

**United Nations**  
**Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)**  
**“The role of national mechanisms in promoting**  
**gender equality and the empowerment of women:**  
**achievements, gaps and challenges”**  
**29 November 2004 – 2 December 2004**  
**Rome, Italy**

**Rethinking the need for and structure of the national machineries  
for women’s advancement**

**Prepared by**  
**Devaki Jain**

---

\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

## Main Points:

- o The Impediments to their effectiveness – as analysed by the papers
- o The Questions that arise and that
- o We need to ask ourselves
- o The situation now: new aspects
- o What were the aims when they were set up?
- o The Issues now are different
- o So what then is indicated ?
- o Indian scenario and innovations
- o Finding a role for the women's bureau - A package of schemes
- o What then is the role of the earlier types of machinery?
- o Are there other ways of bringing in the expertise such as gendering public policy?
- o What then could be the role of these machineries ?

Several excellent review papers have been provided for this meeting, which have seriously looked at the national machineries that have come into being , especially since the Mexico Conference

Reading through them some of the commonalities that emerge are

That while they have played significant roles, followed their mandates, they have also had **impediments**, such as

- o Weak funding,
- o marginalisation,
- o not backed by political will
- o lack of coordination. , that is and not efficiently connected to each other and the other departments ,

My presentation therefore will not refer to these basic aspects of the subject nor even describe the system or the architecture of the machinery in India. But using the Indian experience as the field I would like to propose some other ways of assessing the past and also of designing the future for institutional arrangements for women's advancement

As everyone will admit, the UN as well as governments have had changes in preoccupations and power in the 30 years that have passed since Mexico The **questions** therefore that I would ask is,

- o do we not have to re think the notion of national machineries as bureaus and focal points in government ?
- o as the appropriate instruments at this time ?
- o Is it worth while to go forward on the analysis that what is missing is eg funds and political will etc and this needs to be rectified
- o or do we start de novo??

### *We need to ask ourselves*

- o *what did we want the focal points and national machineries to do when they were birthed ?*
- o *Do we still want them to do the same*
- o *or are there other objectives;*
- o *and further can they still hold that role in the changing circumstances in the landscape*

First I would suggest that there have been four major changes in the landscape

### *The situation now*

1. There has been an explosion in knowledge about women, men society and its impulses. This knowledge is wide spread and has created both awareness, which did not exist in the atmosphere in 1975, as well as a large constituency of knowledge owners and users amongst women. While admitting that *women* is not a homogenous formation of society, it still has an identity in that *difference* is visible.
2. We have made great professional strides in gendering public policy – in intervening in trade conferences, in the Labour sector, in fiscal policy in dealing with formal politics. There is professional competence and organization in many of these fields , and this competence rests in independent agencies just like other usual professional constituencies
3. The third “new” phenomena is the changes in the structure and power of the State. The pressure of liberalization and privatization eg the privatization of public goods has shifted the functions of the state. There is an increase in the visibility and role of the corporate sector , in the trading sector, even more than in the manufacturing sector.
4. There is growing regionalism, and localism as a response to globalisation and these economic clubs are increasing in the South countries too.

### *What were the aims when they were set up?*

When these focal points and bureaus were set up, they were basically to inform governments, to be catalysts within the system to influence, policy design by pointing out what was required to ensure that the concerns and needs of women were incorporated. Within the system *Knowledge giving and advocacy were the keys*. Government as it was then was the key player in provisioning of basic amenities, in funding welfare, and for example in enabling wage parity ; and women were in some ways willing to be considered as requiring welfare , protection, women oriented schemes

In India *in those days* funds were put in the hands of say the Central Social Welfare board which is a network of thousands of small women’s organizations, then there was the Womens Development Corporations with the mandate to fund women entrepreneurs,

to engage in enhancing women's earning capacities, followed by the Mahila Kosh which was a fund like the UNIFEM fund but a credit fund for women's projects.

### **Issues are different**

But **today the issue is different**. World wide and in India more women are being absorbed in the labour force than men but in the informal economy and the vanguard of the women workers movement is working on improving the social protection laws, in building other forms of trade unions and networks that can wield power over the private sector, the Banks including the world bank, the ILO and its international regulatory mechanisms. In other words there is a strong women workers in the informal economy lobby globally<sup>1</sup> ( **reference WIEGO as well as HOMENET** )

Similarly there are lobbies for arguing with trade regimes at the world level, as well as at the regional economic clubs that are mushrooming world wide. Trade protocols have enormous relevance to women's livelihoods as well as food security – they can both expand as well as contract opportunity Here the issues are again related to worker protection, women's bodily risks ( the gender and trade network , among others)

Along with regionalisation there is also localization and some countries have implemented the Beijing mandate of one third reservation of seats for women in elected or legislative bodies or agencies .Hence there are new formations of women in governance often from poor or excluded groups who are neither NGOs nor Govt officials but who are in councils of administration.

Then there is the micro credit movement, even if it feeds into the neo liberal paradigm of shifting support from grants to loans, it is being grasped with both hands by poor women to find ways of lifting themselves out of various deprivations

There is now local national and international professionalism in the capacity to intervene .So too in other areas like fiscal policy as the emerging global campaigns for gender sensitizing budgets reveal .This is what I mean by knowledge and organizational boom

On the other side, the State is receding from taking responsibility for provisioning basic amenities, providing social welfare type employment, due to severe financial crunches as well as the basic ideology against subsidies and budgetary welfare support

***So what then is indicated ?***

### ***Indian scenario and innovations***

---

<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Carr and Martha Alter Chen, "Globalization and the Informal Economy: How Global Trade and Investment Impact on the Working Poor," WEIGO, May 2001; available online at <http://www.wiego.org/papers/carrchenglobalization.pdf>; In Thailand (Homenet) 38 per cent of clothing industry workers are home workers (Homenet 1999) as quoted in Santosh Mehrotra and Mario Biggeri, "Social Protection in the Informal Economy: Home Based Women Workers and Outsourced Manufacturing in Asia", UNICEF, (*Innocenti Working Paper No. 97*) December 2002)

In India one can suggest that apart from the defined national machinery, ie bureau corporations etc, there are women on the governing council of the National Human Rights Commission. Then there is a woman member of the Planning Commission and women on the various Executive Boards like the Reserve Bank of India, the Commissions on unorganized labour, and so on .Further the National Commission on Women, which of course would be counted as part of the national machinery, called eg the Gender Commission in other countries, is mandated to report its findings to the National Parliament unlike the women’s bureau which is part of the overall Ministry of Human Resource Development The Human Rights Commission and the National Commission on Women[NCW] have been vocal and legal in their responses to any intrusion on women’s reproductive rights, on the exploitation of domestic workers, women sex workers and so on . Their power to call attention and to get noticed is greater than the bureaus In that sense it could be said that in the new environment the NCW and NHRC are doing jobs that are required not the bureaus

Another arrival on the scene in India are the associations of elected women in local government, whom we call local women politicians (lwps ) They are mobilizing themselves across party lines in the manner of the inter national association of women parliamentarians, into associations and voicing their demands and finding a place in the State, at a more influential level as they carry political power, votes and local constituencies which the upper echelons of political systems has to take note of. For example in the state of Karnataka there is a state level *Okkoota* which means federation. This association has been recognized by the state government as the principal channel for consultations and fund transfer for social development, by passing all other organizations such as Department of Women and Child and women ngos<sup>2</sup>. This association is now engaged in building budgets from below, as part of the UNIFEM global programme of gender budgeting.

Here is a quote from a woman corporator, member of the association

“.....Women are in no way inferior to men, they too share the talent or “flair to be the agents of change”. They too have a stake in the welfare of the people, argues a women councillor from Hubli. Sharing her experience and speaking on ‘Decentralisation from the perspective of women Councillors’, former deputy mayor of Mangalore City Corporation Judith Mascarenhas said when in power she held regular meetings in the ward. “Ward meetings are important to assess people’s problems, discuss and find solutions to it. People know best about the problems they face in their locality, we (authorities) only have the power to prioritise the problems.”<sup>3</sup>

*Are there other ways of bringing in the expertise such as gendering public policy ?*

---

<sup>2</sup> Karnataka women’s Information Resource Centre, 10<sup>th</sup> Cross, RMV Extension, Bangalore, India

<sup>3</sup> Judith Mascarenhas, “Civic sense has no gender bar, argue women coporators”, Deccan Herald, November 7, 2004, page 3B

One of the innovations that we are trying in India is to find skills and expertise to gender public policy .as well as find a role for the women's bureau.

There are many very basic changes we need to do in the domain of gendering public policy in relation to the inclusion of women's presence as citizens and with special reference to the removal of poverty. We have enough knowledge now to bring what can be called gendered lines into what are called the mainstream sectors, i.e. industry, agriculture, infrastructure, the growth poles of the Tenth Plan.

However, to do this we have to find structured ways, not merely reservation of funds, or through schemes for women but institutional mechanisms, including data frameworks which will enable us to make that intrusion.

During the consultative meetings that had been called by the Planning Commission recently in order to advise them on the mid term appraisal as well as the preparation of the next phase of the Tenth Plan, one of the issues that I brought up was the need to change the appraisal indicators. Usually assessment of a scheme or a programme is done more in terms of funds allotted and funds utilized. But what I suggest needs to be done is to change the indicators of success or assessment framework from this money spent or allocated and outcome achieved to actually examine failures or successes in performance in terms of **outcomes achieved**.

There is a need to examine which items are identified and what is the role that women play in them and how liberalisation would impact production, output, technological choice, location of those small-scale industries and manufacture of these items. Very often, in small-scale and household enterprises, women are engaged in unpaid work. Yet, their contribution to the household product is such that if that household were to lose that particular source of livelihood, women would be the most deprived.

It has been shown that when poverty increases in a household, it is the women who suffer most. It has been suggested that the mechanisation of farming in Punjab, which made women's contributions redundant, is one of the reasons why the state is such a killing field for unborn girls.

Announcements by the finance minister to consider the opening of free trade zones is another area for gendered response. Evaluations by the UN and the ILO indicate that free trade zones have a pernicious effect on the status of women. While employers usually look for female labour and therefore offer an opportunity for employment to women, certain adverse effects are noticeable. Firstly, employers often insist that the labour that they use should be young and unmarried, so that they may work night shifts. Studies conducted by ESCAP and ADB in Southeast Asia showed that during the fast growth phase of the Asian tigers very young women from the rural areas were absorbed in the free trade zones into the work force of sunrise industries. They were offloaded after a few years, and since they had left behind their earlier lives, many of them were nudged into the sex industry

I have brought some of our documents as well as a letter from the member of India's Planning Commission to me as well as our Mid term appraisal of the 10<sup>th</sup> plan where we are writing a chapter on how to gender the plan .A consultative committee was brought in to the Planning Commission to suggest ways .

Another attempt we made was to translate what is considered a policy on women into a ***Women's right to development*** report. Here too it is the legislatures that can enact or act ... so the issue becomes one of women in politics, and not so much women in administration to empower women.

### **Finding a role for the women's bureau - A package of schemes??**

At the consultative meeting, some of the ideas that were given for the bureau were: Crèches for working mothers as a universal to be funded by the women's bureau but managed by the local government, may be the womens committees? Accountability and monitoring by the elected women

For example, a scheme which would package together mid day meal which can offer in any State up to 100 000 jobs for women as cooks and carers to be integrated with a crèche for working women, the Integrated Child Development Scheme and the self help groups( micro credit ). All these can be made into one fund, with the idea that they are support services for poor women and this fund given to the elected Panchayat Raj ( ie Indias local self government ) system for them not only to expend it, but that all those in the area can hold the system accountable for the delivery. It could be a transformatory experience for poor women. These would be support services for Women in poverty

Another useful funded programme could be to organize women workers into women's labour cooperatives:which or who would then negotiate for work in the large investment areas .

Another to reserve some work spaces to women i.e., building toilets, and low cost homes etc To reserve jobs for women upto 50% in the new heavily financed areas like infrastructure and build their skills to take on these tasks. Ways of injecting "concerns" of poor women into Irrigation Projects, like adding drinking water

To design programmes which would prevent a crash when no income, i.e.some form of insurance against dis engagement from traditional work

**However what is happening in India is that even these funds have to be channelised through local self government.**and in addition it is being argued that the design and priorities for funding have to be decided locally. In India we are using the local government machinery to implement as well as monitor these ideas. Hence here the national as well as state level bureaus cannot have any role: even funding will not be a role for the machinery

***What then is the role of the earlier types of machinery?***

Currently some of the issues that are being flagged globally are, Violence Against Women, sexual rights, trafficking in children, the prevention of sex selective abortion which is pulling down the infantile sex ratio in India ( see maps ) . These are issues requiring legal provisions and legal machinery to implement the provisions. In India the principal secretary in the department of women and child development, at a meeting organized by UNIFEM last week in Delhi said that all these rights and how to protect them are in the Indian Constitution and many of the legislations that India has on board .are already valuable. What is required she said was to get parliament to act which would be the job of the women's movement; cannot be done by civil servant as part of a bureaucracy.

IN an earlier analysis of institutional machinery for women's advancement, which was prepared by the Institute of Social Studies Trust, there was a suggestion that these focal points were set up for the UN system to have a spot a niche which they could relate to in their internationalism, a clone of the DAW in the UN.

To some extent this is true. We are finding that the World Bank and other such agencies need nodal points in our administration to be able to conduct business, and often set up such systems even if it goes against the efforts being done in the country to deepen democracy. The world bank set up alternative committees in India and now an ordinance has been passed in the State of Karnataka dismantling these as they interfere with elected councils of government.

***Can the new movements, whether of local politicians or social movements like the right to information, right to work and right for food movements in India be the vehicles?<sup>4</sup>***

***What then is the role of these machineries?*** Are they relevant to the situation? My view is that they are not , and rather than ask for greater funds or power for them , which would not help, it would be better to scrap them or let them go and find alternative ways by which the State can enable excluded social groups , especially in poverty to get out of their poverty and exclusion .

So ***what is the transformed structures*** that we want and do we want structures? or should we think of how to enhance the role of the new entrants to the development landscape and leave space for them , space which now gets occupied by the old machinery ?

---

<sup>4</sup> Devaki Jain, 'The Role of NGOs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Inspire, Empower, Act,' October 10-16, 1999 Seoul, Korea

## References

1. Federating Local Women Politicians: Insights In Collective Experience, for Reconstructing Governance: The Other Voices, A Conference on Grassroots Participation in Governance, February 20-21, 2004, Bangalore, (UNDP and World bank, New Delhi)
2. Devaki Jain, Building The Capacity Of Elected Members of The Panchayat Raj System – A Note, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2004
3. ....Background Note, for The Third Round Table Conference on Reservation In Panchayati Raj for Women, Sheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Raipur, 23-24 September 2004, by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.
4. ....Generating Data From Below, for National Workshop on Experience Sharing and Capacity Building for Engendering Statistics, Thiruvananthapuram, 11-15 October 2004.
5. V.S.Elizabeth and Devaki Jain, Enabling Population Stabilisation through Women's Leadership in Local Self-Government, A Proposal for the Department's New Scheme, NIHFWS, 17-18 February 2003, New Delhi
6. Devaki Jain, Globalism And Localism, Negotiating feminist space,for Rethinking Gender, Democracy and Development, Is Decentralisation a tool for local effective political voice? Ferrara Univesity and Modena University, 20-22 May 2002, Italy
7. ...., Recreating the Budgetary Process-women direct fiscal policy, Brussels, October, 2001