



Engaging with Gender Focal Points in Government and Women's Organizations Locally

GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND
PRACTICE NOTES FROM THE FIELD

BEST PRACTICE NOTE ON ENGAGING WITH GENDER FOCAL POINTS IN GOVERNMENT AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS LOCALLY

Nutrition International (NI) achieves impact through large scale coverage of proven, low cost and effective nutrition interventions, leveraging investments and non-traditional platforms, and influencing evidence-based decision-making for nutrition. Advancing gender equality cements these three complementary pillars for a stronger impact.¹ In practice, such an approach involves working alongside a range of in-country implementing partners, including national, regional and local government, private sector and technical partners across sectors to better integrate nutrition into NI's program countries. For gender equality, national women's machineries (NWMs) are key players within national governments on which NI can exert such influence. NI also aims to facilitate engagement between these entities and segments of civil society and non-state actors at various levels. This includes civil society actors representing individuals who receive unequitable access to nutrition, namely women's organizations (WOs) and girls' groups. This note seeks to provide further clarity on what NWMs and WO are, the best practice principles for engagement with these entities, and concrete examples and additional resources to help NI staff and partners to foster meaningful and productive engagement and partnerships.²

Nutrition International's Commitment to Partner With NWMs and WO

NI believes that greater impact can be achieved by working in partnership to address gender equality and nutrition synergistically. The organization's institutional strategy (2018-2024) states that "NI will work with grassroots, community and civil society organizations (especially groups that aim to empower women and girls) to leverage their existing reach and integrate nutrition into their platforms. For example, NI will continue to be part of the voice to keep girls in school, by overcoming gendered barriers, and also reducing anemia, so girls have more optimal capacity to learn when they are at school. NI will look at ways to reach vulnerable out of school girls and also explore how to reach pregnant adolescent girls with a package of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions, and when practical, how to address the double burden of malnutrition. NI will also explore how working with local women's rights organizations can highlight nutrition as a gender equality issue (and vice versa) in the countries where NI works." *Nutrition International Strategy 2018-2024*



NATIONAL WOMEN'S MACHINERIES (NWMS)

A definition: “National women’s machineries (or “national machineries for women’s advancement”) are government offices, departments, commissions or ministries that provide leadership and support to government efforts to achieve greater equality between women and men.”³

The **main role of a NWM** is to “provide policy advocacy in support of a more consistent response throughout government to the needs and priorities of women as well as men.” NWMs include—but do not duplicate—the role of ministries dedicated to gender equality or women’s empowerment (e.g. Ministry of Gender Equality, Ministry of Women’s Affairs) and do not provide direct services to women. While many NWMs emerged in the 1970s, their role was clarified during the Fourth International Women’s Conference (Beijing 1995) from a global consensus that ministries dedicated to women’s issues (which were often under-resourced or marginalized from the highest spheres of influence) could not singlehandedly catalyze gender mainstreaming across a complex governmental structure. NWMs enable coordination mechanisms to take place for the pursuance and monitoring of gender equality objectives in national governments. For example, a NWM might enable the adoption of a gender-responsive budgeting initiative to track the use of national funding to conduct activities aimed at reducing maternal mortality (a national gender equality priority in a number of countries).

Some of the **main functions of NWM** include:^{4,5}

- Promoting gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting
- Promoting targeted measures to end discrimination (e.g. pay equity)
- Promoting legal reforms based on international agreements signed by the country
- Promoting the use of sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive research
- Contributing to the monitoring and evaluation of (global and national) goals and indicators on gender equality and women’s empowerment

For these purposes, NWM, may accomplish a variety of tasks, including providing technical advisory capacity, internal advocacy, research and outreach to various stakeholders, as well as developing usable gender-sensitive methods and tools to be used by other governmental officials (e.g. gender champions who are staff members in government offices, ministries, commissions, etc.).

From an organizational structure standpoint, the **characteristics of NWMs** are complex to summarize because each NWM is unique and its level of sophistication depends on the national context (e.g. forms of government, maturity of the state, etc.). Some NWMs are a web-like set of entities while others are essentially the lead agency responsible for promoting gender equality in government (e.g. the central coordination unit). There is also a growing trend of establishing sub-national mechanisms (for instance at regional and local level) to multiply the influence of the NWM at all levels. A list of NWMs in Canada and in each NI country (along with their respective websites) has been added to the Key Resources section of this document (see last two pages).

Effective NWMs generally display the following characteristics:⁶

- A strong political commitment with a clearly defined mandate and the authority to execute it
- A strong feminist leadership and competent staff with gender equality expertise
- Location at the highest possible level of government
- Adequate budget
- Additional skills in policy analysis, advocacy, communication and monitoring



What Does an Effective NWM Look Like? The Case of South Africa ⁷

In a 2012 report for UN Women – Egypt Country Office, Fatma Khafagy uses the case of South Africa as an example of a NWM that is able to influence policy-making at all levels of government. She states:

“The National Women Machinery in South Africa demonstrates one of the best practices in terms of inter-relationships between the different components of the national government. South Africa has structured relationships between the Office of the Status of Women and the other structures. The office has a clear calendar of events on when they convene planning and monitoring meetings, how they operate, and when consultative meetings are held at the different levels. The role of the Office of the Status of Women in coordination and monitoring is clearly visible. This structure coordinates all stakeholders meetings that convene for planning and monitoring purposes. The annual gender audits the office undertakes is an exercise in monitoring progress made by its stakeholders in addressing the assigned responsibilities, and tasks undertaken.

The relevant departments and even some of private sector firms are taking the processes of mainstreaming gender seriously. Most government departments have developed gender policies to enable gender mainstreaming to happen within their respective departments. The gender focal points are appointed at very senior level and include at director, deputy director or assistant director levels. In some of the departments, they have established structures that are provided with more than one staff member to coordinate gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment programmes.”

Ultimately, mature and effective NWMs tend to facilitate collaborations between government, civil society and actors such as NI. This in turns increases the legitimacy, quality and relevance of health and nutrition policies and programs to local needs.

NWMs cooperate with civil society and women's organizations according to different modalities. NWMs often acknowledge and formalize their working relationships with civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs, and women's organizations in particular), for instance, by naming NGO representatives on the board of the NWM, by consulting an umbrella organization representing several key national or local NGOs, or by inviting NGOs to participate in formal consultative or advisory bodies. Other times, NGOs are invited/involved into certain policy development processes on an ad hoc basis (e.g. public hearings, consultations).

There are a number of factors that contribute to positive NWM and NGO cooperation including:⁸

- The NWM has reached a level of organizational maturity⁹
- The state and the NGO/WOs have space to influence decision-making without losing autonomy (e.g. the state doesn't attempt to control NGOs/WOs)
- NGOs/WOs hold a positive view of the state, which they perceive as representing their interests
- Political alignment between the state and NGOs within sectoral programs (e.g. misalignment would be when NGOs and WOs are sometimes perceived to hold "radical" ideas)
- Alignment between the strategies, approaches and focus on NWMs and WOs to address gender equality issues (e.g. a service delivery vs. a human-rights-based approach)

The Need for NWMs

"Women's machineries need the voice of civil society to raise the issues, make noise, and push – and CSOs absolutely need the women's machinery. It's critical that both sides come up with a strategy for moving forward together."

Remarks by Gita Sen, Professor (retired), Centre for Public Policy, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, and Adjunct Professor, Global Health and Population, Harvard School of Public Health. Taken from National Women's Machineries on Strengthening CEDAW Implementation, Monitoring and Accountability: Summary of Proceedings. UN Women. 2016. P.24.



What does NWM/WO engagement look like?

Formal and proactive engagement of civil society representatives (e.g. charities, neighbourhood self-help schemes, international bodies like UN agencies, religious-based pressure-groups, NGOs improving health and education, etc.) with NWMs are ideal to foster coordinated and informed gender-responsive health and nutrition policies. However, the reality is that much of the current dynamics between governments and NGOs/WOs occur via a reactive process, for instance, where NGOs and WOs provide recommendations based on the draft versions of national policies made available to the public. The following exemplifies one such process featuring the Indian NWM and Oxfam India.

Example of NWM and WO Engagement on Nutrition and Gender ^{10,11,12}

In 2016, the Ministry of Women and Child Development of the Government of India established its National Policy for Women. This document outlined the ministry's priority areas and operational strategies, one of which was health, which includes food security and nutrition. The government invited comments on this initial draft from civil society, and the call was answered by NGOs—including NI—and national actors with a strong thematic focus on gender justice, such as Oxfam India (OI). OI's response highlighted the importance of engaging in food security and nutrition through a risk management perspective and more specifically looking at strategies to increase women's participation in decision-making on disaster preparedness. Similarly, OI underlined the importance of protecting frontline health workers (who are women) as a strategy to achieve the health/food security/nutrition agenda.

NI and partners to engage proactively with NWMs at the country level while leveraging the capacity of these entities for greater gender-responsive health and nutrition outcomes.



There are a number of practical steps which NI and partners can take to better coordinate their work with those of NWMs. NI and partners can:

- Understand the NWM they are working with, its organizational structure and the entities it cooperates with; or failing that, identify a government representative who can assist them in doing so
- Identify WOs that have a proven track record of maintaining formal or informal relationships with the NWM, especially on health and nutrition-related issues
- Identify gender focal points within the Ministry of Health and other ministries and establish a working relationship with these actors
- Identify gender champions within the Ministry of Health or other ministries with relevance to nutrition (e.g. agriculture, education) at the highest possible level
- Reach out to those actors or use their own relationship with current partners (e.g. private sectors, CSO) and discuss opportunities and entry points for collaboration (e.g. specific policy issues, gaps in sex-disaggregated data for health and nutrition, etc.)
- Identify existing working relationships between ministries or agencies responsible for delivering nutrition and ministries/agencies and focus on entry points and opportunities for cooperation
- Identify capacity gaps (e.g. uptake of research findings) in the NWM's ability to promote gender-responsive health and nutrition policies and design/deliver training and capacity building activities to fill this gap
- Promote the inclusion of local girls and WOs in formal and informal decision-making processes related to nutrition and health in which the NWM is involved
- Maintain these relationships and keep abreast of policy development processes by attending high-level public events (e.g. national consultations) and grassroots events
- Document and disseminate lessons learned and successful strategies used in cooperating with NWMs, as well as girls' organizations and WOs across NI



WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Women's Organizations (WOs), experts and civil society advocates working on gender equality issues, represent essential collaborators for NI globally and at the country level. WOs are women-led organizations whose main purpose is to represent and defend the rights, needs and interests of women. While they are present all over the world, WOs vary tremendously with respect to their mission and the thematic scope of their work, their respective constituencies (e.g. older women, LGBTQ+ community, adolescent girls, etc.), their geographic coverage/affiliation (international, regional, national, local) and their size and status (e.g. umbrella organization or alliance, charity, foundation, private entity, grassroots/local self-help group, voluntary groups, etc.). Many such WOs are involved in service delivery within the health (e.g. sexual and reproductive health and rights) and nutrition sectors. Program Kesejahteraan Keluarga (PKK) is an example of an Indonesian WO originally formed at national level that has associations at grassroots level, which empower women to contribute to development, notably on issues pertaining to family welfare and nutrition.¹³ The PKK has proven to be an essential government vehicle in support of the Safe Motherhood Movement and the Family Planning Program. Through its well-organized network and identity as an organization whose members are normative mothers, PKK cadres have won trust within communities as Family Planning Program Fieldworkers. The role of PKK cadres has been to persuasively approach housewives to participate in, and accept, family planning, as well as to mobilize young mothers to bring their babies to the integrated health station for monthly medical check-ups.¹⁴

WOs play a number of roles, which include:

- Promoting and defending women's rights (e.g. reproductive health rights)
- Providing direct services and information to women (e.g. how and where to access antenatal care and services, including iron folic acid supplementation in pregnancy, or sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and family planning services, etc.)
- Providing opportunities (e.g. skills training, formal education, employment) for women
- Keeping governments accountable for implementing/complying with international norms and standards on gender equality and women's empowerment (e.g. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and global goals (e.g. the gender dimensions of Sustainable Development Goal 2, Zero Hunger)¹⁵

Characteristics that define WOs differ from traditional (e.g. male-dominated) organizations. WOs tend to:

- Embrace feminist values (e.g. believe in gender equality and women's empowerment)
- Feature horizontal (e.g. less hierarchical) organizational structures and leadership styles (e.g. sharing of information/power)
- Foster cooperation and encourage participation rather than competition among staff
- Understand gender equality in a sophisticated way, for instance, by looking at gender along an intersectional lens (many dimensions) rather than a cis/binary perspective
- Feature a deep awareness of notions of power, privilege and notably gender, race and class
- Often work under risky conditions (e.g. threat of arrest, sexual violence, etc.), particularly if the activities they focus on are seen as controversial (e.g. providing information on abortion services)
- Value inclusive processes sometimes as much as they value measuring achievement of results
- Have inclusive organizational culture that values equalitarian relationships
- Make room for emotions and empathy, as a complement to more quantitative reasoning

Principles and steps NI and partners can take towards constructive partnerships with WOs:

- Conduct a due diligence of the WO's motivation, capacity and performance to ensure it is a viable (potential) partner, which includes the organization's gender equality capacity (more on this below); keep in mind that the WO is also entitled to assess NI's viability as a partner
- Be transparent about NI's intent as part of the partnership in the short, medium and long term
- Define roles and responsibilities clearly and do so in a collaborative manner
- Engage a gender advisor or specialist and/or share NI's Program Gender Equality Strategy to have a clear line of communication and common language between both parties with respect to gender equality issues



- Consider the investment of resources (technical and financial) by both parties and if it is equitable (WOs often have limited financial resources, are short-staffed or have limited core funding available)
- Ensure that the partnership is institutionally beneficial to both NI and the WO beyond the achievement of the intervention's objectives
- Learn and make adjustments to build and nurture the partnership

NI staff and partners can assess whether a WO has the necessary **gender equality capacity and commitment** to partner on an intervention by using some of the following questions¹⁶

- Does the WO include gender equality as an explicit component of its mandate?
- Does the WO have gender equality structures, resources and capacity (e.g. available gender specialists) to deliver gender-sensitive programming?
- Who leads the organization and what is the gender balance in its leadership positions?
- Does the organization employ gender specialists with specific sub-thematic expertise (e.g. gender and nutrition, maternal and child mortality, etc.)?
- Does the WO sufficiently integrate gender equality in its programming (e.g. gender mainstreamed in its programs and/or interventions specifically targeted at gender equality results or for vulnerable groups)?
- Does the WO have institutional relationships (e.g. with gender champions in NWMs) that allows it to promote gender equality effectively?
- Does the WO have a proven track record of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through its work? If so, how?
- Does the WO manifest a political will to promote gender equality and women's empowerment?
- Does the WO have an interest in gendered inequities or inequalities in health and nutrition?

KEY RESOURCES ON NATIONAL WOMEN MACHINERIES AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

National machineries in Canada and in NI countries

Canada's National Women's Machinery (Status of Women Canada):

<https://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/index-en.html>

Ethiopia Ministry of Women and Children Affairs:

<http://www.mowca.gov.et/>

Kenya Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs:

<http://www.psyg.go.ke/>

Tanzania Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children:

<http://www.mcdgc.go.tz/>

Senegal Ministry of Women, Family and Gender:

<http://www.famille.gouv.sn/>

Nigeria Ministry of Women Affairs:

<http://womenaffairs.gov.ng/>

Pakistan National Commission on the Status of Women:

<http://www.ncsw.gov.pk/>

Bangladesh Ministry of Women and Children Affairs:

<https://mowca.gov.bd/>

India Ministry of Women and Child Development:

<http://www.wcd.nic.in/>

Indonesia Ministry of Women and Child Protection:

(Note: website currently unavailable)

<http://www.we-apec.com/directory/ministry-women%E2%80%99s-empowerment-and-child-protection-mowe-cp>

Philippine Commission on Women (National Machinery for Gender Equality/Women Empowerment):

<https://www.pcw.gov.ph/>



OTHER RESOURCES

Expert Group Meeting on “The Role of national mechanisms in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women: achievements, gaps and challenges”. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. 2004. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/nationalm2004/

Gender Equality & Public Sector Capacity Development. Tipsheet #6: What are “national women’s machineries”?
<http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/44896421.pdf>

How DAC Members Work with Civil Society Organizations: An Overview
https://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/Final_How_DAC_members_work_with_CSOs%20ENGLISH.pdf

National machineries for women in development: experiences, lessons and strategies for institutionalising gender in development policy and planning. Bridge. Institute of Development Studies. Report No 36. May 1996. Available online: <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/sites/bridge.ids.ac.uk/files/reports/re36c.pdf>

National machineries for women in development: experiences, lessons and strategies. Bridge Occasional Paper. Bell, Emma et. al. 2002. www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/

National Women Machineries. By Fatma Khafagy, PhD. Senior Gender Consultant. UN Women Egypt Country Office. April 2012. <http://bit.do/eBmYM>

Profiles of National Gender Machineries in Africa (Egypt, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe) United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)
<http://www1.unece.org/ngm/ProfilesofNationalGenderMachineriesBigMap.aspx>

Promoting Gender Equality: From Theory to Practice. A training kit for international cooperation organizations. Comité québécois femmes et développement, AQOCI. E. Trépanier. Bouchard. 2011.
(See Module 4 – Assisting and Advising Partners, p.67) <http://bit.do/eBmMh>

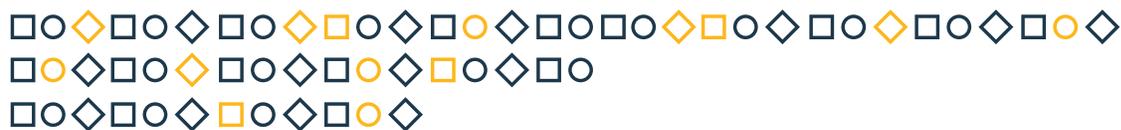
Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: A Global Synthesis Study. Rounaq Jahan. 2010.
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/TechnicalCooperation/GLOBAL_SYNTHESIS_REPORT_Dec%202010.pdf

What are Women’s Rights Organisations?
<https://www.womankind.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/women%27s-rights/women%27s-rights-organisations>

REFERENCES

1. NI Program Gender Equality Strategy, p.8.
2. The World Health Organization defines a partnership as: " ...a collaborative relationship between two or more parties based on trust, equality and mutual understanding for the achievement of a specified goal. Partnerships involve risks as well as benefits, making shared accountability critical."
3. Gender Equality & Public Sector Capacity Development. Tipsheet #6: What are "national women's machineries"? <http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/44896421.pdf>
4. Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: A Global Synthesis Study. Rounaq Jahan. 2010. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/TechnicalCooperation/GLOBAL_SYNTHESIS_REPORT_Dec%202010.pdf
5. In Kenya, for example, the NWM is represented by the Ministry of Gender, Social Development, the National Commission on Gender and Development and the gender focal points in line ministries and sub-nationally. The entities and individuals represented the main stakeholders receiving assistance from the Gender UN Joint Programme. They were entrusted with the responsibility to coordinate, monitor and evaluate gender mainstreaming processes in government in key sectors, collect sex and age disaggregated data, contribute to gender-sensitive planning, policy-making and budgeting, etc. For more information, please consult: <https://bit.ly/2QDInEE>
6. Gender Equality & Public Sector Capacity Development. Tipsheet #6: What are "national women's machineries"? <http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/44896421.pdf>
7. National Women Machineries. By Fatma Khafagy, PhD. Senior Gender Consultant. UN Women Egypt Country Office. April 2012 <http://bit.do/eBmYM>
8. National machineries for women in development: experiences, lessons and strategies for institutionalising gender in development policy and planning. Bridge. Institute of Development Studies. Report No 36. May 1996. P.32.
9. Should the NWM not be mature enough in a particular context, NI staff should engage carefully with government, for instance by consulting national gender experts who are already involved in key policy discussions and are aware of political sensibilities.





10. National Policy for Women 2016 (draft). Articulating a Vision for Empowerment of Women. Ministry of Women and Child Development. Government of India. May 2016. Available at: http://www.wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/draft%20national%20policy%20for%20women%202016_0.pdf
11. Oxfam India's Recommendations for National Policy for Women. Oxfam India. May 18, 2017. Available at: <https://www.oxfamindia.org/blog/oxfam-indias-recommendations-national-policy-women>
12. NI contributed to a women's nutrition strategy which is expected to be published soon. India's current national nutrition strategy is available at: http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/document_publication/Nutrition_Strategy_Booklet.pdf
13. For other examples of women's organizations, please consult a list of partners compiled by Womankind Worldwide available online at: <https://www.womankind.org.uk/what-we-do/our-approach/partners?page=1>
14. For more information, please consult: https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/1322924/95779_10.pdf (Chapter 4, p.38)
15. For more information on this role, please consult "A Guide for NGOs and Women's Human Rights Activists at the United Nations and Commission on the Status of Women 2018. Available online at: https://www.ngocsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/FINAL-NGO-Main-Guide-2018_SandB_SY.pdf
16. Note that WOs will not necessarily feature all of these characteristics. All WOs have strengths and weaknesses.



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