

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

The Big Picture

In Canada

- Institutional mechanisms or national machineries for the advancement of women are necessary to ensure women's needs and concerns are integrated into all programs and policies of governments at every level.
- There are Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women at federal, provincial, and territorial levels, supported by government mechanisms dedicated to advancing women's concerns. Many jurisdictions also have government-funded arm's-length advisory councils on women.
- The functions of these institutional mechanisms include policy analysis and development, research, public information, support to non-governmental organizations and designing tools for gender analysis.
- At the federal level, there is a central agency, a network of structures within departments and mechanisms to coordinate activities.

Around the World

- Nearly 75% of UN Member States have established some form of machinery for the advancement of women, with some machineries located in government, others located in civil society and still others in a mixture of the two.
- The Beijing Platform for Action stresses the importance of national machineries and the need for all parts of government and international organizations to mainstream a gender equality perspective into their work.
- Mainstreaming involves creating the structure, processes and training necessary to analyse and design policies and

programs that are effective for women and men, girls and boys.

- Absence of national machineries in some countries, and low staffing and low resources in existing machineries, continues to inhibit women's progress, and limits the abilities of these machineries to reach out to regional and local levels.

Towards Equality

In Canada

- Since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women tabled its landmark report on women's equality in 1970, Canada has developed and maintained a multi-level national machinery for promoting the advancement of women.
- Canada has had a federal Minister responsible for the Status of Women since 1971. The Minister acts as an advocate within Cabinet to ensure women's concerns are an integral part of government decision-making.
- Status of Women Canada (SWC), created in 1976, reports to the Minister and is the federal government department dedicated to women's equality. It is responsible for policy co-ordination, research, public information, funding and technical assistance related to the promotion of women's equality. SWC assumed funding, research and additional public information responsibilities in 1995.
- The Women's Program, created in 1973 and made part of SWC in 1995, is the primary source of financial and technical assistance to women's and other equality-seeking organizations working to advance gender equality. From 1995 to 2000, the Program provided core and project funding to over 1,500 initiatives at a



cost of \$43 million. The national, regional, and local equality-seeking groups that are funded deal with a wide range of issues within the areas of economic equality, social justice, and access and participation issues for women.

- Other federal structures related to women's equality include: the Women's Bureau of Human Resources Development Canada established in 1954; the Farm Women's Bureau of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada established in 1981; the Women's Health Bureau of Health Canada; the Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and International Women's Equality section of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade; and the Gender Equality Division of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).
- Since 1995, new units have been created: Justice Canada's Gender Equality Initiative; the Office of the Senior Advisor on Aboriginal Women's Issues and Gender Equality, established by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada; the Women's Bureau at Industry Canada and the gender based analysis unit in Citizenship and Immigration Canada.
- In 1995, Canada adopted the *Federal Plan for Gender Equality* that includes a policy requiring all federal government departments and agencies to carry out gender-based analysis (GBA) on future legislation and policies, where appropriate. GBA considers the impact of decision-making on both women and men, and is an important tool for effective economic and social planning.
- Statistics Canada is also a key partner in Canada's machinery. Through close cooperation over many years, Canada continues to develop its highly comprehensive body of statistics and indicators to support GBA.
- Within the Government of Canada, SWC leads the process of implementing the 1995 gender-based analysis policy. In 1999, SWC created a small GBA directorate to increase the understanding and the use of the federal policy of GBA as well as to enhance departments' use of GBA through capacity building.

Around the World

- Seventy-seven national action plans (90 %) include a specific section related to institutional mechanisms, or make explicit reference to creating and strengthening financial machineries and other government bodies, the integration of gender perspectives in legislation, public policy, programs and projects, and/or the generation and dissemination of sex disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.
- Delegations from many countries continue to visit Canada to study models for integrating the concerns of girls and women in public policy.
- Support for national machineries for the advancement of women in developing countries has been an integral part of Canada's international development assistance initiatives for gender equality. For example, support from CIDA has helped national governments strengthen machineries and participate in international conferences such as the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.
- Canada is also a strong contributor on gender issues to many international initiatives and organizations. Essential to these efforts is promoting the integration of a gender perspective into the work of international and regional fora including, for example, the United Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS), la Francophonie, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Commonwealth.
- CIDA assistance to the Government of Bangladesh led to the formation of a high-level National Council for Women and Development headed by the Prime Minister, and today a 96-member network of focal points is currently being coordinated by the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs. Other projects include:
 - technical assistance to the Kenyan Women's Bureau and a group of civil society organizations for the development of a National Policy Paper. The project also provided strategic support to the Bureau to work

with the Ministries of Finance and Planning to establish processes for engendering the national budget and sector development plans; and

- providing the Indonesian Ministry of State for the Role of Women with learning opportunities such as study tours, gender training, research and technical assistance.