# Chapter 4: PRST

# Institutionalisation of gender: Co-option and accommodation[1]

> *"We commit ourselves to promoting full respect for human dignity and to achieving equality and equity between women and men, and to recognising and enhancing the participation and leadership roles of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life and in development."*[2]

## Introduction

The series of United Nations World Conferences in the nineties on the Environment (Rio), on Human Rights (Vienna) on Social Development (Copenhagen) and on Population (Cairo) focussed on issues of women's advancement and empowerment. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 was the culmination of many strands of women's activism in a process of protracted negotiations, for action on these issues. Governments of the world agreed on the Beijing Platform for Action as an attempt to address some of the inequalities and injustices women face the world over.

Since the declaration of the Women's Decade (1976-85), many states have put into place specific institutions such as Women's Ministries and Women's Bureaux and ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The UN Secretary-General's report before the Commission on the Status of Women (43rd session March 1999) enumerated the problems that have plagued national machineries since 1975:

- they are positioned marginally in government's bureaucratic structure and have little influence on the overall policy-making process
- they have no clear mandate
- they are not linked up with NGOs
- they are not linked to line ministries in the government structure
- they lack support on gender mainstreaming from government officials and parliamentarians, with the latter assuming that gender is not relevant in such areas as the economy, defence, and energy policy
- there are difficulties in combining policy-advisory functions and actual programme implementation
- personnel lack know-how and training on gender issues
- lack of funds[3]

As can be seen from table 4.1 overleaf (Indicators of women in high-level jobs in some selected countries in the South) women have not been able to make significant entries into management echelons, however in the professional and technical levels the gains are slightly higher. This confirms critical feminist views that institutionalising women into state structures result in benefits for the middle classes. However, even within the professional sphere, middle class women still earn far less than their male counterparts.

## Representation and institutionalisation does not lead to social transformation

The participation of women in politics and government bureaucracies has not led to a significant shift in the balance of power between men and women. Women's participation in structures, either national machinery or government, must be backed by critical feminist consciousness if it is to promote social transformation. Indeed the constant engagement with a critical mass of women outside and inside structures of governance is crucial.

Feminists have raised the problematic relationship of women to the state, and question changes that are touted as part of gender-equitable development processes. They have argued that the state must be viewed as an



institution where male privileges remain deeply embedded. These cannot be addressed by the mere integration of women into the sphere of politics and the bureaucracy. Feminists also question the argument that conflates female representation with the idea that this will result in feminist decisions and policies. The one does not automatically lead to the other, not just because individual women in the institutions of state cannot all be assumed to be concerned with gender equity, but because of institutionalised resistance to gender equity within the apparatus of governance.

**Table 4.1: Indicators of women in high level jobs in some selected countries in the South (1995)**

**A = % administration and managerial posts occupied; B = % professional and technical women; C = Salaries of women as a percentage of men's income**

| | A | B | C | | A | B | C |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bangladesh | 5.1 | 23.1 | 23 | Malaysia | 11.9 | 44.5 | 29 |
| Bolivia | 16.8 | 41.9 | 17 | Maldives | 14.0 | 34.6 | 17 |
| Botswana | 36.1 | 61.4 | 29 | Mauritania | 7.7 | 20.7 | 18 |
| Brazil | 17.3 | 57.2 | 29 | Mauritius | 14.3 | 41.4 | 25 |
| Burkina Faso | 13.5 | 25.8 | 40 | Mexico | 20.0 | 43.6 | 24 |
| Burundi | 13.4 | 30.4 | 42 | Mozambique | 11.3 | 20.4 | 42 |
| Cameroon | 10.1 | 24.4 | 30 | Namibia | 20.8 | 40.9 | 19 |
| Cape Verde | 23.3 | 48.4 | 32 | Nigeria | 5.5 | 26.0 | 30 |
| Central African Rep. | 9.0 | 18.9 | 39 | Pakistan | 3.4 | 20.1 | 19 |
| Chile | 17.4 | 34.0 | 21 | Papua New Guinea | 11.6 | 29.5 | 35 |
| Colombia | 27.2 | 41.8 | 32 | Peru | 20.0 | 41.1 | 22 |
| Costa Rica | 21.1 | 44.9 | 26 | Philippines | 33.7 | 62.7 | 30 |
| Cuba | 18.5 | 47.8 | 30 | Rwanda | 8.2 | 32.1 | 41 |
| Ecuador | 31.5 | 48.0 | 17 | Singapore | 34.3 | 16.1 | 31 |
| El Salvador | 25.3 | 44.5 | 26 | Solomon | 2.6 | 27.4 | 30 |
| Fiji | 9.6 | 44.7 | 18 | South Africa | 17.4 | 46.7 | 30 |
| Ghana | 8.8 | 35.7 | 32 | Sri Lanka | 16.9 | 24.5 | 33 |
| Guatemala | 32.4 | 45.2 | 19 | Sudan | 2.4 | 28.8 | 21 |
| Haiti | 32.6 | 39.3 | 36 | Thailand | 21.8 | 52.4 | 37 |
| India | 2.3 | 20.5 | 25 | Togo | 7.9 | 21.2 | 32 |
| Indonesia | 6.6 | 40.8 | 32 | Trinidad & Tobago | 23.3 | 53.3 | 28 |
| Lesotho | 33.4 | 56.6 | 30 | Uruguay | 25.3 | 62.6 | 32 |
| Malawi | 4.8 | 34.7 | 33 | Zambia | 6.1 | 31.9 | 25 |
| | | | | Zimbabwe | 15.4 | 40.0 | 27 |

Source: *The World Guide 1997/98: A View from the South*, Instituto del Tercer Mundo. Oxford: New Internationalist Publications Ltd.

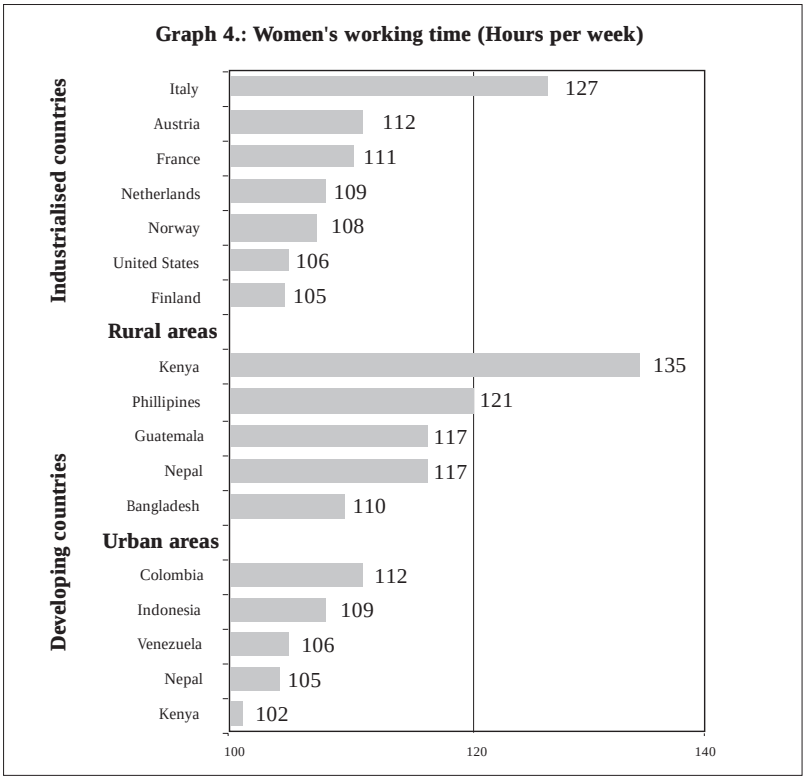
## The family as a site of struggle: Limits to institutionalisation

While there is a diversity of views among feminists on the degree to which the state oppresses women, they converge in viewing the family as the core site of women's oppression. For it is the family that defines the dividing line between the public and the private domains; that is, the boundary of state interference in individual existence. Thus, it is in policy towards the family in which the state intervenes (or not!) most powerfully in the lives of women regardless of political systems. State policy towards women within the family, however, is highly complex, because it is not unidirectional. It varies depending on its purpose, alternatively and sometimes simultaneously controlling and supporting women.

It follows that policy-making which addresses strategic and practical gender needs, is an important area for intervention. While both needs complement each other, there is recognition that by addressing strategic gender needs, women can achieve greater equality, in the process changing existing roles and challenging women's subordinate position.

The call for women to become visible in politics, traditionally a male domain, is one step towards challenging women's subordinate position. But even as there is some increased visibility of women in the public domain, the unequal terms on which women and men enter the public domain has been downplayed by the state. The situation has not significantly changed in the private sphere. The vast majority of women are still overburdened by reproductive duties that have not been equally shared by men. Indeed women are expected to share the burden of addressing both productive and reproductive roles. The hours women work are more than double the normal working hours per week posing extreme hardship on women and also limits to how they can engage in state structures (refer to graph 4.1 on the following page). Nonetheless, as one feminist observed, it is not the presence of women in politics that have made them stand out, but rather it is their absence in a male-dominated field.

Likewise, "training women in marketable skills and abilities will not give them the same degree of agency as men in the public domain as long




as public institutions do not accommodate the different bodies, needs and values that they bring to the workplace. Gender equity thus goes beyond equal opportunity; it requires the transformation of the basic rules, hierarchies and practices of public institutions."

## Development agencies: The reality gap

> "*Clearly the official agencies of development, both within national machineries and at the international level, have the resources and social weight to play an important role in implementing this*

*broader vision of gender equity. However to what extent can institutions that have systematically displayed prejudiced and stereotyped views about women be relied upon to implement the goals of gender equity? There has now been sufficient research into these issues to suggest that the institutions responsible for development planning and administration are not exempt from the gendered processes identified in the public domain at large.*

*Bureaucracies do not passively reflect the values of the wider society, but are actors in their own right, with a stake in upholding the hierarchical organisation of gender. Research into gender relations within bureaucratic organisations suggests that, despite differences in the cultures in which they are located, and the resources which they command, there is a remarkable similarity in the way in which bureaucratic rules and practices actively reconstitute gender hierarchy. Women and men are positioned differently and unequally both as the agents of policy administration and as objects of policy attention. There are few women at the top levels of decision-making within policy to transform this state of affairs, and even fewer who are willing to challenge dominant agency practice. Consequently, even organisations that have adopted goals of gender equity have frequently failed to implement them."*[4]

## Government: Rhetoric and instrumental use of women

Women's groups view governments' pronouncements of commitment to gender equity and closing the gender gap with cynicism and suspicion. Government institutions often equate gender equity with providing access and opportunities for women to participate in the production of goods and services that can contribute to the country's GNP, trade and dollar reserves. It is also equated with efficiency and welfare issues as improved education or health will enable women to perform better in the productive sphere and function well in their reproductive roles. As such these programmes benefit society at large.

Such orientation conflicts with the rights-based feminist view of gender equity that does not need to be justified in terms of outcomes. Instead, it should be seen "as a matter of social justice and social transformation aimed



at redistributing resources and social value more equally between women and men." This means that women need to undermine the gender hierarchies that lead to marginalisation of women in the world of politics and economic production. These kinds of changes can be profoundly threatening to men's privileges, and arouse considerable resistance.

The question remains whether institutions can achieve enough autonomy from dominant interests to challenge male privileges and promote policies necessary for gender equity.

## The South Asian experience

In South Asia countries different approaches to institutionalise gender have been used through the last decades, starting during the colonial period (welfare, equity and WID, anti-poverty and empowerment). Only the latter tries to deal with issues of domination and power and recognises the need to change institutionalised oppression (e.g. in laws, property rights, etc), and has its roots in struggles by feminist and women's grassroots organisations in the developing world.

South Asia offers the paradox of having had one of the first women heads of state and having mobilised thousands into the Grameen bank. On the other hand women bear the greatest burden of gender imbalance, violence and fundamentalism. The forces that affect women's socio-economic and political status are both internal and external (e.g. SAP, globalisation, crippling of local initiatives and inability of nation-state to resolve problems, consumerism) to nation-states. External forces are compounded by the rise of internal religious fundamentalism. One of the positive outcomes of external forces is the international pressure to mainstream/ institutionalise gender. Failure to achieve this is due to a lack of political commitment and attempts to inject it into entrenched patriarchal systems, without simultaneously working towards social transformation.

The reservations placed by India, Pakistan and Bangladesh against critical Articles of CEDAW that address the issues of equality and non-discrimina-

tion render the Convention ineffective in those countries.[5] Nepal remains the only South Asian country which has ratified the CEDAW on the basis that all its Articles will pass into national law automatically and does not require separate and specific legislation in order to become a part of the national legal structure.

All South Asian states have established state agencies with the explicit aim of improving the "status of women". The impetus for this has largely coincided with the United Nations Women's Conferences since 1975 and the declaration of the UN Women's Decade (1976-85), such gains were achieved through the contemporary feminist movement. A Women's Bureau was established in Sri-Lanka in 1977. In India, in 1985 the government established a Ministry of Human Development under which a Department of Women and Child Development was created and in Sri-Lanka a Ministry for Women's Affairs was established in 1986. The high-point of such initiatives by the state was in the run up to and soon after the Beijing World Women's Conference in 1995.

In 1990, the Indian Government also established a National Commission for Women. In 1993, the state introduced a Women's Charter, which included many of the provisos contained in the UN Convention on Women, and with the addition of a section on violence against women. Women's organisations were deeply involved in the process of drafting the Charter, and have since then, lobbied for the creation of a National Commission on Women, to monitor the implementation of the Charter.[6] The Institutional Review of the Women in Development (WID) was set in motion before the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Post Beijing, a National Action Plan for Women's Advancement initiated by the Ministry culminated into a National Policy for Women's Advancement in March 1997.[7] A Parliamentary Standing Committee has also been formed in an advisory capacity to the government for reviewing existing programs for the advancement of women and suggesting recommendations for improvement.

In Pakistan, the election of Benazir Bhutto in 1993 coincided with initiation of the pre-Beijing process. The relentless activism in all international



conferences by Pakistan's NGOs had gained visibility and in the lead to Beijing, the government initiated a collaborative process with them through the Ministry of Women's Development. In the aftermath of Beijing, CEDAW was signed in 1996.

The Bhutto regime took an important step in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. It also brought together NGOs, women activists and governmental officials in drafting and developing the 20- year National Plan of Action (NPA) for Women at the federal and provincial levels. However, a change of government soon after resulted in its finalisation after two years.[8]

South Asia is one of the few regions of the world to have produced high-profile women leaders with four out of five countries having women as presidents or Prime Ministers at some point of time in the post-independence history. However, it also remains a region with a very low proportion of women leaders in the federal, state or provincial levels. The roots of this apparent paradox lie in an entrenched patriarchal system prevalent in South Asia. The women leaders at the helm of South Asian countries are a part of the "over the dead body" syndrome whereby widows or daughters of dead charismatic male leaders acquire the legitimacy to take over the leadership in a culture of dynastic politics.[9]

There is another set of patriarchal values that creates many barriers for the ordinary woman to rise to political leadership in South Asia.[10] Recognising this drawback, all countries of the region have instituted affirmative measures to remedy this situation through legal and legislative action.

## Numbers do not translate into qualitative gains for women

***The Panchayat Raj –-Women in local government***

*In India, two Constitutional Amendments - the 73rd and 74th - made it possible for 1/3rd of the representatives elected to three-tier Village, Block and District Panchayats to be women. As a consequence over 1 million women throughout India today are members of these local government bodies called Panchayat Raj.[11] The Act also ensures that one-third of the positions available for presidents (Sarpanch) of the local-self government councils are reserved for women. The*

*81st Amendment to make 1/3rd reservations for women in the parliament and the assemblies has been stalled twice and is a subject of much controversy because of demands for reservation within reservation for backward caste women. In September 1996, when the bill was introduced in the parliament, the house was more than half empty and 80 MPs (Members of Parliament, mostly men) submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister threatening to vote against the bill on the grounds that it did not provide reservations for other minorities. Two years later, in July 1998, when the bill was introduced again, the house witnessed a pandemonium as male members used every possible disruptive tactic, including physical assaults forcing five adjournments and effectively scuttled the introduction of the Women's Reservation Bill.* [12]

The example in the box above is termed as the "patriarchal conspiracy" by the women's movement. It reflects the lack of political will from most of the political parties (except the left, who are in the minority) to give up seats in favour of women.

The Indian experiment with the Panchayati Raj is a unique example of Political Restructuring and Social Transformation in the region. Once the Act came into being, every political party took pains to field their candidates. In some instances, it ended up in political leaders and party members fielding women - wives, sisters, daughters - to stand for elections. The reservation policy has translated into women de jure occupying 33-40% of the positions in the village councils, which are powerful decision making bodies. However, in terms of genuine participation of women, the experience is very mixed and difficult to generalise in a country as vast as India with Panchayat Raj functioning in 22 states.

After independence women have become more marginalised in terms of representation in Parliament and political parties: e.g. in the 1930–40's there were more women in the Congress Party than there are today in ALL parties together. Women's position deteriorated in India during Gandhi's term of office.

In 50 years since India's independence, the percentage of women members in parliament has never exceeded 7.2%. In fact, in 1996 there was a

set back with women members occupying only 6.2% of a 537-member house.

The democratic political institutions like the panchayats also do little to mitigate the patriarchal value systems that emerge from the complex socio-cultural fabric of the Indian society. One, women have to deal with codes and norms of behaviour (veiling in some states, inability to stay out late at nights in others). This has implications for their participation as leaders in the public sphere. Two, male relatives often call the shots and make all the decisions for the women giving rise to the phenomenon of "proxy/surrogate leaders" and the "dependency syndrome". Three, for substantial majority, women have a genuine handicap of being catapulted from their kitchens and homes to the forefront of decision making in village matters, with little knowledge of local politics, political processes and power-play. This affects their performance in the meetings, in decision-making and in being assertive with their decisions.

In Bangladesh, women do not stand for elections to the Parliament, but a provision exists to nominate 30 women. However, at the local level, the Union Parishad women are directly elected with reservation of seats.[13] This is a breakthrough for the purdah-based society of Bangladesh. In the parliament, women's political participation by nomination through "protected" representation is variously interpreted as negative, because of women's disadvantaged position in the socio-cultural context of Bangladesh that precludes them from competing successfully with male politicians from territorial constituencies. The nomination process renders women's participation in the legislature fully dependent on male patronage of the party in power and effectively undermines women's representative status. In the recent electoral politics of Bangladesh where no party won an absolute majority, the women's seats have become the "deciding factor" for the party that gets the maximum seats to form the government. As for the Union Parishad women at the local level, several problems have emerged, including physical violence and the rape of five women members. One member

was raped for refusing to be corrupt and have the "audacity" to file a complaint with the police.

In Pakistan, since its inception in 1947, reservation for women has increased from 3 per cent to 10 per cent in 1985, ironically, this was during the period of martial law and military dictatorship where retrogressive legislation on women's rights were introduced. Translating to 20 seats for women, the military dictator nominated women from religious groups to these seats. The reservation for women has operated on the principle of indirect elections, where deputies of the national and provincial assemblies elect the women representatives. This procedure has, like in the case of Bangladesh, strengthened the hold of male politicians in the male dominated political parties and provided them with the means of increasing the party seats through this provision. Since 1990, this provision has elapsed and subsequent assemblies as a result have had very few women parliamentarians.[14]

Sri Lanka –with one of the highest Human Development indicators in the developing world (e.g. no gender difference in school enrolment and unlike other countries under study, women have a greater life expectancy than males), has not translated these gains into women's participation in mainstream institutions. Constitutionally and legally women have guaranteed equal political rights (since 1931). Yet, there are low levels of women's representation at all levels of government and this has decreased between 1991-1997. This is due to the dual role in family (wife/mother) and social and cultural prejudices, which negate constitutionally guaranteed political freedom. Historically, women's political involvement and attainment of high positions is dependent on and reinforced by patriarchal and dynastic elements. *(Refer to table 2.1.)*

In Nepal, since the restoration of democracy in 1990, constitutional provisions were introduced making it mandatory to nominate at least 5 per cent women candidates for the election to the House of Representatives



and 7 women seats in National Assembly. A 20 per cent reservation for women at the ward level has been introduced increasing women's representation in the village council, resulting in an estimated 36,000 women as Elected ward representatives in Nepal. In Sri-Lanka there is a proposal to reserve 25 per cent of the seats in the Parliament and at the local level.

***Victories of women's struggle***

*Many women activists who tactically allied with progressive and sympathetic politicians have targeted constitution-writing processes as an opportunity in influencing the state from a gender perspective. In Thailand, a campaign waged by the 35-member Women and Constitution Network resulted in the inclusion of five issues related to gender equality in six articles of the 1997 constitution. Thus, guarantees of gender equality, protection from domestic violence, elimination of discrimination against women, protection of female labour and women's representation in the parliamentary special commission have been incorporated. Women's groups in Thailand and Malaysia have also successfully pressed their respective governments to withdraw most of its reservations to specific articles of the CEDAW.*

Activists working in the border of Burma have utilised CEDAW to raise consciousness among women refugees on the issue of women's rights. NGOs in Thailand used the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW as their common ground with government when discussing women's issues.

## The South East Asian experience[15]

### Policy and legislative advances

Intensive lobbying by women's groups has also led to the enactment of codes and legislation that uphold women's interests. A most significant accomplishment in the last five years is in the area of violence against women (VAW). In Malaysia, the government enforced the Domestic Violence Act in 1996, two years after it was passed as a law. In Thailand, laws on traf-

ficking in women have been promulgated. In the Philippines, a recent legislation has declared sexual harassment as unlawful in the employment, education or training environment while a new Anti-Rape Law has redefined rape as a crime against persons, and not against chastity.

The sustained advocacy and lobby for the passage of such landmark laws have demonstrated that violence in gender relations is a development and justice issue, and not a private matter as prevailing notions insist. Women have politicised issues that have been relegated to the private domain and have been able to slowly transform the conduct and culture of politics. Indeed, women's political struggles have forced the issue of government's accountability to women in addressing VAW.

Even as the principle of gender equality is affirmed in codes and legislation, it is often thwarted in practice. Laws protecting women's rights and interests have yet to be implemented and fully enforced, and their effectiveness tested in court. The challenge is to translate legal status into legal reality. For despite women's constitutional right to equality with men in all respects, many influences discriminating against the advancement of women remain intact. This is because the institutions that prop up the patriarchal ideology and systems have not been transformed.

## Gender mainstreaming and national women's machineries

> *"When a new issue, such as gender, appears on the planning agenda, the first question raised is who will deal with it? Is it necessary to create an entirely new institutional structure or is it more appropriate to institutionalise it within existing mainstream organisations? Or is the best strategy simultaneously to do both?"*

In most countries, both strategies of gender mainstreaming and setting up machineries for women's advancement have been established by governments, as a result of pressure from the international community, the women's movements and funding imperatives.



Cognisant that rhetoric will not automatically translate into affirmative action, representatives of the world's women at the International Women's Year conference in Mexico City in 1975 pushed governments to establish an agency or institutional mechanisms dedicated to promoting equality and gender equity and improving the status and conditions of women. The term "national women's machineries" (NWMs) has been adopted to refer to these agencies which have emerged as key institutional systems for the advancement of women, with government focal points as their primary components. NWMs are tasked with co-ordinating policy-making and supporting government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas. They serve as advisory and co-ordinating bodies. Their tasks include issue identification, priority setting, advocacy, awareness building, policy development, policy analysis, policy influence, welfare protection and monitoring. They also act as a link between government and NGOs.

Mainstreaming in relation to gender and women has gained importance since the Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985. This refers to bringing the gender perspective into the national life which is defined by the UN as 'the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.'

***Structural barriers to gender mainstreaming and institutionalisation***

Despite its common usage in government rhetoric, it was by no means clear to national development agencies just what mainstreaming meant. Many misconceptions continue to confuse policy makers and development agencies. Firstly, that mainstreaming is the responsibility of the ministry for women, gender units and women staff (as opposed to being the respon-

sibility of all key decision-makers such as the head of state, the cabinet, the ministers). Secondly, that mainstreaming is just about special projects, programmes and policies for women (as opposed to promoting the full and equal participation of women in decision-making in all areas and at all levels). Thirdly, that gender analysis is not necessary, nor is it used on a routine basis to identify the differential access to and impacts on women and men of all projects, programmes and policies. Fourthly, that such analysis does not have to be used to devise measures to bring about equal participation and equal benefits for women and men. Fifthly, mainstreaming is seen as changes for women and will only benefit women (as opposed to changing gender relationships between women and men in order to achieve more equal sharing of power and responsibility, that benefits both women and men). There is also a fallacy that mainstreaming is only about changes in women's gender roles and capacities (as opposed to requiring changes in men's roles, attitudes and behaviours as well).

***National machineries and the reproduction of gender hierarchies***

State-sponsored NWMs in SEA were created 'top-down' by the political leadership as a response to the demand from the international community during the Women's decade. This meant that their creation was often more a symbolic gesture than a legitimisation of women's activities. Except for the Philippines, they are not given the power to initiate legislative action that is deemed as an important measure for institutionalising changes.

National machineries generally have very little formal power, as their status in the government hierarchy is generally low. The tendency has been for them to use the "referent power" of their ministers or that of a sympathetic patron, such as head of state. They thus become dependent on these allies. Some heads or directors of national machineries use their personal charismatic power to effect change, failing to understand that when the issues, approaches and activities are viewed as personal to the head of the agency, it becomes difficult to sustain any gains achieved when that person leaves the position.

Bureaucrats view WID as an instrument rather than a goal itself: a means for economic growth or more successful political mobilisation. Income-generating activities for women are promoted, but a redefinition of sex roles to alleviate the resulting double burden is ignored despite its commitment to promoting the welfare of workers. Given the narrow conceptualisation of women's work, issues such as prostitution and mail order brides have not been seen as legitimate concerns of the labour department.

Stubborn male resistance within bureaucracies and a generally hostile environment remain to be one of the most formidable barriers to mainstreaming gender. This is because governments in the main have continued to see women as an add-on or separate matter, purely the concern of the women's bureau.

It comes as no surprise then that national machineries are criticised from all fronts - from within the bureaucracy and from NGOs and women's groups who criticise them for consistently under-performing and not "getting institutions right" for women.

## National plans and public policies

***Lack of political commitment to gender equity is reflected in state budgetary allocations***

> *"Governments in (South East Asia) can claim that they are committed to the Beijing Platform for Action and could quickly show evidences to back up such claim.*
>
> *Everywhere, there are women-friendly policy statements, national machineries, or national plans for women. However, all governments will also claim that the main reason for non-implementation is the question of finances, particularly at this time when national budgets are tighter and economies have either shrunk or stagnated. When times were good, government financing for women's development was already low.*
>
> *The lack of finances is therefore not the only and most critical factors as to why governments lack success in performance. Re-*

> *gardless of whether there is money or not, commitment to the advancement of women that requires gender responsive policies, plans, programmes and monitoring schemes, have always been given an insignificant slice of the pie.*[16] "

Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand have formulated national plans and identified priority areas. With the exception of the richest country, Brunei, although these governments have allocated resources for women-specific development programmes they remain negligible. In Thailand, the budget allocated directly for women development is only 0.003 of the overall budget[17] . In Indonesia, a case in point is the Ministry of Education, which allocated less than 1% to women-specific development programmes.

***Women in power and decision making***

In most countries, policy-makers, development planners and programmers, particularly at decision-making levels, are men. Given this, gender-mainstreaming efforts in Asia Pacific has particularly emphasised increasing women's active involvement in politics, leadership and governance. Even though there are some improvements in the participation of women in politics and decision-making in the Asia Pacific region, women still remain minorities in national legislative bodies and other government apparatus. For instance, female representation in the national assemblies of the South East Asian countries ranges from 6 to 13 percent. *(Refer to table 2.1.)*

## Confinement to traditional sectors

Institutional barriers as presented by prevailing political systems and structures impede women's participation. Political parties are male-dominated and quotas set for women's participation are rarely met. Most political parties do not have women's platform and do not assist women to take on leadership roles. The exorbitant financial costs of running for public office are a major barrier to the political participation of women, and their marginalised social sectors. Women compared with men have limited ac-



cess to political resources, e.g., the support of political parties and private business interests. The "winner take all" type of electoral system effectively rules out minority groups such as women. Such system diminishes women's chances of getting elected because they must garner the majority vote to win a seat, unlike a proportional representation system.

There continues to be an absence of educational and awareness-raising programmes that address gender equality in political and public life, and that build consciousness among women that they can exercise considerable political power as a major political constituency. Bruns observed that attempts to establish all-women or feminist parties have generally failed, but that this should not be misconstrued as a bad sign. "Because women are as different as men are. They stand for, vote for and live in different value systems. So the fact of being a woman is not enough to constitute the programme of a party. But even if some feminist parties have failed they have proved to be a good tool to pressure for gender issues later taken up by bigger parties. Parties in Asia now are beginning to realise that the female vote is an important one. So there is a chance for pressure on certain issues if the female voters are making themselves heard by not voting for those who do not represent their issues."

In addition, the growing religious fundamentalism and the lack of access to new communication and information technologies serve as factors that limit women's active political participation. The rise in religious fundamentalism is acting to prevent women from seeking public office. Women who have taken up the challenge and entered political life, especially at the local government levels, have found themselves vulnerable and actually subjected to various forms of violence such as harassment, physical assault, rape and even murder. Similarly, the threat of and use of violence is being employed to intimidate women from seeking office.

# The Latin American and Caribbean experiences of institutionalisation[18]

## Reasserting culture in institutional transformation

Feminists in Latin America state that we should re-think the importance of relating to power as it is, and consider whether existing power that dominates is what is needed. The concepts of plurality, diversity, affection, and solidarity, are what should inform feminists' agenda for institutionalisation. Latin American experiences point to the State, as not neutral, because the State is composed of people. The same is the case of the markets. Therefore feminists need to debate the process of institutionalisation because it leads to co-option and containment rather than transformation.[19] There are common trends in Latin America and Caribbean as emerged in other regions of the South.

## Securing the gains

Feminists claim that more time and energy needs to be put into analysing the gains achieved through women's struggles. Women entering political spaces and national machinery are the first phase but this needs to be taken further.

Gender, while no longer a marginal issue within society, is not yet a significant part of the Governments' agenda. Gender justice is not one of the aims of current economic development process. For this reason women have to focus on mainstreaming gender in all public policies. The movements towards gender justice should be accompanied by other changes in institutions, in the organisations, but women can not wait for the change to happen, they have to engage with institutions of power.

However, there is growing recognition that more institutionalisation does not mean more power. Further, it is important to analyse the issue of institutionality and try to change it. Women should also think of the creation of new mechanisms and ways of transforming existing structures. In

Mexico, women have not been sufficiently capable of intervening in the mechanisms in which national priorities are decided.

## Transforming national budgets

A significant shift has taken place in Latin American and Caribbean states over the years. While in the past women engaged in programmes and projects today there is an attempt to examine national budgets from a gender perspective. Budgets are key in the political economy of countries and are the policy tools through which the redistribution of resources can be effected. Women's exercise of political pressure on budgets needs, however to be increased.

## Changes in the institutionalising of gender

Gina Vargas highlighted the changes that have taken place during the nineties owing to internal pressure of feminists, external pressure in the form of recommendations from UN conferences and pressure from bilateral and multilateral entities and the modernisation projects of States.

By mid-eighties, countries such as Brazil had created the first state institutions to address women's issues as a demonstration of their commitment. By the nineties most of the countries of the region had introduced gender machinery. State institutions that were set up to address gender concerns made attempts to include gender equity perspectives in social policies. People began to identify women as significant actors in the use of local spaces, able to mediate, and also able to assist in the development of women as a category of excluded people.

## Variations in institutional responses

In response to mobilisation from women and the diversity of claims there have been marked variations in how governments have responded. The response could be characterised as having varied orientations and promoting the use of differentiated power. In this regard, Vicki Guzmán identified three types of responses from the State. States react in ways that reinforce the stereotype notion that women should remain exclusively inside the family. They also identify specific problems of women and their families with a corre-

sponding sector of public institutions and attempt to provide "women specific" solutions. A few states have responded to feminist engagement by introducing a gender perspective and analysis into policies and programmes.

Although there are exceptions, institutions tend to focus on economic and social spheres and have not promoted an inclusive citizenship or women's political participation. But even institutions are weak, without a budget of their own. They compete for funds with civil society, they have not engendered equality policies in the State and they do not establish clear mediation and negotiation channels with civil society and feminists. Experience shows that more progress can be attained not only in democratic contexts but also when there is participation for reforms, as well as a better level of gender institutionality in the state machinery.

## Forming a "power triangle"

Women have underscored the importance of a "power triangle", of an alliance between feminists of civil society, feminists in the state bureaucracy or "femocrats" and political feminists. The region does not have a critical mass of femocrats[20] within state bureaucracies. Instead, people come together during emergencies and do not attempt to consolidate power for social transformation.

## Quotas within neo-liberal policies constrain gender equity

There have been some gains through, quotas have been successful in countries such as Argentina (from 4% to 21% and then 28%), Brazil, Salvador and Nicaragua. In Peru, the number of candidacies and women elected into politics has grown. But there are countries, such as Bolivia, where quotas did not result in a significant increase of women's participation in elective offices, mainly because the quota was no longer linked to the electoral system. Quotas have not been approved in countries such as Chile because of the authoritarian composition of the Senate.

While quotas increase the numbers of women who enter political space, when this happens within a neo-liberal context the possibility for transformation and gender justice are constrained. Women in the region indicate

that this context tends to limit the State's role and subordinates public policies to the logic of market forces.

### Autonomous agendas and alliances

There is not only one feminist agenda but several, overlapping and accumulative agendas, at the same time operating within different levels and spaces through which women want to exert influence and introduce changes. These agendas intend to consolidate democratic spaces and build alliances with other movements and social or political forces with the same objective. Alliances can sometimes diffuse and weaken the feminist agenda for change. But feminist agendas also have a "hard core" that focuses on long-term transformation. This is not easily negotiable with the rest of the actors and provides feminists with strategic focus on the cultural-political project of women's emancipation.

Feminist proposals should be a point of mobilisation by many sectors of society, because they then have more possibilities of being incorporated into state agendas. Not resorting to this is a mistake. In this way, the promotion of different agendas by civil society organisations offers strategic possibilities in engaging with the state. Thus, feminist agendas should become "navigation charts" which serve as a guide under different circumstances and possibilities so as to keep feminist ethics and negotiations balanced.

## African experiences of institutionalisation

Pereira[21] explains that attempts to institutionalise gender equity and equality in Africa have taken the form of Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) desks, bureaux, committees, departments in ministries and sometimes whole ministries in themselves. Furthermore, from the late 1980s onwards, funding agencies shifted their policies from providing small sums towards women and development projects to the integration of gender concerns in general projects or what is referred to as gender mainstreaming. According to Pereira institutionalisation of WID and GAD requires two preconditions: First the state has to be viewed as

*legitimate*, a neutral body that exists as a site for the common good. Second, there must be *political will* and *political commitment* to address issues of gender inequality, discrimination and domination. She points out that in reality, state legitimacy is questionable. The economic changes associated with globalisation, have brought about new political changes that make the state even more illegitimate.

The main threat of the shift from WID and GAD approaches to gender mainstreaming is that there is a possibility of the abolition of women's desks. The argument for the abolition of women's desks is that the focus on women exclusively has not only been ineffective, but has also served to marginalise women further. Pereira further points out that the mainstreaming approach is used, for instance, by Canadian, Scandinavian and the European Union donor agencies. Citing Tarasher and Ford- Smith (1990: 38), she raises several questions regarding this mainstreaming approach.

1. Where mainstreaming is adopted as policy, what will be the mechanisms to guarantee continued attention to women's power within these projects? How will women be sure that the apparently neutral category of 'gender' will operate to empower them?
2. Can project officers – the majority of whom are men operating in male dominated organisations with little knowledge or experience in dealing with gender – cope critically with the growing needs of women? Can crash courses in gender for project staff – unaccompanied by changes in the structures of many of these organisations – result in positive effects for women?
3. Why are policies towards women being conceptualised in such an either-or fashion? Clearly women need both women-specific and integrated activities and organisations.

The Human Rights framework developed after the World Conference in Vienna in 1993[22] allowed for the mainstreaming of feminism. She points out that, Human Rights discourse constructs women as exercising popular sovereignty through global, national and regional networks. With this impetus, shadow reports have emerged as critique of governments' Human Rights strategy.



With regard to institutionalisation of gender, Mama explains that African governments introduced structures for women with varying degrees of effectiveness, with or without the involvement of women's movements. Examples of those structures are women's desks and departments or presidential-commissions and ministries which co-ordinate women in development (WID) projects.

According to Mama, it seems that these structures are probably the consequence of international feminism because African governments have signed the international documents that have committed them to various conventions. But WID initiatives have long been challenged for reinforcing women's subordinate roles in labour intensive, small-scale income generating projects. Moreover they generate more work for women and exacerbate gender conflict and male irresponsibility.

Related to issues of gender mainstreaming and institutionalisation are concerns with the type of categories that women ascribe to themselves and others without realising the roots of such analysis. Assié-Lumumba[23] raises a fundamental question of labelling African women who are engaged in scholarly and activist works, in terms of the philosophical and epistemological issues involved in the analysis from feminism to "womanism". She further questions the assumptions upon which gender mainstreaming is based. According to her, mainstreaming is based on the assumptions that a) the state failed to fulfil its duty towards women, b) it is possible to induce elements of change to transform significantly the original nature and mission of the African state, and c) women, particularly in large numbers, will be able to achieve the goals of transforming the state or at least to establish honest and productive partnerships with the state. She argues that the view that the state has failed to fulfil its duty towards women is tautology. For her, it is the same as arguing that capitalism has failed to satisfy the needs of the workers and that it is possible to transform it into a human-centred and pro-working class system. By implication, the state is not designed to address the needs of women.

Diaw similarly argues that nominal independence of African states merely translated simply into "nationalisation of the state". The essence of the inherited/received state was not questioned with regards to its actual responsibilities towards the entire and specific segments of the population, particularly women. She articulates that the state's inherent inability to occupy the entire socio-geographical space that officially corresponds to its definition has led to a process of socio-spatial re-mapping. Indeed, a new phenomenon of "non citizen zones" where law and order have lost their meaning, is expanding.

Nonetheless, liberal feminists argue that women have been denied equal rights, deprived of full political participation and treated differently on the basis of sex. They further argue that this treatment of women violates liberalism's guarantee of liberty, equality and justice for all. Thus they demand that every individual should receive equal consideration regardless of sex and specifically call on the state to take positive steps to compensate women in the market and home.

## Institutionalisation of gender in the Pacific[24]

The institutionalisation process in the region is still at the infant stage and, therefore, with the exception of Fiji, feminist activism in the region is largely:

- On specific issues, such as sexual violence, labour laws, nuclear and environmental issues.
- Urban initiated and concentrated, as in Fiji and Vanuatu, and fanning out to rural areas and networking with other Pacific countries.
- Appears to be 'going with the flow', that is, following international policies and programmes, rather than arguing for alternative strategies through challenging the prevailing mechanisms, which limit women.

She describes the institutionalization process in the Pacific as part of a continuum with awareness raising through Gender Sensitization Programmes (GSP) at one end; occupying the middle ground are countries which have some institutional measures for engendering; and, at the other



end are some countries with comprehensive reform programmes, such as Vanuatu.

## Conclusion

The type of relationships women and feminist organisations have with the state remains problematic. There is some degree of collaboration between the state apparatus, such as national machineries and the women's movements to institutionalise gender. Yet tensions and conflicts are experienced in this relationship since the ideology of the state remains fundamentally patriarchal and the states' engagement with women tends to be that of using women for development purposes. Alongside this already difficult situation is that women have to deal with bureaucrats and their sexist attitudes on a daily basis.

Increasing the number of women engaged in politics and decision-making has been part of a strategy to ensure that women's rights and issues are put onto the agenda for social transformation. However, the quality of women's participation, that is, their capacity to present a direct challenge to dominant political values, and male-dominated processes has to be improved if strategic gains are to be achieved.

Despite the formidable obstacles faced by women, to abandon the project of institutionalising gender is not an option. For example, as an agent for institutionalising gender, national machineries, however marginal they remain, have been instrumental in making visible the gender issues, invoking the international and constitutional mandates, and challenging the dominant male discourse in the bureaucracy. To a certain extent, national machineries have served as an ally of civil society in pushing for gender equality and equity issues in government spaces.

In waging political struggles, global and national women's movements can benefit from having a space in government where women's issues and interests can be articulated and advanced. Successes in legislative and policy advocacy indicate that such contestation and negotiation can indeed take place.

Mainstream or male stream[25] debates on the nature of states, from both the right and the left[26] and the contradictory logic of how governments make decisions with regard to women and their fundamental human rights as citizens needs to be challenged. In addition engagement at policy levels should not result in complacency because of the co-option of gendered language and the rhetoric of public participation. It is just as important to track the implementation of policy objectives to assess whether such policy shifts have brought with them a qualitative difference to the lives of the poorest women. Consequently the mainstreaming process has to become an opportunity to restructure from within (changing policy, structure and political culture) as opposed to adapting to the dominant ideology.

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***Notes***

1 This Chapter draws on research papers prepared for DAWN PRST by Farah Kabir (South Asia), Maria Luz Tiongson (Southern East Asia)

2 Commitment 5: From the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, World Summit for Social Development 06-12 March 1995 – United Nations

3 UN Secretary-General's Report to Commission on Status of Women, 43rd session March 1999

4 As quoted in M.L. Tiongson, 1999, paper for DAWN PRST Research, South East Asia

5 Abeysekera, 1999, DAWN PRST meeting, Cape Town

6 See Abeysekera 1999, DAWN PRST meeting, Cape Town

7 See Kabir Farah, 1999. Key features of this policy include overall empowerment of women and measures for gender equality in administration, politics, education, economic activities, culture and sports. An important objective is to move from the system of nomination to the Parliament to direct elections.

8 See Farida Shaheed 1999a.

9 See Kincaid Diane. 1978. Party leaders also cash on the wave of sympathy from the electorate and prop up dead leaders' female relatives.

10 Gender discriminatory laws, religious fundamentalism, norms of seclusion, socially ascribed roles and responsibilities, illiteracy (due to denial of opportunities for the girl-child) and negative social and cultural practices are some



of the barriers for women's political participation and rise to leadership.

11 Panchayat Raj translates as "Local Self-Governance". In India, under the Panchayat Raj Act, an estimated 225000 village councils, 5100 block councils and 4750 district councils are legtimised.

12 From Mukerjee, Vanita, 2000 Regional Syntheses Paper on Political Restructuring and Social Transformation in South Asia, prepared for DAWN.

13 The Union Parishad Ordinance (1997) enabled women to be directly elected. More than 46,000 women stood for elections for the 12,828 reserved seats. See Kabir F., 1999

14 See Mumtaz K., 1998

15 While this section is based on Maria Luz Tiongsons' paper (1999) for DAWN's PRST, South East Asia, on the State and the Institutionalization of Gender Equity in South East Asia, the issues raised in her work are common across the South.

16 South East Asia Summary Report, The Asia Pacific Regional NGO Symposium, September 1999, Kasetsart University, Thailand

17 WEDO Report, 1999 New York

18 This section draws in the work of Virginia Vargas, 1999, "New Courses of Action of Feminisms during the nineties: Strategies and discourses", prepared for DAWN's PRST Research.

19 Sonia Miguel, 1999, DAWN PRST Research meeting in Brazil.

20 "Femocrats" is a term that is used to denote women working in bureaucracy.

21 Pereira: in DAWN PRST Africa Regional Report "Cracks in the Edifice", 2000, Cape Town

22 Pereira, 1999, DAWN's PRST Africa Research meeting, Cape Town

23 Assié-Lumumba, 1999, DAWN's PRST Africa Research meeting, Cape Town, through the title of her paper containing "Women's Movements"

24 Ana Maui Taufe – Ulungaki: 2000 In Pacific Regional PRST Synthesis Paper prepared for DAWN

25 Mainstreaming and Male -streaming has to do with how women and feminists accept as a given the dominant mode or adapt to the dominant form of governance.

26 World Bank Report of 1997, Report on Global Governance by Commission on Global Governance, the South Commissions Report, and many other publications