

Gender Mainstreaming in Sri Lanka, 1978-2015

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Gender mainstreaming has been the most “modern” policy approach to gender equality, all over the globe. It also serves as a policy strategy to ensure equality for women in society. Sri Lanka is seriously pondering on uplifting gender mainstreaming strategies in the 21st century. This study investigates the extent of development in gender mainstreaming in Sri Lanka from 1978 to 2015. The main aim of the research was to examine the nature and adapting levels of gender mainstreaming during the period under investigation to explore related initiatives and their implementation in the country over three specific-periods. To explore Sri Lanka’s progress, data were gathered from government-developed documents focused on economic policy through documentary analysis employing both qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. Both the literature review and the findings of the analysis of policy documents revealed two key findings. Despite Sri Lanka’s efforts to incorporate a gender perspective to a certain extent in its policy process, it appears that these attempts lack genuineness towards establishing gender mainstreaming as a new policy strategy. Instead, the focus has often been substantial on gender mainstreaming within donor-funded projects. Notably, Sri Lanka lacks a consistent, well-developed national policy on gender mainstreaming. The study reveals that in Sri Lanka, gender mainstreaming is frequently conducted symbolically, leading to the consequence that a majority of economic policies are gender-blind. Moreover, none of the policy documents focuses on women, who are engaged in informal sector employment nor cater to women’s needs. Further, it is apparent that many of the documents are largely concerned with the ‘practical needs of women’ or ‘practical gender needs’ or ‘welfare programmes’ for women rather than ‘strategic gender mainstreaming’.

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