

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fourth session
1 – 12 March 2010

Interactive expert panel on
“The evolving status and role of national mechanisms for gender equality”

Thursday, 11 March 2010, 3:00 – 6:00 p.m.

ISSUES PAPER

I. Background

The Beijing Platform for Action (critical area of concern H, Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women) gave specific attention to national machineries stating that “a national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government”, whose main task is “to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas” (para 201). Over the years, the Commission on the Status of Women has addressed the role of national machineries and other mechanisms for gender equality, and in particular their capacity to advocate for, support, monitor and evaluate the implementation of gender equality legislation, policies, plans and programmes.¹

The Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in close partnership with the five regional commissions of the United Nations, is implementing a project entitled: “Strengthening national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women”, 2009-2013. As part of the first phase of the project, five regional studies and an overall global synthesis report are being prepared including in regard to the diversity of such mechanisms, major areas of focus, key successes and challenges.

II. Critical issues

The period since the Fourth World Conference on Women, and in particular since the ten-year review of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, has been characterized by a growing diversification and multiplication of national mechanisms for gender equality. In addition to the national machinery for the advancement of women within Government (e.g., a Ministry, Department, or Office), national mechanisms for gender equality increasingly comprise bodies and institutions at the level of Parliament, the judiciary, and a range of independent, accountability and advisory bodies. In addition to the national machinery, focal points, gender units or bureaux in sectoral ministries, and inter-ministerial

¹ Such references are, for example, included in the Commission’s Agreed Conclusions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child of 2007; financing for gender equality of 2008; and the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS of 2009.

committees or working groups now exist in many countries. Mechanisms have also been established at local/municipal and other sub-national levels, and independent bodies such as ombudsperson's offices and equality boards are increasingly in place in many countries.

Given this greater diversity, and depending on the particular mandate, the functions and scope of work of national mechanisms for gender equality have also expanded. Many national machineries have responsibility for promoting, supporting and monitoring the incorporation of gender equality perspectives in all policy areas; the development and monitoring of the implementation of gender equality plans, strategies and programmes; the initiation of legislation; and working on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Gender equality commissions or councils, with high-level participants from government and representatives of a broad range of stakeholders, including civil society, academia and the business sector, sometimes serve in an advisory role to Government and monitor progress in the implementation of commitments to gender equality.

Specialized bodies such as anti-discrimination tribunals, equal opportunity commissions, ombudspersons or similar bodies provide women with avenues for redress against discrimination. Specialized Parliamentary committees assess the gender equality impact of proposed legislation and initiate and lobby for legislation to eliminate discrimination against women.²

Non-governmental organizations and women's organizations play a pivotal role in promoting gender equality. Partnerships between national mechanisms, the private sector, and international and regional organizations continue to support efforts to overcome gaps and challenges.

The gender mainstreaming strategy has been reaffirmed and more firmly established as critical for the promotion of gender equality across all sectors and in all areas of public policy. National machineries for gender equality play a critical role in coordination and monitoring of gender mainstreaming, and for building capacity to undertake gender analysis. National mechanisms have developed gender mainstreaming tools, including guidelines, checklists and manuals as well as guidance for conducting gender impact assessments. Gender-responsive budgeting has emerged as an important gender mainstreaming tool to ensure more equitable allocation of resources. Practical tools and guidelines are increasingly available.³

National mechanisms for gender equality require political support and access to key policy and decision-making processes to enhance their effectiveness. Lack of coordination between national mechanisms for gender equality and other parts of government, and limited collaboration with other stakeholders, such as civil society, can hamper their effectiveness. There is a need to build synergies for effective coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders.

² E/CN.6/2010/2

³ E/CN.6/2010/2

Securing adequate resources for national machineries remains a major challenge in many countries, even where political support for gender equality is strong. Strengthening implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy is necessary to ensure that the needs and priorities of women and girls are systematically and effectively taken into account in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, strategies, plans and resource allocations across all policy areas. Although gains have been made in gender-responsive budgeting, national mechanisms continue to lack the capacity to ensure the effective implementation of this important initiative.

III. Format and outcome of the interactive expert panel

The panel will take the form of an interactive dialogue. Three expert panellists will make introductory presentations of 10-12 minutes. Member States, United Nations system entities and non-governmental organizations will be encouraged to share experiences on the evolving status and role of national mechanisms for gender equality, and/or respond to the panellists' presentations. Interventions from the floor will be limited to three minutes. A moderator's summary of the dialogue will be prepared and posted on the website of the Division for the Advancement of Women.

IV. Issues for consideration in the interactive dialogue

The dialogue provides an opportunity to share experiences and discuss strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of national mechanisms for gender equality and the impact of their work, and strengthen capacity for cooperation and collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders. The following issues could be considered:

- How has the diversification of national mechanisms for gender equality contributed to better outcomes for women? What concrete results can be identified from their work?
- What are some of the constraints and challenges of coordination with diverse national mechanisms for gender equality, and what are the lessons learned and good practices for achieving synergies and collaboration?
- What strategies and processes have resulted in improved links between Parliamentary committees for gender equality and other national mechanisms for gender equality? What outcomes have been achieved for the benefit of women and girls?
- What are some of the factors for successfully implementing the gender mainstreaming strategy? How can challenges and resistance be overcome? What gender mainstreaming tools have been most effective?
- How can national mechanisms play a catalytic role in the implementation of effective gender-responsive budgeting? What type of collaboration and

