



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Recent Trends in National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Africa



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African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGSD)

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List of Acronyms

APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FEFEMPT	Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians of Chad
FEMNET	The African Women Development and Communication Network
FWCW	Fourth World Conference on Women
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PFA	Platform for Action
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
REC	Regional Economic Community
RMFMP	Mauritanian Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDGEA	Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa
SOAWR	Solidarity for African Women's Rights
UNDAW	United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
WILDAF	Women in Law and Development in Africa

Executive summary

This study presents a situation analysis of the status of national mechanisms in the 53 Member States in Africa over the last five years. It argues that contexts such as economic liberalization policies since the 1980s and the role of the State and political reform have shaped the development and current situation of the mechanisms. Within these contexts, national mechanisms have evolved in significant ways.

One recent key trend is the increasing popularity of ministries or ministerial departments for women as lead institutional mechanisms. Instruments to advance gender equality such as legislative reform and gender-responsive budgeting have also become very popular amongst national machineries over the last few years. The main areas of emphasis of institutional mechanisms have been influenced by the Beijing Platform for Action, resulting in continuities and a certain homogenisation in their priorities.

National mechanisms have a network of relationships with other stakeholders, including other ministries, agencies and donors, civil society and regional and international bodies. All these relationships have tended to be ad hoc and not consistently established.

There has been some notable progress but the capacity of national machineries still needs to be strengthened in order to make a real impact on promoting gender equality in Africa. Challenges include financial and human resource deficits. These are exacerbated by external constraints such as political instability in some countries and a lack of national consensus about the necessity and value of institutional mechanisms.

National mechanisms can reposition themselves to widen their influence and accelerate the achievement of an increasingly complex and challenging gender equality agenda through undertaking specific measures. These include strengthening their resource base, building their technical and other gender-mainstreaming capacities, harmonizing their coordinating roles with other mechanisms, and leveraging their partnerships with diverse stakeholders, including cooperating partners, civil society groupings and the private sector.

I. Introduction

Institutional structures and mechanisms at national, subregional, regional and international levels are the main vehicles through which the goals and vision of the Global and African Platforms for Action for gender equality can be realized. The capacities and visions of these institutional arrangements help to determine the level and quality of achievements. In the African context, the elements of the institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women are: policy guidelines and frameworks; organizations, institutions, operating procedures and standards; laws and constitutions.¹

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) commits governments to establishing “institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women”. “Critical Area of Concern H: Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women” gave specific attention to national machineries, stating that “a national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government” whose main task is “to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas” (Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 201). Over the years the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has addressed the role of national machineries and other mechanisms for gender equality and in particular their capacity to advocate for, support, monitor and evaluate the implementation of gender equality legislation, policies, plans and programmes. The Banjul Declaration (November 2009) also emphasised that a critical ingredient for accelerating delivery of the Beijing and Dakar Platforms for Action was strengthening the institutionalization of gender equality and equity through the provision of adequate resources, technical expertise and sufficient authority.

National mechanisms for the advancement of women have been an important part of the gender-equality policy landscape since the mid 1970s. They have played a key role in the making and implementation of national gender-equality policies, including at sectoral level, in knowledge dissemination and advocacy. Some have been more successful and influential than others and over the years some have become more effective, while others have weakened, even after a strong start.

Some countries have strengthened their lead institutional mechanisms, while new mechanisms have emerged in others. Successes attributed to institutional mechanisms in Africa include improvements in public awareness of the importance of women’s empowerment, credit and income-generation projects that have improved livelihood outcomes for rural and poor urban women, national policy documents and plans of action, progressive laws and policy influence across the government machinery (Tsikata, 2000; Geisler, 2004; Bell, 2002). It is by no means certain that these achievements can be attributed solely to the work and effectiveness of insti-

¹ UNECA, 1999, Assessment Report on Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women.

tutional mechanisms, however. Only a systematic study would allow definitive statements to be made about the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms.

This report reviews institutional mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Africa Region² and aims to provide up-to-date information about national machineries and other mechanisms as a basis for discussions and recommendations in order to improve their effectiveness in policymaking, gender mainstreaming and strengthen their capacity for promoting gender equality. Based on a range of data derived from specific questionnaires as well as other relevant literature, the report provides an opportunity to re-examine some of the long-held beliefs about what makes for effective national mechanisms and presents new perspectives on national machinery and mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In this report national mechanisms are defined as *those bodies and institutions within different branches of the State (legislative, executive and judicial branches), as well as independent accountability and advisory bodies that together are recognized as 'national mechanisms for gender equality' by all stakeholders.*

In general, a variety of structures, mechanisms and frameworks for the advancement of women exist to give expression to women's and gender issues at the local, national, subregional, regional and international levels. The national level comprises:

- Government bodies that deal with gender or women's issues, such as: ministries of gender or women's affairs and/or national women's bureaus or women in development commissions; gender focal points in all ministries relevant to the advancement of women, including education, planning, health and the environment; legal/regulatory frameworks, including constitutions, laws, budgetary and auditing systems, which are an integral part of institutional mechanisms in the public arena; international instruments, conventions, declarations and other agreements which by implication constitute institutional (regulatory) frameworks for dealing with gender issues.
- Political party structures, such as women's leagues, branches, desks/associations; political advisers on gender at various levels of government or ruling-party machinery, such as presidential offices and offices of first ladies. The degree of involvement in gender or women's issues varies in different countries.
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based initiatives, umbrella organizations and the broad range of civil society networks; and women's associations.
- Private sector organizations, initiatives and networks; chambers of commerce, financial and credit institutions, employers and employers' associations involved to varying degrees in gender issues.

² The Africa Region has 53 countries, most of which have institutional/national mechanisms for gender equality.

This report discusses strategies for enhancing the effectiveness and impact of national mechanisms for gender equality. It also focuses on ways to strengthen cooperation and collaboration among different stakeholders. The analysis is based on the following issues:

- How has the diversification of national mechanisms for gender equality contributed to better outcomes for women? What concrete results can be identified?
- What are the constraints and challenges of coordination among different national mechanisms for gender equality? What lessons can be learned and good practices identified for achieving synergies and collaboration?
- What strategies and processes have resulted in improved links between national mechanisms and the various stakeholders? What outcomes have been achieved for the benefit of women and girls?
- What factors are involved in successful implementation of gender mainstreaming? How can challenges and resistance be overcome? What gender mainstreaming tools have been most effective?
- How can national mechanisms act as catalysts in the implementation of effective financing for gender equality, including gender-responsive budgeting? What type of collaboration works most effectively?

The report begins by considering the economic, political, social, cultural and institutional context and then reviews developments and trends in national mechanisms for gender equality over the last five years. It goes on to analyse the current status of national mechanisms in the 53 Member States, particularly in terms of human and financial resources. Using this as a basis, the main areas of emphasis and the success factors so far are then identified. After assessing gaps and challenges, the potential opportunities for the way forward are outlined. The main findings and recommendations are brought together in the concluding section.

Finally, by way of a precursor to the main content of this report, there are two caveats that must be stated. Firstly, the data for this report was collected from a questionnaire conducted in 2009. Thus, certain allowances need to be made since, at the time of reading, not all statements may accurately represent the current situation now. Secondly, this report was written prior to the socio-political upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia which is the very reason for the lack of reference to these events.

1.1 Data sources and methodology

The primary data for this report was derived from replies by African Member States to a questionnaire prepared by a group of regional experts and gender equality officers from all the UN Regional Commissions in a process convened and coordinated by UN-DAW. This was supplemented by information from the Beijing plus 15 Survey, to which 47 African countries responded, and secondary data in the form of published and unpublished material on national machinery and other institutional mechanisms, past regional reports, NGO shadow reports and

interviews with officials of three national machineries for women – those of Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe – and an independent expert from South Africa, who were attending the Africa Region preparatory meetings for Beijing plus 15 in Banjul in November 2009. The report also benefits from a wide review of documents obtained from various African Member States, civil society, and development partners.

II. Contextual analysis

This section examines the continuities and changes in the economic, political, social, cultural and institutional contexts of Africa that have a bearing on the functioning and effectiveness of national mechanisms for gender equality. There are striking differences between African countries resulting from their long-term and recent histories, economies, political systems and socio-cultural characteristics. There are also important underlying similarities, however, and these will be highlighted.

2.1 Impact of economic liberalization

The long-standing human and financial capacity challenges facing national mechanisms stem from the historical context of economic liberalization in the 1980s and 1990s. The institutional reforms that were part of those structural adjustment programmes resulted in the downsizing of civil services and public sector enterprises (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999). Skilled staff left government, creating shortfalls in staff and capacities. Institutional mechanisms have stagnated over the last few decades, partly because of overall government downsizing, but also as a result of their very high staff turnover rates.

Decades of liberalization resulted in stagnant growth, debt and high levels of poverty and unemployment in many African countries. In response to the crippling debt burden of many adjusting countries and the failure of adjustment to tackle the deepening poverty of large sections of their populations, the World Bank and IMF injected a poverty focus into the economic liberalization agenda through Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. Countries seeking support from the World Bank or seeking debt relief through the Initiative were required to draw up Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) as the new framework for their economic policies. The main innovation in the papers was the insistence that civil society organizations participate in policymaking.

Thus, the economic liberalization agenda has continued into the post-adjustment phase. In spite of the challenges, the last ten years in particular have seen Africa enjoying unprecedented economic growth. A recent UNECA paper points to economic growth rates averaging five per cent accompanied by single-digit inflation since 2000 (UNECA, 2009).³ However, there are questions about the sustainability of the growth, made more significant by the predicted and unfolding impacts of the recent global food, fuel and financial crises. This is because in many African countries growth did not result in fundamental changes in the agrarian character of economies or their primary commodity dependence. Neither did it result in the creation of decent employment and a basic comprehensive social protection scheme. Instead, the eco-

³ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). *The Global Financial Crisis: Impact, Responses and Way Forward*

conomic liberalization policies underpinning growth resulted in the unprecedented growth of informal economies with insecure and precarious forms of work, and widening income disparities (Tsikata, 2009). Nonetheless, conflict recovery and improved stability were important factors in the recent growth in some countries (UN, 2009).

The context of economic liberalization has therefore contributed to the current weakening of the structure of national mechanisms. For example, economic liberalization has meant a less interventionist State in Africa. From the 1980s, when the state stepped back from development interventions, the political support for institutions such as national mechanisms for gender equality became more tenuous. Furthermore, there is now a gap in Africa between policymaking and implementation which has been further widened by the impact of economic liberalization, while the endemic resource constraints, both financial and human, have led to a lack of progress with some institutional goals, particularly in relation to women's poverty and social insecurities.

2.2 Role of the State and political reforms

Several studies have suggested that the State plays an important role in sustaining and also changing systems in which women are subordinated. However, state power has many dimensions and the State is not monolithic in its responses to gender inequalities. Some studies have brought out the bureaucratic and technical aspects of state power in national mechanisms (Gouws, 2006).

As outlined above, economic liberalization paved the way for a less interventionist State but there are now calls for a return to the developmental State, with a focus on increased macro-economic regulation and planning coupled with a stronger socio-economic equality and equity agenda. This may prove to be a positive period for national mechanisms. Their issues could have more traction and justify the allocation of more resources to tackle them.

The location of the Ministries of Gender or similar units is also a very political issue. In countries where there is a lack of political will for promoting gender equality, mechanisms tend to have low institutional location and to lack powers, while where there is greater political will the outcome is more conducive to strengthened national mechanisms.

Another relevant contextual aspect is significant political reform in the African region. A wave of elections has swept across North Africa in the last ten years, for example. In Egypt, Article 76 of the Constitution was amended to allow multi-candidate presidential elections. Its notable aspect was that, according to official statistics, the participation rate amounted to only one fourth of those entitled to vote.. Evidently, as the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR 2006) noted, electoral reform in the region has some distance to cover before elections become a component of societies of freedom and good governance. However, this is a promising start

to lay the foundations for strengthening the accountability and effectiveness of national mechanisms.

2.3 Social conservatism in State and civil society

Social conservatism in many countries has shaped public discourse on gender issues, affecting the standing and influence of national mechanisms, which have had to contend with public perception reinforced by repeated comments that their concerns are middle-class, urban, foreign-influenced and out-of-step with African culture. There is a long history of recruiting conservative women's groups to oppose measures to promote women's rights within the family and the community, using discourses that exaggerate the class and locational differences between women while downplaying their shared experience of discriminatory family laws. The demonstration by an estimated fifty thousand Malian men and women against a new Family Code on the grounds that it was against religion and culture is a stark reminder of the socially conservative climate in which institutional mechanisms and women's rights groups have to operate.⁴

For example, in parts of North Africa there are serious restrictions on freedom of the press. These limitations put national machineries in a precarious situation, since it is perceived that advocating for women's rights through these means, while other political and civic rights are violated, undermines the integrity of the national machineries and places doubt on their ability to effect genuine change (ECSWA, 2010).

The leaders of institutional mechanisms have thus had to adopt needs-focused and instrumentalist arguments to gain acceptance for their agendas by State and society. This partly accounts for their tendency to focus more on credit, income generation projects and girls' education than on equally important questions of gender inequalities and power relations. The increasingly technocratic approach to policymaking has also disabled the participation of institutional mechanisms for gender equality.

2.4 Regional and subregional initiatives

Despite the challenges outlined above, overall there has been greater official support for gender equality. The establishment of the African Union (AU) and its institutions, particularly the Directorate for Women, Gender and Development under the Office of the Chairperson of the AU Commission, as well as the Women and Gender Sectoral Cluster Committee as one of the ten such committees of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) of the AU, are developments which have given some impetus to work on gender equality and provided commitments that national mechanisms can pursue.

⁴ The Code makes changes to marriage laws, including setting the legal minimum age for marriage at 18, recognizing only civil marriages, allowing joint property ownership, increasing parental rights, and extending inheritance rights to girls.

Furthermore, the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA), adopted by the Third Ordinary Session of the African Union (AU) Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in July 2004, was a critical milestone. The Declaration is important because it “strengthens African ownership of the gender equality agenda and keeps the issues alive at the highest political level in Africa”.⁵ It includes a commitment by countries to report annually on progress towards gender equality and for the Chairperson of the AU Commission to report annually to the Assembly on progress made in the implementation of the Solemn Declaration, as well as on the state of gender equality and gender mainstreaming at the national and regional levels.⁶ The African Union Women’s Decade, declared for 2010 – 2020, offers another means of holding national mechanisms to account. This will be discussed further in the section on Potential Opportunities.

Moreover, in 2003 the AU adopted the Women’s Protocol, which offers significant potential for guaranteeing the rights of women by setting norms and standards for promoting and protecting women’s rights on the continent. The Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other regional economic communities have also been engaged in processes to promote a regional approach to gender equality.

Also important in this regard is the ECA network of Regional Economic Communities (RECs). These provide opportunities for a regional approach to the work of national mechanisms and strengthen efforts at the national level by institutional mechanisms and civil society organizations, while the development of the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI), which has been piloted in twelve African countries and is set to be used in many more, provides space for friendly competition among countries. It is a useful addition to the existing monitoring and evaluation tools, such as the UNDP’s Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM).⁷

The establishment of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) in 2001 was another notable initiative. Its objective is to enhance Africa’s growth, development and participation in the global economy. African countries have also instituted an African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) to strengthen their accountability to each other with respect to their commitments to good governance, as well as gender equality and women’s empowerment (SARR, 2009).

Whether African governments are effectively domesticating these regional agreements and initiatives is an issue requiring further analysis, since success so far seems to have been limited. These agreements nevertheless have the potential to strengthen the work of national mechanisms by creating additional accountability, harmonizing approaches across countries and circumventing resistance and challenges to gender equality at the national level.

5 <http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/conferences/past/2006/October/WG/doc.htm>

6 [http://www.africa-union.org/root/AU/Documents/Treaties/Text/Protocol on the Rights of Women.pdf](http://www.africa-union.org/root/AU/Documents/Treaties/Text/Protocol%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20Women.pdf), downloaded 21/8/09

7 http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/indices/gdi_gem/

2.5 Women's participation in decision-making

The consolidation of multi-party constitutional rule has also seen efforts to improve women's participation in governance, with spectacular results in some countries, but not much progress in the majority of African countries where women's representation in the legislature has remained stubbornly below 15 per cent. The election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President of Liberia inspired women candidates in other countries, such as Benin, Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire (SARR, 2009), while the achievements of South Africa's gender equality mechanism in Parliament under the dynamic leadership of individual champions underscores the importance for effective national mechanisms of women's strong presence in ruling parties, legislatures and other arms of government (Gouws, 2006).

Women's political representation may reflect political will to empower women in the political sphere without this necessarily resulting in empowerment in a vital field for women's autonomy such as the economic sector. Quotas for increasing women's political representation are another visible achievement in some countries in the region. Quotas are important but need to be accompanied by other factors such as societal support for women's representation and structural change in the political system towards more public participation and accountability.

On the other hand, electoral setbacks in some countries and the accompanying escalation of violence are discouraging women's participation and reducing their chances of being elected. In some countries there has been a fall in the representation of women. For example in Algeria, the number of women senators in the Council of the Nation, (the upper house of Parliament created after the 1996 constitutional revision) has fallen. In 2009 there were only four women members, all of whom were appointed by the President of the Republic, as compared with eight in the first, 1997 legislature (UN-INSTRAW, 2009). This has implications for the strength of parliamentary/legislative institutional mechanisms for women and their effectiveness in initiating and ensuring the passage of important pieces of legislation and gender-responsive budgeting.

Another key feature of leadership in national mechanisms in the Africa Region is the involvement of first ladies or the ruling elite in chairing these entities. In some countries this has provided the national mechanisms with strong political support for issues concerning the advancement of women.

However, the dominance of the public space by first ladies and their organizations can also present challenges to national mechanisms. The situation is gradually improving as a result of the growth of independent women's organizations, the turnover of first ladies and differences in their style and preoccupations. In some countries with the same regimes in power for several decades, national institutions have faced a serious crisis of legitimacy because they have been seen as controlled by the first lady and her organization. The exploitation of this leadership by ruling parties is therefore obvious, even if done subtly. This is clear in the celebration of Interna-

tional Women's Day or national commemorations of women, which become opportunities for political marketing operations for ruling party leaders, whose images adorn materials prepared for such events (SARR, 2009). Such styles of leadership have therefore been criticised on various grounds, including claims of patronizing attitudes, attempts by governments to improve the external political image of their regimes and to retain funding allocated to projects for the promotion of women rather than a serious concern for women's advancement.

2.6 Proliferation of NGOs and related implications

In many countries civil society organizations have taken on a higher profile, thrusting themselves into the public space with increasing vigour and impact. In addition, there is growing activity from the grass roots demanding greater internal democracy (AHDR 2005). These organisations have proved fairly effective in raising people's and politicians' awareness of gender equality issues, but they have shown little ability to form a 'hegemonic bloc' in civil society against well-mobilized and well-organized conservative movements (ECSWA, 2010).

It is worth noting, however, that NGO activism has helped to popularize and legitimize gender issues and put them on the agendas of political leaders, parliamentarians and human rights activists. Some human rights and anti-torture NGOs have moved towards building social and political movements (for example, the *Kefaya* movement in Egypt), while others seek to extend their reach by establishing regional coalitions such as the African Women Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) and Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR).

Despite the growing acceptance of the importance of civil society participation in policymaking, the state of the women's movement and the organization of women in Africa has proved challenging for the effectiveness of national mechanisms. Women's movements have either been demobilized by their absorption into national mechanisms or their wholesale substitution by the NGO vehicle itself. As an organizational form, the movement is characterized by the lack of a mass base, connection and accountability to its primary constituencies, donor dependence, the substitution of NGOs for civil society and mass movements⁸, a professional technocratic approach being given priority over politics because they cannot be overtly political or partisan, and a short-term, project-based approach and the favouring of specific solutions being given priority over broad, long-term agendas for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality. These are issues of concern because, while research, advocacy, campaigns and other interventions by NGOs do change formal mechanisms such as laws, policies and resource allocations, it is movements that have the power to change the most embedded and hidden aspects of oppression and to sustain such change (Batliwala, 2008). These characteristics of

8 Batliwala has defined a movement as an organized set of constituents pursuing a common agenda of change through collective action (Batliwala, 2008). This in her view implies a visible constituency, base or membership, membership in either formal or informal organizations, continuity, the existence of collective actions and activities using a variety of actions and strategies with internal or external targets.

NGOs affect their ability to influence and support the national mechanisms and to advocate and implement difficult and controversial policies. They also challenge their ability to demand accountability from the institutional mechanisms and from government as a whole.

2.7 Impact of conflicts and peace processes

About one-fifth of Africans live in countries severely disrupted by conflict (World Bank, 2011). Decades of civil conflict have destroyed economies, societies and institutions, creating a large measure of dislocation, loss of life, crippling disability, loss of property and widespread human insecurity for the majority of people. Large numbers of people displaced by violence and conflict relocate within the borders of their own countries: in 2009 there were an estimated 4.9 million internally displaced persons in Sudan alone (Arab Human Development Report, 2009). All these aspects of conflict have hampered the work of national mechanism in countries left with no resources and large-scale humanitarian devastation (ESCWA, Arab Report on Beijing +15, 2009).

However, there has been progress in terms of agreements such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in October 2000, and the resulting Action Plan, developed in 2003. This framework emphasizes the critical importance of women's participation in national mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. It lays the groundwork for potential gains in promoting both gender equality and peace-building through the use of national mechanisms.

Peace processes have, in fact, brought some institutional dividends in Africa. For instance, in several post-conflict countries, new institutional mechanisms have been established which have engaged in programmes promoting women's involvement in peacebuilding and reconstruction (SARR, 2009). In the case of Liberia, after 14 years of civil war the current administration is fully committed to undertaking efforts to stabilize the Government and, by extension, the national mechanisms in order to put the necessary gender reforms and policies in place. Consequently, several policies and programmes addressing women's rights and empowerment have also been initiated.

The resurgence of conflict and social upheavals in some parts of Africa and their impact on national mechanisms must also be considered, since this could destroy weaker structures or those that are only gradually being strengthened. Thus, in situations where there is a fragile balance between peace and conflict there may well be a need for measures that are both long- and short-term in order to ensure the overall strengthening of national mechanisms for gender equality.

2.8 Other human development challenges

Africa is also the region most affected by HIV/AIDS, with 70 per cent of the 40 million people currently infected worldwide. Approximately fifteen million or 58 per cent of Africans infected with HIV/AIDS are women (Sarr, 2009). The HIV/AIDS situation, particularly in Eastern and Southern Africa, has taken its toll of African institutions, including national machinery and other mechanisms for gender equality, especially in terms of a decrease in valuable human resources. This situation is not as dire as it was in the 1980s and 1990s, but there needs to be further analysis on the scale of its impact now.

The region also has the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. In 2002, 50 per cent of the women who died worldwide from complications related to pregnancy and delivery lived in Africa, where one in six women dies in childbirth (Sarr, 2009). These development indicators have resulted in competing priorities for governments, with implications for the ability of institutional mechanisms for gender equality to secure resources for their work (Warioba, 2005).

Conclusions

The issues highlighted in this section illustrate the major role played by context in the degree to which national machineries operate. Examination of context must include factors such as political will, national resources, human capacity, organization and strength of women's movements, in addition to the general status of women (education, health, legislation, employment and political participation). Whether the State is involved in some form of conflict is another vital factor influencing whether or not it will be able to pursue an effective gender equality and women's rights agenda. Countries involved in wars and other conflicts are typically characterized by low or stagnant economic growth, political instability, and the regression of almost all achieved gains for women (in the health, education, employment, legal and political spheres). The mechanisms for the advancement of women in war zones show continuous shifts in policy focus and weak ability to effect sustainable change.

Therefore institutional mechanisms for gender equality in Africa are struggling to promote women's rights against many odds within their environment. However, some progress has been reported on women's rights in all the twelve critical areas outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action. These will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

III. Recent trends in national mechanisms for gender equality in Africa

This section discusses developments in the structures, mandates, strategies, approaches, concerns and priorities of national mechanisms in Africa over the last five years. As recommended by the 54th Session of the Committee on the Status of Women, a thorough analysis of recent trends in national mechanisms incorporating both the successes and constraints will enable the identification of strategies to enhance effectiveness in promoting gender equality. As stated above, the data were derived from a questionnaire distributed in 2009, so the situation may have changed in some countries.

3.1 Lead institutional mechanisms

One major trend to emerge from the analysis is the establishment of lead institutional mechanisms, i.e. a ministry or a part of one, in most African countries, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Nature of main institutional mechanisms

Structure	Countries	Number
Ministry	Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Djibouti, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Togo,	15
Part of a ministry (women, family and children)	Algeria, Angola, Chad, DRC, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe	23
Part of ministry (other)	Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe	9
Department/Division	Botswana, Burundi, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Zambia	6
Units in key ministries	Mozambique, Swaziland	2

Source: Beijing plus 15 Survey, 2009.
http://www.uneca.org/eca_programmes/acgd/beijingplus15/index.htm

When asked about the nature of their lead institutional mechanisms, 15 African countries mentioned a Ministry for Women. In another 23 countries this mechanism was part of a Ministry which also had responsibility for family, children or community development, social development, youth and sports.⁹ It has been argued that the failure to establish structures specifically

9 Ministry for Women and Social Action (Mozambique 2000), Ministry for Community Development, Gender and Children (Tanzania1990), Ministry of Social Affairs, Advancement of Women and Children (Guinea Conakry 1996), Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Child and Family (Mali 1997), Ministry for the Advancement of Women, and Child Protection (Niger 1999), Ministry of Social Affairs, Advancement of Women, Child Protection and Elderly People (Togo 1996), Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (Uganda 1998), Ministry

devoted to gender equality weakens mechanisms in the exercise of their mission to promote women's empowerment. They have little ability to influence other ministries and can also face resistance from sectoral administrations that are not amenable to cross-cutting mechanisms (Tsikata, 2000).

Some countries with smaller structures, such as women's bureaus, councils¹⁰, departments and desks, augmented these by establishing ministries. In Seychelles a National Gender Management Team was launched in June 2009 to strengthen the capacity of the Gender Secretariat, a unit within the Social Development Department of the Ministry of Health and Social Development. The National Gender Management Team is composed of 13 representative members from government and the private and NGO sectors.

Figure 2: Other institutional mechanisms

Mechanism	Country	Number
Parliamentary caucus/ committee	Ghana, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	9
Gender consultative forum	Namibia, Zambia,	2
Gender focal points	Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mali, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique	15
Gender council	Botswana, Gambia, Ghana, Mauritius, Senegal, Sierra Leone	6
Gender units	Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Mozambique	4
Gender commissions/ committees	Burkina Faso, Chad, Comoros, Lesotho, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe	13
Office of the President	Namibia, Niger, Nigeria	3
Attorney General's chamber	Lesotho	1
Political parties	Mozambique, Uganda	2
Gender groups, women's coalition, etc.	Chad, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mauritania, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Mozambique (Gender Coordination Group)	10
Others	Burundi: National Counsel for Gender Cape Verde: Cape Verde Institute of Gender Equity and Equality Egypt: National Council for Women Equatorial Guinea: National Plan for Multisectoral Action Eritrea: National Union of Eritrean Women Nigeria: Gender Monitoring Office	6

Source: Beijing plus 15 Survey, 2009. – As in the previous table, one country may have two or more mechanisms.

of Advancement of Women and Family (Cameroon 2004), Ministry for Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development (Zimbabwe 2005), Ministry of Family, Women and Social Affairs (Côte d'Ivoire 2007), Ministry of Gender, Family and Child (DRC 2007), Ministry of Family and the Promotion of Women (Angola 1997) and Ministry for Gender, Youth, Sports and Recreation (Lesotho 2000) are also examples of ministries combining women's affairs with other social issues. Moreover, Madagascar's Department for the Advancement of Women is within the Ministry of Population and Social Affairs.

10 In the case of Ghana, the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) has become one of the two Departments of the Ministry for Women's and Children's Affairs, the other being the Children's Department, formerly the National Commission on Children.

Quite a few countries do not have ministries as such but sections of ministries as part of their institutional mechanisms. Botswana has a National Council on Women, established in 1999, while Swaziland has a Gender Coordinating Unit established in 1997. Cape Verde has the Cape Verde Institute of Gender Equity and Equality (1994), while Mauritania has the Interdepartmental Gender Group.

The popularity of the ministerial approach is significant because it comes in spite of the long-standing criticism of ministries of women as lead institutional mechanisms by the women's movement. It regards them as potentially resulting in the further marginalization of gender equality issues by creating a situation where all issues concerning women would be passed on to an institution without the capacity, resources or powers to address them (South African Research and Documentation Centre, 1996). This concern suggests that there are democratic deficits in the establishment of national mechanisms. It has been pointed out that the majority of national mechanisms established in Africa since the 1970s were the result of bureaucratic action. This continues to be the dominant approach. The one exception is the South African mechanism (outlined below), which was established after a long debate about the most effective approaches, with explicit consensus to avoid the mistakes of other countries (Manjoo, 2005; Gouws, 2006).

3.2 Multiple mechanisms

The South African structure has been seen as a good practice model of multiple mechanisms in Africa. Until 2009, it consisted of four interrelated mechanisms, located in different parts of the State and Government, namely: a) the Office of the Status of Women located in the Presidency, created by executive memorandum; b) the Joint Monitoring Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women (JCQLSW), the multi-party women's caucus and the women's empowerment unit in the legislature; c) the Commission for Gender Equality, a constitutionally created independent commission outside government; and d) civil society and the women's movement in particular (Manjoo, 2005; Gouws, 2006; Gender Policy of South Africa). The Office of the Status of Women has, since May 2009, been replaced by a Ministry for Women, Youth, Children and People with Disabilities.

Whether or not the establishment of the Ministry in South Africa will strengthen the work of the institutional mechanisms has been questioned by civil society activists and academics. From its inception, the Commission for Gender Equality had to justify its existence as a mechanism separate from the more established and powerful Human Rights Commission. The close relationship between the two institutions has resulted in persistent calls for their merger (Manjoo, 2005). This suggests that, even when structures are established, constant vigilance is needed to keep them alive. This is especially so in climates where fiscal conservatism is advocated.

The structure of multiple mechanisms is something South Africa shares with an increasing number of other African countries, as illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 3: Number of institutional mechanisms listed

No. of institutional mechanisms	Name of countries	Number of countries
1	Angola, Cape Verde, Congo, DRC, Eritrea, Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania	8
2	Botswana, Cameroon, Comoros, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone	11
3	Benin, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Lesotho, Zambia	6
4	Burundi, Ghana, Mali, Mauritius, Niger, Seychelles, Togo, Tunisia, Zimbabwe	9
5	Burkina Faso	1
6	Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan	2
7	Algeria, Chad, Namibia, Uganda	4
8	Nigeria	1
9	Liberia	1
10	Egypt	1

Source: Beijing plus 15 Survey, 2009. – Two countries did not reply.

Mechanisms include departments, divisions and units in ministries, parliamentary caucuses and select committees, gender focal points/gender desk officers, divisions, women's wings of political parties, inter-ministerial committees and gender groups. By far the most commonly mentioned in the Beijing plus 15 Survey were gender focal points and parliamentary institutions. The recognition of parliamentary mechanisms points to the growing importance of the institution to the agendas of institutional mechanisms.

The establishment and use of multiple mechanisms is an important development because it spreads the work of promoting gender equality and women's rights across several institutions. It also ensures that one of the criticisms of machinery, i.e. that some of their functions are incompatible with their location (Tsikata, 2000), is addressed. Different mechanisms advocate, influence, make, implement, monitor and evaluate policy.

However, coordinating and keeping track of all these mechanisms, avoiding duplication and competition and ensuring that each institution performs its functions has proved very challenging. It is not clear how well thought through these new multiple mechanisms are, what their relationship with the old structures is or what additional value they have brought to the work of promoting gender equality. The situation requires careful study in order to examine synergies between institutions, how well they complement rather than duplicate each other, which of them are strong and which are weak within each country, and which are needed and which can be dispensed with. A related problem is the lack of proper monitoring and evaluation systems in a number of countries.

3.3 Relations with civil society organizations

In the Beijing plus 15 Survey several countries also mentioned civil society organizations as one of several institutional mechanisms. This is a positive development as it gives legitimacy and space to the advocacy role of civil society organizations. The extent to which their status and their effective participation are taken seriously is open to question in view of the fact that, in most countries there are no clearly stated terms of reference, other than statements to the effect that civil society organizations are consulted about policies and also that they are useful partners in the implementation of policies. Very few countries provide resources for civil society organizations or assist them in seeking resources to do their work. Governmental mechanisms continue to take the lead with policy implementation and tend not to work effectively with civil society organizations to decentralize implementation. Furthermore, this status of being part of the institutional mechanisms could prove problematic for civil society activism and its ability to demand accountability.

There have also been changes in the relations between civil society and the national machinery and other mechanisms. In the case of national machineries that are closely associated with ruling parties in some countries, it has been difficult over the years to maintain good relations with civil society because national mechanisms are seen as an extension of state partisanship. In cases where civil society organizations have been designated as the lead institutional mechanism, their relationship with the State could exclude other organizations. In many other cases, relations have their ups and downs and the national mechanisms of different regimes have had more or less cooperative and harmonious relations with civil society organizations. There is a clear need for the stabilization and regularization of relations between institutional mechanisms and civil society organizations in many countries. The approach should be to enlarge the space for activism by civil society organizations while benefiting from synergies in relations.

3.4 Traditional linkages to motherhood and childhood

Despite the diversity and multiplicity of national mechanisms, the traditional linkages to motherhood and childhood prevail. Women are first and foremost individuals in their own right but are perceived as family members whose protection and guidance is accorded to male relatives. This has meant a compromise on both sides in order to move forward. Until 1999 the Women's Committee in Egypt was subordinate to the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, showing that women were more valued as mothers and caretakers of families. This view has not changed much today: the National Council for Women and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood are two institutions that are reminders of the childbearing role accorded to women.

Other countries echo Egypt's attitudes to women. In Morocco, the leading mechanism for women is called the Secretariat of State on Family, Childhood and Handicapped Persons (MCF). Following Morocco's last legislative elections, the Secretariat of State for the Family, Childhood

and Handicapped Persons (SEFSAS) replaced the MCF. This new secretariat of State is under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development, Family and Solidarity. In Tunisia, the mission of the Ministry of Women's and Family Affairs (MAFF) was to promote the status and the situation of women and the family. The MAFF was also allocated responsibility for children and elderly persons and in 2004 became the Ministry of the Affairs of Women, the Family, Children and Elderly Persons (MAFFEPA).

There is, however, potential for countries to move away from the traditional association with motherhood and childhood. The South African multiple structure models referred to earlier provides pointers to this by positioning national mechanisms as proponents of gender equality, women's empowerment and rights.

3.5 Decentralized structures

In keeping with the trend towards decentralization in many countries in Africa, national machineries also report decentralized structures. While the Beijing plus 15 questionnaires did not elicit much information on decentralized structures, the national machinery in Burundi, Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa and Zimbabwe, for example, are known to have decentralized structures, albeit to differing degrees. South Africa's Commission for Gender Equality and erstwhile Office of the Status of Women were represented in the provinces, while Ghana's Ministry for Women and Children's Affairs has regional offices.¹¹ In Mozambique, the National Council for Advancement of Women were also represented in the provinces and some districts. In North Africa too the past few years have seen a move towards decentralizing women's units, this has been necessitated by the need to reach out to women in rural and marginalized areas. In Sudan, there are women's units in the state financial institutions to facilitate financial credits and grants for women in the capital and provinces.

Decentralization has enabled national mechanisms to review, comment on, suggest and amend national development plans. However, it has been noted that the national mechanisms demonstrate weaknesses in decentralizing structures almost everywhere, being very active only at the national level. The decentralized institutions are sometimes represented in planning, programming and budgeting grass-roots development actions, but in most cases they do not address diverse women empowerment issues, including the issue of women's low participation in decision-making bodies.

11 Other examples include Zimbabwe's Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, which is decentralized all the way down to the village level. It has representation in all ten regions, 57 districts and at the ward/village level, and has some 2000 community development workers in its pay. The Tanzanian Ministry for Community Development, Gender and Children has community development officers at all levels which it uses for its work on gender issues. For example, they help to identify women's group beneficiaries of the Ministry's Women's Development Fund, which operates a revolving loan fund with money from the Ministry of Local Government.

Gouws (2006) has argued that there is no guaranteed and direct relationship between having structures in place and gaining policy influence. Much depends on the extent to which priorities are open to negotiation, the extent of government commitment to gender equality and the degree of transparency of action. Other factors include the quality of leadership of national mechanisms as well as the strength of women's movements and their ability to influence policy and political processes (Tsikata, 2000; Gouws, 2006; Manjoo, 2005). This raises the intriguing question of whether an integrated set of mechanisms is influential because of its mainstreaming effects or whether certain mechanisms are effective because of their strategic location and strong leadership (Geisler, 2004).

3.6 Increased use of legislation

Many of the machineries have been able to influence legal reforms in favour of gender equality. Tunisia introduced 14 legal reforms between 1999 and 2009 that rose the age of marriage to 18 years for males and females. The governments of Rwanda, South Africa, Mozambique and Uganda enacted specific laws imposing penalties for gender-based violence. Legal reform also accounts for the increasingly important role of parliaments in the work of institutional mechanisms. The 2000 Constitution of Côte d'Ivoire contains provisions prohibiting abuse, slavery, forced labour, violence, mutilation and discrimination based on sex. The government also adopted a national strategy to fight against gender-based violence in 2008 and initiated the mobilization of resources for victims of violence, the creation of income-generating activities and a project for the rehabilitation of victims of conflict. Ethiopia and Uganda have also passed recent laws on female genital mutilation and harmful traditional practices, while Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe have laws in place that criminalize marital rape.

While these reforms are important in paving the way for more gender equality before the law, many mechanisms indicated weakness in implementing and enforcing the reforms. Thus, equality before the law and legal reform without applying and enforcing the rule of law and the related reforms may be regarded as important achievements, but they do not necessarily lead to sustained and durable success.

3.7 Gender-responsive budgeting

Since the 1990s gender-responsive budgeting initiatives have undoubtedly become an important tool for promoting gender equality. More than 20 per cent of the countries covered by the Beijing plus 15 Survey had such initiatives. In some cases gender-responsive budgeting has been initiated by civil society and by government in others, such as Mozambique. In East Africa there are gender-responsive budget initiatives in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda (Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women, 2004). Gender-responsive budgets have the potential to mobilize both state and civil society actors and bring real

benefits and resources to the promotion of women's rights. Indeed, a report on the East African Region for Beijing plus 10 argued that in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, women's concerns were taken into account in national budgets (Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women, 2004).¹²

At the same time, the technicalities of gender-responsive budgeting could prevent its institutionalization within government and adoption by a wide spectrum of civil society organizations. In addition, it is not clear what the enforcement mechanisms of gender-responsive budgeting are. In government, the lead in gender mainstreaming in the national budget is the ministry of finance (which manages national budgeting mechanisms and processes), back-stopped by ministries of gender/gender units, but this is not always the case and the resulting lack of coordination and collaboration limits the effectiveness of its institutionalization. Care needs to be taken to ensure that this instrument does not become a new fad, promising much, but delivering little.

3.8 Gender mainstreaming strategy

In terms of the evolution of approaches and strategies, the acceptance of the gender mainstreaming strategy for the promotion of gender equality has probably been the strongest catalyst. Gender mainstreaming involved a shift from a focus on "specific and targeted interventions that aimed to empower women along particular thematic lines" to an approach which would "ensure systematic institutional policy analysis from a gender perspective" (UNECA, 1999b). The discourse on gender mainstreaming over the years highlights the fact that the concept is not yet all-embracing, coherent and institutionalized. There is often a lack of clarity about what it means and involves and a lack of capacity to carry it out. It has also tended to be top-down in conception and execution (Mulugeta, 2008). In addition, several studies have identified instances of misuse of the concept by policymakers, as well as unintended consequences, such as the disappearance of programmes aimed at women (Tsikata, 2001; Standing, 2004; Subrahmanian, 2004; Woodford-Berger, 2004; Mukhopadhyay, 2004). It has also been observed that cases of internal resistance act as a major obstacle to ensuring the success of the gender mainstreaming strategy (Moser et al, 2004).

However, over the years, gender mainstreaming programmes have provided space for some progress on some issues of concern to women. Several institutional arrangements and instruments have been used in different combinations in different countries with different degrees of success and effectiveness. These include gender focal points and desks in various ministries, departments, government agencies and inter-ministerial taskforces for particular programmes, gender policies, inter-ministerial bodies, funds, legislation and gender budgeting.

¹² Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI) is a civil society network organization in Eastern Africa.

Figure 4: Gender mainstreaming instruments

Instrument	Country	Number
Gender Policy	Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Guinea Conakry, Madagascar, Mali, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique	20
Gender Focal Point	Burkina Faso, Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique	16
Laws	Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Eritrea, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Tunisia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique	18
Creation of National Committees	Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Togo	12
Observatory	Gabon, Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa	7
Gender-responsive Budget	Angola, Burundi, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Mauritius, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Zimbabwe, Mozambique	10
Ministerial gender equality groups	Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Togo	18
Women's Fund	Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe	12
Development of a Gender mainstreaming guideline	Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania	3

Source: Beijing plus 15 Surveys, 2009. – Some countries had more than one or two instruments, e.g. the gender policy as well as legal instruments/laws and gender responsive budgeting.

Gender equality policies

Most African countries now have gender equality policies, although they vary in complexity and attention to detail. However, the Beijing plus 15 Survey found there to be a lack of systematic sector policies for gender equality and a lack of harmony between gender equality policies and other policies. Gender equality issues are complex and interlocking and there is the additional challenge of the increasingly technical nature of policymaking. Moreover, interventions such as gender-responsive budgeting and gender mainstreaming increasingly require very specific skills. This is fast reducing the space for policy influence and it is important for institutional mechanisms to work out how to pitch their interventions in these spaces in ways that enable them to participate. Capacity-building of staff and members of women's organizations is also needed in order to enhance their skills in these new tasks. For example, as most policies have been drafted bureaucratically, with minimal consultation, disseminating them to all stakeholders both within and outside government will prove difficult.

Gender focal points or gender desk officers

Gender focal points or gender desk officers are one of the most frequently mentioned instruments for supporting gender mainstreaming. They are established in ministries, departments and agencies in order to facilitate gender mainstreaming at all levels and have had some positive effects in the various countries. However, they have limitations, which include:

- The choice of people whose profile and status within their respective institutions may not be appropriate as focal points;
- The fact that often the focal point is not located at a strategic level enabling it to influence decisions within the department at all levels of intervention;
- The fact that the focal point is often not institutionalized in the reference structures means that its activities are not integrated into the planning frameworks and programming of the technical ministry concerned. This prevents the focal point working in a framework with clear guidelines and the material and financial resources necessary to perform its mission (SARR, 2009).

A study of South Africa's gender desks found them to be located within human resources rather than policy departments (Geisler, 2004). A similar lack of influence has been reported in a study of Ethiopia's gender focal points (Mulugeta, 2008). A study on Ghana found that, at the level of local government, gender desk officers were not involved in planning and budgetary processes. In addition, there have been questions about their remuneration and the nature of their relationship with the lead institutional mechanism (Ofei-Aboagye, 2006).

Gender equality committees and other collectives

In order to circumvent the weaknesses of the gender focal point mechanism, many countries have developed gender equality committees and other collectives to replace or supplement focal points. Uganda's Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, for example, has established a Gender and Rights Committee. This Committee, which evolved from the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) Gender Team, which was to mainstream gender in Uganda's Poverty Reduction Programme, now serves as an advisory body to the Ministry, focusing on strategic issues. It includes representation from all government ministries, departments and agencies. The Committee was established to strengthen the gender mainstreaming strategy. It reviews the National Development Plan and various sectoral papers and provides input in order to strengthen their gender equality focus. It also intervenes in national surveys, such as the household and national demographic and health surveys. It works through sub-committees, which support the gender focal points in each Ministry.

Forums of women ministers and parliamentarians

At the parliamentary level, some francophone countries with the support of the UNFPA have established forums of women ministers and parliamentarians. In Rwanda, the forum, which

was created in 1996, played an important role in ensuring the gender sensitivity of the new Constitution. It was instrumental in organizing seminars for women leaders during the drafting of the new Constitution and the revision of discriminatory provisions in legislation and on the eve of presidential and legislative elections. Other examples include the Mauritanian Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians (RMFMP) and the Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians of Chad (FEFEMPT) (Sarr, 2009). In Southern Africa, the SADC Parliamentary Forum spearheaded the establishment of a regional women's parliamentary caucus, which in turn influenced national women's parliamentary caucuses. These have had varying degrees of success in promoting the gender equality agenda.

3.9 Knowledge management information systems

Different kinds of information - databases, websites, disaggregated surveys, surveys on particular problems, and directories - have been collected by several national machineries. Rwanda can be cited as best practice on the collection and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data. After Vision 2020 was issued the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda started collecting and disseminating sex-disaggregated data. The data collected is accessible internationally through the Institute's website.

Some national machineries have entered into partnerships with universities in order to advance knowledge production on gender disparities. Senegal's laboratory for gender and scientific research at the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar has created a website with a database on key sectors. It has also made gender courses compulsory in the sociology department and supervises students specializing in gender research at the Masters and PhD levels. In Guinea Conakry, the UNESCO Chair has been established for the same purpose. The Ministry of the Family in Djibouti has partnered the University for the production of data on gender disparities. Mauritania has a variety of disparity indicators. Gender strategy documents for Gabon and Togo provide indicators on all sectors. In many African countries, however, government statistical services responsible for the production and processing of statistical data have yet to integrate gender dimensions into their instruments.

Data disaggregated by sex provide the basis for analysis and identifying issues to be given priority and the baseline for assessing progress and are also useful for civil society activism. Gender statistics should do more than simply have male and female categories: they should focus on the issues of particular relevance to women and men and girls and boys and their different roles in society. It should also involve the development and testing of indicators and research methodologies for strengthening gender analysis and monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. This requires the provision of adequate human and financial resources and should involve national statistical bodies, centres for women's studies, research organizations and international organizations (UNECA, 1999b).

One important mechanism for knowledge management is the gender observatories established in mainly francophone countries, such as Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Rwanda, Senegal and Togo. Observatories are located both within and outside state structures. In Guinea, for example, the observatory was established in the National Assembly to ensure the rights of women in all fields, while in Senegal it is an organ of the Women's Ministry. In Rwanda, the Observatory is enshrined in the Constitution. It is responsible for the monitoring and control of the basic principles of gender mainstreaming and the rights of women in the development process. It is also responsible for disseminating at various levels the findings and recommendations of programmes for gender mainstreaming in the development process. The Gender Observatory is established by law and must submit its programme and activity reports to the Government. It is responsible to the Prime Minister. These observatories, which should be responsible for ongoing assessment of the enforcement of laws and measures taken to promote gender equality and the achievement levels of proposed indicators in national gender policies, have difficulty achieving their targets because of lack of autonomy and have so far had little success in improving the status of women (Sarr, 2009).

Conclusions

The main changes in national mechanisms are as follows: ministries for women or sections of ministries are increasingly chosen as lead institutional mechanisms and there is a growing trend towards multiple institutions as institutional mechanisms. In order for the full benefits of this approach to be achieved, the relationships among the mechanisms need to be clarified and coordination problems overcome. A few countries have made civil society organizations part of their national mechanisms, while most referred to cooperation with civil society organizations as an important strategy. There is a need to make these claims real in order to maximize their benefits. The gender mainstreaming strategy, along with gender desks and gender focal points, are the most frequently mentioned tools and instruments used by institutional mechanisms. Other instruments are legislative reform and gender-responsive budgeting. If properly used, tools such as gender-responsive budgeting could provide opportunities for effective cooperation among the different stakeholders in order to promote the allocation of more resources to social development and gender equality programmes (Sarr, 2009). This will be discussed further in the next section.

IV. Assessment of status of national mechanisms

The purpose of this section is to assess the status of national mechanisms for gender equality in Africa today. The changes and recent trends in national mechanisms outlined in the previous chapter have determined the key focus areas or priority issues, both at the regional and sub-regional levels. The current scenario with regard to both resources and collaboration with other stakeholders will be carefully assessed. This is vital in order to learn the lessons that can help to overcome challenges and replicate successes wherever possible.

4.1 Key areas of focus

All the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action feature in the work programmes of national mechanisms. This has the effect of creating continuity and homogeneity in the work of national mechanisms across the region. It is apparent from the listed achievements of national machineries and what they identify as emerging issues that women's poverty, political representation and girl child issues continue to have high priority.

There are some subregional priorities. For example, the feminization of HIV/AIDS is a priority issue in Southern and Eastern Africa. There are three significant emerging issues: climate change, social protection and the global financial crisis. While few countries have raised these issues, they show that national mechanisms need to be proactive in taking on new issues critical for the well-being of women. On the other hand, they raise the question of matching resources to mandates and functions as well as processes for setting priorities. In short, the longstanding and emerging issues of concern across the region are as follows:

- The persistence of gendered poverty, which is related to women's poor access to resources and gender biases in economic policies and outcomes;
- The political representation of women;
- The rights and development of the girl child;
- Gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence;
- Health, particularly sexual and reproductive health, with special reference to maternal mortality and morbidity;
- The impact of HIV/AIDS on women;
- The rights of women and children during conflict and post-conflict reconstruction;
- The impact of climate change on women's livelihoods.

4.2 Types, structures and location

There are many types of institutional mechanisms for gender equality in Africa. As already indicated, a number of countries have ministries for women and children, which are often combined with other, less elaborate mechanisms, such as gender desk officers and parliamentary select committees. Other countries have ministries whose portfolio includes women or gender but is combined with other concerns. In terms of location, the vast majority of mechanisms are located inside government, either in the executive or legislative branch. In only a few cases are mechanisms constitutional bodies (Commission on Gender Equality of South Africa) or civil society organizations (Cape Verde Institute of Gender Equity and Equality and the National Union of Eritrean Women).

However, in the Beijing plus 15 Survey, a number of countries identified the low institutional location and lack of decision-making powers of their mechanisms as a major constraint. A study of the SADC Region also found that there are very weak links and cooperation between gender equality structures and national planning and budgetary allocation processes (Warioba, 2005). This is a longstanding problem, complicated by the assumption that the best national mechanisms are located at the highest levels of government. As far back as the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies (NFLS) of 1985, this has been the demand for the location of institutional mechanisms, also reiterated in the Beijing Platform for Action (paragraph 57, NFLS; paragraph 201, Platform for Action). Studies of institutional mechanisms in 2000 found that this demand had been interpreted in different ways by different governments. National machineries were located in the Ministry of Finance, the Planning Institution or the Office of the President in order to fulfil the demand. Thus for some, the highest levels of government means the office of the most powerful office holder in the executive, while for others, it is either the entity controlling resources or the institution in charge of planning. Different locations have their strengths and weaknesses, and these come to shape the national machinery. Furthermore, the various locations have different levels of power and influence in particular countries, and location within the most powerful institutions may not bring many of the assumed advantages to an institution (Tsikata, 2000).

Another internal constraint is the regular reshuffling of national mechanisms, resulting in instability in their structure and location. It was found that while national machineries in some countries had been strengthened, others had suffered stagnation or demotion where ministries were abolished and replaced with a unit within a ministry, for example. In Nigeria the national machinery had been abolished and re-established more than once (Tsikata, 2000).

The mandates of institutional mechanisms have always been broad, demanding a wide range of skills and many hands. Since the 1970s, mandates have included some or all of the following: policy formulation and analysis, legal reform, advocacy, gender mainstreaming, coordinating and monitoring policy and programme implementation, education, training and awareness-raising about gender equality. Monitoring and auditing are functions that are less commonly undertaken

by national mechanisms in the region. Working as an observatory body is another developing role that has emerged in some national mechanisms, in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, for example.

Another longstanding mandate of national machineries is to report on progress on gender equality to United Nations bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Many national mechanisms have been unable to fulfil all their mandates because of resource, political and capacity challenges (Manjoo, 2005; Ofei-Aboagye, 2000; Tsikata, 2000). The mandates of national mechanisms have not changed significantly over the years, but have expanded in practice as different areas of work have increased and deepened. The increase in the numbers of mechanisms in each country, if systematized and harmonized, holds the promise of spreading tasks, even if there are overlaps in the mandates of the different mechanisms.

Figure 5: Functions of the mechanisms

Function	Country	Number
Polymaking	Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea	2
Advisory	Botswana, Burundi, Chad, Gambia, Lesotho, Namibia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	9
Implementation	Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea	15
Coordination and oversight	Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea	20
Monitoring and evaluation	Burundi, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea	13
Advocacy and lobbying	Cameroon, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea Conakry, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Togo, Equatorial Guinea	10
Facilitation	Ethiopia, Namibia, Nigeria	3
Support for gender mainstreaming	Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea Conakry, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique	14
Promoting women's rights; women's empowerment	Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea	23
Financial aid	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Namibia, Senegal, Equatorial Guinea	6

Source: Beijing plus 15 Survey, 2009. NB One country may have more than one function in use. For instance, most gender structures play a role in gender mainstreaming, lobbying and advocacy.

In the Beijing plus 15 Survey, by far the most frequently mentioned functions of the institutional mechanisms were coordination and oversight, promoting women's rights and women's empowerment, policy implementation, advisory functions and gender mainstreaming perspectives. Interestingly, few organizations said they were involved in policymaking. While institutional mechanisms were involved in more areas of work, including monitoring and evaluation, the crucial task of initiating policies for women's empowerment was little mentioned, contrary to the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action. The most common longstanding priorities of national machinery are fighting women's poverty, women's representation in politics and girl child issues. More recently, priorities have included gender-based violence, legal reform and gender-responsive budgeting.

4.3 Resources

4.3.1 Financial Resources

Financial constraints continue to top the list of constraints. The Beijing plus 15 Survey found financial constraints to be the single most mentioned problem.¹³ Before 2000, studies discussed availability of financial resources in terms of the percentage of the annual budget going to the work of institutional mechanisms. These were found to be a minuscule share of national budgets in many countries. In South Africa one study found that the Commission on Gender Equality had a budget of US\$ 405,000 compared with the Human Rights Commission with a budget of US\$ 1.3 million and the Truth Commission with a budget of US\$14.6 million (UNECA, 2001). In Gabon in 2007, the Ministry's budget accounted for only 0.17 per cent of the general state budget. Between 2005 and 2007 the Ministry's operating expenses increased by about 112 per cent, but the programme budget fell by almost half. In the DRC, the share of the national budget that was allocated to the Ministry for Family and Women's Condition went from 0.04 per cent in 2003 to 0.06 per cent in 2008. In Congo, the budget allocated to the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Women's Integration in Development increased threefold. Despite such increases, national mechanisms are still poorly resourced.

While the principle of setting aside a budget for gender issues is accepted in many countries, in practice this does not happen. This is because the different departments give little space to gender equality in their programmes and activities. In most countries there are no specific guidelines for gender equality in the state budget. In Cameroon in 2006, when Parliament decided that any budget that did not take into account HIV/AIDS and gender equality would not be passed, more than 20 departments included a specific line for HIV/AIDS and gender equality. However, it remains to be seen if this can be sustained (SARR, 2009).

13 Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Conakry, Congo, Côte D'Ivoire, Djibouti, Eritrea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, and Uganda all mentioned financial constraints as a problem.

It is clear that the budgets of institutional mechanisms continue to be inadequate, particularly as a result of their ever-widening mandates. For example, the collection of data disaggregated by sex is very expensive. Therefore, in order for this issue to be addressed, statistical services have to be required by law to collect such data under the direction of institutional mechanisms. This is confirmed by other studies which note that, while disaggregated data is available at the national level in some departments, ministries and national statistical bureaux, such data is generally not collected or utilized in national and local government planning and budgetary allocation processes (Warioba, 2005). The lack of gender statistics and the reliable indicators make it difficult to observe changes and provide guidance on the basis of figures (SARR, 2009).¹⁴ Related to this, the weaknesses of monitoring and evaluation systems means that reliable information on areas of improvement, persistent challenges and emerging issues is lacking. The inclusion of such indicators in performance assessments would strengthen the ability of institutional mechanisms to demand accountability on these matters (Warioba, 2005).

Another area of concern in relation to financial resources is that the work of institutional mechanisms is largely funded by donors. A study in 2000 found that Zimbabwe's national machinery was surviving on donations (ZWRCN, 2000). Even more problematic, donor dependence continues to be an issue for the majority of national mechanisms and very few programmes have been developed with national resources. Most countries do not implement their own budgetary allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment at the national or sectoral levels. Therefore the international community has been the main driver of progress. Organizations such as the UNDP and FAO have supported women's organizations in the processing of local products and are responsible for progress in key policy areas. For example, under pressure from donors, second generation PRSPs have enabled the root causes of poverty among women to be more clearly identified, although their implementation remains problematic. For example, Senegal has established a gender department for the PRSPs.

Donor dependence heightens the risk of programming which fits in more with donor priorities and agendas than with national interests and increases lack of sustainability in programming (SARR, 2009). Donor dependence was found to compromise the programmatic autonomy, consistency and sustainability of institutional mechanisms. The reporting burdens, policy conditionalities and related problems of absorptive capacity arising from the use of donor funds have also been discussed in the literature (Ofei-Aboagye, 2000). It has created long-term political problems which have affected relations with other parts of government and undermined the credibility and legitimacy of the agendas of institutional mechanisms for gender equality. Studies have shown that donor dependency was a factor in the preoccupation of institutional mechanisms with project implementation, their neglect of policy work, their inability to recruit and retain high calibre staff, and the homogenization of their agendas, priorities and organizational characteristics (Tsikata, 2000; Chisala and Nkonkonmalimba 2000; Wangusa, 2000; Warioba, 2005). While the donor dependency of any institution has to be placed in a context where

14 In the Beijing plus 15 Survey, Burundi, Congo, Liberia, Mali, Namibia, Senegal, Seychelles, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe identified the lack of available data disaggregated by sex as a major internal constraint.

the share of ODA flows to many African countries are in double digits of gross national income (GNI),¹⁵ it is also the case that certain sectors of government are more donor dependent than others. This could be seen as an indication of governmental priorities.

While the establishment of ministries has implied larger budgets, this is dependent on what is allocated by ministries of finance. Even constitutional bodies like South Africa's Commission on Gender Equality have not achieved financial independence in that they still derive their budget from the Ministry of Justice rather than Parliament (Manjoo, 2005).

Political will and resources go hand-in-hand and are essential to the ability of national mechanisms to fulfil their mandates and perform their functions. Countries with larger resources have been able to impact communities significantly, and this has increased their political support base.

As outlined above, national mechanisms in North Africa have received the political support of executive bodies, as well as the commitment of first ladies. This has resulted in specific examples of the region's commitment to gender equality. For example, in 1999 Tunisia established the Taher Haddad National Prize for the best media work that portrays positive images of women. From 2001 onwards the President of Tunisia offered a gold medal and a sum of \$8,000 to a person, institution, practice or project that promoted the role of rural women, and in 2008 began to offer the same prize to any scientific research written by a woman.

The creation of national development plans, action plans, and strategic gender plans for national mechanisms has also been a sign of political support and commitment to gender equality. Many national mechanisms have developed such documents and have been successful in obtaining partial government funding for them (Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia).

Women's funds are also becoming a popular strategy for addressing the resource constraints of individual women or their organizations. Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, among others, have such funds, although they are earmarked for different purposes. The South African fund is to promote the work of civil society organizations, the Ghana fund is directed at women wanting to enter politics, while those in Tanzania and Zimbabwe are revolving loan funds given to women's groups to support their economic activities. Funds are useful because they provide support for addressing urgent problems, but they enlarge the implementation portfolio of lead institutional mechanisms and take time that could be used for policy work.

15 Twenty-three African countries have been identified as very dependent on ODA flows, including Burundi, DRC, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia and, Sierra Leone, whose net ODA flows between 2000 and 2007 averaged between 33.2 and 44.7 per cent of their GNI. Others, such as Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe, were in the 21.1 to 27.9 per cent of GNI band, while Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia were in a slightly better situation, with their average net aid flows within the same period between 11.6 and 18.1 per cent of GNI (UNECA, 2009).

In some countries, women's funds are perceived, and in some cases used, as a tool of political patronage and are therefore not trusted by the intended beneficiaries. Ghana's fund to support women in politics created a backlash when male candidates in local government elections used its existence to claim falsely that all the women candidates had collected money in the name of their communities and therefore should be asked by the electorate to account for its use. It was time-consuming and difficult for women candidates to refute these allegations and this might have cost some of them the elections. In this connection, the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children of Tanzania has taken a positive step by facilitating the establishment of a Tanzania Women's Bank to focus on giving women loans for their work. Once established, it is expected to run like a bank, independent of the Ministry and with its own board of directors.¹⁶

4.3.2 *Human Resources*

Human resources ranked second among constraints mentioned in the Beijing plus 15 Survey.¹⁷ Most national machineries still have few professional staff and even fewer gender and other technical specialists. This is because the location of national machineries within government has meant that their recruits are civil servants employed for their administrative and managerial capacities rather than their technical knowledge of gender equality issues (Ofei-Aboagye, 2001). The technical staff members of national mechanisms are usually social workers, family economists or teachers. Their predominance is related to the dominant welfare paradigm of gender issues. Post-graduate qualifications notwithstanding, many such workers lack critical skills in gender mainstreaming, and this is an obstacle to the implementation of certain aspects of their mandates. Mechanisms therefore often have to rely on consultants and NGO activists to provide such expertise, which is in any case in short supply, particularly with respect to gender mainstreaming (UNECA, 2001; Tsikata, 2000).

Faced with this problem of lack of capacity, concerted efforts in gender training are needed. The task of promoting gender equality is now increasingly technical, involving the use of instruments such as gender-responsive budgeting, gender indices and matrices, and calls for the production of data disaggregated by sex are likely to result in gender training having renewed importance. More emphasis is therefore needed on technical skills and specialized training, instead of only on consciousness-raising and the politics of gender equality. The importance of both types of training for the work of institutional mechanisms needs to be understood.

Although female staff members are usually in the majority in institutional mechanisms, key posts such as chief of staff and secretary-general remain in the hands of men. The leadership of national mechanisms is often not gender sensitive or politically committed to the gender equality project (ZWRCN, 2000). In some countries, there is a tendency to appoint politicians to head institutional mechanisms more for their loyalty to the government than their knowledge

16 Interview with Tanzanian Minister, Banjul, 2009.

17 Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Comoros, Congo, Côte D'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gambia, Ghana, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe mentioned human resources as a serious constraint.

or commitment to the issues (Manjoo, 2005). These problems of capacity and commitment are often compounded by the fact that national mechanisms have a high turnover of staff and leadership, which poses a threat to the sustainability of their programmes. This has been identified in relation to Botswana, Ghana, Uganda and Zimbabwe (Dambe, 2000; Mensah-Kutin et al, 2000; Wangusa, 2000; ZWRCN, 2000).

While there is increasing recognition of the need to employ persons with skills in gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting, there are challenges integrating these professionals in the bureaucracies of the institutional mechanisms. Furthermore, as institutional mechanisms continue to combine policy work and project implementation, they are likely to be less effective. One study has argued that while Uganda has good policies, the national machinery is overstretched in its efforts to carry out legal literacy efforts (Bell et al, 2002).

4.4 Collaboration between mechanisms and other stakeholders

The national machinery or lead institutional mechanisms are, in general, responsible for developing policies and gender equality programmes, coordinating the activities and interventions of all stakeholders: other mechanisms, ministries, decentralized structures and civil society organizations. However, as stated above, because of their position within government, national machineries often have little influence with other ministries and departments. An exploration of the key relationships of national mechanisms shows that the relationship between the lead mechanism and the cabinet and then its relationships with ministries are the most critical. The ministries of finance and planning are particularly important. Apart from their role in determining the budgets of institutional mechanisms, they are also important for the larger framework of macro-economic policy, and for the success of gender-responsive budgeting initiatives.

Many institutional mechanisms have found that their relationships with other ministries and government agencies lack clarity. This affects the ability of the lead mechanism to have any oversight over the gender mainstreaming programmes and gender focal points/desks of those other ministries. A study of Ethiopia's experience of gender mainstreaming shows that there are structures and programmes in eleven key ministries, which are supposed to be coordinated by the gender mainstreaming unit of the lead mechanism. This arrangement does not work well in many cases. In Rwanda, a committee made up of members of the national machinery, United Nations agencies, bilateral agencies and NGOs has been established to monitor the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. This, it has been argued, promotes governmental accountability (Bell et al, 2002).

Relations with the donor community are very important because many institutional mechanisms depend on donor funding for their operations. Furthermore, in some cases donors support the gender equality agenda through their conditionalities. While this is a contested form of

support, it has often been critical in strengthening the hand of national mechanisms. The early focus of donors on projects channelled the national machinery away from policy work towards project implementation. This was heavily criticized in the literature (Mensah-Kutin et al, 2000; Tsikata, 2000; Geisler, 2004). However, since the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of 2000, donors have been harmonizing their relationships with both government and civil society. In relation to government, they are offering general budgetary support instead of project and programme support on a bilateral basis. Therefore institutional mechanisms can receive support as part of the general budget. While this arguably might protect them from the perception that their priorities are determined by donors rather than their primary constituency of women, it also makes their control of resources more uncertain. A few donors continue to support the lead mechanism through projects.

Relations with civil society organizations are another important part of the web of relationships involving national mechanisms. They have evolved in different directions depending on national histories, the state of the women's movement and relationships between national mechanisms and ruling parties and governments. In countries where national mechanisms have traditionally had very strong relations with ruling parties (Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe and more recently, South Africa), relations with civil society organizations have tended to be difficult (ZWRCN, 2000; Geisler, 2004). In countries where the national mechanisms were perceived to be under the control of first ladies (Ghana, Nigeria), relations with civil society were similarly fraught (Tsikata, 2000; Mama, 2000a; Mama, 2000b). Increasingly, with the consolidation of multiparty constitutional rule, the growing strength and cohesion of women's civil society organizations and the recognition of civil society as an important partner in efforts to promote women's rights, civil society relations with institutional mechanisms have improved but are still guarded in some countries. Much has depended on the approach of the political leadership of the institutional mechanism in question and its attitude to civil society advocacy. Some leaders have simply identified more friendly civil society organizations and done business with them, ignoring those perceived to be critical. The latter are often the more credible and influential organizations, and their lack of relations with institutional mechanisms is a missed opportunity for the exchange of ideas and expertise. Civil society advocacy can strengthen the position of institutional mechanisms within government. The role of NGOs and civil society is also spelt out as a part of the national mechanisms of Southern Africa. In most other SADC countries, while NGOs are recognized, their relationships with the national mechanisms are not spelt out and proceed on an ad hoc basis. Furthermore, it is not clear whether they are a part of the national mechanisms or partners outside the framework of institutional mechanisms (Warioba, 2005).

The general public, particularly women, also expect institutional mechanisms to address some of their everyday problems. For example, ministries of women's affairs are often approached by women seeking solutions to unemployment, domestic violence and the low representation of women in politics. This has sometimes put pressure on lead mechanisms to take a project approach or set up funds and credit facilities. The public also receives from institutional mechanisms advocacy and public education on laws and particular problems such as domestic violence, child rights, etc. Through such education, the institutional mechanisms influence public opinion.

Beyond the national space, national mechanisms engage with regional and international bodies and processes (AU, UNECA, APRM and subregional bodies such as SADC and ECOWAS). Increasingly these bodies offer support to institutional mechanisms, enabling them to network, share experiences, learn new strategies, take up common projects and demand mutual accountability. The United Nations system as a whole is an important aspect of the international commitments of national mechanisms. For example, there has been a significant increase in commitment to implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in the last five years, notably in countries experiencing conflict, in order to strengthen women's involvement in conflict resolution. Ten (10) countries (Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe) are implementing all the provisions of Resolution 1325.

The success of institutional mechanisms lies in how well they balance their various relationships and draw on their synergies. However, few mechanisms have worked out clear strategies and plans for managing these relationships, particularly those with other mechanisms, ministries and civil society organizations.

Conclusions

In sum, the Beijing Platform for Action has resulted in continuities and a certain harmonization in the priorities of institutional mechanisms. Gender-based violence and gender-responsive budgeting have become priority issues everywhere. The fact that some countries identified three emerging issues - the global financial crisis, climate change and social security - shows some ability to be proactive, but raises questions about capacity and resources to tackle these new issues.

The mandates of institutional mechanisms have not changed but have expanded and deepened, mainly because of the efforts to fulfil them, coupled with the establishment of many more institutions. Institutional mechanisms continue to be funded by governments, but many are dependent on donor support, and consider their budgets to be wholly inadequate and not commensurate with their mandates. Human resources remain a major challenge, both in terms of capacity and commitment. The current interest in gender-responsive budgeting provides an opportunity for those working in institutional mechanisms to be trained in a very technical field and to extend this training to civil society actors. However, the time and skills required for such a commitment are scarce and could stretch the capacities of institutional mechanisms.

Relationships of institutional mechanisms include those with the cabinet, ministries, departments, agencies and other state organs, other institutional mechanisms, donors, civil society, the general public, and regional and international bodies. All these relationships have tended to be quite ad hoc and not consistently and formally set up. They need to be systematized in order to be more beneficial and effective.

V. Potential opportunities

There are opportunities for national mechanisms to make significant gains in the national, regional and international contexts. Institutional mechanisms have grown and are managing to expand their work beyond project implementation. More of them are now more involved in policy work under PRSPs and other processes and have established their legitimacy as participants in economic policy discussions. While their efforts have not yielded significant achievements as regards gender sensitivity in economic policies, they have helped to put the issue on the agenda. Furthermore, national mechanisms have taken leadership for law reform to promote women's rights. Their growth over the years places them in a good position to take advantage of new opportunities for gender equality work at the national level.

International cooperation based on partnership and equality is one of the most important arenas for promoting gender equality. International organizations have proved vital for the capacity building of national mechanisms. It is important to go beyond technical training in order to provide long-term academic education on gender issues. The recent global economic crisis has provided opportunities but also great challenges. At one level, the crisis and the debates it has generated have highlighted the importance of the state in policymaking and the critical role of social policy and redistributive measures in development. This should strengthen the hand of institutions working on these issues. However, the projected reductions in economic growth, the reduction of remittances and ODA and the lack of financial reserves of developing countries have resulted in austerity packages, reductions in government spending and budgetary cuts which are not likely to favour social sectors and redistributive policies. This does not augur well for institutional mechanisms as they could suffer budget cuts and reductions in their programmes. Institutional mechanisms have to be vigilant and work to safeguard their budgets and the momentum they have acquired over the years.

Further opportunities exist in the form of current campaigns such as the African Union's Decade on Women, declared for 2010 – 2020. The theme of the Decade is "Grass-roots Approach to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment", emphasizing a bottom-up approach to development. This is particularly significant since it can be used as a vehicle for promoting women's participation in strengthening national mechanisms and holding them to account.

Subregional developments, including the adoption of women's rights and policy instruments, provide an opportunity for national mechanisms firmly to ground their work and influence the direction of national policy, laws and programmes. Of note is the adoption of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008), the SADC Gender Policy (2004), and the ECOWAS Gender Policy (2004), among others. These developments signal stronger commitment and political will by Member States, allowing national mechanisms to leverage this positive shift to strengthen their positions to advance the gender equality agenda.

In addition, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign was launched in Africa in 2010. Two of its components are especially relevant to national mechanisms, namely, to implement gender-sensitive national action plans to address domestic violence and to strengthen data collection on the issue. This can be tied to an overall call for countries to strengthen aspects of their national mechanisms in order to be able to take action on this fundamental human rights and development issue.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Final conclusions

In this account of the status of national machineries and other institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women it has been argued that particular contextual factors have been critical for their development and current situation. These include economic liberalization policies since the 1980s; the institution of the HIPC Initiative and PRSPs, with the attendant economic policy conditionalities; the recovery of several African countries from decades of damaging civil war; the institution of a less interventionist state across Africa, with more recent calls for the return to the developmental state; and an increasingly technocratic approach to policymaking. Other important factors are the social conservatism in both state and civil society, greater official support for certain kinds of gender equality policies, AU, NEPAD, SADC and ECOWAS gender equality initiatives, and the proliferation of women's rights organizations and NGOs.

In contexts with both positive and challenging elements, national machineries and institutional mechanisms have developed in significant ways. Examples of their development are the increasing popularity of ministries for women or departments of ministries as lead institutional mechanisms; a growing trend towards multiple institutions as institutional mechanisms; greater cooperation between institutional mechanisms and civil society institutions, although such relations remain largely informal and without established modalities; and a growing trend towards supplementing gender desks and gender focal points with inter-ministerial committees and other collective bodies. Instruments such as legislative reform, funding mechanisms and gender-responsive budgeting have become very popular over the last ten years.

The main focus of institutional mechanisms has been influenced by the Beijing Platform for Action, resulting in continuities and a certain harmonization of priorities. Poverty, gender-based violence and gender-responsive budgeting have become priority issues everywhere.

Relationships of institutional mechanisms include those with the cabinet, other institutional mechanisms, ministries, departments, agencies and other state organs, donors, civil society, the general public, and regional and international bodies. All these relationships have tended to be ad hoc, rather than consistently and formally set up.

This study highlights the fact that there has been a general strengthening of national mechanisms across Africa (Warioba, 2005), where there has been a change from small single structures to multiple structures. There is a feeling that national mechanisms are more cognizant of their roles and there is visible and sustained activity in gender mainstreaming across government institutions and programmes.

Factors that have made successes possible include the growth and maturation of institutional mechanisms and the lessons they have learned from others and from their own mistakes in the last few decades. For example, the existence of multiple mechanisms in so many African countries is a tangible change arising from the example of South Africa and other pioneering countries. Also important are efforts at the regional level to support the work of institutional mechanisms. The ECA has regional programmes while subregional institutions, particularly the SADC have provided support for institutional mechanisms in various ways and to different degrees. Regional level cooperation has strengthened the dissemination of new strategies and mechanisms. For example, the current interest in gender-responsive budgeting is the result of such cooperation. These regional processes also help to increase skills and resources for certain kinds of undertakings. It is these improvements on the ground that have resulted in more interest in policy and legal reforms. Other success factors are the gradual growth of civil society organizations and their positive influence and impact through policy advocacy.

The range of activities of national mechanisms has also increased: from being predominantly more successful in the areas of information dissemination and projects, they have become more interested and successful in policy advocacy and law reform, although their work in making and influencing policy needs to be strengthened. Factors which have made this possible include the more varied set of institutional mechanisms within each country and the particular characteristics and circumstances of institutional mechanisms, including strong leadership and government commitment.

Some gaps and challenges remain, however. Contextual challenges such as political instability, lack of a national consensus about the necessity and value of institutional mechanisms, and the lack of established mechanisms for demanding accountability are all obstacles to the work of national mechanisms. Moreover, financial and human resource deficits are a critical bottleneck to the effectiveness of national mechanisms, compounded by factors such as donor dependency and the increasingly technical nature of policy work. Poor coordination among institutional mechanisms and lack of adequate monitoring and evaluation systems also add to the problem of ensuring quality in implementation.

There are emerging issues which offer opportunities for promoting a more responsive and progressive gender equality agenda. These include the global economic crisis, climate change and social protection. However, these new concerns are likely to broaden the mandate of institutional mechanisms and this could prove challenging in view of their resource and other constraints.

Therefore, the structures and functioning of national mechanisms are improving but much remains to be done. Only if firm action is taken in carrying forward the recommendations outlined below, can institutional mechanisms even begin to meet the challenges of attaining gender equality in an increasingly complex world.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the main recommendations are as follows:

- i. Machineries should have clearly defined mandates and authority. They should undertake policy analysis, advocacy and communications, and coordinate and monitor implementation of gender programmes / legislation.
- ii. Where possible, responsibility for the advancement of women should be vested in the highest possible level of government as this provides the most strategic influence.
- iii. Financial and human resources need to be commensurate with the mandates of national mechanisms.
- iv. Where multiple mechanisms exist, their mandates need to be reviewed and harmonized. The means by which institutions are coordinated need to be settled and consistently implemented.
- v. Data disaggregated by sex, monitoring, evaluation and performance indicators are urgently required.
- vi. Staff recruitment needs to pay attention to gender equality expertise, while existing staff should be more rigorously trained, particularly in collecting and analysing data from gender perspectives.
- vii. Relations with civil society need to be institutionalized, while ensuring the autonomy of civil society actors.
- viii. The active involvement of a broad and diverse range of institutional actors from the public, private and voluntary sectors should be encouraged in order to work for equality between women and men.

Finally, as fifteen years have passed since the twelve critical areas of concern were identified in the Beijing Platform for Action, it is important to take a fresh look at how national mechanisms should integrate new questions into this framework for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Appendix

Figure 6: Recent laws passed

Laws	Country	Number
Domestic violence	Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, DRC, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Mozambique	17
Marital power	Botswana, Ethiopia, Namibia, South Africa	4
Affirmative action	Cameroon, Mali, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo	7
Labour law amendments	Mali, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique	8
Gender act	Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone	4
Law on FGM and HTPs	Ethiopia, Uganda	2

Source: Beijing plus 15 Survey, 2009. – There was more than one piece of legislation in some countries h.

Figure 7: Achievements since 2004

Achievement	Country	Number
Law reforms/ legislative amendments	Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe,	23
Awareness-raising	Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Tanzania	17
CEDAW domestication and implementation	Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Comoros, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	22
Gender focal points	Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa, Mozambique, Equatorial Guinea	10
Gender information systems (sex disaggregated data)	Mauritius, Mali, Madagascar, Senegal	4
Gender-responsive budgeting	Angola, Guinea Conakry, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Zimbabwe	6
Institutional reforms	Benin, Cape Verde, Guinea Conakry, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius,	6
Gender policy	Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Zambia, Zimbabwe	13
Women's funds	Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Gambia, Gabon, Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea	12
Ratification of AU gender protocol	Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Congo, DRC, Djibouti, Gambia, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Equatorial Guinea	14

Source: Beijing plus 15 Survey, 2009. A country may have obtained more than one key achievement.

Figure 8: Constraints to the work of institutional mechanisms

Constraints	Country	Number
Financial	Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda	33
Human resources	Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe	29
Resistance / lack of political will within the government and committees	Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Madagascar, Nigeria, Togo	9
Lack of data disaggregated by sex	Burundi, Congo, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Guinea Conakry, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, Zambia, Zimbabwe	15
Lack of proper monitoring and evaluation systems	Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Zambia, Equatorial Guinea	13
Resistance / negative attitude within society	Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Madagascar, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Swaziland, Uganda	17
Poor coordination	Benin, Burundi, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique	8
Illiteracy and poverty of women	Burundi, Chad, Comoros, Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Mozambique	7
Low institutional location / mechanism lacks powers	Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal	10
Political instability	Chad	1
Lack of progress	Cape Verde	1
Lack of relevant skills	Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, Tanzania, Zimbabwe	9
Delays in relevant legislation	Burundi, Gabon, Malawi, Madagascar, Seychelles	5
Other		
- Inadequate dissemination of laws and policies	Burundi, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Madagascar, Zimbabwe	7
- Failure to apply Family Code		

Source: Beijing plus 15 Survey, 2009. – The constraints indicated above cut across most countries. For less developed countries, the constraints were more in the areas of finance, capacity, lack of gender disaggregated data, delays in legislation and political will.

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