

The Politics of Integrating Gender to State
Development Processes: Trends,
Opportunities and Constraints
in Bangladesh, Chile, Jamaica,
Mali, Morocco and Uganda

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Preface

The Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in September 1995, provides an opportunity for the world community to focus attention on areas of critical concern for women worldwide — concerns that stem from social problems that embrace both men and women, and that require solutions affecting both genders. One of the main objectives of the Conference is to adopt a platform for action, concentrating on some of the key areas identified as obstacles to the advancement of women. UNRISD's work in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women focuses on two of the themes highlighted by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women:

- inequality in women's access to and participation in the definition of economic structures and policies and the productive process itself; and
- insufficient institutional mechanisms to promote the advancement of women.

The Institute's Occasional Paper series for Beijing reflects work carried out under the UNRISD/UNDP project, **Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives: Integrating Gender into Development Policy**. The activities of the project include an assessment of efforts by a selected number of donor agencies and governments to integrate gender issues into their activities (Phase I); participating countries included Bangladesh, Chile, Jamaica, Mali, Morocco, Uganda and Viet Nam. The action-oriented part of the project (Phases II and III) involves pilot studies in five of these countries (Bangladesh, Jamaica, Morocco, Uganda and Viet Nam), the goal of which is to initiate a process of policy dialogue between gender researchers, policy makers and activists aimed at making economic policies and productive processes more accountable to women.

This paper constitutes a critical component of the first set of activities noted above: it provides an assessment of efforts in six of the seven countries to improve public accountability to women in the development process. The paper begins with a brief theoretical discussion of feminist perspectives on the developmentalist state (Part I). It then goes on to provide an overview of some of the more prominent political, economic and social trends of the past two decades, against which efforts have been made to institutionalize gender in state development processes (Part II). In the main body of the paper (Part III), the author provides a historical and comparative analysis of efforts in the six case study countries to institutionalize gender concerns. The picture that emerges is one of extraordinarily fractured trajectories of institutionalization within the public administration.

Most of the gender units within government bureaucracy that are studied here have a mandate to pursue their agenda across other government departments — a project that is sometimes called “mainstreaming”. For this they have devised a range of policy instruments (e.g. gender

guidelines, gender training) intended to bring about gender-sensitive institutional, policy and operational changes across the public sector in order to make responsiveness to women's interests a routine part of each sector's activities. Despite significant efforts, the attempts to routinize gender concerns have for the most part been ineffective because gender units have been unable to provide the necessary incentives to encourage a positive reception in other departments.

Some of the critical areas for gender mainstreaming considered in the paper include the national development plan and budget which constitute important public statements expressing politically selected priorities for change and progress, and are based on a macro-economic framework designed to create the conditions under which this national vision can be realized. Efforts so far in the countries studied have failed to ensure a systematic connection between national policy commitments to the integration of gender in development and the budgetary allocations that are necessary to realize those commitments. The chronic short-staffing of gender administrative units, compounded by their weak analytical skills, has tended to contribute to this failure. Equally important, however, has been the political weakness of gender constituents outside the state. In the politics of policy-making a critical point of leverage on decision makers is popular pressure and public opinion — the presence of an active constituency.

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May 1995

Dharam Ghai
Director

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