



**STRENGTHENING NATIONAL MECHANISMS
FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND
THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

A GLOBAL SYNTHESIS STUDY

Rounaq Jahan, Ph.D
2010

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Acronyms

APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
COMMCA	Council of Women Ministers for Central America
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
EU	European Union
FWCW	Fourth World Conference on Women
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PFA	Platform for Action
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDGEA	Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

A major development since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 has been the establishment of new mechanisms, in addition to national machineries, to promote achievement of the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women. There has been little documented research on the roles, relationships, achievements and challenges of these multiple and diversified mechanisms. Therefore, in preparation of the fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, in close collaboration with the five regional commissions of the United Nations, decided to undertake a comprehensive study of the national mechanisms based on the review of experiences in all five regions of the United Nations: Economic Commission for Africa, Economic Commission for Europe, Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. This global synthesis study presents key findings from six regional studies commissioned by the five regional commissions.

The global synthesis study was conceptualized and conducted through a consultative process between the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and the regional commissions. Two Expert Meetings were organized to develop the terms of reference of the regional and global studies and review the findings of the regional studies. This global synthesis study has been finalized after a peer review by the regional commissions, regional consultants, and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women.

The study analyses the trends in the evolution of the mechanisms in terms of their structure, mandate, role/function and main areas of work. It explores how the various mechanisms coordinate and collaborate with each other as well as with other stakeholders. It elaborates the achievements as well as the constraints and challenges of the mechanisms. Finally, based on the findings, the study recommends a few priority actions for the future.

The contexts and trends in the evolution of national mechanisms

The regional studies highlight the political, social, economic, and institutional contexts, which influence the work of national mechanisms in their respective regions. A number of contextual factors are identified, some facilitating an enabling environment and others creating challenges for the work of national mechanisms and their effectiveness. The visibility of the gender equality agenda, democratization processes, and the policy framework of human rights and human development have been positive influences. In contrast conflict, globalization, economic liberalization, and the rise of social conservatism have created challenges for the national mechanisms.

Despite regional and sub-regional diversity, certain common trends can be discerned in the evolution of national mechanisms in the last two decades. Mechanisms have multiplied and diversified horizontally and vertically. Their mandates and roles have expanded. They have

adopted a variety of strategies and instruments. Gender mainstreaming has become more institutionalized. The stakeholders of national mechanisms have expanded.

Status of national mechanisms

Four indicators can be used to classify and compare national mechanisms: (1) type of structure and location; (2) mandate; (3) role/function; and, (4) resource.

Type of structure and location

One major differentiation in the type of structure is that between national machineries and other mechanisms, the former being officially, or formally mandated by the government to be the lead agency. Another way of differentiating the mechanisms is to classify them by their location. Yet another way of differentiation is according to their status, whether autonomous or under government control.

A. National machinery

There are variations in the types of structure and location of the national machineries. They can be a stand-alone ministry or part of a ministry; department/division/services under a ministry; unit in the office of the head of government; or autonomous bodies.

B. Other types of national mechanisms

The mechanisms which are increasingly being established since the Fourth World Conference on Women include focal points/working groups in sectoral/line ministries; inter-departmental/ministerial/multi-sectoral bodies; mechanisms in state, municipal and local governments; committees/commissions/caucuses in parliament; committees/working groups within the judiciary; accountability institutions; and, advisory/consultative councils.

Mandate

Increasingly, the trend in all regions is to formulate the mandate of national mechanisms, particularly that of national machineries, with an emphasis on the gender mainstreaming strategy. Notwithstanding this general trend, the mandates are sometimes formulated in a way that highlights the traditional areas of family, children and other social welfare types of activities.

In several countries where national mechanisms have been restructured and integrated within general equality or general anti-discrimination bodies, the mandates have been amended to encompass all forms of discrimination and all equalities.

Role/function

The mechanisms perform a wide variety of roles and functions. These include promotion of legislation; policy and strategy advice and development; formulation and implementation of national action plans; support for gender mainstreaming; support for research, statistics, and data collection; capacity development (training, and development of tools); monitoring and

accountability including implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Platform for Action and reporting on national efforts to comply with international commitments on gender equality; coordination and collaboration; and, social mobilization and provision of direct services to people.

Resource

Resource has been conceptualized in a multi-dimensional way by the study to include financial and human resources; leadership quality of national mechanisms; and, political support from the top leadership as well as powerful constituencies and mass base.

Main areas of work

Strategies and instruments

The four most important strategies pursued by the mechanisms are: gender mainstreaming; targeted measures; promotion of legislation; and, consultation. The most noteworthy instruments for their work include preparation of national and sector plans; gender training; sex disaggregated data and statistics; research; and, monitoring and evaluation.

Priority issues

Several issues have been highlighted as priority of national mechanisms in all regions. They are violence against women, mainly domestic violence but also other forms of physical and sexual violence or sexual harassment; human trafficking; representation of women in politics and public life; women's health, particularly sexual and reproductive health; and, poverty and economic development.

Key findings of the study

Structure

- The multiplication and diversification of mechanisms horizontally and vertically has on the whole been a positive development facilitating gender mainstreaming and helping gain greater visibility, and attention and response to gender equality issues in multiple institutions and levels, as well as in the public domain.
- The trend towards establishment of sub-national mechanisms at regional and local levels is a positive development as these mechanisms have been able to better represent the concerns of communities and nurture a new cadre of grassroots leadership.
- Notwithstanding the overall trend towards multiplication, national mechanisms are far from being institutionally stable. In many countries they face frequent reorganization, location shifts and leadership changes.

Mandate

- Although the Platform for Action guidelines are clear that the mandate of national machineries are to promote the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment through catalytic work and dual-track strategy of gender mainstreaming and targeted measures, there is still a lack of understanding about what catalytic work and gender mainstreaming entail. In many countries national machineries are still too busy implementing their own projects delivering services to women, rather than doing catalytic work providing policy advice to other ministries and departments to mainstream gender equality issues in their policies and programmes.

Role/function

- On the whole, gender mainstreaming strategy is gaining visibility and use through adoption of processes, training and development of methods and tools. Gender-budgeting has emerged as a widely used tool for gender mainstreaming in all regions. But there are still wide gaps in capacity, in terms of technical expertise and tools, to mainstream gender perspective across all policies, strategies, plans and actions.
- The strategy of targeted measures is being used by national mechanisms with great effectiveness. Such targeted measures include temporary special measures where quota laws have contributed towards enhancing women's political representation. Targeted measures have also been effective in addressing emerging specific issues such as trafficking in women.
- Legal reforms have been the most widely used and effective strategy in all regions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Laws to combat violence against women have been enacted across all regions. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been ratified by almost all countries. The advocacy and lobbying for legal reforms and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ratification has enabled national mechanisms to strengthen their links with their key constituencies, especially the women's organizations.
- Sex disaggregated data and statistics and gender-sensitive research are increasingly available in all regions, but there are still gaps. In some countries even rudimentary sex disaggregated data and statistics is not available. In some other countries, their quality is questionable. Data, statistics and research on new and emerging issues are scant. Moreover, in many places despite availability of sex disaggregated data and statistics and gender sensitive research their use by governments in planning and budgetary allocation processes is limited.
- Some progress is noticeable in developing indicators to monitor realization of the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment. But, the existing measures and indicators are limited in scope.
- The countries have fallen short in building a sound monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, which has constrained national mechanisms from systematically learning from their work experiences.
- Positive developments have taken place to ensure accountability. Institutions such as Ombud's offices have been established in many countries to investigate specific cases of discrimination against women. Some governments report annually to parliament and/or

publish an annual report tracking progress towards gender equality. Still, all the regional studies note that it has been difficult to hold the government as a whole accountable for gender equality.

Coordination and collaboration

- With the multiplication of national mechanisms coordination has become a challenging task for national machineries. Many countries have established specific structures such as inter- and intra-departmental/ministerial committees/working groups to facilitate coordination amongst various mechanisms within government. Formal rules/guidelines are also in place in many countries, but all the studies acknowledge that in reality coordination is weak for a variety of reasons. Sometimes structures and rules are missing. Sometime rules/guidelines are not systematically implemented. Most importantly, the national machineries have relatively low status vis-à-vis other ministries and hence are unable to coordinate their activities.
- Collaboration between mechanisms in different branches of government, and with autonomous bodies has improved in many places through concerted efforts to promote various initiatives such as legal reforms. But here, again, the regional studies note scope for greater effort and improvement.
- Collaboration between mechanisms within government and other stakeholders outside government has also generally improved in all regions; but still there are countries where national mechanisms and civil society organizations are not working in a collaborative way. Instead they are competing over resources, particularly donor resources, and constituencies.

Resource

- The resources available to national mechanisms do not match the rising expectations from their constituencies. Mechanisms in all regions work under severe staff and budget constraints. Furthermore mechanisms in many countries are heavily dependent on donor money which risks their sustainability as donor funds and priorities tend to fluctuate.
- In some countries, the mechanisms have been able to overcome the financial resource constraint by tapping into three other key resources: strength of leadership of mechanisms; support from top political leadership; and wide base of constituency support.
- Political will for achieving the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment has on the whole improved but there are variations between regions and countries. The rise in social conservatism poses a threat to the women's movement and the national mechanisms in many countries.

Achievements

- Noteworthy gains have been achieved in many fronts. Laws have been enacted or reformed to remove discrimination against women in a number of areas. The goals of gender equality and women's empowerment have achieved greater political visibility. The strategy of gender mainstreaming is increasingly being used in all regions. Capacity

to address gender equality issues have been developed through methods and tools; training; research and analysis, and data and statistics.

- Several factors have contributed to these achievements. Mechanisms have become more mature and have learned to draw lessons from their setbacks and successes. In some countries strong leadership has built the capacity of national mechanisms. In many countries the strengthened voice of civil society has enabled national mechanisms to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Regional and international processes and institutions have lent legitimacy to the gender equality agenda and have helped in exchange of knowledge that has strengthened the capacity of national mechanisms.

Constraints and challenges

- Despite many positive developments national mechanisms still face many constraints. In some countries they are still structurally marginalized and have to cope with frequent reorganization and change in leadership. Mandates are sometimes diffuse and poorly designed. Staff and budgetary resources are severely limited. Technical expertise to address gender equality is inadequate both within national mechanisms and in other places in government. Coordination amongst various mechanisms within government is weak. Collaboration between mechanisms and between mechanisms and other stakeholders is limited. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system is not effective. Limitations of data, statistics research, methods and tools constrain policy analysis and programme development from a gender perspective.
- The challenges before national mechanisms are many. Sustaining political will, overcoming resistance and opposition and institutionalizing gender mainstreaming strategy are continuing challenges for national mechanisms.

Recommendations

The diversification of structures and greater political commitments and visibility of the gender equality agenda provide national mechanisms with opportunities to further strengthen their profile, refine their mandate and approaches and work more strategically. They can build on promising strategies and areas of work. At the same time they need to address their persistent constraints and challenges. The study recommends the following priority actions to strengthen the national mechanism so that they can be more effective in promoting the gender equality agenda.

Mandate

- The mandate of national mechanisms needs to be further clarified specifying their goal, and emphasizing their catalytic role in the promotion of gender equality and the systematic use of the gender mainstreaming strategy.

Role/function

- Additional efforts are needed to clarify concepts, design tools and methodologies and build capacity for gender mainstreaming within and outside the national mechanisms.
- Targeted measures need to be continued to overcome structural obstacles to gender equality.
- Work in the area of legal reform, as well as the promotion of gender equality legislation should be expanded to combat discrimination against women in all sectors. Work on the effective implementation of such legislation also needs to be enhanced.
- Capacity for policy analysis and advice should be strengthened within and outside national mechanisms to bring a gender perspective to all policy areas across the government. A multi-pronged effort including research, tools, and training is needed to enhance such capacity.
- Collection of sex disaggregated data and statistics, development of methodologies and tools, and gender-specific research and analysis will need continuing promotion and support as they are essential for development of gender-responsive policies and actions.
- National machineries should make greater efforts to ensure that existing data, statistics, research, tools and methods are used by different ministries and departments in their planning and budgetary allocation processes.
- Indicators should be developed to measure progress toward gender quality in a wide spectrum of areas. These indicators should be integrated into mainstream monitoring indicators.
- Effective monitoring and evaluation systems (M&E) need to be designed to assess the performance of governments in realizing gender equality goals and draw lessons for future actions.
- Studies and evaluations need to be commissioned and self-evaluations conducted so that national mechanisms can identify their achievements as well as limitations, obstacles and promising strategies to overcome them.

Coordination and collaboration

- With the diversification and multiplication of national mechanisms, much greater knowledge and capacity are needed to fully realize their potential impact and benefits in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. National machineries should have an inventory of existing mechanisms, their goals and contributions as well as their location in the institutional landscape.
- Channels of regular communication need to be in place and strategies developed to enhance synergies and strengthen collaborative action among national mechanisms in the pursuit of common goals.
- Institutional arrangements and rules for coordination need to be in place, clarified and formalized and their application monitored to improve coordination between the national machinery and ministries/departments within the executive branch of government.
- Collaboration between national machineries and mechanisms in other branches of governments, e.g. parliamentary committees/caucuses, accountability institutions, and autonomous bodies as well as regional and local-level mechanisms need to be improved.

- Collaboration with civil society, women's organizations and other social partners particularly alliances with new stakeholders such as youth, needs to be built to widen the constituency base.

Resource

- Staff capacity of national mechanism in numbers as well in gender expertise needs to be improved. Gender expertise can be improved through recruitment of gender experts and training of staff in methods and tools for gender mainstreaming.
- Capacity of staff outside the national machineries, such as gender focal points, and other officials of government also need to be built. Tools and methods designed for gender mainstreaming should be integrated in the curriculum of general training for government officials.
- Budgetary allocation from national sources needs to be increased so that the mechanisms are not over dependent on external donor resources and can sustain their own priorities and work programmes.
- More attention and efforts should be invested to mobilize and sustain political will for promoting the gender equality agenda and strengthening the national mechanisms. Resistance to the agenda, mounted by social conservatives, needs to be countered by widening the mass base of political support of the women's movements, which is weakening in many countries. The national machineries need to build strategic alliances with women's movements without compromising the latter's autonomy and independent voice.
- Collaboration and exchange with regional and international institutions and processes need to be encouraged as they have proven to be effective in strengthening national mechanisms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

The first World Conference on Women held in 1975 called for the establishment of national machineries for the advancement of women. By the end of the *World Decade for Women* (1976-1985), 127 Member States of the United Nations had established some form of national machinery. As of March 2010, all but four countries had in place national machineries¹.

The Commission on the Status of Women considered the role and structure of national machineries as a priority theme at its thirty-second and thirty-fifth sessions in 1988 and 1991 respectively. The Secretary-General's report to the thirty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women defined the national machinery as a body "recognized by the government as the institution dealing with the promotion of the status of women".²

The Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in September, 1995 in Beijing defined a national machinery for the advancement of women as "the central policy-coordinating unit inside government" and its main task as being "to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas" and considered their "location at the highest possible level in the government" as a necessary condition for an effective functioning (para 201). Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women were identified as one of the twelve critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action.³

The agreed conclusions 1999/2 adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women on institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women reiterated the recommendation that national machineries be placed at the highest possible level of government and be invested with the authority and resources needed to fulfill their mandates.⁴ The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" noted the achievements as well as constraints of national machineries.⁵

A major development since the Fourth World Conference on Women has been the establishment of new mechanisms, in addition to national machineries, for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment at the national level. The majority of countries have started to establish a variety of mechanisms in executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. Furthermore mechanisms have been established outside the government. But despite the proliferation of institutional mechanisms, there has been little documented research on the roles

¹ *Directory of national mechanisms for gender equality*, March 2010. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women

² National machinery for monitoring and improving the status of women. Report of the Secretary-General, document E/CN.6/1988/3

³ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/index.html>

⁴ Commission on the Status of Women. *Report on the Forty-third Session*, 1999, 1-12 March and 1 April (E/CN.6/1999/10):18. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw99.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5.htm>

of these new national mechanisms in terms of their achievements as well as the gaps and challenges and their relationships with the existing national machineries.

In preparation for the ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the Commission on the Status of Women in 2005, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women organized an Expert Group Meeting on national mechanisms to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in November-December, 2004. The Expert Group Meeting identified and reviewed the diversity of mechanisms in place in many countries, including the more traditional women's ministries and departments, as well as new and innovative mechanisms such as gender equality commissions, ombudsperson's offices, networks and caucuses in parliament and gender focal points, and networks of such focal points in some cases, in line ministries. The Expert Group Meeting noted the paucity of empirical data and called for a more systematic study of these national mechanisms to identify their roles, relationships, achievements as well as challenges.⁶

Therefore, in preparation of the fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women decided to undertake a comprehensive study of national mechanisms for gender equality, based on the review of experiences in all regions of the United Nations. In 2008, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women commissioned a global overview report to elaborate an analytical framework and identify the key issues that needed to be addressed by studies in all regions. In 2009, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the five regional commissions and with the funding support of the Government of Italy, launched a project on "Strengthening national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women". One component of the project aimed to provide a global study drawing on the findings of studies from the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia regions. This global synthesis study presents key findings from six studies commissioned by the five regional commissions.⁷

⁶ United Nation 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. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/>

⁷ Regina Tavares da Silva, Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in EU Member States and Candidate Countries and other Developed Economies of the UNECE Region. Regional Study, 2010; Dono Abdurazakova, Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in South-East and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. Regional Study, 2010; Dzodzi Tsikata, Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Regional study: Africa, 2010 (unpublished); María Dolores Fernós, National Mechanism for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean region, 2010; Amaryllis T. Torres, Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Regional study – Asia and the Pacific, 2010; Islah Jad, Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Regional report: ESCWA region, 2010.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study on national mechanisms are to identify:

- The different types of formal mechanisms established at national level and the specific roles played in formulation, implementation and monitoring of national policies, strategies and action plans for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, and in particular in facilitating, supporting and monitoring gender mainstreaming in all national policy areas.
- The inter-relationships between the different national mechanisms and the lessons learned and good practices in terms of synergies and collaboration as well as the constraints experienced.
- The achievements, gaps and challenges of each type of mechanism, and strategies for building on the achievements and addressing the gaps and challenges, as well as the potential for enhancing the roles of each mechanism in collaborative partnerships in promoting strategies for gender equality and empowerment of women.
- Priorities and strategies for increased collaboration between mechanisms for gender equality and women's empowerment at national and regional levels, including with civil society and Non-governmental Organizations.
- The capacity-building needs of national mechanisms to address the gaps and challenges identified and the types of programmes required to address these needs.⁸

Methodology and data sources

The study was conceptualized and conducted through a consultative process between the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and the five regional commissions of the United Nations. Following the preparation of the global overview report, commissioned by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women in 2008 putting forward an analytical framework of the study, a two-day Expert Meeting was organized in collaboration with the regional commissions and hosted by the Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva on 28-29 May, 2009 to prepare the terms of reference, methodological approaches and a common questionnaire for the regional studies. Participants at the Expert Meeting included representatives of the five regional commissions and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women as well as the consultants identified by the regional commissions to undertake the regional studies, and the consultant for the global synthesis study, commissioned by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women.

For the purpose of the study, the Expert Meeting adopted a working definition of national mechanisms for gender equality. These are to include “those bodies and institutions within different branches of the state (legislative, executive and judicial branches) as well as independent accountability and advisory bodies that together, are recognized as national mechanisms for gender equality by all stakeholders. They may include, but not be limited to: the national machinery for the advancement of women within government (e.g. a ministry, department, or office - see paragraph 201 of the Beijing Platform for Action); inter-ministerial

⁸ UNDAW, Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, INT/08/X90, October, 2008 (unpublished).

bodies (e.g. task forces/working groups/commissions or similar arrangements); advisory/consultative bodies, with multi-stakeholder participation; gender equality ombud; gender equality observatory; parliamentary committee".⁹ The Expert Meeting developed a common terms of reference and questionnaire for the regional consultants. Guided by the regional commissions, the consultants undertook regional studies during June - October 2009.

A second Expert Meeting was held in collaboration with the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and the regional commissions and hosted by the Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva, in November 2009 to review the regional studies and identify key findings and recommendations to be highlighted in the global synthesis study, and to develop the outline of the study.

This global synthesis study has been prepared using the terms of reference and an outline developed at the second Expert Meeting. An electronic peer review in January 2010, involving the regional commissions, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and the regional consultants was carried out to finalize the global study.

This global study is based on both primary and secondary data used by the regional studies. The regional studies carried out desk reviews of existing documents. They analyzed government's responses to Beijing + 15 survey questionnaires¹⁰ as well as responses to a supplementary questionnaire which was developed during the first Expert Meeting that was sent to governments as well as selected civil society leaders for the purpose of feeding into the regional studies. In addition, the studies consulted reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women both governmental as well as shadow reports. The written materials were supplemented by interviews with a few key sources.

Information generated by the regional studies, again, underscores the limitations of empirical data and lack of independent evaluation of the functioning of national mechanisms. Not all countries responded to the Beijing + 15 and the supplementary questionnaires. Moreover the responses mostly listed efforts and activities; they did not explore how the national mechanisms function in practice. Additionally, although the study used a broad definition of national mechanisms and aimed to present a comprehensive description of the work of different types of national mechanisms, regional studies indicate that most of the available information pertains to national machineries within government. Only limited data could be collected about the work of other national mechanisms. This global synthesis is prepared within the constraints of these data limitations.

⁹ UNDAW, Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Expert Meeting in Preparation for Regional Studies on National Mechanisms for Gender Equality, Internal Report, 15 July 2009 (unpublished).

¹⁰ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/national-level.html#quest>

Major issues addressed by the study

This study highlights several key issues:

- It analyses the trends in the evolution of national mechanisms in terms of their structure, mandate, role/function and main areas of work. Though there are differences between regions, sub-regions and countries, it is still possible to discern some common trends in the evolution of the structures and functions of the mechanisms across the board in all regions.
- The study explores how the various national mechanisms coordinate and collaborate with each other as well as with other stakeholders. It looks at both the formal and informal channels of coordination and collaboration. A key question of investigation is whether the mechanisms work in such a way as to create synergistic impact or whether the mechanisms duplicate or work at cross purposes.
- The study elaborates the achievements of the national mechanisms identifying the factors that contribute to success. These factors can be internal such as the strength of the institutional arrangements or enhanced capacity of the mechanisms or they can be external such as the strength of the partners of the mechanisms or other actors outside the mechanisms.
- The study discusses the constraints and challenges of the national mechanisms. The constraints can be, again, internal such as lack of resources, expertise and so on, or external such as weak political will.
- The study provides examples of case studies from various regions to illustrate particular issues or approaches.
- Finally, the study recommends a few key actions that can be adopted to strengthen the functioning of national mechanisms.

Structure of the study

The study is structured in eight chapters. Following the introduction, chapter 2 analyzes the changing political, social, economic and institutional contexts in which diverse national mechanisms have emerged and function. It also underscores the major trends in the evolution of these mechanisms. Chapter 3 discusses the status of national mechanisms: their structures, mandates, roles and resources. Chapter 4 highlights the main areas of work of national mechanisms elaborating both strategies and instruments as well as issues of focus. Chapter 5 looks at the coordination and collaboration between various mechanisms and with other stakeholders. Chapter 6 elaborates the achievements of the mechanisms. Factors contributing to success are identified. Chapter 7 analyzes the constraints, internal as well as external and the challenges faced by the mechanisms. Chapter 8 concludes by highlighting key findings and suggesting priority actions for the future.

Expected contributions

This study, first and foremost, aims to contribute to knowledge. The regional studies and the global synthesis study have been undertaken to fill the gap in existing information about the diverse national mechanisms that have gradually evolved since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The regional studies have generated new empirical data about the mandate,

structure, role/function and resource of diverse mechanisms; their relationships with each other as well as others; their achievements and challenges; and their good practices, and potentials. Through an analysis and systematization of these new data, this study presents a comprehensive global overview that is expected to illuminate understanding about the strength as well as weaknesses of national mechanisms and opportunities for future actions to build capacities for their more effective functioning. Second, the study is expected to facilitate cross regional knowledge sharing. The regional studies indicate commonalities as well as differences between regions and sub-regions in terms of the structure and functioning of the national mechanisms. They also highlight good practices and lessons. Finally, the study aims to catalyze global agreements on a set of priority actions that are needed to strengthen the work of the national mechanisms.

The findings of the regional studies as well as the global synthesis study also form the basis for the subsequent phase of the project, which will aim to develop training manuals for national mechanisms to address the gaps and challenges.

2. THE CONTEXTS AND TRENDS IN THE EVOLUTION OF NATIONAL MECHANISMS

The functioning of national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women remain closely related to political, social, economic and institutional contexts prevailing in the various countries and regions across the world. The discussions in this chapter focus on the analysis of these contexts and the evolution of national mechanisms particularly since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The chapter is organized in two sections. The first section examines the continuities and changes in the political, social, economic and institutional environment which have a bearing on the effectiveness of national mechanisms. The second section highlights the major trends in the evolution of the types of structure, mandate and role/function of national mechanisms.

2.1 The political, social, economic, and institutional contexts

The regional studies portray commonalities as well as differences between countries and regions in their political, social, economic and institutional contexts. The overall macro environment under which national mechanisms have evolved and operated and which have impacted on their functioning in the last two decades are briefly examined below under the following themes:

- Visibility of gender equality goals promoted by international and regional processes
- Institutional reforms and reorganization
- Transition to and consolidation of democracy
- Conflict and post-conflict reconstruction
- Globalization and migration
- Economic liberalization, growth and poverty
- Human development and human rights
- Social conservatism and response of women's movements

Visibility of gender equality goals promoted by international and regional processes

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, various global agreements and processes have reiterated support for the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment. This has created a positive environment for the functioning of national mechanisms. The Millennium Development Goals adopted by the global community in 2000 included gender equality and the empowerment of women as one of the eight international development goals to be achieved by 2015. As a result of support from the global policy framework, the visibility and legitimacy of these goals were significantly enhanced in all countries across the world.

Regional processes and agreements similarly promoted these goals. For example, the enlargement of the European Union had a positive impact on the status of women and gender equality both in Eastern and Western Europe. The study from European Union and Western countries argues that the entry requirements to join the European Union worked "as a powerful driving force for new countries to adopt laws and policies and create institutions aiming at

gender equality.... To a certain extent the original European Union countries also felt compelled to do more as they were challenged by the demands imposed on new members”.¹¹

The study from Africa also underscores the influence of regional organizations and agreements to strengthen the work of national mechanisms in “creating additional accountability, harmonizing approaches across countries and circumventing national level resistance and challenges to gender equality.”¹² The regional and sub-regional structures and agreements cited positively by the study are: African Union; African Union’s Directorate for Women, Gender and Development, which has the mandate to promote gender equality within and throughout the Union, as well as within Member States by translating policy agreements and instruments into measurable programmes and projects; African Union Heads of State and Government’s *Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa* which has an implementation framework and guidelines for reporting on its implementation; the African Union *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* (the Women’s Protocol); the *New Partnership for Africa’s Development’s African Peer Review Mechanisms*.

In Latin America and the Caribbean region, again, the Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean’s regional conferences on women between 1997 and 2007 have facilitated the drafting of a regional agenda and have contributed significantly to the strengthening of the national mechanisms for vigorous “collective debate”.¹³ The regional study notes that the creation of the *Council of Women Ministers for Central America* has resulted in the strengthening of national mechanisms and “noteworthy progress in legal reforms, women’s caucuses and the establishment of a common agenda”.¹⁴ The study from the Arab region also refers to the positive contributions of the Women’s Committee, an initiative of the Arab League, in exchange of experiences related to laws, research and policy instruments geared toward gender equality.

Institutional reforms and reorganization

In recent years several countries have undertaken constitutional or institutional reforms that have resulted in reorganization of national mechanisms. The impact of these reorganizations has not yet been assessed, more specifically whether they will promote or dilute efforts to push forward the gender equality and women’s empowerment agenda.

In Latin America constitutional reforms in several countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia have resulted in elimination of national mechanisms which had been in existence for decades. New mechanisms have been established with mandates to work for equal rights and opportunities for all excluded groups. The Latin American study cautions that the impact of these restructurings on the promotion of women’s rights and gender equality is not yet clear.

The study from the European Union and Western countries refers to another new trend of reorganization of national mechanisms for gender equality “moving from gender based

¹¹ Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010, p.3

¹² Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p.9

¹³ María Dolores Fernós, 2010, p.11

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.13

discrimination and gender equality ... to general discrimination ... and to general equality or equalities.... As a consequence, equality appears in some countries mainly related to social diversity and to social inclusion or social cohesion ... rather than envisaging gender equality as a principle of human rights.”¹⁵ This study too cautions about the impact of this type of reorganization on the promotion of gender equality goals.

Transition to and consolidation of democracy

The renewal of democratic processes, which began in the 1990s and extended into the first decade of the twenty-first century, has played an enabling role in strengthening civil society as well as women’s movements. This in turn had a positive impact on the functioning of national mechanisms. Several countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe have overcome military and/or one party authoritarian rule and begun afresh their democratic journey. Democratic transition and consolidation has resulted in increase in women’s participation in governance and political institutions in several countries. For example, in South Africa, Rwanda, Angola and Mozambique, there has been a significant increase in women’s participation in governance structures.

However, not all democracies that have emerged in the last two decades have experienced an increase in women’s political representation. Indeed women’s representation in parliament is on the whole low in all regions except in the Nordic countries. According to the Inter Parliamentary Union database, women’s representation in parliament is 41 per cent in Nordic countries, 21 per cent in the Americas, 19 per cent in Europe (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe member countries), 18 per cent in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, 13 per cent in the Pacific and 9 per cent in the Arab States.¹⁶

One key finding that emerges from the regional studies is that in countries where women’s movements have been an integral part of the processes of democratic renewal such as Brazil and South Africa, they have been successful in shaping policies and strengthening mechanisms for empowering women. However, in many countries, civil society and women’s organizations were much less successful in integrating their agendas as essential elements of democratic renewal.

Moreover, weak democratic foundations have constrained the effective functioning of national mechanisms. The studies from South-Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Arab region particularly highlight the adverse consequences of democracy deficits on the capacity of autonomous women’s movements to exert policy influence. In several countries these movements remain in an adversarial relationship with the policy processes. This had negative implications also for the functioning of national mechanisms. The study from the Arab region points out that sometimes there is a perception of the national mechanisms as top-down bureaucracies disconnected from the aspirations of the women’s movement

The proliferation of civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations as a result of democratic transition has been generally perceived as a positive development though the regional studies most notably from Asia Pacific, Africa and the Arab region point to the dilemmas of

¹⁵ Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010, pp.9-10.

¹⁶ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>, accessed January 2010

donor-dependence of non-governmental organizations. Donor support has enabled non-governmental organizations to expand their work; but at the same time this has led to a disconnection between non-governmental organizations on the one hand and national social movements on the other. The African study argues that while many non-governmental organizations with donor support have been successful in advocating and campaigning for various gender equality issues, they have demonstrated limited capacity to support national mechanisms “to advocate and implement difficult and controversial policies. As well, they challenge their ability to demand accountability from the institutional mechanisms and from the government as a whole.”¹⁷ Moreover, several studies argue that the adoption of the non-governmental organization model for organizing had constrained women’s organizations from developing mass constituency bases or doing political work as donor funded bodies cannot be overtly political or partisan. The study from the Arab region underscores the limitations of non-governmental organizations to carry out mobilizational work or act as catalysts for social and political movements as they tend to “perceive issues for social and political change as ‘projects’ with limited life cycles”.¹⁸ These arguments would be elaborated in more detail below under the theme of social conservatism and response of women’s movements.

Conflict and post-conflict reconstruction

In several regions and within them, in particular countries, civil conflict characterized by severe violence, massive displacement of populations and the breakdown of both government and civil institutions had a particularly disempowering impact on women. Studies from both Africa and the Arab region highlight the negative effects of war and conflict such as pressures of migration, refugees and internally displaced persons; low or stagnant economic growth; political instability; and regression in all indicators of human development. The national mechanisms in war-ravaged countries face additional challenges of dealing with weak and severely limited government institutions as well as large scale devastations and dislocations of population. Furthermore, the study from the Arab region argues that “wars and conflict seriously challenge national mechanisms as they struggle to meet large-scale devastation with limited human capacity and resources. Wars and conflict make issues related to gender equality appear out of context and irrelevant”.¹⁹

However, post-conflict reconstruction has created new opportunities in some of the affected countries to give strength to the voices of women and enhance the capacity of national mechanisms. The Africa study underscores how post-conflict recovery and improved stability had contributed to economic growth in Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. It notes that “peace processes on the other hand, have brought institutional dividends, and in several post-conflict countries, new institutional mechanisms have been established which have engaged in programmes promoting women’s involvement in peace building and reconstruction.”²⁰

¹⁷ Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p.11

¹⁸ Islah Jad, 2010, p.12

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.10

²⁰ Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p.10

Globalization and migration

Expansion and improvements in global interaction in the last two decades have created opportunities as well as challenges for women. National mechanisms had to address these opportunities and challenges in their strategies and plans to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. On the one hand globalization has stimulated unprecedented economic growth thereby widening opportunities for women's participation in the economy. The growing integration of the global economy has also encouraged massive labour migration. This has served to greatly enhance the export earnings of labour exporting countries through migrant remittances and has also contributed to the alleviation of household poverty in many countries. On the other hand, the incidence of benefits from globalization has remained inequitably distributed which has contributed to the polarization of incomes both at the international and national levels.

All the regional studies underscore the mixed impact of globalization in regard to gender equality. Whilst working in the international labour market has contributed in some measure to women's empowerment through income earning opportunities and mobility, it has also exposed them to exploitative treatment and harassment at the hands of migration intermediaries as well as within the labour receiving countries. The downside of the growth in women's migration has been the rise in trafficking in human beings from the developing world into the more developed countries. While the two studies commissioned by the Economic Commission for Europe particularly highlight the challenges of demographic shifts and trafficking of women, national mechanisms in a number of countries had to respond to the problem of trafficking.

Economic liberalization, growth and poverty

The economic policy agendas of the last two decades prioritized economic growth through the instrumentality of the market with a corresponding abridgement in the role of state, including in its delivery of public services. The liberalization policies have contributed to economic growth in some countries, but in many developing countries and countries in transition, they did not lead to significant alleviation of poverty. Instead, the liberalization processes have made these countries more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of global trade, thereby exposing them to recurrent bouts of economic instability. The imposition of budget cuts in the context of economic stabilization programmes along with the growing trend to limit the role of the state, have weakened the state's capacity to play a countervailing role to protect or support the powerless from their disadvantaged exposure to market forces.

The studies from Africa, South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Arab region highlight the negative consequences of economic liberalization on work related to promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. Decades of liberalization have still left many countries in Africa with high levels of poverty and unemployment. The initiative for *Highly Indebted Poor Countries*, and its requirement to draw up *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers* adopted in the post adjustment phase have not been very successful in removing livelihood insecurities and poverty. The erosion in the interventionist capacity of the state has impacted more unfavorably on women who largely operate within the lowest tiers of the market, and are more vulnerable to the instabilities and inequities of the market place. The study from the Arab region similarly notes the negative impacts of economic liberalization in deepening

poverty, and perpetuating unemployment, social inequities and tensions, and weakening nascent democratic institutions. Both Africa and the Arab regions have witnessed street protests and riots over food shortages in recent times. The study from the Commonwealth of Independent States also highlights poverty, inequality, exclusion and declining life expectancies. In all these regards, national mechanisms for gender equality were faced with new and unprecedented challenges in their roles within government as well as vis-à-vis other stakeholders.

Human development and human rights

While the economic policies of dependence on market forces and downsizing of the state had limited the scope of work of national mechanisms, the attention of the international community on the importance of promoting human development and human rights from the beginning of the 1990s created enabling conditions for the national mechanisms to promote the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment. Greater emphasis on enhancing public expenditure through reprioritizing budget allocation and development assistance towards the social sectors of health and education had strengthened the hands of national mechanisms in advocating investment for girls' and women's health and education. The emphasis on people-centred development culminated in the establishment of time bound and measurable targets to reduce gender disparities in education and health in the Millennium Development Goals.

From the 1990s international agreements also began to emphasize a human rights framework in development work. This required transforming the perspective of service delivery from helping "beneficiaries" to participation and empowerment of people to claim their rights. The emphasis on human rights has exerted a positive influence on the gender equality agenda, as gender equality advocates started to campaign for women's rights as an integral component of human rights.

Social conservatism and the response of women's movements

In the last two decades social conservatism has gained strength in all regions of the world. This has posed a threat to women's movements and the work of the national mechanisms. For example, the African study notes that national mechanisms sometimes face criticisms from social conservatives that gender equality issues are the concerns of "middle-class, urban, foreign influenced and out of step with African culture".²¹ The study from South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States similarly highlights the recent "unprecedented growth of traditional patriarchic views and ... revival of religious and cultural practices".²²

The regional studies point out the weak capacity of women's movements in resisting the social conservatives. The studies argue that for a variety of reasons women's movements have been getting weaker in the last two decades in conducting social and political mobilization work. In Africa women's movements have either been demobilized by their absorption into national mechanisms (South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique) or their adoption of the non-governmental organization vehicle for organizing, which has weakened their capacity for sustaining social movements. The non-governmental organization model for organizing has

²¹ Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p.9

²² Dono Abdurazakova, 2010, p. 4

prioritized a short term project approach and professional technocratic work, rather than long term political work of building a mass base of support for gender equality. As a result women's movements have failed to develop the capacity to confront the challenges of social conservatives on the streets who have been quite successful in mobilizing large numbers of people.

The Latin America and the Caribbean study similarly highlights the recent trends in the weakening of the women's movements and their capacity to mobilize a significant mass support base. Similar to Africa there has been a shift in the focus of the women's movements from social mobilization work to other areas: in political participation, service organizations, academia or non-governmental organization work. Some observers have commented on "mobilization fatigue" and others have labeled it as " 'NGO-ization' (in reference to the women activists' incorporation into NGOs)." ²³ The Arab region study echoes similar concerns about the weak capacity of the women's movements to challenge social conservatism. The response of national mechanisms to these trends remains ambiguous.

2.2 Major trends in the evolution of national mechanisms

The Beijing Platform for Action provided a new vision for the mission of institutional mechanisms as well as conditions for their effective functioning. The vision highlighted gender mainstreaming as a major strategy of work. The evolution of institutional mechanisms since the Fourth World Conference on Women has been primarily guided by the recommendations of the Platform for Action and other UN resolutions following Beijing to strengthen institutional arrangements, and increase the effectiveness of the various mechanisms.

Despite regional and sub-regional diversity, certain common trends can be discerned in the evolution of the structure, mandate and role/function of national mechanisms. The regional studies identify the following major trends:

- Multiplication and diversification of mechanisms horizontally and vertically
- Expansion of mandate and role
- Adoption of a variety of strategies and instruments
- Institutionalization of gender mainstreaming
- Continuation of dual-track approach to work
- Enlargement of stakeholders

Multiplication and diversification of mechanisms horizontally and vertically

The regional studies confirm that a major trend in the evolution of national mechanisms is their multiplication and diversification both horizontally and vertically. At the horizontal level, the trend is towards the establishment of various mechanisms in addition to national machineries. Many mechanisms are being created in the executive branch of the government such as focal points/working groups in line ministries; inter-departmental/inter-ministerial/multi-sectoral committees; consultative committees/commissions and so on. There is also a trend of establishing a number of mechanisms in the legislative and judicial branches of government and independent bodies such as ombudsperson's offices or equality boards. In addition there are

²³ María Dolores Fernós, 2010, p.17

specialized offices such as gender equality observatories or centers in universities and research institutes. At the vertical level also there is multiplication of institutions. Increasingly, mechanisms have been set up at decentralized levels in state and regional governments and in local/municipal offices. Chapter 3 discusses this trend in more detail. Box-1 illustrates the trend towards horizontal and vertical multiplication of national mechanisms with examples from one country, Australia.

Box 1
Multiple mechanisms at national and decentralized levels: Australia

Australia provides a good example of development of multiple mechanisms both at national and decentralized levels.

The *Minister for the Status of Women* with support from the national machinery, the Office for Women, works with other government ministers to ensure that women's issues and gender equality are taken into consideration in policy and programme development and implementation. The Office for Women is represented in each of the states and territories, which are located in different departments of the state governments.

The *Attorney-General's Department* and the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade* host regular meetings with NGOs to consult on the government's domestic and international approach to human rights. Furthermore, a *Human Rights Commission* has been established with statutory responsibility which has jurisdiction to investigate and conciliate complaints of breaches of the *Sex Discrimination Act of 1984*. In 2007, a *Sex Discrimination Commissioner* was appointed to the Commission.

Another statutory agency, the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency*, administers the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* through regulation and education.

To address work and family issues, the *Office of Work and Family* has been established in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The *Australian Social Inclusion Board* and the *Community Response Task Force* seek to involve the community and business sectors at the highest level. The principles for *Social Inclusion* in Australia have been adopted to guide an inclusive approach to policy, programmes and services.

Related to these approaches, the *Women's Interdepartmental Committee* (IDC) was created in 2009 so that departments could "do a better job of talking to one another regarding how their policies are affecting and will affect women".

Source: Amaryllis T. Torres, 2010.

Expansion of mandate and role

A second trend (discussed in chapter 3 in more detail) is the expansion in the mandate and role of the mechanisms. With diversification and multiplication of structures, the mandate and scope of work of the mechanisms have expanded. Along with traditional areas of work, new and specialized mechanisms have started to address new issues. For example, the study from the European Union and Western countries notes this expansion in regard to themes like reconciliation of professional and family life or the role of men, and others; it also notes specialized mechanisms addressing issues linked to equal opportunities in employment and, more recently, to violence and trafficking or addressing specific needs of marginalized groups of women like migrants or ethnic minorities. The African study similarly refers to the trend of

expanding the scope of work of national mechanisms following the creation of multiple structures.

Adoption of a variety of strategies and instruments

Yet another trend in the evolution of national mechanisms is their adoption, or promotion of a variety of strategies and instruments to enable them to perform, as well as in response to their expanded mandates and roles. The strategies and instruments include the promotion of gender mainstreaming and the application of temporary special measures; expanded use of consultative processes; adoption and implementation of national action plans, sectoral plans; as well as implementation, or support/encouragement for gender training, research, collection of sex-disaggregated data and statistics, and preparation of various tools for undertaking gender analysis and so on. These are discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

Institutionalization of gender mainstreaming

All the regional studies highlight the trend towards institutionalization of gender mainstreaming. This is being done through structural reorganization, policy reformulation, and design of instruments and tools. The definition of gender mainstreaming elaborated by the United Nations (See Box-2) has set the guidelines for countries. The regional studies refer to a variety of efforts by the countries. For example, the African study notes the shift from a focus on “‘specific and targeted interventions that aimed to empower women...’ to an approach which would ‘ensure systematic policy analysis from a gender perspective’”.²⁴ The study from the European Union and Western countries discusses the trend of assigning the responsibility for gender equality policies to the government as a whole.

Box 2

United Nations definition of gender mainstreaming

“Mainstreaming a gender perspective 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.”

Source: Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997 (A/52/3, 18 September 1997); Agreed conclusions 1997/2.

All regions are expanding the use of various tools for gender mainstreaming such as gender analysis, gender impact assessment and gender-sensitive or gender-responsive budgeting. Gender-sensitive budgeting appears to have recently emerged as a widely promoted tool both by civil society and governments in many countries in all the regions.

²⁴ Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p.14

Continuation of dual-track approach to work

The gender mainstreaming strategy endorsed by the Platform for Action and the Economic and Social Council Agreed conclusions of 1997 have simultaneously underscored the need and importance of targeted women specific policies and programmes. The Economic and Social Council resolution of 1997 states that “gender mainstreaming does not replace the need for targeted women specific policies and programmes or positive legislation, nor does it substitute for gender units or focal points”.²⁵ Indeed, the national mechanisms in all regions have continued to pursue a dual-track approach to work. They have promoted gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes across government through various tools and guidelines, as well as by building analytical capacity and providing training. At the same time they have undertaken specific initiatives and actions in certain areas focused on women such as women’s quota in parliament, violence, and trafficking. These are discussed in detail in chapter 4.

Enlargement of stakeholders

Another major trend in the evolution of national mechanisms is the enlargement in the scope of stakeholders from being primarily drawn from government towards inclusion of a variety of non-government actors. Increasingly, emphasis is being placed on consultation and partnership with civil society, media and other social partners, as well as with independent/autonomous entities. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean region, the trend is towards creation of national councils or commissions with representatives from government as well as civil society, women’s non-governmental organizations, academics and experts. All governments in Latin America and the Caribbean region, reported in the study, have established these commissions and some have even increased the participation of civil society to establish parity with government officials (Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Suriname and Uruguay).

The study from the European Union and Western countries notes heightened awareness about the importance of cooperation with civil society organizations, particularly women’s non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders. In many countries of the region, involvement of men is increasingly regarded as an integral part of the work of the mechanisms. Similarly, in the Beijing + 15 survey, many African countries have reported increased partnership of government with civil society organizations.

However, studies from three regions have raised some concerns about this trend of partnership with civil society. The African study points out that there are no clear terms and rules of engagement for civil society consultations by national mechanisms. In addition, a “status of being part of the institutional mechanisms could prove challenging for civil society activism and also for its ability to demand accountability”.²⁶ The study from the Asia and Pacific region refers to tokenism as a problem which occurs when non-governmental organizations are made part of the national mechanisms, such as being appointed or elected as heads of inter-agency committees, but then are not given the authority to call government agencies for meetings, hold

²⁵ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/ECOSOCAC1997.2.PDF>

²⁶ Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p.14

them accountable to agreed commitments and goals, or may have no secretariat or financial support for their efforts.²⁷ The study from the Arab region notes that some of the leading national mechanisms in the Gulf region create their own civil society organizations to complement their role and function.²⁸

The relationships between national mechanisms and civil society are elaborated in chapter 5.

²⁷ Amaryllis T. Torres, 2010, p. 64

²⁸ I. Jad, 2010, p. 42.

3. STATUS OF NATIONAL MECHANISMS

Multiple indicators can be used to classify and compare the national mechanisms. This study uses a relatively simple analytical framework of four major indicators: (1) type of structure and location; (2) mandate; (3) role/function; and, (4) resource. The four indicators interact with and influence each other. For example, structures and location often affect role/function and resource; the mandate varies with the type of structure and location; resource varies with role/function as well as structure; role/function is impacted by structural location and resource. In reviewing the effectiveness of national mechanisms these interrelationships should be kept in mind.

3.1 Type of structure and location of national mechanisms

As noted earlier in chapter 2, the trend since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing is towards the establishment of different types of mechanisms located in various branches of government as well as outside the government. Structures differ according to their mandates and location. One major differentiation in the type of structure is that between national machineries and other mechanisms. The former is officially mandated by the government to be the lead unit to promote the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment. The other mechanisms are also tasked with the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment but they are not officially recognized as the lead government unit. Another way of differentiating the mechanisms is to classify them by their location, whether they operate at the national level or at decentralized levels; whether they are within the government or outside; and if they are within the government, then their location in the different branches of government. Yet another way of differentiation is to classify mechanisms according to their status as to whether they are established as autonomous or independent bodies, or they are to work within the control of the government.

The vast majority of mechanisms are located 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 are generally located in the executive branch of the government but increasingly also within the legislature. In a smaller number of countries, more prominently in Latin America, mechanisms have been established within the judiciary. Some countries, particularly in Latin America and Europe, have formed independent accountability mechanisms such as ombudsperson's offices or equality boards.

At the national level, the predominant mechanism is the national machinery as defined in paragraph 201 of the Platform for Action, which is generally located in the executive branch of the government. However, in some countries the national machinery is a constitutional or autonomous body, for example, the *Commission on Gender Equality* in South Africa; in others it has been established as a civil society organization such as *Cape Verdien Institute of Gender Equity and Equality* and the *National Union of Eritrean Women*. Still in some other countries such as several countries in the Arab region, national machineries are consultative bodies working under the guidance of the First Lady.

The type and number of mechanisms established by countries vary. The European Union and Western countries, and Latin America and the Caribbean region appear to have established many more types of mechanisms as compared to other regions. For example, Spain reports the existence of over 20 different types of mechanisms (see Box 3).

Box 3
Diversity of mechanisms in Spain

Deputy Committee for Equality Policies – high level body composed of ministers and secretaries of state

Ministry of Equality with the following executive bodies:

1- **General Secretariat for Equality Policies** comprising:

- **Government's Representation for Gender Violence** with:

- Coordination units on violence against women within each government delegations and units on violence against women in each government sub-delegation
- Nation-wide Watch on Violence against Women – inter-ministerial advisory body

- **Directorate General for Job Equality**

- **Directorate General against Discrimination**

- **International Relations Bureau (Deputy General Directorate)**

2- **Women's Institute** – autonomous body under the aegis of the Ministry of Equality comprising:

- **Governing Council**

- **Observatory for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men**

Women's Participation Council - collegiate counselling and advisory body

Inter-ministerial Committee on Equality for Women and Men – coordinating body

Equality Units in ministries

Sectoral Conference on Equality (former Sectoral Conference on Women) for coordination with Autonomous Communities

Specialized Bodies

Inter-ministerial Coordination Group for the Comprehensive Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings for Sexual Exploitation

Interministerial Group to monitor the actions of the Spanish Government National Action Plan for the Application of the Resolution 1325

Women's Health Observatory (Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs)

Observatory for Women in the Armed Forces (Ministry of Defense)

Special Ambassador for the Promotion of Gender Equality Policies – responsible to Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

Department for Sectoral and Gender Cooperation in Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation

Regional/local level

Women's Institutes, General Directorates or Services on Women/Equality in Autonomous communities and cities

Equality Committee in the Spanish Federation of municipalities and provinces

Women's Affairs Bureaux or Equality departments in local corporations, town councils, provincial councils, islands councils and others

Parliament

Congress of Deputies' Equality Commission

Sub-committee on the Comprehensive Act on Gender Violence

Senate Equality Commission

Judiciary**General Council of the Judiciary's Equality Commission****Domestic and Gender Violence Observatory** chaired by the General Council of the Judiciary**Courts for Violence against Women** – 92 courts**Gender Violence Prosecutor****Other bodies**

Equality Units, departments or similar bodies in universities

Source: Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010

The diversity of types of structures and location of national mechanisms are described below under two broad classifications: (A) national machinery; and, (B) other types of national mechanisms.

A. National Machinery

Over 100 countries had already established national machineries within the *Decade of Women* (1976-85). The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing served as a catalyst, spurring countries who had not already done so, to establish national machineries. Generally, national machineries are located within the executive branch of the government as a separate ministry or as a part of a ministry or as a department/division within a ministry or as a unit/bureau in the office of the president or prime minister. In some countries national machineries are also established as autonomous bodies or as consultative bodies. The differences in the types of structure and location of the national machineries are briefly discussed below.

Stand-alone ministry/part of a ministry

In a vast majority of countries, national machineries have been established either as a separate ministry or as a part of a ministry combined with other issues such as children, family or social affairs. These mechanisms are headed by a minister or deputy minister or state minister/secretary. It has been argued that the status of a full or part ministry gives greater visibility and sends a stronger political message about the government's commitment to women's empowerment and gender equality. It enables the mechanisms to have access to top-level decision making, including the cabinet of ministers, perform a wide range of roles and functions, and better opportunities to influence decisions on budgetary resources from the government.

In the majority of countries of Asia Pacific, Africa and Latin America, national machineries enjoy the status of a ministry, though quite often it may cover other issues and not exclusively women's issues. In at least seven countries of Asia Pacific (Afghanistan, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and New Zealand), it is a stand alone ministry. In Australia, the Minister is located in the Department of the Prime Minister. In Africa, Congo, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Namibia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Côte d'Ivoire, Angola and Lesotho are among the countries where the ministries combine women's issues with other issues.

In the European Union and Western countries, national machineries of Belgium, Italy, Luxemburg, Spain and the United Kingdom have the status of a ministry specifically dedicated to women or equality; in other countries such as Austria, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Norway and Sweden, national machineries are associated with other issues within a ministry. In the Arab Region, the Iraqi and Palestinian national machineries have the status of a stand-alone ministry dedicated to women; in other countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Sudan, national machineries are part of a ministry combined with other issues

According to data from the Latin American and Caribbean *Observatory on Gender Equality*, at the present time 40 per cent of national machineries have ministerial rank, another 20 per cent are entities attached to the Office of the President, and 40 per cent depend on another ministry, in most cases associated with social policies.²⁹

Department/division/services under a ministry

In many other countries national machineries are located in a department or division or service under a ministry generally dealing with social sectors such as family, health, labour, social security and welfare. Sometimes they are located outside the social sectors such as employment, internal affairs and justice. Location under a sectoral ministry may provide enhanced opportunities for outreach work or access to the budget of the sector or resources from development assistance for projects, but this location can also constrain other critical aspects of work such as overall policy/strategy development, gender mainstreaming, co-ordination and monitoring.

In the European Union and Western countries, as well as the South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States region, a great majority of national machineries are located under a sectoral ministry. Similarly, in the Caribbean region, in Barbados, Belize, Cayman Island, Dominica, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago national machineries are either units in ministries or departments such as social development, justice, internal affairs, cultural affairs, family and youth.

Unit in the office of the head of state/government

In countries where national machineries have been set up in the office of the head of the government or state, i.e. prime minister or president, this structural location gives the machinery access to top level decision making and cabinet submission from across the government; it also helps the machinery to be an effective catalyst, work for gender mainstreaming, and pursue coordination, monitoring, accountability, policy and strategy development work. National machineries have been able to optimize their structural location in the office of the head of state/government only when they have been able to combine both bureaucratic/technocratic and political mobilization work.

²⁹ www.cepal.org/oig, accessed in January 2010

Autonomous bodies

In several countries the national machineries have been established as autonomous bodies, as councils or commissions that have an independent constitutional status or consultative status with the government. Members of such councils/commissions are generally drawn from both government and civil society. In Latin America, several countries have autonomous national machineries each with a board enjoying a higher degree of independence (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela). In several countries in different regions (China, Laos, Vietnam, Eritrea, Cape Verde, Cuba) mass-based national women's organizations are established to officially represent women's concerns.

B. Other types of national mechanisms

As noted earlier in chapter 1, one of the main objectives of the study was to collect information about the work of other types of national mechanisms, which have emerged since Beijing. Some of these mechanisms are located in the executive branch of the government. Others are located either in the legislative or in the judicial branch of the government. Still others are located outside the government.

Countries in all regions have reported the existence of national mechanisms in addition to the national machinery both in the Beijing + 15 survey as well as in the supplementary questionnaire. However, they have not elaborated on how these mechanisms function in practice. Hence, the regional studies mainly refer to the establishment of these mechanisms without analyzing their actual functioning, relationship to the national machinery, or assessing their effectiveness on the ground. Information is also limited as to how these multiple and diverse mechanisms within government co-ordinate their activities or collaborate with each other and with other stakeholders outside the government.

The various national mechanisms noted by the regional studies are briefly described below under the following headings:

- Focal points/working groups in sectoral/line ministries
- Inter-department/ministerial/multi-sectoral bodies
- Inter-agency commissions/committees
- Sub-national mechanisms (regional/municipal/local)
- Committees/commissions/caucuses in parliament
- Committees/working groups within the judiciary
- Accountability institutions
- Advisory/consultative councils

Focal points/working groups in sectoral/ line ministries

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, a distinct trend in all regions is towards the establishment of focal points/working groups in sectoral/line ministries. The impetus behind this move is to implement gender mainstreaming as the focal points/working groups in

each sectoral ministry are tasked to integrate gender equality considerations in the policies/programmes of the ministry.

The study from the European Union and Western countries reports the appointment of gender focal points primarily in sectoral/line ministries, some with official status and some more informally, to promote and provide oversight of gender mainstreaming in different sectors. In the Commonwealth of Independent States region, in Kazakhstan for example, gender focal points have been established in all government agencies for the development and implementation of sector-specific gender equality policies, while in Ukraine gender working groups are in place in ministries to develop sectoral plans in accordance with the state programme for gender equality, 2008-2010. In the Asia and Pacific region, gender focal points are an important instrument for the realization of the goals of policies and plans for women and gender equality. They coordinate the planning and implementation of policies and selected strategies across government bureaucracy. They serve as consultative mechanisms, linking national plans downward to lower levels of governance and constituent groups, while being accountable upward to the national machinery for the implementation and monitoring of plans.³⁰

However, the regional studies highlight the marginalization of gender focal points. For example, the Africa study notes that though gender focal points have been appointed to facilitate gender mainstreaming in different sectors, they have not succeeded in an optimal way because of their lack of expertise and authority to coordinate and monitor gender-related work. The study points out that though this problem had been identified in the 1990s, very little progress has been made in remedying it.

Inter-departmental/ministerial/multi sectoral bodies

A great number of countries, in all regions, have also established inter-departmental/ministerial/multi-sectoral bodies to facilitate coordination/collaboration as well as gender mainstreaming. Some of the inter-departmental/inter-ministerial bodies perform a more political role when they are constituted at the ministerial level; others are tasked to perform more technical roles. The study from the European Union and Western countries notes that some of these bodies can exist both at political and technical levels; the political body entrusted with a broader scope of work to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote gender equality, and the technical body entrusted with more technical and specific responsibilities for practical action.

The main role of these bodies is to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, and facilitate coherent implementation and monitoring of the gender mainstreaming strategy, as well as promote the mutual exchange of information about concrete initiatives, good practices, instruments, tools and results.

Sub-national mechanisms

Another clear trend since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing is the establishment of various mechanisms below the national levels - in state, municipal and local governments. This is in line with the recommendation of the Platform for Action. The studies

³⁰Amaryllis T. Torres, 2010, p. 27

from Latin American and the Caribbean region, South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the European Union and Western countries highlight the existence of a variety of mechanisms at sub-national levels, although limited information is available on their mandates and functions. In contrast, the studies from Africa and the Arab region do not refer to such mechanisms. These local mechanisms are reported to be functioning better than mechanisms at the national level as they are closer to the people and can work in partnership with communities and civil society. The study from the European Union and Western countries refer to greater satisfaction with the functioning of local mechanisms expressed by several non-governmental organizations.

Committees/commissions/ caucuses in parliament

Establishment of mechanisms within parliament appears to be a growing trend in all regions of the world except in the Arab world. These mechanisms can be formal such as a commission or a committee, or informal such as a caucus or working group. The functions of these mechanisms are generally broad such as promotion and monitoring of laws and policies associated with gender equality and women's empowerment. The mechanisms within parliament have emerged also in countries with more recent histories of democratic governance. For example, all the 16 South Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States countries reviewed for the regional study indicate the existence of gender equality mechanisms within parliament.

Committees/working groups within judiciary

In contrast to mechanisms in legislatures, only a few countries, mostly in Latin America, and South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, report establishing mechanisms in the judiciary. At least seven Latin American countries (Argentina, Columbia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Panama, and Paraguay) currently have committees/working groups within the judiciary to work on gender equality issues. At least four Commonwealth of Independent States countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) also report the creation of committees/working groups within the judiciary.

Accountability institutions

Various accountability bodies have been added to the institutional framework, some appointed by parliament with accountability to it and some by the executive branch of the government and yet enjoying an independent status tasked to hold the executive accountable. The studies from Latin America and the Caribbean region, European Union and Western countries, and the South Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States region refer to the establishment of a variety of accountability institutions such as ombud's offices, equality boards or equal treatment, or anti-discrimination bodies. In Latin America and the Caribbean region, some of these are set up as independent bodies such as ombuds offices; some are located in the legislative branch of government and a few are within the executive branch. For example, Puerto Rico's national machinery has quasi-judicial powers to fine public officials and private institutions that do not comply with national policies on gender equality.

The study from the European Union and Western countries also refers to different accountability institutions. In the majority of cases these now address general equality or discrimination issues. Only in a few cases do they specifically address gender equality issues. In some cases they can assume a quasi-judicial function which empowers them to promote and undertake investigations and provide redress for discrimination cases. The majority of countries in South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States also report the creation of some form of accountability institutions. Only a few African countries report establishment of accountability institutions. None of the 14 Arab region countries reviewed by the regional study refer to such institutions.

Advisory/consultative councils

In many countries advisory/consultative councils have been established with membership drawn from both government and other stakeholders outside the government. The study from Latin America and the Caribbean notes, for example, that these bodies have been set up in compliance with the recommendation of the Beijing + 10 process that had urged greater co-operation and consultation with civil society, particularly women's organizations. The study notes establishment of such bodies in at least 12 countries. The names of such mechanisms vary. For example, the study from Africa refers to *Gender Consultative Forums* in two countries (Zambia and Namibia); *Gender Councils* in five (Botswana, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Mauritius, Gambia) and *Gender Commissions* in seven countries (Mozambique, Uganda, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, Chad, Comoros).

3.2 Mandate

Mandates define the approach to and scope of work of national mechanisms. They vary according to the type and location of the mechanisms. They also differ in their origin, whether they originate in laws or government decrees. Generally, mandates of national machineries are provided in broad terms encompassing a wide scope of work whereas mandates of other mechanisms are limited to their specific level and area of work. Mandates in some cases spell out the approach of work, for example, whether the mechanisms are to primarily focus on catalytic work or undertake implementation of projects; whether they are to pursue a dual-track approach, gender mainstreaming as well as targeted measures focused on women.

The origins of the mandate can impact on the functioning of national mechanisms. For example, where mandates are derived from constitutions or laws, they tend to lend the mechanisms with a greater sense of political legitimacy and stability. On the other hand, mandates originating primarily from a governmental decree have less stability as they can be altered with changes in government. However, this can also provide greater flexibility in adapting the mandate to the changing times.

Increasingly, the trend in all regions is to formulate the mandate of national mechanisms, particularly that of national machineries, in terms of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment with the emphasis on a strategy of gender mainstreaming. However, notwithstanding this general trend, the mandates are sometimes formulated in a way that highlights the traditional areas of family, children and other social welfare-related types of

activities. The studies from all regions refer to this distinction in the framework of the mandates. For example, the study from South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States notes that the mandate of the majority of national mechanisms is built around women, children and family issues. Very few countries in the region refer to international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or the Platform for Action. Montenegro is cited as an exception where the gender equality objective is specifically noted and the national machinery is tasked to review draft legislation to ensure promotion of gender equality; suggest endorsement of international documents on gender equality; recommend measures for gender equality in sectoral areas such as education, health, social policy, employment; make decisions and develop programmes on gender equality in line with the standards of European Union; and, cooperate with non-governmental organizations dealing with equality issues.

The study from the Arab region notes that in the majority of countries, national machineries were created by decrees issued by presidents/kings/Sheikhs, mostly to care and develop programmes for women, children, elderly and destitute women. The study from the European Union and Western countries also notes that in some countries of the region mandates are framed to limit the scope of the national machineries to more traditional areas of family responsibilities.

Often, mandates specify the roles and functions of the mechanisms. For example, the gender mainstreaming role is assigned not just to the national machinery but also to the focal points and interdepartmental structures. Attached to this responsibility, national mechanisms are sometimes specifically mandated to create the instruments and tools necessary to put in practice the gender mainstreaming strategy, through the design of various tools for sectoral gender analysis, gender-sensitive budgeting, gender impact assessments or gender audits.

In many cases their functions are included in the mandates of the national mechanisms. They include preparation of national action plans and monitoring their implementation; providing advice, expertise and training; information and awareness-raising; promotion of studies, research, analysis of data, and other indicators; assistance to victims of discrimination; monitoring of the gender composition of boards, councils and other public bodies; promotion and funding of specific projects and initiatives; cooperating and supporting women's non-governmental organizations or other relevant stakeholders; and so on.

The study from the Latin America and the Caribbean region refers to a trend to diversify the mandates through establishment of specific mechanisms invested with specific areas of work. Four major areas of work are most frequently identified as priorities in the region: violence against women; sexual and reproductive health; women and agricultural development; and, indigenous women.

The mandates of mechanisms in parliaments are generally straightforward: oversight of legislation, and monitoring government policies both specific to gender equality and more general policies related to women's welfare. In a few cases, special bodies have been created within parliament to deal with a specific issue, such as violence against women.

The mandates of independent bodies vary according to their types and nature of mission. For example, ombudspersons or equivalent human rights institutions are usually tasked to receive and investigate complaints, and subsequently, provide assistance to victims of discrimination. Other bodies, such as observatories or special commissions or councils, or institutes, carry out different tasks according to their mandates in specific areas, such as parity in political life, equality in employment, violence against women, trafficking, and so on.

The study on the European Union and Western countries highlights several recent trends in the mandates. First, in countries where national mechanisms have been restructured and integrated within general equality or general anti-discrimination bodies, the mandates have been amended to encompass all forms of discrimination and all equalities.

Second, the recent European Union directives require the creation or existence in Member States of *National Equality Bodies* invested with specific functions. “States are required to designate a body or bodies for the promotion, analysis, monitoring and support of equal treatment of all persons, without discrimination on the grounds of sex, both at work (Directive 2002/73/EC) and outside work, regarding goods and services (Directive 2004/113/EC). Such bodies have prescribed mandates, namely as regards providing assistance to victims in pursuing their complaints; conducting independent surveys on discrimination; or publishing independent reports and making recommendations on any issue relating to discrimination”.³¹

Third, some of the government mechanisms are now mandated to receive and deal with complaints for reasons of discrimination, a matter that used to be mainly within the competence of independent bodies, but which can now be performed by some bodies within government. Fourth, another new trend in several countries is the inclusion of the international dimension, both expressed as coordination of international affairs in the area of equality and representation at the international level, as well as responsibilities in regard to gender mainstreaming in development cooperation. Finally, the management of information and the use of new technologies, including creation of data bases or of specialized websites are also included as part of the mandates of specialized mechanisms.

Although mandates of national mechanisms are increasingly being specified with a focus on their gender mainstreaming role there is a continuing tension between being a lean catalytic mechanism and being a service deliverer. This remains a challenge for the work of national mechanisms, which will be discussed in chapter 7.

3.3 Role/function

The diverse mechanisms established to promote gender equality and empowerment of women perform a wide variety of roles and functions, which are listed in the regional studies. These include promotion of legislation; policy and strategy development; formulation and implementation of national action plans; support for gender mainstreaming; support for research, statistics, and data collection; capacity development (training, and development of tools); monitoring including on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Platform for Action and reporting of national efforts to

³¹ Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010, p. 16

comply with international commitments on gender equality; coordination and collaboration; strengthening accountability; and, social mobilization and providing direct services to people.

Not all mechanisms perform all roles and functions. Moreover many roles and functions are shared by several mechanisms. For example, legislative work is promoted by mechanisms both within the executive and legislative branches of government as well as civil society groups. Similarly, monitoring and accountability roles are performed by mechanisms within the executive and legislative branches of government and also by accountability institutions outside the government. In addition, civil society plays an important monitoring and accountability role. Coordination roles are generally assigned to the national machinery as well as other inter-departmental/inter-ministerial bodies in the executive branch. Similarly, work related to the development of policy, strategy, plans and the promotion of gender mainstreaming fall under the purview of the mechanisms within the executive branch. However, supporting research for policy/strategy/plan development and for gender mainstreaming is often carried out by institutions outside the government. Again, research, statistics, data collection and analysis, training, and tools development are generally carried out/supported both by autonomous bodies outside the government as well as by mechanisms within government.

The various roles and functions performed by the diverse mechanisms are briefly described below.

Promotion of legislation

Several mechanisms work to promote legislation. Generally, mechanisms in the executive and legislative branches of government take the lead in promoting and drafting legislation, for eventual adoption by the legislature. However, mechanisms outside the government also play important roles in research and advocacy for legislation. The regional studies refer to a wide variety of legal reforms that have been initiated and promoted by national mechanisms including gender equality legislation, as well as other laws/regulations mandating equal opportunity in the work place, equal wages for equal work, combating sex discrimination, sexual harassment and violence against women, and eliminating discriminatory provisions in nationality laws, pension laws, divorce and alimony laws and the family court laws. In many countries, national machineries have successfully lobbied within governments for ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or for lifting reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Policy/strategy development

The policy/strategy development role is performed by national machineries as well as other national mechanisms. Generally, national machineries play the lead role in developing and updating national policies on women and gender equality. Other mechanisms in the executive branch also get involved in policy work in different sectors. Policy work is often supported by research which can be carried out by institutions outside the government. Although 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 actors accountable. The national policies are often based on global policy and legal frameworks,

namely 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 various sectors.

Policy development is generally followed by development of strategies and action plans to implement the policy objectives. With multiplication and diversification of structures, multiple strategies have been developed to carry out the respective mandates of different structures. The regional studies refer to the development of various policies and strategies in different countries. The proliferation of strategies has given the gender equality agenda higher visibility but it has also created challenges for coordination with broader national policy objectives, as well as among a range of stakeholders that are tasked with implementation.

Formulation and implementation of national action plans

A major role of national machineries since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing is the formulation, and monitoring of the implementation of national action plans. The action plans generally establish broad objectives on gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as specific goals in different sectors. The areas of specific actions vary from country to country, but most include interventions to improve women's situation in education, health, employment, labour 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, on progress in implementation.

Multiple mechanisms get involved in the preparation and implementation of national action plans. The regional studies from the European Union and Western countries, and the Latin America and the Caribbean regions refer to the active participation of the sub-national mechanisms in the preparation and implementation of these plans. Gender focal points are also involved in the formulation and implementation of sectoral plans.

Gender mainstreaming

As noted earlier, in chapter 2, the promotion, support and monitoring of gender mainstreaming have emerged as the most significant roles of the national mechanisms. The national machineries are expected to play 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 are tasked to raise gender issues in their own ministries/agencies. Inter-ministerial/departmental mechanisms are tasked to harmonize their activities directed towards systematic use of the gender mainstreaming strategy in all policies and programmes. Sub-national mechanisms are also mandated to promote gender mainstreaming at different levels of government. Indeed, all the regional studies refer to efforts by multiple mechanisms to promote gender mainstreaming, to build the capacity and tools necessary for its use and to monitor its effective application.

Research/statistics/ data collection and analysis

Again, national machineries as well as other mechanisms within the government, e.g. the national statistical offices, and mechanisms outside the government such as institutes, commissions etc, carry out the functions of collection of data and statistics disaggregated by sex, development of indicators, and conduct of gender sensitive research. All the regional studies refer to efforts by multiple mechanisms in this area. 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, and on gender perspectives in many sectoral areas has increased. In many countries support has been provided for women's studies departments/institutions at tertiary level. An annual publication of statistical information on women and men is now available in many countries.

Capacity-building: tools and training

Another important role of national mechanisms is capacity building. This involves development of methodologies and tools as well as organization of training programmes. This function is carried out by national machineries, commonly in collaboration with research and training institutions. Various tools have been developed and used in all the regions to undertake gender analysis, gender audits, gender-impact assessment and gender-sensitive budgeting. The regional reports also refer to training of staff of national machineries as well as gender focal points of various ministries and agencies. Capacity-building in several countries have encompassed sensitivity briefings and training of senior managers in different ministries and agencies, and training in specific technical methods and tools.

Monitoring and accountability

A number of mechanisms play monitoring and accountability roles. Generally, national machineries are mandated to play the lead role in monitoring. However, this role is often not systematically performed because of lack of monitoring indicators and data. In some countries, the national machineries have monitored the activities of other ministries and provided recommendations to specific ministries for follow-up action. In other instances, national machineries have presented annual "white papers" or provided responses on progress towards gender equality to parliament. This information has sometimes been made accessible to citizens through websites. National machineries also have the primary responsibility to prepare reports on compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as well as in follow-up to actions by intergovernmental bodies, such as the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women.

In many countries, civil society organizations play an important role in monitoring progress towards gender equality. In some countries, the government has established monitoring bodies with membership drawn from civil society and non-governmental organizations. In some other countries civil society organizations themselves carry out their independent monitoring and assessment of gender equality and also prepare and present shadow reports on compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The accountability role is also performed by several mechanisms. Accountability institutions, such as the offices of ombudspersons or equality boards or anti-discrimination bodies are the lead agencies for ensuring accountability in specific cases of discrimination against women. The mechanisms within the legislative branch of the government can ask for accountability from the executive branch. Again, civil society in many places demands accountability from the government.

Coordination and collaboration

Another key role/function of national machineries 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 structures is growing. Since the relationships between the various mechanisms are often not well-defined, the coordination and collaboration amongst them work well in some countries and less so in others.

Following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing the number of civil society organizations has increased in many countries and collaboration of national mechanisms with non-governmental organizations has expanded. The studies from all regions note the establishment of committees or commissions with joint government-civil society membership, tasked with a wide number of functions. In many cases governments have provided financial assistance to non-governmental organizations to implement projects. Some countries have undertaken a systematic process of government-civil society dialogue. Partnerships between the government and a wide variety of social partners, including trade unions and professional organizations, have also been established in many countries.

Social mobilization and direct services

All the regional studies refer to the role of social mobilization and provision of direct services to citizens through projects as one of the functions still being performed by national machineries in different countries. The study from Latin America and the Caribbean region highlights the social mobilization role as well as provision of direct services to people. The Africa study also underscores the continuing importance of providing direct services to citizens.

Though the roles/functions described above are common to all regions, there are some regional and sub-regional differences in terms of the priorities assigned to various functions. For example, the Latin America and the Caribbean region study notes that the most frequently performed roles are: policy work; promotion of legislation; catalytic work for gender mainstreaming; monitoring and accountability; coordination and collaboration; social mobilization; and, capacity building. The study from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia notes that in the Gulf region awareness raising and international representation are the two main functions of the national mechanisms, while in other countries of the region national mechanisms are assigned a whole variety of roles/functions which include policy/strategy/plan development, monitoring, research and data collection, gender mainstreaming, law reforms, and capacity building including the development of tools and training.

3.4 Resource

‘Resource’ has been conceptualized in a multi-dimensional way by the study. Resource includes both financial and human resources. Staff strength, numbers as well as expertise, are important. Budget support particularly from internal sources is also important. Leadership quality of national mechanisms constitutes another resource. Political support from the top leadership as well as powerful constituencies and a mass base is another key resource available to the national mechanisms.

The regional studies provide limited information on resources. This is, in part, due to the fact that information on resources is scarce and not systematic in responses to the Beijing + 15 survey. Also there are considerable variations among countries in regard to resources depending on their size, number of mechanisms and overall State budget. In addition, it is difficult to assess the quality dimensions of the available resources, for example, experience and expertise of staff, leadership quality, and political support from within and outside government.

However, all the regional studies note that on the whole human and budgetary resources for national mechanisms have increased in many countries, though they are inadequate compared to the expanded mandate and role of the diverse mechanisms. The studies from the European Union and Western countries, as well as from Latin America and the Caribbean region, highlight some positive developments. The study from the European Union notes that when numbers for the available financial resources are reviewed, there is evidence of a certain positive evolution in the resource base with “some cases of significant increases”.³² As for human resources, it argues that “there seems to be a positive evolution in many cases, particularly with growing numbers of personnel involved in regional and local structures”,³³ and also as regards qualitative resources reflected in the general adoption of equality legislation and action plans.

The study from Latin America and the Caribbean region also highlights positive developments in one critical area of resources - political support and the quality of leadership of the national mechanisms. It notes that political support, both at the highest political level and from constituency levels, has been increasing in the region. It argues that the adoption of national action plans in almost all countries is an indicator of political support. Enactment of intra- and inter-ministerial strategies also depend on the political will of the presidency, which has increased significantly in the last few years. The study provides other indicators of increased political support: the adoption of important laws and policies in crucial areas such as quotas laws, violence against women, human trafficking, sexual and reproductive health, paid domestic work; statements by the presidency, ministers, mayors, and other high officials of governments supporting gender equality agendas; and, the increase in the appointments of women to ministerial cabinet posts.

Political support has come not only from the top leadership but important support has also come from specific constituencies and civil society. Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica and Mexico provide examples of strong support by civil society for the national mechanisms.

³² Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010, p. 26

³³ *Ibid*, p. 26

The study also underscores the importance of the leadership role of national mechanisms in gaining the support of the women's movements. Women's organizations throughout the region strongly support the national mechanism's efforts and constitute their natural political base. Additionally, support from academia has been important and consistent throughout the region.

The study, however, notes that despite these positive developments in the region the political will has been uneven and access to financial and human resources have not been commensurate with the expanding mandates and functions of the diverse mechanisms and rising expectations of citizens.

The studies from the other regions also note some improvement in the number of staff, expertise and budgetary resources. Staff strength has been bolstered in many cases with the appointment of consultants recruited from outside the government. Staff expertise has increased as a result of training and development of necessary instructional tools. Additional funds for national mechanisms in developing countries have been provided mainly from donor sources. But the regional studies highlight a number of problem areas as well. The heavy dependence on donor funds with its attendant constraints are noted by studies from Africa, South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Asia-Pacific and the Arab region. These studies question the sustainability of national mechanisms if donor funds are reduced or withdrawn.

The challenges posed by resource constraints will be further discussed in chapter 7.

4. MAIN AREAS OF WORK

The previous chapter has briefly discussed the roles and functions of diverse mechanisms. The mandates invest the mechanisms with a wide range of roles and functions. To fulfill their mandates the mechanisms have pursued a few selected strategies and used several instruments. They have focused on issues which are perceived as priority in a given region. While priorities have differed between countries and regions one can still find some common trends across countries. Discussion in this chapter is organized in two sections. The first section focuses on strategies and instruments and the second on priority issues highlighted in the work of the national mechanisms in different regions.

4.1 Strategies and instruments

The regional studies note a number of common strategies which have been deployed by the mechanisms. The four most important strategies are: gender mainstreaming; targeted measures; promotion of legislation; and, consultation. As part of their roles, the mechanisms have developed and used different instruments to promote the gender equality agenda. The most noteworthy among them are: preparation of national and sector action plans; gender training; sex disaggregated data and statistics; research; and, monitoring and evaluation.

Gender mainstreaming

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the gender mainstreaming strategy has been accepted as critical for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, and national mechanisms have an essential role as catalysts for its systematic use across all areas of government. The strategy has frequently been invested with a legal basis either through constitutional provisions or special equality acts as had happened in many European Union countries. To facilitate and support gender mainstreaming, multiple and diverse mechanisms have been created at different location of government and outside which have been discussed earlier in chapter 3. The national machinery together with these other mechanisms has championed the gender equality agenda in different sectors and levels, and served as catalyst for gender mainstreaming. The multiplication and diversification of structures have on the whole been perceived as a positive development for the use of the gender mainstreaming strategy, though the regional studies point to difficulties of coordinating and monitoring the work of multiple mechanisms as well as their capacity to promote and support gender mainstreaming. Moreover, as the study from Latin America and the Caribbean region admits that it is not easy to assess the impact of these multiple mechanisms on gender mainstreaming because of "lack of precise outcome information".³⁴

While acknowledging the difficulties of assessing the impact of multiple mechanisms in mainstreaming gender perspectives in all policies and programmes, the study from the European Union and Western countries cautiously concludes that "on the whole progress is visible and the strategy is welcomed and accepted" though the "optimal output that will bring about change has not yet been reached".³⁵

³⁴ María Dolores Fernós , 2010, p. 37

³⁵ Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010, p. 31

All the regional studies particularly highlight the development of various tools for gender mainstreaming as a positive step. The tools of gender analysis and gender impact assessment are often mandated by donors as part of their assistance to projects and programmes. As discussed earlier, gender-sensitive budgeting is rapidly emerging as a new tool in both developed and developing countries. Its use is mandatory in some countries and voluntary in others.

Targeted measures

Side by side with the promotion of the gender mainstreaming strategy, national mechanisms have also pursued the use of targeted measures for women or a special group of women. The study from Latin America and the Caribbean region highlights the use of this strategy. In some instances, this strategy is taking the form of temporary special measures as part of a necessary strategy directed towards the achievement of de facto or substantive equality of women with men. One example is quota laws to enhance women's political representation. The study from Africa similarly notes the use of quota provisions to increase women's representation in governance structures. It notes that "their provisions cover appointments to the executive branch of government, representation in the legislature and local government (Rwanda, Uganda). In some cases, ruling parties have spearheaded affirmative action policies (South Africa, where the government has recently launched a 50/50 campaign), whereas in others, it has been the executive branch of government acting on its own".³⁶ The study points out that when affirmative action policies are only administrative decisions without mechanisms for enforcement and monitoring, they are largely ignored.

The strategy of targeted measures has also been pursued to address specific issues. For example, the study from the European Union and Western countries argues that specific actions "have proved to be necessary" to address the "still disadvantaged situation of women in the labour market or their still existing marginal position in political life and in decision-making, both of them requiring positive actions or temporary special measures but also others, like violence, particularly domestic violence or trafficking that affect mainly women and require specific responses; or still another very broad and structural area, that of cultural change and questioning of the prevalent stereotyped views of women's roles and image".³⁷ In the Asia and Pacific region, targeted measures have aimed to enable women to access the benefits of globalization, through employment laws and policies, vocational and practical skills training, entrepreneurship education, microfinance, and access to markets.³⁸

Similarly, the study from the Latin America and the Caribbean region notes the use of targeted measures to address specific problems, for example, violence against women. It refers to a variety of actions such as production of infomercials, brochures, posters and web pages, capacity building and training of key actors such as law enforcement officials, school teachers, health providers, and non-governmental organizations; skills training, and community education. One significant finding of the study is that "direct services particularly to attend to partner violence

³⁶ Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p. 23

³⁷ Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010, p. 29

³⁸ Amaryllis T. Torres, 2010, p. 36

are offered by different mechanisms even though they have no specific mandate in their organic law to provide them”.³⁹

The Africa regional study highlights a popular new special measure strategy - ‘women’s funds’ - to address the resource constraints of individual women or their organizations. In discussing the pros and cons of this strategy, the study argues that the women’s funds “mark a modification of the micro credit and income generation projects of the 70s and 80s administered by national machinery, which were heavily critiqued for not paying sufficient attention to policy issues”.⁴⁰ Women’s funds on the other hand are earmarked for different purposes. The South African fund is to promote the work of civil society organizations while the Ghana fund is directed at women wanting to enter politics. Funds are useful because they provide support which might otherwise be missing. However, there are also some disadvantages to these funds. Their management enlarges the implementation portfolio of national machineries and take away time which could have been used for policy work. In addition, these funds have sometimes been perceived and used as a tool of political patronage. The study cites the example of Ghana’s fund to support women in politics which “created a backlash when male candidates in local government contests used its existence to claim falsely that all the women candidates had collected money in the name of their communities and therefore should be called to account for its use”. The study argues that “it was time consuming and difficult for women candidates to refute these allegations and this might have cost some of them the elections”.⁴¹

Promotion of legislation

Promotion of legislation, new laws as well as reforms of established laws, has been noted by several studies as an effective strategy of work pursued by the national mechanisms. The study from Latin America and the Caribbean region particularly highlights the processes of law and constitutional reforms. It argues that “one of the main strategies that national mechanisms have emphasized is the promotion and approval of law reforms (penal, civil) and in a few cases, constitutional reforms. Violence against women (partner violence and trafficking), work conditions (maternity, domestic paid work), family law issues (custody, paternity, and child support), electoral policies (parity), municipality reforms and national gender policies are legal provisions regularly emerging in the region. Less often, statutes on abortion (Mexico) and sexual harassment and gender-based budgeting have been adopted”.⁴²

The study from the European Union and Western countries similarly underscores the importance and widespread use of the strategy of legal reforms in the region. As a condition of accession to the European Union gender equality laws have been adopted in several countries. In addition, new laws have been adopted or existing laws have been amended to address the issues of equality within the family, in employment, and politics, combating sexual harassment, violence against women and trafficking. The studies from the Arab region, Africa and the Asia Pacific also note the promotion and adoption of various legal reforms.

³⁹ María Dolores Fernós , 2010, p. 37

⁴⁰ Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p.23

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 24

⁴² María Dolores Fernós, 2010, pp. 36-37

All the regional studies acknowledge that the advocacy and campaign required to mobilize support for legal/constitutional reforms as well as the reforms themselves have contributed to advance the agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment, and have in many instances enhanced the visibility and influence of national mechanisms.

Consultation

In recent years, in all regions consultative processes have been more frequently used to promote greater coordination and collaboration as well as dissemination of information on gender equality issues. Consultation processes include both consultation between different bodies within governments as well as consultations with outside organizations. This strategy has been effectively used in regions and countries where civil society is strong, such as in the European Union, and Latin America and the Caribbean region. For example, the study from Latin America and the Caribbean region notes the consultative review processes in policy/plan formulation and implementation at national level, as well as the *Regional Consensus* documents of the *Regional Conferences on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean*⁴³ where consultation has been used as effective strategies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

National action plans

Many countries in all regions have developed national action plans for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. These plans have been used as instruments for advocacy and campaign for policy reforms and specific actions. The study from the European Union and Western countries affirms its wide use as "the main policy instrument at the disposal of national mechanisms to pursue gender equality policies".⁴⁴ The study notes that in most countries, equality mechanisms have been charged with responsibilities to draft such plans or coordinate their drafting in cooperation with different sectors, as well as coordinate their implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Specific action plans have also been formulated in critical areas, like violence or trafficking.

The study argues that "practically everywhere, with very few exceptions, national plans and national strategies constitute the main instrument for the pursuit of gender equality".⁴⁵

The Latin America and the Caribbean regional study similarly highlights the use of national action plans as an effective instrument for the promotion of gender equality, and a key aspect of the work of national mechanisms. It also argues that national action plans for equal opportunity or gender equality are the main instrument to comply with international agreements. The majority of countries reviewed by the study have in place national action plans to establish priorities and milestones to better women's lives in the region. "Adoption of such plans has become more common throughout Latin America in the last decade. National mechanisms usually play a central role both in the preparation and in the implementation of such plans. States

⁴³ See, for example, the tenth regional conference held in 2007, <http://www.eclac.cl/cgi-bin/getProd.asp?xml=/mujer/noticias/noticias/3/27753/P27753.xml&xsl=/mujer/tpl/plf.xsl&base=/mujer/tpl/top-bottom.xsl>

⁴⁴ Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010, p. 31

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 31

have assigned this mandate to the principal national mechanisms, however in some cases, ad hoc mechanisms (inter/intra working committees or commissions) have been set up with the specific mandate to elaborate these plans and/or institutionalize them on a more permanent basis. Women's organizations and NGOs usually take an active role in the elaboration of such plans, through concept papers or active participation in the mechanism".⁴⁶ The study argues that more policies and programmes have been adopted, and mechanisms established by countries as a result of these national action plans.

The Latin America and Caribbean study provides an example from Brazil to illustrate how the preparatory processes for the formulation of nation plans can be used to mobilize women and include their concerns from grassroots up in this governmental document (see Box 4).

Box 4
Preparatory process of national action plan in Brazil

The Brazil experience with national conferences, organized by the national mechanisms to facilitate citizens participation in the drafting of national gender plans, shows that these have been a very successful tool to mobilize women, bring gender equality issues to the public debate and create a wider base of support. The national conferences are important sources for generating substantive ideas for the elaboration of national plans that truly respond to women's needs and aspirations. These national conferences are preceded by municipal and/or state conferences where women participate in the drafting of regional plans of action. This approach builds the capacity and power of civil society. The conferences at all levels provide privileged access to a vigorous debate, and a forum to build trust and reach consensus. They have also contributed to greater transparency in governmental action and have opened to dialogue the relations between the state and civil society. They can be considered as models of solidarity building and of permanent dialogue of the state with social movements.

Source: María Dolores Fernós, 2010

Sectoral plans

The studies from the European Union and Western countries and the Latin America and Caribbean region note the use of sectoral plans as another effective instrument where national mechanisms have a critical role. There is an increasing tendency in these regions in recent years to adopt various sectoral plans in ministries and state agencies, as well as at sub-national levels in regional and local bodies. The study from the European Union and Western countries argues that the adoption of equality plans at all levels and sectors is not yet a general practice everywhere, but it seems to be a trend that, in some cases, also extends to private enterprises, to universities and other institutions. The study further notes the trend of specific thematic plans, mostly addressing the issues of gender-based violence and trafficking.

Gender training

Gender training is, again, a widely used instrument by national mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality. All regional studies refer to its increasing availability. However, the quality and efficacy of this instrument has not been adequately assessed. The study from Africa uses a

⁴⁶ María Dolores Fernós, 2010, p. 38

cautionary note and points out that gender training was one of the earliest instruments used by national machineries to promote gender equality on the belief that obstacles to gender equality were mostly caused by ignorance and the lack of capacity to implement policies and agreements. However, after years of “gender training at all levels of society - within communities, directed at women, development workers, government officials and officers of institutional mechanisms, some realism has developed about the value and limitations of training for achieving gender equality”.⁴⁷ The Africa study calls for changes in the existing methods of gender training. It argues that in future gender training needs to be more technical and specialized to impart the skills necessary for the use of some of the tools of gender mainstreaming, such as gender-sensitive budgeting, gender impact assessments, gender audits, and so on.

Sex disaggregated data and statistics

Data and statistics disaggregated on the basis of sex and gender-specific indicators are critical for improved policy-making and monitoring. National mechanisms have advocated for the collection and use of such data for decades as a key instrument for the promotion of gender equality and for effective gender mainstreaming. Some progress has been made in all regions. For example, the study from the Latin America and the Caribbean region highlights the increasing availability and use of sex-disaggregated data and statistics in national institutions as well as in private organizations which has been facilitated through the support of the national mechanisms. Efforts in this direction are evident also at local and regional levels. In some cases, agreements with the national statistical institutions are in place to guarantee the sustainability of sex disaggregation of data. A few countries have created gender statistics divisions within national statistical offices.

The study from the Asia Pacific region similarly refers to development of sex-disaggregated data and statistics and gender-sensitive indicators, and the creation of resource centres on women and gender issues. It highlights the publication of an annual social report in New Zealand that monitors the well being of New Zealanders by providing sex-disaggregated data and statistics.

Research

Research on women and gender equality issues is yet another key element for the promotion of gender equality, and for purposes of advocacy and campaign. This instrument is thus widely used, and called for, by national mechanisms and other stakeholders. The study from the Asia Pacific region highlights the role of national mechanisms in strengthening availability of studies and research. One example is the work of the Australian government, which regularly commissions research about issues that affect women. The *Office for Women* funded the *Centre for Gender-Related Violence Studies* at the University of New South Wales to establish the *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse*, a database that provides a collection of information on Australian and relevant international domestic violence policies, practices and research. It is sponsoring a three year study, *Trends in Time: Work, Family and Social Policy*, which will analyze the changing patterns of unpaid work in the home among men and women using the three *Australian Time Use Surveys* conducted between 1992 and 2006.

⁴⁷ Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p. 22

The study from the Arab region similarly highlights the support and sponsorship of national mechanisms in conducting research on a variety of issues related to women and gender equality.

Monitoring and accountability

The regional studies refer to lack of indicators for monitoring, which is identified as a weakness in a key instrument of work of national mechanisms. For example, the Latin America and the Caribbean region study suggests that only the more developed countries have been able to establish time-bound targets and regular monitoring (Chile, Costa Rica, and Mexico). The study from the African region similarly underscores the weakness of monitoring and evaluation instruments. The study from the European Union, however, notes some progress in setting targets and indicators in the action plans to measure results.

The Latin America study provides the case study of Chile to illustrate how gender action plans can be systematically monitored (see Box 5).

Box 5

Monitoring implementation of the gender action plan in Chile

All ministries of the national government in Chile monitor every three months the achievement of the programmed goals of all public plans, programmes and projects with specific and concrete objectives. Gender equality, development and mainstreaming are, under the present government, to be measured and closely monitored. The national machinery, at the highest level of government, is in charge of this gender specific monitoring. An economic bonus to all those across the governmental structure serves as a powerful incentive for compliance. Under this programme, a *Gender Focus System* is incorporated by which the gender perspective is systematically and permanently incorporated in standard procedures by all governmental institutions. Accordingly, gender equality policies are treated as any other policy approved by the state in terms of monitoring, evaluation for compliance, and sanctions. 166 gender-specific services have been identified and all are monitored through this system.

Source: María Dolores Fernós, 2010

Other instruments

Several other instruments have been identified by the different regional studies. For example, the European Union and Western countries study refers to the use of the new information technologies by national mechanisms such as websites, to disseminate information on rights, laws, policies, programmes, projects, resources for action and databases; e-learning tools; electronic networks; and so on. However, the study concludes that developments in this area are rather uneven, with some countries at a more advanced stage and others at incipient phase in the creation and adoption of such instruments. The Latin America and the Caribbean study highlights the use of several other instruments such as public notice of bills and policy drafts for debate, campaign and lobbying. The studies from the European Union as well as Latin America and the Caribbean region also refer to 'gender observatories' established in several countries as a useful instrument for monitoring progress towards gender equality.

4.2 Priority issues

The policy agendas of the national mechanisms and the strategies and instruments at their disposal cover a wide canvas. It is not surprising that priorities have to be established within the contextual circumstances relating to gender equality concerns in particular countries as well as their respective resource constraints. However, there are some commonalities amongst the regions in terms of the priority issues addressed by the various national mechanisms. The common issues addressed in all regions are the following:

- Violence against women, mainly domestic violence but also other forms of physical and sexual violence or sexual harassment
- Human trafficking
- Representation of women in politics and public life
- Women's health, particularly sexual and reproductive health
- Poverty and economic development

Violence against women

Violence against women appears to be a key priority issue in all regions. The issue has been addressed through a range of strategies and instruments, including national action plans, law reform, research, data collection, and advocacy efforts and campaigns; and, special training has been designed and undertaken to sensitize law enforcement officials, the judiciary and other key stakeholders. Targeted services have been provided to victims of violence.

Human trafficking

The issue of human trafficking has been similarly addressed through a range of strategies and instruments including awareness raising, enactment of laws to combat the crime and strengthening of enforcement, adoption of action plans, as well as provision of services to victims of trafficking.

Representation in politics and public life

Work on representation of women in politics and public life has been organized around multiple strategies and interventions. Laws and regulations have been enacted providing women's/gender balance quota. Research, data collection and statistics have been used to enhance knowledge and awareness. Training has been organized to impart skills to women candidates. And as noted earlier, funds have been allocated (Ghana) to facilitate women's participation in politics.

Women's health, particularly sexual and reproductive health

Women's health, particularly sexual and reproductive health, has been a priority area, albeit sometimes a highly contested issue because of the opposition of religious groups, such as the Catholic Church in several Latin American countries. Again, work on this issue combined various strategies and instruments: research, data collection, statistics, advocacy, campaigns as

well as formulation and revision of laws and regulations, including related to contraception and abortion.

Poverty and economic development

Work on poverty and economic development has been pursued through all the key strategies and instruments available to national mechanisms, such as formulation of policies, strategies and plans to reduce poverty and improve women's employment and income; laws and regulations to combat discrimination against women in the labour market; consultations with key stakeholders in the public and private sphere; and, provision of services such as skills training and credit to generate opportunities for livelihood.

The studies from the regions also indicate differences in priorities of issues of focus. Several issues have been listed as priority by only two regions. For example, education and training for gender equality have been referred to as a priority in the studies from European Union and Western countries and Asia Pacific. These two studies also list the impact of globalization and migration on women as a priority issue.

Several issues have been listed as priority by only a single region. For example, the study from European Union and Western countries lists reconciliation of professional and family responsibilities as a priority issue. Women and natural disaster management is listed as a priority by only the study from the Asia Pacific region. Partnership with non-governmental organizations and civil society is referred to as a priority again only by the study on Asia Pacific. The Africa study lists conflict and post conflict, climate change, HIV/AIDS and girl child as priority issues for national mechanisms of the region.

5. COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment depends in considerable measures on the coordinated efforts of multiple actors as well as collaboration between them. With multiplication and diversification of national mechanisms particularly within different levels and branches of government coordination, that is harmonizing the approaches and activities of different bodies in an efficient manner, becomes an important but challenging task. So is collaboration which implies working together for a common objective.

The regional studies shed some light on the institutional arrangements for coordination and collaboration. There appears to be some difference between regions in the efficacy of coordination and collaboration between mechanisms and also between mechanisms and other stakeholders. The studies from European Union and Western countries, and Latin America and the Caribbean region report some positive trends. The discussion in this chapter is organized in two sections. The first section discusses coordination and collaboration between mechanisms and the second section focuses on collaboration with other stakeholders.

5.1 Co-ordination and collaboration between mechanisms

Coordination and collaboration between different national mechanisms can take many forms. In some cases there are formal institutional arrangements for coordination and collaboration; in others they are based on informal and ad hoc arrangements. However, the mere existence of formal institutional arrangements, on paper, does not mean that these arrangements are adhered to in practice. Hence, assessment of effectiveness of coordination and collaboration is difficult.

Coordination role/function is performed by different bodies in different places. Generally, the national machinery is assigned the role of coordinating the work of other mechanisms, particularly within the executive branch of the government (e.g. gender focal points). Increasingly in many countries inter-ministerial/inter-departmental/sectoral committees have been established, which aim to coordinate the work of various ministries/departments/sectors. However, the regional studies do not provide detailed information on how these inter-departmental/ministerial bodies actually function and how they co-ordinate with the national machineries.

In the European Union and Western countries, coordination/collaboration usually takes an institutionalized form. Generally, horizontal interdepartmental bodies perform coordination function and in some cases, they enjoy a legal status in equality acts or regulations. Other instruments of coordination/collaboration include formal as well as informal arrangements such as regular dialogues between institutions; establishment of cooperation agreements between different bodies; ad hoc working groups; and, the monitoring function exercised by the national machinery. The study points out that in case of independent bodies, the degree of collaboration and coordination with other mechanisms varies according to the legal status of these bodies.

The European Union study further argues that one of the shortcomings of coordination and collaboration arrangements lies in the often ambiguous mandates of representatives in interdepartmental coordinating bodies and reflected in their lack of decision-making power. It

points out that in several cases where the status of these representatives was based on law, they have been able to overcome these difficulties.

The study identifies several bodies within regional processes which have been able to exercise positive influences on coordination and collaboration. Within the European Union and the *Council of Europe*, intergovernmental committees comprising representatives of national mechanisms or equality agencies, address specific issues of concern.

The study from the Latin America and the Caribbean region also describes a positive trend of coordination and collaboration. Two of the most outstanding mechanisms identified by the study are the *inter-* and *intra-*agency mechanisms for horizontal and vertical gender mainstreaming. The study highlights the adoption of formal agreements between different branches of government as another positive example.

The study from the Asia-Pacific region lists a wide variety of formal and informal channels of coordination and collaboration between national mechanisms. The study notes a variety of ways in which coordination and collaboration can take place, for example, through letters of requests or exchange of emails; in high-level meetings between cabinet and members of parliament to formalize policy, legislations and other commitments consistent with national plans or international obligations; in joint meetings and discussions to prepare national reports on the progress of implementation of international agreements, and for the review and preparation of national plans for women or gender equality; in inter-agency and cross-sectoral dialogues, workshops or conferences to craft gender equality policies, programmes, and projects; and, for the review of ongoing or completed initiatives. The study, however, does not assess the efficacy of various forms of formal and informal channels.

Indeed the capacity of national machineries, to coordinate policy approaches and actions, varies greatly with the country specific situation rather than the design of the institutional arrangements. The coordinating ministry may have succeeded in setting up gender focal points in each ministry but the focal points may lead a marginalized existence in the respective ministries, where their advice may be ignored or taken into account, depending on the individual preference of the ministry. The coordinating role of the national machinery, thus, depends on the influence invested in the body by the government itself or at least by a particular chief executive, and depends on their degree of commitment towards the goal of women's empowerment. Since national machinery exercises little or no fiscal power, it is up to each line ministry to design its sector-specific gender equality policy and set its priority for implementation. It is not surprising, therefore, that most of the regional studies report that there is little real coordination between different departments/ministries, often due to the unclear mandates of the national mechanisms for such coordination.

The studies from South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and Africa, particularly, highlight the problems of coordination and collaboration between mechanisms. The South Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States study reports that coordinating bodies set up at the inter-ministerial level to address gender equality issues do not contribute to increased synergies or common strategies of action except in very specific areas such as trafficking in women. The Africa study notes the subordinated status of the national

machinery located in the women's ministry to other ministries. Even where the national machinery may have a defined mandate from the president or cabinet its relationship with other ministries and government agencies is far from clear. This affects the capacity of the national machinery to exercise oversight over the gender mainstreaming strategy and even the gender focal points in other ministries. Moreover, in particular countries with a heavy dependence on donor funding for women's programmes, whether in Africa, Asia or Latin America, women's ministries tend to become more preoccupied with implementing their own donor funded projects rather than designing policy and exercising their coordinating and catalytic role.

5.2 Collaboration with other stakeholders

The studies from the various regions paint an uneven picture of collaboration of national mechanisms with other stakeholders. All the studies note the increasingly active engagement of civil society and women's organizations in the promotion of the gender equality agenda. However, the ability of the national mechanisms, mostly at the governmental or ministerial level, to coordinate and collaborate with these important players varies between countries and regions. The European Union study reports on greater formal involvement of all kinds of social actors in actions and policies promoting gender equality. The governmental national mechanisms collaborate with women's non-governmental organizations and also with universities and research institutions on a regular basis. Very often these state-civil society relations have been institutionalized with the integration of representative of civil society organizations into official consultative bodies.

Whilst collaboration of the national mechanisms with other stakeholders has emerged as a regular part of the European Union experience, the effectiveness of this relationship has tended to depend on the capacities and dynamism of the non-governmental organizations in particular countries as well as the political receptiveness of the government to these engagements with civil society.

The study from the Latin America and the Caribbean region similarly notes positive developments. Collaboration with non-governmental entities, women's organizations, civil society organizations and academia is occurring through the establishment of inter- or intra-organizational committees to develop, implement and subsequently monitor plans of action. Also, the inclusion of members of civil society, specifically women's organization in consultative and advisory councils, is common. Collaborative efforts are also mounted to address specific issues such as violence against women.

The Asia Pacific study highlights evidence of increasing collaboration between governmental and non-governmental agencies. It reports about regular meetings of cross-sectoral representatives in inter-agency committees with membership from the government, law enforcement, judiciary, social sector, civil society, the media and the business sector, to monitor and review existing programmes of action.

In contrast in South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States where non-governmental organizations have emerged as important players in the post-Soviet era, the interface between the national mechanisms and non-governmental organizations has been more

eclectic. In a number of countries, government-sponsored non-governmental organizations specifically set up to address women's issues such as the *Forum for Women in Kazakhstan*, have emerged as partners to the national mechanisms. Also in Commonwealth of Independent States countries, national commissions or councils for women have been empowered by governments to mobilize women to express themselves on women's issues and to interface with the national mechanisms, and the government. A practice can also be found in a number of socialist states which established large, nation-wide bodies to project women's concerns, for example in the People's Republic of China, in the form of the *All China Women's Federation*. A similar body exists in Viet Nam in the form of the Vietnamese Women's Union, a mass organization with 12 million members. The Vietnamese Women's Union is formally mandated to interface with the *Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs*, the key national mechanism tasked with implementing the landmark law on gender equality.

The Arab region study points out variations in levels of coordination and collaboration. In some countries the relationship between non-governmental organizations and the national mechanisms varies with the personality of the concerned minister. In other countries the national mechanisms selectively choose to partner with certain non-governmental organizations but exclude the most vocal and powerful women's non-governmental organizations from collaboration and dialogue. Since donors tend to be important sources of funding for women's programmes both through the national mechanisms and non-governmental organizations, their role further works against a coordinated approach as both compete for scarce donor resources. The relationship between national mechanisms and civil society organizations in some cases is defined by distrust.

While the regional studies provide useful insights into the varied roles and capacities of the national mechanisms to effectively coordinate policies and programmes for gender equality and women's empowerment, and collaborate across institutional boundaries, none of the studies provide sufficient robust evidence to suggest that coordination by any of these mechanisms has been particularly effective. What information is on offer points to the weak authority and inadequate capacity to strengthen coordination by and among the national mechanisms, and establish better collaboration with other stakeholders. This remains a matter of some concern for promoting gender equality, where programmes tend to be resource constrained, with significant capacity deficits. Lack of coordination risks inadequate attention to strategic policy approaches, and means that resources may be inefficiently allocated, spread over too many partners, both public and private, that programmes may be duplicated and outcomes may thus be less than optimal in relation to the resources invested in them. Weak coordination thus frustrates a proactive approach that tackles the root causes of discrimination and inequality, as well as the building of a critical mass of resources and institutional support which need to be invested in the challenging task of gender equality and women's empowerment. It also means that the critical functions of monitoring, evaluation and accountability may be neglected.

6. KEY AREAS OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The regional studies acknowledge that the goal of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment requires long-term sustained commitment and efforts of various actors both within and outside the government. Undeniably some progress has been made over the last fifteen years. The most important achievements are legal reforms, and policies and regulations in a wide variety of sectors which have attempted to remove discrimination against women and ensure their equality. 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 behaviour.

However, it is difficult to effectively assess the specific contribution of national mechanisms as other actors and factors also play a role in change processes, and pertinent and comparable indicators are limited. It should, therefore, be recognized that gains cannot exclusively be attributed to the work of the national mechanisms. Civil society activism, judicial interventions, political mobilization and, in some places, enlightened political leadership have all made their contributions. Successes attributable to the national mechanisms may, thus, reflect their skills and capacity to draw upon some of these exogenous factors in order to strengthen their own authority, advocacy and capacities for implementation.

The regional studies discuss a few key areas of achievements of national mechanisms and explore the factors that have contributed to the more positive outcomes.

6.1 Key areas of achievements

The studies highlight the following areas where more noteworthy gains appear to have been registered:

- Legal reforms
- Awareness raising and political visibility
- Increase in women's political representation through quotas
- Gender mainstreaming
- Capacity-building

Legal reforms

Legal reforms appear to be a major area of achievement for national mechanisms since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. National machineries in partnership with other government agencies and other national mechanisms as well as civil society have often taken a lead role in promoting 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 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 some countries that have given property rights to women. Labour law reforms have included provisions for equal pay for equal work and work of equal value, removed discrimination against employing women in various fields which had traditionally been regarded as a male preserve, and measures against sexual harassment. Labour law reforms have also enacted maternity and paternity leave as well as other benefits.

The study from the Arab region refers to legal reforms in several countries as a result of the lobbying efforts by the national machineries. In Egypt, the national machinery had lobbied parliament to change nationality laws, pension laws, the tax exemption law, alimony fund law, the “khul” law and the family law. The national machinery of Palestine worked with parliament to prepare gender-sensitive laws for the civil service, local election law, retirement rights and military service. In Jordan the legal age of marriage has been raised through legal reforms.

The Latin America and the Caribbean region study similarly highlights a variety of legal reforms such as the adoption of laws to penalize violence against women. As a result, more women are now filing charges under these laws; other legal reforms noted are laws to combat sexual harassment, equal pay for comparable work and protection of domestic workers.

The study from the Asia and Pacific region describes the use of legislative reform for obtaining gender equality in areas such as employment, education, health, social services, and in political participation and public administration. Legal reform has also helped in changing traditional norms, and to enhance equality in marriage and family relations.⁴⁸

The study from the European Union and other Western countries notes adoption of equality and/or non-discrimination laws, both general as well as gender specific, many of them in compliance with European Union equality directives. The study from Africa points out that nearly one- fifth of the countries responding to the Beijing + 15 survey cited law reforms and legislative amendments as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ratification and implementation as their major achievements.

While being cognizant of the various legislative measures promoting gender equality initiated around the world, laws on the statute books must be effectively implemented and enforced for the protection of the intended beneficiaries; have to be tested in courts of law, and upheld by the judiciary. These various stages of enforcement of the law remain sensitive to the social realities in respective countries which condition access to justice and effective compliance with the law.

Awareness raising and political visibility

Studies from all regions point to enhanced awareness and greater visibility for the goal of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Awareness raising is recognized as one of the major achievements of national mechanisms. The mechanisms have undertaken advocacy campaigns

⁴⁸ Amaryllis T. Torres, 2010, p. 57

on a variety of issues using the mass media and consultation with civil society and community-based groups. They have also used other means such as websites to provide information and to engage in dialogues with citizens.

The study from South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States highlights campaigns by national mechanisms to eradicate patriarchal stereotyping of the role of women in the society and family. The campaigns targeted government officials, law enforcement agencies and the media, with active participation of state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and leadership of youth and religious organizations. The campaigns have used mobile theatre, radio, TV, talk shows, round table discussions and other methods of engagement with broader groups of citizens. The study claims that these efforts have achieved some success in raising awareness about the negative implications of gender stereotyping.

The study from Latin America and the Caribbean region similarly talks about awareness raising through gender training of public officials and challenging gender stereotyping in the media. It also highlights the role of women's caucuses in raising awareness of parliamentarians about gender-based discrimination. All the studies confirm that the outreach to various constituencies who might have been more prejudicial to women's empowerment, has strengthened the hands of advocates for greater gender equality.

Awareness raising has led to greater political visibility of gender equality goals. For example, the study from the European Union and Western countries states that "gender equality ... has become a stronger political subject and a political concern everywhere even if sometimes only for reasons of political correctness".⁴⁹ This indicates that political players are now more inclined to recognize the electoral potency of gender equality concerns and have become more receptive to the initiatives of the national mechanisms.

Increase in women's political representation through quotas

Studies from several regions refer to introduction of quotas to increase women's political representation as a major achievement of the national mechanisms. Here again, national machineries in partnership with government and other national mechanisms, parliamentary bodies as well as civil society has played an important role in promoting quota laws and regulations. The study from Latin America and the Caribbean region points out that a great majority of Latin American countries had adopted quota laws to increase women's political representation after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. As a result women's share in parliament has risen from 8 per cent in 1990 to 18 per cent in 2008.⁵⁰ Argentina is the regional leader with 38 per cent seats in parliament held by women. The increase in women's political representation has been significant in other countries such as Peru, Ecuador, Honduras and Mexico.

In Africa and the Asia Pacific regions, quota laws had also helped to increase women's representation in parliament. For example, Rwanda has 56 per cent women in its parliament. A

⁴⁹ Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010, p. 39

⁵⁰ IPU website <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

new quota law in Nepal adopted in 2006 boosted women's representation in parliament from 3 per cent in 1997 to 33 per cent in 2008.⁵¹

Quota provisions to increase women's political representation need to go hand in hand with other supporting measures to enhance women's effective participation in politics. Where women's representation is insufficiently sustained by the political strength of the women's movement, the presence of women in the elective bodies may not adequately project women's concerns or promote gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming

The studies from all the regions highlight the critical role played by national mechanisms as catalysts for gender mainstreaming, but also acknowledge the challenges in gauging progress as the effects of the strategy "are wide and most of the time invisible and immeasurable".⁵² As in other areas, it is difficult to attribute the specific contributions of national mechanisms in producing gains in mainstreaming gender perspectives as other actors within government as well as outside apply the strategy or promote its use. Still all studies affirm that there is evidence of progress.

The study from Latin America and the Caribbean region identifies two major markers of progress. First is the recognition of gender mainstreaming in constitutional reform processes, where several countries in the region have incorporated the goal of gender equality and equal opportunities in their constitutions. The second is the adoption of gender policies, and the use of, for example, gender analysis checklists in incorporating a gender perspective in policies and programmes. The study from the Asia Pacific region similarly identifies the move towards adoption of a more inclusive and holistic approach to the promotion of gender equality as a measure of progress for gender mainstreaming. In the European Union and Western countries gender mainstreaming is generally acknowledged as the fundamental strategy to be adopted in the pursuit of gender equality. The study highlights the widespread use of gender-budgeting as a measure of progress towards gender mainstreaming (see Box 6).

While gender mainstreaming has been widely accepted as a strategy, its implementation and monitoring, as well as the development of instruments for its functioning, remain at different stages of development in the various countries. This variation in progress between countries even within the same region is noticeable in all regions.

Capacity building

The studies from all regions assert that national mechanisms have contributed significantly to improving the capacity of government officials and non-governmental organizations to address gender equality issues and to design policies and programmes from a gender perspective to promote gender equality. Capacity has been developed, including through training, to undertake research and analysis, collect and use data and statistics, and specific methodologies and tools, such as gender analysis, gender audits, gender-impact assessments, gender-sensitive budgeting,

⁵¹ IPU website <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

⁵² María Dolores Fernós, 2010, p. 49

and so on. Various mechanisms which have been established such as institutes, commissions, units in statistical offices, and research and training centers are now better equipped to undertake research, analyze data and statistics, and develop tools.

In several countries in Europe and Latin America, national machineries have been instrumental in the creation of gender observatories which have been welcomed by women's movements as an important resource providing information critical to reviewing progress towards gender equality. Indeed, information sharing and collaboration between mechanisms within and outside the government have been identified as effective ways of building capacity.

Box 6
Gender budgeting as a tool of gender mainstreaming in Europe

The Council of Europe defines gender budgeting as “an application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process. It means a gender assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality.”

Initiated in Australia and being pursued in all regions, gender budgeting exercise was first started in Europe at the end of 1990s. In 2001, a high level international conference on gender responsive budgeting was sponsored by OECD, which urged the governments and other actors to integrate gender-based analysis in the budgetary process, at all its stages and levels and to report on the impact of the budget on gender equality. This conference led to a number of initiatives in several countries throughout Europe. Some of these initiatives were undertaken by governments and others by non-governmental organizations.

Nordic countries were particularly active. A joint Nordic gender budget initiative resulted in the publication of a report titled: “Gender Budget: Integration of a gender perspective in the budget process.” In Norway, a gender-based analysis of budget proposals for 2003, 2004 and 2005 was undertaken; and since 2005, the Ministry of Finance issues guidelines to all ministries for a gender sensitive analysis of the respective budgets. Sweden also promoted various initiatives, which led to the adoption of a comprehensive plan for gender mainstreaming, with a special focus on the budgetary and legislative processes.

In some of the European countries gender budgeting has been given a legal basis institutionalized through laws (Austria, Belgium, Spain); in others it is adopted in a programmatic context of plans and policies; but in all of them gender budget initiatives and projects are in progress, trying to find the way to be fully institutionalized, both in theory and in practice.

In France, since 2000, a budget document (le jaune budgétaire) was attached to the national budget identifying the expenditure on programmes for the promotion of women's rights and of gender equality and with indicators of the gender equality implications of general expenditure. In Germany, under the inter-ministerial working group on gender mainstreaming a sub-group on gender budgeting was created in 2003, which produced a feasibility study on the matter. In the Netherlands, in 2002, a study was undertaken regarding the budgets of three ministries, focusing on the tax system, housing benefits and social assistance. Gender budgeting was also introduced in various sectors of development assistance. In the United Kingdom, Women's Budget Group, a non-governmental initiative, conducts a regular gender analysis of government expenditure in various sectors, including tax and benefit policy.

Although gender-budgeting exercises were first started in some western European countries, they are now being initiated in some Central and Eastern European countries. Gender budgeting exercises are also being undertaken at regional/local level in various countries across Europe.

Training has been organized of the various actors involved in this process: budget specialists, politicians and decision-makers both in governments and in parliaments; or even larger audiences through seminars and

conferences. Other methods to make this strategy operational have included research, namely feasibility and assessment studies, the establishment of inter-ministerial working groups or other mechanisms and the elaboration of specific tools and instruments of analysis, the systematic gathering of sex disaggregated data and the establishment of indicators.

National mechanisms as well as civil society organizations and academics have played a key role in promoting this process and monitoring its implementation. Regional organizations and networks and international organizations have played important roles in promoting and supporting gender budgeting as a tool of gender mainstreaming in Europe.

Source: Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010.

6.2 Factors contributing to achievements

The studies from the regions identify several factors that have contributed to the achievements of national mechanisms in promoting greater gender equality and women's empowerment. The factors highlighted by the studies are:

- Growth and maturation of mechanisms
- Strong leadership of the national mechanisms
- Synergy among multiple mechanisms
- Strengthened civil society voice
- Regional level cooperation and exchanges

Growth and maturation of mechanisms

In all countries under study the mechanisms have evolved at a varying pace, through a process of lessons learned and insights gained from successes and challenges, often leading to the redesign of the mechanisms within the structures of governance. In countries where the mechanisms have been able to reflect on setbacks and have drawn lessons from successful examples and good practices, they have been able to perform better. For example, the study from Africa underscores the importance of South Africa and other pioneering countries as models for other countries. The study highlights two important features of the South African experience. First, its multiple mechanisms for gender equality have created synergy. Second, the autonomy of the national machinery has enabled it to undertake a more proactive stance for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The study cites the example of the national machinery, South Africa's Commission on Gender Equality, as having intervened as *amicus curiae* in legal cases dealing with rights of women pertaining to widows or divorcees or victims of domestic violence or sex workers and argues that the "Commission was able to do this was because of its independent status under the Constitution of South Africa. A mechanism under the government would have experienced some conflicts of interest intervening in certain kinds of cases, particularly those involving the State".⁵³

⁵³ Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p. 31

Strong leadership of national mechanisms

The presence of strong leadership plays an important role in the building and strengthening of the national mechanisms. Such inspirational leadership may originate in the personal capabilities and commitment of particular individuals. However, such leadership may need to derive its strength from a wider base of constituency support which invests it with the authority to act decisively. Alternatively, the political leadership or system must provide enough institutional space for autonomous action by such enterprising leaders.

The Latin America and the Caribbean region study illustrates various ways in which strong personal leadership from the head of the national machinery has had a large bearing on its particular successes. High-profile leaders of national mechanisms have come from other positions in government, occupied high positions in academia, had political power or came from women's or feminist organizations. Such leaders have been effective in empowering the national mechanisms and rallied the support and political will necessary to comply with mandates. Rank and mandate aside, the political and personal relationships that the head of the machinery can develop with the head of state or government and cabinet ministers in critical areas have been a substantial factor in either opening up or closing possibilities of influencing policies, strategies and institutional mechanisms. The study identifies this close relationship between the political and administrative machineries as a crucial factor in the success of the national machinery, and its ability to draw upon the support of the whole governmental machinery for the promotion of gender equality.

However, the study also cautions that such political closeness has had its drawbacks as it constitutes a factor of instability and vulnerability when there is a change in the government after elections, or when a particular political patron or leader loses power. A further important drawback of such closeness is the historic distrust of the women's movements to deal with governments and their reluctance to draw upon the influence of partisan politics for support for the gender equality agenda. The movements have always argued that women's empowerment and gender equality must be recognized as a human rights issue which should transcend party politics. However, the movements' reluctance to engage with political realities has, on occasion, served to isolate the national machinery from its crucial base of support. In such circumstances, where and when the machinery is threatened and cannot expect to draw on support from its base, it is placed in a most vulnerable position. In many situations when national mechanisms have been imperiled by the loss of support within the government machinery, they have been able to survive by drawing upon the support of the women's movements. The study concludes that the national mechanisms need to navigate through potential minefields in order to garner the support and political will from two different but essential forces: the state and the women's movements.

Synergy among multiple mechanisms

When multiple institutional mechanisms work in collaboration, they can provide a cumulative positive impact in promoting the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment. Not all such mechanisms need be located within the government. Nor may one single mechanism be the sole agency mandated to promote gender equality. What is, however, important is to ensure that

multiple mechanisms do not work at cross purposes but can create a synergy among their various efforts.

The studies from the regions affirm the contributions of multiple mechanisms working in collaboration, as an enabling factor for the promotion of gender equality. For example, the study from South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States highlights the case of Vinnitsia in Ukraine, where cooperation between state government authorities, its multiple mechanisms such as gender focal points, civil society and other academic institutions led to development of a comprehensive gender equality strategy which stipulated mandatory gender equality expertise in all programmes and projects.

The studies from the Arab region and the Latin America and the Caribbean region also note the positive contributions of multiple mechanisms working in coordination and collaboration. Legal reforms in many countries have been the outcome of the efforts of many actors of the government and civil society working together.

The studies, however, raise concerns that in many countries the mechanisms do not work in a coordinated and collaborative way, and argue that greater efforts are needed in the future to enhance coordination and collaboration among the mechanisms.

Strengthened civil society voice

With the spread of democratization, the voice of civil society has been strengthened. This has served as a positive influence in enabling national mechanisms to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. For example, the Latin America study notes that in countries where the women's organizations have participated widely in the struggle for democratic renewal, they have been able to later institutionalize these links either through the integration of representatives of civil society organizations, particularly women's rights non-governmental organizations, in consultative boards or other similar bodies. Alternatively *ad hoc* measures have been taken through the establishment of partnerships in specific projects. In Brazil, for example, women's groups were invited to participate in the drafting of regional plans of action, which helped to mobilize women and encouraged them to bring gender issues into the public discourse as well as build a wider base of support for the work of national mechanisms.

Regional level cooperation and exchange

The capacity for building and strengthening national mechanisms for gender equality and women's empowerment varies widely among the countries across the regions. Regional level cooperation and exchange has been identified as a factor contributing to strengthening the capacities of the mechanisms. National mechanisms in many countries have reached out to regional institutions or to neighbours within their regions to build their own institutions or to facilitate their work. For example, the study on Africa notes that regional level efforts have supported the work of institutional mechanisms. Sub-regional institutions, particularly the *Southern African Development Council*, have provided support for institutional mechanisms at the national level in various ways and in varying degrees. Regional level cooperation has

strengthened the diffusion of new strategies and mechanisms. The study argues that the current interest in gender-sensitive budgeting is largely the result of such cooperation.

Regional cooperation and exchange has also been strengthened through the recent establishment of the *European Institute for Gender Equality* with representatives from Member States, European non-governmental organizations and social partners. This is a promising forum for exchange and coordination through collection, analysis and dissemination of comparable research data on gender equality and gender-based discrimination. The Latin American and Caribbean study highlights coordination and collaboration of national mechanisms with international institutions as a positive trend.

The study on European Union and Western countries recognizes the importance of the *European Women's Lobby* in bringing together a very large number of national and European organizations, to act as a forum of exchange and cooperation, as well as support for coordinated action by non-governmental organizations at the national and European level.

7. CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

Notwithstanding the positive developments since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which have been discussed in the earlier chapters, national mechanisms still face continuing constraints and challenges. The constraints and challenges differ in kind and importance. They encompass a wide variety of areas: weakness in structure, location and mandate; lack of human and financial resources; inadequate capacity to perform their different roles/functions; poor coordination and collaboration amongst various mechanisms; limited voice and influence in policy and decision-making processes; lack of political will and support from powerful constituencies and so on. The constraints and challenges vary across countries and regions. In some regions and countries the national mechanisms are functioning better than others.

The constraints and challenges identified by the regional studies can be classified under two broad headings: internal and external. This chapter discusses first the internal and then the external constraints. The concluding section explores the remaining major challenges faced by the national mechanisms.

7.1. Internal constraints

The regional studies highlight several constraints which can be classified as internal to the mechanisms. They are:

- Structural marginalization and instability
- Unclear and weak mandate
- Resource limitation: staff and budget
- Inadequate capacity
- Poor coordination and collaboration
- Weak monitoring, evaluation and accountability
- Limitations of data, statistics and research

Structural marginalization and instability

Despite the recommendation of the Platform for Action that the national machinery be located “at the highest possible level in the government,” in many countries machineries continue to be structurally located in marginal position with little direct access to key policy and decision making processes. The national machineries are generally a department or a unit in a ministry and as such their heads do not have a seat in cabinet meetings. In these situations, the machineries have to depend on the support of the head of the ministry, who often combines multiple portfolios and may or may not prioritize the agendas of the national machinery. Other mechanisms, such as gender focal points, are also structurally marginalized. Usually junior officials are made gender focal points, and gender equality issues are add-ons to their routine responsibilities.

In addition to marginalization, the national machineries often have to cope with structural shifts or re-organization, which creates instability in their work. The Africa regional study notes that

since 1995 in some countries the national machineries had been strengthened while in others they had suffered stagnation or demotion where the ministries were abolished or replaced with a unit within the ministry. The studies from the Latin American and the Caribbean region and the Arab region note similar cases of structural shifts and re-organization. The Latin American and the Caribbean region study argues that the frequent structural shifts underscore the weak level of institutionalization of national machineries.⁵⁴

Another problem faced by many national machineries is frequent change in leadership. The Africa regional study notes that in one country the national machinery had seen through 12 ministerial changes during 2000-2007.⁵⁵ Similarly the Arab regional study reports that, in one country, five different women were appointed as the head of the Ministry of Women's Affairs between 2003 and 2009. The frequent changes in leadership positions again result in instability in work programmes. The focus of the work may change according to the vision of the different leaders.

The national machineries are exposed to the risk of variability in their structural location and power with regime changes particularly in non-democratic countries. Where national machineries enjoy strong support from top political leadership, they are able to promote their agendas with vigor as part of a top-down process. However, the agenda and the authority of the national machinery may suffer when regime changes and the new leadership may not prioritize the goal of gender equality.

Unclear and weak mandate

Unclear and/or poorly designed mandate is another constraint faced by many national mechanisms. As discussed earlier in chapter 3.2, the mandate of national mechanisms, particularly of national machineries, are generally framed in broad terms. This has led national machineries in many places to undertake too many activities without a strategic focus. They have not been able to prioritize their catalytic work. Instead they have been drawn to implementation of projects providing services to women. The burden of service delivery work has sometimes inhibited the machineries from undertaking policy work, which is critical for mainstreaming gender issues across all policies and programmes.

Though since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing the mandates of national machineries have increasingly emphasized the adoption of a gender mainstreaming strategy, it is still not very clear to many within the national machineries as well as outside in other levels of government as to what this entails: how gender mainstreaming strategy is to be pursued. There is a lack of clarity in terms of what approach and activities should be prioritized and more importantly what approach and activities should be given up.

Additionally, as noted by several regional studies, mandates of national machineries in some countries are still framed in ways that highlight a social welfare approach of work focused on family and children.

⁵⁴ María Dolores Fernós, 2010, p. 52

⁵⁵ Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p.33

In several countries of Europe and Latin America, a new trend is to make gender equality only a 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 race, ethnicity etc. In these situations, gender equality mandates run the risk of losing priority amongst competing mandates of organizations.

Resource limitation: staff and budget

National mechanisms have universally remained constrained by lack of resources: staff as well as budget, which has weakened their capacities to discharge their mandates. National mechanisms have faced rising expectations from their constituencies such as women's groups, for a stronger role in shaping government policy, as well as for targeted projects and services for women. But staff and budgetary resources have not increased to meet this demand. While resource constraints have been particularly evident in the poorer countries, with a weak revenue base, such budgetary limitations also reflect the lower allocative priority assigned to gender equality concerns. The lack of domestic resources to staff national machineries or underwrite policy work, or targeted women's programmes has, in many cases, led to growing dependence on external donors to cover the budgets of the national mechanisms. Such aid flows often come with certain conditionalities, impose reporting burdens on the recipients and put the absorptive capacity of weaker governments under severe stress. This aid dependency has, in particular countries, compromised the legitimacy of these mechanisms and weakened domestic support for their policy agendas. High aid dependence further imperils the capacities and performance of the national mechanisms because both external resource flows as well as donor priorities tend to fluctuate.

The problem of resource constraints was highlighted by all regional studies. In the African region fiscal limitations were identified by the national machineries as the principal constraint inhibiting their work in the Beijing + 15 survey.

The comparatively higher per capita income in a number of countries in the Latin American and the Caribbean region would suggest a possibility to draw upon a stronger revenue base to support gender equality work. However, the regional study reports that “for most of the countries in the region, a lack of adequate financial and human resources is an insurmountable obstacle for the national mechanisms to engage in emerging issues as they have barely been able to respond to the old challenges and problems faced by women”.⁵⁶ This reflects on the lower priority assigned to gender equality issues in national budgets. The study does, however, point out that strong political support usually accompanies an increase in funding,⁵⁷ which appears to have been the case in such countries as Brazil and Mexico.

The need for depending on external donor funds is acknowledged by all regional studies. The Latin America study points out that “for less developed and poorer countries, outside funding from various donors is a necessity and the only possibility towards the creation of gender equality plans and/or projects and for capacity building and for the mere existence of a national

⁵⁶ María Dolores Fernós, 2010, p.54

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 2010, p.33

mechanism”.⁵⁸ In other regions such as parts of the Arab world or Sub-Saharan Africa, and in countries emerging from conflict and with large displaced populations, national resources which can be committed to national mechanisms are particularly constrained so that donors emerge as the primary source of support.

However, dependence on donor funding creates its own problems. The Arab region study notes that donor aid often goes directly to the target groups bypassing the government and without necessarily interacting with the national mechanisms. The study argues that aid dependence and its attendant conditionalities erode the legitimacy of the national mechanisms. The Africa study suggests that, “donor dependence was found to compromise the programmatic autonomy, consistency and sustainability of the institutional mechanisms”.⁵⁹ The European Union study sums up one of the most problematic consequences of external dependence where it states that, in the case of countries relying heavily on such funds, “sustainability is at risk because of lack of funding when international support ends”.⁶⁰

Additionally, the African and the Arab regional studies highlight the problems associated with the use of donor funds to bolster the limited human resources of national machineries. In both regions, national machineries of several countries hired consultants and non-governmental organization activists to augment their limited regular-budget staff. But often it was difficult to integrate these professionals from outside into official national mechanisms where they had to interact with government bureaucracy. Moreover, the consultants were often recruited at a higher salary compared to the regular officials of the national machineries as they were funded by donor projects. This created tension between consultants and the regular-budget officials, and did not lead to collaboration and synergetic efforts to push the work of the national mechanisms.

It is evident, that a minimum threshold of resources has to be domestically generated and prioritized in order to sustain the national mechanisms. This is most likely to occur where gender equality concerns enjoy strong political support at home which can be reflected in the budget decisions of the state.

Inadequate capacity

Whilst resource constraints are recognized as a serious problem, inadequate capacity, particularly lack of expertise within the government, remains perhaps the most serious limitation in sustaining national mechanisms in virtually every region. Despite various efforts of capacity building and undeniable progress in enhancing expertise, there are still gaps between demand and supply. On the one hand, there is lack of capacity within national mechanisms to adequately perform their various roles, such as policy analysis, advice, and guidance; coordination; catalytic promotion and backstopping etc. On the other hand, there is also a lack of capacity across all levels and branches of government to implement a gender mainstreaming strategy.

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, efforts have been undertaken in most countries in all regions to build capacity within national mechanisms as well as in other levels

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 2010, p.53

⁵⁹ Dzodzi Tsikata, 2010, p. 20

⁶⁰ Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010, p. 41

and branches of government. Various tools and methodologies such as gender analysis, gender budgeting, gender impact assessments etc. have been developed and used. Training has been organized for the staff of both national mechanisms as well as other officials of government. Training has encompassed general gender sensitivity training as well as technical training in tools and methods for gender mainstreaming. All of these efforts have undeniably resulted in progress in enhancing understanding and expertise both within national mechanisms and outside in the government as a whole. Still all regional studies highlight inadequate capacity both within the national mechanisms and outside, particularly in implementing the gender mainstreaming strategy.

The Africa study reports that inadequate staff capacity is identified as the second most important problem hindering effectiveness of functioning of national mechanisms in the Beijing + 15 survey. It also highlights other gaps related to capacity-building, for example: shortage of gender specialists, methods and tools; limitations of sensitivity training in the absence of “how to” technical training in specific methods of gender mainstreaming; mismatch of outside experts with regular officials working in national mechanisms and so on.

The study on South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States similarly notes lack of expertise within national mechanisms and lack of understanding and commitment at the higher decision-making levels about the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The study calls on national machineries to develop standards for gender mainstreaming and provide knowledge, expertise, and tools to different agencies of government. It highlights the need for systematic training of newly appointed gender focal points to make them more effective in their work.

The Arab region study similarly points out the weak technical skills of national mechanisms in mainstreaming gender equality issues across all policies and programmes. It underscores the need for building expertise of regular-budget government officials staffing national mechanisms and other agencies of government. As noted earlier the study cautions that by hiring technical experts from outside to work in national machineries or by staffing autonomous bodies such as national commissions or councils with officials/consultants at a higher salary has created resentment or resistance to the work of these experts by the regular staff of government. This has not helped in building capacity.

The study from the European Union and Western countries acknowledges significant progress in building gender expertise, and developing and using tools and methods such as gender budgeting and gender impact assessment. Still the study argues for additional gender expertise and more professionalized gender training for national mechanisms and beyond. It specifically cites the need for designing instruments of analysis and evaluation to assess the effective implementation of gender equality policies.

Poor coordination and collaboration

As discussed earlier in chapter 5, with the multiplication of national mechanisms horizontally and vertically, coordination has become a challenging task for national machineries. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing many countries have established specific

structures such as inter-departmental and inter-ministerial committees/working groups to facilitate coordination of activities amongst different ministries/departments within governments. In some countries formal institutional rules/guidelines exist for coordination; in others coordination is carried out on an ad hoc basis. Studies from all regions note the existence of these structures and rules/guidelines but conclude that there is, in reality, little effective coordination between different departments/ministries. Coordination is poor for a variety of reasons. In some places there are no formal structures or rules/guidelines. In some places, rules/guidelines only exist in theory and are not systematically implemented. Sometimes, structures and processes created for coordination function, but not very effectively. In many situations national machineries find it difficult to perform their coordination role because of their relatively low status and resources vis-à-vis other more established and powerful line ministries such as the ministry of finance.

The regional studies acknowledge that collaboration amongst various national mechanisms such as those between the different branches of government and autonomous bodies vary between countries and regions. Though data is limited, successful actions in many countries in areas such as legal reforms, quota laws and measures to combat violence against women suggest collaborative efforts between mechanisms within executive and legislative branches of government and other mechanisms. However, the regional studies still conclude that there are gaps in collaboration between national mechanisms and more efforts to improve collaboration are needed in future.

Collaboration between mechanisms within the government and civil society again varies across countries and regions. In some countries, government 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. The studies from the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean region affirm this trend of increasing collaboration. However there are still countries where official mechanisms have not succeeded in developing cooperative relationships with civil society organizations. The Asia Pacific study indicates that despite overall progress in government- civil society organization collaboration, in some places national mechanisms may be in competition with civil society organizations for resources, institutional space and constituencies. The study from the Arab region also notes similar strains in the relationship between national mechanisms and selected non-governmental organizations, often over competition for scarce donor resources. This competition and lack of collaboration has had a detrimental effect on the work of both the national mechanisms and civil society.

Weak monitoring, evaluation and accountability

Monitoring progress on the achievement of governments' goals of gender quality and women's empowerment has proven to be a major challenge for national mechanisms. Some positive developments have taken place since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing to develop monitoring indicators to assess government's efforts as well as outcome of those efforts in promoting gender equality. The tool of gender budgeting discussed earlier (Box 6) can be used to monitor the governments' efforts in one critical area, namely public sector expenditure, in promoting gender equality. The Millennium Development Goals adopted by the United Nations

in 2000, which is now being monitored by all Member States, is another powerful tool to assess progress of outcomes of government's efforts in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The Millennium Development Goals establish indicators and time bound targets to review progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment (goals 3 and 5). It also includes gender-sensitive indicators to assess progress in achieving other Millennium Development Goals (goal 2).

However, both gender budgeting and Millennium Development Goals are limited in scope. Budget is only one input, though it is a critical one. Similarly Millennium Development Goals monitor outcomes of only selected areas. Progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment needs to be monitored by a wide variety of indicators beyond gender budgeting and the limited Millennium Development Goals indicators.

Some progress has been made in different countries to develop monitoring indicators to assess progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment encompassing many areas of life. For example, the study from Latin America and the Caribbean region notes country level success in developing and incorporating gender-sensitive indicators into some national censuses on population and housing, and questions on violence against women and reproductive and sexual health in national surveys on family health. Still the study notes that "national mechanisms as a whole seem to be less successful in the establishment of monitoring strategies and when they do frequently there are no time bound targets."⁶¹ The study argues that these limitations owe to lack of political will as well as to "difficulties in the adoption of instruments necessary to evaluate gender impact of specific plans and policies."⁶²

The weakness of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system has been noted by several regional studies. The regional study from Africa identifies limitations of data and statistics as a major constraint for developing monitoring indicators. It argues that resource constraints compromise the quality of data collection and construction of an effective system of monitoring and evaluation. The Arab region study similarly posits that data limitations are a major constraint inhibiting development of an effective monitoring and evaluation system.

The deficiencies of monitoring and evaluation have serious negative implications for effective functioning of the national mechanisms. This constrains mechanisms from systematically learning from their work experiences, their achievements as well as shortfalls as to what works and what does not.

Ensuring accountability, where there are multiple actors responsible for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, is even more problematic. Some efforts have been made in different countries to make public sector officials accountable through laws and regulations. Some countries have established accountability institutions such as ombud's office. In some other countries, governments demonstrate their accountability through reports to parliament and publications about progress made in achieving the goals of gender equality and empowerment of women. Some of these publications are made available to the general public through websites. These measures have helped establish transparency and accountability in these countries.

⁶¹ María Dolores Fernós, 2010, p. 53

⁶² *Ibid*, 2010, p. 53

However, all regional studies acknowledge that on the whole it is difficult to ensure accountability of the government as a whole for the achievement of gender equality goals. Again, there are regional and country differences. But, the study from South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States sums up the situation in a way that can be applicable to many countries in all regions. It states that accountability issue, especially at high level, remains out of the discourse.

Limitations of data, statistics and research

One of the key roles of national mechanisms is to promote the collection and analysis of sex disaggregated data and statistics and gender-sensitive research. While there has been progress in countries since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, there are still gaps in availability of sex disaggregated data and statistics and gender-sensitive research. These limitations constrain design and implementation of policies and programmes with a gender perspective.

The deficiencies of data, statistics and research originate due to multiple factors. First, is the problem of conceptualization. There is still widespread weakness in the capacity of government officials as well as researchers and technical experts to conceptualize the specificity of gender issues in macro and sector policies and programmes. The conceptual invisibility makes it difficult to identify what kinds of data and statistics need to be collected and what kinds of issues need to be researched in order to address the specific gender equality concerns and to establish the discriminatory treatment of women both by the state and within the market.

Second is the problem of financial resource constraint. In many countries, particularly in low income countries of different regions, there are insufficient financial resources to underwrite collection of sex disaggregated data and statistics and undertake gender-responsive research. The regional study from Africa notes that in many countries even elementary information is not available about a whole range of issues relating to women such as domestic violence, trafficking etc.

The third problem is lack of capacity and expertise to collect sex disaggregated data and undertake gender responsive research. All the regional studies highlight the limitations of availability of quality data. For example, the Latin American and the Caribbean region study points out that even in places where data, statistics and research exist, there are huge limitations as to the reliability and completeness of the data. The principal problem is a lack of recognition of the importance of gathering data and of statistics as a tool for policy formulation and monitoring. The Africa region study notes that there is no quality or periodicity of data collection.

The fourth is the problem of scarcity of gender-sensitive research to analyze some of the new and emerging problems. The study from the European Union and Western countries highlight some of these issues: migration, minorities and refugees linked to globalization; demographic movements and conflict situations; the degradation of environmental conditions; aging and poverty; economic and financial crisis with its gendered impact on unemployment, violence, and trafficking etc.

In addition to the problem of unavailability of data, statistics and research, there is also a problem of use of data. The regional study from Africa highlights this particular problem. It points out that while sex disaggregated data and statistics may be available at the national level in some departments, ministries and national statistical offices, to a large extent such data is not utilized in national and local government planning and budgeting allocation process. The challenge for national mechanisms is not simply to promote collection of sex disaggregated data and statistics and gender-responsive research, the mechanisms need to also encourage the quality and relevance of data, statistics and research and more importantly persuade various ministries and departments to utilize existing data, statistics and research for policy/programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

7.2 External constraints

The regional studies also note many constraints which can be classified as external that is, these constraints originate outside the national mechanisms and then impact national mechanisms' performance. The most frequently cited external constraints are the following:

- Lack of political will
- Resistance and negative attitude of powerful constituencies
- Lack of coherence between gender equality policies and other policies

Lack of political will

Lack of political will to promote gender equality is identified by all regional studies as a major constraint. This lack of will may manifest itself in different ways. The European Union study notes that lack of political will is reflected in weak and inconsistent implementation of laws and policies; resource limitations and power of the mechanisms; lack of interest and knowledge of government officials, particularly of senior officials; lack of interest on the part of parliamentarians and other high-level officials and so on.

The Latin America and the Caribbean region study similarly points to the importance of having strong political will. It argues that strong political will is a primary requirement for the success of national mechanisms. It observes that there is a clear and evident difference between the successes achieved by the mechanisms that have strong support from the executive (Mexico, Brazil) and those that struggle in isolation within the governmental structure, lacking political support from the executive and other political machineries. Strong political support usually results in an increase in resources that allows for the implementation of initiatives of the national mechanisms. The study from the Africa region notes that lack of political will was identified as a major constraint for the effective functioning of national mechanism by countries responding to the Beijing + 15 surveys.

The regional study from Africa regions identifies the role of “first ladies” as a dilemma in mobilizing political will and institutionalizing national mechanisms. In countries where the national machineries are headed by ‘first ladies’ or there are organizations headed by first ladies side by side with national machineries, some contradictions are created. On the one hand, machineries/organizations headed by first ladies may be able to exert influence because of the

first ladies' access to the power center. But, here power is generated by support from the head of state/government and not through mobilization of wide constituencies of support from the bottom such support may wither with regime change. Additionally, the dynastic and informal source of power of first ladies inhibits institutionalization of national machineries. In situations where national machineries and organizations headed by first ladies co-exist there is always a potential risk of competition between the two organizations with the national machinery being placed at a disadvantaged situation.

Resistance and negative attitude of powerful constituencies

The studies from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Arab region cite resistance and the negative attitude of powerful constituencies such as conservative religious and social groups as one of the constraints of the work of the national mechanisms.

The study from the Latin America and the Caribbean region highlights the influence of religious groups, specifically from the Catholic Church, in the Central American region, which have put the national machineries under strong pressure that have made them cautious or in some cases completely silent. The study points out that “governments in the region still bow to the enormous influence of powerful religious groups particularly the Catholic Church that pressure elected public officials, specifically parliamentarians to resist legal reforms and the adoption of public policies regarding women’s sexual health proposed by the women’s movement. The liberalization of abortion and other laws relative to sexual and reproductive rights have been particularly resisted. In some countries there has been a backlash and constitutional amendments and statutes have been adopted that penalize any pregnancy termination for whatever reason including rape and risk to the women’s lives”.⁶³ Even some women parliamentarians have supported such amendments. The study further argues that “abortion, an issue that divides women as a whole and parliamentarians in particular, has worked against any progress in the area of sexual health, including ratification of the CEDAW Protocol”.⁶⁴ The study from the Arab region similarly highlights the negative impact of the social conservatives, while the study from the Asia and Pacific region refers to “resisting groups, such as religious organizations and conservative power groups”.⁶⁵ The implications of the rise of social conservatism on the work of national mechanisms had been discussed earlier in chapter 2.1.

Lack of coherence between gender equality policies and other policies

Though many countries have adopted gender equality policies, the goals of these policies are not always supported by the macro policy environment, which privileges economic liberalization, deregulation and cutting back of public services. The influence of macro policies in setting the context of work for national mechanisms has already been discussed earlier in chapter 2.1.

The studies from South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Arab region and Africa highlight this dilemma. The study from Africa notes that over a decade of economic growth without redistribution and the relegation of social policy, has resulted in only

⁶³ María Dolores Fernós, 2010, p. 54

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 2010, p. 54

⁶⁵ Amaryllis T. Torres, 2010, p. 66

minor improvements in the budgetary capacities of national mechanisms. This undermines their ability to embark on various programmes to promote women's empowerment. The Arab region study similarly points out the adverse implications of macro-policies on women's lives in general and the work of the national mechanisms in particular struggling under severe budget constraints. Again, the negative impact of changes in macro-economic and social policy on gender equality and women's empowerment in South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States is highlighted by that region's study.

7.3 The challenges ahead

The studies from all the regions highlight many continuing challenges facing the national mechanisms. The most important is their sustainability. As the study from the European Union and Western countries points out, "sustainability is at risk due to a number of threats. Sustainability is at risk because of lack of funding when international support ends; because officials that are not interested in the subject will tend to move away from such responsibilities; sustainability is at risk because leaders that do not understand or accept the issue of gender equality as a serious human rights issue will tend not to give the required status and means, both human and financial, to national mechanisms and even, as noticed in some cases, make frequent shifts of location and scope".⁶⁶ The studies from other regions, particularly South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Arab and the Africa regions similarly raise concerns about the long-term sustainability of national mechanisms, especially because of over dependence on donor funds.

The studies from the European Union and Western Countries as well as from Latin America and the Caribbean region caution about another potential risk - the new trend of considering gender based discrimination as one form of discrimination comparable to other forms such as race, ethnicity and class. Both studies voice concern as to whether this trend will diminish the visibility and hence the effectiveness of the work of national mechanisms. This concern is also flagged in the study from Africa, where in at least one country there is a constant struggle of the national machinery in maintaining its separate existence.

Another continuing challenge to national mechanisms, as the Latin America and the Caribbean study points out, is that gender mainstreaming is still resisted and has not been established or institutionalized as an indispensable state strategy. This in turn depends, in great measure, on the political will of the head and members of the executive branch and his/her sensitivity and commitment to gender equality, and whether gender equality is a priority of state policy. This commitment, or lack thereof, influences the formal support given to action plans formulated by the mechanisms which need to be implemented throughout the governmental agencies at the national level and vertically at local levels. Evidence suggests that this political will can be created by increasing the political power of the mechanism itself, by constructing a powerful base that will support the mechanism when threatened by opposition from socially conservative forces. Interlocutory links with civil society organizations are an important dimension of the work of the national mechanisms for gender equality. Thus, these channels of communication with the women's movement and civil society in general are essential for the national mechanisms to develop an autonomous base of political support.

⁶⁶ Regina Tavares da Silva, 2010, p. 41

It is, thus, indispensable that national mechanisms do not work in isolation. Alliances must be built with other significant civil society groups aside from women's movement and academia and greater efforts should be made to increase the public presence and influence of the heads of the mechanisms. Evidence from the studies strongly suggests that these "public relations" efforts are useful and result in an increase of influence within and outside the government.

8. CONCLUSION

The regional studies describe a complex and dynamic situation for the national mechanisms across the world. In the decade and half since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, significant progress has been registered in all regions in reducing gender gaps in many sectors, most notably in education, health and employment. Countries in all regions have adopted laws, policies and specific measures to combat discrimination against women and promote gender equality. Many actors both within governments and outside have played important roles in pushing forward the gender equality agenda. National mechanisms are recognized as key players in this effort because they are the ones officially recognized to promote the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Still the contributions of national mechanisms have not been fully appreciated by many in part due to lack of clarity about their precise mandate, role, and scope of work; in part this is also due to lack of empirical data about their actual functioning: their activities, achievements as well as constraints. There is also a need to better understand the functioning of these mechanisms, and of opportunities for enhancing synergies, cooperation and collaboration for greater impact. This study on *Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women* has been undertaken to clarify some of the common misunderstandings and also to provide new insights and updated data on the work of national mechanisms. Time and financial constraints have limited data collection efforts and the study had to depend primarily on the responses to the Beijing + 15 survey.

The regional studies clearly indicate some common trends. They also highlight some distinct differences between the regions. Even within regions there are differences between countries. Many of these variations are due to the differences in the economic, social, political and institutional contexts in which national mechanisms function. The regional studies describe a great variety of activities, achievements as well as constraints of national mechanisms. Here, some of the key findings are presented followed by a few priority recommendations for the future.

8.1 Key findings of the study

Structure

- Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, in addition to national machineries within government, there has been multiplication and diversification of mechanisms horizontally and vertically to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in all regions. The horizontal and vertical multiplications have led to expansion of scope of work and functions of mechanisms. The diversity of structures has on the whole been a positive development facilitating gender mainstreaming and helping gain greater visibility, and attention and response to gender equality issues in multiple institutions and levels, as well as in public policy generally.
- The trend towards establishment of sub-national mechanisms at regional and local levels is a positive development as these mechanisms have been able to better represent the concerns of communities and nurture a new cadre of grassroots leadership.

- Some regional differences in the types of structures of mechanisms are noticeable. It appears that more mechanisms have been established in two regions: European Union and Western countries, and Latin America and the Caribbean region. These two regions also have more sub-national mechanisms at regional and local levels. Additionally, they have also established more accountability institutions.
- Notwithstanding the overall trend towards multiplication, national mechanisms are far from being institutionally stable. In many countries they face frequent reorganization, location shifts and leadership changes.

Mandate

- Although the Platform for Action guidelines are clear that the mandate of national machineries are to promote the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment through catalytic work and dual-track strategy of gender mainstreaming and targeted measures, there is still a lack of understanding about what catalytic work and gender mainstreaming entail. In many countries national machineries are still too busy implementing their own projects delivering services to women, rather than doing catalytic work providing policy advice to other ministries and departments to mainstream gender equality issues in their policies and programmes.
- In some countries mandates of national machineries do not highlight gender equality and women's empowerment. Instead, they are framed in a way that highlight a social welfare approach focusing on family and children.

Role/function

- On the whole, the gender mainstreaming strategy is gaining visibility and use through establishment of processes, development of methodologies and tools, and training. Gender-sensitive budgeting has emerged as an increasingly widely used tool for gender mainstreaming in all regions. But there are still wide gaps in capacity, in terms of technical expertise and tools, to mainstream gender perspective across all policies, strategies, plans and actions.
- The strategy of targeted measures is being used by national mechanisms with great effectiveness. Such targeted measures include temporary special measures where quota laws have contributed towards enhancing women's political representation. Targeted measures have also been effective in addressing emerging specific issues such as trafficking in women.
- Legal reforms have been the most widely used and effective strategy in all regions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Laws to combat violence against women have been enacted across all regions. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been ratified by almost all countries. The advocacy and lobbying for legal reforms and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ratification has enabled national mechanisms to strengthen their links with their key constituencies, especially the women's organizations.
- Sex disaggregated data and statistics and gender-sensitive research are increasingly available in all regions, but there are still gaps. In some countries even rudimentary sex disaggregated data and statistics is not available. In some other countries, their quality is

questionable. Data, statistics and research on new and emerging issues are scant. Moreover, in many places despite availability of sex disaggregated data and statistics and gender sensitive research their use by governments in planning and budgetary allocation processes is limited.

- Some progress is noticeable in developing indicators to monitor realization of the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment. But, the existing measures and indicators are limited in scope and use.
- Countries have fallen short in building a sound monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, which has constrained national mechanisms from systematically learning from their experiences.
- Positive developments have taken place to ensure accountability. Institutions such as Ombud's offices have been established in many countries to investigate specific cases of discrimination against women. Some governments report annually to parliament and/or publish an annual report tracking progress towards gender equality. Still, all the regional studies note that it has been difficult to hold the government as a whole accountable for gender equality.

Coordination and collaboration

- With the multiplication of national mechanisms coordination has become a challenging task for national machineries. Many countries have established specific structures such as inter- and intra-departmental/ministerial committees/working groups to facilitate coordination amongst various mechanisms within government. Formal rules/guidelines are also in place in many countries, but all the studies acknowledge that in reality coordination is weak for a variety of reasons. Sometimes structures and rules are missing. Sometime rules/guidelines are not systematically implemented. Most importantly, the national machineries have relatively low status vis-à-vis other ministries, and are often not given the authority or mandate to coordinate their activities.
- Collaboration between mechanisms in different branches of government, and with autonomous bodies has improved in many places through concerted efforts to promote various initiatives such as legal reforms. But here, again, the regional studies note scope for greater effort and improvement.
- Collaboration between mechanisms within government and other stakeholders outside government has also generally improved in all regions; but still there are countries where national mechanisms and civil society organizations are not working in a collaborative way. Instead they are competing over resources, particularly donor resources, and constituencies.

Resource

- The resources available to national mechanisms do not match the rising expectations from their constituencies. Mechanisms in all regions work under severe staff and budget constraints. Furthermore mechanisms in many countries are heavily dependent on donor money which risks their sustainability as donor funds and priorities tend to fluctuate.
- In some countries, the mechanisms have been able to overcome the financial resource constraint by tapping into three other key resources: strength of leadership of

mechanisms; support from top political leadership; and wide base of constituency support.

- Political will for achieving the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment has on the whole improved but there are variations between regions and countries. The rise in social conservatism poses a threat to the women's movement and the national mechanisms in many countries.

Achievements

- Noteworthy gains have been achieved on many fronts. Laws have been enacted or reformed to remove discrimination against women in a number of areas. The goals of gender equality and women's empowerment have achieved greater political visibility. The strategy of gender mainstreaming is increasingly being used in all regions. Capacity to address gender equality issues has been developed through availability of methodologies and tools; training; research and analysis, and data and statistics.
- Several factors have contributed to these achievements. Mechanisms have become more mature and have learned to draw lessons from their setbacks and successes. In some countries strong leadership has built the capacity of national mechanisms. In many countries the strengthened voice of civil society has enabled national mechanisms to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Regional and international processes and institutions have lent legitimacy to the gender equality agenda and have helped in exchange of knowledge that has strengthened the capacity of national mechanisms.
- Finally, while it is not possible to isolate the contribution of a single mechanism/actor or of a set of mechanisms/actors in realizing the gains towards gender equality, the collaboration of different mechanisms/actors on a particular issue has created the synergies that ultimately resulted in positive change.

Constraints and challenges

- Despite many positive developments national mechanisms still face many constraints. In some countries they are still structurally marginalized and have to cope with frequent reorganization and change in leadership. Mandates are sometimes diffuse and poorly designed. Staff and budgetary resources are severely limited. Technical expertise to address gender equality is inadequate both within national mechanisms and in other places in government. Coordination amongst various mechanisms within government is weak. Collaboration between mechanisms and between mechanisms and other stakeholders is limited. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system is not effective. Limitations of data, statistics research, methods and tools constrain policy analysis and programme development from a gender perspective.
- The challenges before national mechanisms are many. Sustaining political will, overcoming resistance and opposition and institutionalizing the gender mainstreaming strategy are continuing challenges for national mechanisms.

8.2 Recommendations

The diversification of structures and greater political commitments and visibility of the gender equality agenda provide national mechanisms with opportunities to further strengthen their profile, refine their mandate and approaches and work more strategically. They can build on promising strategies and areas of work. At the same time they need to address their persistent constraints and challenges. The study recommends the following priority actions to strengthen the national mechanism so that they can be more effective in promoting the gender equality agenda.

Mandate

- The mandate of national mechanisms needs to be further clarified specifying their goal, and emphasizing their catalytic role in the promotion of gender equality and the systematic use of the gender mainstreaming strategy.

Role/function

- Additional efforts are needed to clarify concepts, design tools and methodologies and build capacity for gender mainstreaming within and outside the national mechanisms.
- Targeted measures need to be continued to overcome structural obstacles to gender equality.
- Work in the area of legal reform, as well as the promotion of gender equality legislation should be expanded to combat discrimination against women in all sectors. Work on the effective implementation of such legislation also needs to be enhanced.
- Capacity for policy analysis and advice should be strengthened within and outside national mechanisms to bring a gender perspective to all policy areas across the government. A multi-pronged effort including research, tools, and training is needed to enhance such capacity.
- Collection of sex disaggregated data and statistics, development of methodologies and tools, and gender-specific research and analysis will need continuing promotion and support as they are essential for development of gender-responsive policies and actions.
- National machineries should make greater efforts to ensure that existing data, statistics, research, tools and methods are used by different ministries and departments in their planning and budgetary allocation processes.
- Indicators should be developed to measure progress toward gender quality in a wide spectrum of areas. These indicators should be integrated into mainstream monitoring indicators.
- Effective monitoring and evaluation systems (M&E) need to be designed to assess the performance of governments in realizing gender equality goals and draw lessons for future actions.
- Studies and evaluations need to be commissioned and self-evaluations conducted so that national mechanisms can identify their achievements as well as limitations, obstacles and promising strategies to overcome them.

Coordination and collaboration

- With the diversification and multiplication of national mechanisms, much greater knowledge and capacity are needed to fully realize their potential impact and benefits in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. National machineries should have an inventory of existing mechanisms, their goals and contributions as well as their location in the institutional landscape.
- Channels of regular communication need to be in place and strategies developed to enhance synergies and strengthen collaborative action among national mechanisms in the pursuit of common goals.
- Institutional arrangements and rules for coordination need to be in place, clarified and formalized and their application monitored to improve coordination between the national machinery and ministries/departments within the executive branch of government.
- Collaboration between national machineries and mechanisms in other branches of governments, e.g. parliamentary committees/caucuses, accountability institutions, and autonomous bodies as well as regional and local-level mechanisms need to be improved.
- Collaboration with civil society, women's organizations and other social partners particularly alliances with new stakeholders such as youth, needs to be built to widen the constituency base.

Resource

- Staff capacity of national mechanism in numbers as well in gender expertise needs to be improved. Gender expertise can be improved through recruitment of gender experts and training of staff in methods and tools for gender mainstreaming.
- Capacity of staff outside the national machineries, such as gender focal points, and other officials of government also need to be built. Tools and methods designed for gender mainstreaming should be integrated in the curriculum of general training for government officials.
- Budgetary allocation from national sources needs to be increased so that the mechanisms are not over dependent on external donor resources and can sustain their own priorities and work programmes.
- More attention and efforts should be invested to mobilize and sustain political will for promoting the gender equality agenda and strengthening the national mechanisms. Resistance to the agenda, mounted by social conservatives, needs to be countered by widening the mass base of political support of the women's movements, which is weakening in many countries. The national machineries need to build strategic alliances with women's movements without compromising the latter's autonomy and independent voice.
- Collaboration and exchange with regional and international institutions and processes need to be encouraged as they have proven to be effective in strengthening national mechanisms.

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