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The Enabling Environment

The establishment and operation of a Gender Management System requires an enabling environment. When the enabling environment is weak, a major task of the GMS is to strengthen it. There are a number of interrelated factors that determine the degree to which the environment in which the GMS is being set up does or does not enable effective gender mainstreaming:

- ◆ political will and commitment to gender equality and equity at the highest levels;
- ◆ commitment to such global and regional mandates as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development;
- ◆ a constitutional and legislative framework conducive to advancing gender equality;
- ◆ the presence of a critical mass of women in decision-making positions in the political, public and private sectors;
- ◆ a well-developed and autonomous civil society and the role it can play in advancing gender equality; and
- ◆ adequate human and financial resources, including donor aid and technical assistance.

This section looks in greater detail at these elements of the enabling environment.

Political Commitment

Political commitment at the highest levels among governments is an essential element of a strong enabling environment for gender mainstreaming and the setting up of a Gender Management System. Political commitment is manifested in a number of ways:

- ◆ the implementation of globally and regionally agreed principles, frameworks and strategies for achieving gender equality (e.g., Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender Equality);
- ◆ adequate resourcing of the National Women's Machinery and of programmes to promote gender equality; and
- ◆ the placement of the NWM in a central location with a high level of political status and influence on policy and decision-making.

Where governments lack political will, the following tendencies can result:

- ◆ placing the entire responsibility for change on women themselves;
- ◆ treating the NWM as a token of good intentions rather than a serious element in the creation of gender-aware social justice and development;
- ◆ expecting the NWM to be a programme delivery agency for 50 per cent of the population, despite meagre human and financial resources and in the absence of appropriate management and procedural measures;

- ◆ requiring the NWM to raise external funds to operate or continue to operate (Ashworth, 1994: 5); and
- ◆ significant disparities between women and men in a range of sectors within the country, including politics, law, finance, education, health, agriculture, trade, industry, information and communications, and others.

This can place a number of constraints on the operations of a NWM¹:

- ◆ inadequate funding and dependence on international donor aid;
- ◆ lack of staff;
- ◆ inadequately trained staff;
- ◆ inability to meet demands;
- ◆ lack of co-operation with or understanding from other government ministries;
- ◆ no national advisory body on gender equality;
- ◆ unclear policy; and
- ◆ political pressure.

Where political will is lacking, it becomes the task of the NWM to promote and strengthen political will through lobbying, advocacy, and gender training and awareness raising. In these activities it should seek the collaboration of like-minded officials within government and of NGOs, the academic community and other stakeholders in civil society.

Lobbying and advocacy of this kind are greatly assisted by the availability of sex-disaggregated data that can form the basis of a gender analysis of existing conditions within the country. Lobbying is effective when it includes a clear statement of the problem, backed up by sound statistical data. This is one reason why the GMS emphasises gender analysis as a key mechanism.

The GMS is not a rigid system; it is designed to be adapted to suit national circumstances. Where the overall environment is not particularly favourable for gender mainstreaming, a GMS may be established in a particular ministry, department, or group of ministries which have a strategic advantage in terms of the enabling environment they offer. Identifying the best strategic entry points for the GMS is one of the tasks of the feasibility study and stakeholder analysis which begins the process of setting up a GMS (see Section 5).

Global, Regional and National Mandates

Commonwealth member states are parties and signatories to a number of international agreements that bear upon the issue of gender equality. One role of Gender Management Systems is to ensure, at the national level, the implementation of the gender equality components of these frameworks.

The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing provided a renewed global commitment to achieving gender equality and equity. The final clause of the Beijing Declaration states, “We hereby adopt and commit ourselves as Governments to implement the Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all our policies and programmes.” In the post-Beijing period, many governments are receptive to gender mainstreaming and the concept of a Gender Management System as a strategy for accelerating the attainment of gender equality. In effect, a GMS both helps to create enabling conditions for gender mainstreaming and enhances an enabling environment where it already exists.

Box 3

International Agreements Pertaining to Gender Equality and Equity

- ◆ the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Regional Platforms for Action;
- ◆ the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development;
- ◆ the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies;
- ◆ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- ◆ UNCED's Agenda 21 (Environment);
- ◆ the Vienna Declaration (Human Rights);
- ◆ the Cairo Programme of Action (Population and Development);
- ◆ the Copenhagen Plan of Action (Social Development); and
- ◆ the Istanbul Plan of Action (Housing and Settlements).

Resources

The effective implementation and monitoring of a Gender Management System requires resources. It should not be seen as primarily the responsibility of the National Women's Machinery to provide these resources. A GMS should be funded by the national government, guided by the Lead Agency in co-operation with the Gender Management Team and the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee (see Section 4).

As with other aspects of the GMS, defining and securing resources requires planning. In planning resource needs, it is important to determine what are the gaps between requirements and availability, how those gaps will be filled and what it will cost to fill them. The main categories of necessary resources are human and financial, and secondary resources which include supplies, services, facilities and equipment.

Human resources

Key among the activities of a Gender Management System with implications for the use of human resources and other complementary resources are:

- ◆ **administration** – the planning, co-ordination, evaluation and management of the system. As a GMS will make different and additional demands on people's time, it is critical to put adequate administrative support in place.
- ◆ **training** – from gender-sensitivity training through to more specialised gender training programmes, e.g., Gender and Macroeconomic Planning, Training for Policy-Makers, or Gender and Health training will require a range of gender expertise and training materials, facilities, equipment and supplies. A Training Needs Analysis is crucial to the establishment of an appropriate programme to build capacity.
So as to develop local resources and build sustainability, the training of trainers should be carried out. This will enable wide coverage of all sectors of the population in gender-awareness.
- ◆ **research data/information** – the collection, storage, analysis and dissemination of information for planning and advocacy will require personnel with the appropriate skills. In some situations, redeployment may be a workable approach.

The Lead Agency requires basic office equipment and technology such as computers, a fax machine, a photocopier, telephone lines and storage of information relating to a Gender Management System. Access to a meeting room should also be ensured.

These resources may be procured from government and from arrangements with international development agencies. The GMS may play a catalytic role in attracting funding or technical inputs from other international agencies. When the services of outside experts are required by the Lead Agency, an important aspect of the experts' work should include local counterpart training or mentoring to build a residential capacity. Gender or Women's Affairs units will also be utilising resources of other ministries and departments, such as the Statistics Office, tertiary educational/training institutions and other organisations.

Financial resources

A budget should be allocated to the Lead Agency. Extra-budgetary funding sources external to government may be secured from international sources. Line ministries should also make provisions from their own budgets for gender-awareness training and to cover the additional responsibilities of Gender Focal Points.

Ideally, financial resources should be sufficient to ensure that gender training can be undertaken for a wide range of sectors within the population, including parliamentarians, public sector personnel, young people, and as many group and organisational leaders as possible.

Legislative Framework

An enabling environment includes the existence of a legislative framework which contains no unfair gender-discriminatory provisions and promotes women's rights as human rights. In some countries, the task of a Gender Management System will include putting in place the desired legislative framework.

Legal and statutory frameworks can empower NWMs to function legitimately and to stake a claim to budgetary resources for the discharge of their roles, mandates and duties. They also underscore the fact that political, economic, social and cultural arrangements are entwined with public policy. A GMS has the task of placing gender analysis within the legislative and policy process and, by so doing, enabling not only the NWM but all agencies of government to address gender needs and interests, and ensure that gender-sensitive public policies are developed. If a GMS is to enable a complex set of policy responses based on assessment of the different impacts that policies have on women and men, then one of its primary functions must be to address the problem that in many countries, the legislative authority for NWMs is virtually non-existent or at best, weak and ineffective.

Of even greater importance is the existence of a legal framework which includes equal employment opportunities Acts, anti-sex discrimination laws which include provision of day-care facilities and other support services, laws on violence against women, ownership of land and property, inheritance, etc.

This legitimises the efforts of social partners working towards gender equality and equity, and also creates a mechanism for corporate, state and individual accountability. The legal framework establishes a rights perspective and renders women as claimants rather than as beneficiaries. It sets standards and delineates categories of people or institutions who are obligated to fulfil these rights and entitlements. It enables women to negotiate their rights at the personal and societal levels.

Critical Mass of Women in Decision-Making Positions

The position of women in decision-making at the highest levels in political institutions, government and the public sector is another critical factor that can impact on the functioning of a Gender Management System. Where institutions are heavily male-dominated, it is more difficult to create the culture needed to advance gender equality.

In the Commonwealth, the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women stood at 7.2 per cent in 1995, well below the global average of 12.1 per cent. No Commonwealth country has reached the critical mass of 30 per cent women in national parliaments. In 1996, more than half of Commonwealth countries reported that their Cabinets comprised less than 10 per cent women. The statistics for local government were more encouraging, with some countries having 30 per cent or more women (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1996).

By the year 2005, at least 30 per cent of those in decision-making roles in the political, public and private sectors should be women. That target, recommended by Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers in 1996, was endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1997, and is consistent with the target set by the UN Economic and Social Council.

An important task of a Gender Management System is to help increase the participation of women in decision-making. A Gender Management System should address the question of women's relative lack of power in the public sphere, and their low representation in the highest institutions of political power and decision-making, i.e., national, provincial or state, and local government.

Civil Society

The changes that the Gender Management System is designed to bring about affect not only the government but every element of the broader civil society. For example, women's rights to choice and decision-making in the private sphere are indivisible from women's rights in the public sphere. A woman's status within the family and her right to personal choice will determine her economic, social and political participation in the public sphere.

The GMS therefore does not exist in isolation. It seeks to build a partnership between government and a wide range of stakeholders in civil society, including academic institutions (such as women's studies or gender and development departments), NGOs and professional associations, and the media. Many of these stakeholders will be represented in the National Gender Equality Commission/Council or similar body, which plays a key role in advocacy and monitoring on the progress of advancing gender equality, and should where possible have a representative on the Gender Management Team.

The extent to which gender equality is accepted within civil society and the influence and credibility enjoyed by women's groups are key factors that determine how easy it will be to set up and operate a GMS. At the same time, civil society contributes to the operation of the GMS through the National Gender Equality Commission/Council and partnerships between the government and non-state stakeholders at the sectoral level.

The Role of the Commonwealth Secretariat

The Commonwealth Secretariat has an important role to play in creating the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming, through its consultative mechanisms and processes, including:

- ◆ consensus building on gender equality/equity at meetings at the highest level of the Commonwealth, including Heads of Government Meetings, and Meetings of Ministers responsible for Education, Finance, Health, Law, Women's Affairs and Youth; Senior Officials Meetings; etc.;
- ◆ institutionalising new structures and mechanisms within the Secretariat in order to mainstream gender into the programmes and activities of all divisions, e.g., the Gender Steering Committee made up of Divisional Directors; Gender Focal Points;
- ◆ co-operation between Secretariat Divisions and their counterparts in Commonwealth government ministries; and
- ◆ developing and piloting new methodologies and hosting regional and international symposia on a number of cutting edge issues, e.g., engendering national budgets, promoting the human rights of women, engendering local and national politics, and conflict prevention and resolution.

As gender mainstreaming is a long-term strategy which requires long-range planning and expertise, it is advisable that National Women's Machineries without the necessary capacity seek outside technical assistance, from multilateral, bilateral and other funding bodies.

Notes

- 1 These negative features were identified in a number of National Women's Machineries in Commonwealth Caribbean countries, where they were linked explicitly to an absence of political will towards gender equality (Gordan, 1984).