Mainstreaming Gender into Natural Resource Management: Still a Tributary?

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Since the late 1990s, gender mainstreaming has been widely adopted by national, regional, and local governments, multilateral organizations, and donor agencies as a vehicle to promote gender equality. Most development agencies working on aspects of agriculture and natural resource management have tried to mainstream gender into their programming during the past two decades, but none has been entirely successful. The paper examines the gender mainstreaming experiences of two organizations working on agriculture and natural resource management – FAO and the CGIAR system. The examples of FAO and CGIAR are instructive in that in both cases there has been some level of involvement with gender mainstreaming efforts for more than 20 years. Both organizations have had dedicated staff who over the years have produced gender tools, surveys, methodologies, and other products. The reasons why gender mainstreaming has not had the hoped for impact may include the following: conflation of organizational objectives and programmatic objectives; managers see GM as an end rather than a process; GM is relegated to one group within an institution who have the responsibility for ‘mainstreaming it’ throughout the institution; gender as an area of work has tended to attract primarily women and often rather young women with little decision-making authority or influence; and GM is not part of the management structure of organizations and the organization does not judge its institutional success of failure in relation to success with gender mainstreaming.