

**National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women:
An Overview of Critical Issues for Review**

Prepared for the Division for the Advancement of Women

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1. INTRODUCTION

In preparation for the ten year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action undertaken by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2005, the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) organized an Expert Group Meeting in Rome, Italy, in 2004 to discuss the work of national mechanisms established in most of the countries since the First World Conference on Women in 1975.¹

National mechanisms for the advancement of women were defined by the United Nations (UN) as the body “recognized by the government as the institution dealing with the promotion of the status of women”². By the end of the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985), some form of national machinery had been established in 127 Member States. By 2004, the number had increased to 165. The structure, role and function of national machineries have, however, evolved over the decades.³

The Expert Group Meeting in 2004 noted that some countries have established multiple mechanisms to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. The more traditional national machineries established in the 1970’s and 1980’s, such as women’s bureaus, departments, and ministries, were generally located in the executive branch of the government. Over the last decade and half, countries have begun to establish a variety of mechanisms located outside the executive branch of the government, such as parliamentary committees, caucuses or networks; gender equality or women’s commissions; ombudsperson’s offices; and women’s/gender equality institutes.

The Expert Group Meeting highlighted the “lack of up to date and reliable information on national machineries” and noted that there has been “little documented research on the role of the new mechanisms that have been set up in recent years, their achievements as well as their relation to the existing national machineries.”⁴

Although Member States have periodically reported on the progress in establishing and strengthening national machineries⁵, and the United Nations has organized Expert Group Meetings on the subject at both global and regional levels⁶, a

¹ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), 2005 The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, Rome, Italy, 29th November – 2nd December 2004, EGM / National Machinery/ 2004/Report 2005/ 30th January 2004, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw, p.5

² E/CN.6/1988/3, para. 21. The definition is based on the outcomes of the Seminar on “National Machinery for Monitoring and Improving the Status of Women”

³ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, Rome, Italy, 29th November – 2nd December 2004, EGM / National Machinery/ 2004/Report 2005/ 30th January 2004, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw

⁴ Ibid, p.8

⁵ United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, National machinery for monitoring and improving the status of women. Report of the Secretary-General, Vienna, Austria, 1987 Oct 15 (E/CN.6/1988/3); and United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Agreed Conclusions on the Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform For Action 1996-1999. United Nations: New York, 2000.

⁶ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), National Machineries for Gender Equality, Paper of Experts Group Meeting, Santiago, Chile, 31 August – 4 September 1998

more systematic study of the different types of mechanisms in place at the national level, their mandates, political support and resources, and most importantly the ways in which they collaborate and complement each other in advancing gender equality and empowerment of women, has not yet been undertaken. A multi-phase project is therefore planned, in a collaboration between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Regional Commissions, to prepare an undated status report on national mechanisms for gender equality and empowerment of women, for presentation at the commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women organized by the Commission on the Status of Women in 2010. The project will provide the needed information base for the development of capacity-building programmes to increase the effectiveness of national mechanisms

This project will capture the evolution of the role of national mechanisms and identify potentials as well as the challenges faced by national mechanisms. It will highlight the achievements of the new mechanisms, the interrelationships between the different bodies and the implications for the future roles of national machineries.

The main objectives of the project will be to:

- Identify the different types of formal mechanisms established at the national level; the specific roles assigned to them in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of national strategies for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; and in facilitating gender mainstreaming in all national policy areas;
- Identify and analyze the achievements and challenges of the different types of mechanisms and the strategies required for building on achievements, addressing constraints and challenges, and enhancing the roles of different mechanisms in promoting, supporting and monitoring gender equality and empowerment of women in the coming decade;
- Identify the types of relationships between different national mechanisms, including good practices in collaboration and synergies as well as the constraints experienced over the past decade; and
- Identify priorities and strategies for increased collaboration between national mechanisms at national and regional levels, and with civil society.

This report, based solely on existing literature, provides an initial analytical framework and overview as a basis for further development of the project on national mechanisms. It focuses on formal national mechanisms established by governments. It does not cover civil society organizations or private sector organizations that exist in all democratic countries. Civil society organizations working on gender equality include academic institutions doing research, collecting and analyzing data and statistics, and undertaking advocacy work, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) delivering services to women. There are also mechanisms working within the private

UN/DAW, 1998a, Report of the Expert Group Meeting on National Machineries for Gender Equality, organized by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago, Chile, 31 August-4 September (EGM/NM/1998/Rep. 1)

UNDAW, Expert Group Meeting/National Machinery/2004/Expert Papers 1-8, Rome, Italy, 29th November – 2nd December 2004.

sector, for example chambers of business and commerce, which are mandated to address gender-based discrimination.⁷ The report will, however, briefly address the relationships between the national mechanisms and these other bodies.

This report aims to highlight the diversity of national mechanisms and provide an overview of mandates, political support and resources. It will provide a brief analysis of activities, achievements and good practices and identify constraints and challenges, including in relation to coordination and collaboration amongst different mechanisms. The report will also outline some of the key issues that need to be addressed in more detail in regional empirical studies in the future⁸.

The report is based on reviews of available literature at global and regional levels. The appendix provides a bibliography of resources utilized. A major constraint faced in the preparation of the report was the lack of information on national mechanisms in all the regions. In recent years, more information has been generated by the Council of Europe for Europe than in other regions. The report does not aim to provide region- or country-specific information in any of the areas covered. The information base is too limited and uneven to allow this. This will be a particular focus of the regional studies in the proposed project on national machineries.

The report is organized in six sections. Following the introduction, Section 2 provides an analytical framework to classify and compare the diverse national mechanisms. Five indicators are used: structure; mandate; role/function; political support; and resources. This framework will be utilized to establish a common basis for analysis and presentation of information on national mechanisms in a more systematic manner. Section 3 discusses the main achievements of different mechanisms, and highlights some areas of good practices. Section 4 analyses the constraints and challenges for the future, including in relation to coordination and collaboration amongst diverse mechanisms. Section 5 outlines the key issues that need to be addressed in the regional studies.

2. THE DIVERSITY OF NATIONAL MECHANISMS: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

An analytical framework is required to classify and compare the diverse national mechanisms that are in existence today in different countries of the world. Table 1 is an initial attempt to provide such a framework, using five variables to classify and compare national mechanisms: structure; mandate; role/function; political support; and resources. These variables interact with and influence one another. For example, different structures have different mandates, and roles/functions. Resource allocation varies with role/function as well as structure. Similarly, political support is impacted by structure as well as resource allocation. The relationships among the variables will be discussed more in detail below. This framework will be further developed in the proposed project on national mechanisms discussed in the introduction.

⁷ United Nations Economic and Social Council, Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its regional outcomes: The status of Institutional Mechanisms for Gender Equality in the UNECE Region by country-Addendum 2, ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting for the 10- year Review of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, Geneva, 14-15 December 2004.

⁸ Ibid, p.3

2.1. Structure

National mechanisms vary by structural location and organization. (See Table 1) They are generally found at the national level although, increasingly, countries are setting up decentralized mechanisms at the state, municipal and other local levels. At the national level, mechanisms can be located in the executive as well as legislative branches of government. Mechanisms can also be set up as horizontal accountability institutions, and/or as autonomous/consultative bodies.

Mechanisms in the executive branch

Mechanisms within the executive branch can be found in several locations. They can be established as a specific separate ministry or as part of a ministry under a minister, deputy/state minister, or a state secretary with designated responsibility for gender equality. They can also be established as a unit or department in the office of the head of the government, i.e. the prime minister or president. In many countries, they are established as a department/division/commission/service/ working group under a specific ministry or state secretariat. Increasingly countries are also forming inter-ministerial or inter-departmental structures. A related development is the establishment of focal points/working groups in various line ministries, such as education, health, agriculture, and industry. In some cases, these focal points are linked together in a network, usually coordinated by the official national machinery. A brief description of different types of mechanisms in the executive branch of the government follows.⁹

- Stand-alone ministry

When national mechanisms are set up as a separate ministry or part of another ministry under a designated minister, deputy minister, state minister/secretary, it gives the mechanism greater visibility and sends a stronger political message about government commitment to women and gender equality. It enables the mechanism to perform a wide range of roles and functions, including formulation of legislation; development of policies, strategies and action plans; field projects; special initiatives; and training. The mechanism generally receives budgetary resources from the government for staff and activities.

These mechanisms, however, also run the risk of having a mission overload, i.e. taking on too many activities that they cannot deliver on successfully. They may be constrained in effectively promoting gender mainstreaming and carrying out coordination and monitoring roles. The women's ministry may have very little leverage to influence other line ministries. Other line ministries, particularly the more powerful ones, such as finance, defense, home/ interior, planning and ministries dealing with economic affairs, may not pay attention to the efforts of the women's ministry to promote gender mainstreaming through coordination meetings, mainstreaming guidelines and monitoring questionnaires. In some situations, the women's ministries may become heavily bureaucratic in order to "fit" in with other line ministries, and lose touch with civil

⁹ Council of Europe, 2004, Stocktaking Study of the Effective Functioning of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Council of Europe Member States, Strasbourg, 30th November 2004, www.coe.int/equality

society and women's movements. In some countries, women's ministries have been used to mobilize support for the regime in power.¹⁰

- Unit in the office of the head of government:

When national mechanisms are established in the office of the head of the government, i.e. prime minister or president, these mechanisms have the advantage of access to top level decision-making and cabinet submissions from across the government. Their structural location helps them to effectively perform gender mainstreaming, coordination, monitoring, accountability, policy and strategy development work.

These mechanisms, however, also face some disadvantages. As units in larger bodies, they may have limited resources, small staff and no programme delivery budget. With a heavy focus on policy work, bureaucratic/technical skills and expertise may be prioritized at the expense of skills required for political mobilization work with civil society and women's movements.¹¹ The bureaucratic/ technical work requires analytical skills, grasp of macro and micro policy issues and good relations with other bureaucrats inside the government. Political mobilization work, in contrast, requires contacts and good relations with powerful groups outside the government, including in civil society and political parties. National mechanisms have been most successful when they are able to simultaneously carry out technocratic/ bureaucratic and political mobilization work.

- Departments/divisions/commissions/services within a ministry

In a great majority of countries, institutional mechanisms are located in a department or division or commission under a specific ministry generally dealing with social policies such as family, family and children, social welfare, health and family, employment and social security. In a few countries they are located outside social policies, for example in internal affairs or justice. When mechanisms are located within a specific ministry, particularly in a social welfare type of ministry, they have the advantage of accessing the budget of that particular ministry and delivering services to women. There could also be opportunities for outreach work with women in the grassroots and for generating extra- budgetary resources for field projects.

However such structural location within a specific sectoral ministry can constrain other critical aspects of work, such as overall policy development, gender mainstreaming, coordination, monitoring/ accountability, and policy/ strategy/ tools development across all sectors.

- Inter-ministerial/inter-departmental structures

¹⁰ Dzodzi, Tsikata. "National Machineries for the Advancement of Women in Africa: Are they transforming gender relations?", <<http://www.socwatch.organization.uy/en/informestematicos/29.html>> ; and Khafagy, Fatma Aly, 2007, Synthesis of Nine Studies on Critical Assessment of National Women's Machineries in the Mediterranean Region, EUROMED Project on Role of Women in Economic Life, March 2007.

¹¹ Council of Europe, 2004, Stocktaking Study of the Effective Functioning of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Council of Europe Member States, Strasbourg, 30th November 2004, www.coe.int/equality

Many countries have set up inter-ministerial/inter-departmental structures in recent years. These mechanisms are useful for coordination as well as gender mainstreaming work. A related development is the establishment of focal points, working groups, units in different line ministries, not only in sectors where work with gender perspectives is well established, for example, education and health, but also in non-traditional areas, such as finance, planning and foreign affairs.

Mechanisms within the legislative branch

Within the legislative branch, both formal and informal mechanisms have been established. In recent years, many countries have formed committees or commissions or sub-commissions, composed of both male and female parliamentarians, to promote legislation in favor of gender equality and promote and monitor the application of gender equality principles in laws and regulations. In several countries, caucuses, groups and networks of women parliamentarians have been set up in a more informal way.¹² These formal and informal mechanisms carry out advocacy, monitoring and accountability, and are involved in the critical work of mobilizing constituency support for gender equality and women's empowerment. They work effectively in partnership with both civil society groups and mechanisms within the executive branch of the government.

Horizontal accountability mechanisms

A number of countries have established institutions to work as horizontal accountability mechanisms. These are government institutions which can hold other government bodies accountable for implementation of gender equality policies. Many Nordic countries, and more recently several Central and Eastern European countries, have set up the office of Ombudspersons.¹³ The ombudspersons are mandated to deal with discrimination complaints and equality matters including complaints on gender-based discrimination. In some countries, such mechanisms have been established in the specific area of employment. Other examples established in countries include bodies such as a Gender Equality Complaints Committee composed of lawyers appointed by the Supreme Court or an Advocate for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men that hears cases of alleged discrimination and issues written orders on them.¹⁴

Autonomous bodies

In many countries national mechanisms have been established which, although under government supervision, seem to enjoy a certain degree of independence or autonomy. Several countries have set up autonomous institutes that have broad mandates.¹⁵ Some countries have formed councils or national commissions that have a consultative status with the government. Members of such councils/commissions are generally drawn from both government and non-governmental representatives. The autonomous bodies have broad mandates and considerable flexibility. They are well suited for advocacy and political mobilization work. They can effectively perform work related to research, statistics, methodology and tools development and training. However,

¹² Ibid, p.13

¹³ Ibid, p.12

¹⁴ Ibid, p.12

¹⁵ Ibid, p.12

since they are not located in the executive branch of the government, these mechanisms are more constrained in relation to policy/strategy/action plan development and in coordination, monitoring and accountability work. Many countries have also set up “observatories” or monitoring centers to evaluate progress towards gender equality. Others have established research centers, data banks, and information offices, working autonomously but still under government supervision and receiving budget from the government.¹⁶

Decentralized mechanisms at the local level:

A recent trend is the establishment of decentralized institutional mechanisms at the local level, in the offices of state government, municipalities and other local level governments. In many countries, for the first time, equality work is being decentralized and new structures are being created in different sectors at the regional and local levels of governments.¹⁷

2.2. Mandate

Mechanisms are established with different mandates. The legal basis of mandates may also vary. In some cases, the mandates specify the approach and scope of work of the mechanisms; in other cases there is more flexibility.

Legal basis of mandates

Some mechanisms draw their mandates from government decisions, and others from parliamentary decisions and equality laws.¹⁸ Where mandates are derived from laws they tend to have greater political legitimacy and stability. Parliamentary mandates also confer a high degree of stability and legitimacy. Mandates that originate primarily with a government decision have greater flexibility but less stability, as these mandates be altered with changes in government.

Work approach

Initially many national machineries focused on specific policy and implementation work primarily targeting women with an welfare approach. Following the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, national machineries have been mandated to promote, support and monitor the gender mainstreaming strategy. In most instances, national mechanisms adopt a dual track approach - pursuing both gender mainstreaming and specific initiatives and actions in certain areas, such as violence against women, trafficking, and reconciliation of family responsibilities with professional work.¹⁹ There seems to be a tendency to enlarge the mandates of national mechanisms, reflecting the more encompassing view of what the building of gender equality must entail. The objective of gender equality is increasingly perceived as an integral part of the

¹⁶ Ibid, p.13

¹⁷ Council of Europe, 2004, Stocktaking Study of the Effective Functioning of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Council of Europe Member States, Strasbourg, 30th November 2004, www.coe.int/equality, p.13

¹⁸ Ibid, p.14

¹⁹ Ibid, p.16

goal of the protection and promotion of human rights. The mandates of many new mechanisms are clearly located within the framework of human rights.²⁰

Scope of work

The mandates of institutional mechanisms focused on gender equality are often formulated in a general way: elimination of discrimination against women, development and implementation of gender equality policies; integration of gender perspective into policies and plans, and coordination. In some countries, however, mandates give specific details of tasks, such as preparation of National Action Plans; monitoring of Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); preparation of national reports; promotion of gender equality in specific areas such as employment and education; capacity-building: gender-specific research and data collection; development of methodologies and tools; advocacy and awareness raising; and co-operation with civil society.

Although in a large majority of cases, the institutional mechanisms established are solely devoted to dealing with gender equality issues, in a number of cases mechanisms have been established with a broader anti-discrimination mandate, where gender equality is only one element. These mechanisms deal with a range of forms of inequality and discrimination such as those based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability. Concern has been raised that when gender equality is only one element of a broader scope of work of an institutional mechanism, there is a risk that the issue of gender equality may be marginalized in competition for attention and resources.²¹ Since the establishment of such mechanisms is a recent and increasing trend, the implications need to be carefully reviewed.

2.3. Role/ function

The diverse mechanisms established to promote gender equality and empowerment of women perform a wide variety of roles and functions. These include legislative work; policy and strategy development; formulation of national action plans; gender mainstreaming; research; analysis of data and statistics; training, and development of tools; monitoring and accountability; and coordination and collaboration. (See Table 1) Not all mechanisms perform all roles and functions. For example, legislative functions are performed by mechanisms in the executive and legislative branches of government. Monitoring and accountability roles are performed by mechanisms within the horizontal accountability institutions, and sometimes by the mechanisms within the legislative branches of government. Coordination roles are generally assigned to the mandated national machinery in the executive branch. Similarly, work related to the development of policy, strategy and plans and gender mainstreaming fall under the purview of the mechanisms within the executive branch. Research, analysis of data and statistics, training, and tools development are also often carried out by autonomous bodies.

²⁰ Ibid, p.15

²¹ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, Rome, Italy, 29 November – 2 December 2004, p.7

There are wide variations amongst countries in terms of the effectiveness of roles/ functions performed by the respective national mechanisms. There is, however, little empirical data to either assess effectiveness within a specific country or to carry out cross-country comparisons. The elaboration of the role/ functions of the mechanisms that are described below are based primarily on information provided by the Member States to the United Nations.²²

Legislation

In many countries, national mechanisms have promoted gender equality legislation, which mandate all government agencies to pursue policies and measures to achieve gender equality. Legal reforms have encompassed a wide variety of issues such as equal opportunities in the work place, equal wages for equal work, and combating sexual discrimination, sexual harassment and violence against women.²³ In many countries, national machineries have successfully lobbied within governments for ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) or for lifting reservations on CEDAW. In several countries, changes have been made in nationality laws, pension laws, divorce and alimony laws and the family court laws to guarantee women's rights in compatibility with obligations at global or regional levels.²⁴ These legal reforms have enabled countries to establish benchmarks to monitor progress towards gender equality and to investigate violations of specific rights. Mechanisms in the executive and legislative branches have generally taken the lead in legislation, while mechanisms established as autonomous bodies have played important roles in research and advocacy for legislation.

Policy work

In the majority of countries, national mechanisms have been involved in developing and updating national policies on women and gender equality. Although these policies are less binding than laws, they nevertheless establish the goals of the state and set standards to monitor progress towards gender equality, and to hold the government and other sectors accountable. Such national policies are based on the global policy and legal frameworks – the Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In many countries, policies include specific and time-bound targets to achieve gender equality in education, employment, decision-making and political participation. In some countries, the gender equality policy is reaffirmed annually by the government to underscore continued political will. In others, it is reaffirmed periodically to demonstrate continued commitment to gender equality. Policy work involves not only elaboration of general gender equality policies; it also encompasses gender mainstreaming in different sectoral policies. Many mechanisms

²² Jahan, Rounaq, 2004, Background Paper on The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and The Empowerment of Women: Achievements, Gaps and Challenges for the Future, Prepared on behalf of the Division for the Advancement of Women for the Expert Group Meeting on national machineries, held in Rome, Italy, 2004, p.6

²³ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, Rome, Italy, 29 November – 2 December 2004.

²⁴ Khafagy, Fatma Aly, 2007, Synthesis of Nine Studies on Critical Assessment of National Women's Machineries in the Mediterranean Region, EUROMED Project on Role of Women in Economic Life, March 2007.

located in the executive branch of government have been involved in policy work in different sector areas. This work is often supported by research carried out by autonomous institutions.

Strategy development

Policy work is often followed by development of strategies and action plans to implement the policy objectives. In recent years, there has been a decentralization of structures to bring the gender dimension into all sectors, both horizontally, with the creation of inter-ministerial and inter-departmental bodies, and vertically, with the creation of regional and local structures. There can therefore be multiple strategies developed by the various structures. While this can significantly increase the attention to gender equality and empowerment of women, the multiplicity of strategies and structures can also create difficulties of effective representation, co-ordination and communication. Overall coordination is required to harmonize strategies with the national policy objectives.²⁵

Formulation of action plans

Following the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, many national machineries began to develop specific national action plans for women. These plans serve as instruments to raise public awareness about the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment. The elaboration of these plans has often been preceded by formulation of policy papers or preparation of situation analyses. The action plans generally establish broad objectives on gender equality, women's human rights and women's empowerment, as well as specific goals in different sectors. In a small number of countries, the plans include specific time-bound targets. Most plans endorse a dual-track approach, including both gender mainstreaming and specific actions which are considered to be critical for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. The areas of specific actions vary from country to country, but most include interventions to improve women's situation in education, health, employment, labor markets, politics and decision-making. In addition, the national action plans identify the lines of actions needed, such as legal reforms, awareness raising, research, and training. Many action plans include reporting obligations, such as reporting by various line ministries or agencies to the national machinery, and reporting by the government to parliament. Some action plans also refer to regular evaluation or monitoring of outcomes. In a significant number of cases, the national action plans have been formulated by the national machinery, in collaboration with different state structures and institutions and NGOs. In others, organizations of civil society have been invited to comment on draft plans before their approval and their comments have been considered in the final texts. Cooperation with NGOs and their involvement in the implementation of certain actions and programmes is also explicitly considered in some national action plans.²⁶

²⁵ Council of Europe, 2004, Stocktaking Study of the Effective Functioning of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Council of Europe Member States, Strasbourg, 30th November 2004, www.coe.int/equality, p.30.

²⁶ Council of Europe, 2004, Stocktaking Study of the Effective Functioning of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Council of Europe Member States, Strasbourg, 30th November 2004, www.coe.int/equality, p.19.

Gender mainstreaming

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, United Nations intergovernmental processes and their outcomes have endorsed the promotion, support and monitoring of gender mainstreaming as a key role of the national machineries.²⁷ In many countries, national machineries have played an important catalytic role by sensitizing different sectoral ministries and agencies to address gender equality concerns in their respective policies and programmes. Gender focal points in sectoral bodies - in some cases within the context of networks of such focal points - have played a key function in this mainstreaming effort. In the majority of countries, the gender mainstreaming strategy has been used to develop policies, strategies, plans and programmes. Gender-responsive budgeting has also been introduced in many countries as part of mainstreaming efforts.²⁸

Research/statistics

In many Member States, national machineries have engaged in efforts to improve data collection, develop indicators and support gender equality research in collaboration with the central statistical offices, and research and science institutions. Data has been collected and published on a wide range of issues. The databases in some countries are disseminated electronically using new ICTs. Many countries have developed and improved gender statistics and indicators, which are key elements in the government's monitoring and evaluation system. Research on women and gender equality issues has increased and in many countries there has been growing support for women's studies departments/institutions. An annual publication of statistical information on women and men is now available in many countries.²⁹

Capacity-building: Tools and training

In many countries, national machineries have taken steps to build capacity for work on gender equality issues. Capacity-building efforts include development of methodologies and tools as well as training programmes. In collaboration with autonomous institutions, national machineries have developed specific tools for different processes, such as gender analysis, gender mainstreaming, gender audits, gender-impact assessment, and gender-responsive budgeting. They have trained the staff of national machineries as well as gender equality focal points of various ministries and agencies. Capacity-building in several countries encompasses sensitivity briefings and training of senior managers in different ministries and agencies and training in specific technical methods and tools.³⁰

²⁷ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, Rome, Italy, 29 November – 2 December 2004, p. 9

²⁸ Budlender, Debbie, 2002, A global assessment of gender responsive budget initiatives, in Budlender Debbie and Hewitt, Guy (eds), *Gender Budgets make more cents*; London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

²⁹ Jahan, Rounaq, 2004, op.cit. p.11

³⁰ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), 2004, The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, Rome, Italy, 29 November – 2 December 2004, p.9

Monitoring and accountability

In the majority of countries, mechanisms have been developed to monitor progress of the implementation of the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as their national policies, programmes, and plans. The mechanisms include special units or committees within the executive branch of government to monitor implementation of measures undertaken by different ministries and agencies. In many cases, the national machineries provide the outcomes of monitoring processes and recommendations to specific ministries for follow-up action. In other instances, national machineries present annual “white papers” or provide responses on gender equality to parliament, outlining progress made in achieving gender equality and empowerment of women. This information is sometimes made accessible to citizens through websites. In some countries, the national machineries undertake assessments of ministries/agencies/cities/provinces to monitor progress and submit reports to the chief executives. In other countries, management tools such as Performance Management Contracts of senior public officials, are utilized to monitor progress and hold governments accountable.³¹

Horizontal accountability institutions, such as the offices of ombudspersons or equality complaints committees, are effective instruments for ensuring accountability in specific cases of discrimination.³²

In many countries, civil society plays an important role in monitoring progress and demanding accountability from the government and the relationships between civil society and national mechanisms in this respect are important. In some countries, the government has established monitoring bodies with membership from civil society and non-government organizations. This facilitates the incorporation of citizens’ voices in government structures.³³

National machineries are also actively involved in the preparation of reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as well as monitoring reports to the Commission on the Status of Women or the regional intergovernmental bodies or other bodies (such as, for example, SADC and the Commonwealth).

Coordination and collaboration

A key role/function of national machineries in some contexts is to coordinate the activities of the diverse mechanisms and foster collaboration amongst them so that effective synergies can be created. This role is becoming increasingly challenging as multiple mechanisms have been established and the number of both vertical and horizontal inter-departmental and inter-ministerial structures is growing. Since the relationships between the various mechanisms are often not well defined, the

³¹ Jahan, Rounaq 2004, op.cit. p.10

³² Council of Europe, 2004, Stocktaking Study of the Effective Functioning of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Council of Europe Member States, Strasbourg, 30th November 2004, www.coe.int/equality, p.12.

³³ Ibid, p.10

coordination and collaboration amongst them work very well in some countries and less well in others.

Following the Fourth World Conference on Women, the number of NGOs has increased in many countries and collaboration of national mechanisms with non-governmental organizations and civil society has increased. In several countries, committees or commissions have been established with joint government-civil society membership, tasked with a wide number of functions. In many cases, governments have provided financial assistance to NGOs to undertake projects. Some Member States have undertaken a systematic process of government-civil society dialogue.³⁴ Partnerships between government and a wide variety of social partners, including trade unions and professional organizations, have also been established in many countries.

2.4. Political support

Strong political support is key to successful functioning of national mechanisms. However the strength of political support varies between countries. It can also vary with regime change and over time within a country. Political support can be drawn from three major sources: the chief executive, specific constituencies and the mass base of support.

Support from the chief executive level

In many countries, the political support of the national mechanisms is based on the commitment of the chief executive. The support of the chief executive is critical, particularly when national mechanisms are new or when they do not enjoy wide constituency support. However, when the mechanisms are more institutionalized and can depend on specific or wide constituency support, they are less dependent on the political will of the chief executive. The mechanisms are then better able to withstand the vagaries of regime change. However, no matter how institutionalized the mechanisms are, it is helpful to have strong political support from the chief executive.

The structural location and functions of the mechanisms can often influence their support from the chief executive. Mechanisms that are located in the office of the chief executive generally have greater access to critical decision-making processes. Similarly, mechanisms that are involved in policy/strategy development and gender mainstreaming tend to have more interaction with the executive branch of government, including the office of the chief executive. Support of the chief executive is important in promoting the gender mainstreaming and policy/strategy work of the national mechanisms and securing the support and cooperation of other ministries.

Support from specific constituencies

In many countries, national mechanisms enjoy the support of specific constituencies. Generally, women's organizations are the major supporters of the national mechanisms. Specific mechanisms may draw the support of specific groups. For

³⁴ Jahan, Rounaq, 2004, Background Paper on The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and The Empowerment of Women: Achievements, Gaps and Challenges for the Future, Prepared on behalf of the Division for the Advancement of Women for the Expert Group Meeting on national machineries, held in Rome, Italy, 2004, p.13

example, mechanisms in the legislative branch tend to get the support of women parliamentarians; and national commissions tend to have the support of women's movements. Specific constituency support bolsters the strength of the mechanisms – depending on the strength of the constituency. Unfortunately, in many countries women's movements are not politically strong. Their support may also be elite-based and they may not be able to mobilize enough mass support to counter socially conservative forces opposed to gender equality.

Mass base of stable support

In some countries, such as the Nordic countries, a wide range of constituencies support gender equality and women's empowerment. In these situations, national mechanisms enjoy a mass base of stable political support and can withstand changes in government and function in a more institutionalized manner with long term plans and programmes. A mass base of stable support also strengthens the voice of the national mechanisms vis-à-vis the chief executive and their capacity to respond to opposition from specific constituencies.

2.5. Resources

There are wide differences in the resource endowments of national mechanisms in different countries in terms of staff, budget, leadership, and expertise. There can also be significant variations in access to resources among mechanisms within a country.

Staff

National mechanisms generally have a limited number of regular budget staff. They often depend on short term consultants and other collaborators outside the mechanism for delivery of a large number of routine activities. Many of the consultants and outside collaborators are supported from extra-budgetary sources, in many developing countries from donor funds. Staffing constraints inhibit the development of long-term planning and programming capacities as well as continuity of approach.

Budget

In many countries, national mechanisms have limited regular budget allocation from government. In a majority of developing countries, the mechanisms are heavily dependent on funds from international bilateral and multilateral agencies. In a number of developed countries, where national mechanisms are well institutionalized, public-private partnerships or private funds are a source of budgetary support.³⁵ Through the exercise of gender-responsive budgeting in many countries, attempts have been made to access resources through the budgets of different sectoral ministries.

Leadership

³⁵ Economic and Social Council, Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its regional outcomes: The status of Institutional Mechanisms for Gender Equality in the UNECE Region by country-Addendum 2, ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting for the 10- year Review of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, Geneva, 14-15 December 2004.

The quality of leadership on gender equality in national mechanisms, as well as among national leaders, is another key resource. The performance of different mechanisms can vary depending on the quality of leadership within mechanisms. The vision and commitment of overall national leadership - i.e, presidents, prime ministers, ministers - is equally important for the success of national mechanisms. The support of national leadership can strengthen and sustain national mechanisms when they are opposed or undermined by conservative political and social forces.

Expertise

National mechanisms require access to expertise in a wide range of areas in order to pursue their multi-faceted tasks, including gender mainstreaming. Expertise is particularly essential when mechanisms are involved in technical issues. There are great variations in access to a wide range of expertise in national mechanisms, both within and between countries. The more effective mechanisms generally have access to significant staff expertise.

Table 1: Diversity of national mechanisms: An analytical framework

Structures	Mandate	Role/Function	Political Support	Resources
<u>I. National Level</u>				
<p><u>Executive Branch</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stand alone ministry • Unit in the office of the head of government • Division/department in a ministry • Interministerial/ interdepartmental structures • Focal points/working groups in line ministries <p><u>Legislative Branch</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committees/commissions • Caucuses/networks <p><u>Horizontal Accountability Institutions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ombudspersons offices • Equality Authority/Equality tribunal/ Equality Boards • Gender Equality Complaints Committee/ Advocacy or Equal Opportunities <p><u>Autonomous Bodies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutes • Councils/commissions • Observatories/monitoring centres 	<p><u>Legal basis of mandates</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government decision • Parliamentary decision • Equality Law <p><u>Approach of work</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Mainstreaming • Specific policy/ implementation work • Dual approach • Human Rights approach • <p><u>Scope of Work</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender as a part of other equality/ discrimination mandate • Gender as sole mandate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Broad ○ Specific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law making • Policy work • Strategy Development • Formulation of Action Plan • Gender Mainstreaming • Research/Data/Statistics • Capacity Building: Tools/Training • Monitoring/ Accountability • Coordination and Collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from Chief Executive • Support from specific constituencies • Mass base of stable support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff • Budget • Leadership • Expertise
<u>II. Decentralized Levels</u>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional equality/ gender structures • Municipality/ local equality structures 				

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND GOOD PRACTICES

3.1. Achievements

The major achievements of the national mechanisms are presented in Table 2. The most important achievements are legal reforms, policies and official regulations in a wide variety of sectors which have attempted to remove discrimination against women and ensure their equal rights. Another significant achievement is the development of capacity of actors both within and outside government to work on gender equality issues. Mechanisms have raised public awareness about the negative consequences of gender discrimination and the importance of promoting gender equality and have worked to change institutional norms/values and behavior. It is difficult to effectively assess the input of national mechanisms as other actors and factors also play a role in change processes, and access to reliable and comparable statistics is limited. Some of the main achievements of national mechanisms are briefly described below.

Legal reforms

Many countries have enacted equality laws that guarantee women's equal rights, particularly in employment. Existing laws have been reformed in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to guarantee women's rights in marriage, divorce and citizenship. In an increasing number of countries, laws have been enacted criminalizing violence against women, including domestic violence, which had for centuries remained outside the realm of legal redress. In many countries, anti-trafficking laws have been passed to combat trafficking of women and children. Land reform measures have been introduced in many countries that have given property rights to women. Employment reforms have included provisioning for equal pay for equal work, removing discrimination against employing women in various fields which had traditionally been regarded as a male preserve, and measures against sexual harassment. Labor reforms have included maternity and paternity leave as well as parental leave and other benefits. In many countries, there have been wide ranging political reforms to strengthen women's voice in decision-making. Special quotas ranging from 5-10 per cent to 30-40 per cent has been reserved in parliament, local councils, political parties and other political organizations to ensure women's presence in these bodies.

Regulations

In addition to legal reforms, many countries have adopted a wide variety of regulations to combat discrimination against women and promote gender equality. Regulations include measures to address discrimination in recruitment, wages and work conditions. They also include affirmative action measures to improve women's participation in education, employment, decision-making positions and political leadership. Many countries have also adopted wide ranging regulations to control sexual harassment in the work place.

Capacity development

National mechanisms have contributed significantly to improving capacity of government and non-governmental organizations to understand gender equality issues and to design specific policies and programmes to promote gender equality. Capacity has been developed through research, analysis of data and statistics, training and design of specific methodologies and tools, such as gender analysis, gender audits, gender mainstreaming, gender-impact assessments, gender-responsive budgeting and gender training. Mechanisms which have been established as autonomous bodies - such as institutes, commissions, units in statistics offices, and research and training centers - are better equipped to undertake research, analyze data and statistics, and develop tools. One of the most effective ways of building capacity has been collaboration between mechanisms within and outside the government.

Awareness-raising

Raising public awareness about gender equality and women's empowerment has been another significant achievement. National mechanisms have often undertaken advocacy campaigns on a variety of issues, using the mass media and consultation with civil society and community-based groups. Mechanisms have also used other means, such as websites, to provide information and to engage in dialogues with citizens.

Changing institutions

Another significant achievement is the gradual change in institutional norms/values and behavior (structures and procedures) in various state bodies. Indicators of these changes include: positive changes in the commitment of leadership, increased resources allocated to gender equality issues, and greater institutional accountability for gender equality.

In recent years, there has been an increase in gender sensitivity in heads of various public institutions. In many cases, gender equality issues are no longer regarded as the sole responsibility of the national machineries. Other ministries and agencies have also initiated actions on gender equality and women's empowerment. They have allocated resources from their own budgets to work on gender equality issues. In a small number of countries, indicators have been established to systematically monitor progress towards gender equality and to hold public officials accountable.

3.2. Good practices³⁶

The Expert Group Meeting in Rome (2004) identified a number of good practices of national mechanisms in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of national strategies for gender equality and empowerment of women, and in facilitating gender of mainstreaming in all national policy areas. The good practices elaborated by the Expert Group Meeting included amongst others:

³⁶ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, Rome, Italy, 29 November – 2 December 2004.

- A clear vision and intellectual leadership which harnesses the knowledge of many relevant partners in the society;
- The development of a strategic plan of action to support policy development and implementation;
- The utilization of research and data collection, in formulation and review of legislation, policies, programmes and plans;
- The establishment of alliances with strategic actors within government (head of governments, line ministries and local governments) parliaments, professional organizations, academic institutions, civil society, community-based organizations and the media to create synergies to enhance outcomes;
- The implementation of a comprehensive approach or “package of actions”—such as legislation, gender mainstreaming action at policy and programme levels, and pilot projects. A package of actions, rather than a single action strengthens the impact. Comprehensive approaches have been developed by national mechanisms in areas such as violence against women, trafficking and increasing the participation of women in politics;
- Capacity development through training of government officials and other relevant actors to support gender-sensitive policy formulation and implementation. For example, training of government officials, police, health personnel, judiciary and frontline workers on violence against women or in human trafficking can contribute towards enhancing capacity across the board. Such capacity-building needs to cover all relevant sectors and be institutionalized rather than ad hoc;
- Allocation of adequate personnel and budgetary resources to government bodies and other partners to implement various activities;
- Innovative special incentives (such as awards to gender-sensitive judges or earmarked seed funds to sectoral ministries) to encourage further actions;
- Establishment of targets, development of appropriate monitoring tools and regular tracking of progress;
- Regular meeting with partners inside and outside government, to assess progress, identify gaps and devise collaborative strategies to address obstacles; and
- Mobilization of political will through public awareness programmes and broad dissemination of information.

Table 2: Achievements of national mechanisms in some areas

<p>1. <u>Legal Reforms</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equality laws• Reforms of personal laws relating to marriage, divorce, citizenship• Laws related to violence against women• Anti-trafficking laws• Land reforms• Property rights• Employment reforms• Labor reforms• Political reforms
<p>2. <u>Regulations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equality/anti-discrimination• Affirmative Action• Sexual harassment
<p>3. <u>Capacity Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data and statistics• Research and analysis• Methods and tools• Training
<p>4. <u>Public Awareness</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocacy and campaign• Media outreach• Dialogue and consultation with citizen groups
<p>5. <u>Changing Institutional Behavior</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership commitment• Resource allocation• Accountability

4. CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

Despite significant achievements, national mechanisms continue to face persistent constraints and major challenges. Six major constraints can be identified (See Table 3), including:

- Marginalization;
- Resource limitations;
- Weak capacity;
- Inadequate monitoring and accountability;
- Poor coordination and collaboration; and
- Weak political will.

Removing these constraints is the major challenge facing national mechanisms in the future.

4.1. Marginalization

Many national mechanisms are structurally located in marginal positions with little access to key policy and decision-making processes. In addition, they often face constant structural shifts. For example, in a ten-year period (1988-1998), one national machinery was shifted four times. In another country, it was shifted six times over a period of two decades.³⁷

Mechanisms may be marginalized because of unclear and weak mandates and vulnerable locations. In many cases, they have to struggle for visibility amongst competing mandates within ministries and among different ministries. The challenge for the national mechanisms is to ensure high visibility of their work and demonstrate results so that they can compete effectively with other agencies and mandates particularly in the context of the restructuring of state mechanisms and scarce budgetary resources.

In several countries, gender equality is only part of the mandate of organizations which have a broader overall mandate on equality and anti-discrimination, including discrimination based on other factors such as age, race and disability. In these situations, gender equality mandates run the risk of losing priority attention of the organization.³⁸

4.2. Resources

Member States frequently cite resource limitations – lack of staff and budget – as a major constraint to the effectiveness of national mechanisms. National mechanisms have faced rising expectations from their constituencies, such as women's groups. Staff resources – in terms of both numbers and expertise - has not increased to meet this growing demand. In many countries, national mechanisms have faced cuts in staff and budget while their functions have increased. Similarly, for gender focal points in line ministries gender equality work remains an add-on responsibility, with no additional

³⁷ Jahan, Rounaq, 2004, op.cit. p.15

³⁸ Council of Europe, 2004, Stocktaking Study of the Effective Functioning of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Council of Europe Member States, Strasbourg, 30th November 2004, www.coe.int/equality

resources to ensure they can effectively undertake these new responsibilities as well as their other work.

Budget limitations have constrained the performance of national mechanisms. In developing countries, mechanisms have often had to depend on external donor funding, which creates instability and undermines continuity. In some cases, reliance on donor funds has led to mechanisms prioritizing donor projects rather than national objectives.³⁹

Weak and sometimes inappropriate leadership has been another constraint. In many countries, there has been frequent change in leadership positions. In several countries leadership of national mechanisms has been in the hands of wives of heads of state or other relatives of heads of government. In some situations, national leadership has used mechanisms to mobilize support for the regime in power rather than to mobilize wide constituency support for gender equality and women's empowerment.

The challenge for national mechanisms in the future is to both push for increased human and financial resources and to ensure effective leadership which can produce results, even within the context of less than optimum resources. A significant increase in human and financial resources is not a realistic expectation for most mechanisms in the near future. Mechanisms will have to enhance the capacity and expertise of their limited staff and identify strategic actions that can be undertaken within the limitations of existing constraints.

4.3. Capacity

Although the capacity to undertake gender analysis and gender-responsive planning, and to formulate gender-sensitive policies and programmes, have improved significantly in the last few decades, in many countries weaknesses in these areas constrain the work of national mechanisms. There is significant variation in the capacity of national mechanisms. In some countries, gender analysis of sectoral policies and gender training of public officials has been initiated as well as collaboration with National Statistical Offices on sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics. Gender analysis of many macro-economic, social and political issues, such as globalization, trade liberalization, migration and war and security, remains, however, inadequate. In other countries, where basic data and statistics is lacking and capacity to undertake gender analysis is weak, the challenges are manifold. Meeting these challenges requires not only a focus on developing internal capacities within national mechanisms but also considerable focus on developing capacities for generating gender disaggregated statistics in the National Statistical Offices and for gender analysis and gender audits in line ministries, as well as the capacity in research institutions to undertake gender-sensitive research and analysis of emerging issues.

³⁹ Jahan, Rounaq on behalf of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), 2004, Background Paper on The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and The Empowerment of Women: Achievements, Gaps and Challenges for the Future, EGM/National Machinery/2004/BP.1, 31 January 2005, p.17

4.4. Monitoring and accountability

Monitoring progress on gender equality and devising accountability measures have proven to be major challenges for national mechanisms. In most countries, national mechanisms are required to monitor inputs and prepare reports on activities, but there are no satisfactory processes and indicators for measuring impacts and outcomes. There is very little knowledge about how specific inputs contribute to specific outputs and no systematic monitoring of gender mainstreaming efforts across all agencies. The definition of outcome indicators, the tracking of progress data against these indicators, and the establishment of causal links between policies/programmes and results, remain problematic.⁴⁰

Ensuring accountability where there are multiple actors responsible for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment remains a key challenge. Some efforts have been made to make public sector officials accountable. In some countries, governments demonstrate accountability through reports to parliaments and publications, some of which are made available to the general public through websites. In countries, where these have been established, ombudspersons serve as accountability mechanisms, addressing specific cases of discrimination. Accountability systems for scrutinizing the gender equality activities of private sector actors, transnational actors, and civil society, are much less in evidence.⁴¹

4.5. Collaboration and coordination

In most countries, there has been an increase of inter-departmental and inter-ministerial structures, and in the number of women/gender equality units/offices and focal points – both vertically at the provincial and local levels and horizontally in different ministries and agencies. While they provide increased opportunities for mainstreaming gender equality issues, these multiple offices also involve challenges for ensuring coordination and collaboration. Coordination of all mechanisms within the executive branch of government is difficult for the national machinery. Coordination with mechanisms outside the executive branch, with horizontal accountability mechanisms, parliamentary committees/caucuses, and statutory autonomous bodies, is even more problematic. The relationship between these various mechanisms is not well defined. In some countries they work collaboratively and support each other while in others they work in isolation without effective synergies.

The challenge for the future is to develop effective partnerships between all national mechanisms so that each can work with autonomy within its own mandate, while supporting and complementing the work of others. Collaboration between mechanisms within the government and in civil society vary across countries. In some countries, official mechanisms have successfully built alliances with civil society and women's movements, creating a successful strategy of inside-outside advocacy to advance the agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment. In other countries, official

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.20

⁴¹ UNDAW, The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, Rome, Italy, 29th November – 2nd December 2004, EGM / National Machinery/ 2004/Report 2005/ 30th January 2004, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw, p.11

mechanisms have developed adversarial relationships with civil society organizations. In these cases, civil society organizations have complained about the tendency of national machineries to control NGO actors and national machineries have been reluctant to give civil society access to governmental policy process. In some developing countries, national mechanisms are in competition with civil society for scarce donor resources. This competition and lack of collaboration has had detrimental effect on the work of both the national machinery and civil society.⁴²

4.6. Political will

Lack of political will is often cited as a major constraint for the work of the national mechanisms. Three measures of political will are:

- Support of the top national leadership;
- Support of the major power groups, and
- Mass base of popular support

Lack of political will of top national leadership is manifested in different ways. In some cases, while top leadership has been officially committed to gender equality issues there has been a wide gap in the implementation of these commitments. In other cases, support from top leadership has been inconsistent. In some countries where national mechanisms have enjoyed the strong support of top leadership this support has been lost with the change of government. In some countries, women's movements enjoy the support of major power groups, such as the bureaucracy, professional organizations, trade unions and the private sector.

The mass base of support for national mechanisms is even more tenuous. In countries where women's movements are relatively weak and marginalized, national mechanisms have only weak constituency support and are in a vulnerable position. In many countries, the women's movements face backlash through the opposition of socially conservative forces.

Women as well as men parliamentarians, and political and civil society leaders, can play an important role in mobilizing and sustaining political will for gender equality and women's empowerment. It is critically important to recognize that the challenge of sustaining political will is recognized as a shared responsibility of men and women.

⁴² Ibid, p.11

Table 3: Constraints and challenges

1. <u>Marginalization</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structural location• Weak/competing mandates
2. <u>Resources</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff• Budget• Leadership
3. <u>Capacity Building</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data and statistics• Research and analysis• Methods and tools• Training
4. <u>Monitoring and Accountability</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indicators to monitor progress• Accountability of public sector• Accountability of market• Accountability of transnational forces
5. <u>Coordination and Collaboration</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordination• Collaboration
6. <u>Political Will</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support of top leadership• Support of power groups• Mass base of support

5. ISSUES FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

Until now, review and assessment of national mechanisms have generally been based on responses of Member states to the UN intergovernmental processes. These responses have reported on structures, mandates, resources and activities but have not attempted a critical analysis of achievement of goals. There are very few independent studies which have collected empirical data on the actual working of the various mechanisms. The existing information on national mechanisms also suffers from another limitation - there is very little analysis of the larger national and institutional context in which these mechanisms operate.

There is a great deal of variation in the performance of national mechanisms in different countries. These variations can be partially attributed to the differences in the levels of socio-economic-political development between countries. There is a need to undertake more systematic comparative analysis of the performance of different countries, using a set of agreed-upon principles and criteria.

To address weaknesses in the sources of information, empirical data must be gathered by the regional studies of the proposed project on national mechanisms through a specially designed questionnaire circulated amongst the Member States.

The regional studies need to collect empirical data on the actual working of the different mechanisms and analyze their performance, achievements and challenges, keeping in mind the national contexts of their operation, and provide an overview of lessons learned as well as good practice examples. The following issues (also outlined in Table 4) would need to be covered by the regional studies.

5.1. Mapping of mechanisms

The regional studies should undertake a systematic mapping of all the national mechanisms, in terms of structure, mandate, role/function, resources, and political support. The framework presented in this report can be adapted to provide a common basis for the mapping exercise in the regional studies.

5.2. Inter-relationship among the mechanisms

The regional studies need to investigate the relationships between the various mechanisms. In some countries, the relationships are formalized in written documents; but in most cases the relationships are not clearly defined. In some countries, there is good coordination and collaboration whereas in others there is little. The regional studies need to identify the factors which lead to good coordination and collaboration, for example whether formal or informal processes are more effective. In many countries, national steering committees have been established for purposes of coordination but they often do not have regular meetings. The studies would need to explore the complementarities of different mechanisms and collect information on whether they work in a collaborative and supportive manner, or operate in complete isolation, or compete with each other.

5.3. Gender mainstreaming role

Although many countries have reported on adopting the gender mainstreaming strategy, very little information is available on the processes and instruments they have used to promote, support and monitor implementation of gender mainstreaming. The studies need to investigate for example, the use of various tools such as gender analysis, gender planning, gender audits, gender impact assessments and gender-responsive budgeting; and assess their effectiveness in mainstreaming gender issue. The studies should also look at the use of other major policy instruments, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) national reports, to promote gender equality.

The analysis of these various instruments should include analysis of their impacts and outcomes. This would include, for example, the impact of gender-responsive budgeting exercises on budgetary allocations for gender equality issues, and in turn, the impact of increased resources in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

5.4. Monitoring and accountability

As noted earlier, monitoring methodologies and tools and accountability measures have been relatively weak. The regional studies need to collect information on the existing monitoring processes and mechanisms and assess their effectiveness. They should investigate how progress is defined in various countries, and which mechanisms are best suited to monitoring progress in these contexts. Similarly, the effectiveness and limitations of existing accountability measures should be analyzed. The potential of different mechanisms to monitor progress and ensure accountability at national level should also be investigated.

5.5. Capacity

The regional studies need to develop a framework to assess the capacity of various mechanisms which includes the issues of resources, expertise, and the quality of leadership. Most countries can generally provide information on staff and budgetary resources, but there is no clear assessment of the expertise required to effectively undertake gender equality work, including gender mainstreaming. There is also very little information on the role of leadership, even though it is a key component of the overall capacity of national mechanisms. The studies need to assess the quality of leadership—vision and strategic action—and identify good practice examples of leadership.

5.6. Achievements

Many reports on national mechanisms misleadingly identify activities as achievements. Activities and efforts do not necessarily result in any positive impact. The regional studies need to analyze the impact of the activities of different mechanisms and related and compare them to the impact of other actors. The development of a law or a policy improving the situation of women may be influenced by other actors, such as women's movements, legal reform commission, a sectoral ministry, or the chief executive, rather than being solely the result of actions of national mechanisms.

The regional studies need to identify strategic actions which may deliver positive results in the short- or long term and compare impact of strategic actions with that of actions with immediate results. The studies should also compile good practice examples.

5.7. Challenges

The regional studies need to analyze three main categories of challenges:

- Promoting gender analysis of new and emerging issues;
- Addressing opposition to gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Enhancing political will to sustain efforts for gender equality and women's empowerment.

In a fast changing world, national mechanisms find it difficult to undertake gender analysis of all new emerging issues such as globalization; trade liberalization; climate change; food and energy crisis; security and terrorism. The success of their work depends on their capacity to undertake gender analysis of emerging issues and suggest specific gender-sensitive actions. The studies need to focus on finding way to effectively increase the capacity of national mechanisms to analyze macro-level issues.

Gender equality efforts are facing a backlash from socially conservative forces in many countries. The regional studies need to identify the various sources and causes of this opposition and develop effective strategies to respond to this challenge.

Finally, the studies need to investigate ways to mobilize and sustain political will for gender equality work at national level, including through strengthening the mass base of constituency support. Strategies need to be identified to assist national mechanisms to broaden their constituency base of support.

Table 4: Issues for Further Investigation

1	<p><u>Mapping of National Mechanisms</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure • Mandate • Role/ Function • Resources • Political support
2	<p><u>Relationship between Mechanisms</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Formal structures ○ Informal structures • Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complementarity ○ Factors contributing to collaboration/competition
3	<p><u>Gender Mainstreaming Role</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes and instruments • Results
4	<p><u>Monitoring and Accountability</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators of progress • Monitoring mechanisms: processes and tools • Accountability measures: mechanisms and processes
5	<p><u>Capacity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource: human and financial • Expertise- within and outside • Leadership: Vision and strategic action
6	<p><u>Achievements</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of activities vs. Activities undertaken • Strategic action vs. actions with immediate results. • Good practice examples.
7	<p><u>Challenges</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender analysis of emerging issues • Addressing Opposition • Sustaining Political will

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