



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE H INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES H

**Objective H.1** Create or strengthen national machineries and other government bodies.

**Objective H.2** Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects.

**Objective H.3** Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

*'(196) National machineries for the advancement of women have been established in almost every Member State to, inter alia, design, promote the implementation of, execute, monitor, evaluate, advocate and mobilize support for policies that promote the advancement of women. National machineries are diverse in form and uneven in their effectiveness, and in some cases have declined. Often marginalized in national government structures, these mechanisms are frequently hampered by unclear mandates, lack of adequate staff, training, data and sufficient resources, and insufficient support from national political leadership.*

*(201) A national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas. The necessary conditions for an effective functioning of such national machineries include:*

- (a) Location at the highest possible level in the government, falling under the responsibility of a Cabinet Minister;*
- (b) Institutional mechanisms or processes that facilitate, as appropriate, decentralized planning, implementation and monitoring with a view to involving non-governmental organisations and community organisations from the grass roots upwards;*
- (c) Sufficient resources in terms of budget and professional capacity;*
- (d) Opportunity to influence development of all government policies.'*

*(Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA))*

### OVERARCHING CONCERNS

In 2007 / 2008 the United Nations Human Development Report ranked Australia 2<sup>nd</sup> in the world on its gender related development index and 8<sup>th</sup> in the world on its gender empowerment measure. The Australian government relies on gender mainstreaming as a key tool for women's advancement.

Gender mainstreaming is based on the premise that the roles, responsibilities and situations of both women and men have to be taken into consideration and that consideration for women as well as men has to be integral to development policy and to political, economic and social structures and outcomes.

Gender mainstreaming policies and programs should respond to the diverse needs of women from across all groups, such as young women and girls, indigenous women, migrant women, refugee women, women with disabilities, lesbians and the aged.

The Office for Women has strengthened its role in advising government agencies on gender dimensions on policy and program development and implementation, such as advice to Cabinet Ministers to consider gender dimensions in the early stages of policy development.

However, gender mainstreaming in Australian policy circles at national and state level, despite a rhetorical move, certain policies remain significantly gender blind, such as the Australian Drought policy. Inadequate understanding continues in some areas of government of the concept and strategies for the implementation of gender mainstreaming and how it should affect the policies and daily practice.

The Office for Women remains a low level ministry, with insufficient staff or seniority at both State/Territory and Federal level, to monitor or adequately influence policies and programs of other ministries with a gender perspective.

Other women's institutional mechanisms such as the Australian Human Rights Commission (Sex and Aged Discrimination Commission) and Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) also remain inadequately staffed and resourced to achieve effective outcomes for women.

A key strategy of the Office for Women in engaging with Australian women is the National Women's Non Government Organisations Alliances. These Alliances act as the bridge between the Office for Women and the broader women's community and have the potential to create strong and effective advocacy mechanisms for women.

However, of significant concern is the lack of knowledge of a large number of women of the existence, roles, benefits and resources of women's institutional mechanisms such as Office for Women, Sex Discrimination Commissioner and Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency.

Indigenous women especially are not being exposed to these mechanisms, indicating an assumed restriction to dealing with 'Indigenous Affairs' as a key entry point to government.

Legislation and mechanisms for recourse around sexual discrimination and violence don't always work for women. The increasingly litigious and complex nature of regulatory frameworks, high costs for legal representation, heightened vulnerability to justiciable problems and issues of 'access' all contribute to social exclusion especially for indigenous, refugee, CALD, and women with disability.

Despite changes in the Sex Discrimination Act (1984), police reporting, and the introduction of a Human Rights Charter in some states, lesbians and gay women are still suffering discrimination in legal settings because of same-sex relationships

Australia was the first country to develop a gender-sensitive budget with comprehensive audit of a government budget for its impact on women and girls in 1984, however, over recent years there has been an ad hoc approach across whole of government.

## GAINS

- ✿ Substantial changes have been made to the family law system by the Family Law (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act July 2006. The changes were aimed to help parents manage family separation by resolving disputes themselves, where possible, and to encourage cooperative and shared parenting after separation. Consultations have occurred in 2009 on the Review of Future Governance Options for the Federal Family Courts.
- ✿ Women's groups and organisations have been active to monitor and work with the government on Beijing Platform for Action Beijing + 15 Review, CEDAW Shadow Report, Time for Action (the national plan on preventing Domestic Violence in Australia), and the National Action Plan on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 & 1820.
- ✿ FaCHSIA funded NGO community consultations for the CEDAW Shadow Report (2008/2009) and Beijing 15 year Review and Appraisal (2009/2010).
- ✿ FaCHSIA sought funding to support and enable community representatives to attend the Commission for the Status of Women (CSW) 53<sup>rd</sup> session and will be funding community representation to attend the CSW 54<sup>th</sup> session. The inclusion of indigenous women in this community representation is a positive step.
- ✿ Engagement and partnership between governments and NGO's civil societies in promoting women's rights and gender equality has increased and strengthened.

## GAPS

- ✿ A representative for women's advancement is not located at the highest possible level in the government. Higher level representation for women in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- ✿ There is insufficient staffing of the Offices for Women at both federal and state government level, EOWA and AHRC. The financial resources allocated are not commensurate with the position occupied in the government structure, nor are the assigned budgets sufficient to ensure effectiveness and capacity to generate substantive long term work rather than short term projects.
- ✿ Despite current government actions, there is insufficient gender budgeting and broader gender sensitive analysis of macroeconomic policies across government. A need for gender-responsive budget preparation, utilisation and monitoring is required.
- ✿ Lack of knowledge of a large number of women of the existence, roles, benefits and resources of women's institutional mechanisms such as Office for Women, Sex Discrimination Commissioner and Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency.
- ✿ 'Caring' is still seen predominantly in terms of young children without due consideration being given to the carer responsibilities of teenagers, adults with disability and older persons, the latter being a growing concern in relation to the changing demographics.

## EMERGING ISSUES

- ✿ Improved funding and resourcing of new Family Court with greater emphasis on ensuring greater accessibility to regional areas.

## SUGGESTED UN LANGUAGE FOR KEY PRIORITY AREAS OF ACTION

- ✿ Ensure that responsibility for the advancement of women is vested in the highest possible level of government; in many cases, this could be at the level of a Cabinet Minister.
- ✿ Calling for all governments to mainstream gender perspectives into all legislation, policies and programmes and promote incorporation of gender-responsive budgeting processes across all areas and at all levels.
- ✿ Urge all governments to improve data collection on the full contribution of women and men to the economy, including their participation in the informal sector(s)
- ✿ Urge all governments to improve data collection on the full contribution of women and men to the economy, including their participation in the informal sector(s)
- ✿ Urge all governments to improve sex-disaggregated data collection and develop performance indicators to measure progress in financing gender equality and empowerment of women at national level
- ✿ Calling on all governments to strengthen the mandates of national machineries for the advancement of women, and ensure that they are adequately resourced to carry out their critical mandates in advocating for, supporting and monitoring the incorporation of gender perspectives in all policy areas and the implementation of gender equality plans and programmes

## UN REFERENCES

### BPFA

Strategic Objective H1 Action 203 (a)  
Strategic Objective H3 Action 206 (e)

### B+5 OD

B+5 IV Action 58, 61, 64, 65

### CEDAW

Article 1,2, 3

### MDGs

*No reference found on these issues*

### Reference in other documents

E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/CRP.1 para 29, 34, 35, 40

### CSW Outcomes Documents 2005 – 2009

E/CN.6/2006/15 para 7 (c) (i) (l) (m) (n) (p), (pt 2) 2, 8  
E/CN.6/2007/9 para 14.6 (a) (b) (c), 14.15  
E/CN.6/2008/11 para 11 (a) (e), 21 (i) (j) (k) (l) (m) (o) (p), 90 (f) (h)  
E/CN.6/2009/15 para 15 (f)