CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Rosalind Eyben and Laura Turquet

Drawing on direct experience, this book is about feminists working politically to promote their organisations' gender equality goals. The aim is that by sharing this experience the books' contributors can help others in similar positions debate and reflect on the challenges of their job and that readers from within the wider international women's movement gain insights to engage more strategically with their allies on the inside of development organisations. From a theoretical perspective, the literature stresses the significance of supportive individuals positioned within the bureaucratic system. The book's insider standpoint is the book's academic contribution, describing and analyzing the political processes of everyday bureaucratic life in which feminists assert their agency and creativity.

This book is about feminists reflecting critically on their own experience as gender advisors in large development bureaucracies. The job of such a specialist includes reviewing policies and strategies, awareness-raising and skill development, and identifying and introducing systems and incentives for planning and monitoring in support of gender equality (Derbyshire 2012.) Not everyone in such posts is feminist and there are also feminists doing other jobs but - except tangentially - this book is not about them. Its theme is the limits and possibilities for feminist gender specialists to make their organisations capable of promoting and supporting rights-based approaches for social transformation that liberate men as well as women from gendered norms. This book is about bureaucrats working politically to transform bureaucracies, 'so that they become a tool in transforming lives of women' (O'Neill, this volume, Chapter 6. p..XXX).

Feminists tend to see bureaucrats as preservers of the status quo. A feminist bureaucrat appears a contradiction in terms. Yet, as this chapter will argue, it is this very contradiction that offers them the chance of becoming change agents. An intellectual and emotional rejection of a bureaucracy's hierarchical and controlling character can alienate

any feminist employee but for feminists employed as gender specialists this feeling of not really belonging may be exacerbated through an awareness that their presence is not welcome. Their job as gender specialist often exists because of external pressure and prevailing norms more than from any core organizational commitment. Their marginalization – a sense of being on the edge rather than fully integrated into the organization- makes life complicated and full of quandaries. It can sometimes be lonely and the lack of recognition can be depressing. Some find their position untenable and leave to exert pressure for change from the outside. Yet others stay to learn the advantages of being on the edge. As insiders they learn to understand and behave appropriately in the organization that employs them - otherwise they will have no credibility and little influence. As outsiders, they keep their critical distance from the organization and are able to challenge 'how things are done around here'. Positively accepting their inside-outside status they reach out beyond their organizations to the feminist movements in civil society that they understand to be the principal force for transformative change for gender equality. By working politically and exploiting rather than lamenting their position on the edge of the organization, feminists employed to work on gender equality issues – although marginalized - can change development bureaucracies. In that context, this introductory chapter explains the book's origins, approach and aims, followed by an overview of the other chapters.

Origin, approach and purposes

The book's origins lie in the editors' own experiences as policy practitioners and bureaucrats working in large international organizations. Feminist bureaucrats find it difficult to communicate their experience: they are busy in their jobs, often unfamiliar with academic discourse and possibly even cautious about revealing to the outside world the realities of their workplace. Hence, when Rosalind conceived a research project about feminist bureaucrat working as gender specialists, it made sense to design it not for extracting data from reserved officials but instead as participatory action research, offering them a safe space to reflect upon and improve their own practice. In 2007, a collaborative project was born in which about a dozen gender specialists (including one

man) and researcher shared a common aspiration for social emancipation and gender justice. The project had a conversational approach. Rosalind was doing research with instead of on her subjects (Pillow 2003). This approach made some of those involved want to write in their own voice, and that encouraged others to contribute. Although not everyone contributing to this present book was a member of that original project, nevertheless all the authors write in that project's spirit of self-enquiry and honest sharing and chapters three, seven and ten capture the reflections and learning from those in the wider group that have chosen to remain anonymous.

Approach

Our approach takes seriously the notion of feminist reflexivity. We ask what is it about our positionality that shapes both how any one of us relates with others and how we choose to act. Hence this book is partial (in the two related senses of this word). Firstly, it makes no claims to represent the situation of all feminist gender specialists in development (although when we have presented our findings to a wider audience of such specialists they have recognized these as their own). Secondly, the book reflects a certain, necessarily limited, perspective of a small number of professional, educated, mainly women analyzing their own direct experience of working with gender equality or women's rights units in governments and development agencies. In most cases, the book does not seek to explore the effects of development's bureaucratic politics as these make waves (or ripples) in the lives and prospects of women in general and in whose name the authors are working. Nevertheless, all the contributors are well aware of the 'long road to walk from victories for women in bureaucratic spaces to gains for women on the ground' (Rao, Chapter 12, this volume, pXXX).

Brigitte Holzner, for example, worries whether spending her time on the construction of texts is of any relevance to the real world (Chapter 5). Claudia (a disguised character in Chapter 8) agonizes whether she is making any difference in the lives of 'rural women in Bangladesh'. And in the same chapter, Ratna is concerned that spending all day 'just

answering emails and reading stuff ... You won't ever have – or you'll have forgotten what it's like, the reality on the ground for women' (p. XXX).

Indeed, it is this anxiety about whether one's job is worthwhile that led to some of the research participants wondering whether if it was self-indulgent to spend time holding up the mirror to themselves. If theirs is not the 'real world', what is the relevance or utility of a book that discusses and analyzes their working lives? The answer, and the challenge, is to keep the bigger picture in mind - otherwise reflection is narcissistic - without staying silent about the minutiae of practice of how change is brokered. Silence about such minutiae is politically unhelpful to the real world, because the secrecy of bureaucracies produces a power effect. Weber noted that every bureaucracy will try to hide what it gets up to unless it is forced into revelation, invoking 'hostile interests' if need be to justify the secrecy (Bendix 1959).

Development bureaucracies may be particularly competent at exercising these privileges of power whereby power is legitimized by reference to 'the poor' for whose sake the organization exists. Staff commitment to this supreme objective may also make them reluctant to reveal their organization's inner workings and thus expose it to criticism. However, when the blinds stay down those trying to look in through the window find it hard to see and therefore to influence what is going on. Feminist bureaucrats at the threshold between inside and outside are appropriately positioned to pull up the blinds. In the absence of external pressure they cannot secure the institutional change they are seeking. Thus making public their reflexive analysis is not self-indulgent if it contributes, as one of them said, to 'demystifying the bureaucracy'.

As such, this book provides an actor-oriented perspective on organizational politics. By 'actor-oriented'we mean that the book is concerned with how specific individuals 'deal with the problematic situations they encounter' (Long 2001: 57) and how they act as brokers at the interface of bureaucracy and civil society.   Feminists' potential to convert any bureaucracy – even a new one like UN Women into an engine of social change

remains a matter of debate. It is a particularly piquant question for the complex bureaucratic architecture of international development whose shared normative discourse is, as the World Bank puts it, 'working for a world free of poverty'.[1] For the authors of the present book, the debate is more than academic. As Aruna Rao stresses, it is emotional and personal:

> [The] politics around gender equality issues are deeply felt. People who get involved in such intense processes are forced to re-examine their own personal beliefs and behaviours – to walk the talk. And they have to do so in an environment which is rife with politics but where no other issue except human rights is politically framed (Chapter 12, p.XXX).

Part of the emotion relates to the discomfort of inhabiting a marginal location in which you are never fully accepted anywhere, either inside or outside the bureaucracy. Yet, when they learn to be comfortable with their position, feminist bureaucrats exploit their marginality through political strategies that include building and balancing internal and external alliances, leveraging outside pressure and turning dominant discourse on its head.

Accepting rather than worrying about the contradictions inherent in being a feminist bureaucrat means they can discover unexpected pathways of personal and organizational change, discoveries that can help the bureaucracy move closer to achieving its rhetorical aspirations of supporting women's empowerment and gender equality. It is largely a succession of small wins and discouraging defeats that over time turn into bigger victories, such as the feminists' success in securing the establishment in 2010 of the new United Nations organization, UN Women. As Joanne Sandler notes, the changes that achieved this outcome did not happen quickly, but resulted from 'years of struggle and the efforts of countless women and men. (Chapter 10, this volume. p. XXX)

To do this requires above all the commitment and craft of a political strategist.

Political Purpose

It is the authors' hope that in sharing their experience they can help others in a similar position to theirs debate and reflect on the challenges of their job. The material from this book has indeed already had a positive reaction from participants at a workshop in Scandinavia for gender specialists from bilateral agencies and development non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Thus the book should first of all prove useful to like-minded colleagues and to those planning a future career in development. For gender specialists newly recruited into development's organizational world, there is little to guide them about effective strategizing in the corridors of power. In addition, another key audience, as just indicated, is those many feminists on the outside who are advocating for development organizations to implement and strengthen commitments they have made. By revealing the inner workings of bureaucracies this book may enable such advocates to become more skilled in supporting their insider colleagues.

From the perspective of a feminist working for a local women's rights organisation in an aid recipient country, a gender specialist in a donor bureaucracy appears self- evidently in a privileged and powerful position. Yet, these two very differently positioned set of actors need each other. On the one hand, feminist bureaucrats working as gender specialists want to support women mobilising as a powerful driver for social transformation. On the other hand, women's rights cannot ignore donors' policy influence and may make good use of donors' money. On a world-wide basis, women's rights organisations received in 2011 a third of all their funding from the donor bureaucracies, like those represented in the present book – bilateral and multilateral agencies and international non-governmental organisations INGOs (Pittman, A. et al. 2012). This proportion is likely to be significantly higher in poorer ones (the donors in this book do not fund women's rights organisations in richer countries). For example, a study of the effects of the external financing of women's rights organisations in Ghana and Bangladesh (Mukhopadhyay et al 2011) found their most important sources of funding were bilateral agencies and INGOs.

Yet, as instrumentalist gender equality discourse assumes greater prominence within international bureaucracies, it becomes ever clearer that so much of what should be a fundamentally transformative project is lost in translation. Gender specialists in donor head offices of organisations, including INGOs, and that Rosalind interviewed for the above study, commented that although women's empowerment and gender equality remain central objectives for many donors, it has become a struggle to preserve and fund rights-based approaches. To that end, they stressed their desire to develop a quality relationship with women's rights organisations so they could work better together for a shared objective and ensure their organizations are held to account for their own commitments.

Perhaps it is naïve to imagine that there can be solidarity between feminist activists in civil society, some of whom fiercely critique the whole development paradigm, and feminists situated in, what one of the feminist bureaucrats in this book described as 'the belly of the beast'. It is a hotly debated issue (Mohanty 2003, Mullings 2006). There are, however women's rights activists that do recognise the strategic value of engaging with those working for change from within international development agencies. This present book should help them do so.

Academic Intent

The book's academic intent is to explore how bureaucratic organizations can support real world change. A parallel stream of research has examined the nature and challenges of gender mainstreaming in international development organizations (Goetz 2003, Prugl and Lustgarten 2006, Rao and Kelleher 2005,) and Klugman (2008) and True (2003) emphasize the significance of the role of supportive individuals positioned within the bureaucratic system for action on gender justice. However, since most scholars have had little or no insider access to the organizations they were studying they have been unable to describe and analyze the political processes of everyday bureaucratic life in which people assert their agency and creativity.

We have to factor in this lack of knowledge about the micro-political strategies of feminist bureaucrats when considering the question usefully explored by many feminist researchers about what makes change happen in global policy spaces (Tickner 2001, Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002, Parpart et al 2002, True 2003, Moghadam 2005, Molyneux and Razavi 2005, Sen 2006). Case studies are available about successful instances of policy processes, such as securing the UN Declaration on Violence Against Women (Joachim 2003), and more recently securing Security Council Resolution 1325 (Shepherd 2008) but studies such as Moghadam's (2005) on feminist policy networks do not sufficiently appreciate the informal and very discreet role of those feminists who support these networks from the positions inside official organizations.[2] The role of gender specialists in development agencies of the member countries of the United Nations is taken into account even less. These may have been supporting campaigns to achieve changes in global policies in favour of gender equality in a number of ways such as securing the resources to fund a campaign or international conference, influencing their country's delegations, financing the costs of Southern campaigners and encouraging their own national lobby groups to be active on the issue. However, their own official caution may render these feminist bureaucrats invisible, misleading us about their role and preventing civil society activists and academics from enquiring as to how they could most usefully support them.

A collection of brief memoirs from those active in the 1970s and 1980s provides some fascinating insights into the challenges of establishing 'women in development' sections in organizations such as USAID, the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat (Fraser and Tinker 2004). Jain (2005) and Skard (2008) recount how those women who established the Commission for the Status of Women were former WW2 resistance fighters, who used that experience to fight their corner in the newly formed United Nations. And an exploration of the 'bureaucratic mire' (Staudt et al 1997) offers a perspective on the years between the 1985 Nairobi Women's Conference and the one that followed ten years later in Beijing. However, little has been published about what happens inside development bureaucracies[3] since Miller and Razavi's illuminating edited

volume of case studies (1998). Knowing more about what happens is not only of academic interest, it can be politically useful.

Walby (2005) argues that unless organizations work through the contradictions between a desire to use gender for instrumental reasons and their desire to promote gender equality in its own right, gender mainstreaming will tend to support the status quo. However, it is more complex than that. As this book will demonstrate, large organizations are heterogeneous and full of contradictions. Politically astute feminist bureaucrats seek to exploit these contradictions rather than resolve them, making small gains as they work towards transformational goals.

Structure of the Book

The experience of being a feminist gender specialist, as interpreted through the eyes of an individual is the focus of most of the book's chapters, In all but one case (Chapter 2, which is about working in a Ministry of Women's Affairs) this is the experience of staff employed in international development organizations: multilateral - the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) United Nations agencies, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB)); bilateral - the Austrian aid department; and non-governmental - Oxfam and Action Aid. The exception to this individual focus is Aruna Rao's chapter (11) that describes a group process of action-learning and reflective practice undertaken with United Nations country teams. These are similar to the approaches Rosalind used in bringing together a group of gender specialists from Europe, Africa, Asia and North America, and working in the head offices of these and other international development organizations (including some of the contributors to this book) and whose reflections are captured in three briefer chapters that are different in tone. Through the device of the conversations that take place between five composite characters, based on this larger group that includes me, these chapters explore relationships, politics, power, coalitions, and discourses and look at how these shape and inform the practitioner's craft. Importantly, in these conversations people talk more frankly about their experience than they would as named authors in the other chapters.

Following this present introduction, Chapter 2 by Rosalind Eyben draws on material from the book's case studies to develop the theoretical arguments about marginality, effectiveness and strategy. Firstly the author considers gender mainstreaming as it has ebbed and flowed within the international development system. She then briefly examines some of the inherent contradictions in this system and its associated pitfalls that feminist bureaucrats need to be alert to in their efforts to facilitate social transformation. The focus then shifts to examining more closely the ambivalence of feminist bureaucrats. The chapter considers what it means to be a politically engaged bureaucrat, including motivation and the challenges and opportunities of being marginal. This is followed by a more specific examination of what it means to be a feminist in a bureaucracy and the implications for feminist bureaucrats' most important political strategy, namely constructive relations with feminist movements and networks.

Chapter 3 provides the first of the case studies, setting the scene by linking feminist activism at the country level with donor support to gender mainstreaming in state bureaucracies. Based on conversations with Francesca Pobee-Hayford, a former senior official in the Ghana Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, Takyiwaa Manuh and Nana Akua Anyidoho, scholar activists, ask what it means to be a self-confessed 'femocrat' in the state bureaucracy. Francesca's objective was to get the Ministry to take up its central management role as the primary implementer of the government's gender mainstreaming agenda. She concludes that despite some achievements, MOWAC is still struggling to do this due to a rapid turnover of staff and to an inability to develop strong political relationships with other Ministries as well as externally with the women's movement. Eventually, frustrated at inadequate political leadership combined with ministerial micro-management of her job, Francesca resigned from the civil service to take up a post as gender adviser in the country office of a bilateral development agency. Manuh and Anyidoho discover that despite all the institutional challenges they have learnt about from Francesca, they are now more optimistic than before about gender mainstreaming in Ghana.

Chapter 4 describes how in 2007 a group of feminist bureaucrats working as gender specialists in head offices of international development bureaucracies got together to talk about their approaches. It was an action research process that continued on and off for three years. This chapter is the first part of three evocations of some of what they said and discussed. The five characters are based on twelve real individuals but Rosalind has heavily disguised them and the places where they meet (in a way analogous to using fictional characters) to protect the anonymity of those participating and to represent different points of view. This particular chapter explores the theme of feminist identities as discussed over supper together in New York.

From her post as gender adviser in Vienna for the Austrian aid programme, Brigitte Holzner considers in Chapter 5 some of the same challenges. Feminists face the dilemma of engaging with the state machinery to change it while finding they are devoting most of their time to performing the tasks that the bureaucracy requires of them, after which the machinery fails to deliver the hoped-for transformations. Small wins seem the best that can be hoped for. She describes two instances of engaging with EU development institutions to secure language favourable to women in policy texts. In the first case, by making good use of inter-organizational alliances, she was successful. In the second instance, the policy topic was more difficult to influence and she failed. There were certainly some changes in the circumstances, but possibly the principal difference was that the second case (gender and the macro-economy) was more threatening to the EU mainstream policy discourse than the first case (the role of women in armed conflict).

Chapter 6 consists of Rosalind's conversation with Patti O'Neill who works for the OECD. Employed in New Zealand's national gender machinery and then in its aid programme, as Francesca Pobee-Hayford was in Ghana, Patti moved to Paris to be responsible for gender issues in the work of the DAC that brings together all the bilateral aid agencies in a forum to discuss policy issues, coordinates peer reviews of agencies' aid programmes, and collects statistics. She looks back on her career as a political activist

and feminist bureaucrat. She stresses the importance of building alliances based on trust and mutual respect within and outside the organization in which the feminist bureaucrat works. These relationships work better if at certain times others are not told about them and when you challenge each other constructively, recognizing and building on complementary roles. Among Patti's other tips for being an effective feminist bureaucrat are creating win-win situations – 'We need to avoid being "the finger-wagging gender police" and choosing your battles, which means that strategy must be accompanied by constant scanning of the political environment and readiness to shift tactics in response to emerging opportunities. And, she concludes, when things go wrong, it is essential to keep a positive and optimistic outlook.

Chapter 7 is about working as a gender adviser in international NGOs. Laura Turquet analyzes the strategies used and the challenges encountered when she lobbied DFID on its gender equality policy while struggling to avoid marginalization within her own organization, Action Aid. She argues that building relationships with feminist activists has to be a two-way process. Those on 'the outside', women's organizations and feminist campaigners, need to appreciate what the insiders are trying to do and reach out to them; and those on the inside must be frank about the challenges of their own bureaucratic location. Like O'Neill she emphasizes the importance of establishing relationships of mutual trust and respect.

In Chapter 8, we return to the five women we met in Chapter 3. This time they are on a weekend retreat in the country. Picking up the threads from their conversation in New York, they ask themselves how they define success. This leads on to talking – and disagreeing – about gender mainstreaming and how to work effectively with an organization's instruments, discourses and procedures.

This is also a strong theme in the chapter by Ines Smyth (Chapter 9), who works for Oxfam, and spent a year as the leading Gender Specialist at the ADB, an institution with very different ethos and priorities. She explores how the character of the two

organizations shapes their commitment and approach to promoting gender equality in their programmes. Her experience at ADB helps her look at the world of international NGOs in a new light. She concludes that feminist bureaucrats must persist in tackling obstacles and areas of resistance not a popular approach in NGOs, she comments, where immediate and simple solutions are expected for social problems of intractable complexity.

Chapter 10 takes us into the UN. Joanne Sandler, previously a senior official in UNIFEM in New York, vividly portrays the experience of feminists struggling with the institutional sexism of the UN bureaucratic machine and shows how this played out in the difficult but ultimately successful negotiations around the creation of UN Women. She writes 'Documenting the types of systemic institutional sabotage that UNIFEM faced throughout its life is a hedge against history repeating itself with UN Women' (page___). UN Women, she argues, must insist on institutional equality if it is to play its role in transforming the UN system as an advocate and instrument of gender justice. What she does not speculate upon is whether, if the new organization is successful in avoiding the marginalization that UNIFEM experienced, it will still manage to maintain its strong links with global feminist movements that as outsiders played such a strong role in supporting the struggles of those inside the belly of the beast.

In Chapter 11, our group of five women find themselves together at an international meeting of gender and development specialists in Berlin. By now, they have got to know each other well – are able to talk more informally and frankly about their work. What happened at the meeting stimulates a supper-time discussion about how power operates in international development processes. How do feminist bureaucrats respond? How subversive do they dare to be?

We leave the head office politics of the preceding chapter to return to the country level – Morocco, Albania and Nepal – in Chapter 12 where Aruna Rao, a consultant, describes how she and her colleagues worked to strengthen the gender equality programming of

three UN Country Teams (UNCTs) with an action-learning approach for inter-agency Gender Theme Groups (GTGs). Through the lens of each country context she examines the importance of inter-organizational co-operation between gender equality staff in UN agencies, and looks at why this has been difficult to achieve in the environment of institutional discrimination that Sandler analyzes in the previous chapter. She concludes that 'Rather than burdening GTGs with resource manuals focusing on planning and monitoring mechanisms and processes', it may be far more effective to enable them to organize and develop joint solidarity strategies with government and the women's movement, to enhance their voice within.

Finally, in Chapter 13, the book's conclusion, we draw together the common experiences, lessons and strategies of the feminist bureaucrats who have shared their reflections in this book. Without doubt, there are many disadvantages of the marginal position that we occupy - including a sense of powerlessness, lack of visibility both inside and outside our own organizations, conflicted loyalties and the demands of being held accountable on two fronts. But, if feminist bureaucrats can exploit their marginal position and work politically, they can turn each of these disadvantages into an advantage to advance their own agendas. In order to do so, we identify a check-list of strategies for feminist gender advisors in development agencies: building internal and external alliances, leveraging outside pressure, creating win-win situations, preparing for and seizing opportunities, and coping with bureaucratic resistance.

Notes

[1] See the home page of the World Bank www.worldbank.org.

[2] Except in some cases the roles of UN bureaucrats (for example Ferree and Tripp 2006) but these do not fully take into account the networking between feminists in multilateral and bilateral agencies (see Chapter 10, this volume).

[3] Other than an interesting study of gender specialists in Canadian development agencies (Hendriks 2005).

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