

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN: NEW CHALLENGES



BEIJING AT 10 : PUTTING POLICY INTO PRACTICE



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Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action



Critical Area H: Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

In addressing the issue of mechanisms for promoting the advancement of women, Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively.
-Beijing Platform for Action (paragraph 202)

The profound cultural and structural transformations necessary for achieving gender equality require the participation of all sectors of society. Critical Area H: Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women of the Beijing Platform for Action (PfA) refers to State responsibilities for eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, as well as the need to establish specific mechanisms within state structures in order to address gender equality.

Considering the advances and setbacks of institutional mechanisms (also known as national machineries in the case of national governmental entities); the PfA calls for national mechanisms to be the main actors in gender mainstreaming strategies for the programmes, projects and budgets of all sectors. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at its forty-third session (1999) recognized the need for increased efforts devoted to the creation and strengthening of these mechanisms. Measures were included in the conclusions of the session to ensure political commitment to strengthening institutional mechanisms, placing them at the highest level possible and granting them the necessary authority to fulfill their mandate and responsibilities.

At present there are many different sources of information and analysis on the characteristics, advances and obstacles faced by institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Yet systematic assessments of the impact of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women on national political discourse, on public policies, and on the political and decision-making process itself are still lacking.

The results of expert group meetings convened at both the regional and international levels constitute one important source. Among these meetings are the Expert Group Meeting on "National Machineries for Gender Equality"¹ held in Chile in 1998 and organized by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); the "Regional Meeting

¹ Expert Group Meeting on 'National Machineries for Gender Equality,' 1998. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/news/natlmach.htm>

of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific”² held in Korea in 2003 and organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the Ministry for Gender Equality of Korea, and the most recent DAW Expert Group Meeting on “The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: achievements, gaps and challenges”³ held in Italy in December 2004.

Another important source of information about the advances and challenges faced by institutional mechanisms are the responses received to the questionnaires sent by DAW to all UN Member States in anticipation of the ten-year review of the Beijing PfA in 2005. The questionnaires focused on a review of major achievements, gaps and challenges, as well as priority areas for further action to ensure full implementation of the PfA.⁴ The deadline for submitting responses was April 2004.

The non-governmental sector has also undertaken analyses of the effectiveness and capacity of institutional mechanisms to generate the necessary transformations at the state level. Most notable among these efforts are the studies produced by the BRIDGE programme at the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex) in 1996.⁵ An updated version of this report was prepared in 2002 which indicated that most of the obstacles identified in the first evaluation remained.⁶

Although institutional mechanisms can take on many forms and have differing levels of effectiveness, the conclusions of the various reports indicate that they share many of the same opportunities and obstacles.

Strategic Objective H.1

“Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies”

Actions to be taken by governments include: creating national mechanisms or strengthening existing ones at the highest possible level of government, endowed with clearly defined mandates and authority, the availability of adequate resources and the ability and competence to influence policy and formulate and review legislation; providing staff training in designing and analyzing data from a gender perspective; establishing procedures to allow participation in policy development and review process within the government; reporting to legislative bodies on progress made in the implementation of the Platform for Action; promoting the active involvement of institutional actors in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The call for the creation of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women was officially made at the First World Conference on Women in 1975. This petition was promoted and accepted by women’s organizations around the world who saw in this mechanism the opportunity to make the practical and strategic needs of women visible, bringing them out of the private realm and up to the politicized state sphere of action. According to the Directory of Focal Points for the Advancement of Women, by the end of the

² ‘Regional Meeting of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific: Towards a Forward-Looking Agenda,’ 2003. http://www.moge.go.kr/eng/regional_meeting/index.jsp

³ Expert Group Meeting on ‘The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women’ 2004. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/docs/EGM%20final%20report.26-jan-05.pdf>

⁴ Government responses to the DAW questionnaire are available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/english/responses.htm>. All subsequent references to country experiences are derived from these responses unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ Byrne, B. et al. *National Mechanisms for Women in Development: Experiences, lessons and strategies for institutionalising gender in development policy and planning*. Brighton: BRIDGE, 1996. <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/Reports/re36c.pdf>

⁶ Bell, E. et al. “National Mechanisms for Women in Development: experiences, lessons and strategies” Brighton: BRIDGE, 2002. <http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/beijing12/machineries.pdf>

UN International Decade for Woman (1976–1985), 127 UN Member States had established some type of institutional mechanism. The Directory of National Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women prepared by Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in 2004 shows a total of 165 countries with established institutional mechanisms.⁷

In the Asia-Pacific region, there has been progress in the creation of institutional mechanisms although it varies from country to country; while some have formed commissions to work on gender issues, others assign the tasks to existing mechanisms already working on women and children's issues. Ministries for Women, responsible for policy-making, planning and coordination, have been established in Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In other cases, national commissions are created under the Executive Office (Prime Minister or President) to monitor women's work, as is the case in Thailand. Women's departments have also been created in specific ministries, to address women's development in various sectors, as is the case in Bhutan, India and Nepal. In Uzbekistan, by Presidential decree, the position of Deputy Prime Minister was created to coordinate activities related to the social protection of families, women and children. One important strategy has been that of relocating the focal points so that they may have access to higher levels of power thereby having greater influence on decision-making. In the Republic of Korea, for example, the mechanism was relocated in the Presidential Commission for Women's Affairs (PCWA), which later became the Ministry for Gender Equality.

In Latin America, there are several notable examples such as that of the Dominican Republic, where the government raised the status of the institutional mechanism (the Women's Secretariat) to the highest level within the government, granting it ministerial rank and a seat in the cabinet. In eight out of fourteen countries national mechanisms for the advancement of women are placed in a hierarchal position which allows them the maximum authority to participate in the ministerial cabinet, while in five countries the mechanisms have direct access to the Secretariat of the Presidency or of the Government, and in one country it intervenes in instances of coordination where policies are designed.

Although these countries are complying with the strategy of raising institutional mechanisms to the highest possible level in government, it must be noted that in many cases, the government responses to the DAW questionnaires highlight that the financial resources allocated to the institutional mechanisms are not commensurate with the position occupied in the government structure. Moreover, the budgets assigned by the central governments in almost all cases are insufficient to support substantive work.

In the rest of the world progress is also evident. Italy, Namibia, and others, created new ministries or raised the rank of existing mechanisms. Albania raised the institutional mechanisms to the level of the Council of Ministers, while in Botswana the mechanism was raised to a Government Department simultaneously with the formation of the Botswana National Council on Women, which is the highest advisory body of the Government in women's issues. In Ethiopia, Iran, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and Zambia agencies and units for women's affairs were established at different levels of the governmental structure. In the Central African Republic, the institutional mechanism is located in the Ministry of Family, Social Affairs and National Solidarity.

A notable case is that of Afghanistan where the government formed during the reconstruction process included a Ministry of Women's Affairs as part of the presidential

⁷ "The role of national mechanisms in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women: achievements, gaps and challenges" Aide-mémoire for the expert group meeting organized by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA, 18 October 2004, http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/AideMemoire_18Oct04.pdf.

cabinet. This achievement is primarily a result of the advocacy efforts of women's groups in Afghanistan as well as those of international organizations.⁸

Establishing the legitimacy of their functions is one of the greatest challenges faced by these mechanisms, both in the cases of newly created ones and those that have been raised to higher levels within the decision-making structure. There is still strong opposition to the existence of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, from conservative sectors who argue that having a specific mechanism for women is a form of discrimination, and from technocratic critics, who state that the structures represent an unnecessary expense for the State.

According to ECLAC, "In several countries a consensus has not yet been reached on the legitimacy of the role of these mechanisms for the advancement of women as spaces for policy-making. Certain sectors would like to assign them an exclusive role of social service providers and it is observed that in some countries the gender approach is understood as being a new opportunity to marginalize women based on the argument of avoiding their discrimination or of not excluding men, children or the elderly, which again leads to the vicious circle of the vulnerability-centered approach. This could well be a new expression of traditional resistance to the integration of a real gender perspective in the state apparatus."⁹

The performance evaluations of the institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women have been carried out based on three basic factors: their mandates, the status that they have within the state apparatus and the activities that they perform within their work plans. These evaluations paint a picture of similar limitations for the consolidation of the mechanisms' mandates, with certain regional differences. These limitations can be summarized as follows:¹⁰

- *Weakness of mandate and conflictive functions:*

A review of the mandates in selected countries indicates that in some cases they are ambiguous, while in others they are limited to a secondary function. A weak mandate further complicates the legitimization of the national machinery. In many cases, national plans for gender equality have been developed in an effort to overcome the weakness of the mandate. This strategy will be examined in the next section of the report.

- *Insecure financial and human resource:*

One of the main constants in the countries' responses to the questionnaire on the implementation of the Beijing PfA is the financial instability in which the institutional mechanisms must carry out their mandate.

Faced with this reality, institutional mechanisms have resorted to different strategies. Some have been successful in promoting gender mainstreaming in national budgets. In this regard, workshops have been held for gender budget planning for those in positions of power and decision-making. For example, Botswana and other African countries have developed training programmes for this purpose. In the case of Cameroon the budget assigned to the Ministry has increased significantly due to the genuine interest shown by the State in reducing gender disparities.

⁸ "Afghan Women Still in Chains Under Karzai: Kabul's central jail holds female prisoners whose only 'crime' is their refusal to be second-class citizens." Common Dreams News Article 23 January 2005. <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/0123-02.htm>

⁹ *El Desafío de la Equidad de Género y de los Derechos Humanos en los Albores del Siglo XXI*. Document presented at the Eighth Regional Conference on Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, Lima, Peru, 8-10 February 2000. Santiago: ECLAC, 1999. <http://www.eclac.cl/publicaciones/UnidadMujer/5/lcl1295/indice.htm#INDICE> (translation by INSTRAW).

¹⁰ The categories used in this discussion are based on the framework developed by BRIDGE to analyze the performance of the institutional mechanisms.

Another strategy used by institutional mechanisms all over the world is that of developing programmes financed through international development cooperation. Different agencies of the United Nations system, such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), among others, have been fundamental in this strategy, as well as other instances of multilateral European cooperation. In Central America, it is worth noting that each country has cited internationally financed programmes for institutional strengthening.

International financing has been a crucial support for the institutional mechanisms for women. And yet this dependence on international funding for sustainability is not appropriate as it could lead to compliance with the donor's agenda rather than addressing national gender concerns. Moreover, a lack of financing from the national government demonstrates a lack of national political will; and that women's/gender issues are clearly not a priority in the governments' national plans. Consequently, many international donors have now shifted their priorities from financing for specific projects to supporting initiatives for institutional strengthening, including the development of national plans for gender equality

- *Bureaucratic resistance to gender mainstreaming:*

All over the world, there are still indications of resistance to gender mainstreaming efforts. For example, the diagnostic analysis developed by BRIDGE found that some planning and administrative departments of the different ministries mistakenly consider that the implementation of gender programmes is costly and reports uncertain benefits.¹¹ In addition, cultural resistance to gender equality leads many bureaucrats to consider that the mainstreaming mandate is an imposition and not an ethical obligation.

In most cases in which resistance has been overcome, it has been due to the ability of the institutional mechanisms to effectively carry out their work plans. However, this ability is usually compromised by the previously-mentioned financial instability, which then places the mechanisms within a vicious circle of not securing enough funding to be able to carry out their work plans, but being denied funding for their perceived inefficiency at carrying out their work plans.

In addition to these obstacles, the *paradigmatic transition from the Women and Development approach to a Gender in Development approach* has been identified as a challenge. Most of the mechanisms develop their work plans from a combination of approaches, combining projects that address the practical needs of women with gender mainstreaming strategies in public policies.

According to the background document of the Regional Meeting of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific (cited above), the main obstacles faced by institutional mechanisms can be summarized as follows:

1. Lack of political will and commitment. In some cases, regardless of how high within the government the national mechanisms are placed; with little support or political will their objectives cannot be achieved;

¹¹ Byrne, B. et al. *National machineries for women in development: experiences, lessons and strategies for institutionalising gender in development policy and planning*. Brighton: BRIDGE, 1996.
<http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/Reports/re36c.pdf>

2. Amorphous legal and institutional status. In many countries a structural vacuum exists, with no clear procedures or constitutional solidity, which prevents institutional mechanisms from accomplishing substantive goals;
3. Government indifference to gender mainstreaming. Budget reductions for gender issues are common since they are accorded less importance. Moreover, there is a tendency towards implementing short-term projects, and local interests are given priority by ministers thereby relegating gender to last or next-to-last place;
4. Competition with civil society organizations. On occasion, competitive relationships are hinder collaboration with women’s organizations and NGOs which further hinders the effectiveness of the institutional mechanism’s work;
5. Isolated focus of institutional mechanisms, out of step with broader policies. Gender is often treated as something completely separate from other aspects and sectors of life.
6. Donor dependency. This is an important obstacle because dependency on external financing often limits work, since the donor’s agenda must be respected.
7. Feminine focus. Programmes’ that focus only on women ignore the impact of masculinities in building and changing gender relations.

In many instances, and especially in developing countries, the legitimacy of institutional mechanisms develops in direct proportion to the level of institutionalization of the State in which it exists. This relationship is particularly important with regard to gender mainstreaming in policies, legislation and statistics.

Areas for Future Action:

- Carry out systematic assessments of the impact of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women on national political discourse as well as the impact on public policies;
- Develop strategies for economic sustainability for institutional mechanisms, including awareness-raising activities in national financial planning units or offices on the need to increase budget allocations for the implementation of national gender plans and the need to identify donors from national private sectors;
- Develop mechanisms for decentralizing activities on gender issues taking care to ensure that the institutional mechanisms have recognized influence at the national level;
- Carry out capacity-building activities to guide the participation of institutional mechanisms in emergency situations, such as those caused by natural disasters or armed conflict.

Strategic Objective H.2

“Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects”

Actions to be taken by governments and institutional mechanism, include to: seek to ensure that before policy decisions are taken, an analysis of their impact on women and men, respectively, is carried out; work with members of legislative bodies, as appropriate, to promote a gender perspective in all legislation and policies; facilitate the formulation and implementation of government policies on equality between women and men, develop appropriate strategies and methodologies, and promote coordination and cooperation within the central Government in

order to ensure mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all policy-making processes; promote and establish cooperative relationships with relevant branches of government, centres for women's studies and research, academic and educational institutions, the private sector, the media, non-governmental organizations, especially women's organizations, and all other actors of civil society.

In recent years much importance has been given to the development of national plans for the advancement of women. According to information DAW, of the 191 UN Member States, 121 or sixty-three percent¹² have already deposited their national plans for the advancement of women. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women of India and the Strategic Plan on Gender Equity and Equality of Belize are just two examples of these policies.

Gender and development plans are often integrated into national development strategies. For example, the National Gender and Development Plan of St. Kitts and Nevis constitutes an integral part of the macroeconomic strategy in which the development objectives of the federation are considered. Manifested in this plan is the government's commitment to generating a process of gender-sensitive development for which specific actions in six critical areas are contemplated: strengthening national capacities for the implementation of the national plan; gender mainstreaming in government; alleviation and gradual eradication of women's poverty; reducing violence against women and domestic violence; improving women's access to health services; and increasing women's participation in all areas of decision-making.¹³

Relating the gender perspective to the development of budgets is an effective way of making governments transparent and it serves to raise the awareness of the planners, since it highlights the difference in the impact of budgets on men and women. In the Asia-Pacific region the national gender plans of twelve countries were accompanied by specific allocations in the national budget. Since 1996 in the Philippines, five percent of the annual budget is devoted to gender and development activities. In Malaysia, approximately RM50 million of the national budget is devoted annually to specific women's programmes under the Department of Women's Affairs. Likewise there is a specific budget line for gender activities in Indonesia and Korea. Other countries such as Vietnam, Nepal and Thailand have special funds for gender and women's programmes.

The case of the Philippines provides an example of gender mainstreaming in various sectors. The Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (PPGRD) 1995–2025, a thirty-year plan, was created to identify gender issues in all sectors: health, education, art and culture, family, communications media, labor, etc. Mechanisms have been created to guide development planners in gender mainstreaming in each phase of planning.

As established in the Beijing Platform, the implementation of these plans requires inter-sectoral cooperation. This requirement is particularly important for gender mainstreaming strategies that refer to the adoption, by all ministries of the State, of the vision and the tools developed in order to guarantee that the effects of governmental judgments contribute to the development of gender equality.

Indonesia provides an example of gender mainstreaming in several ministries. There is a State Ministry for the Role of Women, under the presidential office, and focal points have

¹² Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Compliance with International Legal Instruments on Women. Division for the Advancement of Women, 2004. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/compliance-table-12.21.04.pdf>

¹³ The UN's WomenWatch website presents a compendium of national development plans developed around the Beijing Platform for Action: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/natplans.htm>

been established in eleven agencies: the Department of National Planning; the Ministry of Education; the Department of Health; the Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium-sized Business; and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, among others. In Thailand, the government established gender equality offices and gender focal points at every level of its ministries in 2001. During the first stage, each ministry established such offices and has formulated strategies for gender equality within its agencies.

In some African countries a relationship between the institutional mechanisms for women and other government Ministries has been established. For example, in the case of Botswana, the national gender mechanism is one of the departments in the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs. It is connected with other Departments through gender focal points. In addition, projects have been carried out to create gender policies in other ministries such as Finance and Development Planning and Commerce and Industry, among others. Likewise, in Kenya and Namibia there are gender focal points in the various ministries, although in the first case they are either nonfunctional or not very effective.

It has also been possible to successfully apply this strategy in some Latin American countries. In the case of the Dominican Republic, ministerial focal points were established by means of a presidential decree. However, although all the ministries have a gender equality office, in many cases this office exists at a minimal and non-operative level. However, the offices in the Secretariats of Education and Agriculture and in the national Police have begun to show results.

Another fundamental component of the gender mainstreaming strategy is the development of networks with civil society organizations. It should be pointed out that, in most cases, these are the same NGOs that promoted the formation of the institutional mechanisms in the first place. However, the building of mutually supportive relationships has not always been easy and in many cases is hindered by a lack of clarity and definition in the mandates and the functions of both spaces. However, many advances can be noted in this regard.

In some African cases, collaboration between the gender mechanism, NGOs, and civil society has been achieved. This is the case in Botswana, where the national women's machinery worked closely with NGOs through the National Coalition of NGOs. Likewise in the Central African Republic civil society forms a part of the mechanism to implement the Beijing PfA. In this case, the role played by NGOs consists of research on the situation of the women in the country and their needs in every area of social and economic life.

In the case of Indonesia, an interagency working group has been formed comprising representatives from all local NGOs and from women's research centers. In Korea, the Ministry of Gender Equality, established in 2001, has four divisions including the Division for Promotion and Cooperation with Women's Rights which works primarily with NGOs and international agencies. In Malaysia, the national mechanisms and institutions for the advancement of women are composed of the government, the private sector and NGOs working jointly to improve the status of women. In Mongolia, the National Council on Women has representation from Parliament, ministries, departments, academic institutions, NGOs and community organizations.

In Guatemala, NGOs have played a fundamental role in the formation of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. In fact, the creation of the Presidential Secretariat of Women of Guatemala in 2000 was in part a result of the demands of women's organizations who then selected a slate of ten candidates from which the Minister was appointed by the President of the Republic. In the case of El Salvador, the Board of

Directors of the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development (ISDEMU) includes four representatives from women's organizations elected by the sector.

National machineries have developed a variety of activities to support the review of legislation, to ensure the well-being of women and gender equality, as well as gender mainstreaming in all governmental policies and programmes. India for example, created a National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, with legal, institutional and programme responses to gender discrimination. In Cambodia, the Ministry of Women's and Veterans' Affairs becomes involved in the formulation of legislative strategies and guidelines to prevent discrimination against women. In the Republic of Korea the Women's Development Act consolidates the legal basis for taking institutional and financially adequate measures, in support of gender equality. The institutional mechanisms in countries of Central Asia were established by prime ministerial or presidential decrees.

In Malaysia, the most recent achievement has been that in Article eight of the Federal Constitution the term "gender" was introduced in laws and policies that prevent discrimination towards women. There have also been achievements in this regard in Morocco where, in 2002, by means of a new electoral code access to Parliament was facilitated for thirty-five women. In 2004, the new labour code confirmed the principle of gender equality in the workplace, in matters of salary and employment. Sexual harassment on the job is now considered a punishable offense. Moreover, women's rights are guaranteed in the new Criminal Code, and in the new family legislation.

In Europe different advances were also observed, including in the Russian Federation, where the Duma as well as the Federal Assembly have adopted strategies and guidelines for the development of laws that prevent gender discrimination. In Portugal different parliamentary commissions have been created to review all legislative projects from a gender perspective.

Achievements can also be identified in Latin America. In Guatemala, the Presidential Secretariat for Women became involved in the development of the Municipal Code, succeeding in making the participation of the Women's Commission obligatory in all municipalities. In Honduras, the National Institute for Women has become actively involved in the development of a bill to modify the Municipalities Law to officially establish Women's Municipal Offices. In the Andean region, the case of Bolivia stands out because of its legislative advances, especially in the Law of Popular Participation which guarantees women's participation in the processes of local planning; and the Municipalities Law, which establishes protection and services for the special needs of women, within the Integrated Legal Services section.

With regard to laws referring to the promotion of respect for the human rights of women, it may be pointed out that most of the achievements at the national level have been made possible by developments at the international level.¹⁴

Areas for Future Action:

- Strengthen relationships with civil society organizations in an effort to include their participation in mainstreaming the gender perspective into the public agenda;
- Create, where necessary, and strengthen existing relations with centers for gender studies, involving them in the process of strategic planning with gender

¹⁴ For more information on the relationship between national conventions and legislative tasks at the national level, download the INSTRAW Progress Report on Critical Area I: Human rights of women <http://www.un-instraw.org>

perspectives, the training of relevant actors, research, and the production of gender-sensitive statistics;

- Strengthen coordination among different state agencies, developing integrated plans to address phenomena such as the feminization of poverty and gender-based violence which require actions from various government sectors.

Strategic Objective H.3

“Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation”

Actions to be taken by national, regional and international statistical services, as well as governmental bodies and United Nations agencies in cooperation with research and documentation organizations include to: ensure that statistics related to individuals are collected, compiled, analysed and presented by sex and age and reflect problems, issues and questions related to women and men in society; involve centres for women’s studies and research organizations in developing and testing appropriate indicators and research methodologies to strengthen gender analysis, as well as in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the goals of the Platform for Action; improve data collection on the full contribution of women and men to the economy, including their participation in the informal sector(s); ensure the regular production of a statistical publication on gender that presents and interprets topical data on women and men in a form suitable for a wide range of non-technical users.

Systematic access to reliable data is fundamental for the success of any gender equality policy. Both qualitative and quantitative data are indispensable for diagnosis, programme design and monitoring and evaluation of interventions. However, until recently, a simple act such as including a variable for sex was not a common practice in statistical work worldwide. To a great extent, this was due to a lack of vision regarding the form in which the phenomenon itself affects men and women differently. In fact, one of the main obstacles that has to be overcome to create gender-sensitive statistics and indicators is that of convincing the information management specialists of the importance of disaggregating the data, on the one hand, and of identifying new questions that refer to the relationships between men and women and the specific living conditions of women, on the other.

At the international level, the Economic Commissions of the United Nations System have played a fundamental role in the production of sex-disaggregated statistics and gender-sensitive indicators. In many cases, these agencies also have invested their efforts in developing indicators for evaluating of the implementation of the Beijing PfA, as will be discussed below.

In Africa, the Economic Commission for Africa launched *The African Gender and Development Index*.¹⁵ The AGDI is more than just a compendium of statistical information. It is an index that comprises two components: The Gender Status Index, and the African Women’s Progress Scoreboard (AWPS). The AGDI is specific to the African reality since African conventions and documents relating to the empowerment of women were used in its development. The AGDI has been piloted in twelve countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia and Uganda. The results of this first exercise were published at the end of 2004.

¹⁵ *The African Gender and Development Index*. Addis Ababa: Economic Commission for Africa and Africa Centre for Gender and Development, 2004.
http://www.uneca.org/fr/acgd/en/1024x768/en_home/en_new/Leaflet%20AGDI.doc

In Latin America, ECLAC developed a collection of indicators for evaluating the implementation of the Platform for Action within the context of Beijing+5.¹⁶ In addition, the Website of the Women and Development Unit¹⁷ includes data for selected countries based on three requirements: that they be representative of some of the principal social dimensions in which gender inequalities are expressed, identified by the Regional Programme for Action for Women of Latin America and the Caribbean 1995 – 2001 and the Beijing Platform for Action; that they be common to all countries; and that they reflect the present situation, in accordance with the most recent statistical information, compared between countries and validated by ECLAC and specialized international institutions.

The Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) also has undertaken work in producing gender-sensitive information by developing the Gender Statistics Website for Europe and North America,¹⁸ which presents statistics gathered for the UNECE gender statistics database created in 1993 with the aim of monitoring the situation of the women and men in the UNECE member countries, and evaluating the effectiveness of policies.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)¹⁹ also developed a collection of indicators for measuring the implementation of the Beijing PFA. In addition, UNESCAP has developed different regional activities, in coordination with UNIFEM, to train the relevant actors in the use of gender-sensitive statistics in development work.²⁰ These workshops resulted in a collection of national profiles on women as well as other materials.

Finally, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ECSWA), together with other organizations of the United Nations System has initiated the "Gender Statistics Programmes in Arab Countries."²¹ The regional GSP programme has been implemented since 1997 in twelve countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen. To-date, four regional workshops have been held for the identification and development of gender-sensitive statistics and indicators.

Other agencies of the UN System also have contributed to the creation of indicators that give visibility to gender inequalities. The UN Statistics Division has published three issues in the series, *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics*²² corresponding to the years 1991, 1995 and 2000. In 2000, UNIFEM began the production of a biennial publication, *Progress of the World's Women* in which women's advances towards "the enjoyment of a life free from violence, poverty and inequality" are emphasized.²³

On the other hand, UN agencies such as UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Health Organization (WHO) have made substantial contributions to the production of gender-sensitive statistics in their annual publications. In 1995 UNDP developed two indexes in addition to the Human Development Index; the Gender and Development Index (GDI)²⁴ and the Gender

¹⁶ The definition, description and measurement of the indicators developed by ECLAC to evaluate the implementation of the Beijing Platform are at <http://www.cepal.org/mujer/proyectos/perfiles/beijing/beijing21.htm>

¹⁷ ECLAC database of gender statistics: <http://www.cepal.org/mujer/proyectos/perfiles/default.htm>

¹⁸ UNECE Gender Statistics Website for Europe and North America: <http://www.unece.org/stats/gender/web/welcome1.htm>

¹⁹ *Gender Indicators for monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action on women in the ESCAP region*. Bangkok: ESCAP, 2003.

<http://www.unescap.org/esid/GAD/Publication/Gender-Indicators.pdf>

²⁰ ESCAP Statistics on Gender and Development: <http://www.unescap.org/esid/GAD/statistics.asp>

²¹ The description of the Gender Statistics Programmes in the Arab Countries, as well as some of its results can be found at:

<http://www.escwa.org.lb/gsp/about/main.html>

²² *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*. New York: United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (Statistics Division), 2000.

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/wwwpub.htm>

²³ *Progress of the World's Women*. New York: UNIFEM, 2000. http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f_page_pid=122

Progress of the World's Women: Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals. New York: UNIFEM, 2002.

http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f_page_pid=10

²⁴ *Gender-Related Development Index*. New York: UNDP, 2004. http://hdr.undp.org/docs/statistics/indices/index_tables.pdf#page=14

Empowerment Measure (GEM).²⁵ These indexes are now included in yearly editions of UNDP's *Human Development Reports*. In addition, many national human development reports have referred exclusively to the subject of gender inequality, according to information from the Human Development Report:²⁶ Cambodia and Benin in 1998, Rumania in 2000, Mozambique and Namibia in 2001, Guatemala in 2002, and Bolivia and El Salvador in 2003, to name just a few.

In the extent to which most of the statistical projects of international agencies are based on locally produced figures, these actions developed at an international level have affected national processes. However, in the evaluations conducted by the countries a great delay in the fulfillment of this strategic objective at the national level continues to be evident, which will require greater analysis in the coming years.

Areas for Future Action:

- Create, where necessary, and strengthen existing networks between national machineries at the regional level for information sharing, particularly in the identification and replication of good practices for strengthening institutional processes;
- Regularly update information systems on the status of women and on gender relations. All citizens should have access to these systems; care should be taken to use the most appropriate means to reach all sectors of the population. Practical applications for information produced should be sought; for example, incorporating the information into formal curricula of public education.

Conclusion

A review of the progress made in the strengthening of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women in different countries presents a panorama from which significant lessons learned can be extracted. Different documents have reiterated the diversity of elements necessary to further extend the institutionalization of mechanisms and highlight the importance of strengthening their legitimacy within the scope of national governments.

Although it is fundamental that the recommendations be adapted to different national contexts, one constant for all countries is the need to develop creative and innovative strategies to further the process of mainstreaming gender into the public agenda. In this regard, it is essential that over the next few years, institutional mechanisms concentrate their efforts on awareness-raising and the mobilization of relevant actors in order to promote their work both within and outside the State.

²⁵ *Gender Empowerment Measure*. New York: UNDP, 2004. http://hdr.undp.org/docs/statistics/indices/index_tables.pdf#page=18
²⁶ UNDP Human Development Reports: <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/>