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# From Policy to Action

A study on the implementation of  
gender policies and a gender perspective  
in Swedish humanitarian assistance work

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## Abstract

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More than a decade has now passed since the concept of “gender mainstreaming” and policies addressing a gender perspective first appeared on the international agenda, yet evaluations on these policies’ implementation show that progress has been slow in the field of humanitarian assistance. As executive workers, the humanitarian field staff have in policy documents been identified as crucial actors in the “gender mainstreaming” work, however, no previous research have been found evaluating their achievements in the field.

This study examines if formulated gender policies, within Swedish humanitarian organisations and agencies, are implemented and translated into action in the field. This was carried out by investigating Swedish humanitarian fieldworkers’ gender sensitiveness and experiences of working with a gender perspective in the field. The empirical material was collected from qualitative deep interviews with ten fieldworkers from four different humanitarian organisations/agencies. The interview data was then analysed by using a theoretical framework based on Gender theory, Postcolonial feminist theory and Policy implementation theory.

The results show that even though most of the interviewed fieldworkers mean that they are aware of gender issues and the importance of using a gender perspective in the field, they have a general low understanding of the gender concept. An emerging “cultural sensitivity versus gender policy implementation” dilemma was valid and possibly affecting the informants’ attempts to act on formulated policies. Moreover, the method that the organisations/agencies use when educating staff on gender issues seem to have an impact on this dilemma. It became apparent that the fieldworkers underestimate their own responsibility in using a gender perspective in the field; at the same time the organisations/agencies overestimate their workers’ capacity to implement their gender policies. Much also indicate on how a still old-fashioned gender discourse is produced, and reproduced, in gender policy formulations and among the fieldworkers. In conclusion, it seems like a gap occur between the initial intention of a policy, its formulation, interpretation and the final intervention result.

**Keywords:** Gender equality, gender mainstreaming, humanitarian/disaster relief, policy implementation, postcolonial feminist theory

## Sammanfattning

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Mer än ett decennium har passerat sedan begreppet "gender mainstreaming" och genuspolicys först dök upp på den internationella dagordningen. Trots detta visar utvärderingar att genomförandet av dessa policyer varit långsamt inom humanitärt- och katastrofbistånd. Som verkställande arbetare har personalen inom humanitär verksamhet i flera policydokument identifierats som viktiga aktörer för arbetet mot att implementera genuspolicys, dock har ingen tidigare forskning utvärderat deras faktiska utförande i fält.

Studien undersöker huruvida svenska humanitära biståndsorganisationer- och myndigheters formulerade genuspolicys implementeras och omsätts till handling i fält. Detta görs genom att granska svenska humanitära fältarbetares genusmedvetenhet och erfarenheter av att arbeta med ett genusperspektiv i sina uppdrag. Det empiriska materialet samlades in från kvalitativa djupintervjuer med tio fältarbetare från fyra olika svenska organisationer/myndigheter. Materialet analyserades med hjälp av ett teoretiskt ramverk baserat på Genusteori, Postkolonial feministisk teori och teori kring policyimplementering.

Resultaten visar att även om de flesta av de intervjuade fältarbetarna säger sig vara medvetna om begreppet genus, och vikten av att använda ett genusperspektiv i fält, har de en låg förståelse för innebörden av konceptet. Ett dilemma mellan "kulturell känslighet" och "implementering av genuspolicys" uppkom, där organisationernas/myndigheternas utbildningsmetod av ett genustänk möjligtvis har en förstärkande inverkan. Tydligt var att fältarbetarna verkar underskattar sitt eget ansvar i att använda ett genusperspektiv i fält, samtidigt som organisationerna/myndigheterna överskattar sina anställdas förmåga att arbeta efter de formulerade policyerna. Mycket tyder också på att en fortfarande ganska otidsenlig könsdiskurs produceras och reproduceras både i formulerade genuspolicys, och bland fältarbetarna. Sammanfattningsvis verkar det som att det uppstår en klyfta mellan den initiala intentionen av en policy, dess utformning, tolkningen av denna och interventionens slutresultat.

**Nyckelord:** Jämställdhet, gender mainstreaming, humanitärt bistånd/katastrofbistånd, policy implementering, postkolonial feministisk teori

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lise-Lotte Hallman', written in a cursive style.

Stockholm, January 2013

## List of Abbreviations

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<b>ECOSOC</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Council
<b>GAD</b>	Gender and Development
<b>IASC</b>	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation for Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
<b>MSB</b>	Swedish Civil Contingency Agency
<b>MSF</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NE</b>	National encyclopaedia
<b>OCHA</b>	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>PTSD</b>	Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
<b>SRC</b>	Swedish Red Cross
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	Office for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNISDR</b>	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>WID</b>	Women in Development

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# 1. Introduction

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In April 1991, a powerful and destructive cyclone struck Bangladesh killing four times more women than men (Eklund and Tellier, 2012:589). Following the 2004 tsunami nearly 75 per cent of reported fatalities along the affected coastline in India were women and children (Pincha, 2008:1). Also, the impact from the Pakistan earthquake in 2005 resulted in far more women than men becoming casualties or being killed (MSB, 2009:10). Reports from Bangladesh and India in the aftermath of the cyclone and tsunami indicate that female dress codes<sup>1</sup> limited women's mobility, and consequently their ability to escape (Eklund and Tellier, 2012:589; Pincha 2008:21). Also, most women did not know how to swim since undressing in public, in order to practice, is culturally inappropriate in countries like India (Pincha, 2008:7). Moreover, women were not allowed to leave their homes to seek safer ground without an accompanied male relative, which resulted in women drowning or being crushed under collapsed structures (Eklund and Tellier, 2012:589; MSB, 2009:10). Since women often are restricted to the home sphere, they had no access to publicly installed early cyclone warning systems, and therefore, they were not warned (Eklund and Tellier, 2012:589).

## 1.1 Gender in disaster and conflict

The examples from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan indicate that women and men are affected by disasters in different ways. Biological and physical factors, such as muscular strength could explain women's greater vulnerabilities, however, rooted social gender<sup>2</sup> norms and stereotype could be of equal, if not even more, importance (Eklund and Tellier, 2012:590; OCHA, 2005:1).

Around the world, social and cultural perceptions of women's and men's roles and responsibilities result in inequalities that affect the access to, and control over, resources and decision-making power (IFRC, 2010:7; WHOa, 2012). Women are in most societies subordinated men, lack social status and discrimination in political, economical and social spheres are common (IFRC, 2010:7; MSB, 2009:8; WHOa, 2012). Generally, women play a

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to traditional long dresses, for example, a sari, worn by women in many Asian countries. The dress consists of four to nine meters long cloth draped over the body (NEa 2012-11-13).

<sup>2</sup> *Gender* refers to the socially and culturally constructed "[...] attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationship between women and men and girls and boys" in a given socio-cultural context. These relationships, attributes and opportunities are learned through socialization and are changeable over time (OCHA, 2005:1). Gender thus "[...] determine what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman and a man" (OCHA, 2005:1). For further definition see Chapter 2.1 Gender Theory.

central role within the family being responsible for the (unpaid) reproductive work in a household, meeting the needs of family members, while men perform the productive (paid) work outside the home (WHOa, 2012).

Women and children today constitute the largest group, 80 per cent, of people being internally displaced or who have become refugees as a consequence of disaster and conflict (IASCa, 2005:2). Nonetheless women are often excluded from decision-making processes and have less access to emergency relief and information in disaster and conflict settings (WHOa, 2012). Commonly, women are portrayed as victims, and not actors, ultimately leading to the neglect of their central role in disaster response work (WHOa, 2012). Thereby, women's needs and opportunities easily become invisible and are frequently forgotten in relief assistance processes (MSB, 2009:2). Furthermore, women experience increased vulnerability since they are more likely than men to suffer from sexual and reproductive health problems (Pincha, 2008:11; IFRC, 2010:8; WHOa, 2012). In camps or temporary shelter arrangements, women are also frequently exposed to gender-based sexual or physical abuse (Pincha, 2008:9; IFRC, 2010:8). Many women who lose a husband in a disaster consequently lose a head of household. Thus, the source of income disappears and henceforth these women must alone provide an income for the family to fulfil the needs of family members, many having no other option than to beg or sell their body (WHOa, 2012; IFRC, 2010:7-9). The increased burden on women and their vulnerability in post disaster and conflict situations put a lot of emotional and physical stress on women, which further could explain why Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is more frequently reported among women than men (Pincha, 2008:9; WHOa, 2012).

## **1.2 Gender perspective in international work**

Motivated by the 1990s increased number of fatalities among women, researchers started to explore the theme of gender and its possible connection to vulnerabilities in disasters and conflicts (Pincha, 2008:3-6). A gendered discussion soon infiltrated the international agenda, and the concept of “gender mainstreaming” was introduced in order to highlight the different opportunities of women and men in development and peace-building programmes (Charlesworth, 2005:2). Under the United Nations (UN) Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, the concept achieved great popularity. Highlighted was the fact that gender issues for long had been left out in “normal/mainstream” institutional activities and instead assigned as a question for “specialized women's” institutions (Charlesworth, 2005:3). In the

following “Beijing Platform for Action”, formulated strategies gave gender issues top priority and encouraged *all* international institutions to address inequalities between women and men in their work (Charlesworth, 2005:3). The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) later on adopted the concept “gender mainstreaming” and defined it as;

“[...] a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”  
(ECOSOC, 1997:24)

Also acknowledged was the importance of providing continuous special gender training for staff working at all levels within development programmes (ECOSOC, 1997:28). International humanitarian agencies and organisations<sup>3</sup> were not late to realize that developed action plans and policies on “gender mainstreaming” also should be applied in their work. Today, many states, organisations and agencies have committed to acting on these general policy documents, such as the Beijing Framework for Action, but also specialized strategies and policies<sup>4</sup> have been formed to make sure that “gender mainstreaming” is implemented in humanitarian and peace building activities (Dharamapuri, 2012:57-58).

In year 2000, a gender perspective in international aid work gained further recognition when reaching discussions at the highest level of the UN Security Council. For the first time, the Security Council members linked the components of *gender equality*, *peace* and *security* to each other and declared this by adopting “Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security” (UN Security Council, 2000; Dharamapuri, 2011:56; MSB, 2009:9). The resolution states that UN member states must act to promote women’s participation in conflict preventing work and management of peace and security operations. It also demands that a gender perspective should be applied in all activities, and that peace and security-keeping staff should act on the needs of women, girls and boys. Women should also be given opportunities to formulate their own needs and problems and be involved in problem-solving processes (UN Security Council, 2000:1-4).

Sweden was one of the first UN member states to adopt a national action plan to implement the UN resolution 1325 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2009). According to the Swedish

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<sup>3</sup> Humanitarian assistance are in this thesis defined as the relief, support or assistance provided in a situation of war/conflict or a (un)natural disaster (WHO, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> One example of such policy is the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s (IASC) “Policy Statement for the Integrating of a Gender Perspective in Humanitarian Assistance” from 1999 (IASC, 1999).

government, the action plan has received a lot of positive attention and has inspired several countries and organisations in their 1325 implementation process (Government Offices of Sweden, 2009:5). The Swedish action plan identifies actors from different instances and levels, from the civil society to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and public authorities, as responsible for implementing a gender perspective, and ultimately resolution 1325, in their peace and security operations (Government Offices of Sweden, 2009:9).

### **1.3 Problem definition**

More than a decade has now passed since the concept of “gender mainstreaming” and policies addressing a gender perspective first appeared on the international agenda, yet evaluations on these policies’ implementation show that progress has been slow in the field of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (OCHA, 2005:4; Charlesworth, 2005:11-13; Dharamapuri, 2011:56-58). To date, only 24 of 192 member states have initiated a national action plan in order to implement the UN Resolution 1325 (Dharamapuri, 2011:57). This year’s (2012) International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR), arranged by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) highlighted women’s and girl’s central role before, during and after disasters. The motive for this theme was found in the need of making women’s and girl’s important work and achievements in disaster risk reduction more visible. Also stated was the fact that many hinder still remain for women and girls who want to participate in decision-making processes in disaster management (UNISDR, 2012:3).

Some researchers mean that a “gender mainstreaming fatigue” (Charlesworth, 2005:11) and a still generally poor understanding of gender and gender inequality dimensions within humanitarian organisations have caused the lack of progress in gender-focused work (Charlesworth, 2005:11; Pincha, 2008; UNISDR, 2012:3). Despite well-formulated gender approaches and policies, problems still occur in these organisations’ attempts to implement gender in practical work. Clearly, there seems to be a consistent trouble in translating commitments and plans into real actions (Charlesworth, 2005:11). Even Sweden, as a country in the forefront of forming action plans to implement Resolution 1325, identify major challenges to organize, educate and take action on these plans (Swedish government, 2009:7). As executive implementers, the humanitarian field staff have in policy documents been identified as crucial actors in the “gender mainstreaming” work (Charlesworth, 2005). For example, the IASC state in a “5 Ways Strategy to Strengthen Gender Mainstreaming in

Humanitarian Action” that building capacity of humanitarian actors’ knowledge in gender issues is an important initiative for future action (IASC, 2006). However, surprising enough no research consulting this particular group on the issue of gender implementation has been found.

#### **1.4 Purpose and research questions**

The aim of the study is to examine if formulated gender policies within Swedish humanitarian organisations and agencies are implemented and translated into action in the field. The ultimate purpose is therefore, to study Swedish fieldworkers’ gender sensitiveness and experiences of working with a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance, in a low-income country<sup>5</sup>.

##### *Research questions*

- What understanding and definition of gender is found among the fieldworkers?
- What kind of information/instructions do the fieldworkers receive on a gendered dimension of the fieldwork?
- What are the fieldworkers’ experiences of working with a gender perspective in the field (if using it)?

##### *1.4.1 Definitions*

*Gender sensitiveness:* see criteria for “High gender understanding” under chapter 2.1.3

*Framework for gender understanding.*

*Fieldworkers:* Based on the criteria set when selecting the informants for this study, see chapter 3.2.1 *Selection of informants.*

##### *1.4.2 Delimitations*

This study will not focus on organisations’/agencies’ formulation of gender policies, but pay attention to how aid workers implement and *understand* these policies in relation to their fieldwork. Thus, this study will not be able to say something about this particular issue, and not scientifically determine if the organisation’s policies are “correctly” or “incorrectly” formulated to enable implementation. Other scholars are therefore encouraged to investigate this purpose further, in order to come to an ultimate and all-embracing conclusion on the issue of formulated gender policies’ implementation in the field.

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<sup>5</sup> Low-income countries (LIC) are countries having a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of \$1,025 or less (WB, 2012-12-09).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

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*The following chapter presents a theoretical framework that later will be used in coherence with the empirical material to analyse and discuss the fieldworker's experiences. First, an introduction to Gender theory focused to its use in the field of aid and development work, then an outline of Postcolonial feminist theory and intersectional perspectives. Last, but not least, Policy implementation theory is described where a number of scholars give their thoughts on this broad subject.*

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### 2.1 Gender theory

Gender theory highlights different theoretical discussions surrounding the issues of sex/gender and how this function in relation to the context of culture and society. Gender theory and discussions on past and present articulated international gender policies are therefore suitable tools to use in order to understand how the fieldworkers talk and define gender and gender focused work. The final part of this chapter will clarify discussed issues and make them comprehensible for analysis in a “Framework for gender understanding” inspired from a special “ranking model” developed by gender and conflict expert Lina Abirafeh (2009).

#### 2.1.1 Gender categoricism

Gender theory defines gender from a constructionist perspective. Women and men's thoughts and actions are thereby seen as socially constructed and a result of culturally adopted ideas of femininity and masculinity (Courtenay, 2000:1387). Gender could be described as “[...] something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others” (Courtenay, 2000:1387). Often gender is seen as fixed categories of “men” and “women” where dichotomous classifications of two bodies constitute the ultimate definition (Connell 2011:1675). Categorical thinking of gender could be seen as close to an essentialist perception of masculinity and femininity, and “male roles” and “female roles”, where these two are assumed to be opposites and in contrasts to each other. Gender categorical thinking assume there to be only one male role or one female role, which are described in stereotype characteristics (Courtenay, 2000:1387). Since there is an exclusive focus only on the two categories of women and men, there is a risk of undermining diversities within the gendered categories, such as differences between hegemonic and subordinated masculinities or between lesbian and heterosexual women (Connell, 2011:1675-1676). Read more about this under chapter 2.2 Feminist theory.

Gender stereotypes are socially constructed and a result of a common agreement to what is considered typical and atypical in a society. For example, research indicates how men and boys often are socially pressured to show independency, self-reliance and strength (Courtenay, 2000:1387-1388). A constructionist perspective mean that individuals hold the exerting power and are active agents in the production, and reproduction, of these dominant norms of masculinity and femininity. Therefore cannot men and boys be seen only as passive victims to socially prescribed stereotypes (Courtenay, 2000:1387-1388). Gender (and also feminist) theory further discuss that gender meanings and gender roles arise in discourses, which are constructed and based in people's common ways of, for example, talking and creating images or texts (Connell, 2011:1676). Gender theorists thereby mean that the common view of masculinity and femininity as dichotomies are an effect of discourses, and not an expression of an absolute truth. Hence, the subjects of masculinity and femininity are dependent on a continued discourse to reproduce themselves, however, that also enables a possibility to change them (Connell, 2011:1676).

### *2.1.2 Gender in aid and development policy- the past and present*

Researchers have over the years followed and addressed how the concepts of gender and “gender mainstreaming” have been used and addressed in international humanitarian and human rights systems. In these aid policies and programmes the term gender is used frequently, but the *actual* focus is on women (Connell, 2011:1676; Abirafeh; 2009:23; Dharamapuri, 2011:58). Hence, highlighting a gender perspective is confused with working towards women's objectives and the promotion of their empowerment. This is too based in a categorical perception where gender is linked to fixed biology of women and men where the main targets are women, as a group distinct and separated from men (Abirafeh, 2009:24; Connell, 2006:1675; Dharamapuri, 2011:58; Charlesworth, 2005:15; Eklund and Tellier, 2012:600-601). The term “gender” is thus equated to the term “women”. The UN Resolution 1325 focus exclusively on women; attention to special needs of women, supporting women's initiatives and protecting their human rights, and a connection to men and masculine identities in conflict and violence is left unexplored (UN Security Council; 2000). According to Charlesworth (2005), this categorical perception and the exclusive focus on women when working with a gender perspective indicate a narrow understanding and a general lack of insight that gender is a product of societies' power relations and sociocultural structures of subordination.

The role of men and male gender identities is crucial to enable social change, and still, in most aid policy and programmes this is overlooked. Their role and place is certainly not defined in these documents and plans, and the greatest responsibility to change gender roles thus will come to women themselves, and not men (Charlesworth, 2005:15). According to Charlesworth (2005), there has been a consistent lack of interest within the UN human rights system to investigate how stereotype gender roles and social power relations have a connection to violations against women's human rights. Instead are these violations often presented as a biological fact and an aspect of women's "inherent" vulnerability (Charlesworth, 2005:11). A "biology approach" to gender issues thereby risks appreciating also women and men's actions as either natural or controversial (Charlesworth, 2005:15).

In the 1980s, the focus for gender equality work within development programmes changed from "Women in Development" (WID) to "Gender and development" (GAD). A WID-approach focus on technical solutions and the promotion of women's participation and opportunities in male dominating spheres, thus, in many ways fortifying an artificial dichotomy between men and women's spheres and roles (Rathgeber, 1995:206; Abirafeh, 2009:30). The newer GAD-concept did not believe in quick-fix solutions to gender inequality problem and instead wanted to question social structures and understand the power and politics of subordination (Rathgeber, 1995:206, Abirafeh, 2009:30; Charlesworth, 2005:2-3). The GAD-approach also addressed both *practical* and *strategic* needs and interests of women and men. The further focus on basic needs for survival, such as food, water and safety, while the latter is of more long-term character and linked to, for example, control over resources and the right to political participation and decision-making processes (Rathgeber, 1995:206; Pincha, 2008:5). To date, the GAD approach still lags behind within development agencies. Abirafeh (2009) exemplifies this by referring to an Afghan example. An aid intervention here began with a "GAD-centred discourse", that addressed the politics of, for example, structural issues and distribution of power. Yet, the implementation resulted in a "WID-style implementation" of more technical solutions and standardized aid packages, which ignored or avoided confronting power imbalances and the political nature of gender inequality (Abirafeh, 2009:30). Thus, the formulated gender policies in the Afghan case in the implementation phase only meet people's practical needs through technical interventions, and not the strategic ones.

### 2.1.3 Framework of gender understanding

In conclusion, the above-discussed dimensions of gender theory and international aid and development programmes, have been put together in a “Framework of gender understanding” that will be used to conclude if the informants have a low or high understanding of gender. The framework derives from a “ranking model” developed by Abirafeh (2009:47) who used it to measure five Afghan aid institution’s views, presence and quality of gender issues in their aid policies. The model classifies gender understanding as *low, medium or high*, based on a number of criteria established under each category. Since Abirafeh’s model was developed to understand gender policies’ definition and perception of gender, and not a person’s understanding, it does not fully suit this study’s purpose. Therefore, the “ranking model” only constitute a base for this theoretical platform’s “Framework of gender understanding”.

Adjustments and modifications have been made, and instead the determined criteria for the framework were set with the base in arguments and theories from above mentioned Gender theorists. However, Abirafeh’s model assisted the establishment of under what category, *high* or *low* gender understanding, each criterion should be set. The framework only rank gender understanding of the fieldworkers as *low* or *high*, a decision made since it was considered unnecessary to establish an “in between category”. The idea is instead that the analysis, if necessary, will be able to establish the informants as a mix between the two categories, as for example fulfilling two criteria on the *low* understanding category, and two on the *high*. Thus, if the criteria are predominantly met under *high understanding*, this imply on the informants affiliation to this category.

#### **FIGURE 1. Framework of gender understanding**

##### **LOW UNDERSTANDING**

- 1) Do not know what the term gender means and cannot connect it to the performed fieldwork.
- 2) Use of the words “women” and “gender” as token, do not mention men.
- 3) Categorical thinking of women and men.
- 4) Suggest technical solutions to equality problems, WID-approach.

##### **HIGH UNDERSTANDING**

- 1) Know what gender means and can connect it to the performed fieldwork.
- 2) Broaden the concept of gender by, for example, including an intersectional approach.
- 3) The term is used in relevant contexts and includes men as an important aspect of gender analysis.
- 4) Suggestions of GAD-approaches as a solution to gender inequality, address structural and power relations.

## 2.2 Postcolonial feminist theory

For this study's purpose, postcolonial feminist theory is useful since it enables analysis to look at aspects and dilemmas rising from the aspect of western fieldworkers going to an often ex-colonised poorer country to help people living there. First, a short introduction to the separate fields of postcolonialism and feminism will be given, then follows a summary on interesting thoughts generated from postcolonial feminist theory.

Central within a postcolonial analysis is how the world still is deeply influenced by the past colonial order although colonial powers decades ago handed over the leadership to post colonised countries' own governance. Neither the colonising powers, nor the post-colonised societies, were left unaffected by these time's geographical conquests, the establishment of western capitalism and civilisation projects of native inhabitants (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz, Thörn, 2005:17).

Tolhurst et. al. (2012) identify feminist principles and theory as important in the analysis of gender inequality and criticises "gender mainstreaming" policies in international health programmes to undermine and leave out this analysis. In order to understand underlying factors to gender based discrimination, structural inequalities and women's subordination in relation to men, a feminist approach is useful since analysis look at societies deeply rooted gendered power structures as a main cause (Tolhurst et. al. 2012:1828). However, feminist theory is no coherent discipline and there are many orientations, which have different focus when explaining, and analysing gender inequalities and women's subordination. Despite this, a dominating interpretation, with roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, is that women are oppressed on the basis of that they are women (Gemzöe, 2010:7). Also, most feminists probably would agree to a common will of working towards an abolition of this oppression, and equality between men and women (Gemzöe, 2010:7).

### 2.2.1 Criticizing western feminists

During the 1980's, critique against western centralised feminist ideas emerged. Mohanty (1988) argue that western feminists discourses produced "Third World<sup>6</sup> Women" as a singular

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<sup>6</sup> The term origin from the Cold War period where the "First World" constituted the western "democratic" states, the "Second World" the communist and the "Third World" were nations, such as Sweden and India, standing outside the first and second world conflict. However, the classification after hand changed and the third world countries' later common denominator became their "underdevelopment" in relation to the first and second world and struggle to attain economic development. Most of these countries are situated in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Today there is a general resistance to the use of these categories since it implicate that there are good (the first) and bad (the second and third) countries (NEb 2012-12-09).

and homogenous entity. Also, Hooks (1984:3-4) questioned the dominating white woman's perspective in the feminist discourse at this time. Based in a postcolonial feminist debate Mohanty (1988) argued that women in the "third world" were described as oppressed, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, family-oriented and victimized, while women in the "first world" were educated, modern, had control over their bodies and sexuality and freedom to make their own decisions (Mohanty, 1988:65). Western feminists were also questioned for assuming that all women, regardless of class, ethnics, culture and geographical location, have the same interests and desires in life (Mohanty, 1988:61-64; Hooks, 1984). In the work of Rathgeber (1995), 1980s gender approaches in development programmes are criticised for being based in a Eurocentric view of what is considered as a desirable and adequate "standard of living". Rathgeber (1995) mean that despite the fact that these programmes improved their approaches from WID to instead concern GAD, one fact remained; formulations and interpretations of the needs and interests of policy beneficiaries (the local population) originated from academics and "experts" on the highest level, who were positioned far away from people with own experiences and opinions.

### *2.2.2 The rise of intersectionality*

Critique eventually resulted in a broader definition of women's exposure to gender inequality. The inclusion of social class, ethnic identities, nationality, age, sexuality, dis/ability and religion to gender were requested, and based on these thoughts the theories of "Intersectionality" were formed (Tolhurst et. al. 2012:1827-1828). Using the approach of Intersectionality, it gains deeper understanding of how gender intersects with multiple social divisions and inequalities in the society, thus enabling a more multidimensional analysis of existing power relations (Tolhurst et. al. 2012:1827-1828). Tolhurst et. al. (2012) mean that "gender mainstreaming" praxis generally assume there to be only two genders - women and men - consequently excluding a third group of "transgendered", such as *hijra* in India and *bantut* in the Philippines. An intersectional approach can pay attention to all dimension of gender while "gender mainstreaming" policies' interpretation of gender might limit successful actions (Tolhurst et. al. 2012:1827-1829).

### **2.3 Policy implementation theory**

Implementation of policy is the process of turning policy into practice. Defined by Buse, Mays & Walt (2005) a gap in this process often derives from a difference in what the policy architects intended when formulating the policy, and the actual result. Prior the 1960s, few studies paid attention to the aspect of implementation capacity when researching public policy design. However, as a reaction to the growing inefficiency in wide-ranging reform programs in the United States during this period, scholars started to interest in policy implementation research (Pülzl & Treib, 2007:89). Since then, three generations of implementation studies have evolved that in different ways raise awareness of the problem that many policies lag behind indented expectations when being implemented. This has formed, what today is summarised in, the wide field of policy implementation theories where the focus varies a lot between different disciplines (Pülzl & Treib, 2007:89). This study will concentrate on how theories on implementation of health policy, public policy and development policy could relate to this study's purpose of investigating gender policies in humanitarian interventions.

Much of the literature written by scholars within the field of policy implementation suggest that public policy processes consist of four main functional stages, in a so called "public policy cycle". All these stages; the agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation, help to explain the behaviour of actors throughout the whole policy process (Skok, 1995:325-326). Abirafeh (2009) recently studied policy implementation in five aid institutions in Afghanistan, and concluded that a policy process depends on a number of factors. Her research describes how policies pass through three phases before reaching practice. The first phase in the policy-to-implementation process is the formulation of the policy. Here, perceived needs and images of the policy's "subject", accurate or not, constitute the base of the policy. Once printed on paper the intent of the policy becomes apparent, however, this intention could be perceived differently, and therefore, interpretations of the printed formulations vary (Abirafeh, 2009:11). Thus, depending on the reader, and the strategic purpose the policy serves, the outcomes will differ. The second phase, therefore, surrounds the issues of interpretation of the formulated policy. The final step is the intervention that intends to implement the policy. This phase depends on correctly planned and performed intervention strategies in order to keep connected to the originating policy purpose (Abirafeh, 2009:11).

Abirafeh (2009) gives an example of a policy-to-implementation journey from her study of five aid institutions work in Afghanistan. The policy addressed a transformation of women's position in the Afghan society. However, the policy had a narrow understanding of Afghan women's social, historical and political realities and this was reflected in the interpretation of the policy, where the plan was to take a short cut to social change. The intervention overlooked women's agency and instead promoted a technical intervention to meet the political issues. As a result, the social transformation failed (Abirafeh, 2009:11).

### **3. Research design**

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#### **3.1 Choice of study**

The idea of this study came from a recent introduction to humanitarian assistance and disaster management in the last course of International Health at Södertörn's University. An interest for gender issues has followed me through the whole study period and after the disaster management course, continued reading opened my eyes for the importance of having a gender perspective and includes a gender analysis in humanitarian assistance. Seizing down the subject to a manageable level, the choice came to conduct interviews with workers who have own experiences in the field, and also limit the study purpose to say something only about Swedish humanitarian fieldworkers understanding and ideas.

#### **3.2 Data collection method**

The purpose of the study needed a method that could bring a deeper understanding of the informant's experiences and thoughts, and say a lot about little rather than little about a lot. A qualitative method was therefore considered ideal since a few qualitative interviews, instead of many quantitative, could give room for the informant to explain and in depth reflect on their thoughts and experiences. It was also easy to ask supplementary questions if any expressions were unclear or contradictory, which can avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. Qualitative methods also enable informants to interact and impact the conversation's outcome, which minimise the researcher's risk of (unconsciously) controlling and influencing the informant's answers, thus also the results (Holme and Solvag, 1991).

Qualitative interviews constituted the primary source of data and this method was considered a strength since it enabled investigation to be carried out in an everyday context, and the interview situation to be similar to an ordinary conversation. This creates more of a relaxed atmosphere, than a strict hearing situation and hopefully influences the informant to feel calm and willing to share his/her experiences with the researcher. The study was performed in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, between November 2012 and January 2013. It is based on 10 interviews with Swedish fieldworkers working within 4 different organisations/agencies all performing humanitarian assistance in disaster-affected countries abroad; The Swedish Civil Contingency Agency (MSB), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Swedish Red Cross (SRC) and the Church of Sweden. The choice to focus on Swedish humanitarian fieldworkers and their

experiences was based partly on convenience; costs and loss of time could be minimised, but also since Sweden seems to be in the forefront of forming “gender mainstreaming” action plans and policies.

In the initial phase of the investigation, literature was screened to form a holistic overview of the subject and history of gender issues in international and humanitarian work and to develop the theoretical framework. These sources were found by using *Google scholar* searching tool and the Södertörn’s University’s own database *Söder Scholar*, which exclusively gather peer-reviewed sources of books, articles and journals. Search words used in different combination were: *gender, gender mainstreaming, feminist theory, disaster, disaster management/response, humanitarian assistance/aid, policy implementation theory and policy cycle*. Also, by screening the already found sources’ own list of references, further useful sources were retrieved. A number of reliable books on qualitative research method were examined when forming the research design of the study, and they also posed great help in the interview and analysis phase. Officially published reports by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and agencies were also helpful in the initial writing and research phase.

### *3.2.1 Selection of informants*

An inquiry was sent out through an email to coordinators in several Swedish agencies and organisations being engaged in humanitarian assistance. For example, also the Swedish Office for UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children Sweden were asked. However, only a few responded and those who did therefore had to be chosen for the study. The inquiry asked for help to find Swedish fieldworkers who would be interested in participating in the study. In the letter, it was important to clarify that the informants were not supposed to be gender experts. It was otherwise considered a risk that the coordinators would choose people with special knowledge, and leaving out those without. Also, if mentioning too much about the focus of the study the organisations could chose to only direct respondents with “favourable” ideas for the question in matter. Therefore, the only description revealed was that the study would cover equality work in humanitarian assistance. The criteria for the selection of informants were that they had been working in a refugee camp for at least two weeks some time during the past five years. Also noted in the letter was that the workers’ sex, age, and the tasks performed in the field, was unimportant. However, an underlying aim was to seek as much diversity among the informants as possible. The organisations/agencies responded with a list of fieldworkers who fulfilled the

criteria, thereafter a new letter was sent out to these with more information about the logistics, expectations and requests of participation. Ten people accepted the request and were booked in for an interview. Whether these informants are a representative sample of Swedish fieldworkers cannot be determined. Therefore it is hard to know to what extent this study's results and conclusions are generalizable and valid for *all* Swedish humanitarian fieldworkers. However, this fact should not affect the validity and reliability of the study.

Also very little information was given to the informants about the study's purpose and the focus of the interview, this with hope that they would not prepare themselves beforehand. The main reason for this precaution was the importance of that the informants reflect on the questions asked by their *own* experiences and thoughts, and not something that they have read when researching. Also clarified to the informants was the importance of their answers reflecting *their* experiences and ideas, not someone else's. Nevertheless, it is still a possibility that some answers more reflect what that the informant believe they *should* answer and know. The risk of getting invalid data might also be high if the informant try too hard to be a "good" respondent, and answer in a way that he/she believe the interviewee hope for. For example, without further scientific basis, it is likely that a majority of people working within the aid business in Sweden agree to that a gender perspective is an important perspective in development aid. Therefore, it is possible that some answers might reflect a will to be aware of what this perspective and gender issues in general include, even though not actually knowing.

To be able to better understand the informants' experiences and understanding of gender policies within their organisation, it was important to find out whether there actually exist formulated policies. Still, since this study does not focus on *what* is formulated in these documents and how this is done, no further analysis has been carried out on this material. The SRC and MSB have their officially formulated gender policy published on their websites, however, the MSF and Church of Sweden do not. Therefore, was a request for this information sent out when asking them for informant-help.

### 3.2.2 *The interviews*

The ten selected fieldworkers were 4 men and 6 women, and between the ages of 36 to 63 with an average age of 52,7 years. Three had been working for MSB, three for MSF, three for SRC and one for the Church of Sweden. However, several of them had experience from working in two or three of these and other organisations/agencies, such as the UN, Rotary Doctors Sweden

and Africa Groups of Sweden. All had been to at least two missions within their organisation/agency and the length of their commitments in field ranged from three weeks up to several months. Most informants had a university degree in nursing or a medical degree, but also backgrounds in social work, zoo ecology and as a cook occurred (a more detailed list on the informants can be found in Appendix 1). Since nine of the informants lived far away from Stockholm, some of the interviews had to be carried out over the phone, more specifically four of them. This was not ideal since it is more difficult to create an engaging conversation with someone over the phone, thereby affecting the quality of the received information. However, it was considered necessary in order to be able to speak to more fieldworkers. The remaining six interviews were conducted at a place chosen by the informant, with the intention to create an environment where he/she would feel as relaxed as possible. However, since four out of these six were in Stockholm on a business trip or just visiting when the interview was held, a more official and impersonal place had to be chosen, for example a café, hotel lobby/restaurant or a sofa group at a congress centre.

Every interview was unique and the focus differed depending on what the informant wanted to discuss, and what seemed extra interesting in every particular case. The interviews were done in a semi-structured way, where no fixed questions were set before hand and no response options were available. This type of questionnaire gave possibility for an open-end discussion and an opportunity for the informant to bring new perspectives to the study, which further challenge the researcher's potential pre-understanding of the issue (Holme and Solvag, 1991:99-100). However, some questions about the informants' background were asked to all, in order to enable comparison between them, for example about profession, age and where they had worked. An interview guide with broader themes and suggested questions and topics of discussion was prepared and used as a base for the discussion. These topics were: thoughts on the term gender and a gender perspective; gender policies within their organisation/agency; introduction/information of gender policies and a gender perspective prior field work; the functioning of using a gender perspective in the field – problems/hinder or success; greatest challenges for future work with gender policies and a gender perspective; and time for own questions or comments to what had been discussed. Under these topics a number of more specified questions had been set, but they were only used if the interview came to a standstill or if the informant did not give detailed answers. Nevertheless, important to note is that these specified questions were never used in the initial phase of a conversation, this to not influence and direct an interview too much.

The interviews lasted for 20 minutes to 1,5 hour, average of 37 minutes, and the spoken language was Swedish, the mother tongue of all informants, thus giving all informants the same opportunity to express themselves. For a qualitative study 30 minutes interviews could be seen as relatively short, but the possibility that many would decline participation in the study if asking for more time was considered high since December for many people is a stressful month, both at work and privately. To be able to find a pattern in the informants' answers, and thereby form a valid base for an analysis, it was considered important to talk to as many fieldworkers as possible. Therefore the time of each interview given was less priority than finding at least 10 people to interview for the study.

Brief notes were taken during all interviews, but a recorder constituted the most important interview registration tool. This was decided based on the risk that the researcher may lose the vital contact and is hindered to interact with the informant if being too concentrated on getting the notes right (Kvale, 2009:195). However, reordering could also have a disruptive function in a conversation that is supposed to be relaxed and casual, since it might result in the informants being hampered in their answers when knowing that their voice is caught on a tape. However, reflecting on advantages and disadvantages with each method, to record was decided, but under the condition that the informants were promised anonymity and had to approve its use beforehand.

### **3.3 Analysis of data**

#### *3.3.1 Transcription of data*

The interviews were transcribed in two stages. After each interview notes, own impressions and the recordings helped to summarise what had been discussed. This was written down, but only in general terms and not literally. Being aware that transcription is an interpretation in itself (Kvale, 2009:200-202), and the risk that important parts of a discussion are forgotten after an interview, the recordings were used as primary source for the summaries. When all interviews had been performed the summaries were gone through. Those parts that were thought to be of interest for the purpose and research questions were taken into consideration. These interesting parts generally constituted of found patterns in the discussions and corresponding answers between the informants. However, also some answers being distinctive from the others were thought to be of interest for further analysis and discussion. The

transcribed material was printed in chapter 4 where those interesting patterns are described in general term, but also by giving examples of individual informants' stories to in the text create presence from the informants' voices. The reason to not direct quote the informants were mainly based on the fact that most of the informants did not reveal independent and enough long answers. Questions that followed up their thoughts constantly had to be asked in order to make them reflect in depth on their stories. Direct quotation could therefore result in the text becoming incoherent and difficult to read. Instead, clear and exact descriptions of what was said is presented, and by referring to the informants by numbers when reproducing their stories, the reader could him/herself check the validity in the answers if accessing the raw material.

### 3.3.2 Analysis

The intention of the analysis was to, as objectively and open-minded as possible, reflect on the interviews and come to conclusions. An open approach to theories would therefore give the material enough space to itself guide the direction of an analysis and thus minimise the influence of a researcher's own preconceptions in the results. However, since this kind of analysing method and theory formulation can be very time consuming, and time was limited for this study, a draft of a theoretical framework was set prior the interviews. Later on, the framework was fully developed into three main theoretical fields; Gender theory, Post colonial feminist theory and Policy implementation theory. The choice of these theories derives both from the way the purpose and the three research questions were formed, and what was considered as a relevant frame of references for the empirical findings. For example, the research question asking for the informant's gender understanding clearly demand a gender analysis to be able to draw conclusions.

Important to note in relation to a study's formulation of theories, is the fact that these choices impact, and might delimit, what kind of conclusions that can be drawn. The base of theories is often a simplified model that can explain and reflect on the reality, thus not all-embracing answers and absolute truths (Holme & Solvang 1997: 51). Taking the "Framework of gender understanding" as an example, one question can be raised: In chapter 2. *Theoretical Platform* it is established that gender is a complex and multifaceted issue, is it then possible to establish someone's understanding of these concepts by using a simplified classification model? It probably may present a risk if the researcher gets too concentrated in matching the informants' answers to a simplified model or a theory of an issue, since then possibly overlooking patterns pointing at other dimensions than those established beforehand. Therefore, it is of fundamental

importance that the researcher has an open mind to, and dare to see beyond, theories to not miss any aspects.

The analysis followed the structure of presenting and comparing empirical material to the theories focusing on answering the purpose and research questions. Some of the data was not in coherence with the pre set theories, but instead of leaving these findings be, they are presented in chapter 7. *Discussion*. The intention of this extended section was to broaden the discussion beyond formulated theories, but also indicate on issues that future researchers might need to investigate in order to establish a deeper conclusion to how gender policy implementation can become more effective and progressive in humanitarian assistance.

### **3.4 Validity and reliability**

The aim of writing a detailed method description of this study is to enable its replication (reliability) and the validity of the result (Backman, 1998:37). To determine whether this study's outcomes are reliable, it is crucial that other researchers have the possibility to reproduce the study with the same methodological design, and replicate the same results and conclusions. If this is possible, it indicates a certain consistency in the interpretations and the results of the study (Backman, 1998:37-38). However, a reconstruction of a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews is almost impossible since they often rely on a personal connection between the interviewee and the interviewer. For example, my much younger age (24 years old) in relation to most of my informants could create a distance that an older researcher would not experience. Also the fact that I am a woman could affect how well a connection function to a female or a male informant. Possibly, both these aspects, and many more, impact the received information making it difficult to reproduce the exact same results in another study.

There are two other aspects resulting in a difficulty to replicate the exact same study results. Firstly, the same answers from 10 other informants are needed, and secondly, it demand researchers to have the same objective approach to the analysis of the material. The possibility of conducting an investigation with absolute objectivity is little since no researcher is entirely free from his/her conscious or unconscious history, preconceptions and values (Holme & Solvang, 1997:323-324). Another objectivity problem that could occur is that the researcher along the way loose distance to the study, thus giving own personal interests too much space in

the writing process (Kvale, 2009:259-262). Nevertheless, these facts do not in particular have to mean that the results and drawn conclusions from this study are less trustworthy and valid. A researcher can still conduct a scientifically correct study if he/she is *aware* of these risks, and reflect on how to interpret the collected data from these values and interest. For this study a presentation of the method has been revealed in dense and clear descriptions, and all steps of the process motivated and reflected on. This should help the reader to him/herself judge the validity and reliability of the study.

Important to highlight when reflecting over the empirical results is how the questions were formed and the way the discussions on gender were carried out with the informants. The informants were asked to reflect over gender and what a gender perspective mean to them. Due to the straight character of this question, and since no alternatives of topics were given, it is possible that dimensions that the informants actually would agree to, or find important, were forgotten and left out. Perhaps that can explain why many had difficulties in giving exhaustive answers and including multifaceted dimensions of gender. If the informants had been asked more specific questions their answers probably might have come out in a different way. For example, it is highly probable that all informants would agree to all people's rights to the same opportunities *if* directly asked, but now this kind of discussion came up only when speaking to two informants. The intention of this study was to find out how the informant understands gender from *their own point of view*, therefore a method of using leading questions and giving alternative answers was impossible. To sum up, the patterns found in the empirical results will have to speak for themselves, but the reader, as well as the researcher, should also have in mind this discussion to not draw too hasty conclusions of the informant's mind-set. Also notably is that this study can only say something about what has been said, and not what the informants actually meant or had the intention to say. Hopefully, none will feel misunderstood or wrongly interpreted.

### **3.5 Ethical aspects**

When officially publishing an investigation the researcher can no longer control in what way, and for what purpose, the study will be used (Bryman, 2010). This was considered in the writing process, and the aim therefore was to be as precise and direct as possible when describing how the research was carried out and decisions motivated in relation to method of selection, analysis and discussion. The informants have been informed in what way their

answers will be used in the thesis and have been guaranteed anonymity. Some of the information given from the informants have been analysed and resulted in conclusions that might be experienced as less flattering. However, since all informants constitute a relatively privileged, well-off and un-exposed group in the Swedish society the risk of them being harmed by the results was considered as small, thus still enabling publication.

## 4. Findings

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*This chapter present the main findings from consulting ten fieldworkers understanding of gender and their experiences from working with a gender perspective. The informants' answers and thoughts constitute the base of the text, which is structured by following the themes of the three research questions. The three main subjects have then been separated into sections, occasionally with own subtitles. Each section present interesting patterns that were found in the interview material by describing it in general term, but also by giving examples of individual informants' stories (a more detailed description of the method of transcription can be found under chapter 3.3.1 Transcription of data). All examples refer to the informant source by a number that is traceable in Appendix 1.*

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### 4.1 Understanding gender and a gender perspective

When asking the informants about their own understanding and appreciation of the term “gender” and what a “gender perspective” means, most seemed a bit unsure of how to define it in the best way. Most also acted unused to reflect over gender issues and the implication of the concept gender in connection to their field tasks. This was most evident among the informants mostly working with health care, which were five out of totally ten informants. When asking about their understanding of the term gender and the concept of a gender perspective, most answers were quick, brief and descriptions reflected mainly in general terms. Those who felt unsure or described gender in very brief terms had more trouble reflecting over their experiences and the concept of a gender perspective in connection to their fieldwork. Nevertheless, only one informant completely passed the question when she realized that she could not think of anything connected to the meaning of gender and a gender perspective (informant 8).

In most interviews the initial input in the discussion on gender concerned the terms of “women and men” or “female and male”. Many expressed that a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance is important since they know and had noticed that women and men, in many countries, do not have equal opportunities. Gender equality work was considered an important component of a gender perspective in the field, where women were identified as a main focus group and in need of special attention. One informant meant that since a male perspective tend to be stronger than a female, in most parts of the world, it is crucial to highlight a gender perspective to compensate this (informant 3). Another identified a risk of men taking too much space if fieldworkers are unaware of the fact that most countries they operate in are male dominated and restrict women's movement and opportunities (informant 10). Some informants meant that a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance concern issue of how an operation plan and adapt its intervention in respect to social and cultural rules for women and men, such

as dress codes and norms of how staff should socialize in an appropriate way. Therefore, a gender perspective in the field was much described as having the right information about the location's sociocultural situation and rules, in order to enable the work to be performed with cultural sensitivity and respect.

Four informants mainly discussed gender from their own point of view and focused their reflections on a gender perspective in the work to concern the fieldworkers and their colleagues (2,3,5,6). The number of women and men in the workforce was highlighted as important when discussing a gender perspective, and another two also mentioned this as a central dimension of gender equality work. One informant meant that a gender perspective is when women and men, both sexes, work together within different fields. He also argued that the ultimate ambition of this work is to have equal participation from both sexes (informant 2). Another informant answered by highlighting a question of whether it could be easier to be a man or woman in different situations, and referred to her own work environment within health care (informant 3). For example, there could be a differences in how people listen to a female or a male doctor, and despite having the same formal position, a male doctor could have greater authority and decision making power than a female. However, she being a female doctor had never experienced a similar scenario in the field.

All informants agreed to the importance of having a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance work, and some expressed a concern for operations overlooking it. One informant also highlighted the fact that that most people believe gender to be only a question of femininity and masculinity, meaning the implication is much greater than that. However, she did not further exemplify this (informant 1). Two informants gave examples and broadened the definition of gender. One referred to all people's right to the same information, support and help regardless of, for example, sex, religion and sexual orientation (informant 3). The other informant argued that a gender perspective should work towards equal rights and treatment between the two sexes; for example, one should not have different career opportunities, salaries, different tasks and responsibilities at the workplace (informant 6).

## 4.2 Awareness of and received information on gender policies

Information about the organisation/agency's officially formulated gender policy was either published on their websites, or received in an email that forwarded detailed documents or handbooks on the issue or a link to where information about this could be found<sup>7</sup>. Only one organisation, MSF, replied that they, with shame, not yet have a policy concerning gender in their interventions<sup>8</sup>.

The received information and education about a gendered dimension of humanitarian assistance work was different between the informants and their organisations. Seven out of ten knew that they sometime ago had been introduced to a gender perspective, and six out of ten informants knew that their organisation/agency had a formulated gender policy. Three out of these six worked for MSB and remembered attending introduction courses and training many years ago, before going out in the field for the first time. They all revealed how the education brought up the meaning of gender and the importance of having a gender perspective in the work (informant 1,2,5). The other two informants, who were aware of their organisations' formulated gender policies, had been working for the SRC. Nonetheless, almost all informants who had been to an introductory course and training emphasized that it was many years ago and since the memory more or less had faded, it was difficult for most of them to reflect on what exactly had been said and discussed. One informant described that the introductory courses had given many moments of "aha" and "oh right". The informant had learned a lot about a gendered dimension and what other countries look like, though today she had troubles remembering exactly what these discussed issues were (informant 5). The three informants who had to admit not remembering how a gender perspective was introduced, or who could not further discuss what their organisation/agency's gender policy describe, seemed a bit embarrassed since, as one of them put it, "they probably *should* know it" (informant 4). One informant, who had trouble answering exactly what her organisations' gender policy include, gave the advice to instead speak to a person working with gender issues at a higher level, within her organisation. She meant that this person probably would have a lot more information to give, but when asking if he/she had field experiences, which was an important criteria for informants in the study, the answer was no. However, in order to get a better answer on the question for the thesis her advice remained since she herself was more of a "doer" than a

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<sup>7</sup> Email correspondence with Annette Agervret, information officer at Church of Sweden. 2012-12-05.

<sup>8</sup> Email correspondence with Elisabeth Falk, Office volunteer at MSF. 2012-12-05.

“thinker” (informant 7). Only one person, representing the “not-knowing” group, explained this as a result of the actual absence of these sorts of policies within her organisation (MSF) (informant 6), which was confirmed by an email received from the same organisation<sup>9</sup>.

When discussing if and how the informants had received an introduction to a gendered dimension to *each* mission, one story was commonly shared. A general introductory course on, for example, the organisation’s routines, code of conduct and what to generally expect in the field, was given before going out on the first mission. However, since the fieldworkers in disaster situations often have to leave with very short notice, they have little time for researching every location or country of mission. At the most, a few documents on, for example, the general history and cultural characteristics, are received.

For some, the lack of information was seen as a problem since it was a stressful factor, and it could affect the possibility of performing a good job. For example, one informant described how she, some years ago, signed up for a MSF list of health care personnel available for humanitarian interventions. The informant later attended a three days introduction course and an interview, but the contact then ceased for a longer time until the earthquake struck Haiti in January 2010. Within very short notice she had to leave Sweden to help affected in need of surgery in Port-au-Prince, and there was no time for preparation and receiving information about the situation and what to expect at the site. The informant described how the situation for the organisation in the aftermath of the earthquake in 2010 was very panicked, and she believes it was therefore she suddenly received a phone call and quickly had to leave for Haiti. The circumstances were neither optimal for the informant, as completely new in the organisation, nor for the organisation, however, the catastrophic situation demanded it. The informant also concludes that it probably had been better and easier for her to perform her tasks, if there had been a better introduction. Luckily, she had some years earlier been working for another organisation in Kenya giving her some experiences of camp-life and medical care in the field, which also helped her deal with the situation in Haiti (informant 3).

However, a majority of the informants saw the rushed situation as something that you have to get used to if working within this kind of business, and when learning how to deal with it, it could even become an appreciated dimension of the job. People who need clear and detailed

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<sup>9</sup> Email correspondence with Elisabeth Falk, Office volunteer at MSF. 2012-12-05.

messages were given the advice to instead engage in more planned missions, not those of most catastrophic character (informant 7,8). Two informants also argued that there is little need for specialized information on gender issues prior to every particular mission, since a gender perspective always is present due to its deep ties to the foundation and the by-laws of the organisation (SRC) (informant 3,7). Accordingly, there should be no need to carve it out and learn specifically about it before going out. Many informants also meant that there is no way you can become totally prepared for what is waiting on site due to the catastrophic nature of the missions. In most cases you have to learn by experience and by doing, and if facing a problem, support from more experienced staff at the setting can function as a backup. These thoughts were reflected among many of the informants when asking them how well prepared they feel before going out in the field. Nine out of ten informants felt that they, despite short notice, are considerably well prepared on a gendered dimension of the mission prior departure. They mean that they bring previously learned knowledge from the introductory courses and earlier experiences into every mission, and then learn the rest on site.

### **4.3 Implementation of a gender perspective**

The appreciation of how well or not a gender perspective is implemented in the field differed between the informants and two different interpretations of the question seemed to be valid.

One understanding focused a gendered discussion in the field to concern their own and the assistance workers' situation. Their general appreciation of the implementation of a gender perspective here was positive and they had not felt discriminated based on their sex. Even though both male and female fieldworkers had been restricted in freedom of movement and clothing (dress codes) they had not faced any major problems, mainly since they had received the right information to be able to follow local norms and rules. A discussion how a gender perspective is used when working in the field with one informant, a nurse who previously had been working with health care in Pakistan, surrounded issues of how he acted in accordance to the local culture when treating patients. Firstly, all personnel, and especially his female colleagues had to adapt to the local dress codes, such as not wearing short and skin-tight clothes. Secondly, the informant himself, as a man, also had to consider local norms and policies when meeting and treating victimised local women and girls. For example, if a Pakistani woman or a girl seeks medical treatment that requires staff to examine more intimate parts of the body, only a woman can perform the task. Accordingly, to accept this and respect the local custom wherever a programme or project is performed, it is important not to offend

those you are trying to help (informant 10). All informants reflecting on the workers conditions in the field revealed how the labour force helping affected in the field generally was “mixed”, that their organisation/agency made no distinction between female or male workers and both women and men had the same rights and obligations. However, to some extent the discussions also had a focus on how a gender approach concern those who the workers are supposed to help at the disaster/conflict setting - the affected and victimised.

#### *4.3.1 Causing more harm than good*

The informants described how they are full of hope and engagement to the commitment of doing good and thinking gender in the field when sent out from Sweden, but the reality is that they have to consider more dimensions of their work than gender. The informants highlight the importance of having the right information to not tread on anyone’s toes and that respecting local customs and norms is vital to not risk causing more harm than good in the work. They stress the fact that when finishing their work, after a month or so, they go back home and those who stay are the local population. Therefore, the fieldworkers have a great and important responsibility towards this group. For example, one informant argued that including local women in the relief force at a campsite in a Muslim country could be a good idea when the organisation still is operating in the area, but when they leave, the community might push her away since she has challenged local rules and lost her honour, thus also her value. The intention of a women-participation project could be good, but the informant means that the consequences could be serious if not carefully thinking it through an intervention (informant 2). Many of the informants stressed that it will take time before reaching higher grounds in the issues of implementing a gender perspective in all humanitarian interventions, and that a broader acceptance will not come over just a night. This is mainly due to the fact that the fieldworkers operate in foreign countries in which they are guests and have to follow and adapt to local policies and rules. However, many stressed the importance of also acting as a good example of Sweden and Swedish values and norms since their performance as Swedish fieldworker in many ways have an effect of how people they meet understand and think of the country. For one informant it was important to show women the same respect as men, by for example letting them enter a room before him, gladly in front of other men to manifest his statement and the values he represent (informant 10).

One informant mentioned that it sometimes could be difficult to respect cultural rules and values and local authorities and at the same time acting on the behalf of those being seen as

less valued within that culture and society, such as women, disabled and people sick in tuberculosis. She described that there had been cases when her organisation had put pressure on local co-operating organisations or authorities in issues concerning “invisible” and marginalised groups, and it had resulted in them being busted out in the cold. However, in other cases, generally when those who hold the power were in a dependency position towards her organisation’s equipment or funding, they accepted the requirements and demands (informant 8). A good cooperation and relation with local organisations and authorities was therefore stressed by several of the informants as a crucial factor of how well a vulnerability approach and gender perspective can be implemented by an organisation/agency in the field. Several of them also mentioned that larger organisations are more likely to succeed in having a gender or vulnerability focus in interventions since they hold more power and their legitimacy and accountability, as a well-established and experienced organisation, increase their possibility of making a change. They mean that these organisations/agencies, such as the UN, International Committee of Red Crescent and Red Cross (ICRC) and Oxfam, probably can afford having a longer-term perspective and therefore invest in issues of for example gender and not only questions of, for example, distribution of relief goods. The informants’ appreciation is that these larger and well-known organisations/agencies have a similar gender focus in comparison to their own organisation/agency, but it is more difficult to keep track on the agenda of all smaller actors also operating in a disaster/conflict situation. However, some informants also mention women-specialised smaller organisations, such as the Swedish “Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation” who have a focus on supporting women in conflict and disaster, as important stakeholders in highlighting a gender perspective in interventions.

#### *4.3.2 The limits of time in interventions*

Many informants describe situations when the lack of time and the often very chaotic circumstances in relief assistance situations affect their work. One of the informants exemplified this when he described how he was sent to Ethiopia to conduct an assessment as the first step in a psychosocial support programme in three refugee camps. The informant’s team, sent out by the Church of Sweden, were supposed to interview focus groups in a camp, in order to assess people’s needs and requests of psychosocial support in the area. When the groups finally came together they consisted only of clan leaders, and all men. The informant described how the team wanted to diversify the groups more and include also women and children, however, the end result was still fewer participating women than men. When asking

about the cause to this the informant meant that in this particular refugee camp there was a consistent and rapid influx of new refugees every week, the camp grew and probably the pressured situation gave little time to give the groups a desirable structure. The result therefore was the product of making the best out of a tricky situation (informant 3). The appreciation of solving dilemmas and problems, by making the best out of the situation came back in several of the informants' reflections.

Most informants concerned the short period of time each field mission run, a limit in the performance of a successful job. This was most evident among those working with health care. One informant working as a doctor in the field revealed how she actually never had considered gender issues in the field, mainly since the commitments to the organisation always is very short. This was explained as essential for the mission due to the high burden and pressure on workers employed in disaster/conflict situation. However, it was also seen as a limit since it results in that she either do not have the time to think of anything else than how to perform the job in a good way, or that she never get to see the fruits of an eventual projects that she has been involved in (informant 6). This was expressed by other informants too, who also mean that this make it very difficult for them to evaluate whether a gender perspective is or is not successfully used in the field. The same informant working as a doctor also mean that she has not used a gender perspective in her missions as a result of that both she and her organisation, being a medical organisation, mainly think and work from a medical perspective where the focus of saving life is more important. She also believes that it might be difficult to motivate investing resources in gender projects when people die in cholera, the needs are huge and can never be meet. They speak about and act on women's special health concerns and how to treat women who have been subjected by men's violence, but issues on, for example, a broader gender situation in the society never comes up (informant 6).

#### *4.3.3 Recipes for future success*

The closing discussion of most interviews surrounded issues of the informants' ideas on the future and major challenges ahead for the use of a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance. Most informants identified the importance to continue raising awareness of gender issues in the field and that newly recruited get adequate information and introduction. One informant also reflected on that people who have been working within humanitarian assistance for a very long time might risk being desensitized and blunt, consequently losing the same engagement and interest in working towards a more gender sensitive job performance. She

means that the utmost implementers of a gender-focused intervention are those who work in the field, her and her colleagues. Therefore, the engagement and energy from these people is crucial for future success (informant 1). Another informant also suggests that a more stable personnel situation, where people get engaged with longer commitments to the field, could make interventions more sustainable and enabling for a better gender focus (informant 6).

Expressed by many informants was the need for gender issues to keep integrating and gain further recognition in *all* different sectors engaged in humanitarian assistance in the field. One informant explained how there was a team focusing specifically on questions concerning vulnerability connected to age, women and girls in Haiti, to make sure this perspective was visible in all the work at all time. However, the informants own analysis of this group's work, and these sort of specialised groups work in general, was that it easily end up as an isolated unit, a part from all the others who just keep doing "business as usual". Since there is a specialised group fulfilling the purpose of highlighting gender issues, no one will become responsible for embedding these questions in each unit or sector. In the best of worlds the specialised group's work will become absorbed by all actors, who take equal responsibility of implementing better intervention, but yet, the informant reason, the work has not come that far (informant 10).

#### **4.4 Summary of the main findings**

The following themes and interesting patterns have been found in the empirical material:

Most informants seemed unsure of how to define gender and a gender perspective in the best way. Many also acted unused to reflect over gender issues and the implication of the concept gender in connection to their field tasks. However, all stressed the importance of highlighting a gender perspective. The number of women and men in the workforce was seen as an important dimension when discussing a gender perspective and gender equality work.

Many remembered that they sometime ago had been introduced to a gender perspective, and they knew that their organisation/agency has a formulated gender policy. However, many had troubles reflecting on what exactly had been said and discussed since it was given many years ago. Since the fieldworkers in disaster situations often have to leave with very short notice, they have little time for researching each location or country of mission. For some the rushed

situation of working with relief in disaster and conflict situations was considered a problem, but to others it was seen more as a, sometimes even appreciated, part of the job that you have to get used to.

One understanding focused a gendered discussion in the field to concern their own and the assistance workers' situation. However, some discussions had a focus on how a gender approach concerns those who the workers are supposed to help. The informants stressed that it might be difficult to implement gender policies since the fieldworkers operate in foreign countries, in which they are guests and have to follow and adapt to also local policies and rules. Many described situations when the lack of time, and the often very chaotic circumstances in relief assistance situations, affect their work. The results in field were therefore described by some as a product of making the best out of a tricky situation.

## 5. Analysis

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*With base in the theoretical framework, this analysis reason on the main purpose of this study; to examine if formulated gender policies within Swedish humanitarian organisations and agencies are implemented and translated into action in the field. Three research questions were set to function as a tool to answer this study purpose, and have formed and motivated the focus and structure of this analysis. First, the informants' definitions and understandings of gender are analysed to the Gender theory and Postcolonial feminist theory. Then, the same theories constitute the base for analysis of the informants' experiences from working with a gender perspective in the field and their organisations' routines of educating and informing on their gender policies. The Policy implementation theory has been applied in several discussions as a tool to establish if and where a possible implementation gap might occur, as a result to the discussed issue. As a concluding section, all discussed issues are summarised and matched to the "Framework of gender understanding" in order to establish whether the informants have a low or high gender understanding.*

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### 5.1 Gender = women?

The gender theory reveals how gender often is seen as fixed categories of "men" and "women". The theory thus reason that diversities within these categories, as well as people who do not fit into these categories, such as transsexuals, risk being undermined and overlooked (Courtenay, 2000; Conell, 2011). Consulting the informants about their appreciation and understanding of gender a categorical thinking was valid. Highlighted to the subject of gender were discussions mentioning "femininity and masculinity", "women and men" and "female and male", and only two informants broadened the concept to include *all* people's (read: not only the stereotype categories of women and men's) equal opportunities and rights regardless of sex, age, religion and sexual orientation. A majority of the informants' expressed understanding of the gender concept and a gender perspective can therefore be seen as problematic since they presume gender to include only women and men, and therefore not focus at people excluded from these definitions. The informants working for SRC emphasised a vulnerability approach instead of referring to a gender approach to humanitarian assistance. To some extent, this perspective could leave more room to include people outside the two categories of women and men, however, even though claiming that vulnerable groups in disaster/conflict situations also include disabled and children, the following discussions focused on women.

Scholars researching aid and development policies within the international humanitarian assistance field mean that a gender perspective often is used, however, a limited understanding of the concept "gender" is valid since exclusively focusing on women (Charlesworth, 2005; Abirafeh, 2009; Connell, 2011). The informants revealed that a male perspective tends to be stronger than a female perspective in most parts of the world and that it, therefore, is important to highlight a gender (female) perspective to compensate this. A gender perspective is here

thought to be synonymous to a female perspective, indicating on a similar understanding of the concept gender that the theorists express. Stated by the informants was a concern for women's position and opportunities, and therefore, should women as a group constitute the main focus in gender equality work. This too could be connected to a categorical perception of gender where women and men are seen as separated entities distinct from each other. Women are considered the ultimate group to direct gender equality promoting interventions to since being a group in need to be raised. Increased gender equality is moreover supposed to favour women and their position in the society. Postcolonial feminist theorists are concerned with categorical perception of women and men, and identify a risk enhanced with referring to women (and men) as a stable and homogenous entity since that may create an assumption of that all women, regardless of class, ethnicity, culture and geographical location, experience a common oppression and have the same interests and desires in life (Hooks, 1984; Mohanty, 1988). The informants speak of women as subordinated men and as a group who need special attention and support since they often lack opportunities. These descriptions claim that women as a group are victims to men's superiority and that power need to be given this group in order to strengthen their position. Thus, women are portrayed as passive victims, and not actors, in desperate need of saving (by the western enlightened feminists, another assumption that postcolonial feminist theorist criticised western feminists to have in the 1980s (Mohanty, 1988)). The questioned understanding of oppressed and victimised "third world women" therefore, to some extent, seemed to be (re)produced by the informants' views of gender equality work.

Intersectional theories deepen the reasoning about gender by arguing how gender intersects with not only one, but multiple, social divisions and inequalities in the society. This further problematizes the static perception of women as a homogenous entity, experiencing the same oppression and having the same desires in life. Since intersectional theories mean that other components, such as religious affiliation, dis/ability and age, are incorporated in and affect power relations and social status, it should not be enough to identify gender inequality only in relation to sex. With base in both postcolonial feminist and intersectional theories, inequality is therefore a result of complex social power relations. Two persons can therefore never experience subordination or oppression in the same way. Thus, it is clear that most of the informants do not define gender as more than a question of sex (men and women); hence a power analysis is in many ways excluded from their conception. This also imply on a lack of deeper insight that inequalities constantly are constructed in deeply rooted in structures of

subordination within societies and cultures, where power hierarchies varies between different sociocultural contexts and also during time (Charlesworth, 2005; Tolhurst et. al., 2012).

Even though many informants first showed an unsure approach to defining gender and a gender perspective, all stressed the importance of considering it in the field. Common were discussions focusing gender and a gender perspective to their own situation as a female or male fieldworker, and whether they had, or had not, experienced major troubles concerning their own sex in the field. It was clear that the informants did their best to define and reflect on gender, even though not being all sure and this could imply that they know that it is a highly valued issue within their field of work. Also highlighted when speaking about gender equality was the number of women and men in the group. The often equal number in Swedish relief teams was seen as a good example for these organisations' positive work towards gender equality, and this can probably be understood to a broader context of their background as Swedish, citizens who normally live and function in a Swedish social climate. The Swedish debate in media and within the politics often discuss gender equality in terms of the amount of women having leading positions in, for example, corporations and problems connected to female respectively male dominating job sectors<sup>10</sup>. Associating the number of women and men in a group to function as an indicator to positive or negative achievements in the work towards gender equality could therefore be understood. In conclusion, for most of the informants, a familiar "Swedish context" –understanding to gender and a discussion on their own position and situation was close at hand and therefore became valid. The informants' understanding of gender inequality and achievements connected to the numbers of women and men at different positions show similarities to what the Gender theory describe as a WID-approach (Rathgeber, 1995; Abirafeh, 2009). A WID-style approach to gender issues often include the promotion of women's participation in male dominating spheres through technical solutions, such as gender quotas to increase the number of women at decision-making positions. Since the informants connect gender to reflections over the number of women respectively men in the group, it could be seen as emphasise for a WID-based intervention. WID-approaches to gender equality work could also be connected to a categorical perception of gender. The approach much focuses on women and men's spheres as separate entities and the promotion of women's participation in men's spheres, thus also fortifying dichotomies between the two spheres and differences between women and men. The informants were found to understand gender from a

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<sup>10</sup> An example of this can be found in a newspaper article published by Joachim Kerpner in Aftonbladet 2013-01-01. Available at: <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article16004868.ab>

categorical perspective, and their emphasis for WID-based solutions to gender inequality thus get an additional explanation. Both Rathgeber (1995) and Charlesworth (2005) mean that increasing the number of women working in humanitarian agencies and participating in these programmes does not necessarily change the way institutions function. Further this could be explained with the postcolonial feminist argument meaning that women, as a group, do not automatically share the same interest and concern for gender-based and women's issues. One conclusion could therefore be drawn; even though equal representation of both sexes are important in gender equality it does not necessarily change how institutions are ruled and give possible improvements for gender equality. Therefore, there seem to be no shortcut or quick fix to gender inequality, which a WID-approach much implies.

## **5.2 Who is responsible for implementing gender policies?**

Instructions on a gender perspective and a gendered dimension of fieldwork were found to be issued only in an initial phase of involvement with the organisations/agencies. This has showed to cause possible problems. When receiving only a general description and instruction on gender issues, many dimensions and problems encountered with using a gender perspective in the field seem to be left to the fieldworkers' own capacity of finding solutions and using common sense when arriving to new places. It is clear that the organisations/agencies put a lot of the responsibility of implementing a gender perspective on their fieldworkers and their ability to act in the right way. However, when consulting the informants, little indicated on an awareness of this obligation and most did not see themselves as key actors in work connected to gender issues. Some mention that those working in the field hold much of the executing power of policy formulations implementation, but most of them also meant that their particular duties in the field had limited specific gender focus since they, for example, were more focused on medical care, cooking or hygiene promotion. Admitting to not using a gender perspective did not seem to concern the informants too much, and this might be understood to their thoughts that a gender perspective actually *is* highlighted and used in the field, even though themselves do not belong to the group of the most important executive implementers. Some referred to that there often are other persons who are more concentrated to gender issues in the field, and that special groups or teams can function as a lobbying entity for the highlighting of gender. In conclusion, the informants seem to underestimate their own responsibility, but at the same time the organisation/agency overestimate their workers capacity. Therefore, it is highly probable that a gender perspective gets limited in use since the informants believe that

someone else will implement a gender perspective, while the organisation think and expect all workers to act on their policies. According to the Policy implementation theory, there are three different phases of which policies have to pass before reaching practice – policy formulation, interpretation and intervention. Referring to the latest discussion a communicating problem seems to occur when a policy is supposed to turn into action. The informants have been introduced to the organisations/agency's policy, and they have understood the importance of having working with gender policies in the field, however, somewhere at the interpretation level they have understood the policy to not further concern their own work. The organisation/agency probably believe that their policy formulations are clear, and that the reason for progress being slow is that gender issues take time to implement since being engaged with social transformation. However, it is also possible that the reason to gender policy's being slowly implemented in humanitarian assistance is the fact that none actually use it.

When first introduced, “gender mainstreaming” was supposed to be the answer to a broader inclusion of gender issues into other institutions and sectors than those being specialized on “women's issues” (Charlesworth, 2005). However, conclusions drawn from this analysis indicate an actual backlash for the concept of “gender mainstreaming” and a kind of misunderstanding of its meaning. The informants appreciate gender issues to be someone else's concern while they perform their own more “practical” duties – for example, one informant referred to herself more as a “doer” than a “thinker” (informant 7). When discussing gender and a gender perspective with the informants, a general impression of insecurity towards the term was valid, and to most of them, gender issues seemed to be something quiet abstract and unmanageable for a “simple” field worker. Maybe a still quiet academic discussion, and to some extent an inaccessible terminology and rhetoric surrounding the gender concepts, make the fieldworkers believe that only people in the top and those on leading positions need to be fully aware of the meaning of a gender perspective, and how to use it. This additionally support a postcolonial feminist discussion reflecting on how gender development programmes often are formulated by academics and experts on the highest level, positioned far away from people with real experiences and opinions (Rathgeber, 1995). In this case, the informants' experiences are not taken into account in policy formulation processes resulting in the printed words being spelled far away from the reality of those who are supposed to implement them. The informants, therefore, experience difficulties in connecting to the concept of gender in the field,

maybe also since what is formulated actually is hard to implement in practice. Many of the informants revealed stories how they at all time try to perform their job in best possible way, however, the often unstructured and catastrophic character of disaster relief work result in that you have to make the best out of a situation that is not ideal. Adding the implementation theory to this it is possible to deduce another potential gap between the phase of policy formulation and the interpretation. An expert and top-down policy formulation seem to increase a possible failure in implementation since it increase the risk of policies not being adapted to the real situation in the field. Although the fieldworkers do their best to take in and use the printed words in their work, a failure in the intervention phase is highly probable.

Applying a WID approach and using a women's focus as a gender focus is also enhanced with a risk of leaving out men and their role in this work. The informants' answers and the terminology used concerning gender and using a gender perspective almost exclusively focused on women. Only one informant (10) mentioned that he actively in the field could influence other men to change their perception of women if he in different ways manifests his view of men's and women's equal value. If not including men as equally important in both the concept of gender and the work connected to using a gender perspective in the field, a gender perspective risk being reduced to a women's perspective. As established, the female perspective was valid in the informants' answers. Charlesworth (2005) warn for this scenario since women then alone get the whole responsibility for changing existing power structures without the inclusion of men, a probably difficult task since men often hold more power than women. Also, if these issues always are referred to women and women's participation, the project of gender policy implementation might become captured and limited to specialised women's institutions, thus risk never being fully integrated into all sectors. One informant reported how a gender specialised group worked in Haiti in 2010, which is an obvious indication that the mainstreaming of gender was not implemented in this mission, but rather remained as an activity for a specialised institution. The informants' own analysis of the subject is rather interesting and worth highlighting in this discussion. He argues that if there is a specialised group fulfilling the purpose of highlighting gender issues, no one will become responsible for embedding these questions in each unit or sector. In the best of worlds, the specialised group's work will get absorbed by all actors who take equal responsibility of implementing better intervention, but yet, he reason, the work has not come that far (informant 10). Since only little evidence was found on this field, no further analysis or conclusion will be drawn. Accordingly, future investigations are encouraged to look deeper into this subject.

### **5.3 Cultural sensitivity versus gender policy implementation**

Although the informants' gender understanding can be criticized from a postcolonial feminist perspective, they also show a certain awareness of a postcolonial debate when discussing how gender sensitive interventions can be performed in the field. They describe that it sometimes can be difficult to try to make a change, or act on behalf of those being most vulnerable, and at the same time respect local cultural rules and values. The informants mean that since they are guests and work in a foreign country, under a short period of time, they have to adapt to that country's laws and principle to not risk causing more harm than good. This could indicate that the informants' have insight in the history of colonisation and past colonisers' behaviours when exploiting people and natural resources in a majority of the countries in Africa, Asia and the Latin and South Americas during large parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most people probably refer to this time as a horrible past in the history, and thus the importance to strive towards a better behaviour when being, and interacting in post colonised countries. Thus, the informants express a concern for the importance of respecting other countries' culture, rules and own sovereignty in order to not act in a superior way. One informant exemplified this by describing how authorities at the location of mission might believe that having local women working and participating in disaster management work is culturally unacceptable. At the same time, the Swedish fieldworkers have been taught that having a gender perspective, showing equal respect to all people, and working towards securing all people's rights is of utmost importance in the field. The fear of acting in a colonial/superior way and saying that a western way of living and thinking is right and good, seemed to create a dilemma resulting in that it sometimes is more convenient for the informants to not act at all, or just a little, on formulated gender policies and plans.

A postcolonial feminist theory argues that gender policies and programmes, addressing a gender perspective, most often are top-down ruled and based on Eurocentric views where academics and "experts" interpret and formulate problems and solutions (Rathgeber, 1995). A sort of top-down approach to the teaching of gender dimensions in the field was to some extent found among the informants' answers. First of all, they are prior the first field mission taught about gender in most general terms by Swedish instructors from a Swedish organisation/agency in a Swedish context. Secondly, little information and consultation is given on, for example, special circumstances in each country connected to a gender dimension before going out on each mission. Once on site, the informants have to rely on methods and information once

introduced to in earlier courses. It is possible that the instructions are given and received in a fair and multifaceted way, however, still the fact remains that the policies and plans are taught from Sweden, and with no consultation or connection with the target group and real experts in the field (the population living and functioning at the disaster/conflict setting). From a postcolonial feminist perspective, this could be seen as problematic since the teaching method do not give possibilities for those who the policies actually concern to raise their voice. This in turn, might create a great distance between the fieldworkers and the affected population and generate an unbalanced power relation where feeling of “us” as the helpers and “them” as victims develop. The informants showed fear of implementing formulated gender policies and using the taught methods since not being sure if they might tread on anyone’s toes. Probably they would not experience a dilemma if being sure that formulated gender policies were closely tied local requests and needs. Risks encountered with top-down teaching and instructing methods, carried out far away from the real targets thus are found to increase problems connected to policy implementation.

#### **5.4 The role of gender discourses**

Central within gender theory and feminist theory is a discussion on that gender meanings and roles are based in discourses that are constructed in people’s common way of talking and creating images or texts (Connell, 2011). Furthermore, the theories argue how these meanings and roles therefore are not an expression of an absolute truth, but dependent on a continued discourse to be reproduced. Therefore, all individuals hold executing power of, and are active agents in, the production and reproduction of formed dominant norms of what masculinity and femininity are. Even though the informants see themselves as active promoters of gender equality work, their understanding and reasoning about gender could much be seen as fortifiers of categorical and stereotype images of women and men, and upholders of a WID-approach to gender equality work. The discourse theory emphasise individuals’ role and responsibility in upholding narrow gendered discourses, however, the informants’ understanding is most likely a product of a greater discourse within the international humanitarian assistance field. Therefore should *both* individuals, in this case the fieldworkers, and those who at a higher level develop policies and form the debate, be responsible for changing a gender discourse. Policy formulators officially seem to be interested in changing the focus within gender inequality work to a more multifaceted and intersectional GAD-approach, however, their insight in the importance of a discourse analysis seem to lag behind since they, according to Abirafeh (2009),

Conell (2011) and Dharamapuri (2011), still use much of the rhetoric that view women and men as dichotomies. It is probable that a discourse analysis is of great importance when it comes to understanding why implementation of gender policies often fails in the humanitarian assistance field.

### **5.5 High or low gender understanding?**

With base in the above analysis and discussion of the informants' answers and expressions, a summary of the most important themes of how they understand gender follow. The summary is then matched to the "Framework of gender understanding" (described in chapter 2.1.3) to "classify" and determine whether the informants have a low or high gender understanding.

Most of the informants stated knowing what the concept of gender and a gender perspective mean (criterion 1, *high understanding*). However, a majority had a limited understanding of the meanings of gender using the words "women" and "gender" as token and basing their understanding on categorical perceptions of women and men (criterion 2 and 3, *low understanding*). Despite a change in the official rhetoric about gender to focus more on GAD-mechanisms, the informants emphasised technical solutions to equality problems and thus a WID-based approach to women focused projects (criterion 2 and 4, *low understanding*). None of all informants mention or properly highlight men's role in gender equality work (criterion 3, *high understanding*). With base in these results most informants fulfil criteria 2 – 4, and also partly 1, under the category of *low understanding*. Only two informants fulfil one criterion (2) under *high understanding*, when stressing a "rights perspective" than a "female perspective" to gender issues. Adding it all up, a predominant correspondence to the category of *low understanding* is established, hence concluding that the informants have a general low understanding of the gender concept.

## 6. Closing discussion

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*Some of the reflections made and the interview material were not in coherence with the pre set theories, and also went outside the frame of the study purpose. Hence, in this chapter a broadening discussion follow that takes also these aspects into account.*

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It seems like much of what today is written about gender has turned into common sense in a humanitarian assistance discussions. In one way, we could call it a “gender mainstreaming” result and sign of progress. Since turned into an issue of common sense, it might breed an idea of that there is little need for a continued discussion on what “gender” and “gender equality” *actually* means. So when reaching the top of many agendas, the term and concept of “gender” instead erode, and do not function as intended. This could also, in the end, lead to that none is entirely sure of what gender refers to, but despite this, few ask since all are aware of that they should know due to its common high value. Consequently, gender continue being an abstract and inaccurately defined concept, thus the work towards gender equality and more gender sensitive humanitarian interventions gets limited.

The initial interest for this subject was raised when learning how a gender perspective was introduced in the fields of international and humanitarian aid. Since many voices state that progress has been slow in the humanitarian assistance sector, questions of whether the formed gender policies actually are implemented in the field were raised. As a result of a number of reasons, this study has been focused on the fieldworkers’ role in this issue. Despite this, some reflections have been made on the broader field of gender policy implementation in humanitarian assistance. Generally, effective policy implementation is difficult, mostly since it is hard to formulate words in absolute coherence with the reality. Reflecting on the Policy implementation theory it seems like the planning, careful consideration and evaluation of each step of an intervention is crucial to enable a policy to become action. When looking at humanitarian assistance, time is scarce and quick action in an unplanned situation is essential for saving as many lives as possible. In a disaster/conflict situation, a lot of people are traumatised and need to return to a normal state of living as soon as possible in order to not risk worse economical, social and psychological consequences than already caused. Also, the possibility of consulting the policy’s target group, the local population, is a problem when an intervention often start planning and packing relief goods and equipment even before reaching the country in need. These dimensions could be an explanation to why it seems to be more

difficult to implement gender policies in the field of humanitarian assistance than others. However, this should not be an excuse to overlook the importance of a continued development and increased efficiency in the implementation of gender policies in this particular field. Disaster and conflict situations have also been found to tear up social structures and patterns, which might indicate that this situation instead is perfect to start a social transformation project. Organisations and agencies should not be content by only forming a policy, they must also actively evaluate and follow up how executors understand and implement them. One conclusion, and also a further recommendation for organisations and agencies, is that since every situation is unique, involve different people and include different opportunities, humanitarian situations probably demand a flexible policy and approach to gender, as well as well-educated staff who know their role and place in the work.

As a last comment to this study, a discussion on the introductory chapter (1. Introduction) will be raised. The text revealed in this section, in many ways reproduce a low understanding of gender since replicating a categorical discussion surrounding a narrow discussion of women and men's different vulnerabilities in disasters/conflicts and by referring to women as a singular and homogenous group opposed to men. This could indicate also the writer's (the researcher's) general low understanding of gender, however, this was consciously considered when reflecting upon what information the reader should have in order to understand the study purpose and proceed further into the study. The intention was to present a background to the issue of gender in humanitarian relief by using literature that summarise topics surrounding these issues. Unfortunately, if once again applying the frameworks of Gender theory and Postcolonial feminist theory much of the found publications on gender issues from organisations and agencies could be criticised for having a general low understanding of gender. The reader is thus given background information that (probably) many people working within humanitarian relief would agree to be correct and valid. Hopefully, when the reader has proceed to the analysis part of the study it will encourage him/her to go back and question also the information written in the introduction, and thus also today's broader and much mainstreamed international discussion on the gender concept.

## 7. Conclusion

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The development of aid policies and interventions promoting a gender perspective seem to have made major progress over the past 30 years, however, many theorists (Rathgeber, 1995; Charlesworth, 2005; Abirafeh, 2009; Dharamapuri, 2011) are pessimistic to its actual use in the field. Unfortunately, when reflecting over the interviews held with the ten informants, who in different ways have worked with humanitarian assistance in the field, a similar conclusion can be drawn from this study's result. The following conclusions have been established:

- Even though most of the informants stated knowing what the concept of gender and a gender perspective is and the importance of using it in the field, when analysing their answers to the "Framework of gender understanding" a majority of the informants are considered having a general low understanding of gender.
- The informants seem to underestimate their own responsibility in using a gender perspective in the field, and at the same time the organisation/agency overestimate their workers' capacity. It is therefore possible that a gender perspective gets limited in use since the informants believe that someone else will work with gender issues while the organisation think and expect all workers to implement their policies. Thus, a gap seems to occur somewhere between the phase of the policy formulation and interpretation, causing a fail in the intervention and final implementation phase.
- Many informants expressed an implementation dilemma where attempts to make a change, or act on behalf of those being most vulnerable, sometimes clash with showing respect to local cultural rules and values. A connection was found between this dilemma and the organisations/agencies "expert" and "top-down"-methods when instructing and teaching their workers on their gender policies. "Expert" and "top-down" methods when formulating gender policies also seem to increase a possible failure of implementation, since it increases the risk of policies not being fully adapted to the real situation in the field.
- Much indicate how a still old-fashioned gender discourse is produced and reproduced in gender policy formulations. This in turn probably influence fieldworkers own gender understanding. Therefore future researcher are encouraged to shed more light on the

importance of discourse analysis and its possible connection to failure in the implementation of gender policies in the humanitarian assistance field.

- A reason to progress being slow in the humanitarian assistance field could be that gender policies take time to implement, since being engaged with social transformation projects. However, this study also indicates that this possibly is a result of few actors actually using it in the field.

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**In ownership of the author:**

1. Interview 1-10
2. E-mail correspondence between the informants, MSB, MSF, SRC and Church of Sweden.

Documents and recordings can be collected upon request.

## **Appendix 1: List of the informants**

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Below is a list of informants interviewed for the study. Information is given on their sex, age and profession in the field.

**Informant 1:** Female, 45 years old, nurse

**Informant 2:** Male, 55 years old, nurse specialised in psychiatry (ex. UN-soldier)

**Informant 3:** Female, 47 years old, anaesthetist

**Informant 4:** Male, 54 years old, psychosocial support

**Informant 5:** Female, 49 years old, cook and camp technician

**Informant 6:** Female, 36 years old, doctor specialised in infectious diseases

**Informant 7:** Female, 63 years old, hygiene promoter

**Informant 8:** Female, 61 years old, nurse (ex. UN-soldier)

**Informant 9:** Male, 58 years old, expert in a team investigating environmental issues

**Informant 10:** Male, 62 years old, child health/paediatric nurse, health and hygiene promotion