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**27 February 2019**

## **Wrapping up the Work on the National Gender Machinery in the Fifth Parliament in Preparation for the Sixth Parliament**

### **Introduction**

In September 2017, the Multi Party Women's Caucus (MPWC) took a decision to look into the state of the National Gender Machinery (NGM), with a view to identifying challenges that impede upon its effective functioning. This decision was informed by the International Women's Conference hosted by Parliament in August 2017, which adopted the following resolution:

Parliament should work towards strengthening the capacity, resources and the authority of the national gender equality mechanisms so that they can support and monitor the implementation of action plans.

The NGM, when first conceptualised, was envisaged to become the conduit through which gender rights were taken up in the state and as being an important platform for channelling related policy concerns and issues. When first established, the NGM took its role of engaging in public consultation on gender issues seriously and embarked upon many information gathering and evaluation workshops. The establishment of the NGM was located in South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (henceforth 'the Gender Policy'). The Gender Policy created for the following structures of the NGM:

### **Structure of the National Gender Machinery**

<b>Government</b>	<b>Parliament</b>	<b>Independent Bodies</b>	<b>Civil Society</b>
The Presidency	Portfolio Committees (including the Joint Monitoring Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and Status of Women)	Constitutional Court	Non-Government Organisations
Office on the Status of Women	Parliamentary Women's Caucus	Other Courts	Religious Bodies
Provincial Offices on the Status of Women	Steering Committee to Women's Caucus	Commission on Gender Equality	CONTRALESA
Gender Units in Line Departments	Provincial Women's Caucus Groups	Public Service Commission	SALGA
Gender Units in Local	Women's	Human Rights	



Government Structures	Empowerment Unit	Commission	
		SA LAW Commission	
		Public Protector	
		Land Commission	
		Truth Commission	
		Youth Commission	
		Independent Electoral Commission	

The structuring of the NGM was meant to ensure that a platform was created to plan and review progress on gender equity at all levels, within the executive; the legislature; within independent bodies and within civil society at large. Over time, some of the structures of the NGM have become defunct and new structures, such as the Department of Women, have emerged. The policy framework, as it stands, is outdated and needs reviewing to take into account developments since the 1990s.

### **Summary of Key Challenges Facing the NGM as identified by the MPWC**

Through the course of its deliberations on the NGM, the MPWC has noted that there are several challenges, which have significantly affected the ability of the NGM to deliver on its mandate. As a result of these challenges, the ability of the NGM to promote gender equality in South Africa has come under threat. There is therefore a need to strengthen the NGM to ensure that it is able to deliver on its mandate.

The following key challenges were identified as negatively affecting the ability of the NGM to function effectively:

**National Gender Policy outdated:** The National Gender Policy is outdated and needs to be reworked. Some of the structures in it, such as the Office on the Status of Women, no longer exist. The role of new structures, such as the Department of Women, are not reflected in it. The nature and structure of the machinery has changed, without updating these structural changes in the related policy framework. As a result, it can be argued that the NGM is in a difficult position as a collective structure that meets regularly to address its challenges. In addition, the NGM has been somewhat marginalised in the state without the capacity, resources or powers to address the issue gender issues across Government. The Gender Policy is critical to driving the state's overarching response to promoting gender equity. It is critical that there is a relevant, contemporary and responsive framework in place. The National Gender Policy should therefore be updated as a matter of priority.



**Status of Commission for Gender Equality unclear.** Discussions have been underway to potentially explore merging the Commission for Gender Equality with the Human Rights Commission. A parliamentary review process looked into this matter. The submission made by the Commission on Gender Equality was that it did not support such an amalgamation as there was a need for a dedicated structure to take on the role of promoting gender equity in South Africa.

**Resources:** The lack of adequate resources has been a critical issue hampering the work of the NGM. There is a need to cost the work of the NGM and to ensure that it is properly resourced.

**Coordination:** In the early years following its inception, the NGM met relatively regularly to plan and coordinate its work. In recent years, the work of the NGM as a structure has ground to a halt. There is a need to ensure that the NGM is properly coordinated. One of the key challenges in this regard is that the former Office on the Status of Women took on the role of the coordinating the NGM. The OSW has since become defunct and the Gender Policy does not speak to the role of the Department of Women in this regard.

**The status of the Gender Focal Points (GFPs) in Government departments is unclear.** There has been no updated research on how many of these structures are functioning, what they are doing and what their challenges are. In terms of the National Gender Policy, the GFPs had the main responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the policy in Government departments at national and provincial level. All departments were meant to establish GFPs which were tasked with assisting with the formulation of action plans to promote women's empowerment and gender equality in the work of departments.

**The work of the GFPs was as follows:**

- To ensure that each department implements the national gender policy.
- To ensure that gender issues are considered in departmental strategic planning exercises.
- To ensure that departments reflect gender considerations in their business plans.
- To review departmental policy and planning in line with the National Gender Policy Framework.
- To review all policies, projects and programmes for their gender implications.
- To ensure that departments provide and use gender disaggregated data in their work.
- To establish mechanisms to link and work with civil society.
- To coordinate gender training and the education of all staff within departments so as to ensure that gender is integrated into all aspects of the work.



- To monitor and evaluate departmental projects and programmes to assess whether they are consistent with the National Gender Policy.

In terms of the policy framework, GFPs were meant to be located in the office of the Director General so as to facilitate access to all programmes and programme officials within the department and thereby enabling gender mainstreaming. The policy further recommended that GFPs were appointed at Director level to ensure that competent, skilled staff were tasked with gender mainstreaming. In 2003, the JMC on Improvement of Life and Status of Women conducted an investigation into the level at which GFP staff had been appointed. It found that the vast majority had not been appointed at Director level and that GFPs comprised of junior staff with no skills or authority to take up gender mainstreaming in the Department. As a result, the work of most GFPs was limited to organising events around Women's Day and the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children. Most of the GFPs were not working on departmental policy and gender mainstreaming in departments.

In a report to the MPWC by the Department of Women on 8 November 2019, the Department noted the following critical challenges in relation to the GFPs:

- GFPs were not equipped with the necessary skills to enable them to influence public and macroeconomic policy and programming from a gender perspective.
- GFPs were not located at an authoritative level prescribed in the National Gender Policy.
- GFPs appear to have limited support from their departments.
- In some instances, there is no central point or budget for the implementation of their work.

### **Review of the NGM by the Department of Women**

The Department of Women is currently in the process of reviewing the NGM. The review began in September 2018 and is meant to be completed in March 2019. The objectives of this review are as follows:

- To assess the current status of the NGM and its capacity to drive the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda.
- To examine programming, services, directions, organisational efficiency and the resource capabilities of the NGM structures.
- To highlight strengths, challenges, gaps and opportunities for the NGM.
- To identify policy recommendations and actions that need to be implemented to enable the NGM to function effectively.



- To enhance and reconfigure the NGM for advancing gender equality.
- To contribute to the current debate on the role and effectiveness of the NGM and how women's issues should best be streamlined in the NGM structures.

The review comprises six stages of work, which are as follows:

<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Situational analysis and historical overview of the work of the NGM (September 2018)</b>
<b>Phase 2</b>	Data collection through semi-structured questionnaires sent out to heads of NGM structures (October-November 2018).
<b>Phase 3</b>	Analysis of findings and compilation of recommendations (November-December 2018).
<b>Phase 4</b>	Presentation of findings to NGM structures (January 2019).
<b>Phase 5</b>	Outcomes of discussions of Phase 4 incorporated into a report, which will be submitted to an Expert Advisory Group (February 2019).
<b>Phase 6</b>	Incorporation of the inputs of the Expert Advisory Group into the final NGM Diagnostic Review report (February- March 2019).

### **Wrapping up the work of the Fifth Parliament**

It is critical, as we move towards wrapping up the work of the Fifth Parliament, it is critical that the process of monitoring the strengthening of the NGM is handed over and continued into the Sixth Parliament. As part of this process, it is also important that the relevant structures in Parliament, namely, the PC on Women and the MPWC, table its experiences and lessons learnt in terms of strengthening these structures in Parliament.

