

Canadian Experience in Gender Mainstreaming

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Canadian Experience in Gender Mainstreaming

1. Introduction

This paper outlines the Government of Canada's experience with gender mainstreaming.¹ "Gender mainstreaming" is a term that came into widespread use with the adoption of the Beijing *Platform for Action*, which emphasized the importance of:

"mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively."

While not using the term "gender mainstreaming," the Canadian government has had a long-standing commitment to the analysis of policy impacts on women early in the policy-decision-making process. In 1976, a strategy of integration required that all federal initiatives and decisions be assessed for their impact on women, at every phase of decision-making, and in every area of activity. In 1995, a systematic approach to gender mainstreaming was formally articulated in the *Federal Plan for Gender Equality*, presented to the UN World Conference on Women.

This approach was stated as a commitment to implementing gender-based analysis in the development of policies, programmes and legislation. Further commitments were made to developing analytic tools, training approaches and data for undertaking gender-based analysis.

The need to restate this commitment illustrates the complexity of ensuring that policies across government are formulated to advance equality between women and men. There are challenges at several levels. To date, much attention in international discussions has been given to the requirements at the political level (are commitments authoritatively stated and promoted?) and the institutional level (are the appropriate structures in place?). The Canadian approach also recognizes the need for further development at the technical level, in that attention must be paid to adapting concepts and methodologies for the range of policy sectors that are required to do effective gender-based analysis.

This paper begins with a review of the current environment for undertaking gender-based analysis within the federal government, highlighting the aspects that are seen as particularly important in establishing an enabling environment (Section 2). It then presents two short "case studies" of developments in policy areas that illustrate the complexity of undertaking effective gender-based analysis and influencing decision-making processes (Section 3). Finally, the paper reviews some challenges and next steps in achieving a more systematic, cross-sectoral approach to policy-making in support of gender equality (Section 4).

2. Environment for gender-based analysis

The commitments made by Canada in the Federal Plan for Gender Equality are built on lessons learned from initiatives to enhance implementation of the government's commitment to gender equality over two decades. Steps taken since then have also contributed to establishing an

¹ Canada is a federation in which distinct areas of jurisdiction are assigned to the federal, provincial and territorial governments. This paper focuses on the approach taken by the federal government, although a brief outline of the approaches of several other governments is provided in Box 4.

enabling environment for implementing gender-based analysis. Aspects of the environment that facilitate implementation are:

- a positive policy environment, including a clear legal foundation for the development of policies supporting gender equality, and a clear government commitment to a systematic and cross-sectoral approach;
- an institutional infrastructure, including a national machinery with a clearly-defined role, mechanisms to support gender equality within other government departments, intergovernmental collaborative mechanisms, and mechanisms for information exchange and collaboration among federal, provincial and territorial governments;
- increased availability of analytic inputs for policy decision-making that supports gender equality, including guidelines and analytic frameworks for gender-based policy analysis, policy research to support more informed debate, and gender equality indicators to assess progress; and
- constructive partnerships with actors outside government, based on recognition of the role and contribution of equality seeking organizations and processes for consultation that facilitate exchanges about issues, priorities and policy alternatives.

Sections 2.1 - 2.4 discusses each of these factors in turn.

2.1 Policy environment

Clear legal foundation for gender equality

The legal foundation for gender equality was strengthened when the equality provisions of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* came into force in 1985. Sections 15 and 28 of the *Charter* outline a standard of gender equality to which all governments in Canada (federal, provincial, and territorial) must adhere in their legislation and programs. Judicial decisions and policy debates under the *Charter* have contributed to a recognition that treating women and men identically will not ensure equal outcomes, and to an increasing acceptance of the concept of substantive equality (equality as equality of results or outcomes).

The equality provisions of the *Charter* provide the basis for challenging laws that result in unequal outcomes for women. Such arguments have been made in relation to employment opportunities and pay, spousal support, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual orientation, pregnancy, pensions and violence against women. The ability of Canadian women to challenge legislation through the court system is assisted by the Court Challenges Program, which provides financial assistance for test cases of national significance put forward on behalf of or by groups or individuals that will clarify language and equality rights under the Canadian constitution.

The equality provisions of the *Charter* have provided momentum for the application of gender-based analysis in the development of legislation. Gender-based analysis can prevent costly legal challenges under the *Charter*, while at the same time promote sound and effective public policies.

Government commitment to gender-based analysis

Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Gender Equality (1995-2000) was presented at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women. The *Federal Plan* was prepared through collaboration among 24 federal departments and agencies, led by Status of Women Canada (SWC). It is both a statement of commitments and a framework for the future.

The first of the *Federal Plan's* eight objectives made a commitment to government-wide implementation of gender-based analysis in the development of policies, programs and legislation. The specific commitments made are outlined in Box 1 below. Through these, the government sought to institute a more systematic, cross-government approach to addressing gender equality issues than had previously been achieved. The *Federal Plan* clearly states departments' and agencies' responsibility for gender-based analysis and envisaged that implementation would be phased in over a five-year period, as departments and agencies developed the necessary expertise and capacity. The role outlined for SWC in the process is to collaborate with other departments in developing tools, training materials and procedures for gender-based analysis, and to monitor the process.

BOX 1

Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Gender Equality (1995-2000)

Commitment to gender-based analysis:

"The federal government is committed through the *Federal Plan* to ensuring that all future legislation and policies include, where appropriate, an analysis of the potential for different impacts on women and men. Individual departments will be responsible for determining which legislation or policies have the potential to affect women differentially and are, therefore, appropriate for a consistent application of a gender lens.

"The federal government is committed to:

- the development and application of tools and methodologies for carrying out gender-based analysis;
- training on gender-based analysis of legislation and policies;
- the development of indicators to assess progress made toward gender equality;
- the collection and use of gender-disaggregated data as appropriate;
- the use of gender-sensitive language throughout the federal government;
- the evaluation of the effectiveness of the gender-based analysis process."

2.2 Institutional infrastructure

National machinery with a clearly-defined role

The national machinery, Status of Women Canada (SWC), has evolved since its initial establishment in 1971 (see Box 2 for the major milestones in this evolution). SWC is now a department of government reporting to the Secretary of State (Status of Women). SWC provides expertise and strategic advice to the Secretary of State on issues affecting women and gender equality. SWC currently has a staff of just over 100 employees.

SWC plays a pivotal role in fostering partnership between departments and jurisdictions, as well as among other stakeholders and NGOs, to coordinate policies and programs that address key issues of relevance to women's equality. Through mechanisms such as interdepartmental committees, SWC staff contribute their specific expertise and knowledge to develop federal policies and programs

SWC has taken particular leadership in facilitating partnerships in the development of policies and programs to address the issue of violence against women and children. Collaborative action on this issue, supported by pertinent research and SWC funded community-based programs, has enabled SWC to: contribute to the adoption of a new international human rights instrument; participate in the development of a Canadian position with respect to a United Nations protocol on trafficking in women and children; assist in the development of community prevention strategies, tools and models; identify gaps in research in these areas; and increase public awareness of issues such as violence prevention, violence against the girl-child, sexual exploitation of children, and trafficking in women and girls.

Both the SWC mandate and the *Federal Plan for Gender Equality* provide for SWC's leadership role in the process of implementing the commitment to gender-based analysis. Major concerns include further development of the concepts, tools and methodologies required for gender-based analysis. This includes, for example, tackling difficult conceptual issues such as the recognition of unpaid work in policy development (discussed in section 3.2), and collaboration with other departments to develop the sector-specific analytic tools required for gender-based analysis. SWC also promotes debate and understanding of gender-based analysis through policy discussion at roundtables and workshops with both government and non-government actors.

As a means of increasing understanding and use of gender-based analysis across government, SWC has appointed a Director, Gender-Based Analysis, for a period of two years, March 1999. The role of the Director side is to encourage and assist other federal departments and agencies to set up their own processes to ensure that gender-based analysis is incorporated into all of their policy and program development activities. Specific actions that will be pursued include:

- working with departments to create action plans to integrate gender-based analysis in their work;
- developing training modules for departments and other interested parties;
- establishing accountability and evaluative processes to assess progress made;
- building a resource library, developing further reference materials and tools for the use of departments, and encouraging them to develop and use their own sectoral tools; and
- establishing appropriate interdepartmental mechanisms to advance implementation.

The Director chairs an Interdepartmental Committee on Gender-Based Analysis (IDC on GBA), a focal point for coordination, facilitation and support of gender-based analysis activities across federal government departments and agencies. Comprised of gender specialist

representatives from a variety of federal departments, including Justice, Health, Citizenship and Immigration, Human Resources Development, Indian and Northern Affairs, Canadian Heritage and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the committee is active in identifying and sharing GBA information and resources, including best practices on implementing GBA and gender-based analysis training tools.

BOX 2

Major milestones in the evolution of the national machinery:

- 1970 Presentation of the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women*, which made recommendations on how the machinery of government could better represent women's interests that have since shaped Canada's approach.
- 1971 Establishment of the Office of the Co-ordinator, Status of Women, as a small unit within the Privy Council Office (the government department serving the Prime Minister), with the mandate to co-ordinate the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.
- 1973 Establishment of the Women's Program to provide financial and technical assistance to women's and other organizations working for gender equality. (The Women's Program was managed by a department that also had programs to assist other social groups experiencing inequality, to develop their capacity to express their views and advocate equality measures).
- 1973 Establishment of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW), a federally funded but independent organization which published research and advised Parliament on areas of concern related to women's equality (until its dissolution in 1995).
- 1976 Expansion of the Office of the Co-ordinator into Status of Women Canada (SWC) as a separate governmental body mandated to provide leadership, expertise, and strategic advice to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, and to federal government departments and agencies on issues affecting women.
- 1976 Adoption of a policy on the integration of concerns about the status of women. The policy recognized the need in the policy-making process for early, effective identification and analysis of possible differential impacts of policies and programs on women and men. In implementing the policy, each federal department and agency was required to designate a senior-level implementation mechanism or focal point to provide direct input into policy and program development.
- 1995 Integration into SWC of the Women's Program and its regional operations structure, and the policy research, dissemination and public information responsibilities of the CACSW. The integration of these functions into a single organization has strengthened SWC's outreach to national, regional and local women's and other equality-seeking organizations, and its policy and research capabilities.

Mechanisms for gender equality in other ministries and agencies of government

Although SWC has a leadership role, all other government ministries are responsible for

implementing the government's commitment to gender-based policy analysis within their mandates. Several ministries established an office or unit on women's issues before 1995, and the 1995 commitment to gender-based analysis has encouraged others to take a similar step. Examples include:

- The Women's Health Bureau of Health Canada promotes gender-based analysis of policies and programs within Health Canada by developing health sector-specific tools and training, and by providing advice and resource materials. It has a staff complement of 15. Its work is strengthened by inputs from the five Centres of Excellence for Women's Health. Initiated in 1996, the Centres of Excellence have been provided with six-year federal funding to conduct policy-based research on women's health.
- Human Resources Development Canada has a Women's Bureau that was initially established in 1954, in what was then the Department of Labour. The staff of the Women's Bureau work as policy and program advisors to departmental officials on the practice of gender-based analysis.
- The Department of Justice established the Office of the Senior Advisor on Gender Equality in 1996. The Office consists of a Senior Advisor plus two gender equality analysts. Its major activities include: designing analytical tools to conduct gender equality analysis in the areas of litigation, legal opinion, legislative drafting, policy and program development, and management practices and policies; developing and offering training modules on the application of gender equality analysis in law; designing awareness mechanisms; and contributing to the analysis of all substantive issues arising in the Department to ensure that they are examined from a gender equality perspective.
- The Office of the Senior Advisor on Aboriginal Women's Issues and Gender Equality was established by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada in 1998 and is assisted by a department-wide Advisory Committee on Gender Equality (ACGE), including representatives from both regional offices and headquarters.
- The International Women's Equality Section of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade functions as the focal point on issues of gender equality and women's human rights within the Department. It also serves to integrate these issues into foreign policy development, Canada's input into world conferences and the work of multilateral organizations.
- The Gender Equality Division of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is the agency's focal point for gender equality. Its activities include the development of mechanisms to mainstream gender perspectives into CIDA's management, planning and performance assessment systems; contributing to the Agency's knowledge base on gender equality; participation in conferences and international policy dialogue on gender equality; and the management of information on gender equality issues, particularly lessons drawn from gender equality policy implementation in developing countries.

These offices and advisors have been instrumental in assisting departments to formulate their own specific strategies for gender-based analysis and gender-equitable policies. Two examples are set out in Box 3.

BOX 3 Strategies at sectoral level – two examples

HEALTH CANADA

On March 8, 1999, the Minister of Health launched Health Canada's *Women's Health Strategy*, a framework to guide Health Canada in addressing biases and inequities in the health system. The strategy's main objectives are:

- to ensure that Health Canada's policies and programs are responsive to sex and gender differences, and to women's health needs;
- to increase the knowledge and understanding of women's health, and women's health needs;
- to support the provision of effective health services to women; and
- to promote good health through preventive measures and the reduction of risk factors that most imperil the health of women.

The strategy provides for the development of tools, methods and training materials appropriate to the health sector to assist in implementing gender-impact assessments. Health Canada will be assisted by the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health, several of which have undertaken projects to survey and analyze existing tools and curricula, upon which health sector-specific tools and curricula will be developed.

JUSTICE CANADA

The Department of Justice established its Gender Equality Initiative in 1996 with the goal of preventing and eliminating systemic gender discrimination in the Canadian justice system, and in the policies and practices of the Department of Justice. Since then, Justice Canada has:

- adopted the *Policy of the Department of Justice on Gender Equality Analysis*;
- established a network of over 55 gender equality specialists to act as resource persons for their colleagues on the application of a gender-equality analysis in their area of responsibility; and
- prepared *Diversity and Justice: Gender Perspectives*, a manual of "critical questions to be asked at each step of policy development, litigation, prosecutions, legal advice and legislative and regulatory drafting processes to ensure that gender is taken into account, inequality is identified and remedies are developed."

Federal, Provincial Territorial relations

Canada is a federation in which the federal government has responsibility for policy and programmes in certain sectors, the provinces in others and some responsibilities are shared. Some policy areas of particular concern to women are largely the responsibility of provincial governments; these include, employment standards and benefits, social services, education, and marital property. Areas for which the federal government is responsible include, monetary and

fiscal policy, trade, national health standards, and insurance coverage for periods of unemployment.

Since critical gender equality issues are therefore often affected by actions of more than one level of government, intergovernmental collaboration is important to promote coherence between federal and provincial/territorial approaches. Since 1982, productive partnership and collaboration have existed among the federal, provincial and territorial governments to advance women's equality through the efforts of the Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women. Meeting on an annual basis, Ministers have, among other things, worked together on policy issues and raised public awareness on areas of concern to women. For example, a joint initiative of Federal, Provincial, Territorial Ministers responsible for the Status of Women resulted in the 1997 publication entitled *Economic Gender Equality Indicators*. (please see page **14** for more detailed information)

Provincial and territorial governments have also developed policies and established mechanisms to promote consideration of gender equality issues in policy formulation. Some provincial and territorial governments have created action plans to implement the Beijing *Platform for Action* within their jurisdictions. Many have committed to the integration of gender-based analysis in their policies and programs. Box 4 provides a very brief overview of some of the approaches taken by these other governments.

BOX 4 Provisions for Gender-Based Analysis in provincial and territorial jurisdictions

Provincial and territorial governments have agreed on “the importance of having gender-based analysis undertaken as an integral part of the process of government” (Statement by Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, 14th Annual Meeting, May 1995). Recent steps taken by several of these governments are briefly summarized below.

British Columbia

In 1993, British Columbia embarked on a process of integrating gender-based analysis across government - into all legislation, policy and program development - by formalizing a process for the inclusion of a gender impact analysis in all Cabinet submissions. The Ministry of Women's Equality provides advice to ministries; conducts training sessions; and has developed tools such as Gender Lens: A Guide to Gender-Inclusive Policy and Program Development (revised 1997) to support policy and program developers in recognizing the potential impacts of public policy and in designing policies and programs that recognize the experiences of women and effectively meet the needs of women and men.

Alberta

Conducts gender-based analysis on an informal basis with other departments, primarily through involvement on interdepartmental committees.

Saskatchewan

The province has produced a gender-inclusive analysis guide. It also holds workshops on gender-inclusive analysis. This also incorporates the diversity of aboriginal and non-aboriginal perspectives.

Manitoba

The Manitoba Women's Directorate has taken a pivotal role in facilitating the incorporation of gender analysis in the development of government policy and programs, through the development of a “hands on” guide to assist in the implementation of gender-inclusive analysis in all departments, along with a training workshop to accompany the guide. A pilot workshop was held in June of 1999 for Senior Policy staff from government departments and received an overwhelming response; a second workshop was sponsored in October 1999.

Ontario

The Secretary of Cabinet issued a directive to departments to consult the Ontario Women's Directorate, where a substantial impact on women is anticipated in relation to a submission to Cabinet. Consultations with departments and analysis of gender impacts occur through the involvement of the Ontario Women's Directorate on interministerial committees or through established links with other departments; at other times it is done on an informal basis (for example, through work with analysts in other departments).

Québec

The ministère du Conseil exécutif (executive council), the Secrétariat du Conseil du trésor (treasury board secretariat) and the Secrétariat à la condition féminine (status of women secretariat) are jointly responsible for the work of the interdepartmental committee for the integration of gender-differentiated analysis (GDA) into the public policy process of the Government of Quebec. A steering committee composed of deputy ministers ensures the involvement of senior officials, the taking of decisions on proposed recommendations, the adoption of necessary instruments, the implementation of strategies, and the

dissemination of selected approaches. In addition to consulting with academics and non-governmental organizations, the working group reviewed the literature and examined experiences in Europe, Oceania and North America. It also reviewed governmental and departmental mechanisms governing the adoption of legislation, policies, programs and other measures. Two pilot projects are underway.

The Quebec ministère des Finances (finance department) is developing a *statistical tool to analyze the impact of fiscal policies on women and on men* and the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (health and social services department) is integrating GDA into the *Guidelines for dependent elderly persons*.

New Brunswick

The Executive Council Office has prepared a guide on gender-based analysis and a statistical profile on New Brunswick women that have been sent to all departments for use in evaluating the gender impact of policies and programs.

Nova Scotia

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women undertakes policy analysis and information-sharing with other departments. It is structuring an interdepartmental working group to examine resource and training needs to develop a more formal approach to gender-based analysis as part of the policy process within the government.

Prince Edward Island

To improve the integration of gender considerations in policy and program directions, an interdepartmental policy forum, with representatives from each department of the provincial government, was established in 1996. In its first year of operations the policy forum examined a number of GBA tools developed in other jurisdictions and sectors, and collected research on their relative effectiveness. It has not as yet developed or adopted any one tool. In the past two years, the policy forum continued to collect information on approaches used to mainstream gender perspectives, hosted a focus group on educational needs and attitudes on gender with one government department and assisted external researchers in setting up ten additional focus groups involving academic, policy and community participants. The forum will use the findings from these initiatives to further inform and develop educational strategies with policy designers, program administrators and evaluators.

Newfoundland

The Women's Policy Office has developed gender analysis guidelines. It has offered assistance to other departments on the use of these guidelines, through workshops. A preliminary analysis of follow-up surveys conducted with workshop participants indicates that 28.5% of respondents reported that they are using the gender inclusive analysis guidelines, and another 32% are applying some aspects of the knowledge and skills they gained from the workshop in their policy and program work. The Women's Policy Office is also involved in assisting other departments with GBA through involvement on interdepartmental committees.

Yukon

The government is committed to carrying out an awareness of gender considerations. Cabinet has emphasized the need to consider impact on women and aboriginal populations in the preparation of Cabinet submissions and in public consultations. This has been encouraged through the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Issues and the strong support of their Minister, whose responsibility for several portfolios, including Justice and Education, has made collaboration easier. Gender-based analysis is carried out on an informal basis with assistance from the Women's Directorate.

Northwest Territories

The Women's Advisory Office works on an informal basis with policy analysts in other departments to ensure the integration of gender considerations in their work.

Nunavut

The new territory of Nunavut, formed in April, 1999, is exploring gender-based analysis resources, tools and training through the Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth

2.3 Analytic inputs for gender-based analysis

Guidelines and assistance for gender-based analysis

The development of tools and methodologies – particularly tools and methodologies specific to particular ministries and policy sectors – was recognized in the *Federal Plan for Gender Equality* in 1995 as a major requirement for the implementation of gender-based analysis. To provide a general framework, on which other departments could build, SWC prepared a manual entitled *Gender-Based Analysis: A guide for policy-making*. Government of Canada sector-specific manuals that have been produced to date includes:

- human resources and employment: the Women's Bureau has undertaken resource and research initiatives, such as the development of *a Gender-Based Analysis Guide* (1997) and a *Gender-Based Analysis Backgrounder* (1997);
- legal analysis: the Department of Justice has prepared a manual entitled *Diversity and Justice: Gender Perspectives*, which provides guidance in taking up gender equality issues in policy development, litigation, prosecutions, legal advice, and legislative and regulatory drafting processes;
- international development cooperation: a recent publication of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which has perhaps the most experience of all government departments in implementing an agency-wide approach to gender analysis, is their *Guide to Gender-Sensitive Indicators*, with an accompanying project level handbook; and
- aboriginal affairs: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada developed a Gender Equality Policy, a manual for the application of gender equality analysis, and modules for training within the department.

Gender-Based Research

All stages of the gender-based analysis process – from the development and analysis of policy options and recommendations to the indicators used in the policy evaluation – depend on the availability and accessibility of timely, policy-relevant research. There are many individuals, agencies and institutions participating in the development of research which addresses the impact of gender on women and men's status in diverse sectors of Canadian life. Various key contributors at the federal level in this area are instrumental in ensuring the systematic collection and compilation of gender disaggregated data (Statistic Canada) and promoting and supporting independent, curiosity-driven research on gender issues (SSHRCC). Their contributions are highlighted below:

- **Statistics Canada:** Statistics Canada is the country's national statistical agency, with programs organized into three broad subject matter areas: demographic and social, socio-economic and economic. Under the Statistics Act, Statistics Canada is required to collect, compile, analyse, abstract and publish statistical information on virtually every aspect of the nation's society and economy. Statistics Canada's role in compiling and disseminating gender-disaggregated data is a crucial component in the development of relevant policy research for gender-based analysis. In partnership with the Policy Research Fund at SWC (see below), Statistics Canada published *Finding Data on Women: A Guide to Major Sources at Statistics Canada*, a document which provides information on gender-disaggregated data sources that can be used in carrying out gender-based analysis. Web site <http://www.statcan.ca>.
- **The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)** is Canada's federal funding agency for university-based research and graduate training in the social sciences and humanities. Part of SSHRC's mission is to help put the benefits of research to work by promoting the transfer of knowledge among researchers, research partners, policy makers and other stakeholders within Canadian society. SSHRC plays a key role in sponsoring research which informs gender-based analysis work through its support of theme research: problem-oriented research focussing on major social, cultural, intellectual and economic issues. One of the Strategic Research Themes which SSHRC targets is *Women and Change*.

Moreover, in recent years, the dearth of policy-relevant research which could serve as the cornerstone for enlightened policy decisions spurred the creation of several research initiatives at the federal level to address this issue. The Policy Research Secretariat, the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health and SWC's Policy Research Fund identify, support and in some instances, undertake, gender-based policy research which moves beyond the identification and analysis of a policy gap to the proposal of actual policy solutions or alternatives. Indeed, SWC defines policy research, for the purposes of its own Policy Research Fund, as research whose primary focus is linked to the public policies that advance the status of women.

The Policy Research Secretariat, the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health and SWC's Policy Research Fund are briefly described below:

- Centres of Excellence for Women's Health: In 1996, in response to the lack of research in the area of women's health, Health Canada's Women's Health Bureau established five Centres of Excellence for Women's Health across Canada. The Centres are dedicated to conducting policy oriented research, using a determinants of health approach, aimed at improving the health status of Canadian women. The Centres facilitate collaboration on women's health policy research among academics, community agencies, health professionals, service providers and women themselves. The five Centres and their institutional hosts are as follows: the Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (Dalhousie University) web site <http://www.medicne.dal.ca/mcewh/index.html>, Le Centre d'excellence pour la santé des femmes -- Consortium Université de Montréal (Université de Montréal) web site <http://www.cesaf.unmontreal.ca>, the National Network on Environments and Women's Health (York University) web site <http://www.yorku.ca/research/nweh>, Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (University of Winnipeg) web site <http://www.pwhce.ca> and the British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre). Web site <http://www.bcewh.ca>
- Policy Research Secretariat: The Policy Research Secretariat houses the Policy Research Initiative (PRI), which was launched in July 1996 by the Clerk of the Privy Council. The PRI seeks to strengthen the policy research capacity in Canada, building a solid foundation of horizontal research upon which future public policy decisions can be based. The Initiative brings together over thirty federal departments and agencies, organized into four interdepartmental research networks - Growth, Human Development, Social Cohesion, and Global Challenges and Opportunities. In 1998, the Policy Research Secretariat partnered with SWC to sponsor a workshop on *Women and the Knowledge-Based Economy and Society*, which explored the potential implications of the KBE/S for women and directions for further policy research and development in this area. Web site <http://www.policyresearch.schoolnet.ca>.
- Policy Research Fund: SWC's Policy Research Fund (PRF), launched in 1996, aims to support forward-thinking, independent, and nationally-relevant policy research on gender equality issues. Policy research, as defined for Status of Women Canada's Policy Research Fund, is nationally relevant research whose primary focus is, should be, or will be linked to the public agenda. It includes research that identifies policy gaps, new policy questions, trends and emerging issues, proposes frameworks for the evaluation, analysis and critique of existing policies, develops alternatives to existing public policies and proposes concrete policy options or recommendations. A small, non-governmental external committee (nominated by constituents) plays a key role in identifying priorities and research themes, choosing research proposals to be funded and exercising quality control over the final research products. Policy research themes explored to date include women's access to justice, women's paid and unpaid work, women's vulnerability to poverty, the integration of women's diversity into policy research, development and analysis, trafficking in women as

well as women and the Canadian Human Rights Act and women and the Canadian tax system. The research is funded on a competitive, call-for-proposal process. In its three years of operation, the PRF has received proposals from national, regional and local women's groups, academic researchers, independent researchers, research organizations, equality-seeking groups and partnerships. To date, over 20 research reports have been produced through the PRF. By funding and disseminating rigorous and credible research, SWC aims to improve the quality of public debate and policy deliberations on gender equality and thus contribute to better policies - that is, policies that advance gender equality. Web site <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca>.

Indicators

Canada has devoted attention to gender equality indicators because of their importance for measuring progress toward gender equality, and for identifying differences between women and men in factors that influence well-being.

A joint federal-provincial/territorial initiative resulted in the 1997 publication of *Economic Gender Equality Indicators* (EGEI's), a set of benchmarks to assess the relative status of women and men, and to measure change over time. The framework for selecting the EGEIs uses two mutually reinforcing routes to gender equality:

- improving women's access to domains traditionally dominated by men and encouraging men to share responsibility in female-dominated areas (e.g., removing discriminatory barriers that prevent women and men from realizing their potential); and
- correcting the undervaluation of activities where women have predominated (e.g., equal valuation of the ways in which women and men are different as well as similar, and promoting a greater sharing of society's costs and benefits).

Indices included compare women and men in such areas as earnings, income from all sources, paid and unpaid work, education and training. For policy purposes, the indicators are most valuable as a set because the interaction of income, work and learning is more complex for women, on average, than it is for men. The indicators deliberately challenge traditional assumptions and male norms, in favour of a more inclusive standard, and find new ways of using existing data to highlight realities that are often obscured.

For example, until recently, there has been little data to describe the organization of work and its implications. Public debate and public policy tended to be based on untested and often faulty assumptions. The picture provided by the set of indicators reflects the overall gendered structure of our society – that is, women work longer hours than men, they are pursuing training and higher education to a greater extent than men, but their earnings and income are still far lower than men's. The major factor in this disparity has been shown to be the social and

economic organization of the care of children and other dependents. The *Economic Gender Equality Indicators* are now being updated for publication in *Canadian Social Trends*, a widely distributed Statistics Canada periodical.

In 1998, an international symposium on Gender Equality Indicators was co-sponsored by a number of departments (SWC, Women's Bureau of Human Resources Development Canada, Statistics Canada and Health Canada) as a way to stimulate public policy discussion on equality indicators. A report of this symposium *Gender Equality Indicators: Public Concerns and Public Policies* was published in 1998.

2.4 Partnerships outside government

Recognition of the role of women's organizations

Canada has a well-developed network of over 1,500 women's organizations, which play a significant role in progress toward gender equality. They contribute to setting local, regional and national agendas for gender equality, provide direct services to women and children, and educate all sectors of the public and government on issues relevant to gender equality. The importance of violence against women on the public policy agenda is an excellent example of how women's voices and experiences have shaped legislation, policies and programs in recent years. This contribution could not have occurred without thousands of individuals in communities donating their time and expertise to improve the lives of women.

SWC's network of regional representatives maintains regular contact with equality-seeking organizations across the country. SWC's Women's Program also provides financial and technical support to a wide range of community, regional, provincial and national organizations: in 1997-98, a total of 348 projects and organizations were funded with grants totaling \$8.165 million. Further, non-monetary support for groups and individuals includes assistance with identifying alternate funding sources, information-sharing on best practices, direction on organizational development and institutional change, and direct involvement in the development and implementation of projects.

Consultation provides the government with information about the ideas and concerns of Canadian women on public policy issues affecting them. For example, as part of consultations on proposed changes to Canada's pension system, SWC organized a policy roundtable focused on gender implications. The roundtable brought together departmental representatives, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and provincial governments.

Women's organizations also participate in the public consultations on the annual federal budget held by the Department of Finance, or meet with the Minister of Finance and other key Cabinet Ministers, including the Secretary of State (Status of Women), to provide their input.

In 1996, SWC undertook a series of consultation meetings with constituents across Canada, seeking advice on various aspects of the agency's work. One result of that process was a Discussion Paper on the types of formal and informal consultation approaches, their frequency and the resource implications of future activities. The Discussion Paper was circulated to women's organizations and other equality-seeking organizations, and their comments have been taken into consideration for the Consultation Policy that SWC will soon be releasing.

3. Case studies

The “case studies” in this section outline developments in two areas and illustrate some of the challenges in achieving implementation of gender-based analysis as a routine element of policy development.

3.1 Tax treatment of child support

“Child support” refers to the financial support given to the parent with custody of the children by the other parent, on separation or divorce. Until recently, Canadian income tax provisions required the recipient of child support (usually the mother) to pay income tax on these payments; the person who paid (usually the father) could deduct the same amount from his taxable income.

This measure was of longstanding concern to women’s equality activists because of its negative financial consequences for women and the children for whom they were responsible. The measure was established in the 1940s, when few mothers were in the paid labour force and it was intended that tax savings to the father would be passed on to the custodial household. However, the operation of the measure was complex and there was little empirical evidence that it was having the intended effect. There was, in fact, evidence that the measure was hurting rather than helping the households with the children.

Despite the efforts of activists, this issue did not gain attention of policy-makers until the 1990s. Initial discussions among governments were focused on the amount of child support, not on the tax issue. However, SWC (along with activists outside government) concluded that the problem could not be remedied by child support guidelines and strong enforcement alone, and that tax changes were, in fact, required to ensure gender equality and children’s well-being. SWC’s detailed gender analysis, with input from tax and law experts, helped put the issue on the tax reform agenda and guided the development of options for tax reform.

Non-government organizations undertook further initiatives, such as public information campaigns, and lobbying of Members of Parliament and Cabinet, which contributed to mounting pressure on the federal government to review the tax treatment of child support

Further impetus for change resulted from a case before the Supreme Court which argued that the tax treatment of child support was contrary to the guarantee of equality between women and men of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Women’s organizations mobilized around the case, assisted by two projects funded through the federal Women’s Program, and several made arguments before the Court. Although the Supreme Court majority decided that the tax provisions were not contrary to the Charter, the two female judges disagreed and the debate about this case made the tax provisions a high-profile issue.

Following the Supreme Court decision, the federal government appointed an official Task Force on the taxation issue, co-led by the Secretary of State (Status of Women) and two other Members of Parliament, which held hearings across the country.

In formulating specific recommendations, both SWC and activists outside government were hindered by their limited capacity to test their policy options using actual data and modelling software. The tools for such analyses rest with line departments whose support and

cooperation was required if policy options were to be tested. Large gaps in the availability of data also made impact analysis difficult.

SWC continued to work with other federal departments in defining options for change and assessing their impact on individuals and families. Through this process the approach proposed by SWC was assessed and found to be the best option. The child support reforms package introduced in 1997 thus included child support guidelines, enforcement measures and tax system changes.

Several points about implementing gender-based analysis can be highlighted from this experience:

- the importance of alliances among experts and activities inside and outside government to place the issue on the policy agenda;
- the importance of contributing clear arguments and options to enlarge the debate to include gender equality considerations;
- the importance of analytic capacity, including when policy research and data may be limited; and
- the importance of perseverance as policy change may be a long process, with both predictable and unpredictable elements.

3.2 Unremunerated Work

Data for Canada illustrate the importance of unpaid work and its gender dimensions. Statistics Canada estimates that unpaid or non-market work done in Canada is worth between 30.6 percent and 46.3 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), depending on the method of estimation. In terms of time, women carry out 65.6 percent of all unpaid work in the household, and an even greater share of work in caring for children. (William Chandler, (The Value of Household Work in Canada, 1992), National Income and Expenditure Accounts: Quarterly Estimates, Fourth Quarterly 1993, Statistics Canada.)

It has taken many years to gain recognition of the implications of women's dependent care work for economic development, for the formulation of macroeconomic policies and for women's autonomy. Through their work over several decades, feminist economists have demonstrated that women's ability to participate in the paid labour force is inextricably linked to their unpaid caring and reproduction tasks, and that these tasks make an important contribution to overall economic activity and human development. Women's organizations in Canada and in other countries have also advocated for policy recognition of the amount and value of unpaid work, and women's disproportionate responsibility for it. Within government, SWC has worked to raise the profile of this issue, to include it in domestic and international commitments, and to facilitate the consideration of dependent care work in policy development.

For many years, attention focused on questions of measurement and valuation of unpaid work. A 1993 conference co-sponsored by SWC and Statistics Canada, for example, brought together statisticians, academics and women's groups to discuss technical and methodological issues related to definition, measurement and the attribution of monetary value. SWC also supported the development by Statistics Canada's unpaid work satellite account to the national

accounts. Assertive lobbying by women's organizations also resulted in the inclusion, in the 1996 Canadian Census, of questions on unpaid child care, elder care and housework. Statistics Canada's long-standing leadership on the measure and valuation of unpaid work has expanded national and international recognition of its economic value.

More recently, the focus of activity has shifted to the policy implications of this information. A number of policies that address aspects of unpaid work have been adopted over the years, even though their objectives did not specifically include recognition of unpaid work. Maternity, parental and adoption benefits are some examples. Another is the provision of the national public pension plan, which ensures that the pensions of parents are not reduced as a result of caring for young children. The Finance Sub-Committee of the House of Commons recently conducted hearings across Canada to examine possible tax reforms to help families with children meet their income and caregiving needs. SWC and several women's organizations were called as witnesses.

Unpaid work and its relevance to public policy have not been well understood. This is changing in many countries, however, due to the time and income constraints faced by families with children, and to an aging population in which elder care needs are increasing. A changing labour market is also affecting the way societies will meet the care and needs of children, the elderly, sick and disabled persons.

Further work is required to develop a framework for analyzing the policy implications of unpaid work, to define the most important policy issues and to implement a coherent strategy across the many relevant policy areas. This will help form the building blocks of a more comprehensive solution.

In order to identify some of the policy implications of unpaid work, SWC's Policy Research Fund issued a call for policy research proposals dealing with the theme of the relationship between the changing role of the state, women's paid and unpaid work and women's vulnerability to poverty. A notable recent contribution under this theme is a study by Dr. Isabella Bakker, entitled *Unpaid Work and Macroeconomics: New Discussions and New Tools for Action*. A considerable amount of other PRF research addresses unpaid work issues by examining child care, elder care and public service delivery issues. An example is *Benefiting Canada's Children: Perspectives on Gender and Social Responsibility*.

These initiatives are complemented by the financial support provided by SWC for the work of women's non-governmental organizations to study and promote awareness of the policy implications of unpaid work. One important product has been the development of *When Women Count: A Resource Manual on Unpaid Work*.

This account of development in relation to unpaid work highlights several points about the implementation of gender-based analysis:

- define the policy issues clearly so that the debate will be on solutions rather than definitions;
- as with the example of child support, the steady pressure of activists outside government is often an important means of placing the issue on the policy agenda;

- the need for continued policy research as well as analytic and methodological development in key areas; and
- support for rigorous gender-based analysis of all new policies and programs.

4.0 Challenges and future directions

Progress has been made in establishing a positive environment for implementing the policy commitment to gender-based analysis, and in increasing understanding and debate both within and outside government on a broader range of policy options. There is, however, room for further progress. Major challenges include:

- **Adapting to a changing government and economic environment.** In recent years, the federal-provincial/territorial relationship has been changing, with several key policy areas that have an impact on women's lives devolving to the provinces and municipalities. All governments have been "downsizing" and face adjustments in light of global restructuring, as well as shifts in population, employment and social structures. This has resulted in increasing concern among women about the need for a policy knowledge base that better reflects women's situations and interests, and greater comparability and accountability for gender equality across the country.
- **Making effective use of limited resources for stimulating gender-based analysis.** While all departments and agencies are responsible for pursuing gender-based analysis, SWC, as the national machinery, continues to play an important role as advisor and catalyst. Because of the number and complexity of policy issues associated with gender equality, SWC must react to the full spectrum of new and changing issues on the government's economic, legal and social agenda. The fact that responsibility for policies that affect women is shared by a large number of federal departments therefore presents special challenges. While SWC can and does influence other departments, it seldom possesses the direct authority to lead policy development.
- **Promoting exchanges and common understanding among stakeholders.** Stakeholders with a role in achieving progress toward gender equality include SWC as the national machinery; other federal departments and agencies; parliamentarians; provincial/territorial governments; women's organizations, other equality-seeking groups; the private sector; educational institutions; and labour, among others. These players have different perspectives as well as differing levels of knowledge and resources. This diversity makes the systematic implementation of gender-based analysis a challenge. Continued and enhanced information sharing among stakeholders, including work on clarifying definitions and terminology related to gender-based analysis, will be critical to its achievement.
- **Accomplishing systematic application of gender-based analysis.** Despite the commitment to gender-based analysis, implementation varies. Government departments continue to be criticized for not reflecting women's realities and experiences. Ongoing training, availability of gender-based research, and policy analysis is necessary to ensure consistency and quality of application.
- **Progressing with the development of analytic resources for gender-based analysis.** Despite much progress in developing data that reflects women's experiences, initiatives in

gender-based analysis have revealed major gaps that inhibit assessments of issues and policy options. SWC continues to work closely with Statistics Canada and other departments on data development and dissemination, in order to improve data information on women and men in Canada.

Further work is also required to refine indicators, and to develop indicators that reflect the social diversity of the population and recognize that factors such as Aboriginal status, disability, race, age, family status, and rural or urban location, can interact with gender in different ways. There is a concern that the Economic Gender Equality Indicators discussed in Section 2.3 over-represent progress by not sufficiently addressing the situation of less advantaged women who are experiencing deterioration in their economic circumstances. Also important is further progress in analysis and interpretation of indicators.

- **Promoting further policy links and mutual respect between governments and NGOs.** Consultations on policy issues and options with women's and other equality-seeking organizations, as well as civil society, is an important part of gender-based analysis. Such consultations complement the technical aspects of analysis with qualitative means of ensuring that conclusions and proposals reflect women's views. Perceptions of the value of such consultations among NGOs are influenced by the extent to which they believe that their views are heard and responded to, particularly given that consultations can be a time and resource-consuming process for all parties involved.
- **Political commitment.** Gender-based analysis contributes to evidence-based decision-making by ensuring systematic integration of gender perspectives throughout the policy and program development process. The successful implementation of this approach to further the progress in gender equality requires and depends on the political commitment of the party in power.