Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women: mainstreaming gender, democratizing the state?

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Institutionalizing women's interests in all areas and sectors of policy at all levels has been a concern of women's movements worldwide, as well as of international institutions such as the United Nations (UN). Gender mainstreaming has emerged as a strategy for addressing this issue, relevant to all states and public institutions. National machineries for the advancement of women are regarded as appropriate institutional mechanisms for ensuring that gender mainstreaming agendas are implemented and issues of gender equality remain in focus in public policy. Gender mainstreaming and national machineries have found added salience in international public policy through UN-led and national governments' endorsed agreements on these issues, such as the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Agreed Conclusions¹ (see also Staudt, chapter 2, this volume).

Certain themes emerge in the analysis that follows. First, are national machineries as state institutions the most appropriate instruments for furthering women's interests? Two sets of debates inform this issue — the viability of women's engagements with the state and the nature of women's interests. The second theme is about the viability of national machineries as bodies promoting women's interests — do these institutions command the necessary resources to be able to promote women's interests? In this context I address issues of resources — economic and political, the setting of goals and targets for national machineries, as well as the political environments in which these machineries are embedded. Here, the stability of governance institutions, for example civil society and

the relative strength of women's movements, and issues of accountability of the machineries are also important. The third theme focuses on the processes of democratization which a state needs to undergo to mainstream gender effectively — the hierarchical nature of state bureaucracies and political parties, the presence or lack of auditing mechanisms within state machineries, leadership commitment to gender mainstreaming and, of course, increasing the presence of women within state bodies at all levels.

Defining issues

What is gender mainstreaming? It can be defined as '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 of 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' with the aim of transforming structures of inequality (UN, DAW, 1998:4). In this book the term is used largely to address issues of gender mainstreaming in public policy institutions although the impact of such policy shifts is expected to create a political context in which the process of gender mainstreaming in private institutions also proceeds.

There has been a debate among those concerned with issues of gender justice about whether to use the language of equality or of equity. The position of those concerned to emphasize issues of difference between men and women is that the equality discourse tends to erase the differences between women and men, that sameness becomes the focus rather than an acknowledgement of the different needs and interests of women and men. The argument is also made that the language of equality is a language of universalism, and that universal norms are really the norms of Western hegemonic societies which are inappropriate, or even counter-productive, in different cultural contexts (Ali,

2002). International bodies such as the UN and some other feminist scholars, however, have asserted the need for universal rights to be made the centrepiece of gender justice strategies. So, for example, it is argued that

the term 'equity' . . . is conditioned by subjective criteria, [and therefore] cannot become a substitute for the fundamental legal principle of equality . . . [Further] that reference to [the] 'dignity of women' does not encompass and cannot be substituted for the principle of the 'dignity and worth of [the] human person and the equal rights of men and women' enshrined in the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (UN, 2000:5)

The argument is that any dilution of equal treatment of women and men on grounds of culture undermines the very basis of gender justice. It also allows women of some countries, and some religious and ethnic groups, to be left out of the discussions about refining and contextualizing the rights of women and men. Hegemonic cultural discourses often reinforce traditional gender roles and the focus shifts away from the needs of women outside the boundaries that define these roles. Codification of women's social role within these cultural boundaries then comes in the way of processes of democratization of the state and within civil society. In this volume, we have used the term 'equality' rather than 'equity'.

What are national machineries? Despite attempts at a common definitional understanding of these institutions, differences remain in the ways they are conceptualized which depend on the political contexts obtaining in individual states. National machineries emerged as instruments of advancing women's interests after the World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City (1975), but were particularly strengthened in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). They can be defined as 'the central policy coordinating unit inside the government. [Their] main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas' (Platform for Action, para. 201). National machineries are thus 'catalysts' for promoting gender equality and justice. However, as Kathy Staudt points out in this volume, 'we find vastly different institutional cultures, leaders and leadership styles, degrees

of coordination, birthing periods, disciplinary specializations, missions and staff demographics, gender and otherwise — all protecting their autonomy to likewise different degrees' (p. 46; see also Goetz, chapter 3, this volume). The nation-state thus continues to be the focus of women's movements that remain embedded in particular cultural, historical and political contexts. In order to embed gendered perspectives into policy, the spotlight most often turns to how national states are performing on this score, though global institutions themselves are also increasingly under scrutiny in this regard.

Can state institutions promote women's interests?

I would suggest that one of the most important questions for analysing national machineries is whether state-based or promoted institutions such as national machineries can be effective in advancing the interests of women given the embedded nature of these machineries in structures of inequality.

I have argued elsewhere that the question of engagement with the state and state institutions cannot be seen in terms of binary opposites. Indeed, we need a position which allows for a mobilization of women's interests and their articulation within the space of civil society which would challenge the gender status quo. In parallel, it would allow for an engagement with the policy-making machinery of the state in order to institutionalize the gains made through discursive and political shifts brought about through these mobilizations. I have termed such a dialectical position 'in and against' the state (Rai, 1996). In terms of the national machineries for women, I would argue that an 'in and against' the state position allows us to consider mainstreaming gender through and within the state seriously and critically. Thus, on the one hand, as the different case studies in this volume show, women's movements, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international institutions such as the UN have striven for state institutions in the form of national machineries committed to the gender equality agenda to be recognized, and given political space

and resources. This strategy has been seen as addressing the continued marginalization of women in the public sphere and to continued gender inequality more generally. However, on the other hand, there has also been a concern that national machineries might well be used, especially where a strong women's movement does not exist, to co-opt the gender agenda within state policy, thus divesting it of its radical edge. Holding these two positions together, at times in tension with each other, does not take away from the importance of the state as an arena for furthering gender justice. It also suggests that the state is a fractured and ambiguous terrain for women, needing complex negotiation and bargaining by those working within its boundaries as well as those on the outside. So the answer to the question of whether national machineries can be effective in advancing women's interests must be yes, but under certain conditions which include issues of location and resources as well as of strong democratic movements holding these bodies accountable. This position has not always been acceptable within women's movements or among feminist scholars, as will be evident below. However, if we examine the position of women in politics today, we can see that the scale of women's exclusion from political bodies needs to be addressed urgently if the nature of these bodies is to be changed.

Women in political institutions

A head count of the officers of the state in all sectors — legislature, executive and the judiciary — in most countries of the world reveals a massive male bias despite many mobilizations furthering women's presence at both national and global levels. An Inter-parliamentary Union study found that the number of sovereign states with a Parliament increased sevenfold between 1945 and 1995, while the percentage of women Members of Parliament (MPs) worldwide increased fourfold (Pintat quoted in Karam, 1998:163). The UN *Atlas of Women in Politics* (1999a) shows that women form 13.4 per cent of MPs as a whole. The Nordic states lead, with women constituting 38.8 per cent of members of

both Houses of Parliament, while the Arab states have only 3.5 per cent (UN, 1999). Furthermore, data show that there is no easy positive co-relation between economic indicators and the presence of women in public bodies. While in Europe (without the Nordic countries) women comprised 13.4 per cent of the total number of MPs, the figure in Sub-Saharan Africa was 11.7 per cent, in Asia 14.3 per cent and in the Americas 15.3 per cent. In recognition of the slow improvement in women's representation in national Parliaments, enhancing women's presence within state bodies is now being pursued by both women's movements and international institutions. This suggests that an engagement with state structures is now considered an appropriate means of bringing about shifts in public policy.

I now sketch out the major positions that have been articulated in feminist state debates, and the shifts that have occurred within them. A familiarity with these debates sheds light on the difficulties that women's groups have had in engaging with national machineries and, therefore, on the process of mainstreaming gender through institutional strategies.

Feminist state debates

There have been two separate shifts in feminist debates on strategy and theory. First, within the women's movements there was a significant shift in the 1980s towards engaging positively with state feminism as a strategy that could be effective in furthering the cause(s) of women. Women recognized that interests need to be articulated through participation and then representation in the arena of politics. The argument about presence, as Anna Jonasdottir (1988) pointed out, concerns both the *form* of politics and its *content*. The question of form includes the demand to be among the decision makers, the demand for participation and a share in control over public affairs. In terms of content, it includes being able to articulate the needs, wishes and demands of various groups of women. The interest in citizenship was also prompted by the shift in women's movements, in the 1980s, from the earlier insistence upon direct

participation to a recognition of the importance of representative politics and the consequences of women's exclusion from it (Lovenduski and Norris, 1993; McBride Stetson and Mazur, 1995; Rai, 2000). It is here that politics — public and private, practical and strategic — begins to formalize within the contours of the state.

Second, in the 1970s, feminists began to engage with theories of the state, as opposed to theorizing politics. There were several reasons for this shift, many of them mirroring the shift in the study of citizenship. Traditional political theory has defined the state as a 'set of political institutions whose specific concern is with the organization of domination, in the name of the common interest, within a delimited territory' (Rai, 2000:1569). Weber, in his work *Politics as a Vocation*, gave a modern definition of the state as an organization with a territory, with a monopoly of violence and legitimacy to be able to use that violence (Weber, 1972). Together with Marxists and socialists, feminists have sought to move beyond this description of an organizing agency, which was seemingly not embedded in the structural power relations of the economy and patriarchy. Some have questioned the liberal presumptions of the state as a means of overcoming the state of nature and the establishment of the patriarchal state. Others have attempted to use class analysis to understand how women's position within the family and wage labour regimes is regulated by the capitalist state, and still others have analysed the state in parallel with their analysis of the law which systematizes male power (MacKinnon, 1987; Pateman, 1985).

Political responses to the theorizing of the state have also been varied. While some, like Judith Allen, posed the challenging question: 'Does Feminism Need a Theory of "the State"?' (1990; Pringle and Watson, 1992), others have seen the state as a potentially legitimate agency of the politics of change (Eisenstein, 1978). Similarly, while some have queried whether state organizations such as national machineries for women 'transform gender equality activists into technocrats/bureaucrats first and foremost, or is it that they have tended to attract technocratic feminists?' (Tsikata, 1999:17), in other contexts, such as Australia and Canada, feminists insisted that they needed to engage with the state bureaucracy to influence policy making within

state bodies in the interests of women outside. As Marian Sawyer explains in chapter 12 of this volume, an 'important aspect of the Australian model of women's policy machinery was that it was originally developed by the women's movement rather than invented by government' (p. 244). In many Southern states too women have chosen to engage with the state after a period of maintaining a sceptical distance. In some countries this shift has come about in tandem with the process of democratization, such as in South Africa. In other states, such as India, this has been due to a realization of the need to shake up consolidated privilege within state structures in order to make them sensitive to growing gender demands. Women have also analysed state power in the context of communist states to show how class-based understanding of gender relations need not translate into policies that speak to the strategic interests of women (Einhorn, 2000).

The state response

Most states have also undergone a shift in their policies towards accepting gender mainstreaming as a valid political agenda. This has been primarily due to pressure from global institutions such as the UN (see Kardam and Acuner, chapter 4, this volume). States' acceptance of the outcome of the World Conferences on Women, particularly the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century, has resulted in a commitment to some form of institutional change. The political and discursive shifts within women's movements discussed above have added to this pressure on the state to engage with gender equality agendas. Support of global institutions through training sessions and particular projects, as well as political pressure from international NGOs and women's movements, have also been helpful in moving forward states' agendas on the issue of mainstreaming. Finally, practical issues such as filing state reports on the status of women under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

against Women (CEDAW) has shown the need for a body to oversee the process (see Ali, 2001).²

So, for a multiplicity of factors, national machineries for the advancement of women are now in existence in many states. However, if these bodies raise issues about the nature of the state and women's engagement with it, they also raise questions about what and whose interests are they going to promote, mainstream and embed in political institutions. Identifying, aggregating and representing interests is thus a core element of the work of national machineries. National machineries have been envisaged as nodes for acknowledging, listening to, recognizing and articulating the interests of different groups of women within the national political community. Representing women's interests to governance circuits at different levels is one of the important tasks of national machineries. Thus they are also seen as conduits between civil society and the state. What have been the debates on women's interests that were needed to inform this mandated function of the national machineries?

Representing women's interests

What are interests? Interests can be defined as shared understandings and articulations of concern to an individual or group. The term includes both the objectives of the individual or group and the power of the individual or group to attract attention to those objectives. While traditional liberal theory has largely focused on individual interests, collective action and social conflict frameworks of analysis have shifted this focus to groups (Young, 1995; Kymlicka, 1995). These frameworks also allow us to reflect upon strategies for the pursuit of interests — demonstrating, lobbying, going on strike or other such forms of collective action.

There is a comprehensive literature about theorizing women's interests. The concept has been examined in two different ways. The first is to challenge the view that equates women's interests with identity politics and particularistic demands. As Jonasdottir (1988) has emphasized, interests are formulated within particular contexts which frame the processes of making choices. She has also argued that women

are not just another 'interest group' because they exist in a historically determined conflictual and subordinate relationship to men. There is of course the issue of difference among women that has challenged both feminist scholars and women activists. While women exist in a historically conflictual relationship with men, they also do so with women of a different class, ethnicity, sexuality, dis/ability, and so on. So, for example, economic interests divide women, just as their subordinate position *vis-à-vis* men places them on the same side. Economic interests, especially in the context of global restructuring, have become important markers of difference among women, even as globalization is bringing women closer together across national boundaries through technological and global governance networks (Hoskyns and Rai, 1998; Parpart, Rai and Staudt, 2002). Whose interests, in this context, is not always an easy question to answer. There has also been some debate among feminist scholars on women's interests and gender interests. The latter are interests addressing the structure of relations between women and men, the former those concentrating on women's lives.

Maxine Molyneux has made an analytical distinction between women's 'practical' and 'strategic' needs. Practical interests reflect women's immediate and contained demands — for better conditions of work, equal opportunities, child care, housing, water, and so on. These interests do not challenge the wider framework of patriarchal structures of power. Strategic interests reflect the need to shift the paradigms of power. In the words of Molyneux, 'In the formulation of practical interests there is the assumption that there is compliance with the existing gender order, while in the case of strategic interests there is an explicit questioning of that order and of the compliance of some women with it' (1998:235).

From a different standpoint, Chantal Mouffe (1992) and Mary Dietz (1992) have made the point that framing women's interests — both practical and strategic — in terms of the general interests of a just society can be an effective way of giving them greater salience in wider political debates and policies. This would be an effective way of mainstreaming — as opposed to adding gendered analysis on to existing paradigms of power. The current climate of

global restructuring could be a good starting point of such reformulations. This might include suggesting, and insisting upon, new policies addressing women's interests and, participating in making discursive shifts — the language of politics, agenda setting for the next phase of gender politics, challenging the reversal of already fought for and won freedoms and benefits.

Some have claimed that Molyneux has made too rigid a distinction between the two sets of interests. However, Molyneux argues that the 'pursuit of particularistic interests . . . is of course not necessarily at variance with strategies that pursue broader goals and interests and may be framed in terms of general principles' (1998:239). The distinction also allows political strategizing to take place. As Molyneux points out, 'The political *links* between practical and strategic interests are ones which can only emerge through dialogue, praxis and discussion' (1998:236). National machineries need to be able to participate not only in making these distinctions clear, but to be able to strategize according to the specific contexts within which they function. If this is to happen, national machineries need clarity of mandate, sufficient resources and a stability within governance networks.

In the following section I examine the second theme of the book — the mandate and resources of the national machineries for the advancement of women.

National machineries for women

The mandate of national machineries places a great deal of stress on their agenda-setting role, while their legitimacy derives from the close contact they are able to maintain with women's groups. Finally, they represent national states at international bodies. The following is a survey of different issues that arise for national machineries in performing their roles.

A variety of national machineries

National machineries vary considerably from country to country. In most countries the national machinery is part

of the government structure. The particular issues here relate to the status of the governmental body, its closeness to the highest offices within the government, the resources — both economic and political — available to it, and the access or otherwise it has to other sectors and bodies of government. In some countries, national machineries remain outside government, though the government recognizes their role as an important forum at both the national and international levels. Here the resource issue is critical at both the economic and political levels, as are issues of flexibility, voice and consensus building across political boundaries. These bodies might be considered more autonomous, or less influential, depending on how they are able to negotiate political boundaries, to become effective in improving the status of women.

All national machineries are embedded in specific socio-economic and political contexts. Comparisons between them are therefore not always useful. However, we can identify five elements that are critical for all:

- 1 Location [at a high level] within the decision-making hierarchy [and authority] to influence government policy.
- 2 Clarity of mandate and functional responsibility.
- 3 Links with civil society groups supportive of the advancement of women's rights and enhancement of women's status.
- 4 Human and financial resources' (United Nations, 1999b).
- 5 Accountability of the national machinery itself.

I discuss the first four points in turn in the following sections. I will return to the question of accountability in the Conclusion to the book.

Location

In a survey conducted by the Division for the Advancement of Women in 1996 it was noted that two-thirds of all national machineries are located in government, and one-third are either non-governmental or have a mixed structure. Of those within the government, more than half of the national machineries are part of a ministry, one-third are located in the office of the head of state and the rest are free-standing ministries. Of those within ministries, half are situated in Ministries of Social Affairs and one-third in that of Labour (ECOSOC, March 1999; see also Jezerska

and Kwesiga, chapters 8 and 10 in this volume). Why is there a preponderance of national machineries in Ministries of Social Affairs and Labour? What does it say about the assumptions regarding 'women's needs/concerns'? Does this indicate a 'low status' within the governmental structure itself — the high-status ministries being either the 'earning' ministries such as the Treasury or Industry, or regulating ministries such as Home and Foreign Affairs, while Social Affairs is a high-spending area? (see NGO Co-ordinating Committee for Beijing +5, 2000:73) What does this mean for opening up or 'democratizing' the state through the presence and activities of the national machineries? As the Ugandan case (see Kwesiga, chapter 10 in this volume) suggests, the comparatively low status of the Social Work Ministry has meant that restructuring of the state machinery under the structural adjustment policies has led to frequent downsizing and relocation of the national machinery for women. However, government portfolios which were traditionally considered 'soft' — Welfare, Health and Education — are also, under regimes of economic restructuring, where fundamental arguments about resource allocation are taking place. It is at this time that national machineries can be most effective in insisting upon a 'reassessment both of priorities of states and of the normative social order' (Molyneux, 1998:242).

Free-standing machineries too have strengths and weaknesses. One danger of an autonomous entity is the lack of political clout and therefore of political and economic resources. No ministry or politician need feel responsible for this body, and its achievements bring no benefit to ministers who might then develop a stake in the functioning of the machinery. As Marian Sawyer comments in chapter 12 of this volume, 'Australian feminists decided against a self-standing bureau or ministry on the grounds that it might simply become a "waste-paper basket for women's problems" and an alibi for gender-blind policy in the rest of government [and] would lack policy clout' (p. 245). Second, the resourcing of such a body would pose considerable problems. While project-based grants could provide it with some resources, this would not provide the stability of organization needed to develop medium- and long-term strategies. If the machinery was funded by international agencies, the

political consequences of this resource might be unacceptably high in some political contexts where the political system might label the machinery as a 'tool of Western agencies'. Such a loss of legitimacy would make the work of the machinery extremely difficult indeed.

Location at the highest level raises the profile of the machinery, and arguably enhances its economic and political resources. In some countries the success of the national machinery derives from its cross-ministerial location (see Åseskog, chapter 7 in this volume). This is possible only when the head of government takes responsibility for opening up the governmental structure in this lateral way. However, to be effective at the highest possible level, several factors have to be considered, together with the location and the commitment of the head of government. The position of the head of government within the political system is crucial — the weaker this position, for example, as part of an unstable coalition, the less likely is the national machinery able to be to use this political resource (see Rai, chapter 11 of this volume). A more general political instability, military coups for example, can also threaten the work of machineries at the highest level. As Honculada and Ofreneo point out in chapter 6 of this volume, 'In the great divide between those for and against martial law [in the Philippines] the [National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women] was perceived by second-wave feminists to be an ally of government' (p. 133). However, in other countries, such as Turkey, the number of women in the government has increased since the military intervention. Times of transition can also be moments of opportunity for the national machineries to strengthen their position (see Zulu, 2000; Jezerska chapter 8 of this volume). The Algerian case also suggests that the political context in individual countries is of primary importance in any analysis of gender mainstreaming through institutional mechanisms (Mehdid, 1996). While visibility provides resources it can also be a burden. A head of state might adopt populist agendas that are not in the interests of women for immediate political gain. As Ugalde urges in chapter 5, 'It is thus effective to create "alliances" with mid-level state personnel who are, in general, more open and more stable than appointed and/or elected officials at the top of the political machinery'

(p. 125). In some contexts, location at the highest level within the governmental structure that is not accountable to the citizenry can lead to the alienation of the national machinery from civil society groups. 'In Chile, Kardam and Acuner point out that some civil society organizations saw the [National Women's Machineries] as an arm of a state which does not represent their interests' (p. 103). An eight-country study by the UN in Africa also reveals that 'being located in the highest level of government does not guarantee national machinery influence and effectiveness . . . An often ignored issue in the location debate is whether the location which is viewed as advantageous, because of its proximity to the powers that be, is also the best location when the mandate and functions of the national machinery are taken into account' (African Agenda, 1999:13 and 15). Autonomy for the work of the machinery can be low at the highest levels of government. Co-optation thus remains a crucial issue for national machineries.

Location is also important for the role that national machineries might play at the regional and global levels. Here the national machineries function to participate in international forums, represent the governmental and non-governmental debates on gender equality, and collect and disseminate information, ideas and good practice from the global to the national level. Location at the top levels of government would provide the machineries with increased credibility at these forums, as well as the negotiating power to make contacts, strategic cross-border contacts and projects. This has happened successfully in South America (see Vega Ugalde, chapter 5 in this volume). However, the South Asian experience has not been so rewarding regarding cross-border contacts between state-based national machineries. The tense political situation between India and Pakistan dominates, and the contact between women remains productive only at the NGO level. National machineries are thus embedded not only in historical and cultural contexts, but also in more immediate intra- and interstate politics.

Clear mandates and functions

Clarity serves a political purpose — it does not allow national machineries to be held responsible for areas that

are beyond their remit. It also allows an assessment of why certain areas are outside the remit of the women's national machinery. Such an assessment can prompt questions about the openness of state structures to the agendas of gender equality. A review of the mandates and functions of various machineries illustrates this.

Some national machineries exclusively focus on their role as policy advisers and catalysts for gender mainstreaming, leaving the actual implementation of policies, programmes and projects to other bodies. Other women's machineries not only devise programmes but also monitor their implementation. An implementational role for the national machineries also has its merits. First, a successful project implementation raises the profile of the machinery involved and provides credibility. The 3R project, carried out with the support of state funding and of the Equality Affairs Division by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, which analysed the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming in local committees and boards, would be one such example (Åseskog, chapter 7 of this volume). Second, involvement in implementational processes could lead to cross-sector liaising that could spread the influence of the national machineries and open new areas for mainstreaming. Finally, taking responsibility for implementing policies could increase both political and economic resources as the process of implementation gathers pace. However, there are also disadvantages of being involved in the implementation of policies. Under federal and/or multi-party political systems, for example, an implementational role can lead to confrontation and divisiveness within the civil society groups and the national machinery where these groups are affiliated with political parties not represented at the central level of government (see Rai, 1997). Most studies in this volume show that national machineries for women do not take on (and neither are they expected to) the role of implementing policies. It was for these reasons that the UN Expert Group Meeting on National Machineries in 1998 specifically recommended that national machineries 'at the governmental level [are] a catalyst for gender mainstreaming, not [agencies] for policy implementation. [They] may, however, choose to be involved in particular projects' (UN, DAW, 1998:10).

A catalytic role of national machineries can be useful for strengthening their profile within the state and in civil society in the following ways. First, mainstreaming works through its 'ownership' by cross-ministerial structures of government. The responsibility of developing policy initiatives can involve the machineries in negotiations with other ministries that can expand the network of bodies involved in the process of mainstreaming gender equality agendas. Second, raising the profile of gender equality agendas is a more effective use of political and economic resources than trying to use scarce resources to implement policies which might best be done by individual ministries. Third, the role of national machineries as a catalyst within government allows these bodies to develop and conduct research on the policies being implemented and feed these through into policy forums, and to develop methodologies and 'the political ability to anticipate and judge key opportunities and possibilities for effective political impact' (Vega Ugalde, p. 124). This would make machineries proactive rather than reactive to state initiatives.

While approaches to the functioning of the national machineries vary, there are major functions that all these bodies need to carry out, though with varying degrees of effectiveness. These are, in terms of their relations with civil society, making gender visible through media campaigns or other means; developing links with civil society groups that support gender equality in order to strengthen the lobbying process; and to channel resources to community organizations, enabling them to participate in the processes of mainstreaming gender. While research and feeding through the results of research into both civil society and policy-making bodies overlap, other state-oriented functions include the following: ensuring gender training for governmental officers; developing new initiatives and methodologies to ensure gender equality in government policy-making processes; reviewing proposed legislation in all appropriate areas; monitoring government policy through insisting on gender-disaggregated budgets, for example; and disseminating good practice. At the global level, the national machineries function to participate in international forums, represent the governmental and non-governmental debates on gender equality, and collect and disseminate

information, ideas and good practice from the global to the national level.

Links with civil society

The relationship between national machineries and civil society is mutually reinforcing.

Civil society groups have often played a crucial role in establishing national machineries. Support from civil society also strengthens the position of national machinery vis-à-vis other parts of government . . . National machineries need strong links with non-governmental organizations . . . Whenever possible, they should institutionalize their relationship with these organizations. (United Nations, 1999b:18).

While civil society is a crucial factor in the functioning of the national machineries, it is often not theorized enough to distinguish how it might support or in fact be a hindrance to the work of national machineries. Some clarificatory analysis is thus important in this context. First, 'it is necessary to hold together the constituent elements of civil society — including the system of needs (the market), the system of rights (the law) and non-state associations — rather than highlight one of these aspects of civil society at the expense of the other' (Fine and Rai, 1997:2). This is important especially in the context of the growing need to assess how the globalizing markets on the one hand, and legal initiatives of international institutions on the other, are affecting women. Such an analysis would be important for national machineries in order to advise, strategize and make alliances with different groups within civil society. Without an understanding of how markets are gendered and how this affects their functioning, for example, changing labour markets and the shifting position of women and men within them would be difficult to map out (Evans, 1993). Similarly, an assessment of how CEDAW might be used by national machineries to push the state to enact laws that are in the spirit of the aims of CEDAW, while at the same time embedded in local political culture, is needed. NGOs would be useful participants in any strategizing by national machineries. However, an analysis of the variety of NGOs that are supportive of women's rights would reflect both the political concerns of national machineries and the

political positions of NGOs. As Stokes points out in chapter 9 of this volume, 'the question arises as to what extent there can be a shared point of view amongst such divergent groups. Are the Union of Catholic Mothers, Stonewall (a gay rights group) and the Women's Engineering Society ever likely to share an opinion?' (pp. 198–9). Strategizing to build on groups that are sympathetic and oppose those which are not requires a complex analysis that goes beyond categorizing all civil society groups as beneficial to the work of national machineries.

Second, and equally important, 'we need to highlight the exclusionary aspects of civil society in relation to those who find no place in its system of needs or in its associational life, and therefore to question the description of civil society as a sphere of "uncoerced action" for all' (Fine and Rai, 1997:2). As the Pakistan's NGO Review of the Platform for Action states, 'increasing violence in society and violent conflict that has accompanied the rise of militant sectarian and conservative politico-religious and ethnic groups not averse to using violent armed tactics . . . to silence . . . those with different or opposing views have militated against women's groups espousing the cause of enhancing women's rights (NGO Coordinating Committee, 2000:47).

Third, 'in terms of the civil society–state relation, we should emphasize the importance of the state beyond simply maintaining (or not maintaining) the parameters of civil society itself, and of politics in mediating between the particular interests of civil society and the universalist claims of the state' (Fine and Rai, 1997:2). As the 'Recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on National Machineries . . .' suggest, governments are critical to the effective implementation of the Platform for Action by encouraging NGO participation on policy agencies, in setting up accountability mechanisms, and indeed, '[w]henver possible, Governments should utilize NGO volunteer capacities' (UN, 1998:12). However, the restrictive power of the state is also evident in the many studies in this volume (see chapters 6, 8 and 10). Taking the above into account it is, however, important to note that women's groups that have organized outside state boundaries are critical to the continued strength and accountability of national machineries.

Resources

One could argue that the question of resources is fundamentally about politics. It is the political will of national leaderships that determines the resourcing of bodies such as national machineries. Without a commitment of the leadership to gender equality, and to the mechanisms important for monitoring its pursuit, resourcing of these institutions is bound to be poor. An additional pressure is the economic restructuring of the state itself. The pressures of liberalization and the consequent shrinking of state budgets are resulting in cut-backs to the budgets of bodies such as the national machineries. This phenomenon is not only confined to countries in the global South such as Uganda but is also prevalent in countries that are more economically secure such as Australia (Kwesiga and Sawyer, chapters 10 and 12 of this volume). While resources can and need to be enhanced through project funding from multilateral bodies, the political costs of such support can also be significant. One way of enhancing political resources is to link up with civil society groups that have an important voice in the political system. While this strategy is not always feasible, it is important that we consider it seriously. Given that resources are political, the state elite's political will (or lack of it) can determine the extent to which national machineries are considered important political actors and given access to the policy making and implementational infrastructure of the state. The strength of the women's movement and the corporatist nature of the state can be important factors here, as is clear in the study of Nordic states (Åseskog, chapter 7 of this volume).

National machineries and democratization

Democratization as a concept and process is informing the governance agendas of both international organizations and development agencies. Loans are often tied to democratization of state institutions and bureaucracies, and political pressure is applied to ensure compliance in this regard. However, it is not always the case that ensuring gender

equality is built into the definition of such 'democratization'. Considerations of cultural specificity often dilute the message of women's equal rights. As Anne Marie Goetz points out in chapter 3 of this volume, 'the hierarchical and undemocratic nature of bureaucracies, and their hostility to agendas which challenge accustomed organizational patterns . . . is compounded by the high boundaries erected between different sectoral Ministries and by the patronage politics preserved by Ministerial boundaries' (p. 89). In this context, national machineries need to be part of the process of democratization of the state from the outset if gender equality is to be made integral to it. If, as the Platform for Action and subsequent recommendations on the issue suggest, there is a need for greater consultation between NGOs and national machineries and the state bodies involved in policy making, then the question of access to government becomes critical. There are five areas where a democratization of the state/government is required in this context. First, there is the issue of devolution or decentralization. This might be considered at the two different levels of political devolution and of privatization.

While many states are considering devolved government under pressure from ethnic or regional movements and economic possibilities within their polities, we need to consider the gender-specific implications of decentralization and whether such decentralization is beneficial to the work of national machineries. The particularity of political systems would have to be considered here. If decentralization takes place with a strong central bias then the national machineries for women at the devolved levels would have to consider their relationship with the central national machinery. Here, the relationship between civil society organizations and the national machinery would take on another layer of complexity. Given the paucity of resources available to national machineries in most countries, another layer of organization might not be the most efficient way of maximizing budget support and garnering influence for addressing gender equality agendas. On the other hand, decentralization in large, multi-ethnic and multi-religious states could benefit gender mainstreaming as it would be more clearly 'owned' not only by governmental elites at the centre but also by local governmental and state elites.

Decentralization under globalization is also occurring as privatization of welfare regimes. For example, as the state retreats from its role in the provision of health services in order to stabilize the economy under conditions of structural adjustment, two issues might arise for national machineries. First, how to campaign for ending discrimination within the private sphere in terms of women's access to privatized health provision. Second, how to influence the health machinery in terms of recruitment policies, as well as gender-sensitive provision of health facilities.

Second, the role of political parties is also an important issue for the democratizing of the state. As several chapters in this volume suggest, the place and ideology of political parties within the state system can either promote or hinder gender mainstreaming. A monopoly of state power poses difficult questions for gender equality. On the one hand, as Jezerska points out in chapter 8, 'In a political sense, the women were officially equal with men under the communist system. For example, "the greatest number of women in the unicameral parliament [in Poland] under the communist regime was 23 per cent in 1980–1985, far higher than in many Western democracies"' (p. 171). However, the lack of political space for women to organize meant that this formal equality was not translated into gender equality agendas, and women who did attempt to push the boundaries of state policy faced threats of political persecution. In consolidated democracies such as India political parties pose different sorts of question. The selection process of candidates for election has routinely favoured men even when the gap between men and women in terms of their electoral participation has never been very wide (Rai, chapter 11 of this volume). In South Africa, this issue has been dealt with by encouraging political parties to introduce quotas for women on their party list, with varying degree of success (Zulu, 2000). As many countries experience the 'third wave' of democratization and transitions from single-party to multi-party governance take place, the role of political parties in gender mainstreaming remains critical, and should be the focus of attention of both national machineries and NGOs.

Third, democratization of the state is also needed in the area of monitoring and auditing mechanisms. These

mechanisms have to be seen at different levels. First, in terms of democratic elections of the government, which would include a democratic audit of political parties and the functioning of state institutions. Second, intra-state accounting and monitoring mechanisms. This involves the national machineries holding other areas of government accountable in terms of gender mainstreaming. As the Australian and Canadian examples show, 'gender budgets', also adopted by South Africa and the Philippines, require all government departments and agencies to prepare a budget document which disaggregates outlays in terms of their gendered impact (Sawer, chapter 12 of this volume; UN, 1998). Finally, the openness of the state to civil society scrutiny is required if gender agendas are to be monitored, implemented and audited. Strengthening the mechanisms of consultations with civil society groups, including the establishment of formal channels for such consultation, where possible ensuring that the mass media carry the message of gender equality or at least do not carry materials inimical to it, and including women's NGOs in international conferences would be some of the ways in which this scrutiny could be carried out. The openness of the state to such auditing will be premised upon the openness of the political system in general, and critically upon the leadership of political parties and governments. The question of the political will of the leadership remains extremely important, but also unpredictable in any equation regarding gender mainstreaming. Auditing and monitoring require training. This training must involve existing personnel and new recruits and officers of the state at all levels. The training can be provided through national machineries — in which case the machineries need to develop in-house technical capacity — or through civil society consultants at both national/local and international levels. The role of multilateral organizations such as the UN becomes critical in this context.

Fourth, leadership commitment to gender mainstreaming can be affected by different elements within the political system, as well as the personal commitment (or the lack of it) that leaders bring with them. Populist politics can work both ways — leaders can take advantage of a general civil society mobilization by women to push for gender equality. This has been the case in many countries covered in this

volume, such as Uganda (see Kwesiga, chapter 10). The reverse can also be the case, whereby civil society mobilizations in the name of 'culture' or religion can undermine the leadership's commitment to gender equality (Karam, 1998). Individual leaders' perceptions of themselves can also have an impact upon whether or not they take up gender matters. In India and the United Kingdom strong female leaders — Mrs Indira Gandhi and Mrs Margaret Thatcher — did not choose to pursue gender agendas. Their understanding of their own meritocratic entry into public life did not allow them to see the social exclusion of women as a political problem (Rai, 1997). Leadership commitment can also be affected by political instability. As Kardam and Acuner point out in chapter 4 of this volume, 'Instability leads to job insecurity, . . . lack of motivation and ineffective performance' (p. 102).

Fifth, democratizing the state also needs to address the issue of the presence of women within political institutions. Different states have addressed this in a variety of ways, or not at all. Quotas for women in political institutions — in local and national representative bodies, political parties' lists and administrative recruitment — has been one strategy, and is increasingly being demanded by women's groups. It has been adopted in some states (see Åseskog Rai, chapters 7 and 11 in this volume). The argument here is well rehearsed — the presence of women in state institutions allows women's interests to be considered at the time of political debates, policy making and implementation. This presence needs to be at a 'threshold' level for women in state institutions to feel confident enough to take up issues across party and sectoral lines. While the evidence of the impact of a quota-based strategy is mixed (see Rai, 2000), national machineries can benefit from these in two ways. First, they could lobby women more directly on women's rights and, second, they could use the expertise and access to state bodies of women parliamentarians or bureaucrats.

Democratization processes are therefore crucial for embedding national machineries in the architecture of governance. These processes include democratization of state and political systems, as well as gender mainstreaming within state and policy structures. As national machineries for the advancement of women become an established part of the

political landscape of countries, their success will depend upon the way they are able to address issues of governance and democratization both within the state and in their relationship with civil society associations at both the national and global levels.

Notes

- 1 Agreed Conclusions of the Economic and Social Council 1997/2, New York: United Nations doc. A/57/3/Rev.1, Chapt.IV.A, Report of the Economic and Social Council for the year 1997.
- 2 The implications of CEDAW for states party to it are potentially far reaching indeed. Not only must they abolish all existing legislation and practices that are discriminatory, they are also under a positive obligation to eliminate stereotyped concepts of male and female roles in society. 'Traditional customs and practices' as an argument is not considered valid.