

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN



The *Beijing Platform for Action* (PfA) has identified “insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women” as a critical area of concern. The PfA contains strategic objectives and actions to: create or strengthen national machineries; integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies and programs; and, generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

PATTERNS AND TRENDS

- Since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women tabled its landmark report in 1970, Canada has developed and maintained a multi-level national machinery for the advancement of women.
- Canada has had a federal Minister responsible for the Status of Women since 1971. The Minister acts within Cabinet to ensure women’s contributions and concerns are an integral part of government decision-making.
- Status of Women Canada (SWC) supports and reports to the Minister. It was created in 1976 with a mandate to “co-ordinate policy with respect to the Status of Women and administer related programs”.
- Since 1995, SWC has added responsibilities for independent research and public information, as well as funding for women’s and other equality-seeking organizations. The Women’s Program, which provides funding to these organizations, has existed since 1973 in different departments.
- While SWC is the coordinating agency for the advancement of women, each federal department and agency is responsible for gender equality. Several departments have focal points and gender-based analysis (GBA) policies, such as the Women’s Health Bureau of Health Canada, the Gender-Based Analysis Unit at Citizenship and Immigration Canada and, the Gender Equality Unit at the Canadian International Development Agency. The first such mechanism created was the Women’s Bureau in Labour Canada in 1954.
- Provincial and territorial governments also have status of women Ministers and offices within the public service, and some have independent advisory councils. In addition, there is a Federal/Provincial/Territorial (FPT) Forum of Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women that fosters sharing of good practices and works collaboratively on issues of mutual interest. Their 23rd annual meeting was held in 2004.
- Two significant FPT Ministerial initiatives are the innovative *Economic Gender Equality Indicators* (1997) and *Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile* (2002).
- Canada has a long history of continuous development of statistics and indicators. Statistics Canada routinely disaggregates data by sex and has also pioneered the measurement of unpaid work and violence against women, areas that are fundamental to understanding the realities that women face.
- *Women in Canada: a gender-based statistical report* has been produced every five years starting in 1985, providing a comprehensive picture of women and men in areas ranging from health, family status and education to paid and unpaid work and income.
- The first federal plan of action on gender equality was developed in 1976 following the 1st United Nations World Conference on Women. In 1995, the *Federal Plan for Gender Equality* included a policy requiring federal departments and agencies to carry out gender

based analysis (GBA) on future policies as a tool for effective economic and social planning. For 2000 – 2005, the *Agenda for Gender Equality* was introduced as a strategy to accelerate GBA implementation, increase support to women's organizations, and to meet international commitments.

- Canada has an extensive and diverse network of women's organizations and equity seeking groups many of which receive government support. These organizations contribute in many ways to priority-setting and public policy development.
- The inclusion of women's equality rights in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is an example of Canada's legal foundations and a prime example of the impact of non-government organizations (NGOs), who lobbied for this constitutional guarantee.

- *Women in Canada 2005, a gender-based statistical report* is expected to be published in the fall of 2005.
- The federal government will use lessons learned in the Beijing +10 review and appraisal process to work with NGOs, Parliamentarians and other partners to develop a new federal strategy on gender equality for the future.

RECENT INITIATIVES

Examples of federal government initiatives include:

- In 2002, the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* included the requirement to report on the impacts of the *Act* from a gender-based perspective in an annual report to Parliament.
- A significant addition to Canada's mechanisms is the creation, in the fall of 2004, of a Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women.
- In 2004, a dialogue with experts in gender equality as well as others with expertise in government machinery and governance issues was held, to examine ways in which accountability for gender equality could be improved in Canada.
- A F/P/T/Aboriginal Forum addressing issues of concern to Aboriginal peoples includes Aboriginal women's organizations. A recent series of roundtables held by the Prime Minister on issues such as housing, education and governance all included a gender perspective. Aboriginal women are also involved in the development of a report card on progress for Aboriginal peoples.