Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

1. Global commitments

The strategic objectives in the Beijing *Platform for Action* identify three inter-related areas for attention with regard to institutional structures and strategies to promote action on all the priorities in the *Platform for Action*.

(Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies.

(Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects.

(Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

The *Platform for Action* emphasizes that the national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas. All government ministries and agencies share responsibility for achieving progress toward equality between women and men.

A definition of gender mainstreaming was agreed by Member States through the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1997:

Gender mainstreaming is "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality." (ECOSOC conclusions 1997/2.)

Commitment to gender mainstreaming was reaffirmed at the 23rd special session of the General Assembly in 2000. The outcome document of that session calls upon governments to establish or reinforce existing institutional mechanisms at all levels to work with national machineries to strengthen societal support for gender equality, in cooperation with civil society, particularly women's non-governmental organisations. It also emphasizes the need to strengthen national capacity to generate data for gender-based analysis and make this accessible to the public and policy makers.

World leaders meeting at the 2005 World Summit recognized the importance of gender mainstreaming as a tool for achieving gender equality. They undertook to actively promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and progress in all political, economic and social spheres, and to strengthen the capabilities of the United Nations system in the area of gender equality.

2. Progress at the national level

There has been some progress in relation to each of the three strategic objectives under this critical area of concern, as well as one particularly notable area of innovation – gender analysis of government budgets.

National machineries

By 2004, most countries had established some form of national machinery (some 165 countries reported having a national machinery, an increase from 127 in 1985). The type of agency varies greatly among countries, reflecting differences in government structures as well as political choices.[3]

Many governments took steps to strengthen the national machineries, including, for example, upgrading the machinery to a full ministry, increasing the status of the responsible minister, linking or locating the machinery with a more central or influential agency, and increasing the machinery's human and/or financial resources. Many countries established focal points or offices in sectoral ministries at the national level, often coordinated by the national machinery, or established inter-ministerial committees. Special offices or focal points for women or gender equality were also established at municipal, district and provincial levels.[4]

A major development of the last decade was the creation of new mechanisms to complement the national machinery, such as a parliamentary committee on women's rights, an advisory group to government, a commission that reports to parliament, an office of equal opportunities, an ombudsperson, or some combination of these structures.[5]

The increased number of mechanisms for promoting gender equality reflects better understanding of the responsibility at all levels of government for pursuing gender equality commitments. It has also increased the number and variety of actors promoting gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming strategies

Many countries have made their gender equality goals more explicit through the formulation of national gender equality policies and action plans guided by the Beijing *Platform for Action* commitments. Tools such as guidelines, checklists, handbooks and manuals have been developed to support implementation. A range of initiatives has been undertaken to strengthen awareness and capacity of senior decision-makers and staff in key agencies and sectors. Workshops, training programmes, round-table discussions and conferences have been convened to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality for the achievement of national objectives in all sectors and to promote the use of gender analysis in formulating policies and programmes.[6]

Momentum has also been provided by processes established to monitor the implementation of the Beijing *Platform for Action* and related national policies. A number of countries have also made strategic use of the CEDAW reporting process. In some countries, monitoring processes led by the national machinery have resulted in feedback to particular ministries. In other countries monitoring has taken more high-profile forms, such as periodic progress reports to parliament, or monitoring missions focusing on particular sectors or regions followed by the publication of a report. In some countries, citizens and civil society organisations have also participated in monitoring, either as members of a monitoring body or through independent activities focused on government accountability for follow-up on gender equality.[7]

Gender budget initiatives: lessons, resources and country experiences

š Website: *Gender-responsive budget initiatives*: www.idrc.ca/gender-budgets/. Collaborative effort between UNIFEM, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) that aims "to support government and civil society in analysing national and/or local budgets from a gender perspective and applying this analysis to the formulation of gender responsive budgets." The site supports networking, and provides access to online manuals and training materials and to country case studies.

š Debbie Budlender (2004). *Expectations versus realities in gender-responsive budget initiatives.* UNRISD. www.idrc.ca/gender-budgets/ev-66706-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.

š Budlender, D. and G. Hewitt (eds) (2002*). Gender Budgets Make More Cents: country studies and good practice.* Commonwealth Secretariat: www.idrc.ca/gender-budgets/ev-66710-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html. Articles by practitioners on the approaches, challenges and successes of initiatives in the Andean region, Australia, Korea, Mexico, the Philippines, Rwanda, Scotland, South Africa and the UK:

š *BRIDGE Cutting Edge Pack on Gender and Budgets* (2003). Overview Report by Helena Hofbauer Balmori; Supporting Resources Collection by Hazel Reeves and Charlie Sever. www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports_gend_CEP.html#Budgets .

š IPU and UNIFEM (2004), *Parliament, the Budget and Gender.* Intended as a resources for legislators. www.unifem.org/resources/item_detail.php?ProductID=61

Statistics and indicators

Many countries have identified the need to improve the quality and availability of data. This reflects the importance of reliable data disaggregated by sex for gender analysis and the implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy. Steps taken include an increased focus on sex-disaggregation in data collection through household surveys and the national census. Some countries have prepared and disseminated booklets with data relevant to the critical areas of concern of the Beijing *Platform for Action* and on the gender dimensions of issues such as education and housing. Attention has also focused on improving data on issues such as violence against women.

The Internet has offered new possibilities for making data available. For example, the website of the statistical office in Sweden, Statistics Sweden, makes available a booklet on "Women and Men in Sweden: Facts and Figures". In Chile, the national machinery (Servicio Nacional de las Mujeres - SERNAM) manages a database that provides up-to-date statistics and information related to, for example, households, poverty, employment, health, education and violence.[10]

3. Gaps and challenges

Despite progress on a number of fronts, many constraints faced by national machineries and problems with data availability have persisted throughout the decade. As both leadership by

National machineries

National machineries still face constraints similar to those reported in 1995 and 2000. One of the major problems is lack of human and financial resources, including insufficient staff and budget for national machineries and insufficient specialized resources for line ministries. Many national machineries are faced with obstacles, such as unclear mandates, frequent relocation within the government structure, weak and frequently changing leadership, and poor technical capacity.[11] Additional issues include the use of national machineries for political mobilization by ruling parties, inappropriate and partisan leadership, competition and conflict between government and civil society organisations, conceptual confusion about gender mainstreaming, and reliance on donor funding that often comes with pressures for "deliverables" that leads to women-focused initiatives rather than pursuit of gender mainstreaming approaches. The proliferation of gender equality mechanisms in many countries is a promising development, particularly where there are collaborative working relationships among mechanisms within a country.[12]

The trend toward decentralization has added new challenges for national machineries as sustaining and building on progress depends on the extent to which local authorities are mandated to and capable of addressing gender equality issues. Supporting the gender focal points at the local levels may be a critical strategy for the future, but one that will make additional demands on national machineries that are already struggling to meet their responsibilities with limited resources.

The priority placed on improved governance in international discussions has increased attention to issues that may offer new entry points for national machineries to promote implementation throughout government of a gender mainstreaming approach; such issues include greater transparency in decision-making, more effective accountability mechanisms, enhanced citizen participation in decision-making, improved public service technical capacities and resources. Seizing these opportunities will require a skilled and strategic approach by national machineries.

Gender mainstreaming strategies

The Beijing *Platform for Action* emphasizes the need to systematically integrate gender perspectives in decision-making processes across all sectors. One of obstacles to full implementation is the perception that gender mainstreaming should be dealt with by women or by the women's ministry. There is still not widespread understanding that gender mainstreaming contributes to informed analysis and to effective decision-making and policy processes. Attention to gender equality is often perceived as less urgent than, for example, action to eliminate poverty, poor health or low productivity, which illustrates the limited understanding of the links between gender equality and other development issues.

Understanding the rationale for taking account of gender equality is but a first step. It must be followed by increased experience and skills in integrating gender perspectives, into all sectors and agencies. This continues to prove challenging, particularly where national machineries or focal points are weak with respect to authority, technical skills or resources.

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Elements of a gender mainstreaming strategy

"The term 'mainstreaming' came from the objective to bring attention to gender equality into the *mainstream* or core of development activities. A number of important elements in the mainstreaming strategy can be identified. These include the necessity to ensure:

š attention to gender equality from the *initial* stages of processes so that there is potential to influence goals, strategies and resource allocations and bring about changes in policies, programmes and other activities;

š gender analysis of the roles, responsibilities and contributions as well as potential impact of planned actions on women and men respectively, as the first essential step, before any decisions are taken;

š a focus on *both women and men* and the relations between them, especially in relation to access to and control over resources and participation in decision-making processes;

š *explicit attention* to gender perspectives, making them visible and showing the links between gender equality and achievement of the overall goals of all sectors;

š moving beyond focusing on increasing the numbers of women participating to *bringing gender perspectives to the centre of attention* in analyses, policies, planning processes and resource allocations;

š identification of the need for changes in goals, policies, strategies and actions, as well as institutional changes – changes in structures, procedures and cultures."

Source: Hannan (2005). *Gender mainstreaming.*[13]

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Availability of statistics for policy development and monitoring progress

Calls for action to improve statistics have been made since the United Nations First World Conference on Women (1979). However, according to *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistic* – a global review of trends in the availability of national data over the last three decades – only limited progress has been made since then. [14] Data problems are particularly significant in least developed countries, particularly in Africa. The study notes that efforts to monitor the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have further highlighted inadequacies: data is poor on basic indicators such as maternal mortality (MDG5), and there are major gaps in sex-disaggregated data on indicators such as infant mortality (MDG4), adult morbidity (MDG6), and educational enrolment (MDG2&3).

The World's Women 2005 also notes that while some progress has been made in the area of economic activity, the data remain weak. Only 127 of 204 countries (less than two-thirds) provide data to the United Nations on the economically active population, although most of these provide a breakdown by sex. Over three decades the number of countries able to provide unemployment data disaggregated by sex has doubled, but this still accounts for only 114 countries of the 204 reviewed (just over half), and less than a quarter of countries reporting wage data provided this separately for women and men. Less than a third of countries are able to

4. Strategies to accelerate implementation

In 2006, at its 50th session, the Commission on the Status of Women focused on the importance of enhancing women's participation in development and creating an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women. The agreed conclusions of the meeting included a number of actions to strengthen institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming. The actions most relevant to strategies of national governments are highlighted below.[16]

(Incorporate gender perspectives into all local and national planning, budgetary, monitoring and evaluation and reporting processes, and mechanisms relating to national development strategies, including strategies focused on the implementation of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, fully utilizing existing gender equality policies and strategies.

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and technical assistance they provide to local governments. Given the number of governments that may exist at sub-national levels – which could include, for example, provinces, districts, regions, municipalities – it is important to develop strategies that maximize the national resources available for outreach and assistance.

For the municipal level, guides and tools have been developed to assist in developing structures and strategies for gender mainstreaming. One guide, for example, reviews steps that could be taken toward a "women-friendly" city, with illustrative examples from around the world related to, for example, possible administrative structures, consultative mechanisms, and adaptations of programmes to serve women's needs.[18] The regional and international networks of cities and municipal governments that play a role in disseminating resources for their members through meetings and websites could also be valuable partners to national governments in strategies for local level capacity building for gender mainstreaming.[19]

National measures to promote municipal action on gender equality: example from Latin America

š Bolivia: legislative developments include the Law on Popular Participation, which promotes women's participation in local planning, and the Municipalities Law, which calls for local development plans to address the needs of both women and men.

š Guatemala: the Presidential Secretariat for Women participated in the development of the Municipal Code, which requires all municipalities to involve the local women's commissions in their work.

š Honduras: the National Institute for Women (the national machinery) has provided technical back-up for the establishment and operation of municipal offices for women, and was involved in reforms to the Municipal Act that will officially establish municipal women's offices; steps have also been taken to mainstream gender perspectives in the handbooks on local management used by the Ministry of the Interior and Justice

Sources: INSTRAW (2005), *Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of women* and National reports of Guatemala, Honduras and Bolivia (2004).[20]

Strengthening collaboration with civil society organisations

The relationship between national machineries and women's civil society organisations (CSOs) is critical to the effectiveness of national machineries. However, these relationships are shaped, in part, by whether a government encourages collaboration and considers it fruitful. Relationships can also be influenced by whether and how a national machinery reaches out to civil society. In many cases, the development of national action plans to implement the Beijing *Platform for Action* and the CEDAW reporting process have served as a basis for creating partnerships between governments and civil society.

Constructive relationships with CSOs that articulate women's interests can assist national machineries in setting priorities and advocating for these within government. The efforts of an autonomous women's movement to hold governments accountable to their gender equality commitments are important for making progress, and for ensuring accountability. The effectiveness of CSOs in this monitoring and advocacy role depends in part on their access to information and data to undertake analysis and advocacy as well as on the opportunities they are given to consult with governments. National machineries can play a facilitating role in both these areas.[21]

Consideration should also be given to the mechanisms for consultations:

"To remain relevant, national women's machineries must have legitimacy and credibility with women's organisations and NGOs representing women's interests. They must create structures for consulting with and responding to the concerns of women's organisations, ranging from informal discussions or public hearings to seats for NGO representatives on government committees. A system of formal representation is likely to exclude small and lesser known organisations. Therefore, in settings where women's organisations are diverse, public hearings combined with informal consultations may be more effective. Such direct links between national women's machineries and their constituency, women's organisations, can also help to maintain accountability."[22]

Partnerships with Civil Society Organisations: examples from two countries

"Thailand. The Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development (OWAFD) has established various types of partnership with NGOs. At the policy level, a coordi

women's empowerment. Planning processes within governments toward achieving the MDGs provides opportunities for addressing many of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing *Platform for Action*. The weight given to monitoring MDG indicators, and associated capacity development investments, provide opportunities to raise long-standing concerns about improvements in data to better reflect women's situation in these areas.[28]

Using processes related to the MDGs and Poverty Reduction Strategies as entry points

In its report for the ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,* Vietnam outlined its use of the MDG and PRSP processes to advance gender equality:

"Vietnam signed the Millennium Declar

women: achievements, gaps and challenges" (Italy, 29 November – 2 December 2004). This website gives access to a series of papers on experiences and approaches in particular countries as well as several comparative and issue-based studies. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/ (accessed 29 June 2007).

(United Nations, Department for Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division (2006). *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*. This issue of The World's Women focuses on trends and progress in the availability of data at the national level in the areas covered by the PFA and proposes strategies to strengthen national statistical capacity. Available online (in chapters, or complete report, with a set of two-page press releases on key issues): unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/wwpub.htm accessed 26 June 2007).

Notes

[1] *2005 World Summit Outcome*, United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/1, para. 59. www.un.org/summit2005/documents.html (accessed 29 June 2007).

[2] CSW agreed conclusions: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/ (select session, then agreed conclusions) (accessed 26 June 2007).

[3] Jahan, Rounaq (2004). *Background Paper* for the UN/DAW Expert Group Meeting on the Role of National Machineries in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/documents.html. Also see the Final Report of the meeting. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/ (accessed 29 June 2007).

[4] National reports for the ten-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/english/responses.htm (accessed 26 June 2007).

[5] Jahan, Rounaq (2004). *Background Paper* for the UN/DAW Expert Group Meeting on the Role of National Machineries in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/documents.html. Also see the Final Report of the meeting. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/ (accessed 29 June 2007).

[6] United Nations (2005). *Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000:gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century." Report of the Secretary-General.* E/CN.6/2005/2, para. 692-697.

[7] Jahan, Rounaq (2004). *Background Paper* for the UN/DAW Expert Group Meeting on the Role of National Machineries in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/ (access 29 June 2007).

[8] Budlender, Debbie (2004). *Expectations versus realities in gender-responsive budget initiatives.* UNRISD. www.idrc.ca/gender-budgets/ev-66706-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html (accessed 29 June 2007).

[9] Economic Commission for Africa (2005*). Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa: Questioning the achievements and confronting the challenges ten years after Beijing*, p.6. www.uneca.org/beijingplus10/pubs/Gender%20Equality.pdf

[10] Sweden: www.scb.se/templates/Listning2____117051.asp (accessed 29 June 2007); Chile: www.sernam.gov.cl/basemujer/index.htm (accessed 29 June 2007).

[11] National reports for the ten-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/english/responses.htm (accessed 26 June 2007): www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/english/responses.htm. (accessed 28 June 2007).

[12] Jahan, Rounaq (2004). *Background Paper* for the DAW UN/ Group Meeting on the Role of National Machineries in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/documents.html; Dzodzi Tsikata (2001), *National machineries for the advancement of women in Africa: are they transforming gender relations?* Third World Network-Africa. www.socialwatch.org/en/informesTematicos/29.html

[13] Hannan, Carolyn (2005). Presentation on "Gender mainstreaming: a key strategy for promoting gender equality at national level", at the panel on Moving Bejing Forward: Strategies and approaches for creating an enabling

environment, UN-ESCAP High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its Regional and Global Outcomes, held from 7 to 10 September 2004. In ESCAP (2005) *Asia and the Pacific Beijing+10: Selected Issues:* www.unescap.org/publications/detail.asp?id=1093 (accessed 29 June 2007).

[14] United Nations, Statistics Division (2006). *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics.*

Review of National MDG Reports. pp. 25, 55: