National women's machinery: state-based institutions to advocate for gender equality¹

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Introduction

This chapter considers the effectiveness of National women's machineries (NWMs), examining their record of promoting women's interests in five countries: Bangladesh, Chile, Jamaica, Morocco and Vietnam.² These countries are each at different stages of integrating gender into development processes. They also differ in their degree of economic development, their political histories and the nature of their main economic constraints. What they have in common is a reasonable degree of political stability since 1990, though the specific characteristics of civil society and governance in each country differ. The singling out of these countries is not intended to give the impression that they are either particularly remiss or progressive in their approach to institutionalizing women's interests in development — when it comes to institutionalizing women's interests in policy processes, no country in the world can be considered 'developed'.

NWMs are created on the premise that the state must take a lead in promoting gender equality. They are a form of institutionalized or bureaucratic representation of women. The reason the state has been such an important focus of feminist efforts to redress gender injustices is because the state is assumed (or hoped) to have a degree of autonomy from patriarchy and hence, to the degree that the state assumes responsibility for women's interests, it can provide a resort of appeal against the power of men in more intimate institutions such as the family.

But few states have distinguished themselves in championing women's rights. Indeed, the injustices worked in women's lives by the power asymmetries attached to gender differences across most social institutions have historically commanded a very weak response from public authority all over the world. In the Platform for Action from the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing it was asserted that a lack of political will was the reason for the slow implementation of gender equality policy measures in many countries. This 'lack of political will' explanation is too vague to be of much use; it does not direct attention to the real problems of generating political support for socially unpopular policies and, in any case, it underestimates the rather high degree of political will which does exist among many national leaders, but which cannot be translated into results because of insufficient backing from political parties or civil society, or insufficient power over the permanent government: the civil service. In addition, the 'lack of political will' explanation for policy failure ignores the problem of the deep institutionalization of gender differences and male privilege in the public sphere. This is the prime concern of this chapter, which concentrates on efforts to integrate women's interests into state institutions.

Institutionalizing WID/GAD

In most of the cases in this study, measures to institutionalize the Women in Development (WID)/Gender and Development (GAD) machinery in the state bureaucracy have been in response to pressures exerted either by foreign donors or the international feminist movement through the United Nations (UN) system. This is not to suggest that women's organizations had not been actively pushing for the state to take responsibility for gender equality. However, in some of the cases (Bangladesh and Vietnam), the energy of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s was co-opted by political parties in an effort to harness additional political support from the country's female constituency. In other cases such as Morocco, the efforts of

women's organizations were oriented towards more conventional women's welfare projects. In only two of the case countries — Chile and to a lesser extent, Jamaica — did a national concern with WID/GAD and the establishment of government machinery emerge in direct response to pressure from the women's movement.

Structural and sectoral location

Two responses to the question of finding an institutional location for the WID/GAD agenda have been common. One is to set up an advocacy unit at a central level with a mandate to influence planning processes across all development sectors. Staudt's detailed analysis of this kind of response in the United States Agency for International Development shows how this can be a method for placating troublesome constituencies while at the same time ensuring that the issue is contained because of the inherent difficulties of pursuing cross-sectoral change, especially where the advocacy unit is desperately under-resourced, as tends to be the case (Staudt, 1990). The other response is to set up a WID/GAD desk in a sector which is seen as most closely identified with the issue, or indeed to create a new WID/GAD sector. Typically this enclaves the WID/GAD issue in a social welfare sector, where it may share in a general derogation of social welfare issues as being marginal to main development concerns such as growth. Alternatively it may be lumped in as a new quasi-sector with a range of residual and marginalized concerns — such as culture, youth and sports. The institutional location of WID/GAD bureaucracies can thus be discussed in terms of their proximity to power in the central state directorate (vertical location) and their thematic or sectoral location (horizontal location).

The different formal roles that WID/GAD units have been assigned fall into the following typology:

- *'Advocacy' or 'advisory' units*, located either in a central political unit, such as the office of the Prime Minister or President, or in a central economic planning unit, such as the Ministry of Planning. This WID/GAD unit is

responsible for promoting attention to gender issues and giving advice to various government units. Very often, however, it is under-equipped in terms of staff numbers and technical skills, and becomes the representative of a 'special issue' in an often resented or easily dismissed policy-pleading role.

- *Policy 'oversight' or 'monitoring' units*, which may have rather more robust powers to the degree that they may be granted automatic rights to review projects before approval by central economic planning units, or to review submissions for Cabinet decisions.
- *Units with implementation responsibilities*. These WID/GAD units create programmes which are designed to have a demonstration effect, inspiring replication in other areas of government activity. They also respond to policy needs not well catered for elsewhere, for example by setting up shelters for victims of domestic violence. But the typically low level of resources for policy implementation means that these efforts are isolated and cannot produce broad-based policy changes across the public administration.

Central advocacy or 'oversight' WID/GAD bureaux within the central state directorate have been set up in Chile and Vietnam. Chile's National Service for Women (SERNAM), set up in the early 1990s, has a curious statutory basis: it is a unit within the Ministry of Planning yet it is headed by a state minister. Neither a full Ministry with an input to Cabinet decisions, nor an established boundary-bridging body, it straddles two administrative identities in a way which diminishes its potential impact. In principle its institutional location provides it with access to the 'technical core' of policy making, and indeed rhetoric about gender equality now figures in the Ministry of Planning's work. However, it lacks clear mechanisms for ensuring changes in government decisions, such as automatic review of all new investment decisions, or clear means of ensuring cross-ministerial compliance with the WID/GAD policy mandate. Women's desks and gender-sensitive programmes do exist in some other ministries, and SERNAM supports these. Its formal mandate explicitly excludes project implementation functions, except for demonstration and experimentation purposes. However, its limited impact on

cross-ministerial decision making has made it focus instead on public awareness building and on implementing pilot projects which are donor funded and often executed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), prompting the observation that SERNAM behaves more like an NGO than a part of the public administration (Pollack, 1994a:20). In its operational work it focuses, importantly, on activities which are neglected in other areas of government, such as sexual violence, adolescent pregnancy and female-headed households.

In Vietnam, the Vietnamese Women's Union (VWU) is the *de facto* national women's bureaucracy. It is one of several important mass organizations which make up the 'Fatherland Front of Vietnam' — or the ruling Communist Party. Although by official statute it is an NGO, it has strong links to government and has been influential since the 1950s in promoting progressive legislation for women, in particular labour legislation protecting women's conditions of employment and rights to maternity leave. During the war years, however, its main function was the mobilization of women as combatants, suppliers and supporters of the war effort, and as a result its main skills are in 'agit prop' (Tran Thi, 1994:29) rather than in structured policy advocacy. One feature of its wartime organization was the development of an extensive grassroots network in villages, as well as representation in trade unions, giving it a valuable structure for coordinating gender and development efforts nationally. However, with just 150 staff members, the VWU is grossly under-resourced, and its level of influence in villages and trade unions is highly uneven (Olin, 1988:16).

Although the VWU gained the formal right, in a 1988 decision by the Vietnamese Council of Ministers, to be consulted and involved in any decision regarding women in the country, its lack of resources, and lack of veto power over unsatisfactory government policy, mean that it has to rely primarily upon the uncertain mechanism of the goodwill of government members to include it in decision making. It is in any case curious for an 'NGO' to be recognized to have privileged access to state decision making, and this may have been more of a rhetorical gesture than an effort to institutionalize the VWU's influence on policy making.

While its formal mandate as an arm of the Party is to focus on issues of national concern to women, since 1990 it has increasingly turned to the implementation of gender and development projects (such as income generation) in response to the new availability of funds from international donors.

In Bangladesh the WID/GAD agenda has been institutionalized in a distinct Ministry, but it shares space with marginalized public concerns such as children. The Ministry suffers from under-resourcing, significant power distance from the central state directorate, association with residual welfare or community issues, and overlapping roles with ruling party-linked women's units. This central WID/GAD unit has had a long but very administratively discontinuous history. It has been hostage to shifting political currents, having been promoted to ministerial status under the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) regime of President Zia ul-Rahman in the 1970s, demoted to a Department of the Social Affairs Ministry under President Ershad in the 1980s, and reinstated as a Ministry under the BNP regime of Zia's widow, Begum Khaleda Zia in the mid 1990s. These changes owe less to any significant variation in the official commitment to the WID/GAD agenda than to its utility at various times in generating international political capital in demonstrating a progressive national position. The credibility of these positions has been highly compromised by simultaneous concessions — which have increased in significance over time — to Islamic interests. What has remained a constant in this opportunistic administrative tergiversation has been an unclear mandate and deficiencies in staff, financial resources and administrative privileges.

The Ministry's formal mandate combines an advocacy role with a programme implementation role. However, it is under-equipped to carry out either role. Its one direct link to national economic planning processes is through the Women's Desk in the Planning Commission, where a sole officer is also responsible for sports, culture, youth, social welfare and media, a cluster of responsibilities which signals women's place among a residuum of planning concerns. It has begun to experiment with WID focal points across sectoral ministries, which will be discussed in the next section. Since 1990 it has been granted right of

oversight and appraisal over projects of other ministries and agencies, where it is given ten days to review new projects before they are forwarded to the Planning Commission. However, just two staff members are available for this and they are constrained by the tight time limit and by a lack of gender analysis skills. On the operational side, its tiny budget for implementing programmes (just 0.22 per cent of the national development budget) restricts it to small projects which are largely urban centred, although it uses these to promote issues neglected by other ministries, such as working women's need for hostels and child care, shelters for survivors of domestic violence, legal education and legal aid, and vocational training. Many of its top-level posts are vacant, and have been for years, and it is quite unable to fulfil its functions as a line Ministry, with staff in less than a quarter of sub-districts.

In Jamaica the Bureau of Women's Affairs has had an uneasy history on the administrative peripheries of the state, shunted back and forth between the Ministry of Youth and Community Development, and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Only once, in response to heightened awareness of the issue provoked by the 1975 UN World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City, was it located in the Office of the Prime Minister, from 1975 to 1978. After 1989, however, it was located in the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Sport. This is significant and appropriate, given women's very high participation in the country's formal labour force. However, this latest institutional placement may have owed less to women's strong labour force attachment than to the fact that at the time that Ministry was headed by the only female Cabinet minister, who was assumed, because of her gender, to be likely to provide the right home for the Women's Bureau.

The Bureau has had a combined mandate of advocacy and project implementation, and has been highly dependent on outside funds to carry out these functions. In the late 1980s these funds were withdrawn in reaction to the government's persistent failure to provide counterpart funding, forcing the Bureau to withdraw from project activities, most of which had an income-generating focus, and to focus on efforts to influence the national planning process. Though this shift in focus is regretted by Bureau members

(Mariott, 1994), it is a mixed blessing, as the Bureau was never properly equipped to implement projects. Also, curiously, the majority of these projects were conventional small-scale and informal-sector income-generating ventures. In a country which has one of the highest rates of female participation in formal employment in the world, this conventional WID focus seems unjustifiable. It perhaps best reflects the Bureau's intellectual and financial dependence on outside donors and their externally-derived WID perspectives.

Of all the case countries, Morocco has invested the least in setting up a coherent WID/GAD administrative entity. Instead, women's desks have been set up in an *ad hoc* manner across a range of Ministries, in response to new funding opportunities available through the international community. The Women's Desk in the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs has had nominal responsibility for responding to international pressures for WID policy statements, but has no policy oversight role, no advocacy role and no policy coordination role. Otherwise, there are women's units in the Ministries of Youth and Sports, Public Health, Agriculture, Planning and Foreign Affairs, and in the National Agricultural Credit Service. It is impossible to speak of a coherent WID strategy emerging from any of these units. Each responds to Ministerial priorities, and usually each is focused around women-specific and foreign-funded project activities which make few encroachments on broader Ministerial activities.

Overall, then, in none of the case study countries except Vietnam has the WID/GAD concern found a secure and sustainable institutional expression. When located in advocacy units close to central state decision-making units, they tend to be inadequately resourced to fulfil their functions. When set up as separate Ministries they can become isolated as a peripheral enclave and associated with marginal concerns. There are cases where the WID/GAD issue has been seen by the dominant political party as a useful political resource, as a means of demonstrating national progressive attitudes to the international community, as in Bangladesh. In these cases the WID/GAD issue risks appropriation by, and hence association with, the ruling political party, which compromises its future in the administrative

structure. This kind of politicization of the WID/GAD agenda also undercuts its legitimacy and may cut it off from its natural constituency, where autonomous women's groups may shun association with party-linked WID units. The overwhelming degree to which WID/GAD advocacy and project activities in every one of these case countries depends on outside funding underlines the shallowness of national commitment to the issue and fundamentally undermines the sustainability of efforts to institutionalize the gender equality mandate.

Mechanisms for influencing other ministries: 'mainstreaming'

Most of the WID/GAD units in question here have a mandate to pursue their agenda across other government departments — a project sometimes called 'mainstreaming'. For this they have devised a range of policy instruments, such as gender-monitoring checklists, guidelines, inter-ministerial committees, gender awareness training and WID Focal Points. Gender-specific national policy statements or plans have also been formulated; these will be reviewed in the next section. Mainstreaming measures are intended to provoke gender-sensitive institutional, policy and operational changes across the public sector in order to make responsiveness to women's interests a routine part of each sector's activities. At the very least, they are also hoped to tap the technical and administrative resources of other departments to make up for resource deficiencies in the WID/GAD sector in research, advocacy and implementation. Vietnam and Morocco will not be discussed in this section as the state units charged with gender equality in both countries do not appear to be equipped with mainstreaming mechanisms. In Morocco, the gender units of various ministries appear not to benefit from central coordination. And while the VWU has extensive links downwards to villages and horizontally to trade unions, it lacks mechanisms for coordinating policy with government units.

Jamaica is the only case country to have elaborated detailed gendered project guidelines and checklists. Jamaica's

Project Profile format for all new projects incorporates a procedural step for assessing potential gender-differential impact issues. Linked to this, methods for assessing gender-differential impact have been incorporated into the training for civil servants at the Administrative Staff College. To ensure adherence to this measure, the Bureau of Women's Affairs has a seat on the project Pre-selection Committee of the Planning Institute. For projects in process, a Gender Monitoring Checklist specifies five benchmarks against which development actions are assessed: whether sex-disaggregated data are used or collected; whether the project adheres to national policy commitments; whether mechanisms exist to consult with women and men on gender issues; whether the project takes action on equality issues; and whether the context for the project is gender sensitive, in the sense of incorporating women's specific needs.

Chile and Bangladesh have experimented with designating WID Focal Point officers in other ministries. In Chile, this has been an informal process. SERNAM lacks institutional measures for communication and coordination with other Ministries, and hence requested that each Ministry designate a contact person with whom SERNAM can communicate. There are no institutional rewards associated with the Focal Point position and, unsurprisingly, the position has often been occupied by individuals uninterested in the issue and hence unwilling to commit time to it. The Ministries of Labour and Education are notable in that there has been committed top-level support for the gender issue from male ministers. This is not enough, however, as the strongest resistance comes from mid-level male staff. Training is only a partial solution, as it reaches only a few individuals, and often, as in the case of the highly resistant Ministry of Agriculture, the majority of staff reject training opportunities by failing to attend seminars on gender awareness (Pollack, 1994a:17).

In Bangladesh, a formal Focal Point system was introduced in the early 1990s, where designated contact individuals in twenty-seven ministries constitute an inter-ministerial coordination committee intended to meet every three months. Again, these positions have often been given to lower-ranking individuals who lack commitment to the

gender issue. WID planning cells in ministries are understaffed and lack technical skills, and hence are unable to arm their Focal Points with relevant information or policy analyses. Ideally, the Bangladesh Department of WID would provide this technical support, but it is equally under-resourced in this area.

By and large in the cases under review, 'mainstreaming' has been interpreted as a project of simply gaining access to other ministries; as a means of inserting staff charged with the WID mandate into the administrative structure and inserting women as a target or client group in every development sector. The difficulties of achieving this alone have postponed a more transformative project of challenging the basic operating assumptions of each sector and their underlying disciplinary biases. The sorts of gendered project guidelines and monitoring checklists developed in Jamaica do indicate means of pursuing this more transformative project. However, tools of that sort can too easily be dismissed if their use is not policed or supported by effective sanctions on non-compliance, such as vetoes on gender-insensitive project proposals. The experiments with Focal Point officers show, disappointingly but predictably, that success relies on committed individuals in that position and that commitment cannot be engineered by training alone.

There is a more general problem inherent in projects of seeking cross-ministerial compliance to a new policy mandate. This has to do with the embeddedness of bureaucratic interests and their defence within bureaucratic boundaries. Most public administrations feature a strong propensity to protect ministerial territory and to resist cross-cutting interests. Especially in contexts of resource scarcity, administrative units tend to guard their own territory because development resources attached to programmes and projects offer opportunities for patronage. This imposes competition between ministries, which defend privileged access to resources by evolving distinctive mandates and operational processes tied to disciplinary and sectoral concerns. These same kinds of incentive operate in national WID units as well, producing a strong incentive to concentrate on women-specific projects which provide a visible justification for their continued existence.

Promoting national ownership of the WID/GAD agenda: integrating gender to national planning processes

National development plans and budgets are important public statements expressing politically chosen priorities for change and progress, and are based on a macroeconomic framework designed to create the conditions under which this national vision can be realized. Integrating gender into this process requires both political and economic groundwork by WID/GAD policy advocates. This involves securing top-level commitment to WID/GAD priorities, agreeing action programmes and earmarked funds for every planning sector, generating sex-disaggregated data, and designing gender-specific achievement targets and progress indicators at the macro and sectoral levels.

In Chile SERNAM has formulated a national Equal Opportunity Plan. This is designed to 'promote an equal distribution of resources and social tasks, of civil rights, and participation, and access to power between men and women, and to value women's contribution to economic development' (Pollack, 1994a:3). SERNAM has been successful in providing a new impetus for collecting sex-disaggregated data, both within the Ministry of Planning, where it is located, and in other governmental departments. Within the Ministry of Planning, the annual socio-economic population survey is disaggregated by sex, and all new analytical work related to poverty and labour market issues makes an effort to address gender issues. As of 1995 households have been disaggregated by sex of headship in living standards studies. Across other government departments, the National Statistical Institute of the Ministry of Economics has introduced measures to sex disaggregate new data related to economic and employment variables, and has created a sex-disaggregated index of wages and salaries which illuminates problems of discrimination against women in the labour market.

In Bangladesh issues related to women have been raised in each successive five-year development plan from the first (1973-78) to the current plan. All of these plans have put primary emphasis on enhancing the quality of women's domestic role, through, initially, handicraft training and

family planning, and later through improved provision of rural credit and better access to education. The second plan (1980–85) was the first to propose a multi-sectoral approach to women's development. But in this and subsequent plans, only the social sectors show significant expenditure allocations for women. The third and fourth five-year plans raised employment issues for women, but these were almost entirely oriented to informal micro-enterprise opportunities which enable women to raise the productivity of their home-based work. No measures were detailed to increase the number of women participating in the formal labour force, save for a 15 per cent quota for women in public sector employment. Rarely are resources or institutional mechanisms specified in these plans to enable the Women's Ministry to discharge its coordinating, information generation and policy design functions.

An alternative approach to the promotion of women's interests in national planning documents has been the formulation of separate gender-focused national perspective plans by WID/GAD units. In Jamaica a *National Policy Statement on Women* was produced by the Bureau of Women's Affairs and adopted by the Cabinet in 1987, and a five-year *National Development Plan on Women* was produced by the Bureau and the Planning Institute in 1990. The 1990 Plan details actions to be taken in each major development sector and identifies main agencies responsible for implementation. But its implementation remains the sole responsibility of the Bureau of Women's Affairs. It has neither a budget nor details of budgetary implications for other government departments, and it has not been internalized by other departments because it was elaborated without any participation from them. Further, since it was elaborated separately from the Jamaican Five-Year Development Plan to 1995, it remains essentially external to the main planning framework.

In Morocco there is no WID presence in the Ministry of Planning or other central government departments, which means that there has been no clear point from which gender-sensitive planning guidance could emerge. The Centre of Demographic Studies in the Department of Statistics in the Ministry of Planning does, however, produce valuable sex-disaggregated data, particularly in relation to the formal

workforce. But no women or gender-trained researchers are part of this team, nor is it animated by any concern to illuminate significant information on gender for planners. This restricts the potential impact of sex-disaggregated data on the policy-making process, and it has also meant that a range of important gender issues are not included in national surveys — for example, the legal and political aspects of women's lives (Barkallil, 1994:17).

Vietnam, like Morocco, has no system for mainstreaming gender equality concerns in national planning. No systematic attention to gender equality is paid in the State Commission on Development Planning or in technical or line ministries. A national employment generation programme launched in 1992 did not include a component for women until the VWU put pressure on the government to allocate some of the funding to a credit programme for women (in the end, just 1.8 per cent of the funding from the national programme was allocated to women) (Van Anh, 1988:26). Observers feel that gender equality concerns have tended to be addressed in national planning only when problems caused by gender relations impede national production goals (Olin, 1988:16). For example, the concern to free women's labour for employment in public sector services and industries during the war turned attention to the need to replace women's domestic labour through the provision of child care.

But in spite of this lack of clear mainstreaming mechanisms, the VWU has played an important role in promoting women's rights. It was involved, for example, in fiercely lobbying the government to retain the provision for six months' maternity leave in the new Labour Code adopted in 1994. In this, it actually clashed with another women's department, the Board for Women's Affairs in the Confederation of Labour, which was promoting a reduction of maternity leave to four months, lowering the costs of maternity benefits as an incentive to newly privatized businesses to hire women. Another motive behind this was popular resentment at women's capacity to moonlight in a second job during paid maternity leave. The Labour Code eventually adopted ambiguous wording guaranteeing six months' maternity leave to state workers and four months for women employees in private business.

A problem with this process is that neither the sectoral gender policy statements nor the draft national policy statement detailed budget implications of any of the proposed policies. As with national planning experiences in Morocco, Jamaica and Bangladesh, this failure to follow through recommendations with clear calculations of public expenditure implications is an important reason why WID/GAD policy commitments tend to stay trapped on paper.

In sum, WID/GAD institutions in many of the case studies have developed a capacity for strategic planning, but what they still lack is a capacity to ensure that national policy commitments to the integration of gender in development are clearly tied to budget allocations. Here, skills are needed in budget analysis, and in the identification of important policy documents — such as public expenditure reviews or published national budget statements — for analysis and exposure. In some other countries, notably South Africa, Australia, Canada, some Caribbean countries and, lately, Uganda and Tanzania, techniques in gender-sensitive budget analysis have been developed which are now being used in planning and budget analysis in some of the countries under study here (Hurt and Budlender, 1998). For this to be effective, however, more sex-disaggregated data are needed about the extent to which government spending actually reaches women and, more generally, about women's income, consumption and contribution to production. There have been some examples of noteworthy successes in challenging definitional biases in some data bases used for planning purposes — most particularly, in labour force statistics. Less success has been achieved with data on expenditure and consumption, such as Living Standards Measurement Surveys, or Integrated Household Surveys which continue to regard the household as the main unit of analysis. It has also proven difficult to introduce indicators relating to gendered asymmetries of power — such as participation in local and national politics, sexual violence and juridical rights — to official data used in planning. With regard to the latter, the strategy of WID/GAD units has been to focus on raising public awareness of these issues, as a preliminary step in legitimizing them as matters for policy and planning. These efforts, many of which involve liaising with constituencies and amplifying women's

'voice' within the administration, are the focus of the next section.

Developing WID/GAD constituencies in and outside the state

Making space for women in the state

A theme which emerges powerfully from the review of the experiences of NWMs is the chronic short-staffing of these units; the general paucity of women in the higher levels of the civil service and in government; the lack of awareness of, and commitment to, gender issues generally among state personnel; and the critical importance of allies in government and in the administration. Some WID/GAD units have been staffed and headed by men who are not necessarily gender sensitive. As career civil servants, they consider placement in a marginal administrative unit to be a demotion (which indeed it may often be). Women civil servants in the same positions may share these characteristics and attitudes. As a range of studies of women bureaucrats in other contexts show, women bureaucrats and politicians cannot by any means be assumed automatically to be predisposed to work in women's interests (Dahlerup, 1988; Hale and Kelly, 1989; Hirschman, 1991). Their class status distances them from the concerns of poorer women. More importantly, the few women who do gain access to administrative or political positions tend to be isolated from other women and are under powerful pressures to conform to the dominant orientations of their institutions and the work patterns and concerns of their male colleagues. These pressures limit possibilities for developing sensitivity to, and acting in, women's interests (see Rai, 1997, and the Conclusion to this volume).

Association with an under-prioritized agenda such as WID/GAD can exacerbate problems of individual marginalization and, ironically, problems of personal disaffection with the issue. High-flying careers in the civil service are not often made on its 'softest' peripheries and certainly not in stigmatized 'women's' sectors. Many WID/GAD bureaucrats feel great frustration at their lack of resources

and limited impact, their uncertain mandate and, worst of all, at the lack of legitimacy the issue appears to have. It is worth quoting Barkallil on the perspectives of Moroccan civil servants in WID units:

They [WID bureaucrats] find themselves engaged on an issue for which they often do not feel prepared, all the more so because their mission is in no way defined by written directives coming from higher levels of the administration like the Ministries concerned or the Prime Minister. One has the impression that they are assigned to a delicate question which they have been left to manage as best they can, not with a view to satisfying objectives of effectiveness but in a manner such as to appear to be doing something, from the perspective of national and international opinion, but above all, from the perspective of foreign donors. (1994:22)

Where there has been a positive reception for WID/GAD policy goals in line ministries, this almost invariably relies upon the support of a gender-sensitive civil servant — often, but not always, a woman. This speaks not just to the importance of gender training for state agents, but to the importance of building up what Dahlerup terms a ‘critical mass’ of women in public administration (Dahlerup, 1988).

Obstacles to the increased representation of women at senior levels in the bureaucracy are considerable the world over. Quite aside from structural problems stemming from sex typing of women in the education system and labour markets, and from the competing demands of women’s private lives, women who do gain access to the bureaucracy eventually bump into glass ceilings maintained by the bureaucratic fraternity. In Morocco, this process is personally managed by the representative of traditional patriarchy — the King — who makes all appointments to high administrative office, and has not once conceded this honour to women civil servants.

In Bangladesh, there is a recruitment quota system in the civil service. Since 1972, 10 per cent of gazetted and 15 per cent of non-gazetted posts have been reserved for women. No special training is provided to enhance their performance in the civil service, let alone their gender sensitivity. The system has evolved into a maximum ceiling for women recruits, rather than a minimum threshold. Quotas have had the effect of stigmatizing women’s presence in

the civil service, where they are regarded as having gained access by virtue of their sex, rather than through merit. On the other hand, they have without question allowed for a greater presence of women in public service than would have occurred without special measures.

In Vietnam, quotas for women's employment in the public administration do not appear to have generated the same problems as in Bangladesh. To begin with, quotas were much less a reluctant and tokenistic gesture towards gender equality than a campaign to ensure adequate staffing levels in the civil service given men's absence on the war front. In 1967 the then Prime Minister suggested an increase in the quota of women civil servants in education and public health offices, as well as trading and light industry establishments, from 50 per cent to 70 per cent (Tran Thi, 1994:9). Though the proportion of women in public administration has not appeared to exceed the high point of 48 per cent in the 1980s, this nevertheless suggests an extremely gender-balanced bureaucracy. The picture is rather different when scrutinized by status levels: women have never held more than 5 per cent of directorships in state-run firms. Nevertheless, the high numbers of women in the rank and file of the public administration may account for the consistency with which gender-sensitive legislation on issues such as labour and property rights has been promoted and implemented, unlike other contexts in which top-level policies for gender equality encounter bureaucratic resistance at the implementation levels.

Several general observations can be made about efforts to gain allies and to increase women's representation in politics and the administration in the case countries. First, most often women who are already in the administration, even if gender sensitive, are too isolated to risk association with the GAD issue. However, efforts to network among them, as is happening in Chile, sometimes through the Focal Points mechanism, can strengthen their resolve and effectiveness. Second, quota systems for increasing women's representation in the administration are not necessarily effective in building up an internal GAD constituency. This should not, however, be taken as an argument against minimum quotas for women, as the possibility remains that they may eventually constitute a 'critical mass' with enough mutual

support to venture allegiance to the GAD agenda, as may be the case in Vietnam.

Cultivating a constituency: mechanisms for public advocacy, coordination with NGOs and linkages to women's organizations

NWMs and domestic women's movements are, in an important sense, mutually constituting. Often it is the women's movement's pressure on the state which leads to the creation of an NWM. Once in place, the femocrats within the NWM benefit from an active constituency of women's groups in civil society to help demonstrate the legitimacy and urgency of the policy reforms they are promoting. But this relationship can be compromised where domestic women's movements are not strong enough to provide legitimacy to the NWM, particularly where NWMs have been set up in response to donor pressure. In these contexts, official WID/GAD units often find themselves trying to build up a domestic constituency that includes but goes beyond women's groups, through raising public awareness of gender issues, promoting the development of women's organizations and establishing links with sympathetic NGOs.

In Bangladesh, which has a strong women's movement, the Department of Women's Affairs maintains an impressive register of women-friendly NGOs. But women's organizations prefer to maintain distance from the Department, because, at least in the past, it was staffed by members of the Bangladesh Jatiyo Mahila Sangstha (National Women's Association), linked to the right-wing BNP, in and out of power since democratization in 1990. Also, the Department of Women's Affairs is an unappealing partner for the women's movement because of its limited institutional capacity to influence development processes, particularly in rural areas. It has offices in just 22 of the 64 districts and has staff in just 100 of the 460 sub-districts.

In Jamaica, processes of constituency outreach on the part of the Bureau of Women's Affairs are well institutionalized, but its relationships with NGOs and women's organizations have been uneven and very much dependent on the economic situation — both of the Bureau itself and the country. Over the years, the Bureau has come to work

more closely with NGOs as its own capacity to initiate research and implement projects withered with the withdrawal of donor funds consequent on the government's failure to provide counterpart funding (Mariott, 1994:5). Disappointingly, however, its relationship with women's organizations was not strong over the 1980s and 1990s. Observers suggest that the women's movement has been decimated by the economic hardships brought by austerity measures in the 1980s, diverting efforts from advocacy to economic survival (Mariott, 1994:6).

In Morocco, reflecting the uneven institutionalization of WID units across the administration, there is a notable absence of a point of communication or coordination between the government and women's groups or NGOs. Some degree of consultation with women's organizations has occurred in women's units in certain Ministries and government units (particularly the Ministry of Youth and Sport, the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Agricultural Credit Service), but these are isolated instances such as seminars which tend to be sponsored by external donors and focused on particular projects.

With regard to cross-sectoral issues of critical relevance to matters of equality and redistribution, consultation with women's organizations has been almost insultingly cursory, showing an astonishing degree of condescension and disregard for women's perspectives on public policy. For example, in the recent process of reforming the country's Islamic family law code, the *Moudouana*, managed by the King, women's organizations were only peripherally consulted. They were contacted in writing; public debate and the risk of conflict were avoided. Not a single woman from the women's movement sat on the commission charged with revising this critical piece of legislation. The resulting legislation reproduced a patriarchal family model, ignoring changes in women's social and economic roles in Morocco.

Chile differs from the above cases in that SERNAM has had no formal mandate to work with women's organizations or NGOs. This may to some degree reflect a desire on the part of the main coalition of feminist organizations (the National Coalition of Women for Democracy; CNMD) to preserve its autonomy and to pursue a more radical agenda outside government. SERNAM has pursued a project of

putting gender issues on the public agenda primarily through the creation of Centres of Information on Women's Rights, concentrating on democracy, poverty and human rights. It has collaborated with NGOs for the purpose of research into employment and domestic violence issues, and only when funded by international agencies. According to some observers, this relative detachment may be due to a reluctance to become embroiled in political differences within the NGO and women's communities (Pollack, 1994b:4). In a context of highly politicized forms of associational life in civil society this reticence is perfectly understandable and probably healthy. In any case, the dynamism of CNMD and its autonomy from the administration are probably the best guarantors of the continued development of a feminist constituency in the country.

Finally, Vietnam differs radically from the other cases in that women's activism in civil society, independent of the Indochinese Communist Party, was one of the political freedoms denied in socialist Vietnam. In the current environment of liberalization, controls on civil society are being relaxed and formal Party units such as the VWU are becoming more autonomous. In the meantime, the VWU's contact with its constituency has been strong, made possible through its extensive grassroots network.

One serious obstacle to effective collaboration between NWMs and the women's movement in all the case countries stems from bureaucratic norms. Too much interaction with outside constituencies can be seen as a violation of professionalism to the extent that it is regarded as politicizing the administration and eroding its integrity. For example, in a relatively open and transparent administration, a WID/GAD unit might rightly illuminate deficiencies in the government's accountability to women, thereby providing outside constituencies with 'ammunition' with which to lobby for change. This means divided loyalties for many WID/GAD bureaucrats, which can undermine their credibility in the bureaucracy. A similar set of constraints operates in the opposite direction. Women's organizations in particular may resist association with an administration linked to a government which is not seen as responsive to their concerns. This appears to be the case in Bangladesh. The transformative potential inherent in an iterative

relationship between an active women's constituency and WID/GAD agents in the administration is perhaps best exploited where both retain a degree of autonomy, yet attempt to ensure that their activities on either side of the state/civil society divide are mutually supportive. This appears to be the pattern in Chile.

Conclusions: towards accountability for gender equality

Efforts to integrate gender in development through NWMs have produced many strategic gains. Above all, they have legitimized a place for gender issues in development. Government units dedicated to promoting gender equality in development have innovated policy analysis and monitoring tools such as gender checklists and guidelines for cross-government use. Other new instruments for coordinating gender-sensitive planning across the government have been WID/GAD Focal Points in line ministries and synoptic gender-sensitive national development plans. NWMs have had pockets of success in gaining allies and have made critically important gains in revising data bases used for development planning to include aspects of women's lives.

At the same time, NWMs have encountered constraints which include marginalization through under-resourcing in staff, skills and funding, and through patterns of institutional location and role assignment which stigmatize and condemn in advance their ambitions for gender-transformative policy change. Beyond the problem of bureaucratic resistance, there seem to be two main constraints on the effectiveness of NWMs' policy efforts. One is that gender-sensitive policy proposals tend rarely to be traced through to actual budgetary implications, and fail to make a direct impact on the main instrument for national development planning and indeed for accountability systems: the public expenditure planning process. The second serious shortcoming regards the nature of connections between NWMs and the women's constituency in civil society. Ideally a strong constituency base among women's organizations and gender-sensitive NGOs would strengthen the position of the WID/GAD agenda in government, while at

the same time sensitizing it to the needs of the national female citizenship. But it has proven difficult to build up or to exploit this iterative relationship.

It is worth asking why so many governments the world over have appeared willing to make commitments to women's rights and to gender equality in the development process and to set up institutions to promote this. Similar support is rarely given to other issues — such as class inequality — which also represent deep social cleavages and which envisage profound structural change. The reason has to do with politics. No government or bureaucracy feels it has anything to fear from women. In civil society they rarely represent a highly mobilized constituency, at the domestic level their interests are often closely bound in with those of men in the family, and in politics and public administration they are under-represented and have rarely acted to entrench a new feminist corporatism. As such, the chance of fundamental changes towards gender equality actually being realized is negligible, given the relative absence of forceful and demanding constituencies within and outside of the state. As a result, far from having anything to fear from women, many governments can make important political gains at the international and domestic levels by espousing gender equality, without serious risk of being held accountable and having to operationalize the promises made in top-level rhetoric.

The experience of NWMs obliges us to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the opportunities for promoting gender equality through the public sector. This chapter concludes with a sketch of a framework for studying this. The extent to which pro-gender equality groups within civil society and the state will succeed in promoting women's interests in public policy, and the extent to which states will respond, will depend upon the interaction of three major factors:

- *The social, cultural and economic power of the gender equality lobby in civil society* — its power to mobilize resources and public concern to support its demands.
- *The nature of the political system* — the depth of procedural and substantive democracy, the different levels of government at which women can express their concerns — and *the organization of political competition* (the

number and types of parties, their ideologies and memberships, the relative importance of high finance or crime in political contests).

- *The nature and power of the state* and its bureaucracies — whether it is a developmental state, whether it has the will and capacity to enforce change in the culture and practices of its bureaucracies, whether the public service has internalized a commitment to social equity, poverty reduction, and so on.

The prospects of women influencing policy will be further shaped by the institutions which organize opportunities for consultation and dialogue with officials, for formal representation in public decision-making forums and, finally, for accountability to citizens. These distinctions between participation, representation and influence emphasize that the creation of opportunities for consultation do not lead, on their own, to policy influence. Nor do opportunities for women to be represented in political forums or in the administration (through quotas for local government councillors or through NWMs) mean actual influence and power (see table 3).

Beginning with the women's movement, this framework allows consideration of accountability issues within women's civil society organizations. Thus, for instance, in

Table 3 Aspects of the relationship between advocacy and influence

	Participation/ consultation	Representation/ presence	Accountability/ influence
The power of the women's movement in civil society			
The nature of the political regime and of political competition			
The nature of the state and its bureaucracies			

an organization claiming to represent poor women, the top row of the table could be filled in to make note of the arrangements for the participation of poor women in the organization's activities, the extent to which they are represented in leadership structures, and the mechanisms through which poor women can demand accountability from the organization.

Politics is the intervening variable determining the effectiveness of women's 'voice' in civil society and public sector response. The women's movement may be equipped with all it needs to press demands on the state — a united and well-organized membership, allies in the right places, generalized social support and even a crisis event to concentrate public concern on the group's needs — but the political environment may undercut its impact if the gender equality constituency is not seen as relevant to prevailing political agendas or patronage systems.

Political systems have a critical impact on the calculations that women's groups make about the value of engaging with the state. Formal democracy and the existence of basic civil and political rights are crucial preconditions for virtually any kind of civil society activism which engages critically with the state. Beyond this, the relative strength of oppositional political energies in society, and the ways in which they are represented politically, will shape women's civil society strategies, as will the relationship between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. For instance, where there is robust multi-party competition, as in Chile, women's groups may pursue confrontational, high-visibility strategies in the hope of interesting opposition parties in taking up their concerns in the legislature.

The nature of the state is of great significance to the effectiveness of women's 'voice' in civil society. The nature of access opportunities to policy-making arenas, and redress mechanisms when policies go wrong, will empower some citizens over others. The coherence, probity and managerial capabilities of the administration will dictate the value of attempting to engage the public sector in partnerships for more responsive administration. The civil service culture will determine the degree of professional defensiveness and resistance with which bureaucrats will respond to initiatives to improve their receptivity to women's needs.

The impact of women's efforts to encourage the public sector to respond to their needs and interests will, most importantly, be shaped by accountability systems in the public administration, which differ according to the model of political-administrative control in the particular country. As this chapter has suggested, many of the efforts of NWMs have been weakened by a failure to engage with internal state accountability systems — for instance, by auditing government expenditure to see that funds earmarked for gender equality programmes are actually spent properly.

The future for advocacy administration such as the NWMs reviewed here lies in developing strategies which tackle obstacles to gender equality in all three arenas: civil society, politics and the state. Most importantly, if states are to be held accountable for gender equality, then gender equality advocates have to 'engender' national accountability systems: both 'vertical' mechanisms based on political engagement and 'horizontal' mechanisms such as financial auditing, administrative rules and procedures, legal processes, and so on. Much has already been achieved in the political arena in many countries, though the emphasis remains on increasing women's representation, as opposed to accountability to female constituencies. But when it comes to public sector accountability systems, the experience of NWMs shows us that the work of making states accountable for gender equality has only just begun.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is an edited version of the monograph: 'The Politics of Integrating Gender to State Development Processes: Trends, Opportunities and Constraints in Bangladesh, Chile, Jamaica, Mali, Morocco, and Uganda' UNRISD Occasional Paper No. 1, 1995, Geneva, also published in *Missionaries and Mandarins: Feminist Engagements with Development Institutions* (eds: Carol Miller and Shahra Razavi), London: IT Publications. The original paper was based on data up to 1994 and investigated women's machinery in seven countries. Because of space constraints, Mali and Uganda have been left out here. Efforts have been made to update the data for this paper, but there will be places where the information is out of date, and for this the author apologizes. My thanks to Shahra Razavi for permission to reprint.
- 2 The primary data on which this chapter is based are drawn from interviews commissioned by the UN Research Institute for Social

Development in 1994–95. The interviews were held with members of state bureaucracies, representatives of non-governmental organizations, members of women's organizations and academics, almost all of whom in one way or another were involved in promoting improved state attention to women's needs and interests in development. The interview data are rich in subjective assessments of official policy efforts, but perhaps because of this there is considerable unevenness in the details provided on formal policy measures and their impact. My thanks to the writers of these country reports: Nadira Barkallil, Lalla Ben Barka, Mohsena Islam, Joy Kwesiga, Christine Mariott, Molly Pollack and Tran Thi Van Anh.