

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.¹

The Commission on the Status of Women continues to pay attention to the issue and adopted agreed conclusions on institutional mechanisms in 2005 and 2006.²

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-sensitive budgets

An important innovation since the Beijing conference is “gender-sensitive budget initiatives”. Although this term covers a wide range of approaches and participants, it generally refers to efforts to link gender equality objectives with an analysis of government budget allocations and/or performance. The general aim of analysing budgets from a gender perspective is to ensure that the needs of both women and men (and both girls and boys) are reflected in policies, programmes and budget allocations.

In some countries, gender-sensitive budget initiatives have been initiated by civil society organisations or academics, while in other countries legislators or parliamentary committees have taken the lead, and in yet others the process is pursued within the civil service. There is a growing body of literature documenting experiences and identifying lessons. Country case studies are a particularly important resource as they highlight the importance of developing appropriate strategies taking into account the specific country context, including political commitments of government, public service environment, government structures, and must be developed in light of the particular objectives and opportunities available.

Gender-sensitive budgeting has attracted widespread interest among gender equality advocates because of its potential as a tool for gender mainstreaming. To date, the main impact has been to increase awareness of gaps and inequalities, and to contribute to better understanding among civil servants and decision-makers about the relevance of gender equality to their policies and sectors. These can be significant contributions, even if limited impacts on budgets have yet to be achieved.⁸ The performance-based budgeting approaches being introduced in many countries have been identified as offering greater promise for actually integrating gender perspectives in decision-making. This is because performance-based budgeting focuses attention on the link between policy objectives and budget allocations, and thus provides a conducive environment for efforts to link gender equality objectives with budget allocations.

Gender Budgeting Initiatives in Africa

“Following the pioneering work in South Africa, at least 14 other countries in sub-Saharan Africa are carrying out gender budgeting initiatives. They include Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Most initiatives reflect movement towards more transparent and participatory forms of governance. In some countries, civil society groups and parliamentarians carry out the initiatives jointly ...For example in Uganda, the initiative is a creative partnership between FOWODE [Forum for Women In Democracy] and the women’s parliamentary caucus, in Tanzania TGNP [Tanzania Gender Networking Programme] started the initiative in 1997, and in Zimbabwe the ZWRCN [Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Centre and Network] works with the parliamentary committee responsible for public finance. In other countries the initiative has been led by government Ministries (Finance in Mozambique, Women’s Affairs in Nigeria and Gender in Rwanda), with support from bilateral and UN agencies.”

Source: Economic Commission for Africa (2005). *Promoting Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Africa*.⁹

Gender budget initiatives: lessons, resources and country experiences

- 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.
- Debbie Budlender (2004). *Expectations versus realities in gender-responsive budget initiatives*. UNRISD. www.idrc.ca/gender-budgets/ev-66706-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.
- 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:
- *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 .
- 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 and adequate data are important elements in gender mainstreaming strategies, gaps in these areas also hinder progress in the implementation of global commitments on gender equality.

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.

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:

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

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 provide frequent reports on the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector (one of the indicators of gender equality identified by the international community for monitoring MDG3).

A review of the extent to which national MDG reports contain explicit attention to gender perspectives confirms these data gaps, and also highlights the weakness of reporting and analysis on the gender dimensions of poverty: only 17 of the 78 reports reviewed include sex-disaggregated data on poverty indicators.¹⁵

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.
- ▶ Develop and implement effective national monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at all levels to evaluate progress towards gender equality, including through the collection, compilation and analysis and use of data disaggregated by age and by sex and gender statistics, and continue developing and using appropriate qualitative and quantitative indicators.
- ▶ Encourage and promote close cooperation between central authorities and local governments to develop programmes aimed at the achievement of gender equality, thereby granting equal opportunities for women and girls.
- ▶ Increase understanding of and capacity to implement gender mainstreaming as a strategy for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, including by requiring the use of gender analysis as the basis for all policy and programme development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, in particular in the areas of health, education and employment.
- ▶ Develop and promote strategies to mainstream a gender perspective into the design and implementation of development and socio-economic policies and budgetary processes, and share best practices and encourage innovations in gender mainstreaming approaches.
- ▶ Mobilize adequate funding for gender-sensitive development policies and programmes and for national mechanisms for gender equality, through national, regional and international resource mobilization and gender-responsive budget processes in all sector areas, and allocate adequate funding for women-specific measures.
- ▶ Encourage enhanced coordination and collaboration between all mechanisms for the advancement of women and gender equality at all levels, such as women's ministries, gender equality commissions, relevant parliamentary committees, ombudspersons, gender focal points and working groups in line ministries, as well as with women's groups, associations and networks.

The sections below consider a number of strategies that can be implemented or promoted by national machineries.

Increasing the influence of national machineries through effective linkages with other government agencies

Linkages with other governmental agencies are critical to the effectiveness and reach of national machineries. Many countries have established focal points, inter-ministerial committees or working groups, or other mechanisms. However, the establishment of a such a mechanism is

best seen as one element in a strategy for influence. A key issue for national machineries is the formulation of an effective approach to maintaining and supporting potential partners.

A discussion between three national machineries working in different governmental structures in Asia (in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines) drew on their experience to identify key approaches for establishing and sustaining effective linkages with other government bodies.¹⁷ They identified the eight key approaches summarized below.

- ▶ *Search for the best entry points to an agency.* The best entry point will depend on the circumstances, and could be, for example, joint work on a policy issue in which there will be clear rewards for the partner agency, or a link with a unit for which gender equality issues are clearly important to agency objectives, or a link with a man or woman who could act as a “champion.”
- ▶ *Target capable political leadership with the other agencies.* The support of influential politicians or bureaucrats willing to allocate time or resources can be invaluable.
- ▶ *Seek out allies, but work towards institutionalization.* Allies are important, but there are risks to relying too much on relationships or on personalities, although these can be important catalysts for more change and more firmly anchored relationships.
- ▶ *Establish and maintain trained and well-positioned focal points within linked agencies.* Individuals with focal point responsibilities in partner agencies need to be supported with skills development to be effective, and need to be sufficiently senior to gain respect but not so senior that they have not time for this task.
- ▶ *Institutionalize mechanisms for linking.* Focal points need legitimate and consistent channels for interacting with the national machinery and with other focal points in order to maintain technical and political support as well as to develop common approaches and exchange experiences.
- ▶ *Introduce incentives to learning gender analysis skills.* Provide the motivations for change through, for example, introducing a gender training requirement for promotion, or encouraging personnel to see these skills as an important aspect of their technical capacity.
- ▶ *Secure sufficient resources.* Line agencies may be unwilling or unable to take the steps to integrate gender perspectives if they do not have the resources to develop approaches or undertake new initiatives.
- ▶ *National women’s machineries must be perceived as the legitimate and benevolent experts in gender mainstreaming.* A reputation as a good source of technical expertise and a useful ally in support of the partner’s goals are important to effectiveness; approaches that are seen as “policing” others provoke defensive responses that hinder the development of useful linkages.

Promoting mainstreaming approaches by local governments

Action by all levels of government is important to meeting the Beijing *Platform of Action* commitments, particularly since decentralization processes in many countries have increased the scope of authority of local governments.

In some countries, efforts to increase awareness and capacity at sub-national levels of government have been an important part of the work programme of national machineries. National ministries responsible for local government, where they exist, can be a strategic target for capacity development so that gender equality perspectives are incorporated into the training

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

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 coordinating body composed of GO [Government Organisations] and NGO representatives and gender experts has been established. At the implementation level, a memorandum of understanding has been signed between OWAFD and the National Council of Women, to effect a collaboration that would empower women. More memoranda of agreement are being prepared to deal with specific problems like violence against women, training of women for local elections and administrative positions. OWAFD considers collaboration with the government, NGOs, civil society, local governments, and experts, as a strategy to achieve gender equality in Thailand.”

“**People’s Republic of China.** The government of China has paid particular attention to close cooperation with NGOs. Five NGOs have developed their own programmes to implement the National Programme for the Development of Chinese Women (2001-2010), and have conducted effective cooperation with the government and concerned departments in the labor protection of women workers, encouraging women’s participation in politics, alleviating poverty among rural women, helping urban workers with employment, eliminating illiteracy among women, increasing women’s awareness of health care, and safeguarding women’s personal rights. In the area of violence against women, government departments and NGOs cooperate with each other to take various means and measures to rescue and assist women victims.”

Source: Quoted from ESCAP (2003). *Asia and the Pacific Beijing+10: Selected Issues.*²³

Working with parliamentary mechanisms and legislators

Parliamentarians also have a role in reviewing government performance in achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment. Parliaments in some thirty countries have established standing committees on gender equality or the status of women. Another approach has been to include the gender equality mandate in the responsibilities of parliamentary committees working on human rights or social affairs. These committees differ considerably in their roles, reflecting differences between parliamentary and presidential systems of government among other factors, as well as in composition, mandate and working methods. The Inter-Parliamentary Union maintains an informative database, *Parline*, which contains information on specialized parliamentary bodies dealing with the status of women and gender equality and their nature, mandate, membership, working methods and other characteristics of these committees.²⁴

The work of these committees can be an important complement to the efforts of national machineries to increase awareness and debate on gender equality issues as well being a source of ideas and momentum on particular issues and strategies.

National machineries can also take steps to assist parliamentarians to enhance their knowledge and capacity of gender equality issues. In the Philippines, for example, the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (the national machinery) worked with legislators and legislative staff to develop a guidebook on gender-responsive legislative analysis and development. The two-year process of close collaboration was a capacity-building exercise for all involved in the process, and the published guidebooks are a resource that could be used by a wider group of legislators and their staff.²⁵

Another strategy has been to strengthen the capacity of parliamentarians to incorporate gender equality perspectives in their review of government budgets. The Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNIFEM have developed a handbook on *Parliament, the Budget and Gender, Handbook for Parliamentarians* which is intended to assist members of parliaments and their staff to review budgets from a gender perspective, and provides examples of experience in this process. National machineries could bring this handbook to the attention of parliament and use it as a resource in working with parliamentarians to increase their capacity to act on gender equality issues.²⁶

Examples of parliamentary mechanisms

- Costa Rica: The Permanent Select Committee on Women has five members (three women and two men) who are appointed by the speaker of the legislature. Their mandate is to determine projects related to women; propose amendments to national laws to bring them into line with international treaties; examine social problems related to women and amend local laws accordingly; and exercise oversight of executive action on women's affairs.
- India: The Committee on the Empowerment of Women has 30 members representing both chambers of parliament (currently five men and 25 women). The Committee monitors and assesses the steps taken by the government to secure equality and improve the status of women.
- Ukraine: The Sub-Committee on Promotion of Gender Equality is one of seven sub-committees of the Committee on Human Rights, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations. The 12 members of the Committee (10 men and 2 women) participate in sub-committees at their discretion. The mandate of the Sub-Committee on Promotion of Gender Equality is to ensure the Parliament elaborates and adopts laws that promote equal rights for women and men.

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parline database on specialized parliamentary bodies²⁷

Making more strategic use of MDG processes to mainstream gender perspectives

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the international community in 2000 have provided a clear focus for government action on a number of key goals and for monitoring progress toward achievement of those goals. Additional momentum has been generated by the support from multilateral and bilateral organisations. Many countries have followed up on the MDG commitments by formulating national targets and integrating the goals into national development plans, including Poverty Reduction Strategies. Much effort has been invested in identifying steps required to achieve the goals by the target dates and in annual monitoring.

Only a few countries have seized the potential to build on the MDG momentum and the processes for action planning and monitoring to advance gender mainstreaming. The eight major goals all have gender equality dimensions, and one focuses specifically on gender equality and

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 Declaration, strongly reaffirming its commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015. The MDGs have been localized into the Vietnam Development Goals (VDG). In many cases, the VDGs go further than the MDGs and incorporate more targets in relation to gender equality. To transform these targets into reality, the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) was developed and approved by the Prime Minister in May 2002. The CPRGS incorporates gender targets, the VDGs, and draws together existing national strategies (including the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women) and sector plans into a concrete road map for development. The [National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam] (NCFAW) and Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) were invited as consultants in the process of drafting the CPRGS. As the result, gender issues have been considered and integrated into every objective of the CPRGS. Its implementation is currently being supervised by VWU - as a member of the Central Management Board with a gender perspective. The skilful incorporation of gender concerns in Vietnam's CPRGS is considered a model for other poverty reduction strategies in the region."

Vietnam shows that the localization of targets can highlight gender equality objectives that are critical to poverty reduction: for example, for MDG3, Vietnam specified as a target "ensure that the names of both husband and wife appear on land use certificates by 2005." Vietnam's MDG report suggests that making strategic use of the MDG process can promote understanding and action on gender equality at the same time as enriching the approach to the MDGs. The report includes a section on "cross-cutting challenges to gender" including violence, traditional attitudes, access to resources and lack of data, and how they affect all the MDGs. A section on provincial and social disparities is also included under each goal.

Sources: National Report of Vietnam (2004); Vietnam MDG Report 3; UNDP (2005). *En route to Equality*.²⁹

Promoting improvements in statistics

The improvement of statistics clearly remains a challenge. The importance assigned by national governments and the international community to monitoring progress on the MDGs means that in many countries issues of statistical capacity and data quality are on the agenda. It is important that gender equality advocates inside and outside government seize the opportunity to advocate for improvements in the capacity of statistical systems to generate data that adequately reflects the situation of both women and men.

The publication *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics* sets out strategies and actions required to improve this dimension of statistics. It promotes measures to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems to produce reliable and timely basic statistics and strategies to mainstream gender equality perspectives in all aspects of statistics. The major strategies that specifically focus on actions by national governments to mainstream gender equality perspectives are summarised below.³⁰

- ▶ *Specify the development of gender statistics within the legal framework of official statistics.* Specify formal requirements for sex-disaggregation and the incorporation of a gender perspective with national statistical legislation governing the production and dissemination of official statistics.
- ▶ *Support and strengthen gender statistics units.* Establish a unit that can play a catalytic role in initiating and monitoring the process of mainstreaming a gender perspective in statistical systems, facilitate communication between data producers and end users of statistics, and enable better understanding of the need to produce gender statistics, including sex-disaggregated data;
- ▶ *Foster dialogue between statistics offices and interested stakeholders, including women's groups.* Enable advocates to use gender statistics more effectively, and statisticians to gain a better understanding of the data needs of these users;
- ▶ *Train producers of statistics to incorporate a gender perspective into their work.* Provide regular courses in tertiary education institutions or statistics offices for statisticians and field personnel;
- ▶ *Tap existing sources of data and enhance their usefulness for producing gender statistics.* Make more effective use of the administrative data already routinely collected and thus building on data systems already in place.

Mainstreaming a gender perspective in national statistical systems: tackling concepts and methods

Disaggregation by sex is an important step, but improving data quality also requires consideration of concepts and definitions and in the methods used in data collection and reporting. Nepal is one of several countries to have taken up this challenge. The national statistics office undertook a comprehensive approach to incorporating a gender perspective in all aspects of the 2001 census.

"The process in Nepal was part of a larger exercise by the Central Bureau of Statistics to improve the quality of census data. The process was supported by the European Union and involved a United Nations interagency group. Activities included:

- ▶ gender-orientation workshops for senior and mid-level census management;
- ▶ the establishment of four gender-oriented technical committees, including one to review the questionnaire and manuals and one to review the occupation and industry classifications used;
- ▶ mobilization of female field personnel;
- ▶ training for enumerators;
- ▶ a census media campaign promoting the gender perspective to respondents; and
- ▶ generation of both sex-disaggregated data and special tabulations on gender issues.

Gender-specific questions on ownership of housing, land and livestock were added to establish the sex of the owner. The existing occupation and industry classifications were found to be gender biased—with occupations and industries dominated by men classified and specified at more refined levels than those in which women predominated—and were replaced by a new standard classification. Following lobbying by women's groups, the census also implemented the 1993 revision of the System of National Accounts and the International Labour Organization standard of economic activity and work participation to a much greater extent than previous censuses."

Source: United Nations, Statistics Division (2006). *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*³¹

Establishing or strengthening progress monitoring and accountability mechanisms

A number of countries have established monitoring and accountability mechanisms that give visibility to achievements and shortfalls on gender equality commitments and help keep the issue on the political agenda. Approaches include:³²

- ▶ *Preparation of periodic reports, often annual, for cabinet or legislature.* For example, in Japan the Government submits an annual report to the national parliament describing progress, actions taken in the last year and proposal for the coming year; in Denmark there is also an annual report to the legislature, and in the Ukraine by the Ministry for Family, Children and Youth to the Cabinet of Ministers;
- ▶ *Establishment of an institution or committee to monitor progress.* For example, Poland has set up a permanent team of experts, including NGO representatives, to develop indicators to monitor implementation of the national action plan and to prepare a monitoring report.
- ▶ *Building on international reporting processes.* For example, making full use of reporting requirements associated with CEDAW and the MDGs to promote greater understanding and action on gender equality commitments.

Strategic use of the CEDAW reporting process

“Good practices exist in many countries for reporting on actions to eliminate discrimination against women and for following up on CEDAW reports and their recommendations. In the Netherlands the government is required to report to Parliament every four years on implementation of the convention before the state party’s report is submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the concluding comments of the committee are also presented to the Parliament. Uruguay’s Parliament organizes a session to follow up on the committee’s recommendations and calls on members of the government to discuss them. Mexico and Sweden convene seminars or special meetings to discuss the committee’s concluding comments. Many state parties publish their reports, together with the committee’s comments, to give wide publicity to the convention and its implementation.”

Source: Millennium Project (2005). *Taking Action*³³

5. Resources

- ▶ Bell, Emma et. al. (2002). *National Machineries for women in development: experiences, lessons and strategies*. IDS: Bridge Occasional Paper. Discussion of the situation of national machineries, constraints to their effectiveness, the implication of changes in their environment (decentralization, civil service reform, democratisation), possible strategies for effectiveness, and several case studies. www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/NWM.pdf (accessed 29 June 2007).
- ▶ CIDA, Asia Branch (2000). *Accelerating Change: Resources for Gender Mainstreaming*. Manual based on discussions at a technical workshop with participants from national women’s machineries of Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines that focused identifying lessons from their experiences about practical strategies. [www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Policy/\\$file/Accchange-E.pdf](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Policy/$file/Accchange-E.pdf) (accessed 29 June 2007).
- ▶ United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women (2004). Expert Group Meeting on “The Role of national mechanisms in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of

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

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- 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 Mechanisms 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 Mechanisms 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 Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/ (access 29 June 2007).
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- 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
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- 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 Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/documents.html; Dzodzi Tsikata (2001), *National mechanisms for the advancement of women in Africa: are they transforming gender relations?* Third World Network-Africa. www.socialwatch.org/en/informesTematicos/29.html
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