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Institutional Framework for Mainstreaming Gender in Public Service Personnel Management

The Gender Management System

The Commonwealth has developed the Gender Management System (GMS) as a means of mainstreaming gender throughout national governments. The GMS is defined as:

“a network of structures, mechanisms and processes put in place within an existing organisational framework [such as a national government], to guide, plan, monitor and evaluate the process of mainstreaming gender into all areas of the organisation’s work, in order to achieve greater gender equity within the context of sustainable development...”

Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999a

Enabling Environment

A programme of gender mainstreaming in the public service requires a positive enabling environment including political will at the highest level, legal and administrative frameworks that are conducive to gender equality, and sufficient resources for the programme’s implementation. Where any of these elements is lacking, lobbying, advocacy and awareness raising are necessary on the part of the National Women’s Machinery or Women’s Bureau, as well as other interested parties, to bring about the requisite change in consciousness for a suitably enabling environment.

Public service commissions and central personnel agencies can, through their supervisory role of the whole administration system, play an important role in bringing about this change in consciousness by identifying targets, giving policy advice to stakeholders regarding gender mainstreaming, and securing the implementation of gender-positive policies.

The Structures of a GMS

The interrelated structures of the GMS are designed to provide a strong and sustainable institutional framework for gender mainstreaming.

A central component of the GMS is the Gender Management Team, which consists of the Permanent Secretary of core government ministries, such as Women's or Gender Affairs, Finance, Development Planning, Justice, and the Public Service. The Gender Management Team would also include at least one representative of civil society, such as the head of the National Commission on Gender Equality.

The role of the Gender Management Team is to provide leadership for the mainstreaming of gender in the core ministries, and establish broad operational policies, indicators to measure the effectiveness of those policies, and timeframes for their implementation.

A GMS also includes other institutional arrangements for mainstreaming gender:

- ◆ Gender Focal Points – two or more designated senior staff members in each core and line ministry, whose role is to serve as in-house gender experts, share information on gender issues, and promote gender mainstreaming in their ministries;
- ◆ an Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee whose representatives are the Gender Focal Points in each ministry;
- ◆ a Commission or Council on Gender Equality; and
- ◆ a Parliamentary Gender Caucus consisting of gender-aware parliamentarians.

Public service commissions and central personnel agencies have a key role to play in setting up the various institutional structures of the Gender Management System. While the Gender Focal Points will be nominated by their respective departments, public service commissions and/or central personnel agencies can work with the Lead Agency, i.e., the National Women's Machinery (Women's Bureau or Ministry of Women's Affairs) to develop these institutional structures and ensure that nominations are forthcoming for the various positions.

The GMS structures function within the context of the particular organisation or agency in which they are established. In the case of

public service management systems, this context is undergoing change and varies according to particular national circumstances.

Public service commissions and central personnel agencies are also among the ministries affected by the national Gender Action Plan and by mainstreaming gender within their own ongoing activities.

Structure and functions of public service management systems

In many Commonwealth countries, public service commissions have been fashioned mainly after the British Civil Service Commission. For all but a few Commonwealth countries, provisions relating to public service commissions were written into the founding constitutions on achieving independence. In East and Southern African Commonwealth countries, for example, public service commissions all have their functions succinctly spelt out in the constitution.

An important function of the public service commission is to uphold and protect the public service's traditional values, namely, neutrality, selection by merit, and probity and integrity. Each of these values has a particular gender dimension.

Neutrality: One of the aims in creating public service commissions in Commonwealth countries at the time of independence was to safeguard the political neutrality of the public service. For this reason, public services can be resistant to changes made by governments to their status and functioning (Polidano and Manning, 1996: 7-9). So even when there is political will towards adopting more gender-aware practices and approaches, change may not come rapidly.

Selection by merit: The merit principle is regarded as one of the foundation stones of the public service. However, it raises some important issues when looked at from a gender perspective. In many countries of the Commonwealth, educational and career opportunities have over several generations been far more available to men than to women. Although women are catching up with men in education and work experience in a number of countries, a narrow application of the merit principle, based only on the past training and experience of the applicant, could nevertheless result in a disproportionate number of jobs being awarded to male applicants.

Two approaches may be adopted to correct this imbalance without prejudicing the merit principle: positive action and affirmative action. Positive action means taking special steps to encourage people from under-represented groups (e.g., women) to apply for a post, and to ensure that the recruitment and selection process is welcoming to them. However, at the point of selection, all candidates are treated equally. This means that there is no preference given to any group. Affirmative action means that the interview board selects a candidate from an under-represented group (e.g., a woman) where he or she is suitably qualified for the position (based on criteria set by the board), in preference to any other candidate who also meets the requirements.

Only if the selected candidate is less well-qualified than another can it be argued that the merit principle is being breached. However, merit is a function not only of the past experience of the applicant, but also of the stated requirements of any specified job. The inclusion in the job specifications of a requirement that the incumbent be aware of and experienced in dealing with gender issues would serve to increase the numbers of decision-makers who are gender-sensitive and can take gender-informed decisions.

Probity and integrity: These traditional values of the public service can be brought to bear on gender mainstreaming through the understanding that women's rights are human rights, and that the denial of equality for women is a breach of their human rights. Probity and integrity require a respect for human rights.

Most public service commissions work in collaboration with a government ministry, variously referred to as the ministry of the public service or central personnel office. The central personnel office is part of the executive and fully accountable to the government. It deals with matters not under the remit of the public service commission, which can include job creation and classification, staff training and development, and determining pay and conditions of work (Polidano and Manning, 1996: 11).

Increasingly, a third set of players in public service personnel management is made up of line ministries and departments, to whom some decisions relating to staff appointments, promotions, training and discipline are delegated.

There are therefore three strategic points of entry for gender mainstreaming in the management of public service personnel: the Public Service Commission itself, the central personnel office, and the line departments.

Between them, these three players are responsible for three major areas of personnel management, namely appointments, promotions and setting terms and conditions of employment; discipline; and staff training.

Public service reform

Many Commonwealth governments are engaged in a vigorous process of reform in their public services. The Commonwealth Initiative for Public Service Reform involves, among other things, a shifting of emphasis from a regulative to a performance-oriented approach, with the use of improved performance management systems to ensure that career advancement is linked to high performance. Another aspect of this reform is that power to make decisions is increasingly being delegated from the public service commission to other agencies. Depending on how advanced the process of public service reform is in a given country, the three players will share their responsibilities in different ways.

The task of mainstreaming gender in the public service cannot be accomplished through the public service commission alone; the involvement is also required of the central personnel office and each of the line ministries where personnel decisions are taken. Of particular importance are such core ministries as Finance, Legal/Justice, and Development Planning.

A performance management approach to public service management, such as that being adopted by many Commonwealth governments, is premised on the following key elements:

- ◆ timely and accurate flows of *information* about what is being achieved in the work of the public service;
- ◆ setting clear *standards* of performance and establishing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour;
- ◆ clearly defining areas of *responsibility*, such that staff are aware of what is expected of them;
- ◆ systems of *accountability*, such that good work is recognised and rewarded, and unacceptable performance sanctioned.

The adoption of a performance management approach provides a point of entry for gender mainstreaming through the integration of a gender awareness into each of these four elements. The GMS mechanisms provide a means of achieving this.

GMS Mechanisms

Gender analysis

Gender analysis is the process by which the differential impact on women and men of development policies can be discerned. It involves the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data which reveals the different status, conditions, roles and responsibilities of women and men. This data is fed into the policy process, to enable assessments of the impact of existing policies and programmes on gender inequalities. Gender analysis also involves assessing how gender-inequitable power relations may impact on the achievement of a range of development goals including the goal of gender equality.

Gender analysis needs to be both quantitative and qualitative. The use of gender-sensitive indicators in such areas as demographics, patterns of human settlement, households and families, education, health, economic activity, access to land and credit, legal rights, gender-based violence, and macroeconomics can provide useful quantitative data which should be complemented by qualitative data including historical and socio-cultural analyses that help to clarify the 'why' as well as the 'what' of gender differences in a given society.

Management Information System

The Management Information System is the repository and clearing house for all information relating to the establishment and functioning of the GMS. Its function is to gather, synthesise and disseminate information on the goals, activities and achievements of the GMS and on other topics relating to gender mainstreaming and the advancement of gender equality and equity.

The Management Information System works closely with the government statistical agency or census bureau. It promotes and develops the use of sex-disaggregated data based on gender-sensitive

indicators to provide material for gender impact analysis, policy appraisal, and monitoring and evaluation. It also works closely with the government information agency and with media contacts to disseminate information regarding gender mainstreaming and the GMS. This may be achieved through a monthly or quarterly information sheet, bulletin or newsletter. Innovative methods for collecting, documenting, storing, retrieving and disseminating information should be devised. Appropriate resources should be made available for such efforts, which play a key role in transforming the institutional belief systems and organisational culture (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999a).

The public service ministry or commission should work closely with the Management Information System, which would normally be set up by the GMS lead agency, namely the Ministry of Gender Affairs or Women's Bureau. The public service ministry should provide sex-disaggregated information on staffing at all levels, and on the gender implications of staffing and personnel policies. In return, the Management Information System should provide the public service ministry with information on the establishment and functioning of the GMS in core and line ministries.

Performance Appraisal System

A gender-aware performance appraisal system which rewards the advancement of gender equality and equity is one of the critical levers through which organisational change can be brought about.

The central personnel office, public service commission or ministry of public service can play a key role in ensuring that the performance appraisal systems in use in the public service are gender-sensitive. The system(s) should be able to measure changes in individual and departmental standards of achievement of the goals of the Gender Management System, including the extent to which individual staff members have acquired gender awareness (e.g. through training) and have applied such awareness in their work (e.g. through the achievement of gender goals or the institution of gender-specific programmes). This information should form one of the criteria for career advancement.

Incentives do not necessarily have to be financial; for example, a gender awareness award of merit, publicised through the

Management Information System, could help to transform the institutional culture to one that is more gender-aware and more supportive of gender equity goals (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999a).

Gender training

Gender training is necessary in order to build capacity in gender analysis and gender planning, to raise levels of gender awareness and to increase gender sensitivity. Among the various types of training offered to public service employees by the public service commission or central personnel office, gender awareness training should be included as a matter of course.

It is of prime importance that the members of the Gender Management Team and the Gender Focal Points be aware of and sensitive to gender issues. It will therefore be necessary, as a high priority, to provide gender awareness training to these staff members so they can effectively fill their leadership role in gender mainstreaming.

A number of measures should be taken to improve the quality and scope of gender training:

- ◆ capacity-building in gender awareness, analysis and planning should be undertaken throughout government structures, not only in the social sectors;
- ◆ gender training should include both more general gender sensitisation exercises and substantive, sector-specific training exercises directly related to knowledge gaps identified by policy-makers themselves;
- ◆ gender training should be regular and ongoing;
- ◆ gender training should include briefing on the GMS, explaining its mainstreaming aim and its component parts;
- ◆ since the promotion of gender awareness is a cumulative process, gender training should not be seen as a 'one-off' exercise but should be provided at regular intervals in an ongoing programme (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999a).