be achieved by evaluating the freedoms, the real opportunities, or choices that people have to lead a life that they have reason to value, rather than what they have achieved in terms of 'functionings' ([Sen, 1999, 2009](#)). Such an approach moves beyond a resource-based approach or a rights-based approach to justice, and focuses also on the social conditions that affect the conversion of resources, and the processes of making choices in achieving certain valued capabilities ([Nussbaum, 2000](#)). Much of the literature on the capabilities approach in the field of education has focused on identifying capabilities that education should foster in certain contexts ([Walker and Unterhalter, 2007](#)), in defining educational quality more broadly ([Tikly and Barrett, 2010](#)), and in understanding the social conditions that might affect the conversion of capabilities to actual functionings in and through education ([Smith and Barrett, 2010](#); [DeJaeghere and Lee, 2011](#)).

In this paper we are interested in understanding how processes of dialog, and the social conditions that shape dialog, might influence NGO actors' different understandings of gendered inequalities in education, and their recognition of gendered patterns in schools in relation to the other spaces that they occupy such as the NGO in which they work, and their homes. Although the role of public reasoning and debate in the capabilities approach is important in conceptualizing the 'how' of justice, it has received relatively little attention in the educational literature

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/356080>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/356080>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)