Conclusions: looking forward

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The chapters in this volume have provided a comparative and critical assessment of national machineries in different countries and geographical regions. This brief concluding chapter will provide an overview of the main issues raised by the contributors. These include both the success stories of, and the challenges faced by, national machineries for women.

As national machineries are at the cusp of an expanded role, there is a need to review current practices, lessons learnt and organizational effectiveness, and to strategize for the new challenges. The first section examines the issue of accountability of national machineries themselves as a means of strengthening machinery–civil society relations which in turn may strengthen the position of the machinery within the state structure. The second section briefly summarizes the lessons learnt from the various case studies in this volume and determines what may be an enabling environment for national machineries.

Accountability and legitimacy of national machineries

It can be argued that the legitimacy of national machineries is an important political capital. This capital is needed to invest in efficient, pragmatic and normative work of the machineries. Further, it must be recognized that this capital is not static but rather that it can expand, as well as decrease. To increase this capital, national machineries need to build strong relationships with civil society organizations on the one hand, and demonstrate effectiveness in influencing policy *outcomes* on the other (see Staudt, chapter 2 of

this volume). In order to do so, national machineries need to be aware of issues of accountability to their constituencies in their multiplicity — women's movements and groups, academics, policy makers and activists. As the various chapters in the book reveal, women's groups have only recently begun to shed their entrenched scepticism of 'working with the state'; therefore, one way of ensuring that activists do not 'give up trying to be "partners" and stick to the role of "adversaries"' is for national machineries seriously to take into consideration the accountability issue (Balasubrahmanyan, 1993:31–5).

The legitimacy of national machineries is also bound up with how far they are able to, and are seen to, represent the interests of the majority of women. This issue becomes important with the increased pressures of globalization on national and local economies. It is also important in multi-ethnic and -cultural societies and in political contexts where established democracies are not yet operating. In all these contexts the interests of some groups are more readily visible than those of others. If organizations such as national machineries represent these changing interests, and indeed participate in articulating and sometimes aggregating these, then the *processes* by which this happens need to be taken seriously. It is in this context of representing interests and influencing outcomes (policies) that we need to examine the question of accountability of national machineries.

Accountability can be defined as the 'requirement for representatives [and representative organizations] to answer [for] the disposal of their powers and duties, act upon criticisms or requirements made of them, and accept (some) responsibility for failure, incompetence, or deceit' (McLean, 1996, p. 1). Accountability can be discussed in *normative* terms — that women bring a different style of politics to the public sphere. For this an open, dialogical and listening style of functioning and being is essential. In this context, the accountability of national machineries would be discussed in terms of openness to different standpoints and to varied strategic and practical interests. Thus accountability, with its focus on responsibility, allows us to discuss a new form of politics. A *pragmatic* reason for taking accountability seriously is that without engaging in a dialogue with varied interest groups, without creating a trust between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and women's

groups on the one hand, and national machinery on the other, the *raison d'être* collapses. If national machineries are unable to generate a dialogue with civil society because they are perceived as unaccountable, arrogant and removed from concerns of women's groups organizing in the field, the purpose for which national machineries have been created would not be achieved. Finally, there is a strong *efficiency* argument attached to accountability. As pointed out in chapter 1, national machineries function at different levels of governance — national/local, regional and international. In articulating 'women's interests', national machineries become representatives of 'women's movements', and civil society groups to governments, regional and international bodies. The support of these various groups increases the legitimacy of national machineries; the scepticism and opposition of these groups to the national machineries' style of functioning, agendas and programmes, would erode their legitimacy. National machineries are stronger in their position *vis-à-vis* governance circuits if they have strong legitimacy signals from their constituencies (see United Nations, 1998:12–14). This is particularly important as they hold their mandate of representing women's interests in tension with the need to function effectively and democratically by engaging in negotiation, bargaining and strategizing which might result in positive outcomes for women.

In support of increasing autonomy for national machineries, it could be argued that a mainstreaming of gender agendas requires negotiating across ministries, sectors of government bureaucracy and with civil society organizations. Such negotiations can be effective only when the leadership of the machineries is 'freed from stricter forms of political accountability if they are to be freed to engage in discussion' (Phillips, 1991:156). The argument for deliberative democratic practice presupposes a level of autonomy for representatives of interests which allows them to shift their positions if persuaded by the arguments had in a deliberative space. Without such autonomy representatives have no role to play other than as 'carriers'. Without autonomy there is no flexibility and therefore practical politics becomes impossible, leading to an impasse and breakdown of communication.

Here a focus on the leadership of national machineries, and the question of politics in general, becomes important. Committed, intelligent and resourceful individuals make a

Table 5 Enabling national machineries

Areas of work of the state	Areas of work of civil society associations	Issues for national machinery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive legislation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear mandate • Well-defined space within the state, preferably at the top of the state hierarchy • Increasing levels of women's participation in political institutions through quota or other appropriate policies • Administrative infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to the highest policy-making bodies • Access to information needed to monitor state bodies • Transparency of bureaucratic/state procedures in gender mainstreaming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobby the government to establish a national machinery for women in order to mainstream gender equality issues in policy at all levels • Monitor the government's work on gender mainstreaming from the outside • Enable national machineries to articulate a gender equality agenda which is widely acceptable • Monitor the work of national machineries • Insist upon transparency in the work of the machinery • Develop innovative links with the national machinery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about the mandate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the constitutional provision and status of the machinery? • What is the core area of work for the machinery? • Clarify the channels of communication within government • Insist upon access to relevant information in order to audit governmental policy making and implementation, especially for gender audit of the budget • Make the case of taking both processes and outcomes of gender mainstreaming seriously

- Adequate number of trained personnel
 - Staff demographics within the state to be more gender equal
 - Resources
 - Political support for the agenda for mainstreaming gender
 - Political support for the national machinery and its work
 - Supporting autonomy of the machinery within the state structure
 - Economic provision at an appropriate level
 - Technology to enable 'outreach' work of the machineries at national and international levels through the internet
 - Support of innovative linkages between the machineries and civil society organizations
 - Skills and training resources for personnel of the machineries on an ongoing basis
 - Establish regular communication channels
 - Share information and experience with the machinery to increase the knowledge and skills base of the machinery
 - Establish and maintain links with civil society organizations on a non-partisan basis
 - Be transparent about intra-organizational procedures
 - Use the internet to consult widely and feed back on the work of the machinery
 - Learn from other machineries by participating in regional and international conferences and exchanges
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difference to organizations. Leaderships have to choose, at times, between different types of political capital — governmental or non-governmental. As Kardam and Acuner argue, 'Leadership is a matter of entrepreneurship; it involves the combination of imagination in inventing institutional options and skill in brokering the interests of numerous actors to line up support for such options... within [the structural] constraints' (p. 112 of this volume). These choices can be more or less urgent and difficult depending upon the nature of government itself. The wider issue of democratic governance is relevant here (see Fox and Brown, 1998:15–17; Staudt, chapter 2 of this volume).

Picking a path through these different choices cannot be easy, requiring strong leadership on the one hand, and strong allies on the other. While it is not necessary that these choices are as stark as delineated here, they alert us to the need for distinguishing between processes and outcomes where the work of national machineries is concerned. The question of autonomy goes hand in hand with the question of accountability. It is the balance between accountability and autonomy that needs to be got right for national machineries to be effective. National machineries thus need to be advocates as well as deliberators and critics, otherwise co-optation becomes a real danger. 'Reasonableness' in government — linked to autonomy for shifting positions — can undermine the oppositional/challenge politics that might be required to shift the status quo. The examples of the various national machineries in this book suggest that some machineries are better able to face challenges than others. In most part it is the context in which they operate that is crucial to their success, as it is to the weakness of others. So what makes for an enabling environment for women's national machineries?

An enabling environment for the national machineries

The chapters in this volume have identified several elements of an enabling environment for the national machineries for women. Broadly, these include the role of the state, civil society organizations and the work of the national machineries themselves (see table 5).

An enabling environment, however, is also a contextualized environment. As we have seen in the various chapters of this book, the embeddedness of national machineries cannot be disregarded. The *politics* of national machineries thus becomes important. The political system within which the machineries are situated, whether or not they are autonomous from the state and political parties, whether there is a strong civil society, whether there are civil associations supportive of the broad agendas of the machineries and whether there is adequate resourcing of the machineries are all factors that impact on the functioning of these bodies. The international community becomes an important source of strength in some political contexts, but poses difficult issues of independence of machineries in others, especially where nationalist rhetoric is available to, and deployed by, the major political players. The economic strength of the state is also important to the strength of the machinery — under-resourcing and vulnerability due to restructuring of state bodies often depend on the state of a particular economy. Finally, the ways in which gender mainstreaming is understood and accepted as a frame of reference within particular political contexts are also critical. As Goetz points out, gender mainstreaming as ‘de-institutionalizing male preference’ faces enormous obstacles, especially as ‘No government or bureaucracy feels it has anything to fear from women’ (1995:211–12). However, the possibility of national machineries working effectively becomes higher where women’s movements have been able to produce a long-term discursive shift in the way gender mainstreaming is discussed. The Nordic example, however imperfect, does suggest this.

Conclusions

This book reflects both the longer-term strategic and shorter-term practical needs of national machinery functioning. While these analyses are made in the context of the national/local space, the arguments presented here are also valid for assessing the work of national machineries at the regional and international levels. Different contexts bring different

strains and tensions on the one hand, and also varied possibilities of alliances and negotiations. These need to be mapped and used by national machineries.

Challenges for the future

In conclusion, the most pressing issue for national machineries is how to create an enabling environment. Capacity building of these machineries in times of economic and political restructuring of the state is difficult, but imperative (see Goetz and Kwesiga, chapters 3 and 10 of this volume). Second, there needs to be acknowledgment of the political process that is crucial to gender mainstreaming. Here it is important to consider the point made by Goetz in chapter 3: 'The "lack of political will" explanation for failure in promoting women's rights and interests 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' (p. 70). However, it is also important to note that 'political will', defined to include the leadership of political parties, civil bureaucracies and state bodies, can be an accountability measure available to the national machineries for assessing progress on the achievement of the gender mainstreaming agenda. Here, leaderships of national machineries, their links with NGOs and civil society organizations and networks at local/global levels, and their visibility at the global level are important factors.

Third, the nature of national machineries is important — decentralized organizational structures, even within a context of strong central state control, are important to link in with civil society organizations at the grassroots, as well as to lobby and monitor the functioning of state-level bodies at local levels which are so critical for implementation of national policy. As Silvia Vega Ugalde argues in this volume, 'Experience demonstrates that there is greater mobilization, greater public visibility, greater impact on public opinion, a greater degree of participation by women when such an initiative arises from below, from civil society [rather than from the state]' (p. 129).

Fourth, democratization of state institutions, and of politics more generally, is crucial. The demographic map of state institutions needs to be changed to reflect gender equality.

The work of national machineries within the state can result in an 'expanded sisterhood with women in government staking out their claims as much for themselves as for the whole bureaucracy, networking among each other and with women in the GO-NGO community for mutual growth and . . . a common agenda' (Honculada and Ofreneo, p. 142 of this volume; see also Stokes, chapter 9 of this volume). The nature of political systems is critical to capacity building of national machineries, as it is to the developing of networks as well as innovative institutionalization of gender equality agendas through the work of national machineries. As Jezerska argues in chapter 8 of this volume, 'International, intergovernmental and regional institutions should be encouraged to provide financial and technical assistance in support of institutional mechanisms and the development and implementation of tools for gender equality' (p. 183; see also Åseskog, chapter 7 of this volume).

Fifth, democratization in this context also means crucially a democratic and accountable functioning of national machineries themselves, as without such accountability the legitimacy of the machineries themselves can be brought into question. As Sawyer argues in chapter 12 of this volume, 'Accountability through performance agreements between chief executive officers and ministers, without an external element is unlikely to result in . . . expert scrutiny' (p. 250). One way that this could be strengthened is to have stronger consultative mechanisms, not only with the participating governments such as questionnaires for states, but also with civil society organizations (www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/question.htm). Sixth, democratization needs to be embedded in the framework of mainstreaming itself if mainstreaming is not to become a 'code word for killing off gender audit' (Sawyer, p. 250). As Staudt argues in chapter 2 of this volume, 'Good governance is about many things, ranging from opening democratic spaces to performing governance tasks well, justly and equitably' (p. 61). The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean also suggests that 'the subject of the [democratic] agenda is central to all debates about the State, not just because democratic governance depends on the ability to define the social, political and economic aspects of the public agenda . . . , but because this very definition is a necessary

precondition for social cohesion' (1998:21), as well as for gender equality. Finally, more comparative research needs to be done to establish a more sophisticated analysis of best practice and common pitfalls. To quote the Secretary-General of the UN: 'Despite the international presence of national machineries, little research has been done to assess their increasingly important role on the international and regional level' (p. 3).

It is by negotiating these different agendas that national machineries become important instruments of gender mainstreaming and supports for women's empowerment.