

THE MAINSTREAMING CONUNDRUM

By Laetitia Mukurasi

1. We are mainstreaming We are gender mainstreaming We are the champions of mainstreaming <i>Halleluyah!</i> Abolish a unit with 4 professional staff In the name of “efficiency... and cost-effectiveness” Give them lip-service and install a token Put a minute section of one in its place One for the price of four For this one-woman show No budget No administrative support No research assistance No career ladder Low salary <i>Kiini macho!</i>	2. We are mainstreaming We are mainstreaming We are No.1 at gender MALEstreaming Make-believe gender is a priority issue Subsume it under THE PRIORITY issue Environment, poverty, whatever Render it almost invisible Smother it under layers Keep it out of sight It should not see the light Certainly it should not be privy To top level policy discussions Budgets and lending decisions You see Gender is “not technical” What can these women tell us? Keeping gender under wraps Bringing it in as an afterthought Is a perfect way of keeping it contained Its functionaries riled and neutralised Or hopefully rendered mute These gender activists Need a male chaperon Put them on a short leash Or matters could get out of hand Gender mainstreaming? Great big misunderstanding
3. Ah, this riddle known as mainstreaming If management is defined as the art Of getting things done through or with other people Then gender mainstreaming is a managerial function To be achieved through or with other people But how do you attain that Operating from under the table Without power and authority When your position Has no coercive power, no political clout No quid pro quo, no leverage No incentives, no penalties You have been set up Gender is going nowhere <i>Danganya toto</i>	4. This mainstreaming business Is a conundrum Integrating gender requires hard work First, the documents arrive late - with orders “Your deadline is now” “Put gender in” “Validate the gender paragraph” “Mention the word women at least once Mix and stir quick” <i>Alimradi</i> Don’t delay disbursement Donors might be put off <i>Sukuma twaenda</i> First, you read the loong document Hours on end Then you research, surf the net For country and sector specific data You exercise analytical skills To obliterate the stereotype, the, myth and misconceptions To coin a factual comment, phrase With all evidence intact At the end of all this, one sentence appears “And women will participate”

	But there is no mention of the gender of the beneficiary How can gender equality get traction? How can women get a fair deal? <i>Hadithi, hadithi</i> <i>Uongo njoo, utamu kolea</i>
5. Oh, the foibles of gender mainstreaming It would assist If someone at least had the sense To tell you that your input is inadequate Or that it is off key Or that they do not want it But you spend hours And give your best Yet your contribution is ignored The box gets a tick The feminist was there The truth is - it really doesn't matter Your presence is a ruse Things just move on And your contribution- Is nowhere to be seen It has evaporated Puff....! into thin air <i>Majanga!</i>	6. Of course you are right Your concern is legitimate But you have to accept that It is not up to you You are not the ultimate decision maker You do not have authority to halt or delay projects That short shrift gender/women issues You are fixture under the table You are not "senior" enough to participate In project approval committees You are not anywhere near The decision making table They are
7. Colleagues can do as they please Bosses do not ask the right questions Senior management can get away with it Accountability is for the birds It decorates the books You see you are mainstreaming Meddling into other people's work Your comments are not wanted Your input does not count Your contribution is purposely invisibilized It is not your programme/project There is no joint ownership <i>Document ina wenyewe!</i>	8. Hey, this thing called mainstreaming Is a hit and miss business Does not always guarantee the result you seek Puts you in such an awkward position Makes you tell lies When confronted with documents That are pure junk You have to pay false compliments In the name of encouragement Where these are not due You have to flatter and ingratiate yourself To get a foothold in the door This extends to made-up speeches Making fraudulent claims Professing commitment, when none exist Retouching a damning report Concealing the true state of gender mainstreaming To make reports palatable for donors It is all a PR exercise It is mostly hot air <i>Nguvu ya soda!</i>
9. Ah, this animal mainstreaming So you want to bring a women's perspective In a programme or project Whose task manager, His manager, and his director, Probably the vice-top dog and even the top	10. Oh, this beast called mainstreaming So, you urge them to share resources, power and dignity You ask a male colleague to pass on this message In his dialogue with officials

dog himself Possibly a significant number of board members and governors Who stand on podiums and exalt gender equality Are all struggling With “these equality issues” In their own minds In their own homes They are carrying excess mental baggage Are prone to patriarchal angst, tricks and quibbles Maybe they do not believe That a woman Can have a perspective A different perspective Has a right to a perspective Could be the seemingly sophisticated Task-manager/boss/top-dog/board member/governor Who arrive at the office Well turned out In expensive Armani suits and ties And Dior aftershave Are batterers, oppressors or dictators At the domestic front <i>Salaale!</i>	In regional member countries Whose meetings Are attended by male majorities Who hold the same convoluted views Or carry the same baggage And you expect mainstreaming to happen This same colleagues has a wife Who does not even know his salary Actually he thinks Sharing power with his wife Is anathema In his mind the wife is not his equal She is not even a partner After all he paid the dowry She is financially “dependent” on him He says “my wife does not work” Despite all the wealth she produces - Children, care, love, companionship Which when given a monetary value Could amount to more than his salary
11. Working in gender mainstreaming Can be an occupational hazard It has taught me, to tread with care I do not how, when, and whose sensibility I have stepped on I dare not take for granted That we are all on the same wavelength Behind my back, I am already labeled That feminist Troublemaker The gender police Or its French equivalent A gender “gendarmierie” <i>Haya, We are mainstreaming</i>	