

Making environmental mainstreaming happen

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Environmental mainstreaming – the integration of environmental policies across different sectors and levels of government – has in practice often remained patchy or superficial. Drawing on a review of experience from nine countries, this brief asks what can be learnt from organisational arrangements for environmental mainstreaming to contribute to greater success.

Key messages

- Governments use or develop either largely 'vertical' or, more commonly, largely 'horizontal' organisational arrangements to enable mainstreaming. The former emphasise top-down pressure for compliance and the latter cross-sectoral coordination by an environment agency or inter-ministerial task force.
- Mainstreaming often involves the setting up of environment units in ministries and departments or of cross-sectoral working groups. To be effective, however, these need to be supported by strong political commitment – expectations, with adequate resources, from the highest levels of government.
- A combination of elements of both vertical and horizontal approaches could facilitate better mainstreaming. This would involve strong political pressure (demonstrated by a clear vertical reporting structure), combined with two 'horizontal' elements: (1) technical support from a well-resourced environment agency, and (2) cross-sectoral coordination and monitoring.
- A combined approach could be achieved incrementally as capacity for, and commitment to, mainstreaming grows. This might involve a gradual shift from sole reliance on the core of government for monitoring and coordination functions to greater reliance on an inter-ministerial group.

Environmental mainstreaming is viewed as a key mechanism for promoting commitment to the environment in development policy and planning. It involves the inclusion of environmental considerations in sector and local government policies, plans and budgets as well as in overarching policy documents. In Europe, it is referred to as Environmental Policy Integration (EPI).

Mainstreaming is likely to remain an important part of efforts in working toward more sustainable development. For example, the

January 2012 Zero Draft Outcome Document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) called for national sustainable development councils to be established to ensure that mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues takes place.

Studies on environmental mainstreaming have paid little attention to organisational structures. However, mainstreaming requires civil servants to juggle conflicting demands and loyalties, and organisational structures can make that process harder – or easier.



Banana plantation, Rwanda © Meaghan O'Neill (flickr)

'Vertical' and 'horizontal' organisational approaches to mainstreaming

Vertical, top-down arrangements are strongly led by the core institutions of government, which instruct the individual ministries or departments to address environmental concerns in their particular sectors. In addition, environment units might be formed within the ministries to provide assistance.

Horizontal, cross-sectoral approaches are usually driven by the environment agency, sometimes in collaboration with the agencies of planning and finance, with little top-down support. The environment department issues mainstreaming guidelines and an inter-ministerial committee might aim to coordinate policies and plans across the different sectors.

Most of the nine countries studied focus on one of these approaches, but also draw on the other approach to an extent. (See 'combined model' diagram overleaf.)

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Lessons from the case studies

Findings suggest strengths and weaknesses of vertical and horizontal approaches. In particular:

- A clear vertical reporting structure in which a central unit with high status leads environmental mainstreaming demonstrates strong political commitment and increases the potential for mainstreaming in centrally coordinated policy documents (but not necessarily in sectoral ministries). In Tanzania, for example, the incorporation of the Division of the Environment into the Vice President's Office seems to have encouraged the environment to be seen as a cross-cutting issue and to have promoted more effective mainstreaming (Assey et al., 2007).
- Sector-based environment units tend to prioritise the concerns of 'their' sector over the environment and to have insufficient funding and technical capacity (Rutasitara et al., 2010). There is little evidence that they provide cross-sectoral coordination.
- A (well-resourced) horizontal approach can give better technical support to line

ministries, arguably promoting more effective mainstreaming on the ground.

- Environment ministries and departments tend to be ineffective in cross-sectoral coordination roles: they are perceived by other ministries as having low status and are frequently under-resourced. Coordination by the more powerful departments of planning and finance can be more effective.
- Similarly, the effectiveness of cross-sectoral groups seems to depend – at least in part – on their mandate, whether they report to a high-level political office and whether a 'high status' department leads them.

Toward an effective combined approach

A wholly vertical approach would involve an unsustainable reliance on political will for mainstreaming, while a wholly horizontal approach would not provide enough pressure for compliance. However, combining elements of both could enable their strengths to correct each other's weaknesses. Promoting effective mainstreaming across sectoral boundaries and

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multiple levels of government may require:

- Strong political pressure from the highest level, demonstrated by a clear vertical reporting structure and appropriate resource commitments
- Technical support to sectors provided by a unit operating horizontally (such as a well-resourced environment agency) rather than by sector-based units
- Cross-sectoral coordination and monitoring by a high-status agency (such as the ministry of planning or finance) and/or an inter-ministerial group
- Organisational arrangements that adapt to changing levels of capacity for, and commitment to, environmental mainstreaming

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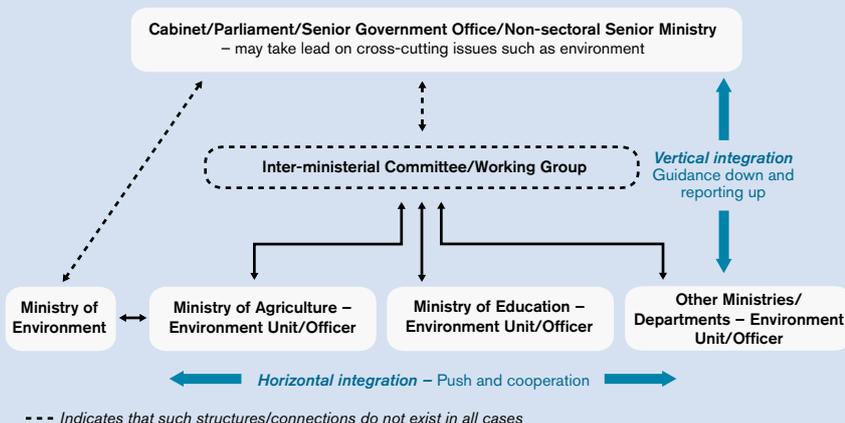
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Learn more

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Combined model of vertical and horizontal integration of organisational structures and policy



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