5 Promoting a gender agenda in climate and sustainable development

A civil servant's narrative

Gerd Johnsson-Latham and Annica Kronsell

Prologue

I, Annica Kronsell, became acquainted with Gerd's work on gender, sustainability and development when reading her report from 2007 (discussed below) and invited her to a conference on Gender, Power and Climate Change, at Lund University in 2010. Gerd's participation at the event was not in an official capacity; nevertheless Gerd's perseverance in pushing gender issues onto the governmental agenda on sustainability, climate and development issues truly impressed me. We have met many times since and Gerd continues to amaze me with her tireless work on gender and climate, whether it is in government or civil society organisations. Over the years, I have been particularly curious about her work in the institutional context of government offices, asking myself if Gerd can be seen as femocrat, as an outsider within, or an activist inside? Her experiences are important; thus, I asked Gerd to write them down as an input to this book. This being an academic text, we agreed that I would take her story and interpret it in relation to feminist institutional theory. The text presented in this chapter is, thus, the result of the encounter between a civil servant and an academic.

Introduction

This chapter discusses the promotion of gender perspectives in the sustainable development and climate agenda from the unique perspective of a civil servant with gender expertise, reflecting on a long career. Gerd Johnsson-Latham has been working with international (development) cooperation for the last four decades, primarily in the areas of gender equality, women's rights, climate justice and sustainable development in her role as a civil servant. Her main employer has been the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), but she has also worked with the Swedish Government Offices in other capacities, and served in the UN and the World Bank. Her knowledge of the multilateral context is solid and genuine and her competence broad as she has also pursued women's rights, gender and climate policies by virtue of her work in civil society: at the international level through the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), and at the two Swedish NGOs: *Kvinna till Kvinna* and

Klimatriksdagen (The Climate Parliament). The narrative which constitutes the material for this analysis was provided by Gerd herself, then edited and framed by me, Annica Kronsell, in close dialogue with Gerd. The chapter aims to use Gerd's narrative to provide reflections on the institutional challenges that government officials face when promoting gender equality within government offices and, particularly, in international fora and how they navigate that space in order to gender mainstream the agenda. The reflections come from the perspective of feminist institutionalism (Chapter 1, this volume). The text which is indented is Gerd's own words, while the rest of the text is the analysis developed from the dialogue between us.

Feminist institutionalist analysis demonstrates that institutions – like ministries and multilateral organisations – organise power inequalities through formal as well as informal rules and practices (Mackay et al., 2010; Krook and Mackay, 2011; Ljungholm, 2017). Gerd's narrative sheds light on the power relations affecting the gender, sustainability and climate nexus of ministries and the multilateral institutional context. It tells a story of path dependencies (Kenny, 2007, p. 93; Waylen, 2014) in terms of the specific notions of what 'gender' tends to imply, or be understood as, basically concerning women – e.g. as *not* privileged men – and also how gender objectives are placed in relation to other competing objectives like trade, development and administrative principles. Gerd's narrative recognises that gender is nested in other power categories (Kaijser and Kronsell, 2014), such as economic status and place. Most importantly, Gerd's long experience as presented through her narrative also provides hope in that it shows that change is possible. Her story gives us valuable knowledge of how it is possible to affect the agenda, by pointing to critical acts that primarily female, gender-focused civil servants take. The critical acts that stand out in Gerd's narrative are: a) the reports that underscore the importance of going into depth, and generating new knowledge – on gender relations and privileges of males – as a way to push policy-making and action forward, b) the importance of being part of, and taking advantage of, networks of gender experts and political opportunities and c) the value of the everyday nitty gritty, hard institutional labour of analysing documents and finding ways to include gender in as many places as possible, because this can become a platform for action. Through the narrative, Gerd alerts us to the institutional inertia that affected her work and, finally, she concludes with visions for a transformative agenda, only really possible through political mobilisation.

The critical acts of a gender expert

Gerd describes her career in the following way:

I started working at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 1976. At the time, there were few female civil servants. In 2020, there was an equal proportion of female and male professionals in the MFA, at all levels within

the organisation and a female foreign minister, the sixth female to hold the title.

My different posts have taken me to numerous international conferences, organised by both the UN and the World Bank, including the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. In my role as gender advisor and civil servant I have been part of negotiating teams on broader matters, at times with a focus on women, at times with a focus on economic development, on sustainability and climate, where the aim was to highlight effective strategies for how women in different segments of society can play a key role in such endeavours.

During her career, she has witnessed a dramatic increase in the representation of women in the MFA, both among civil servants and politicians. Although providing a critical mass (Chapter 1, this volume), according to Gerd this has not necessarily meant an increase in critical acts, that is, a gamechanging increased focus on women's rights or gender issues. She speaks of several challenges:

In my professional experience I have faced various challenges when promoting gender equality and women's rights, primarily within international development cooperation, but also in areas regarding human rights, rule of law and disarmament. The same goes for my two-year assignment with the High Commissioner for Refugees (1980–1982), in Hanoi, and in my two years at the Nordic Office of the World Bank (WB), in Washington DC (1986–1988). In the 1980s, neither gender nor the environment were prominent in international cooperation but the WB had begun to address environmental issues (partly as a result of massive demonstrations against huge dam-building projects in Brazil and India financed by WB) and had just established a position to work on 'Women in Development' (WID) with Karen Mason as one of the first officers on the gender desk. However, WID's efforts must be considered largely insignificant in relation to the overall hardship of poor women, often aggravated by the harsh conditionality that typified the Structural Adjustment Lending (SAL) of the WB at that time.

In reflecting on the critical task of mainstreaming gender, Gerd compares her work with that of other gender advisors across the globe – i.e. the work involved in scrutinising policy documents, policy speeches and budget proposals from a gender perspective. It implied ardent work and long hours and was not always rewarding. The more satisfying undertakings, she explains, were those that lead to innovative thinking and empowered women in different areas and educational processes, including dialogues with colleagues in various departments of the MFA, looking for relevant entry points and processes in daily and strategic work where gender could easily be applied and be helpful to outcomes. One such example is how women could be actively involved in defining priority areas for disaster relief, or how women's rights could be put more to the forefront in multilateral

negotiations, primarily within the UN but also in national legal reforms. As a gender expert, Gerd was also charged with a typical task of such a position, that of educating the staff:

At the request of the political levels at the MFA (Pierre Shori and his political advisors), I organised and led the ministry's gender training efforts for a number of years. Through various seminars, I tried to disseminate gender awareness in different departments focusing on topics like multilateral and bilateral development cooperation, disaster relief, promotion of human rights, democracy, etc. A challenge in this context was – and still is – to get staff to prioritise gender training, keeping in mind their busy daily agendas and sharp deadlines.

Gerd's experience illustrates how gender mainstreaming can take many forms and encompass truly critical acts, but also be superficial; to be compared to "green-washing" in the environmental area where the concept "sustainability" often aims at obscuring unsustainable practices.

The importance of in-depth knowledge as critical acts

Gerd's demonstrated expertise on gender gave her the unique opportunity to engage in three in-depth studies on various aspects of gender equality/women's empowerment. These became critical acts – i.e. acts that civil servants can perform in order to elicit change. Gerd pushed the limits for each topic she undertook to study, not the least in terms of how she pinpointed male privilege and power and contrasted with and challenged the understanding of gender in the institutions, at least in the MFA and in the Ministry of Environment. However, in the Ministry of Justice, the framing was totally accepted, probably as a result of the practice within legal systems to explicitly pinpoint perpetrators. It should be highlighted that the studies Gerd presented tended not to be fed into the overall work of the ministry, but that was actually the case for many other strategic studies at the MFA. This is, of course, unfortunate but reflects the fact that the 'slow path' of these learning processes never really fit into the daily hurry at ministries, where speed often is prioritised. Yet, through these studies Gerd managed to convey her feminist perspective on gender power which she describes as follows:

Male violence is crucial to gender power and often aims to subdue and control women. It is seldom a sign of pure rage, but rather a means to maintain power and privileges. The privileges are, of course, more evident among the richer and more influential men. Basically, all males are granted privileges in their capacity as males, for example in given roles as 'heads of family'. It follows the pattern of the feudal system, where every man, even at the bottom layers, gets rewards for obedience in preserving the overall power-structure. Thus, while poor men are deprived by more influential and richer males,

men have in return by tradition been entitled to control their own family members.

My framing stressed 'privileges' and not only 'power' and was not necessarily shared by other colleagues, who pointed to the fact that 'male privileges' was not a commonly used concept at the time. My first study 'Power and Privileges: On Gender-Based Discrimination and Poverty' was given considerable attention within civil society but failed to influence conventional approaches to pursuing gender equality within the MFA. For instance, the planned press-conference to launch the study was both questioned and delayed several times.

Hence, while Gerd's first study (2004) is an example of a critical act in that it pushed gender perceptions out of the comfort zone, according to Gerd its actual impact within Swedish Government Offices is doubtful, in contrast to Swedish civil society where Gerd was invited to present her findings in numerous areas such as within the Swedish Church community, Forum Syd (a major umbrella organisation for development cooperation). However, her work was evidently also recognised at ministerial level as she was asked to conduct a second study the following year, this time hosted at the Ministry of Justice.

The report was published in 2005 as 'Patriarchal Violence as a Threat to Human Security'. Again, my 'framing' of the problem did not focus on violence against women in armed conflict but in everyday life, an issue that was not regarded as a self-evident part of the human security agenda. Instead, a prevalent framing of that problem was in the family arena, generally labelled 'domestic' violence, or possibly 'violence against women' – but not language pointing out men as perpetrators. It reflects the fact that male violence against women was often socially and even legally accepted in many societies – though women, on the other hand, regularly pointed out male, often spousal violence as the major aspect of deprivation in their lives.

Her third study 'Gender Equality as a Prerequisite for Sustainable Development', connected to sustainability and the climate issue, had the purpose of demonstrating how, and to what extent, awareness of gender-based differences could inform and improve undertakings to enhance sustainable development. It was published in 2007 by the Swedish Environment Advisory Council (Johnsson-Latham, 2007).

At the time, there were few if any studies demonstrating how, and to what extent, awareness of gender-based differences pinpointing men could inform and improve undertakings to enhance sustainable development. Through gender-disaggregated statistics and data, the study showed how male behaviour affected carbon dioxide emissions, compared with emissions from groups with less economic power and resources. It highlighted how the lifestyles of well-to-do males tended to set a pattern for men (and some women) across

the globe. As such it was one of the first studies to direct attention to the question of male privilege in relation to gender and connect it to climate change and sustainability issues. Further, it argued that lack of attention to these gender differences would jeopardise efforts to promote sustainable development.

This report has become a seminal text in the field of gender and climate change, and is widely cited among scholars, civil society actors and governments with 143 Google Scholar citations including key works in the field and 668,000 hits on Google including OECD, UNDP, UNFCCC.

I was very pleased to also note considerable media interest in my study on gender as a prerequisite for sustainable development. In Sweden, the study was referred to on the front page of the second-largest daily newspaper, I was invited to a flagship news programme by the Swedish national television, and I was interviewed by at least a dozen smaller magazines covering gender and/or environmental issues. I also noted that uncountable articles highlighted my report and they emerged from all across the globe: Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the USA. I was further invited to present my findings in a paper for UNRISD (Johnsson-Latham, 2012). All these interventions pointed to the fact that this was the first time in history that a governmental publication had addressed male lifestyles as a cause of unsustainable development and carbon dioxide emissions.

Indeed, the report provided a new perspective and as Gerd explains:

In 2006, there were few – if any – policy papers within governmental offices (or research, for that matter) that pointed at males – especially wealthy males – as a problem. With my background in studies of male power and privileges in the context of poverty alleviation, I was given the task to study male lifestyles and consumption patterns as a key area for addressing sustainable development. Studies on gender and climate had, up until then, mostly studied women in the South as victims of drought and floods. I decided – with the experiences from my previous two studies – to shift the lens on the discourse on gender and sustainable development in a completely new direction and scrutinise male behaviour. (While I initiated this new framing, the idea was fully supported at political levels.)

Gerd's report (Johnsson-Latham, 2007) presents a transformative agenda for engendering climate politics and a convincing argument for why this is necessary. Due to assigned gender roles, women and men often have very different lifestyles and consumption patterns. This is evident in terms of mobility and transportation: a sector with some 25% of all global carbon emissions. In general, men enjoy greater freedom of movement, have more economic resources, work in prestigious, well-paid jobs, and are more likely to travel by more expensive

means such as air and automobiles. Women – in every income segment – tend to focus more on their homes and families, earn and own less, and have less freedom of choice compared to men. Referring to studies in richer countries, the report shows that while men dominate decision-making fora, the tax resources societies spend on infrastructure primarily tend to benefit wealthier men, with the bulk of investments provided for aviation and highways. Fewer investments are provided to public transportation (trains, buses, metro, etc.), the use of which is more prevalent among women without driving licences and cars who often rely on more sustainable modes of transport.

While the trajectory of the report seems out of the league of a civil servant's action space, it can definitively be perceived as a critical activity that aims to transform conventional thinking on gender. Gerd could be considered to be a femocrat given the fact that her actions seem to fit into that description (Chapter 1, this volume). While Gerd's ideas sometimes were perceived as controversial, the reliance on in-depth knowledge in her pursuit often won acceptance.

Of course, my position within the MFA was influenced by my strong stand on gender policies, and though I wanted my action to fit into the overall – often unspoken – cultural norms at the ministry, I have often been considered as head-strong; a person who does not avoid challenging prevailing policy options. In spite of this, I feel that I have by and large been respected, and even appreciated. Not least for a sharp pen and analysis.

The 2007 report's analysis and results were widely spread outside the government offices, but its precise paths of influence in the foreign ministry or its input to its feminist foreign policy from 2014 remain unclear or vague. Gerd worked at the MFA Department for Human Rights 2012–2017, as the Chief Editor for Swedish reports on adherence to human rights, rule of law and democracy across the globe. This included pursuing women's rights and pressing for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in multilateral fora such as the UN Commission for Human Rights. It seems safe to say that Gerd has taken her role as a gender advisor seriously and has also accomplished important acts of gender politics.

Networks enable critical acts

Clearly, Gerd's ambition has been to realise goals set out at political levels to pursue gender equality. She was well aware all along that these goals sometimes conflicted with other goals *also set out at political levels*, particularly economic interests which, in general, indeed tend to be more decisive for government actions than gender equality. However, though she understood the difficulties, Gerd generally interpreted her role as gender advisor to be the one to push for options which were as beneficial as possible for gender equality. Critical acts of gender experts should not be perceived as individual pursuits as they are highly dependent on collaboration with others. A support network of gender advisors can be critical

for any success or even the possibility to carry on work. This is strongly argued by Gerd and she exemplifies it with her experience in the Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) and its gender group, in particular, providing a key source of support and inspiration for gender advisors across donor countries. Several members of this group played a leading role in the international negotiations on women's empowerment, notably the complicated and controversial deliberations on SRHR as evidenced in for instance, the UN World Conferences in Vienna, Cairo and Beijing in the 1990s. Facing similar institutional challenges the gender experts shared valuable experience – in coping with difficult processes – widely within the network.

An Italian colleague, Bianca Pomeranzi, later a member of the CEDAW-committee provided me with critical support in areas such as dominating epistemologies and the need to critically analyse 'knowledge' as knowledge at worst can be used for perpetuating power structures. Dr Carolyn Hannan Andersson – a world-leading gender advisor at SIDA and, later on, head of the UN Division for the Advancement of Women gave me most valuable insights on both advantages and shortcomings with gender mainstreaming. While conducting the study on poverty, I was also lucky to learn from many colleagues, including Amima Mama at the African Gender Institute in Cape Town on how power-relations within the Military often are replicated in civilian institutions. From IDS in the UK, notably researchers and experts on female poverty such as the professors Naila Kabeer, Sylvia Chant, Andrea Cornwall and Diane Elson, I learned about the similarities – regardless of geographical areas – in gender-based power-structures, in families as well as at national level. Diane Elson was, and is, one of many prominent experts within the Commonwealth who has developed tools for engendered budgeting – mechanisms applied by many, including the Swedish Ministry of Finance.

The importance of politics

Gerd's narrative also discloses how the potential of critical acts must be understood against the broader context of politics, i.e. beyond the institutions. Politics offer opportunities, but also throw up challenges. According to her, it was crucial for the work in the MFA that gender equality as a goal and gender mainstreaming as a means was furthered during Pierre Schori's time as Minister for Development Cooperation (1997–1998), when he and his political advisor, Lena Ag (now Director-General of the Swedish Gender Equality Agency), requested all departments of the MFA to produce gender equality plans:

Some of these plans lasted longer in the institutional memories of the departments, while others had shorter lifespans. By and large, many plans – notably the parts most easily put into practice such as disaster relief focusing among other things on SRHR – had a reasonably lasting effect.

It was also the political level – with Minister Mona Sahlin and her political advisor, Stefan Engström, both committed to gender equality (and Sahlin had played an active role at the Beijing Conference in 1995) – that commissioned Gerd to produce the study on gender and sustainable development discussed above. Mona Sahlin also opened a high-level, well-attended seminar when a draft of the study was presented in New York, in the context of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in 2006. Gerd used that occasion to push a more transformative gender agenda and explains:

During my years in development cooperation, the approach when addressing gender had been to strategically address women as victims in need of assistance. In general, that meant poor women were objects – but could also imply looking at women as agents, and even to apply an intersectional perspective. However, the gender approach very seldom meant that *men* and male behaviour were the focus of analysis and interventions with two exceptions to that rule: when men were the main perpetrators of violence against women and when highlighting men as fathers. I felt that the time was ripe and I seized the opportunity to introduce a new perspective in the sustainability discourse. To me, it was logical, based on my experiences from the poverty study, which had highlighted male privileges – and how these male privileges often deprived women of essential rights and resources.

The presence of political will – among leading politicians and gender experts – offers support and opportunities to push gender issues on agendas in a transformative way much beyond – albeit also important acts – of ‘add women and stir’ strategies or the inclusion of gender in important texts. Political will was declared strongly when the Swedish Government launched its Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) in 2014. The FFP has attracted scholarly attention (e.g. Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; Aggestam et al., 2019; Robinson, 2019) and has been appreciated in government circles in many parts of the world (e.g. Rosén Sundström and Elgström, 2019). France and Canada (e.g. Thomson, 2020) have followed suit in establishing similar goals and policies. The launching of the FFP has given a strong and important signal – and remains a beacon – in a time when women’s rights are contested, often violently, in very many parts of the world.

In the FFP, women in peace and conflict were a priority and SRHR was of paramount importance but climate issues were not. A notable change with the FFP is that the normal order of procedure would be that embassies and representations in multilateral arenas, such as the UN, would be requested to submit suggestions for gender action. In the 1990s, this standard was only applied to some departments; with the FFP it has become more all-encompassing, stretching across all departments. Gerd, however, has some strong objections to the FFP:

The FFP is not a transformative agenda. For example, several Swedish NGOs have criticised the Swedish MFA for acting in manners inconsistent with the goals of the FFP. One example is the MFA allowing arms sales to countries

like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates where women are gravely discriminated and while both countries are also heavily engaged in warfare in Yemen.

The Swedish FFP emerged from a long engagement of the MFA on gender issues. Already, the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 was an example of Swedish leadership in the multilateral context. This implied work to include gender-relevant text in platforms and convention text. Gerd gives an account of her first-hand experience:

Sweden (then a recent addition to the European Union), played a key role for attaining a ground-breaking and far-reaching Platform for Action (PFA). A major Swedish achievement was to include a recurrent paragraph in each and every section of the text, with the aim of ensuring that gender would be a key aspect in poverty reduction, education, health, violence, peace and conflict, economy, etc. The Swedish team – with gender expertise in a number of areas such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, international law, economics, conflict resolution and UN negotiations at large – was one of the stronger actors in Beijing in 1995, together with several other actors, including in the global south. It could be noted that one paragraph in the PFA gives special attention to women facing double or triple discrimination, such as migrant women, older women, women with disabilities and Indigenous women (though at that time the concept of intersectionality was not used).

Conservative politics as an obstacle to gender equity

There is much contestation on gender in the multilateral context in 2021. The Swedish position – stressing gender equality and later feminist foreign policy – stands in sharp contrast to an international system plagued by populist/national conservative winds and increased influence of anti-gender movements, e.g. in Russia, USA, Brazil, India and Eastern Europe.

A reflection on the challenges I have faced when working multilaterally for the MFA is that there are radically diverging political views on gender, more than on most political matters. Over the years, the major obstacle to advancing gender equality has been the harsh resistance from several states, as well as the Vatican, a non-state observer within the UN, all endorsing conservative religious views. The most fierce political objection to gender equality relates primarily to SRHR; women's, young persons and LGBT-persons rights to their own bodies and sexuality. Many actors have worked closely together to resist secular approaches and all aspects of SRHR, regardless of faith (but often most vocal from the Russian Orthodox Church and also by the USA during Republican administrations). Their efforts have been particularly notable in the multilateral context, during numerous international

conferences organised by both the UN and the World Bank, and not least in fora set up to enhance human rights, such as the UN Commission for Human Rights.

Since 2000, gender equality has, according to Gerd, faced increasing challenges due to conservative political forces becoming more prevalent.

As I see it, reactionary forces were taken by surprise in Beijing 1995 regarding the achievements made in just two decades since the first UN World Conference on Women in terms of women's rights, in a direction that they did not favour. So, from then onwards, those who objected to gender equality and SRHR, have gathered support and collected huge amounts of money to pursue their agendas. This provides a stark contrast to the limited resources of women's rights groups. Even the EU has become less active in pursuing gender concerns since it expanded to include Hungary and Poland as member states in 2000. To include these states was part of a security agenda – but in reality, it became contrary to women's or gender security, notably in countries like Hungary and Poland. While it had previously been difficult to gain consensus within the EU on SRHR – due to objections from Malta and Ireland, supported by the Vatican – today with Poland, and Hungary as members, the EU has become a far weaker advocate for SRHR on key matters such as legal abortion, sexual education for adolescents, measures to reduce violence against women and permitting abortion for women and girls who have been raped, including during armed conflict.

Gerd also notes that misogyny has become more common as autocratic forces defend 'traditional' gender roles (cf. Chapter 12, this volume) which challenges Sweden's positions in multilateral fora. An example is the Geneva-based UN Commission for Human Rights, where since 2010, many states have given high political priority to stopping gains made in the previous 30–40 years related to advancing women's rights.

We have seen it with political leaders such as Orban, Kaczynski, Erdogan, Putin, Khamenei, bin Salman, Modi, Trump and Pence. We've seen it in countries across the globe, among populists and, nationalist groups, in political parties and on social media, and among 'lone wolves' and incels, who are prepared to kill to 'defend' their masculine privilege as well as – very often – their perceived white supremacy. While these leaders question and dismantle women's and LGBT rights within their own jurisdiction, they also collaborate internationally against those rights. Interestingly, many of these actors have also collaborated as climate change deniers including in negotiations in COP (Conference of the Parties) regarding the Paris Accord.

Thus, many men – and some women – who advocate a so-called traditional role for women also reject action to combat climate change and global warming. This fits well into my observations from efforts to

mainstream and integrate *gender* in already established agendas such as economic development or legal reforms and in trying to integrate *climate awareness and sustainability* in relevant areas of concern. In doing so, I found that the same types of resistance surfaced in both areas – gender and global warming – when I and others tried to change the framing of problems. I think that the reason is that both gender and climate change is frequently perceived as a threat to many current male definitions of progress – and discourses which also challenge the expertise and status of well-established economists and policy-makers.

(cf. Chapter 12, this volume)

While the importance of political support for gender issues has been crucial for the work of gender advisors like Gerd, in the multilateral context, the strength and emergence of conservative politics is a counterpoint. It makes it not only difficult to advance gender equity, LGBT and SRH Rights but also implies that some of the victories won have been reversed or risk being reversed. In this context, pursuing a climate-related gender agenda and pointing to men and male privilege, may be particularly difficult.

Institutional path dependencies

As noted in the introductory chapter (Chapter 1, this volume), historically derived notions of gender tend to persist resulting in a path dependence that hampers opportunities for innovation and change (Kenny, 2007). Gerd reflects on her experiences of institutional path dependencies from the inside of the government offices and the foreign ministry:

The main institutional challenge government officials face when promoting gender equality within government offices is the odd constraint of insisting that the purpose is to address women in need of help – because this means it is not possible to address the real problem of masculine structures and the mostly male actors depriving women of means and rights.

The failure to recognise masculine structures is an institutional path dependence that works against transformation (e.g. Krook and Mackay, 2011; Mackay et al., 2010; Waylen, 2014) and instead leads to weaker, more superficial measures, such as increasing the representation of women, or ‘mainstreaming’.

Gerd tells us that this applies not only in multilateral institutions but also within Sweden, where gender equality is generally accepted in society and SRHR has been a Swedish priority for decades, not the least in terms of pushing abortion rights and young people’s access to sexual education. The Swedish Foreign Ministry has been pursuing women’s rights, empowerment and (from the 1990s and onwards) LGBT interventions with considerable political and institutional backing. However, these issues remain prioritised only as long as desired projects and interventions fit within other overarching agendas, for example, if

they fit with development efforts, peace-making, or conflict resolution and only as long as those agendas are not drastically changed by including gender concerns. Institutional inertia relating to the prominence of trade for Swedish welfare has strongly impacted sustainability issues. Gerd worked at the Ministry for Sustainable Development for two years (2006–2007), in a secretariat established to enhance sustainable development and experienced this firsthand:

First, the secretariat had been placed in the prime minister's office but was later transferred to a less crucial part of the government offices. The secretariat had representatives from a handful of ministries, bringing together experts to create a multidisciplinary unit, in the hope that this would be conducive to creative thinking. While the secretariat gave a signal that Sweden continued to pursue the active role on environmental issues, a strong driving force behind Sweden's pursuit of sustainability was growth and trade-oriented and a way to demonstrate that Swedish technology and innovations can contribute to solving environmental problems and climate change.

Our task was to mainstream sustainable development in key policy documents such as policies and speeches, at the national level, in the EU and globally in the UN and World Bank. Generally speaking, it was a question of adding some smartly formulated sentences and subject matters in order to place a reminder of the sustainability perspective – not really to transform the message as a whole.

Priority of trade

Sweden's economy relies heavily on international trade and its workforce is largely dependent on trade exports, thus the support for exports is robust and non-partisan. Swedish governments have strongly supported Swedish export industries, portraying Sweden as a modern country with technical solutions that are extremely conducive for the environment – i.e. the idea of ecological modernisation which has become an institutional path dependence. As an example, in the national country strategies of the MFA which are established to define the main features of Sweden's relations to other countries and facilitating exports, constitute the backbone and overarching concern in the strategies, while sustainability, the environment and climate issues are secondary. With an economy and labour force heavily oriented towards exports, Sweden often balances ambitions regarding gender equality with concern not to offend important trade partners, demonstrated in the past with the case of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, countries which pursue gender apartheid.

Limiting frames

Other limitations had gender effects. In Gerd's view, gender-based discrimination constitutes examples of unsustainability in several areas, in terms of damage

to both the physical and the social environment, something difficult to pursue fully due to the way the issues were framed and dealt with:

While the aim of climate and sustainability efforts was to engage a multidisciplinary approach, the reality was that we often had to work with addressing forestry, water, energy and so on, in separate agendas. This gave very limited room for addressing gender and intersectionality in terms of *who has access* to sustainable forestry, to water resources, energy etc. The framing of the problems which conformed to a technical, rather than a social approach to sustainability failed to determine *who was causing* the problems. One consequence is that it gives the impression that *men* in their role as experts and engineers have the solutions to the problems; not the women. Thus, female experts are rarely called upon in this context, even when they could have given a voice to different segments of women and men, for example on the need for more public transportation.

Gerd demonstrates that how sustainability and climate change are framed can be limiting, as the frame prioritize specific topics and actors and excludes others.

One of my suggestions is thus that a gender-equality perspective helps to enhance innovative thinking and can help us see that moving to carbon-free societies could for many – women as well as men - not mean a sacrifice but instead lead to emphasis on more crucial and sustainable aspects of well-being. One such example, could be to press for zero-tolerance regarding male or societal violence; to be secured by legal provisions, law enforcement, adequate funding etcetera.

In her work on sustainability and climate issues Gerd discovered that although she had support from political levels as we noted above, there was less support from what she calls the 'line' particularly to her report 'Gender Equality as a Prerequisite for Sustainable Development'. There was a trio of female senior civil servants at the Ministry for Environment who decided that the report should not – unlike her previous reports on poverty and violence – be published within the government offices, but was instead diverted to a government subsidiary agency (*Miljövärdsberedningen*). It seems as if the ministries were not ready for this new framing of gender issues proposed by Gerd.

The 'line' of civil servants at the ministry – primarily females, at all levels – were far less enthusiastic about the study. Instead, they prioritised time within the secretariat to focus on daily tasks such as commenting on EU or UN statements to be held in Brussels and New York on matters relating to sustainable development. There, they would concentrate on a sentence or two to be inserted in texts that could, for instance, address poor women as victims of environmental degradation – but certainly not to address males as causing degradation. At the time of my study on gender and sustainability,

the Ministry of Sustainability was, among many things, involved in several working groups under the UN Commission on Sustainable Development to promote sustainable lifestyles. Generally, however, these working-groups – a part of the so-called Marrakesh-process – followed the overall more cautious approach of mainly dealing with innovative techniques and women as victims who should be more involved in decision-making.

Administrative practices

Through Gerd's narrative, we learn that politicians may support a transformative perspective and in particular that women at the political level share a strong common commitment to advance gender equality and women's rights and to the extent possible seek to transform the political agenda to attain those goals. However, politicians come and go, and what prevails is an administrative logic in the workplace enacted by both males and females in senior, managerial levels. With the exemption of gender advisors, they do not necessarily support a transformative agenda. Gerd explains about this path dependence:

According to my experiences, an impediment for more far-reaching transformation is often civil servants, mainly at senior, managerial levels, who are unwilling or afraid of being considered driven by personal agendas. They point – often rightfully – to the fact that the task of civil servants is precisely that: to be 'servants' of the politicians, not to be activists. That is, of course, a rule not followed by all, the breaking of which is often appreciated by some politicians who are prepared to promote gender equality even while such paths conflict with other political goals.

Ministries are maybe more advantageous for people who go by the book and follow the rules, not for strong-headed enthusiasts. Mostly, staff prefer to go by the book. The same goes for many young civil servants, notably within the MFA, who do not want to risk their future and career by being considered headstrong. All in all, at least in the MFA, it is more important – and appreciated – among peers never to make a mistake, even at the expense of not being brilliant, and even at the expense of not saving lives.

To follow such administrative logic means that civil servants will not advocate anything that challenges power structures, even if civil servants in the MFA, for the most part and regardless of their gender, are committed to addressing the needs of poor women and enhancing women's rights. However, at best it means that women can be considered as actors, agents, addressed in all their multitude through advanced intersectional analysis. Such analysis would still be insufficient in addressing the real problem: male privileges, male 'rights' and unsustainable male consumption and lifestyles (Gore, 2020). In speculating why this is the case Gerd writes:

I am convinced that the reason that senior-level officials within government offices do not advocate transformative approaches is that the overall agenda

is to always focus on helping those at the bottom – but never challenging those at the top. Further, this approach is also a means to promote economic growth – perceived as a prerequisite for providing resources for less advantaged groups – even if it is detrimental for the climate, whereas obliging the rich to share their resources with those less well off would be much better for both climate and biodiversity.

Conclusion

Gerd's narrative highlights the committed and zealous labour that gender advisors put into diverse institutional contexts of multilateral organisations and government agencies, work that consists of analysing documents and finding ways to include gender in relevant texts that can then become platforms for further action. Such activities are well served by expert knowledge, coming from commissioned studies and research often advanced through networks of gender experts. These are imperative and critical acts. Gerd suggests that to gender mainstream climate change issues effectively, more knowledge and data are needed it is imperative to address excess consumption of rich males. She points to the necessity of providing sex-disaggregated data and data on wealth and income to identify who is causing CO² emissions and specific data on the beneficiaries of the fossil fuel economy.

Through her narrative, Gerd alerts us to the institutional inertia of specific framings of gender in relation to economic priorities that affected her work and how gender equality in reality is just one of many political goals set out to be pursued by means such as 'gender mainstreaming'. She also pointed to the limitations of political and administrative institutions with embedded restrictions on civil servants in terms of their roles and tasks largely determining their scope of action. Nevertheless, Gerd's narrative also signposted that opportunities could arise for civil servants to take action, and to the necessity of being brave enough to seize those opportunities (as also argued in Chapter 6, this volume). While all acts that have been discussed in the chapter can potentially advance gender issues, politics plays a crucial role both in terms of supporting transformative gender concerns and in obstructing them. Gerd maintains that for real transformation, another kind of politics is necessary. Gerd's visions for a future transformative agenda for gender, intersectionality, climate and sustainability, is that it 'is only really possible through political mobilisation. Transformative ideas have to become part of the ideas supported by the dominant political parties and governments of democratic countries' and mobilise the needed broader support, she continues: 'It is important to identify those who promote and advocate transformation as to enable collaborations and alliances between actors both inside and outside government and across societies'.

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