Development of a National Gender Management System for Local Government in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The National Gender Management System (NGMS) is based on the analysis of the overall gender machinery context of Zimbabwe that includes the Government of Zimbabwe, donor agencies, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), the private sector and the United Nations Agencies. The NGMS was developed using relevant literature reviews and modifying the GMS of the Commonwealth Secretariat (1999). A study of international best practices and case studies from other African countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania and Kenya was also used.

Key words: National gender management system, national gender machinery, local government, gender focal persons, gender equality

Introduction

A National Gender Management System (NGMS) is the network of structures, mechanisms and processes put in place within an existing organisational framework, to guide, plan, and monitor and evaluate the mainstreaming of gender into all areas of the organisation’s work, in order to achieve greater gender equality and equity within the context of sustainable development (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999). The purpose of NGMS is to make governments more gender-aware; increase the numbers of women in decision-making positions within and outside government; facilitate the formulation of gender-sensitive policies, plans and programmes; and promote the advancement of gender equality and equity in society (Frankinson, 2000). An NGMS may be established at any level of government, or in institutions such as universities, inter-governmental or non-governmental organisations, private sector organisations or trade unions. The mission of an NGMS is to advance gender equality through promoting political will; forging a partnership of stakeholders including government, private sector and civil society, building capacity and sharing good practice (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999). The goal of a NGMS is to mainstream gender into all government policies, programmes and activities in keeping with the constitutional imperative of gender equality.

The NGMS developed can be used as a coordinating mechanism for managing and implementing the National Gender Policy (NGP) of 2013-2017. It can be coordinated by the Government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Gender and Community Development (MWAGCD). In order to effectively promote gender equity, equality and justice in local councils, it is necessary to have effective NGMS through a network of structures to guide the planning and to monitor and evaluate the process to ensure sustainable development. It is desirable that the NGMS are established within the existing organisational framework of local authorities. These should be connected to the national structures to ensure that local level activities are systematically accounted for at the national level. The NGMS recognises the strategic importance of building partnerships with social actors at all levels. Key stakeholders should be allowed to articulate their perceptions, needs and priorities. Gender balance should be sought, taking into consideration that women and men may have unequal access to and control over appropriate resources to participate in decision-making structures. An NGMS has a number of benefits in Zimbabwe which include the following:
(a) Development policies and programmes that work because they take into account the realities of more than half of the country’s population;
(b) A fair and equitable distribution of power, resources and decision-making between women and men;
(c) Government ministries and local authorities that are able to respond to the needs of both women and men within their respective sectors;
(d) Employees who are trained and experienced in addressing issues from a gender perspective; an efficient and effective mechanism for meeting reporting requirements under international, continental and regional agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (Cedaw), Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

Characteristics of an Effective National Gender Management System

A key feature of an NGMS is its ability to establish a comprehensive network of structures, mechanisms and processes for bringing a gender perspective to bear in all government policies, programmes and projects. In order to achieve the desired policy targets, social re-orientation and institutional arrangements shall not be in a linear fashion but rather curvilinear and holistic. Coordination and gender mainstreaming takes place within the NGMS. The NGMS shall be comprised of four pillars aimed at providing an enabling environment for the intended restructuring of gender role relations in the society, building structures for actualising targets, providing the required technical skills, institutions and processes for coordinating strategic action for change. According to the Commonwealth Secretariat (1999), the four pillars are:

(a) Enabling political environment;
(b) GMS Structures;
(c) GMS Mechanisms and
(d) GMS Processes
FIGURE 1: National Gender Management System

Enabling Political Environment

- Political will and commitment
- Constitution of Zimbabwe and the National Gender Policy
- Presence of an active involvement of civil society, NGOs, donors and private sector and UN agencies
- International, continental and regional instruments (CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, MDGs, Protocol to the African Charter and SADC Protocol on Gender and Development)
- Adequate human and financial resources including donor aid and assistance
- Presence of a critical mass of women in decision-making positions at all levels
- Social and cultural orientation
- Development partnerships

GMS Structures

- Lead Agency (Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Gender and Community Development)
- Gender Management Team in all government ministries and local authorities
- Gender-Focal Points in all Ministries, provincial and local authorities
- Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Gender
- Zimbabwe Gender Commission
- Development partnerships

GMS Processes

- Setting up GMS structures and mechanisms
- Developing and implementing a National Gender Action Plan
- Mainstreaming gender in the national constitution and all government ministries and local authorities
- Gender-responsive budgets

GMS Mechanisms

- Gender Analysis and mainstreaming skills
- Gender Training and Education
- Management Information Systems
- Performance Appraisal System

Policy Strategies

- Policy partnership and programme reform
- Information Communication Technology
- Economic reform and financial accountability
- Research
- Monitoring and evaluation
Enabling Political Environment

The Enabling political environment refers to the overall policy framework within which gender equality and women’s empowerment can be achieved. In Zimbabwe, the overall policy framework includes the Constitution (2013), NGP (2013-2017) and the NGP Implementation Strategy (2012-2015). It also includes other policy pronouncements by the Government of Zimbabwe on gender equality and the empowerment of women. Enabling political environment also refers to commitments made by government in recognition of the unequal opportunities for women, gender relations that discriminate against women and the attendant consequences on women which include: increased poverty, sexual and gender based violence, lack of equality in representation and participation in decision-making structures, and lack of education and resources, among other issues. The government should be able to recognise these challenges, develop national plans that recognise inequality and prioritise the allocation of resources to bridge the gender gaps.

The enabling political environment builds from international, continental and regional commitments to which the Government of Zimbabwe is a signatory. These commitments place an obligation on the Government of Zimbabwe to prioritise gender equality and allocate resources to ensure that women’s status in all sectors is improved. These international, continental and regional commitments include the Cedaw, BPFA, the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government and the SDGs and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

Creating a gender-responsive and equitable society requires support from the highest level of governance at all tiers – particularly the Presidium, Cabinet, Parliament and the Judiciary must embrace and demonstrate gender-equality principles and practice for any meaningful change to occur in the country. Political commitment at the highest levels is an essential element of a strong enabling environment for gender mainstreaming and the setting up of an NGMS. Political commitment is manifested in a number of ways. The establishment and operation of an NGMS requires an enabling environment. When the enabling environment is weak, a major task of the NGMS is to strengthen it. There are a number of interrelated factors that determine the degree to which the environment in which the NGMS is being set up does or does not enable effective gender mainstreaming. These include:

(a) Political will and commitment to gender equality and equity at the highest levels;
(b) Commitment to such international, continental and regional obligations such as Cedaw, the BPFA and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development;
(c) A constitutional and legislative framework conducive to advancing gender equality;
(d) The presence of a critical mass of women in decision-making positions in the political, public and private sectors;
(e) A well-developed and autonomous civil society and the role it can play in advancing gender equality;
(f) Adequate human and financial resources, including donor aid and technical assistance;
(g) Adequate resourcing of the National Women’s Machinery (NWM) and of programmes to promote gender equality; and
(h) The placement of the NWM in a central location with a high level of political status and influence on policy and decision-making (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999).

Gender Management Structures

Institutional mechanisms are critical for ensuring that gender mainstreaming takes place. Care must be taken to ensure that these structures are not marginalised, and that they are not regarded as just pertaining to human resource or internal institutional issues, but extend to the policymaking, planning and implementation arms of the institution.
Functions of Gender Focal Persons

The functions of Gender Focal Persons (GFPs) among other issues include ensuring that:
(a) Each Ministry, department and local authority implements the NGP;
(b) Gender issues are routinely considered in strategic planning exercises;
(c) Ministries, departments and local authorities reflect gender considerations in their plans and report routinely on them;
(d) They review their policies and plans in line with the NGP and Implementation Strategy;
(e) Policies, projects and programmes are reviewed for their gender implications;
(f) Mechanisms link and to liaise with civil society and private sector;
(g) There is co-ordination of gender training and education of all employees so as to ensure that gender is integrated into all aspects of the work;
(h) There is monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes to assess whether they are consistent with the NGP.

Lead Agency

The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategy (1985) lays stress on:

“Appropriate government machinery for monitoring and improving the status of women should be established where it is lacking. To be effective, this machinery should be established at the highest level of government and should be ensured by adequate resources, commitment and authority to advice on the impact on women of all government policies. Such machinery can play a vital role in enhancing the status of women, inter alia, through the dissemination of information to women on their rights and entitlements, through collaborative action with various ministries and other government agencies, and with non-governmental organisations and indigenous women’s groups.”

Success in setting up and implementing a NGMS is contingent upon having an influential Lead Agency which can initiate dialogue with the key stakeholders on the need for a gender mainstreaming strategy to accelerate the achievement of gender equality. In Zimbabwe, gender issues fall within the purview of the MWAGACD. The MWAGCD should initiate and strengthen the institutional arrangements of the NGMS and is should be responsible for the overall co-ordination and monitoring of the NGMS. It advocates for change and works to impact on policy decision. It plays a strategic and catalytic role, introducing critical gender concerns into the policies, plans and programmes and ensuring that key targets and indicators on the status of women are agreed on and met.

The role of the MWAGCD should be to empower women’s organisations through capacity-building, education and training, as well as through the provision of information and resources. This can be achieved through:
(a) All government structures providing information on their functions and on the policies, programmes and laws in their departments which affect women;
(b) All government structures endeavouring to carry out awareness-raising on the issues of gender and to provide education or training, where appropriate. For example, the health department should educate the public about women’s health;
(c) Research, technical assistance, monitoring, advocacy and awareness-raising by organisations in civil society playing an important role in the effective development and implementation of the NGP.

National commitments to the achievement of gender equality commitments are made at the central government level through national plans for the advancement of women. However, implementation of these requires that necessary mechanisms and policies are established at the local level. In Zimbabwe, the NGP includes an implementation strategy which assigns Gender Units and Gender Focal Points
(GFPs) in all sectors at central, provincial and district levels. Similarly, policies that establish quotas for women’s participation in policymaking can ensure that local government provides a space that ensures women’s active and effective presence in leadership roles within them (IDRC, 2008).

Gender Management Mechanisms for Advancing Gender Equality

According to the Commonwealth Secretariat (1999), there are four principal mechanisms for effecting change within an organisation using a NGMS:

(a) Gender analysis: This involves the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data which reveals the differential impact of development activities on women and men, and the effect gender roles and responsibilities have on development efforts. It also involves qualitative analyses that help to clarify how and why these differential, roles responsibilities and impacts have come about.

Gender analysis is the basis for gender-equitable local development. Local governments should ensure that planning and budgeting decisions are based on an understanding of gender inequalities and women’s needs. Such analysis can be carried out in collaboration with Gender Focal Points and institutional support mechanisms. Gender analysis is a diagnostic tool for planners to overcome inefficient resource allocations (Overholt, 1985; Feldstein and Poats, 1989). Establishing participatory processes for dialogue with women’s groups at local level are also helpful to identify needs and priorities. For example, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) has developed a checklist that highlights some of the key issues and questions municipalities should consider to promote women’s participation in municipal decision-making processes. The checklist can be used to inform municipalities’ planning and budgeting decisions (Byrne and Laier, 1996).

(b) Gender training: Key stakeholders in a NGMS will require training in such areas as basic gender-awareness and sensitisation, gender analysis, gender planning, the use of gender-sensitive indicators, and monitoring and evaluation. Since the NGMS aims at the gradual transformation of organisations and a realignment of the belief systems, power structures, policy and planning processes within them, training may also be required in conflict prevention and resolution, and the management of change.

Training is central to the implementation of the National Gender Programme. There are two distinct foci to the training. The first is aimed at the development of specific gender skills, such as gender based analysis. These skills are aimed at ensuring that the civil servants directly involved in implementing the programme have the skills with which to advance the programme. The second most important training is the gender sensitisation of senior management to ensure that they integrate gender considerations into everything they do, including the integration of gender into their reports.

(c) Management Information System (MIS): This is the mechanism for gathering the data necessary for gender analysis, and sharing and communicating the findings of that analysis, using sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators. The MIS is much more than just a library or resource centre; it is the central repository of gender information and the means by which such information is generated by and disseminated to the key stakeholders in the NGMS. Its function is to gather, synthesise and disseminate information on the goals, activities and achievements of the NGMS and on other structures and formations relating to gender mainstreaming and the advancement of gender equality.

(d) Performance Appraisal System (PAS): Based on the results of gender analysis, the NGMS should establish targets in specific areas. The achievement of these targets should be evaluated both at the individual and departmental level, through a gender-aware PAS. This should not be separate from whatever system is already in place for appraising the performance of
employees. The present system should be reviewed and overhauled to ensure that it is gender-sensitive. The PAS should also take into account the level of gender-sensitivity and skills such as those acquired through gender training or field experience of individuals.

The challenge for implementing the PAS has been the lack of matching the development of plans with implementation. Most plans have focused on process implementation rather than results-based implementation. The PAS is expected to bridge this gap for the implementation of the NGP. The PAS will be located within the MWAGCD and specifically designed to monitor the overall performance of government in the implementation of the NGP (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999).

Structures and mechanisms such as decentralisation procedures are required at the local level to ensure consultation with women’s organisations and that the needs and interests of women are taken into account in policy decisions and the allocation of resources. In order to ensure local level implementation of gender policies and to increase accountability of service provisions to women, gender units or women’s committees within local government are required. Along with these strategies, local level bodies which invite participation from civil society organisations should ensure that they include representation from women’s organisations and ensure that participating institutions take measures to increase female representation and voice their opinions (Byrne and Laier, 1996).

The local authorities, CSOs and the Zimbabwe Local Government Authority (Zilga) should implement support mechanisms for women who are often entering politics for the first time. Mentoring of new councillors would for example make their learning process easier and would benefit the council in general by new councillors becoming more effective in a shorter period of time. More effective orientation and training for new councillors would also go a long way in assisting councillors grappling with understanding the institutional operations (Morna and Tolmay, 2010).

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

The only way to measure the gendered impact of policies, laws and service delivery is by having gender indicators as part of the monitoring and evaluation system. These, in turn can only be meaningful if the organisation keeps regular, accurate and updated gender-disaggregated statistics. These statistics must go beyond how many men and women are in decision-making positions (Elson, 1991).

**Gender Responsive Budgeting**

Another useful measure in gender mainstreaming is resource allocation. The easiest gender-related statistic to pick out in any budget is resources specifically targeted at projects for women. However, such resources usually constitute only a tiny portion of the overall budget (often not more than 5%). Far more revealing is the extent to which women benefit equally from the resources allocated to mainstream projects and the extent to which these projects help to redress gender imbalances, for example through promoting access by women to non-traditional areas of work. Gender budgeting therefore refers not only to expenditures earmarked for women, but also to an analysis of the entire budget from a gender perspective (Elson, 1991).

Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) initiatives are intended to afford a mechanism by which governments, in collaboration with lawmakers, CSOs, donor and other development agencies, can integrate a gender analysis into fiscal policies and budgets. A GRB is not a separate budget for women but an attempt to disaggregate expenditure and revenue according to their different impacts on women and men. The idea of gender-responsive budgets developed out of a growing understanding that macroeconomic policy can contribute to narrowing or widening gender gaps in areas such as incomes,
health, education and nutrition and make the living standards of different groups of women and men better or worse (Elson, 1991).

In her contribution, Elson (1991) argues that national budgets generally underestimate women’s contribution to the macro-economy, discount the unpaid economy in which women perform most of the work of caring for and maintaining the labour force and the social framework, and disregard the effect that gender relations and the gender distribution of resources have on total production, savings, and investment. Elson (1991) points to the economic costs associated with gender inequality and the growing awareness that such inequality is costly not only to women but to society as a whole.

Civil society participation in GRB initiatives is facilitated by a broad common purpose of actors inside and outside government. From within civil society, it is usually NGOs who take the lead. According to Budlender (2000), these NGOs are often made up of women who are contemporaries of those in government, which facilitates greater collaboration. Men have also played a significant role and featured as the target group for lobbying and training in government initiatives because of the dominant role they play in budgetary decision-making.

The implementation of gender equality is first and foremost the responsibility of all the institutions of government. To achieve gender equality, government must embark on a rigorous gender mainstreaming strategy. Much of the responsibility for planning and implementing effective and innovative strategies for the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality will rest equally with key structures of the MWAGCD, other ministries and government departments at the national, provincial and local levels.

The effectiveness of local government in undertaking gender-responsive planning and budgeting and achieving gender-equitable local development depends on a range of stakeholders that contribute in different ways. Central government’s role in regulating and overseeing local government needs to ensure that they have the necessary powers, human resources and budgets to deliver on their responsibilities. A key factor in the process is the MWAGCD and related mechanisms at local and central levels. These can provide technical support and facilitate dialogue between local government and gender-equality advocates and women’s organisations, and also assist local government in identifying priority areas. Donor and UN agencies can ensure that local governments are enabled to carry out these functions through ensuring gender-responsive financing and technical assistance. Throughout the planning and budgeting processes, an environment of partnership, dialogue and joint accountability needs to be nurtured. The engagement of civil society, including women’s organisations and local representatives, as partners in this process is critical to the success of these efforts (Budlender, 2000). Addressing gender inequalities in development processes and budgets is increasingly gaining legitimacy as a developmental issue worldwide. Increasingly, it is being documented and recognised that inclusive and gender-sensitive budgeting results in the attainment of key development milestones. Non-participatory planning and budgeting at local levels only restricts poor men and women’s ability to participate and benefit from key developmental processes and what budgets hold for them so that they can demand enhanced accountability from duty bearers. In Zimbabwe, women lag behind men because historically they have not enjoyed the same rights and equal access to key resources and opportunities such as education, land, credit and decision-making (ZWRCN, 2012).

**NGMS Processes**

The process normally begins with a feasibility study and stakeholder analysis. This should include a review of the status of women nationally, any NGMS-related mechanisms already in place, and recommendations on what structures, process and mechanisms need to be put in place and, where appropriate, on the appointment of a technical expert to work with the government in setting up the
NGMS. The feasibility report is presented to the MWAGCD which tables it in the Cabinet. Once it is approved, the MWAGCD coordinates the process, which includes the following steps:

(a) Reviewing the national Gender Action Plan or developing such a plan if none exists;
(b) Reviewing the NGP to determine its gender-awareness;
(c) Setting up the NGMS structures;
(d) Strengthening the NGP;
(e) Developing a gender training programme;
(f) Building gender analysis and planning expertise in the various government sectors;
(g) Establishing or strengthening linkages between the NWM and other stakeholders;
(h) Establishing monitoring and evaluation and reporting mechanisms;
(i) Developing a programme of public awareness through the media; and
(j) Networking with donors and other agencies to seek resources for the NGMS and gender mainstreaming (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999).

Conclusion

The NGMS recognises the strategic importance of building partnerships with social actors at all levels. Key stakeholders should be allowed to articulate their perceptions, needs and priorities; gender balance in interest representation should be sought, taking into consideration that women and men may have unequal access to and control over appropriate resources to participate in decision-making structures. A strong NWM is important for gender mainstreaming because it must be able to function as a strategic and co-ordinating unit with the required experience and expertise in the areas of gender integration, gender planning and project management. A strong and effective NWM will have personnel with technical expertise in gender issues, skilled in administration/co-ordination, project management, training, research, information management and dissemination, and evaluation.

Recommendations

(i) Strong leadership in gender mainstreaming should be provided by NWM, which usually take the role of the Lead Agency in the setting up and running of a NGMS.
(ii) Political commitment at the highest levels among governments is an essential element of a strong enabling environment for gender mainstreaming and the setting up of a NGMS.
(iii) The effective implementation and monitoring of a NGMS requires resources. It should not be seen as primarily the responsibility of the National Women’s Machinery to provide these resources. A NGMS should be funded by the national government, guided by the Lead Agency.
(iv) 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.

References


