Gender mainstreaming and promotion of gender equality

A case study of the Swedish Cooperative Centre, Vi-agroforestry project, Kisumu-Kenya

Jecinta Okumu
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JECPNTA OKUMU

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Abstract. Gender mainstreaming is accepted by many national and international agencies and Non-governmental organization, as an effective strategy for promoting gender equality. Many researchers widely agree that essential but can also lead to poverty eradication, human development and general economic growth everywhere but more specifically in Africa. This just shows the importance at a global level of gender equality and any strategy towards achieving it.

The main aim of this thesis is to assess how gender mainstreaming as a strategy and approach has led to gender equality within the Swedish Cooperative Centre-Viagroforestry project-Kisumu (SCC-VI). It is based on exploring how gender mainstreaming works on a day-to-day basis in the project area. To collect relevant information, a detailed background review of Swedish Cooperative Centre-Viagroforestry project was done; field staff were interviewed with the help of a predesigned semi-structured question guides and focused group discussions were conducted with different farmer groups involved in the project.

The interviews and the focused group discussions were later transcribed as part of analysis. The focus group discussions, which were conducted in Luo, were translated to English. The main finding was that as a project, SCC-Vi is committed to mainstreaming gender in its activities, however the staff had limited skills for mainstreaming. Similarly, it was clear that focus was mostly put on numbers/quantitative aspects as opposed to the qualitative aspects of equality. The conclusion drawn here is that mainstreaming may lead to gender equality, but its success highly depends on how the process is implemented and whether there is adequate knowledge about the structural causes of inequality and skills the staff have to do it. From this research however, it was not possible to show that gender mainstreaming has led to equality.

Key words: Sustainable Development, Gender, Gender Equality, Development and Gender Mainstreaming.

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Summary
This research is aimed at understanding whether gender mainstreaming as a strategy can influence gender equality and equity and also whether it can promote achievement of sustainable development. The research is done in SCC-Vi-agroforestry project, Kisumu. This is a project that has used the strategy of mainstreaming in most of its viagroforestry services and the aim is to see whether the strategy is achieving its purposes and aims. Gender mainstreaming has been advocated as a way towards bridging gender gaps and for achieving sustainable development by many national and multinational organizations and as such, it is important to evaluate whether it achieves these goals. It is also very clear, that the mechanisms of mainstreaming are very technical and complex and that sometimes the end results from mainstreaming might lead to even wider gender gaps and inequalities, as the results from this research shows.

Key words: Sustainable Development, Gender, Gender Equality, Development and Gender Mainstreaming.

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Dedication.

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my dear son Cruz Ochieng, who had to put up with all the late nights and all the travels to the field, when all he wanted to do was to play.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

CBO- community based organizations.
VSL- village savings and loans.
NGO- non-governmental organizations
WID- women in development.
GAD- gender and development.
OSAGI- office of special adviser of gender issues to the UN.
OECD- organization for economic cooperation and development.
SCC-Vi- Swedish cooperative center/viagroforestry project.
SIDA- Swedish international development agency.
ECOSOC- the economic and social council of the United Nations.
DFID- department for international development (uk).
TGNP-SARDC- Tanzanian gender networking programme- South Africa research and documentation Centre
M1- male 1.
W1 female 1
FGD focused group discussions.
INTRODUCTION
Gender mainstreaming is currently accepted globally by national and international agencies as well as Non governmental organizations (NGOs) as a strategy for promoting gender equality. Gender equality has been a major concern in the development discourse since the end of World war two. Pietilä and Eide (1990) for example, argue that, “The issue of gender equality has been on the map for a very long time and can be traced even to the establishment of the UN in 1945.. the principle of the equality of men and women is already recognized in the UN charter, where it is stipulated that one of the purposes of the united nations is to achieve international cooperation…in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language and religion. This same principal was further confirmed in the universal declaration of human rights of 1948.” The two authors further point out that in the past years, issues concerning and of interest to women have gone through a process of varying treatment within the UN and its specialized agencies. During the first decades in the 1950’s and 1960’s, women’s issues were seen primarily within the context of human rights and thus were discussed only in the commission on the status of women and the third committee of the UN general assembly, which deals with social and humanitarian affairs. However in the 1970’s, the perception changed and in 1972, the decision was made to declare 1975 the international women’s year. As a result, women’s issues came to the front with different strategies to deal with them.

In the 1970’s therefore women in development (WID) strategy was prominent as an attempt to achieve equality and in 1979; the convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women was adopted. The UN decade of women, which ended in 1985, initiated the integration of women in development (WID), triggering the formation of thousands of women’s organizations and networking across the world. The trend accelerated during the following decade. This was a milestone towards gender equality movement over time. As Pietilä and Eide (1990) point out, “characteristically, women were seen as resources and their contribution were sought to enhance the development process and make it more efficient. Then, in the international development strategy for the UN’s third development decade (1980’s) a trend towards seeing women as equals, as agents and beneficiaries in all sectors and at all levels of the development process finally emerged.”

According to Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris (2011), “in 1993, the world conference in Vienna proclaimed that women’s rights were human rights. In 1994, the Cairo international
conference on population and development placed women’s empowerment and health at the center of sustainable development programmes. Two years later, the Beijing fourth world conference on women adopted a platform seeking to promote and protect full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women.”

Different strategies have been employed over time to promote gender equality world wide, among them women in development, gender and development and now gender mainstreaming. Despite all the initiatives over time to address issues of gender inequality starting by the establishment of the UN in the 1940’s, declaration of human rights in the 50’s and 60’s, the mention and celebration of the women’s year in 1975, the different world conferences on women (Mexico city conference, Beijing conference, Nairobi conference etc.) and even the current millennium development goals, great disparities persist and a lot still remain to be done to bridge gender gaps including women’s poor conditions and related power disparities.

The research on which this thesis is based intended to assess whether gender mainstreaming as a strategy for achieving equality is indeed achieving the objectives that many international and national organizations attribute to it, but most of all, it is geared towards reflecting on the how of mainstreaming by systematically looking into the day to day implementation of gender mainstreaming. Similarly, the research will dwell on the practical implementation of mainstreaming at the project level - what it entails in the day-to-day activities of both the staff and the people benefiting from the project work.

**Objectives of the study**

The aim of the study was to explore how SCC-Vi-agroforestry project implements and works with gender mainstreaming in its day-to-day activities and to investigate to what extent this has resulted in the promotion of gender equality and also the effectiveness of mainstreaming as opposed to having gender specific programmes towards achieving sustainable development. The study aimed to answer the following questions: How does SCC-Vi-agroforestry project implement and work with mainstreaming of gender in its day-to-day work? Does gender mainstreaming address the gender practical and the strategic needs? Does gender mainstreaming lead to gender equality both in terms of equity and justice, use and control of resources, legal status? Does gender mainstreaming address the gender-gaps in society for example, gaps in literacy levels, nutrition, healthcare, etc. In addition, the study also aimed to
answer the question of how gender mainstreaming addresses the underlying societal structures that lead to gender inequalities in this area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many development organizations and international bodies have over time shown the importance of working towards gender equality. Many efforts as shown in the introduction have been put towards achieving equality and as Tina Wallace (1991) argues “the principle of equality of men and women was recognized in both the UN charter in 1945 and the UN declaration of human rights in 1948.” But despite all the financing and different strategies over the years, gender inequality still persists.

Over time different strategies have been employed to address issues of gender inequality. Women in development (WID) which focused on women not primarily as agents of change but rather as vulnerable or even a marginalized group for whom women specific projects were designed was followed by gender and development (GAD) approach which signals two important departures from WID as indicated further below and now gender mainstreaming strategy.

The Organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD) guidelines on gender equality highlights two reasons for the conceptual shift to GAD approach (Goetz 1997). Firstly, women’s material situation had improved but this had not changed the socio-economic power relations’ vis-à-vis men. Secondly, women were getting integrated into the development processes but were still not gaining from the integration in the same way as men. One could argue that the early discussions on WID tended to treat women as an exclusive and excluded group and as a result instead of improving the relative position of women is society, it actually continued to marginalize them. In response, gender mainstreaming was introduced in order to include gender lens to every aspect of development work.

Emphasis has mainly however been put on the technical aspects of mainstreaming and in the process, it has become an end in itself contrary to the argument by OSAGI (1997), that “while gender mainstreaming is accepted globally, it is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality.” Mainstreaming involves ensuring that the gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities
including policy development, research, advocacy, legislation, resource allocation and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.

Gender is an issue because of the fundamental differences and inequalities between men and women. These differences and inequalities may manifest themselves in different ways in specific countries or sectors but there are some broad patterns that point to questions that should always be considered. For example, inequalities in political power (access to decision making and representation), gender division of labor and discriminatory attitudes (women watch 1997).

**Gender gaps**

Gender gaps are caused by the social rather than the biological difference between men and women. Gender gaps exist in nutrition, health, education, literacy, job opportunities, income, ownership of land, access to credit, access to resources, and participation in political processes. The size and nature of the gaps vary from country to country, but the existence is universal.

When focusing on rural women in poor counties, the gender gaps are in every area mentioned above and act as severe impediments to women’s economic advancement. Compared to men in the same socio-economic group, women are under-nourished, under educated, more often illiterate, in poorer physical health due to frequent childbirth, relegated to lower paying jobs, responsible for greater proportions of unpaid household labor, non-owners of land for either legal or social reasons.

As Hannan, 2000) states, “Since women are almost always excluded or disadvantaged in relation to men in their access to social and economic resources and decision-making, inputs to identify and redress the imbalances have tended to focus on women rather than men. It is however increasingly recognized that more attention must be given to men as well as women and the relations between them, in order to achieve equality.” In the 1950’s and 1960’s, women’s issues in development were addressed under the question of human rights, and women were viewed as objects to protect or make recommendations for but not necessarily to consult and in the 1970’s, although women were still not necessarily consulted, their key position in development process became more widely recognized. In the 1980’s, there has been a growing trend towards seeing women as agents and beneficiaries in all the sectors and at all levels of the development process.
**Gender and Gender equality**

Gender recognizes that while biological differences between men and women do not change, their social roles however vary in different societies and cultures at different periods of history. Whitehead (1979) points out that “gender differences are shaped by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural factors and processes that shape their lives.” In other words, gender is the socially constructed meaning of the differences between females and males, which allocates unequally social power and privileges to women and men and shapes their identities and perceptions, interactional practices and the forms of institutions created.

Children learn their gender from birth and depending on where and how they are brought up. They learn how they should behave and how others, and themselves perceive them as either masculine or feminine. Throughout life, parents, teachers, peers, culture and society reinforce this. Brett (1991) highlights the same point that “every society uses biological sex as one criterion for describing gender but beyond that simple starting point, no two cultures would completely agree on what distinguishes one gender from another. Therefore, there is considerable variation in gender roles between cultures.”

Gender equality between women and men on the other hand should according to Sida (1998) include “equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys.” Equality is not just a women’s issue. Rather, it should concern and engage men as well as women. However, Equality does not mean that men and women will become the same. Women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. According to the UN (1985), for true equality to become a reality for women, the sharing of power on equal terms with men must be a major strategy.

Equality can be looked at from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The qualitative aspects are those related to empowerment and opportunities to empowerment whereas the quantitative aspects concerns the need to give equal weight to values, knowledge and experience of both women and men, as a means of eradicating and directing all areas of societal development. Hannan (2000) argues that “in recent years there has been a preference within bilateral agencies for development to use simplified tools and quantifiable targets in the gender equality efforts, rather than a focus on the more political aspects of promoting
gender equality.” Many NGO’s working for equality, tend to focus more on the numbers of the people they target and reach with the interventions most of the cases at the expense of the actual impact of the intervention. Hannan (2000) Summarizes what equality is by saying, “The pursuit of gender equality is therefore a powerful catalyst to transform relations of inequality and power in all aspects of life to achieve sustainable human development.”

However, despite the increased focus on gender in policy and development cooperation, there is still evidence that gender is equated to women, a point that Latham et al (2003) agrees with. This is to say that gender equality often involve a focus on the conditions of women. However, it is also important to shed light on men, their self-interests and the way in which men set their stamp on social structures and access to power and privileges. It is in this context that gender mainstreaming has been recognized as a strategy to address these shortcomings.

**Gender mainstreaming**

According to office of special adviser of gender issues to the United Nations, OSAGI (1997), “gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy, an approach, and a means for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all the activities. Mainstreaming represents a shift in thinking about women; from women as a target group of development assistance to gender equality as a development objective.”

From a historical perspective, gender mainstreaming was established in the Beijing platform of action, crafted during the fourth United Nations world conference on women in Beijing in 1995. Later the twenty -third special session of the UN general assembly, in June 2000 to follow up the implementation of the Beijing platform of action enhanced the mainstreaming mandate within the UN. More recently, the economic and social council adopted a resolution (ECOSOC resolution 2001/41) on gender mainstreaming (July 2001) which calls on the ECOSOC to ensure that gender perspectives are taken into account in all its work, including in the work of its functional commission and recommends a five year review of the implementation of the ECOSOC conclusions1997/2.

According to the employment and social affairs department of European commission (2004), gender mainstreaming recognizes that while the initiatives specifically addressed to women at the margins of society are needed, they are insufficient on their own to bring major change.
According to Beijing platform of action, gender analysis is the critical starting point for gender mainstreaming. Equally important is that gender mainstreaming cannot be achieved without explicit institutional commitment to the strategy and systematic efforts to implement it.

To Hannan (2000), “There is no set formula or blueprint to mainstreaming that can be applied in every context.” What is however common to mainstreaming is that a concern for gender equality is brought into the mainstream of activities rather than be dealt with, as an add-on activity. This means that a first step in the mainstreaming strategy is to assess how and why gender differences and inequalities are relevant to the subject under discussion, identify where there are opportunities to narrow these inequalities and decide on the approach to be taken.

Gender mainstreaming is of necessity, a technical as well as a political process. It would require shifts in organizational cultures and ways of thinking as well as in goals, rationales, structures and resource allocation by organizations. It calls for efforts to enable both women as well as men to formulate their own interests, and to participate in decision-making processes (see BRIDGE (1997),

A key element in the mainstreaming is therefore that there should be a shift from quantitative aspects of participation of both men and women to more transformative aspects. It is not only about influencing practical interventions, it also calls for influencing the vision, mandate, policies, strategies and routines, organizational structure, processes, procedures, institutions and culture.

The Office of special adviser on gender issues to the United Nations (OSAGI, 1997) argues that “gender mainstreaming is a strategy for making concerns and experiences of women and men an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres. This is also to ensure that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated”. This as mentioned earlier is a move from the earlier WID strategy. However many agencies and organizations involved in mainstreaming gender do not really do that in all the programmes and as such it appears it has become yet another politically correct term to use while in essence little gets done. There is a growing realization that gender equality and mainstreaming have been oversimplified. This has reduced promoting gender equality to technical processes. Such
oversimplification has led to the depoliticization of the concept and the systems theory used in this study indicated the complex and interacting factors that need to be addressed to make gender mainstreaming a holistic process.

SYSTEMS THEORY AS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In an attempt to understand how gender mainstreaming leads to gender equality I have used systems theory, which springs from biology, but is applicable to many fields of study. It provides a theoretical model for explaining and predicting phenomenon. Its function is to focus attention on the diverse systems in which complex living entities interact. The basic assumption in this theory is that a system is made up of individuals, interrelated to constitute a whole and the limits to such a system are defined by established or arbitrary boundaries. The boundaries give a social system its focus and identity as a distinction from other social systems with which it interacts.

This theory emphasizes the interrelatedness and mutual interdependence of elements within the system. The emphasis is also on the complex and diverse factors that can influence any specific human behavior. Looking at the research topic of whether gender mainstreaming contributes to gender equality, gender equality can be set as the boundary for this system and then everything else that interact within such a setting can be said to be within the system including the gender relations, the economic aspects, religious, cultural political and general social situations.

A change within one of the components in a system can establish a chain reaction that forces the system to readjust and achieve balance. Gender mainstreaming efforts can be seen as such a change expected to invoke a chain reaction to how the society is organized in terms of the social, political economic and even religious spheres. In a linear relationship, gender mainstreaming is assumed would lead to gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming  gender equality

But that is a very simplistic way of looking at it. From the systems theory, there are many factors that interplay between and within the two links above. For example, for gender mainstreaming to lead to equality, a lot of actors and phenomena interplay in a feedback loop that may be both positive and negative. There maybe policies, laws etc. involved, not forgetting the people who may resist or go along with the changes.
By introducing gender mainstreaming, both expected and unexpected changes within the equality system can be experienced as a result of loop feedback from the different relations within the system. The equality system can be seen in terms of the political, social, cultural and even religious aspects of the people and by mainstreaming gender different chain reactions can result in all the spheres.

Gender Equality is an open system that depends on different but multi-layered systems. In order to talk of equality, we have to look at the interplay between cultures, social, political, religious, legal institutions and structures within a society and see how these institutions relate and reinforce each other. Research by Sören Augustinsson and Ulf Ericsson (2008) on sustainable work systems and complexity, indicate that the matter of change and sustainability is central to the understanding of complexity. Based on complexity and systems theories, activities that aim to control, regulate and reinforce routines that cause predictability and stability may give rise to difficulties when it comes to complying with the factors that we consider to be characteristic of sustainable work systems. In their research, they used systems theory to understand change and stability in organization work systems.

To Stacey (2000), ‘the starting point of this is that healthy and surviving organic systems are non-linear. They are dynamic and can only be understood by analyzing the complexities of interconnections among all the variables in a system.’ Agustinsson and Ericsson (2008) argue that “the form of feedback that contributes to equilibrium and stability is of a negative nature. Positive (reinforced) feedback contributes to changes… In a complex and energy producing operation both forms of feedback occur simultaneously.” This implies that, the changes that occur in the system can be of either positive or negative nature, and stability in the system is achieved when these forces counterbalance each other.
When gender mainstreaming is introduced into such a system, it should create a chain reaction and feedback loops both positive and negative into all the sub-systems. Whether positive or negative, it will trigger changes on how the people within the system relate to each other and to the subsystems (the political, social, cultural, legal etc. institutions). As a result, it might call for a change in the laws, policies etc. within the system to achieve stability in the system. Some of the actors within the system may resist the changes and try to maintain status quo. As a result, when talking of mainstreaming leading to gender equality, it purports to the feedback loops that results from the mainstreaming strategy. This thesis aims to explore to what extent the gender mainstreaming in this particular context has changed the institutions and power relations.

Methodological Issues

Research setting

This research is a case study carried out within the project area of Swedish Cooperative Centre-Viagroforestry -Kisumu in Nyanza province in Kenya. Kenya, located in eastern
Africa borders Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania and the Indian Ocean on the eastern coast, has an economy heavily dependent on rain-fed agriculture and tourism.

According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) world index (2009), the agricultural sector in Kenya directly and indirectly employs nearly 70% of the country’s 38 million people with half of the sector’s output being subsistence production. It is in this background of subsistence agriculture that SCC-Vi-agroforestry project works. SCC-Vi-agroforestry project works with agroforestry in the east African Lake region including; Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania. It does this through providing knowledge to improve food and nutritional security, to increase fuel-wood availability and to increase income to small-scale farmers. The project states that in the process of their work, they work with crosscutting issues including gender and Hiv/AIDS through mainstreaming them in their day-to-day work. The aim of the study was therefore to explore how SCC-vi-agroforestry works with gender mainstreaming in their day-to-day activities.

**Research participants and sampling**

The participants in this research comprised of members of a total of 24 different groups involved in different activities in different project areas. The groups were selected on the basis of how long they had been involved with SCC-Viskogens work. I wanted to talk to group members that had been with SCC-VI for 3 or more years so as to see how far they had come with gender mainstreaming. Twenty-three of the groups had been with the project for 3 or more years whereas one was new, this being its first year with SCC-VI activities. All the groups in the study were Village Savings and Loan (VSL) groups working with village loaning’s and savings and had a membership of between 10-30 members.

When the viskogen project in Kisumu started, the village savings and loans (VSL) was not a component, but by the time of the study, all the groups had joined the VSL, suggesting just how important the money aspect was for the groups. At the time of the focused group discussion, the VSL component had been operational for almost a year. Compared to the other components or areas of SCC-VI activities, the VSL seemed to be the most popular among the groups.

Out of all the 24 groups, 20 were registered as women groups, 2 as youth groups and 2 as Community Based Organization’s, (CBO’s). I was keen on the leadership of the groups and
in all the groups, half of the chairpersons were men even when 20 of the groups were registered as women groups. Men headed all the CBO groups.

In addition, 10 staff members were purposefully selected from the same area as the groups in the focused discussions were located. They were interviewed to gain their perspectives on mainstreaming and more importantly to understand how the staff worked with mainstreaming on a day-to-day basis.

**Data Collection Methods**

**Focus Group Discussion**

SCC-Viagroforestry project works mostly through small farmer groups and as such, focused group discussions were conducted among existing groups. The focused group discussions within the groups were conducted with the help of open-ended semi-structured interview guide. As defined by Kitzinger and Barbour(2001) Eds, “focus groups are group discussions exploring a specific set of issues. The group is focused in that it involves some kind of collective activity…crucially, focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interviews by the explicit use of group interaction to generate data.”

In the process of the focused group discussions, more questions emerged which necessitated further probing, for example, when talking of skills for mainstreaming. The advantage of FGD over many other methods is that the comments of one participant can generate comments from the others and ideas and opinions can be developed and explored more so than in individual interviews. “focus groups are ideal for exploring peoples experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns. The method is particularly useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms in their own vocabulary. Focus groups also enable researchers to examine peoples different perspectives as they operate within a social network.” Kitzinger and Barbour(2001)

In some of the groups, even though the women were the majority in terms of numbers, it was the men who talked most. So in such cases, I directed the questions to women and asked for their opinion on the different discussion topics just to ensure that they also contributed to the discussions. Being focused group discussion, my interest was more on the interaction between the group members as opposed to individual responses. I paid much attention to the
body language, the giggling’s and facial expressions of the participants. There were instances when it was clear that the majority of participants in the groups had no clue regarding gender mainstreaming even though the responses they gave was in affirmative.

There were also instances where there were dominant persons in the groups who seemed to talk on behalf of everyone else and the rest of the group members were just left to give short answers of yes and no. In the two CBO groups, the men were still predominant especially in the amount of time they spoke, even though in both cases women were the majority in terms of numbers. In order to get the perspectives of women, I asked questions directed to the women and probed for explanations from them with regards to what the men said. This was to get their views and whether they agreed with the men or not. In the women groups, there were also instances where some women were more dominant than others especially those that were in leadership position. In such situations, I made sure that all the members actually had an opportunity to say something by asking questions directly to them. Most of the women groups were composed of members within the same age group-but in one of the groups, there was different age group representation. In this particular group, the older women seemed to take charge more of the discussion. In all the groups however, it was clear that they all associated issues of gender mainstreaming to women issues. In more than one occasion, I tried to bring in issues related to men, but not once did anyone talk about it, even though one of the women group was actually a men group-that registered itself as a women group, just so they could be part of the project. The focused group discussions were all conducted in Luo-the local language in order to ensure that all the group members could participate in the discussions.

Direct observations were made in order to analyze the gender relations, also from interactions during the focused group discussion. Further information was generated from the program officer of gender and development in SCC-Viskogen.

**Individual interviews**

I interviewed 10 staff members who held different positions in the organization, some working in the field while others in the office. The aim for interviewing the staff was to explore how they work on a day-to-day with issues of gender mainstreaming. The interviews were conducted in English and were tape recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The staff interviewed said they had undergone a one-day training on gender to ensure they had
knowledge on gender issues and mainstreaming. From the feedback above, I probed further to explore whether a one-day training is adequate to work with gender mainstreaming. My attempt to probe on how the organization employed an accountant who had no accounting skills raised a hostile response in the interview and therefore I quickly moved to the next question.

The projects’ monitoring and evaluation documents were reviewed as part of the background study. And a thorough background study of the project was done in order to compare the development and the changes in gender relations between the start and now.

**Data analysis**

The group discussions and individual interviews were read and transcribed as part of the analysis. The focus group transcriptions were then translated from Luo to English. The transcripts were then read thoroughly in order to identify patterns in the data, codes and categories. By re-examining the codes and categories for new relationships, the following five themes presented in this thesis were developed including: 1) gender issues as women issues 2) mainstreaming as a numbers issue 3) mainstreaming and marginalization of men 4) challenges in implementing mainstreaming 5) tangible benefits from gender mainstreaming. Quotes and conversations are included in the results section, to represent the voice of the participants as well as interactions in the groups (see Barbour and Kitzinger 2001).

**RESULTS.**

The importance of gender equality was well recognized by the participants in this study, both groups and the staff. The result section highlights what seemed to be understood as gender mainstreaming and challenges in its implementation.

**Gender issues as women issues**

In all the focused group discussions, (FGD’s) and the staff interviews, there was no doubt that they equated gender issues to women’s issues. There was a lot of focus on women’s involvement and participation in all the project activities and a general observation was that gender was almost all the time equated to having a special concern for women. One field officer said:

“I take special emphasis on how women are engaged in the project. We work mostly with women groups to achieve equality. We look at the
number of women represented at all levels of the project activities and most of all whether they are involved in the planning and implementation of agroforestry.”

In the discussions by the group members’ attempts to talk about gender issues were seen as issues specific to women. All the different questions although not directly mentioning gender, were seen as women issues. Involvement and participation of women in all the activities was seen as the measure of equality. A male member said:

“Nowadays women’s issues are very important. All the NGO’s working in the area wants women in the projects. That is why it is very important to have equal numbers of women as men in groups. As you can see, majority of our group members are women—equality is very important for us.”

In one of the youth groups that was part of the FGDs, women were included in the group, not because they contributed with anything, but because the men felt having women in the group, gave the group more credibility within the project as indicated in the following conversation:

\( M1 \): we started as a youth group playing football and no income. Now, it is not only a pass time, we get money from selling seedlings and there are many youth who want to join us.

\( \text{researcher} \): how many are you in the youth group:

\( M1 \): we are 18 people.

\( \text{researcher} \): how many women? How many men?

\( M2 \): we are 14 men and 4 women.

\( \text{researcher} \): this is the only group that I have seen with more men than women! Why?

\( M3 \): it is because we started as a football club and not many women play football here.

\( \text{researcher} \): and these women that are members now do they play football?

\( M3 \): no, they are some group members’ wives. They help with watering the nursery sometimes.
**Gender mainstreaming as a numbers issue**

From the interviews and the focused group discussions, it became clear that gender mainstreaming was mostly equated to the number of both men and women participating and involved in the different project activities. As indicated by one group member,

*M1*: this group is registered as a CBO. The group was started in 2004…or was it 2006? It was 2006 and registered in 2007. As a CBO, we have 14 affiliate groups which are engaged in different activities including poultry farming, community health, fish farming, dairy goat farming, beekeeping, commercial tree nursery, horticulture and table banking. As a CBO, we have a total membership of 266 individuals from the 14 different groups, out of which 150 are women and the rest men. You can see that majority of our members are women. We take gender very seriously. Hahaha. I am the chairman, and we have 9 officials in the CBO, 5 of which are representatives’ chosen from the different groups.

*researcher*: I notice that only 3 of the officials are women. Is there a reason why?

*M1*: it is the way we were elected by the group members.

There was a good deal of reference to the number of women in the group, numbers of women participating in different activities and the benefits they got as a staff indicated in this quote:

“We look at the number of women represented at all levels of the project activities and most of all whether they are involved in the planning and implementation of agroforestry. That is the most important aspect of gender mainstreaming.”

There was some reference to the underlying factors that contributed to inequalities or that perpetuated the existing gender relations. From this, it can be assumed that the references to the underlying issues were actually addressed, but, these issues were only mentioned in order to collect relevant quantitative data for the reports. There was a lot of emphasis on issues that can be quantified and reported, especially in monitoring and evaluation process. As one staff pointed out,

“We don’t just collect data in terms of numbers of males, females, youths and all that. We usually try to collect data in terms of who does what in the community and who is involved in what in the community, who does what best at the community level such that during our feedback, they are able to agree that this is what works best.”
collection we look at mostly who heads the household, who owns the resources, who
decides on what should be done in the farms, what activities are done in the homestead
that require both men and women or just an individual, the issue of leadership in group,
who actually leads the group in terms of the officials and especially what the group is
registered as."

From this interview, the emphasis was put on the numbers of the people reached and not on
the quality of their participation or even involvement. Out of all the groups that were in the
focused group discussions, more than half of them were women and yet men still held most of
the leadership positions, especially in the CBO’s. Similarly, the types of activities that both
men and women engaged in were different and the men were in activities that were more
economically beneficial than women. At the same time, more and more responsibilities were
falling on women, just because they got some benefits from the project. These are some very
important qualitative aspects that came as a result of the kind of involvement and participation
that few really talked about or even reported. Questions on the cultural, religious, political,
legal or even structural nature that contribute to the inequalities were hardly mentioned or
even dealt with in the reports or in the groups. Things that could not be quantified went
unreported. The qualitative aspects of mainstreaming are very difficult to plan, implement or
even monitor. This was clearly lacking in the projects annual reports. Apart from the
quantitative aspects planned for and monitored, there was not a single qualitative aspect of
gender that was shown in any of the three annual reports that I had access to.

**Men as marginalized group in the mainstreaming strategy**

The groups and the field staff mentioned the relevant gender dimensions in SCC-VI work. To
the different group members, just having a representation of different sexes and age groups
was seen as enough and benefiting economically from the group activities was also seen as a
measure of mainstreaming. The field staff too pointed to ensuring equal participation among
men and women as an indicator of mainstreaming as indicated in the quote below:

> We look at the number of women represented at all levels of the project activities and
> most of all whether they are involved in the planning and implementation of agroforestry.
> That is very important measure of mainstreaming in itself.

From the different responses on what mainstreaming is, it was clear that there was no clear
understanding of mainstreaming as a strategy that entails bringing all the gender issues into
the mainstream. Actually at this point there was no clear difference of what strategy the staff
was using, whether it was women in development or gender and development. There was so
much focus on women as a group and their involvement and
participation in the project activities and in the process the men were said to be marginalized without anyone taking notice of. From one interview, a staff participant said:

“Currently, it looks like the men are a bit more marginalized. I don’t know if it is because most of the development agents were coming with the notion that women were marginalized. So most of the people who could receive help or funding are actually women in self-help groups or youth groups. If you look at it in that aspect, they could go to the field and you will not get any group registered as a men group. When actually you find a group with just adult men and calling itself a women’s group; for the sake of maybe getting help from another organization. Looking at it this way, it looks like at the end; the men are more marginalized now. Taking into the advantage because they own the resources they have the power to do everything, which might not really be true.”

It can be safe to say that all the attempts to working with gender issues in the organizations were dealt with separately from all the other project activities. Women were worked with as a special group instead of as part of the project. There was a lot of special focus on women as a group as opposed to working uniformly with both men and women.

Another staff member also indicated that they work with gender mainstreaming at all levels of the organization and they mostly tried to involve the group members through the planning process as indicated in this quote:

“Most activities are done at field level, make sure they collect gender sensitive data...most of the time collect and plan by themselves, and they influence the data by giving feedback especially where there is a lot of disparities. Aspects of gender they work with goes beyond gender disaggregated data to include, who does what? Who heads the households? Who owns the resources, who have access to what? Who heads the group etc.? Currently it shows that men are more marginalized. You find a group for example that has a membership of only men, but are registered as a women group”.

From the same interview, it was clear that men are more likely to be leaders in groups mostly because of the literacy advantage as indicated in the conversation below:

**Researcher:** how does the situation look for both men and women in the field?

**Staff 1:** ‘Sometimes you realize that .... Looking at the situation, we actually need somebody who can read and write. Sometime we get women who because of their low literacy levels are mostly disadvantaged in that aspect because we need someone who will be able to go round and explain the data. That we require him/her to be able to read it,
collect it and fill it in a form. In such a situation, they may actually have to leave women out because they will not be able to read and write. And when you look at the data, sometimes we collect data on literacy level; most of the women have gone to primary school level. Its like most men have gone to secondary/tertiary level and that means they are more advantaged when it comes to doing something that requires writing.

Researcher: and how do you address such a situation?

staff1: in such a situation, we sometimes ask them to elect a secretary. Because the important thing for us is, for them to know what it means to involve both sexes into leadership positions. So when it comes into an area where it is because of literacy level, then we usually have what we call a group secretary. We ask them to still have elected officials depending on their capabilities and considering the gender aspect. But if they really need someone to type and do all the things that a woman cannot do, then they elect a secretary that can do all that.

Researcher: but in the long run how then does such a situation help the women to better themselves?

staff1: now as you find, that is something that is a bit beyond us, because when it comes to illiteracy, that is a government thing and the programme of adult learning is not really doing well for the whole country. But for us what is really important is for them to understand what the form says. The other thing we usually ask the secretary is to translate the form so that they are all able to understand what information is needed. When we have forms being filled at the household level, then in that case the women are not left out. But the issues of illiteracy have not really been properly addressed.

At the group, it is mostly the secretary and treasurer that fill the forms. So usually the women don’t need do much writing or they get a male secretary that actually reverses the situation and actually breaks the barrier as secretarial jobs are basically considered a women’s job.

From the above conversation, it is clear that the demands of the organization can benefit men at the expense of women. It can also be seen that there are many dimensions of mainstreaming strategy that the staff are unable to deal with due to different reasons for example how illiteracy among women stands in the way of their participation in different activities. In the FGD’s however, mainstreaming of gender was equated to involvement of women in the development projects. There was not a single group that defined mainstreaming per se and most times mainstreaming was mentioned it was in reference to women’s
involvement. This was the main reason the perspective of men being marginalized was expressed.

Challenges in implementing mainstreaming
It was clear that working with mainstreaming strategy was considered as very challenging at many levels, both for the staff and the groups, as a staff member pointed out:

“It is very difficult, we can try and ensure that we have equal representation in the groups but beyond that how do I tell somebody that they have to give or share ownership of land to their wives? How do I address the issues of inequalities brought about by cultural practices and beliefs? If a family does not agree on women planting trees because of their culture how do I address that?”

From the above response, it can be argued that lack of adequate knowledge and skills on both gender issues and mainstreaming strategy is a challenge that both the staff and the group members face. The staff explained they had undergone a one-day gender sensitization training that is meant to equip them with skills of gender mainstreaming on their day-to-day work in the project, as one staff pointed out below:

“All the staff in the project has undergone a gender training that entailed gender analysis tools and sensitivity. The training was conducted on a day. As a result all the staff in the project were equipped with adequate training to mainstream gender.”

The question here is whether one day gender sensitization training is enough to give adequate skills to work with the complex gender issues for gender mainstreaming to lead to gender equality as assumed. However one of the staff justified it by saying that:

“Gender mainstreaming is a continuous activity and therefore one learns and improves with continued implementation.”

It is clear that the greatest challenge in working with mainstreaming in this case therefore is lack of adequate exposure to mainstreaming. From the gender analysis done in the area, culture and religion are given as the most important structures leading to inequality. It would have been very interesting to see how through mainstreaming they attempted to address these cultural and religious perceptions. If not addressing them, at least highlighting their existence. However as pointed out above by one of the staff, some of them do not know how to address issues that results from culture or religion and as such they do not deal with them.

Another challenge in implementing gender mainstreaming strategy is literacy. An interview with a staff member pointed out, that the level of literacy in the rural area is low, and women
have a lower level of literacy than men. And for the organization to effectively collect relevant information, they need people who can read and write. And since more men are literate compared to women, they are forced to use more men than women. At the same time, the organization is working with agroforestry and not adult literacy; and so it becomes difficult to influence literacy issues even though it is important for effective mainstreaming.

Due to the lack of exposure and knowledge in working with mainstreaming, most of the efforts towards addressing gender issues are still done within the existing gender system and as such continue to enforce the inequality structures. Looking at the kind of activities that the different groups engage in, they are typical to the traditional gender roles and even though the different groups benefit in different ways, they still perpetuate the gender system existing. The women are more in small scale businesses selling fish and vegetables, the men are in more long term economic activities such as planting trees for timber, small scale fishing etc. and unless and until this cycle is broken, the gender inequalities will continue as the conversation below indicate:

W 1: viagro has done a lot for us. We have a tomato farm and we got trainings on how to do pest management. Viagro also promotes tree planting and most of us here plant trees in our homes. The chairperson also went to a training on how to make finished products from soya. As a result, she makes milk and tea from soya, and sells it here in the village. She has been training us to do that too. We also have the VSL that helps us get loans for different activities and purposes. I recently bought iron sheet for my house.

W 2: now you have mentioned almost everything that viagro has done to us. For me, I can say that from all the trainings that I have been on, I benefited most from poultry keeping. I have even built a better poultry house and I am now selling more eggs than ever

Researcher: does everyone implement similar activities here?

W3: we know that viagroforestry is very keen on tree planting. But they have brought much more than that. We sit and plan as a group on what we want to do and even if it is something that as a project they don’t work with, they introduce us to other organizations that do.

Researcher: so what did you do before you came into VI agroforestry?

W4: we had our small businesses to do. But I have to say that we have seen a lot of changes since we started.

W5: I have to go now. But next time you come, we will take you around to see all the good things we have done, all the trees we have planted.
Tangible benefits from mainstreaming

Many if not all the group members explained that due to their memberships in the different
groups, there have been a lot of benefits as the following conversation from one group
suggests:

W1: Yes, I have to plan my work better, I am a member in 4 other groups and we meet
weekly in all the groups. That means that in addition to all my house and garden work I
have to set aside at least 5 hours a week for group meetings it adds up my chores and it
sometimes messes up my business but on the upside I get much more money from the
groups to take care of my family.

W2: I am happy with this savings and loaning. Since it started I don’t quarrel as often
with my husband as I used to. I don’t need to ask him for money all the time for even the
basic things like salt. I can now buy most of the household things by myself. I can pay for
my children’s fee…. It has brought peace in the house.

From the response, there is no doubt that some of the group activities bring tangible benefits
that help group members with their day-to-day needs. These may vary from being able to put
food on the table, pay school fees, and buy uniforms for their children or even basic medical
care.

How the group members day to day activities have been impacted on as a result of their
membership to the group, this was a point that raised a lot of discussion as the men saw it as a
welcome activity whereas women, especially those engaged in small scale businesses argued
that it required them to do a lot more time planning in order to accommodate everything. The
women also talked of how their dignity had been restored:

W1: we know that VI agroforestry promotes tree planting and farming and they want
people to plant trees in farms. We do that. I now have moringa trees in my farm. I use the
leaves as vegetables they are very nice.

W2: we have gotten different trainings on poultry and fish farming from viagro. All that
is part of what viagro work with. We even learnt how to make soap.

W3: we plant trees that grow very fast and we can use them fuel wood.

Researcher: you have already told me of how the situation was before you joined viagro.
But how has the situation improved since you joined the organization?

W4: it is much easier for me now to buy food without having to ask my husband or walk
around the village trying to borrow some money. I don’t have to go round telling everyone
in the village the problems in my house in order to get some money. I keep my dignity in that way. My family is now respected in the village.

W5: I am happy with this savings and loaning’s. Since it started, I don’t quarrel as often with my husband as I used to. I don’t need to ask him for money all the time for even the basic things like salt. I can now buy most of the household things by myself. I can pay for my children’s fee. It has brought peace in the house.

Researcher: does everyone agree with that observation?

W6: gone are the days when we asked money for everything now we can buy most of the things also. We are no longer a bother. We can even sit down and laugh together. Just ask the men in the group.

In another group, the following conversation ensued:

Researcher: ok. Somebody talked of the benefits you have got from being in viskogen. Are there any negative things that you have experienced as a result of the same?

Long silence...

W1: yes. I have to plan my work better. I am a member in 4 other groups and we meet weekly in all the groups. That means that in addition to all my house and garden work I have to set aside at least 5 hours a week for group meetings. It adds up my chores and it sometimes messes up my business but on the upside I get much money from the groups to take care of my family.

Researcher: well, I can see that most of you are in a hurry to leave, but I was wondering how easy it is around here with clean water and toilets?

W2: we all have latrines, but clean water is a bit of a problem. During the rainy season we collect the rainwater from our roofs. There are some wells in the village that we can buy water from the owners.

W3: it is true what the women are saying. We no longer need to hide when we leave the home. They used to ask for money even for salt. Some of us don’t work also, but we are expected to have money to everything.

Researcher: so I take it that your membership in the group has been worthwhile.

W4: just look at how our skins are shining. We can even afford to slaughter chicken and just sit and eat with other group members.

Similarly, with the intention of seeing the implication that mainstreaming strategy had towards addressing both the gender basic and strategic needs, I looked at how the groups
access the basic services like clean water, food as a group member said in the following quote:

It’s much easier for me now to buy food without having to ask my husband or walk around the village trying to borrow some money… I don’t have to go round telling everyone in the village the problems in my house in order to get some money. I keep my dignity in that way… my family is now respected in the village.

The group members seemed to agree with what the woman was saying. From that response I realized that we sometimes can separate the gender basic and strategic needs but in most cases by attaining or achieving one of the needs you directly or indirectly influence the others. A staff member also agreed on the benefits that not only the groups get directly, but on those that the entire region get indirectly as a result of the project activities in the area as this quote suggests:

Actually, looking at the time when I entered the organization as an extension officer in 2002, I was working in an area where it was even difficult to initiate an activity like tree planting because definitely will not have the right of planting a tree in a land that was not hers. But currently if you go down to the field, those are issues that have been left out completely. You find a woman coming with seedlings at home, planting her own seeds. When the rainy season comes, she can actually decide to do her own farming. And I really believe it is because of our project intervention, because if I compare that to the area where I come from, where they have not had our project intervention, the situation has been the same all these years. So I really believe in the project intervention in these areas. They also tell us themselves like when you go to a group meeting and you are maybe impressed with what they have been, they tell you it is because of you people. Originally we left the women out assuming they could not or the youth because they could not do what we did. But we discovered that they are very good in activities that we older people cannot do. For me, I believe that is something that we as a project can be proud of and say we have actually made the community realize the importance of involving all genders in the intervention. It has really changed.

At the same time it's important to point out that the loans from the VSL provides space for discussion between men and women as one woman pointed out:

My husband and I talk and plan how we are going to use the loan. He knows now that I bring the money, so he is much nicer to me.
From the above response, it is a tangible positive impact of the project intervention, however being a qualitative aspect not reported in the project reports.

**DISCUSSION**

The main objective of this research was to see how SCC-VI works on a day-to-day basis with mainstreaming of gender in their activities. This information was collected through focused group discussions with 24 different groups and 10 individual interviews with staff. As indicated above, I used focused group discussions and individual interviews to collect the relevant information. The focused group discussions within the groups were conducted with the help of open-ended semi-structured interview guide. In the process of the focused group discussions, more questions emerged which necessitated further probing, for example, when talking of skills for mainstreaming. Focused group discussion is a rapid assessment, semi-structured data gathering method in which a purposively selected set of participants gather to discuss issues and concerns based on a list of key themes drawn by a researcher/facilitator (Kumar 1987). The advantage of FGD over many other methods is that the comments of one participant can generate comments from the others and ideas and opinions can be developed and explored more so than in individual interviews.

From the FGDs and the interviews with the staff, it became clear that SCC-Viskogen organization is committed to working for gender equality. However, the findings point out that old strategies including women in development and gender and development approaches have somehow continued to prevail.

To achieve equality through gender mainstreaming, it is crucial that all the aspects/spheres including political, social, economic, cultural, religious are considered. This however is very difficult in practice. By using a mainstreaming approach, inter and multi/trans disciplinary is necessary. Results from the FGDs and interviews show that both the staff and the group members put a lot of emphasis on the measurable aspects of project work and those that are difficult to measure or quantify are hardly mentioned. Just because they are not measurable, does not make them less important and if they are not dealt with they complicate the entire attempts to promoting equality. As shown in the systems theory, all the sphere including the cultural and political aspects of inequality must be dealt with simultaneously.
For example, when introducing gender policies at a work place, we need to understand its implication in all the various spheres. What political, cultural, social, economical or even religious implications such a policy has. As BRIDGE (1997) shows, ‘A key element in the mainstreaming is therefore that there should be a shift from quantitative aspects of participation of both men and women to more transformative aspects. It is not only about influencing practical interventions, it also calls for influencing the vision, mandate, policies, strategies and routines, organizational structure, processes, procedures, institutions and culture.

Similarly, mainstreaming has been institutionalized and a lot of space created for gender considerations, but in practice, gender positions and desks are often given to staff members who often have insufficient training and most of the times gender considerations are overlooked. Simply put, gender analysis is often conducted in a standardized and shallow way. (See Hannan 2000).

Certainly, definitions of roles and needs have helped to avoid the worst pitfalls of total gender blindness but there is also a risk that it strengthens instead of challenging the gender stereotypes. Systems theory shows the importance of all the components of the system being taken into consideration in order to achieve the desired change. If for example the skills aspect is left out, it doesn’t matter how much time and money is put towards mainstreaming— the end result might be something else than what is expected. Mitchell (2004) explains further that “gender mainstreaming is a highly inclusive term covering most aspects of development work, yet with very few verifiable ways for identifying when and how gender mainstreaming is to occur and how to evaluate it. The concept has been criticized for being too abstract and difficult to understand especially for non-English speakers” (Employment and social affairs: European commission 2004).

Many organizations and institutions have put a lot of effort and money towards achieving gender equality, but are yet to make progress. The staffs in SCC-VI have undergone a one-day training on gender issues and are expected to master the complexities of mainstreaming gender. It is clear that SCC-VI is committed to working with gender mainstreaming, but they lack the level of knowhow of working with the strategy effectively both among the staff and the farmers that they work with. Hannan (2000) further points out that, ‘As a concept, mainstreaming is difficult since it has no real meaning in itself, apart from the sense of
bringing something into the mainstream or Centre of attention/action. The mainstreaming strategy reflects the desire not simply to be part of the mainstream but to have the potential to change or transform the mainstream.’ According to BRIDGE (1997), “mainstreaming is of necessity, both a technical and political process requiring shifts in organizational cultures and ways of thinking as well as in goals, rationales, structures and resource allocations by organizations.” It calls for efforts to enable both women as well as men to formulate their own interests, and to participate in decision-making processes etc.

In this study I chose groups that had been working with SCC-VI for at least 3 years in order to assess the progress they had made over the years in the project with regards to gender mainstreaming. A main objective of the research, was to explore how SCC-VI works with gender mainstreaming on a day-to-day basis, but also to Assess whether mainstreaming as a strategy leads to gender equality. In SCC-VI, most of the staff interviewed and from the group discussions, gender mainstreaming was understood to mean that women participation and involvement. In general, there was a tendency by the groups and the staff interviewed to equate gender mainstreaming as women and as numbers. According to Hannan (2000), “different research show how gender equality and mainstreaming have been oversimplified. This has reduced promotion of gender equality to technical process. Such oversimplification leads to depoliticize the concepts. Depoliticization of gender equality by northern development organizations was identified as an emerging problem during the Beijing conference. The NGO forum representatives from the south raised the issue of the depoliticization of gender and gender analysis in a number of workshops thus also raised the risk of such depoliticization of the mainstreaming strategy.”

A lot of mainstreaming efforts were put at the planning level, both by the staff but also by the farmers. Those interviewed talked mostly of women instead of gender issues. I got the impression that both the farmers and the staff still equate gender to women. At the same time, looking at how they worked with what they called mainstreaming, I did not see any difference from the previous strategies of women in development and gender and development. It actually seemed to be a mixture of GAD and WID as opposed to mainstreaming strategy. There was an impression from the staff that mainstreaming entails, having more and more women involved in different activities. as pointed out above, it begs the question therefore of how mainstreaming strategy differed from the WID and GAD strategies that were promoted earlier.
From the group discussions, it was clear that there were many complexities in working with mainstreaming. One of the major challenges was working with the qualitative aspects of mainstreaming. Much emphasis was put on measures that were quantifiable and yet issues like culture and religion that play a major role in peoples lives and gender equality were not mentioned in the reports or even in the discussions. The systems theory, appreciates the complexity of working with both qualitative and quantitative aspects of gender mainstreaming and as a result, by assuming the qualitative aspects, not much change will be gained towards gender equality. By not addressing the cultural and religious causes of the inequalities, little can be expected to change irrespective of the number of women involved in the project. Similarly, much focus was put on the economical aspects of inequality in terms of control, access and use of resources. This seemed to be the main focus of both the staff and the group members. Gender equality was reduced to an economic focus.

I also observed that men and boys are more and more being pushed in the periphery in the name of gender mainstreaming. There was hardly anyone who during the group discussions or interviews brought about the situation of men. Despite all the probing, one staff pointed out that they mostly work with women groups because its much more common to find women’s group than men groups. However, mainstreaming should work with both the men and the women at the same time. However, even though the organization worked more with women groups, there was a contradiction in that leadership positions were occupied by men and the men seemed also to benefit more than the women economically on the basis of the types of activities they engaged in. This is one way on how the systems theory explains change. In the theory, a change within one of the components in a system can establish a chain reaction that forces the system to readjust and achieve balance. And so the men forming groups and registering them as women group is one way of readjusting, in order to benefit from the resources of the project.

There is also another contradiction from the findings. Women are not only burdened by culture, but also by the interventions which are aimed at making their burdens lighter. It was clear from the group discussions that women were in-charge of the home and domestic chores. The project activities added more chores to the already overburdened women’s day-to-day activities. There were discussions in the groups that showed how progressive the women were in terms of their talk when they are in the groups but at the same time they are very aware of
all the cultural requirements expected of them. This implies that unless gender mainstreaming focuses on the complex factors mentioned in the theoretical part, such role conflicts will prevent the achievement of sustainable change that leads to equality. This is also a way that mainstreaming can shift things unless we put all these different things that women do and analyze them holistically.

The reports on the different project activities also put a lot of emphasis on the numbers. This focus on numbers might not necessarily imply a change in structures. During monitoring and evaluation, a lot of gender mainstreaming was shown mostly in terms of figures. E.g. the number of men and women benefiting from SCC-VI services, including training. There was not much on the qualitative aspect of mainstreaming e.g. assessing how the intervention has improved the social and power relations among the farmers for example. All the staff and most of the group members who participated in the group discussions and interviews seemed to be very aware of the quantitative aspects of mainstreaming. From all the group discussions, it is evident that more than 70% of all present were women, and yet more than half of all the leaders in all the groups were men, and men did more talking as compared to women even though the men were fewer. This just points to the fact that gender equality is much more than just the numbers. Just because we have 50 women and 50 men does not necessarily imply equality.

From the group activities, it was also still clear that men were more represented in the groups that had more economic activities or in activities that had substantial economic value. Women were more in poultry keeping and small scale gardening venture or small businesses, whereas men had commercial tree nurseries and the rest. Apart from most leadership positions being taken by men for different reasons, some women were in groups as appendages to their men. Take an example of the youth group that plays football. The four women in the group are there just because they are married to the men who are members of the group. They actually don’t participate in the group activities apart from watering the seedlings once in a while. From this observation, it was clear that without proper reflection on the structural causes of gender inequalities, it is very easy to reinforce the existing gender structures, and roles and in the process achieve reverse results from what was hoped for. This seems to be another contradiction which could mean keeping men more economically advantaged than women i.e. maintaining the status quo. The main observation here is that there are contradictions for example, the omission of men but at the same time their benefitting more from this project on
account of their educational level. From the systems theory perspective, achieving change especially if we fail to deal with the complexities of the phenomena can lead to contradictory results.

SCC-VI has a very clear gender policy and it is clearly stated that gender will be a part of the crosscutting issues to work with on a day–to-day basis by streamlining it in the project activities. However, there is a disconnect, between policy and implementation. They still need a lot of efforts by personnel in the field of gender to streamline it implementation properly.

Another observation is that the number of men in groups has almost doubled the last year. A concern from staff interviewed was that most organizations working in the area targeted women and favored them as compared to men. As a result, there were not many men groups’ registered or even men in the groups. Most groups were VSL groups, and the ratio of men to women was observed to have grown to almost proportional levels. This can be attributed to the monetary aspects of the VSL. It is clear that these VSL groups give both men and women access to loans and as such better economy to meet their needs. But what is clear is also that the women use their loans to meet their basic needs whereas the men mainly invest the money in other economic activities. The question therefore is whether the loans address the root causes of inequalities in these areas or whether it perpetuates and strengthens it? Gender mainstreaming in this case should in my view have tried to address the root causes of inequality.

One of the objectives of this research was to see whether the gender practical and strategic needs of the groups were being met as a result of the project intervention through mainstreaming. Women’s practical needs involve inadequacies in their living conditions connected with their existing roles in society including access to clean water, health facilities, family planning advice and productive inputs. Practical needs are those needs related to basic needs necessary for survival. Strategic gender needs on the other hand involve improvements to status and opportunities in society. For example access to land ownership and credit, increased level of education, vocational training, decision making etc. There clearly were benefits from the attempt to mainstreaming and the inclusion and participation of women in the different group activities, from the discussions in the groups, there were some level of pride from the different group members knowing that they are doing something and actually contributing in their families instead of depending on the men.
If you meet your basic needs of food and shelter, they give you a confidence on how you relate to others, in participating in-group activities and in taking part in different decision. From the systems theory, a change in one aspect of the system normally triggers other chain reactions which maybe unplanned or unexpected. What the findings indicated was that mainstreaming as a strategy in itself has no problem, but the challenge of achieving equality through mainstreaming gender highly depends on how the entire process is conducted, the skills for conducting it, the involvement of all and not just women and most of all the commitment to working for equality. As argued by Pamela Thomas (2011), “The enthusiastic adoption of gender mainstreaming by governments, UN agencies, NGO’s, and the private sector occurred without a clear understanding of the concept and strategies for its implementation, lack of commitment to gender equality and gender mainstreaming, lack of leadership and funding, lack of understanding of how gender mainstreaming should affect the policies and daily practice of development practitioners and the inability of gender mainstreaming to transform power structures”, Are some of the pitfalls of mainstreaming that should be avoided.

**Conclusion and recommendations.**

It is clear that SCC-Viagroforestry project is committed to addressing issues related to gender and gender inequalities, And as many other NGO’s, they use the strategy of mainstreaming. They also have the leadership committed to addressing issues of gender inequalities both among the staff and also to the farmers they work with. Having studied how the project implements their gender mainstreaming attempts, it is clear that it is not enough with just good will from the management. It does not matter how much money invested towards mainstreaming, if implementation is not based on knowledge of the underlying factors that cause inequality and how to address them. It is also clear that gender issues are multifaceted and multidisciplinary and therefore requires staff adequately trained to work with such complexity.

Most of the groups in the study were positive regarding what they have achieved from the savings and loaning groups. While most of the benefits have been economical for example, as mentioned by men, not asking for money to buy salt restored dignity to women. It is important to point out that unless ways are found to address causes of inequalities resulting
from cultural practices, religion, political and even social issues, the inequalities between the genders will continue albeit taking different forms.

Linking the entire observations and the systems theory, shows how complex issues of gender equality are and by focusing on just one aspect of it, might not lead to the expected results. If much focus is put on the quantitative aspects of mainstreaming, the kind or level of gender equality hoped for may not be achieved. One reason for not achieving equality is that mainstreaming has been narrowly defined as a matter of numbers and focuses mostly on women.

Finally, although mainstreaming as an approach may be effective in addressing issues of inequality at whatever level in society, unless all those involved are trained on how to work with the complexities involved in the process of mainstreaming, and are committed to doing it, mainstreaming may remain as just a politically correct term for business as usual.

**Research limitations.**
All the focused group discussions were conducted in Luo—which is the local language of the groups. Even though I speak Luo as my mother tongue, translating academic words to Luo and back to English was difficult. Words like mainstreaming and equality tend to achieve a different implication when translated to Luo. This was the main limitation, as if not all get the same meaning from the same words, it becomes a bit difficult to ascertain if all the group members had the same understanding of the subject.

**Recommendations.**
This was a case study done only in one project area. It would be relevant if a similar studies are carried out in other projects within SCC-Viskogen and compare especially the implementation processes.
More investment by the organization towards staff trainings on gender issues and gender mainstreaming would equip the staff with the necessary knowledge to adequately work with gender mainstreaming.
Appendix 1

Interview Guide.

Research topic: does gender mainstreaming lead to gender equality and sustainable development: case study of Kisumu district, Kenya.

The aim of this study is to find out whether there is a correlation between gender mainstreaming and gender equality and whether equality in return leads to sustainable development.

Section 1: background information.
Name: (optional)…………………………
Occupation:………………………………..
Age:
Sex:…………………………………………
Marital status: Education.:……………………………………..

Section 2
1. how does your day to day activities look like?........................................................................................................................................
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b, for those with spouses, how does your day and spouse compare?................................................................................................................................
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How did you get in contact with vi-agroforestry project? In which year?........................................................................................................................................
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How do you relate to the day to day programme work?

What did you do before you were in touch with the project?

What has changed since you came into the project? Both positive and negative.

What’s the nature of service provision with regards to:
- Water,
- Latrines/toilets,
- Education,
- Medical services

How has your relationship with others been influenced as a result of your group membership in the project?
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