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NATIONAL MACHINERIES IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Progress and Challenges

Joint paper prepared by the UNECE, UNDP, UNIFEM and OSCE

SUMMARY

This paper presents progress made and future challenges for gender national machineries in five countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and three Caucasian countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). The analysis is based on country responses to the UN questionnaire and also includes information from UNDP, UNIFEM and OSCE

Progress was made through the implementation of Action Plans and the establishment of new institutions on gender questions.

Weak points still remain in the institutional area in terms of gender budgets and finance, lack of experience and human resources in general. There remain many areas for improvement and further work in the area of gender equality and human rights, as well as health, violence against women and trafficking.

Countries are being supported by gender programmes of various international organizations.

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INTRODUCTION

A national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside the government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective in all policy areas

Paragraph 201, The Beijing Platform for Action

The Beijing Platform for Action (PFA) was the starting point for institutional mechanisms to come to the fore as one of the critical ways for achieving gender equality in most countries of UNECE region. During the last ten years countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus have developed new gender-oriented institutional mechanisms.

Most national Governments have established departments, commissions or committees on women's issues and gender equality to fulfil their international commitments. The Beijing process facilitated new mechanisms for mainstreaming gender into governmental policies. Progress could be seen in the introduction of new laws and in the establishment of new institutions. It was very supportive in the process of civil society's building and creating strong linkages with NGOs. Problems still remain in the social and economic situation of countries. While attaining the de jure equality, more progress should be done in terms of the de facto achievements.

In the 1990s, countries in Central Asia suffered serious setbacks in their economic growth, employment and social protection. In 2003, GDP in most of these countries was below the 1989 level: income levels had declined, poverty increased and civil society remained weak. Gender-oriented policy has therefore been a low priority in this region.

The situation in the South Caucasus is in many aspects similar to that in most of Central Asia: economic problems, and dramatic cuts in social services, health and education. In addition,

political instability has resulted from the difficult process of economic improvement and trying to resolve ethnic conflicts within countries and in neighbouring territories.

Despite these difficulties, countries have developed institutional mechanisms (established gender bodies on all levels of authority and promoted these activities through NGOs), increased the number of women involved in decision-making, and have organized support of women. The progress can be seen from: (a) the creation of gender machineries on governmental and local levels (before the Beijing Conference, these bodies existed only in Tajikistan); (b) the improvement of legislation and cooperation with international organizations.

There has also been certain progress in women's participation in policy and decision-making. In most countries, NGOs took a lead role in gender-equality questions, in implementing new support programmes for women and in promoting improved legislation. The role of women in conflict-prevention has increased and now has support at governmental level. Gender equality was promoted across all Governments and at all levels. Most progress in promoting gender mainstreaming in the region was achieved thanks to a clear division of responsibilities.

Much remains to be done in countries of Central Asia and South Caucasus to strengthen the institutional mechanisms. The main challenges to such national machineries often stem from mandates that are not sufficiently clear, from lack of experience, from insufficient human and financial resources.

There remains the problem of raising awareness and recognition of gender equality as a human right. Countries have a problem of information flows improvement and further development of tools, such as gender budgets, to mainstream gender into all levels of authority and to build strong linkages between governmental bodies and NGOs, with international support. Establishing strong links with civil society offers many benefits for national machineries.

International support of PFA implementation, especially from the United Nations and its partner organizations has been critical over the last ten years. International organizations played an important role in supporting gender activities, in implementing women support through pilot projects, programmes and seminars, as well as in providing case studies on good practices.

I. AN OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

A. Central Asia

Kazakhstan

The first steps towards improvement of women's situation were made just after the Beijing Conference. The national machinery for gender equality in Kazakhstan was established in 1995 and had the statute of a Council on Family and Women's Issues and Demographic Policy under the President of Kazakhstan. In 1998, the Council was reorganized into a National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs, again under the President, and was provided with broader authorities.

The Commission was established to protect the interests of the family and ensure the necessary conditions for women's participation in political, social, economic and cultural life. Similar commissions have been established under the governing bodies in the provinces and in both Astana and Almaty.

The Commission serves as a national coordinating mechanism on the implementation of the National Plan of Action on improving women's status in Kazakhstan, which was approved by Government Resolution 999 of July 19, 1999. At present about 80 per cent of the activities of the Plan have been realized focusing on women's advancement, creating an enabling environment for ensuring equal rights and opportunities, fostering social partnership between civil society, women's NGOs and the Government for joint actions to achieve gender equality in all spheres. Further steps towards gender equality and women's advancement have been marked with the adoption of Government Resolution 1190 of November 27, 2003 (see description in the box).

The Resolution approved the Concept of Gender Policy in Kazakhstan. Its main objectives were: (a) to promote women's representation in politics and decision making; (b) to promote gender responsive legislation; (c) to develop policies and programmes to provide equal access to economic assets; (d) to provide vocational training and re-training; and (e) to foster women's entrepreneurial skills through special credit schemes and small and medium-sized entrepreneurship development.

The Concept stipulates the introduction of gender education in the Republic, gender expertise in the legislation, and the introduction of gender indicators into the budget policy, state plans and programmes. The Concept is designed both for the current period of stabilization of the socio-economic situation and for the sustainable growth of the national economy (up to 2010), as well as for the long-term perspective (up to 2030).

Thirty-three members of Parliament have formed the parliamentary group "Otbasy" ("Family") to bring the issues of family, women's advancement and gender equality to the agenda of the Parliament. During the recently held Women's Forum, organized by the National Commission in September 2004, the President of the Republic noted the urgency of such a Law. The draft law has already been reviewed by international and national NGOs and specialists.

Kyrgyzstan

Recognizing the need to further enhance the effectiveness of the national machinery, Kyrgyzstan has reformed the structure of its institutional mechanisms. It has abolished the State Commission and the Council, and established a National Council on Women, Family and Gender Development under the President, with the Secretariat. By Government Decision (Resolution of 23 July 2004) a new Section on Women, Family and Children's Affairs was established under the Social Department of the Prime Minister's Office. An Institute of Gender Focal Points within the sectoral ministries and agencies has also been established, but it is not effective due to insufficient knowledge and commitment, and to the high turnover of staff.

The adoption of the National Plan of Action for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic for the period 2000-2006 marked a turning point, setting out clear guidelines for action to support gender equality and the participation of women in the country's development. Follow-up measures to the National Plan are regulated by Government Resolution of June 2002, which stipulates the roles and responsibilities of the central and local authorities with regard to implementing gender policy. The legislation and evaluation base has also been improved in order to support gender issues.

Legislation improvement:

Based on a Government Decision, Resolution 94 of 23 February 2004 regulated the requirement for mandatory gender analysis of normative and legislative acts. In 2003, the Secretariat created a system for monitoring and evaluating the progress in implementing the Action Plan and strategies, which envisages mandatory reporting by relevant government bodies twice a year.

For further progress in that area, the Secretariat has reported to the President of the Republic on the need to be more focused on implementing the planned steps in the National Action Plan 2002-2006.

The financial side of gender equality activities remains a problem, although some progress has been made. For implementing the matrix of activities of the National Plan of Action, the Secretariat is using state funds and the support of international organizations to carry out measures to develop and intensify the potential of women.

Tajikistan

The Committee on Women and Family Affairs was established in March 1991 by Government Regulation 37. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the status of the Committee was preserved, by continuing its functions under the Government. A Chair, nominated by the President of the Republic, heads the Committee. The Committee has direct reporting lines to the Vice-Minister of the Government (description of the Committee's strategy and role is in the box). In 2002 the Department on gender equality issues was created under the Office of the Government.

The Council of the Committee – playing consultative role, has been entrusted with the responsibilities of promoting gender perspectives into state policies and programmes.

Committee's Strategy

The strategic priorities of the Committee, aligned with Tajikistan's long-term development strategy, focus on the following:

- To give advice, views and recognition to the Government on positive steps in efforts to integrate women's advancement issues into the develop programmes and policies
- To help the Government in the process of policy formulation for the advancement of women

The Committee's role is to ensure the effective implementation and coordination of programmes for women and families, as well as elaborating new directions for the advancement of women and to strengthen the institution of the family, was further pursued by the Government's decision to establish other mechanisms for addressing specific issues related to women and families and gender equality issues, such as:

- The Committee on Family Affairs, Health, Social and Ecology Protection within the Parliament of the Republic;
- Monitoring Council, established under the Vice-Prime Minister in 2002. In 2004 the composition and the tasks of the Council was modified in the light of the State programme on "Rural Women and their access to land";

In 2002, coordination councils focusing on women and gender equality issues were established

under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Economy and Trade.

The Committee focused on specific areas and responsibilities for establishment of new mechanisms for women, families and gender equality issues. The staff of the Committee fulfils the executive role, ensuring the implementation of the decisions and recommendations drawn up by the members of the Committee's Council, focusing on: gender equality and women's advancement; monitoring the implementation of the National Plan; measures to provide education and training opportunities to women and policies on population, family development and reproductive health.

Strong connections were established between governmental bodies and NGOs. To further enhance the status of women, the territorial branches of the Committee are functioning at the level of local Governments. Women throughout Tajikistan are able to obtain assistance from women's committees set up at the district level. These Committees fulfil the role of a centre for women to obtain knowledge and information in legal literacy, counseling, etc.

Policies and legislation are in place to enable the Government to improve the situation and status of women in the country. The National Plan of Action for 1998-2005 and the 2001 "Main Directions of the State Policies for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women in Tajikistan 2001-2010" are two political instruments for achieving gender equality.

The funding of the national machineries is being carried out within the limits of funds allocated by national and local budgets, as well as through foreign investment, donor assistance and through the cooperation with international organizations.

Turkmenistan

The Women's Union of Turkmenistan, named after Gurbansoltan-eje, is a key institution in the national machinery that deals with women's issues. Registered as a non-governmental organization, it acts as a conductor of the state policy on women, and has a well-developed structure throughout the country. The work of the Women's Union is facilitated by the Inter-ministerial Task Force that has been set up on an ad hoc basis to coordinate efforts in implementing Turkmenistan's commitments under the Beijing Platform of Action and the CEDAW frameworks.

The Women's Union undertook specific efforts during the last few years, with the support of international organizations, to build its capacity as well as capacities of the Inter-ministerial Task Force members so that they would have better knowledge and understanding of gender equality concepts, modern approaches to promote the advancement of women and reporting mechanisms under its international obligations in the area of women's rights.

Uzbekistan

The Beijing Platform was an impulse for administrative changes in Uzbekistan. The Presidential Decree of March 1995 introduced the position of the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of women's affairs, doubling as Chairperson of the Women's Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The decree also set up a permanent Secretariat on Social Protection of Family, Motherhood and Childhood, which was formed as part of the Cabinet of Ministers.

NGOs also play an important role in the development of gender equality activities. The Women's Committee, registered as a 'societal' or non-governmental organization, is subsidized by the Government and acts as its agency in women-related issues and policies. The Committee

has established local branches throughout the republic at regional, city, district, local community levels, according to territorial and administrative division.

The recent Decree of the President of Uzbekistan of 25 May 2004 “On additional measures to support the Women’s Committee of Uzbekistan” urged the Committee to strengthen its role, especially at grass-roots levels, “to explain and observe religious traditions” to be able to “effectively oppose the efforts of the destructive forces to involve women in extremist and terrorist activities”. The Decree substantively increased the staff of the Committee both at the head office and local levels and delegated them more power and authority including coordination of activities of independent women’s NGOs and their registration with the Ministry of Justice.

B. South Caucasus

Armenia

In 1997, according to the responsibilities assumed by the Government of Armenia, a new Department of Family, Women and Children Issues was created at the Ministry of Social Security. The Department developed government decrees “On the Basics of the Programme for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Republic of Armenia” and “On the National Plan for the Improvement of Women’s Status and Enhancement of Their Role in the Society for the Period 1998-2000 in the Republic of Armenia”.

In September 2000 under the Prime Minister’s Decree, an Intergovernmental Commission was established to develop a national action plan and create mechanisms for the implementation of this plan. The Commission members are Deputy Ministers and Heads of Departments from the Ministries of Health, Education, Foreign Affairs, Culture, Youth and Sport, a member of the National Assembly, as well as the Presidents of four women’s NGOs. The Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Affairs heads the Commission.

The National Action Plan just developed is the main document for improving women’s situation in Armenia. The Interagency Commission developed the “National Action Plan on Improving the Status of Women and Enhancing Their Role in the Society for the Period 2004-2010”. The Plan was adopted by the Government in April 2004. The measures contained in the Action Plan will also be helpful in addressing the social and economic problems of women, and eventually help to overcome poverty in the framework of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Program (PRSP).

One of the important developments has been the establishment of an efficient dialogue between the government bodies and NGOs. About 1,700 NGOs are registered in Armenia, 12 per cent of which dealing with women’s and children’s issues. There are about 60 women’s organizations promoting women’s political, social and cultural rights. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, together with UNICEF, the Central Bank and other Ministry representatives are involved in gender activities. Women are widely represented at the middle levels of decision-making. A special Women’s Board, involving representatives of different ministries and public organizations, was created under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister.

In May 2002, by Prime Ministerial decree, a post of Deputy Minister for women’s and gender issues was created within the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The Deputy Minister supervises the Department of Family, Women and Children’s Issues, coordinates all the women-related activities of other ministries, ensures collaboration with women’s NGOs and enforces compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In 2004 the post of Adviser to the Prime Minister on Women’s Issues was created, and the institute of Ombudsman was established. The institute is headed by a woman.

Azerbaijan

The strategy for gender mainstreaming in Azerbaijan is a two-tier one: ministerial level - in the structure of the Interagency Council - and local-authority level (regional bodies of executive authorities under Presidential authority). Since 1994, the following bodies have been created: the National Commission for the preparation of the Beijing Conference, 1994; the National Commission on Women's Issues, 1998; the Interagency Commission on implementing gender mainstreaming. There is also a Governmental Commission on Women's Issues. The focal points responsible for gender policy in ministries are members of the Interagency Council under the State Committee on Women Affairs.

The National Plan of Action on Women's Policy (2000-2005) was elaborated by the State Committee for Women's Issues in close cooperation with all relevant ministries and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in March 2000. The NPA considers national priorities and situation in the Republic and defines adequate measures related to all areas of concern defined in the Beijing Platform.

The Committee develops informational and consultative work, implements trainings and projects in cooperation with international organizations. Committee's work is under evaluation of women congress, which lately took place in 2003. The Committee explores statistical data for analysis of further steps in direction of women rights and opportunities for development. Women NGOs, associations and trade unions play valuable role in the Committee's work, their opinion might be the key point in the decision making of authorities. Gender equality is under Committee's responsibility under cooperation with Parliament, this means, that necessary legislation changes are under direct discussion of Parliament and the Committee.

The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Tourism has worked out the State Programme entitled "Young Families", adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers. The programme is focused on implementation of strategic objectives referring to the issues of reproductive health, gender advocacy etc. As a follow-up to the presidential decree of 2000, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Programme for women refugees and IDPs, aimed at providing relevant employment in refugee camps.

Azerbaijan is implementing a number of actions to eliminate existing gender inequality in combination with its poverty alleviation efforts. There is already official recognition in Azerbaijan that poverty can affect women and men in different ways and that policies have to take into account these differences. The State Programme on Poverty Reduction and Economic Development (SPPRED) took a lead role in this area. At present international organizations extend support and assistance to measures related to gender and women issues. One of the main conditions for successful implementation of the SPPRED will be further attempts to increase gender awareness in programme monitoring in the implementation phase.

Georgia

At the time of the Beijing Conference Georgian society had little awareness of the global strategies and achievements gained for the advancement of women. No serious gender research and analysis had been carried out. State Commission on the Elaboration of State Policy for the Advancement of Women was created by presidential Decree after Beijing in 1998 and attached to the State Chancellery. It received instructions from the President of Georgia. The Commission was given responsibility for elaboration of State policy and strategy on the support and improvement of women's conditions in Georgia and for working out a plan of action. Financial difficulties do not allow the State to provide the commission with a budget. There were also informal Gender Groups operating within the ministries concerned. The National Olan od

Action was elaborated by the Commission and approved by the President in 1998. In addition to the National Action Plan, National Plans for Health protection and employment were developed, which contain special measures for the protection of women's health and their employment. In 1999 the State Commission elaborated the draft Order of the President of Georgia On Strengthening the Protection of Human Rights of Women in Georgia and was instructed to work out the Plan on Combating Violence against Women. Gender mainstreaming is put into practice by awareness-raising on gender issues as well as training of specialists in different fields and at different levels. Training courses on gender equality issues were held in different NGOs, the Ombudsman's Office, the respective ministries and the Parliamentary Women's Club.

The main institutional body on gender questions in Georgia is the ad hoc Working Group on setting up a State Commission on gender equality at the State Minister's office. It has 10 members, including NGO representatives. The Ministry of Economics, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health Care and Social Protection participate in the work of Working Group.

Soon after the "Rose revolution" (February 14th, 2004) an NGO group – representatives of the Women's NGO Coalition of Georgia - submitted an initiative on the creation of effective institutional machinery in gender equality. With regard to supporting local initiatives of women's NGOs, an ad hoc Working Group was created on setting up a Governmental Commission on gender equality at the State Minister's office (August 2004) and is headed by a woman - the State Minister for European Integration. There is also broader participation of civil society actors in planning and implementing state the gender equality policy (see the box with statistical acknowledgement). Women's participation increased in the decision-making process and in core positions in the public and private sectors.

In the 2004 Parliament, women's representation has increased from 7.2% to 10%. In the autumn of 2001 for the first time in the history of Georgia a woman became the Speaker of the Parliament and in 2004 she was elected again for the same position. A woman chairs the majority party, too. Women chair 2 out of 13 parliamentary committees. In the newly appointed Government of Georgia (2004) 5 women are in the Prime Minister's Cabinet (20%). In the former Government there were only 2 women ministers (11%). Since women are rarely elected as chair, they have insignificant representation on the regional or district level. The Coalition of Women's Non-governmental Organizations of Georgia, created with the support of OSCE/ODIHR, is the body created and launched as a result of the conscious desire and acute necessity expressed by women leaders in Georgia.

Nowadays the Government and the Women's NGO Coalition of Georgia are cooperating on finalizing the process of creating new effective national machinery for the advancement of gender issues. An ad hoc working group established at the state minister's office includes 8 representatives of Women's NGO Coalition of Georgia.

II. CHALLENGES

The Caucasian and Central Asian subregion is remarkably heterogeneous in development terms. Its inherited internal commonalities are giving way to increasingly sharp divergences. The changing context of the subregion includes zones of semi-encapsulated conflict and/or post-conflict recovery, as well as of relatively high economic growth. The political and socio-economic profile of the subregion with different levels of liberalization, stabilization, and structural reform reflects variegated development problems that continue to pose significant challenges for the institutional frameworks that aim to advance women's status.

The challenges faced by national machineries could be grouped around two inter-related sets of issues: those that derive from the complex environment in which the national machineries are acting (i.e. overall political, social and economic situation) and those that pertain to the organizations' internal processes.

A. Raising awareness on gender issues

One of the biggest problems, at all levels, both horizontally and vertically, is lack of understanding and recognition of gender issues. Awareness of the links between advancement of women and democratic, people-centered development remain largely ignored. Gender issues are often assumed as a synonym for 'women's issues', creating a situation where women are seen as the ones who should be concerned and dealing with those problems themselves. In addition to that, there is widespread public opinion that economic and political issues, especially in times of transition and post-crisis, are those that should be dealt with first, while 'women's issues' in fact are not at a poor stage, should not be 'dramatized' therefore, and could be prioritized as of secondary importance that can wait until 'better' times. These attitudes have serious implications, as in many cases they result in limited state funding. One of the ways to overcome such a widespread situation could be to start large-scale public awareness-raising campaigns, conducted with the participation of trained mass-media in a consistent, culturally sensitive way. The lessons learnt so far demonstrate that this work requires longer-term vision and much more serious investment than was initially thought.

B. Changing traditional views and attitudes

The roles women play at family level as housewives solely responsible for recreational and child-bringing functions are projected to the mandates of national machineries having them focused on childhood, youth and family issues. Men's involvement is insufficient, and is usually limited to protectionist measures that come from the top. Meanwhile, there is a need to build a broader societal consensus on gender equality issues by having them stopped being seen as limited to 'social' issues only, and emphasizing men's participation as crucial to the success of this development goal. Subsequently, the mandates and status of national machineries vs. Governments have to be sufficiently upgraded to overcome isolation and marginalization dangers some of them currently face.

C. Strengthening capacities of national machineries

Although the differences between the countries in the sub-region are growing, some generalizations still could be made with respect to the capacities of national machineries. Despite the significant efforts made in setting up and developing these institutions, there is still a long way to go before they become effective mechanisms able to influence the critical policy mainstream and bring qualitative change. Few national machineries (as in the case of Kyrgyzstan) have sufficiently high-quality gender expertise that can feed the work conceptually. There is a need for substantive capacity building of national machineries staff to be able to change the environment they work in.

D. Improving partnerships of governmental institutions and NGOs

The full potential of partnerships between state-supported institutions in charge of women's affairs and independent civil society organizations is underutilized. Often competitive relationships between the two undermine the work towards the common goal of gender equality. Civil society organizations remain weak and donor-oriented in most of the countries reviewed (with few exceptions). But national machineries could play an indispensable role by acting as a bridge, by bringing together women's NGOs and the rest of the government structure, reviving

and reinforcing policy dialogue on gender equality issues and building trust, solidarity and stronger partnerships.

III. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

International organizations have played an important role in the development of national gender machineries. Most of the legislation and the Actions Plans were drawn up only after some international pressure and pressure from more developed countries with stable legislative systems and sustainable implementation of human rights for women. The increasing role in gender support within countries and internationally is also played by international organizations such as UNDP, UNIFEM etc., but there are also international institutions (EU), foundations (Soros) and the academic community which play an important role in gender equality improvement in the areas of finance, legislation, research, analysis and implementation.

United Nations Development Programme

Throughout the region, UNDP supports the implementation of projects addressing gender problems at both national and regional level. The major focus of its work is pursuing the goal of gender equality through mainstreaming gender across its all policies, programmes and operations. Producing methodological and training tools and textbooks to facilitate these processes in CEE/CIS countries is thus of critical importance. *Gender Mainstreaming in Practice: a Handbook* (<http://gender.undp.sk>) developed and published by UNDP Bratislava Regional Centre has been translated already into seven languages of the region (Russian, Ukrainian, Latvian, Georgian, Uzbek, Turkmen, Slovak). It has served as an entry-point for a number of important initiatives in the region. These initiatives included introducing short-term obligatory courses for civil servants at the Academy of Public Administration under the patronage of the President of the Russian Federation; a series of training courses for government officials in Ukraine that led to the President's decree inaugurating high-profile Gender Focal Points mechanisms at ministries and in local administrations; in addition to other similar projects in other countries in the region.

Capacities in new approaches such as gender-responsive budgeting were built, through creating pools of national resources. In order to reinforce this methodological work, UNDP supports at both national and regional level, capacity-building efforts in collecting, producing and disseminating sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics of both data producers and users.

UNDP's comparative advantages - such as its knowledge of the region, technical expertise in democratic governance and gender in development issues, outreach and access to top policy makers, institutional network of country offices throughout the region, and its administrative capacity - make it an important partner in promoting gender equality in the region.

UNIFEM

UNIFEM, within its mandate to promote women's advancement and gender equality, pledges a significant importance for cooperation with national machineries, considering them as equal partners for achieving commonly shared missions for gender equality and women's advancement. The major strategic areas of support to and partnership between UNIFEM and national machineries were built around the following areas:

Support to review the laws and regulations affecting the rights of women in different spheres of life, suggest support to amendments/or drafting new laws which are essential for observance of women's human rights and achieving gender equality. Gender legislation

initiatives by the National Machineries in: Kazakhstan (Law on Domestic Violence, Gender Equality Law); Kyrgyzstan (Law on Domestic Violence; Gender expertise of Land Code, Family and Civic Codes for ensuring rural women's rights to land); Tajikistan (Gender Equality Law; Gender expertise of Land Code, Family and Civic Codes for ensuring rural women's rights to land);

Strengthening the synergy and fostering the dialogue between government and civil society on the issues of gender equality and women's advancement: Kazakhstan (2000), Uzbekistan (2000) and Russia (2002) – the dialogue and partnership for the CEDAW reporting processes – round tables to discuss the CEDAW reporting procedures, content and meaning of government and shadow reports; round tables to discuss CEDAW Concluding Comments and elaboration of follow-up actions; Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan – the dialogue between Women Peace Networks and Governments to foster the culture of peace and to review the programmes and strategies towards improving the status of women internally displaced persons and refugees.

Developing tools for enforcing and monitoring policies on gender equality and women's advancement. In Kazakhstan (2003-2004) the debates around the MDG Report and Gender Supplement to Kazakhstan MDGR inspired the national machinery to elaborate, in consultation with sectoral ministries and civil society, the Concept of Gender Policy of Kazakhstan, which contains the set of measures to be taken by the Government for achieving gender-responsive development priorities. The members of the National Commission mapped out a set of indicators from the perspective of the priorities of the National Plan of Action on improving the status of women in Kazakhstan, and other national development plans and programmes;

In Tajikistan – Monitoring Council, established under the Vice-Prime Minister office, including elaboration of the set of gender sensitive indicators to track the level of rural women's access to land.

UNIFEM has also supported several national delegations, including the representatives of the national machineries for participating in different international and regional events (such as CEDAW reporting), workshops and training.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE ODIHR) work recognizes equality of women and men as an integral part of sustainable democracy. The OSCE ODIHR regards promoting gender equality as not just an instrument to combat discrimination but also as a means of ensuring democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights, which are so central to its concept of comprehensive security. Thus, its work in the South Caucasus and Central Asia aims to increase the access of women to decision making, raise public and political awareness over discrimination and women's rights issues and improve the legal framework to protect women's rights

Since 2000, the OSCE ODIHR, in cooperation with Governments and civil society structures, has been actively involved in promoting equality between women and men and advancing human rights of women by implementing a long term programme on *Increasing Women's Participation in Democratic Processes*. The programme has succeeded in strengthening the women's movement and creating national machineries, mechanisms and systems that reflect country-specific needs and involve jointly government and civil society actors. The OSCE ODIHR programme activities focus on:

- Establishing effective government and civil society cooperation that works on advancing equal rights and opportunities for women and men, promoting gender education and combating violence against women;
- Creating strong NGO networks on increasing the role of women in decision making on local and national local levels;
- Building teams of qualified local women leaders with awareness raising and training skills;
- Implementing community initiatives and supporting new organizations working on gender issues, in particular outside of capital or large cities.

The OSCE ODIHR programme has a significant impact on increasing the understanding of gender equality as an integral part of democracy among the government and civil society representatives. It also creates both the demand for and policies addressing equal opportunities for women and men. The programme will continue its work of raising awareness, building national capacity and expertise in South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Support of Other UN Agencies and Institutions

International institutions, Governments, the business sector and civil society are also seeking new schemes to address women's social needs as the result of the reduction in budget allocations in CIS countries. The International Soros Foundation network, Social Investment Fund, EU Tacis programme, People's Voices project, funded by the World Bank have launched and completed a number of projects addressing social reform in region.

WHO supports gender programmess and organizes projects, oriented on health improvement in a gender context. It also organizes awareness-raising seminars (e.g. Almaty, Kazakhstan in 2004).

For more than 30 years, *UNFPA* has been at the forefront of bringing wider attention to gender issues, promoting legal and policy reforms and gender-sensitive data collection, and supporting projects that empower women economically. The Fund aims to improve the status of women at every stage of their lives. Reproductive health is a lifetime concern for both women and men, from infancy to old age. *UNFPA* supports programming tailored to the different challenges they face at different times in life.

SOROS Foundation: The Network Women's Program for Central Eurasia works to promote the advancement of women's human rights, gender equality, and empowerment as an integral part of the process of democratization. In 2002 the International Soros Foundation completed the following projects within the East-East Programme to counter economic and social impact on women in transition in the CEE/CIS region.

Universities and research institutions also play important role in support of gender initiatives.

IV. AREAS FOR FURTHER ACTION

There are still areas for further action in gender-equality questions, understanding of women's issues, improving of tolls and mechanisms of support and understanding between stakeholders (gender bureaux at governmental and public level), gender budgeting, human rights in the countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus, which might be clustered as follows:

- A. Raising awareness on gender issues: status of gender bodies, commissions and committees is not clearly defined and their decisions are frequently neglected

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and gender equality have been put in place in all countries of the region, varying in different forms and operating at different levels of government. Wider acceptance of mainstreaming approaches, growing awareness that gender equality and women's rights constitute a 'common good' and recognition for the need for synergy of both traditional women's policies and gender policies could be listed among positive developments.

B. Strengthening resources for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of adopted platforms of actions

An effective and integrated monitoring system and indicators are needed for efficient tracking of the progress made in implementing action plans. There is a need for a set of measures to support the generation of gender-disaggregated information on a continuous and timely basis. The implementation of the policy and programme of affirmative action should be reviewed by the national machinery's executive bodies, councils, and gender focal points on a regular basis, at least twice a year. Such reviews should focus on the progress towards the achievement of equality goals and, if required, recommend further action.

C. Improving tools and mechanisms

A multi-ministerial "gender desk", with administrative and budgetary powers, with broad participation of gender-sensitive economists, lawyers, women's NGOs and business organizations, could be an effective tool for ensuring that gender concerns are addressed in the formulation, implementation and evaluation stages of policy making. To mainstream gender effectively into institutional processes, Governments should coordinate their efforts and strengthen the linkages between the National Plan of Action to Empower Women and various national plans aiming at sustainable development, economic growth and poverty reduction. Concrete data are not available on mechanisms to analyse the specific roles and responsibilities, and the consequent problems, needs and interests of women have therefore not been identified.

Areas for further improvement may include the following aspects: political will/commitment. The gender policy needs to be adopted and supported by senior management to endorse the gender-related actions/measures for further enforcement and implementation by technical and administrative staff. The commitment from senior and middle management at the level of department directors/ heads of unit is crucial to ensure incorporation of gender perspectives in all aspects of programme planning, implementation, monitoring and budgeting. Capacity building for the staff of national machineries on the issues related to gender-responsive planning and monitoring would be essential for attaining basic skills to oversee the national MDG/CEDAW/BPFA Report processes, including how to monitor and report on the international commitments, set targets, and facilitate discussions on development goals.

D. Cooperation of all stakeholders within countries

Government commitment and political will ensure that the national agency primarily responsible for gender mainstreaming will have real authority and the ability to consolidate gender equality measures of different actors and up-scale it on the higher political agenda. Enforcement and implementation of policies and legislation. Progress has been made in the CIS in gender legislation initiatives, resulting in the adoption of gender equality laws and in laws being reviewed from a gender perspectives for the promotion of women's rights and elimination of discrimination. However, compliance to and enforcement of these laws is still inadequate. These could be addressed through the special measures directed to transforming attitudes of policy makers, enforcers and implementers, and providing clear and user-friendly operational guidelines for implementation; and adopting a systematic approach to advancement of women

and gender mainstreaming. The actions and measures should be undertaken on a systematic basis for increasing effectiveness and efficiency of measures aimed at women's advancement and gender equality. There is a need for a system that ensures frameworks that would allow systematic incorporation of gender issues in policies and programmes, including implementation and monitoring. Establishing such a system will require adequate measures for improving technical and institutional skills and addressing the problems of turnover of staff committed for gender equality.

NGO linkages, coordination, and facilitation. National machinery must play an important role in linking women's organizations with policy makers and developing coordination mechanisms among NGOs. Also, one of the most important functions of women's policy machinery is providing resources to community organizations, including funding, information and access to the policy process.

Accountability. The role of national machinery is strengthened through mechanisms of accountability such as gender audits, performance indicators, reporting to legislative bodies, and reporting under international agreements. For instance, a system should be established that will allow that once the national machinery recommends changes to existing or new policy, the relevant ministry has to explain to the Cabinet and to the Parliament why it has not followed the Commission's recommendations.

Advocacy for the incorporation of gender issues in the design of national economic and sectoral adjustment policies. This requires provision of analytical tools and an information base for determining the gender impact of economic policies, structural adjustment and the integration of relevant concerns, supported by evident statistical and factual arguments.

Strengthen the national capacities for identifying and following up on a set of acceptable and comparable gender equality indicators, aligned with the Millennium Development Goals and national development policies to be applied and traced on a systematic basis.

E. Better coordination of donor programmes.

Adequate Budgetary Allocations. Budgetary allocations must provide adequate human, material and financial resources for developing and implementing effective and forceful institutional machinery. Resources must allow capacity building for all staff, with training, coaching and mentoring, so that staff have the necessary skills and information to work with gender analysis tools, as well as adequate resources to implement planned activities. The mandates of national machineries for gender equality need to be strengthened, ensuring that the roles and responsibilities are well defined and consistent with acknowledged international norms and standards. Clarity in structures, processes and mechanisms need to be emphasized. The relevant departments must have a process in place for implementing the policy and monitoring its progress. Appropriate central arrangements should be put in place in each department to achieve this. The structure of the national machinery should set out clear channels for interaction with other government departments, bodies, and agencies. To ensure this, national machineries have to work closely with gender specialists or gender units, building networks and alliances. It is also necessary to have an administrative mechanism for policy dialogue between the sectoral ministries, departments and women's NGOs.

Indicators for Success¹

¹ Adapted from the NM Strengthening Strategy, Canada (UNIFEM)

- A dual strategy in place, which combines a strengthening of gender equality in all policies and alongside specific measures and resources targeted solely at improving women's opportunities and conditions.
- Cooperation structures in place to bring together different policy bodies and services and levels of management, reflecting the need for an integrated policy approach to gender mainstreaming which cuts across all sectors and policy areas.
- The nomination of a person responsible to oversee the policy, preferable at a sufficiently high level to influence decision-making.
- Adequate funding: allocation of sufficient time and human and budgetary resources in each unit.
- Large-scale training to develop the necessary gender expertise.
- Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation (gender audits), and accountability, ensuring that gender analysis involves both gender impact assessment and gender proofing (routine checking of policy proposals).
- Collection and dissemination of "best practices" and coordination of national action plans to implement the PFA.
- A strong front-line staff, strong collaboration with civil society groups, and a strong line of communication with line Ministries. Established mechanisms for feedback from other government departments and agencies and groups in civil society.

Annex 1
Progress in building national machineries in countries of Central Asia and Caucasus

Country	Framework and Legislation				Institutional Bodies		Links with Line Ministries	
	Governmental decrees		National Action Plan					
	Before Beijing	After Beijing	Before Beijing	After Beijing	Before Beijing	After Beijing	Before Beijing	After Beijing
Armenia	1991 1992	2002	-	2004- 2010	-	1997 1998 2000 2002 2004	-	<u>Intergovernmental Commission</u> (Deputy Ministers and Heads of Departments) <u>Adviser</u> to the Prime Minister's on women issues
Azerbaijan	1994	1998 2000	-	2000- 2005	1994	1998	National Preparatory Committee for the Beijing	<u>Interministerial Council</u> under the State Committee for Women's Issues (representatives of all ministries)
Georgia	-	1998 1999 2000	-	1998, 2000- 2004	-	1998 August 2004	-	<u>State Commission on Advancement of Women</u> (representatives of various ministries) Until Feb. 2004 <u>Ad Hoc Working Group</u> at the State Minister's office, Since Feb. 2004
Kazakhstan	-	1997 1999 2002 2003 2004	-	1999-	-	1998	-	<u>National Commission</u> on Family and Women under the President (representatives of various ministries)
Kyrgyzstan	-	2000 2001 2002 2004	-	2002- 2006	-	1996 2001	-	<u>Guidelines</u> for integrating gender perspective at the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Education <u>Women's Council</u> at the Ministry of Ecology and some other ministries
Tajikistan	1991	2002	-	1998- 2005	1991	2002	-	<u>Coordination Council</u> (representatives from Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs, Trade and Economy, Health)
Turkmenistan	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	-	<u>Interministerial Task Force</u>
Uzbekistan	1995	1996 2002	-	1998, 2001	-	1997	-	<u>Joint Commission</u> for social protection of the family (representatives of various ministries)

Source: National Responses to the UN Questionnaire; Council of Europe