



*The Equity Diamond:* National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.  
 Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*, **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*, **GDI** (Gender Development Index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*, **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

*Ghana's official instrument for the advancement of women is the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD). It was created in 1975 by the then military regime in response to the UN. Originally under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its location within government has changed several times. Currently it is under the Office of the President but heavily subject to the informal control of the first lady and the December 31<sup>st</sup> Women's Movement (DWM) of which she is president.*

## THE BEIJING FOLLOW-UP

On the eve of the Beijing Conference, the NCWD had been weakened and its social standing eroded by a variety of factors including a haemorrhage of experienced staff, inadequate funding (and dependence on external donors) and a decade of management instability due to high turnover of chief executives. The current executive secretary is the fifth since 1986.

The NCWD regularly sends representatives to UN meetings for women, such as the Commission on the Status of Women. Prior to the Beijing Conference, the NCWD had already undertaken a number of activities including participating in the Africa and global prepcoms.

The NCWD's 15-year draft Plan of Action (Plan) incorporated some provisions on institutional mechanisms from the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), and addressed some of the institutional issues of the NCWD identified by a study into its problems. Government approval for the Plan, which would restructure and revitalise the NCWD, was expected by 1997. Restructuring was to address the urgent need for material and human resources at all levels, and the NCWD would also secure a befitting national secretariat. In terms of NCWD's relationship with state structures. The Plan also included a recommendation that a presidential staffer be assigned for NCWD affairs.

The Plan called for the establishment and registration with the NCWD of gender focal points in all institutions in the country by the year 1997. It included the aim of self-financing of NCWD, but expected donor support to continue. It called for the institution of procedures for government consultation of women's groups in the appointment of NCWD members and the executive secretary. Finally, it expects to have a parliamentary committee on gender and development to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Platform for Action, and a programme to enable the NCWD to monitor the progress of implementation of its own 15-year Plan, with publication of a report on women every five years, is also included.

There are many good points in the Plan's proposals for strengthening the NCWD. The proposed measures are patchy, however, and they do not fully incorporate the recommendations of the PFA. This is particularly so with regard to the role of NCWD in government policy-making processes, the clarity of its mandates, and the strengthening of its resource base. The Plan does not fully address some of the central problems ailing the NCWD, such as

its staffing and resource problems, its powers and legal status, and its political and legitimacy problems. Though acknowledging the urgent need for human and material resources, the Plan makes no proposal on how to deal with it. The Plan is also weak on proposals for the collection and dissemination of gender disaggregated data and law reform. In spite of these weaknesses, the Plan if implemented would address some of the problems of the NCWD and set it on the road to implementing some Platform for Action provisions.

### THE NCWD'S IMPLEMENTATION RECORD

In a report on its implementation of the PFA, the NCWD mentions the (still to be finalised) draft Plan of Action as one of its achievements. Other successes it claims include: an affirmative action proposal, which focuses on women in decision-making at the district regional and national levels and female access to education. According to the NCWD, the vice president pledged that the proposal will be implemented by the year 2000; the setting up of a national CEDAW sub-committee to monitor its implementation and that of the affirmative action proposals; a national gender strategy policy document (under preparation); the creation of gender focal points; the media dissemination of the PFA.

There are some problems with these claims. A majority of persons interviewed in a study commissioned by the Third World Network (TWN-Africa) were ignorant of the provisions of the Platform for Action and NCWD priorities for its implementation. This means that such issues are not really in the public domain and have not begun to influence the post-Beijing work of many organisations. This has partly to do with the NCWD's methods of work and its failure to publicise its plans and consult with the civil society organisations working in this area. There were no consultations on the affirmative action proposal and very limited consultations on the gender strategy document. To date, the membership of the Ghana CEDAW Committee has not been publicised. The NCWD's relationship with the gender focal points is unclear.

Part of the problem with the NCWD's post-Beijing implementation has been the weak institutional base of the programme. This is partly because the agenda is being driven by the first lady (who led the country's delegation to Beijing) rather than by the NCWD. She set up the committees to prepare the affirmative action proposals, the Draft Plan of Action and the media dissemination plan. Her location outside the NCWD and lack of an institutional accountability and legitimacy on questions of the Platform for Action have created difficulties for the NCWD in its work.

Despite expectations of their involvement in its implementation, preparation of the Draft Plan of Action did not involve women's organisations and other interested NGOs beyond circles associated with the first lady's December 31<sup>st</sup> Women's Movement (DWM). Not surprisingly, five years after Beijing, most of the provisions have not been implemented. The NCWD has very limited resources

and its staffing situation remains precarious. Its board has been reconstituted without consultation of civil society organisations. There was no announcement when a presidential staffer was put in charge of its affairs.

The NCWD's poor implementation record extends to other areas of the PFA. Many people interviewed in the TWN survey did not know the NCWD's priorities in the PFA. NGOs in particular lacked adequate information about the specific interventions of the NCWD with regard to the PFA. Only a small minority of respondents were able to mention a few of these priorities: education and the girl child, poverty, health, peace, and women in decision-making. A few also mentioned the areas of economic independence and employment as priority areas chosen by the organisation. Many NGO respondents, however, complained that they had no idea of how these issues came to be chosen as priority areas and the extent to which the NCWD had implemented the PFA.

### A WAY FORWARD

The government has to urgently deal with the NCWD's organisational and resource problems so it can implement its mandate in general and the Platform for Action in particular. In the first place, the donor dependency of the NCWD needs to change, and the Government should commit enough resources to the national machinery as part of the process of demonstrating its commitment to the work of the organisation.

Given the wide ranging nature of the PFA mandate, it would appear that multiple institutions in different locations, with different forms, and clearly demarcated roles and powers are needed to fulfil clusters of functions. Advising on policy, implementing policy, monitoring and evaluating policy and its implementation, playing a watch-dog role and so on require different combinations of skills, resources and institutional forms.

Some functions cannot be performed from within government. Some respondents to the TWN survey proposed that the legal status of the NCWD be rooted directly in the Constitution, instead of in legislation. Parallels were drawn with the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), which was created by the 1992 Constitution and has since gained great respectability. The main advantage cited was the fact that the NCWD would be independent of and not subject to interference by governments, be held in high esteem and have wider powers to promote women's concerns.

While constitutional bodies may be guaranteed some protection and autonomy, CHRAJ experience shows that they are not protected from rear-guard actions such as being starved of resources and having their decisions ignored. Thus being a constitutional body does not guarantee success without other favourable conditions such as good quality leadership and staff, a vigilant civil society and a progressive media culture.

The NCWD needs to regain its legitimacy and leading role. The draft gender strategy document, the affirmative action proposals and the Draft Plan of Action should be put out for discussion and

debated by all organisations and institutions engaged and interested in gender equality work before being finalised as policy to be implemented. The NCWD also has to review its relations with civil society organisations and involve them more systematically and consciously in its activities. They in turn should offer it more support.

Finally, the NCWD's subordination to the first lady has to end. That relationship has contributed significantly to the NCWD's loss

of legitimacy in the eyes of many groups and individuals working on women's and gender issues.

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