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—
Chair

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•(1105)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. We'll call the meeting to order.

Before we start with our witnesses, I would just like everybody to be aware that we have a parliamentary delegation from the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia sitting in the audience today.

We welcome you. We certainly hope that you will get some benefit out of our meeting.

Also, for those of you who can stay afterwards for about 15 minutes and visit with the delegation, that would be a good thing too. We'll make that opportunity available so that you can meet the individual members from the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.

Now we will start with our witnesses.

Welcome to our Auditor General, Ms. Sheila Fraser.

We'll ask you to start, please.

Ms. Sheila Fraser (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

We thank you for this opportunity to meet with the committee today to discuss our chapter on gender-based analysis from our spring 2009 report. With me today are Doug Timmins, assistant auditor general, and Richard Domingue, principal, who are responsible for the GBA audit.

As many of you will recall, this audit was performed following a recommendation made by the committee last year that our office examine the implementation of GBA in the federal government. The audit objective was to determine whether selected departments were conducting GBA and whether the central agencies were reviewing gender impacts in cabinet documents on policy and program spending initiatives.

The federal government made a commitment in 1995 to implement GBA throughout its departments and agencies. As you are well aware, GBA is an analytical tool that can be used to assess how initiatives and policy proposals have an impact on men and women. Despite recent efforts to improve GBA practices in some departments and in the central agencies, we found that the government has not met its 1995 commitment to ensure that the analysis of gender impacts is carried out.

We looked at seven departments whose responsibilities can have an impact on men and women differently. The implementation of a

GBA framework varied greatly in the departments examined. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is clearly a leader. It is the only department we examined that had fully implemented the elements of a sound GBA framework. The Department of Finance Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, and, to a certain extent, Health Canada had implemented many of the key elements of an appropriate GBA framework. We note that Transport Canada and Veterans Affairs Canada have no GBA framework.

We reviewed 68 recent initiatives to verify if GBA had been performed. We considered an analysis to be GBA if we found documented research on gender impacts and we determined that the impacts had been considered in developing policy options—two key factors in performing GBA.

[Translation]

We found that few departments that are performing gender analyses were able to demonstrate that these analyses were used in designing public policy. Only in 4 of the 68 initiatives we reviewed was there evidence that GBA had been integrated in the policy development process. In 30 of the initiatives reviewed, gender impacts were analyzed but there was no evidence provided that the analysis was considered in developing public policy options. In 26 initiatives, we could not find any evidence that gender impacts had been considered at all.

We also found that the selected departments provided limited information to Cabinet and Treasury Board on the gender impact of proposals and spending initiatives. In more than half of the memoranda to Cabinet and over one third of submissions to Treasury Board, we found no reference to gender impacts. There was no indication why this information was not reported.

[English]

All three central agencies are responsible for reviewing a number of considerations in policy and budget documents, including the gender impacts reported by federal departments and agencies. The central agencies have a critical challenge role in ensuring departments take into account all relevant factors. The central agencies could not provide written evidence that they reviewed and challenged gender impacts of policy proposals or spending initiatives submitted by departments for approvals.

In its response to this audit, the government disagreed with our recommendation that central agencies document the challenge function they exercise when reviewing policy proposals or spending initiatives. I have serious concerns with the lack of appropriate documentation when I am told that evidence of challenges to gender-based analysis exists only in a cabinet confidence to which I do not have access. I am of the view that it is crucial for departments to maintain documentary evidence of key responsibilities such as their challenge of proposals and initiatives going forward to cabinet and Treasury Board.

[Translation]

There is no government-wide obligation to undertake GBA and the government's commitment to implement GBA has not been clearly communicated to departments and agencies. These are key factors that could explain why GBA practices vary greatly among the departments we reviewed, why GBA is not regularly performed, and why little information on gender impact is reported to Cabinet and Treasury Board.

Some officials expressed concerns over the leadership of the central agencies in promoting GBA. I believe TBS and PCO should provide support to Status of Women Canada in order to help the government meet its 1995 commitments.

[English]

Madam Chair, this concludes my opening statement. We would be pleased to answer any questions committee members may have.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you very much.

Although we have other people here to answer questions, I believe our next presenter will be Ms. Beckton.

Ms. Clare Beckton (Coordinator, Office of the Coordinator, Status of Women Canada): Thank you.

My name is Clare Beckton, and I am the coordinator, Status of Women Canada.

As you know, Status of Women Canada, in collaboration with the central agencies, leads the process to implement gender-based analysis across the federal government. I am joined today by two colleagues from central agencies. Neil Bouwer is the assistant secretary of social development policy for the Privy Council Office, and he also serves as PCO's champion for gender-based analysis. I'm also joined by Catrina Tapley from the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. Ms. Tapley is the executive director of the security and justice division at Treasury Board and, more importantly, is the

secretariat's champion of GBA. As such, Catrina ensures that program and policy analysts and senior management at TBS understand and fulfill their gender-based analysis responsibilities.

We are pleased that the Auditor General has recognized the efforts made by both the central agencies and Status of Women Canada to improve the practice of gender-based analysis in government. The goal of integrating the practice of gender-based analysis is increasingly being reflected in government initiatives. This has been reported in government responses to reports issued by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women pertaining to the practice of and accountability for gender-based analysis.

• (1110)

[Translation]

The government recognizes the importance of continuing to enhance the practice of gender-based analysis across all departments and agencies. Making gender-based analysis sustainable is a shared responsibility amongst all players, with the responsibility for performing gender-based analysis resting with individual departments and agencies.

[English]

Status of Women Canada helps departments build their capacity for GBA by developing and delivering training and tools, case studies, and public awareness materials. It also provides technical assistance to guide their efforts to create GBA organizational frameworks.

Key departments and agencies have used Status of Women Canada's training and tools. They have either adapted those to their own mandates and cultures, or created their own training products using Status of Women Canada's materials as a starting point. All have used the Status of Women Canada network of GBA trainers. For example, our colleagues at both PCO and Treasury Board Secretariat have made real efforts to embed GBA as a practice throughout their organization.

At TBS, they have improved GBA training for the program and policy analysts who are responsible for challenging initiatives or policy proposals from departments and agencies. PCO also provides GBA annual training for its policy analysts to support its work. The Auditor General has recognized this process.

[Translation]

In the last few years, the Government of Canada has taken concrete steps to advance the implementation of GBA systematically across the federal government, set within existing accountability frameworks, with the central agencies playing a pivotal role.

[English]

Through its review of proposals developed by federal organizations, PCO helps to ensure that GBA is integrated into the policy process and that the results are brought before ministers for decisions in the form of memoranda to cabinet. Similarly, the Treasury Board Secretariat uses its challenge function to ensure that Treasury Board submissions from departments have no unintended gender bias.

Since 2007 GBA has become one of the lenses that Treasury Board Secretariat uses to examine and challenge policies and programs before they are presented to Treasury Board ministers for their consideration. Currently Status of Women Canada, Privy Council, and Treasury Board present, in a complementary fashion, an information session to departments on what is expected from a GBA perspective in memoranda to cabinet, Treasury Board submissions, and organizational frameworks.

Status of Women Canada, with the support of the Privy Council Office and the Treasury Board Secretariat, has agreed to further enable departments and agencies to meet their commitments on gender-based analysis by clarifying and better communicating expectations about when it is appropriate to perform gender-based analysis.

Treasury Board and PCO, together with Status of Women Canada, will identify departments with challenges in meeting their GBA commitments and hold informal discussions. They will also continue to provide guidance to departments on the preparation of their policy and program proposals, including the consideration of gender issues when appropriate.

Treasury Board and Privy Council Office will also continue to provide regular training for their analysts so that they can communicate the government's expectations with respect to gender-based analysis in their work with departments.

Departments and agencies will also be asked to document the analytical process used to identify gender impacts when developing policies, programs, and legislation, as well as the implementation of gender-based analysis frameworks, and report findings. This is also reflected in PCO's template for memoranda to cabinet and in Treasury Board's updated guide to preparing Treasury Board submissions, which includes GBA in guidance to departments.

• (1115)

[Translation]

Through these and other measures, we are following on our goal to ensure that gender-based analysis becomes second nature and is consciously integrated into the work we do every day.

[English]

My colleagues and I would also be pleased to answer your questions.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you very much.

We will go to our first round of questioning, starting with Ms. Neville, for seven minutes, please.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of you who are here this morning. It's good to see you here.

Let me begin by thanking the Auditor General, first of all, for doing this report. It's an important one. As you stated, it's one that the committee has been urging your agency to do.

For me, it was a profound disappointment, when I read your report, given the work that this committee has done over the years on gender-based analysis and gender-based budgeting, to realize how far we have not come in that area.

When I listened to the two presentations, I found myself wondering if we were commenting on the same report or not, because there was such a profound discrepancy in the views of it.

I have many questions, and probably not enough time.

First, to the Auditor General, you recommend in your report that the central agencies document their challenge function. They have clearly said they won't. The minister reminded me, when she was here, that I didn't know what the cabinet process involved, and cabinet documents; you referenced it in your presentation.

Why did you make this recommendation? What evidence did you use? The challenge function: how important is it to be able to have that tool available? And how do we make it happen? *Is* there a way of making it happen?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think it's important at the outset to clarify that we do have access to many cabinet documents, or what are considered cabinet confidence. We had a new order in council, in fact, in 2005 that clarified further our right of access to cabinet confidence. There are certain documents, though, that we recognize should remain confidential and that we have no need to see—for instance, recommendations to ministers and discussions that go on in cabinet meetings. But analysis that may be considered cabinet confidence, we should be able to have access to and see.

We obviously have to be careful with these documents as to how we disclose what is in them, but we see them normally as part of our audit work. I believe it is very important that we be able to assess the challenge function that is done by the central agencies, be it PCO or TBS. It is a very critical part of the process in almost any major decision that goes on. All we really wanted to see was whether it was actually done. Had there been a review? Had the questions been asked?

As we said, I think about half of the memoranda to cabinet make no mention of it. Well, why is that? Did nobody ask? Was gender-based analysis considered or not? All we wanted to see was that the analysis and challenge function had been done.

We were told that it was done but it was done verbally, and the only indication that it was done was in documents, the *précis* or other documents, to which we do not have access.

Personally, I find that hard to believe, and I find that not acceptable. I say even to senior people in Treasury Board or PCO, how do they know that their people are doing this if there's absolutely no documentation, not even an e-mail, about this?

So we think that there should be documentation. It does not have to be volumes and volumes, but simply notations on file about the kinds of questions that are being asked when reviewing these proposals. I would think that this would be a normal part of the way government should operate.

We can understand, and people have told us, that at times, for example budget proposals, timelines are very short and things are very compressed, and one of the reasons given is that it would make the process more cumbersome. I think to every general principle there can be exceptions, and documentation can occur after the fact, but I would certainly expect that kind of documentation to exist.

• (1120)

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

I've got so many questions, I don't know where to go.

You identified INAC as a department that is doing well, and I'm pleased to hear that. INAC as well has put forward a number of bills, two in particular, that are recommendations to Parliament. One is dealing with the repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, which was amended significantly in committee, and currently the government has brought forward something on matrimonial real property.

An independent analysis of that would be supportive of a gender lens for women. Did you in your analysis look at it in terms of a cultural context? In those two particular pieces of legislation, the women of those communities, based on their history and culture, are very vociferously opposed to the first piece and are to the second one.

Did that factor into your analysis—a cultural component?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: No. In fact, our work would be more limited in fact than what you may expect. We would look to see that the elements of a gender-based analysis framework are in place, that we can see evidence that the analysis has actually occurred and has been considered, but we wouldn't go into an evaluation of the analysis itself, and we certainly would not have considered cultural issues in that.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): You have about thirty seconds left.

Hon. Anita Neville: What do we need to do to ensure that your recommendations are implemented?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I really think, as we make the recommendation, that Status of Women Canada needs more support from PCO and Treasury Board Secretariat. I would suggest that the committee might want to get a detailed action plan from government on what they are actually going to do on this and perhaps suggest that there be a follow-up audit, not necessarily by us but either by Status of Women or Treasury Board Secretariat internal audit, that they actually track and see what progress is on a regular basis going forward.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you very much.

We will now move to Madam Demers, please, for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for joining us this morning. We are delighted to welcome you here.

However, I am not so pleased, Ms. Beckton, when I think about what the Auditor General revealed in her report.

As I recall, you have been on the job for two years and every time you have appeared before the committee, you have reported on all of the efforts made to implement the practice of gender-based analysis in government. You have told us about a number of success stories as well, and about individuals who have championed gender-based analysis. And yet, today, because of the current economic crisis, women are more vulnerable than ever.

How can we explain the discrepancy between what Ms. Fraser is telling us and what you have been telling us over the years?

Mr. Bouwer, you are involved with social development policies and you are a champion at PCO. I understand that the most important policy decisions are made at PCO. How do you account for the fact that there are no provisions in the economic recovery plan specifically designed to give women access to the job market? Many men are able to access today's labour market, either through infrastructure or other programs. However, all that women have access to is training programs.

Ms. Tapley, you are also a champion of gender-based analysis. I have to wonder why you sat back and allowed the pay equity draft legislation to be passed into law. The witnesses whom we have heard from to date on the issue of pay equity all agree that this was not the type of legislation they wanted. Two employers who testified last week were the exception. They were happy with this legislation because now they will no longer be responsible for negotiating pay equity with employees. Would you care to share your views on this subject with me?

• (1125)

[*English*]

Ms. Clare Beckton: I'll start, then I'll turn it over to my colleagues.

Of course, we've accepted the recommendations of the Auditor General and a great deal of work has been done over the last few years, on which the Treasury Board and PCO could elaborate more, working together with Status of Women to look at the accountability mechanisms that are necessary to ensure that gender-based analysis will not only be done, but through which departments can demonstrate that accountability. So there has been a great deal of work done to set in place the ability to move forward with the recommendations that are in the Auditor General's report.

I'll now turn it over to my colleagues from PCO and Treasury Board.

Mr. Neil Bouwer (Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet, Social Development Policy, Privy Council Office): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, it's a pleasure to be here to talk about this subject, and I welcome your questions.

You were asking about the economic action plan and the question was why was there not a component that would address the needs of women. Really, that's a question for the government to answer. As an official, I'm here to talk about the challenge function and the processes that we use to bring public service advice to bear on government decisions. Policy decisions are the prerogative of the government, so I can't really comment on that per se, but I'll be happy in discussion to talk about the role.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Is it not your role, as champion of GBA, to make specific recommendations to the government?

[English]

Mr. Neil Bouwer: My role is to ensure that throughout the decision-making process, gender considerations, and many others, are brought to bear on an issue so that ministers have the best advice possible in order to make a decision.

That doesn't always mean they will take decisions the way I advise them to—I don't pretend to have that kind of influence—nor is it really my role. What I do is I bring considerations to bear and ensure through my briefings to cabinet committee chairs, and those of my colleagues to their cabinet committee chairs and ultimately to the Prime Minister, that different considerations are taken into account.

We strive to ensure, Madam Chair, that the best decisions possible are taken and that the government has at its disposal the best that the public service has to offer in terms of advice, and that includes gender-based analysis.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Let me put the question to you another way, sir. I don't know if you give me an answer or not. Were your recommendations different from the ones that were followed? Would some of your recommendations have secured a place for women in the job market?

[English]

Mr. Neil Bouwer: On an ongoing basis we give advice, and where appropriate we ensure that gender issues are taken into account. I'm not at liberty to talk about any particular policy area and what the advice was from the public service. I think the decisions of the government stand for themselves.

My interpretation, incidentally, of gender-based analysis in very recent years is that progress has been made. There is further progress to be made, as I think is clear from our discussion here, but I think that central agencies are playing a role in that. As champion for the Privy Council Office, I would say that certainly in the area of domestic policy, beginning with social but also in the area of economic, we are making progress.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I do not want to disparage the work you do. I'm convinced you are doing everything possible to ensure that your

recommendations are taken into consideration. However, the fact of the matter is that regardless of the work that is done, without strong leadership and a genuine desire to implement GBA and everything it entails, we really are spinning our wheels.

[English]

Mr. Neil Bouwer: I understand your point.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Tapley.

[English]

Mrs. Catrina Tapley (Executive Director, Security and Justice Division, International Affairs, Security and Justice Sector, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you for the opportunity to comment and the chance to be here today.

I want to begin by echoing the comments Madam Beckton has made, that we look forward to working with Status of Women as we continue to promote gender-based analysis. We certainly agree with the Auditor General's recommendations in that regard.

Unfortunately, you asked me a question on the Pay Equity Act, and I have to admit that this is not my area of expertise at the Treasury Board Secretariat. I understand that the committee is continuing to study this act in some detail, so I know you'll have an opportunity to pose those questions and have those discussions with others from Treasury Board who can answer those questions in a more holistic way.

• (1130)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): You have five seconds left.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, thank you for your generosity. I would also like to thank the witnesses. I'll have more questions later.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): We will move on to Madam Boucher, please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good morning everyone. Thank you for coming here to meet with us.

It is always very interesting to speak on behalf of women. As you know, women are still very rare in the political sphere. Leadership is required and I believe that we have seen some. A number of measures have been taken. Our minister of state will be implementing the action plan for women, the first initiative of its kind, I believe. We lead the way in the field of GBA and we want to promote the full participation of women in the social, cultural and economic life of Canada. We started from a long way back and although there is still much to be done, there is no denying that we have made some progress. We can focus on the negatives, but it is very important to remember that there have also been many very positive developments over the years.

It is also important to note that Status of Women Canada has worked very hard to ensure training is available and to support the efforts of various federal departments in the field of GBA. Ms. Fraser, you just said that the government must take on a greater role in implementing GBA. Status of Women Canada, TBS and PCO have all agreed to do so.

My question is for Ms. Beckton. I'm familiar with the work you do. We speak fairly often. Can you tell the committee what you have done thus far to promote GBA across government? What steps have you taken?

[English]

Ms. Clare Beckton: Thank you for that question.

I'll explain what we have done. As you have said, Madam Boucher, Status of Women has been instrumental in ensuring that training is available to all the government departments. We have trained a number of trainers in addition to our own staff who have assisted departments. We have trained this committee, as you will recall from the last session. We have also provided training to the budget office, and as well to the clerks of the various committees.

We have also been working with various departments to help them build their capacity to be able to develop frameworks for gender-based analysis and in essence serving as a centre of expertise. Status of Women has evolved the tools on how to do gender-based analysis. We're continually working on those tools and guides to better support the departments.

My central agency colleagues can talk more about this, but we have done extensive work with the Privy Council, Treasury Board, and with the Department of Finance. Certainly we work with central agencies on looking at the accountability mechanisms, the important role they play, and how we work together. With the Department of Finance, we have furnished training to Finance officials on the gender-based analysis, which is obviously being reflected in the work they're doing in terms of their budget.

In terms of gender-based analysis, we have also been working with specific departments around the issue of culture, which has been raised here this morning. We have held some sessions with some of the aboriginal groups, including the Inuit, Métis, and first nations, around the development of cultural frameworks, being very much aware, with our colleagues at Indian and Northern Affairs, that you do have to look at the cultural aspects through the gender lens as well.

There has been considerable work done by Status of Women over the years and, as we say, with our central agencies. Perhaps they would like to talk a little more about some of the specific elements they've been looking at in terms of accountability.

Neil.

• (1135)

Mr. Neil Bouwer: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I should say first of all that central agencies, as Ms. Beckton has said, have increased the visibility and signaled the importance of gender-based analysis generally. At the Privy Council Office, we now ensure that all our officers receive gender-based analysis training and also receive training as part of the orientation to the

Privy Council Office. As well, we are tailoring the tools from Status of Women Canada for use in the challenge function. We are also doing outreach with departments. So where we think appropriate, we will talk to sponsoring departments that ultimately have the responsibility for undertaking gender-based analysis. That's part of the challenge and support function we play. We've also been working with central agencies and Status of Women to try to coordinate our efforts better.

In terms of the challenge function, the officers are accountable to their directors and to me. This is an organic and informal process. We ensure that, on the proposals coming forward, we are satisfied that gender analyses have taken place and decide whether or not we deal with the department and put the onus back on the sponsoring ministry.

Mrs. Catrina Tapley: Thank you.

It's a pleasure to be able to comment on what we've done at Treasury Board Secretariat over the last year and over the last couple of years. I've left with the clerk of the committee a copy of a binder of the training materials we've used for the past years, the sessions we've held, and a new pamphlet we've produced at Treasury Board Secretariat for analysts to help pose better and more significant questions.

Similar to what PCO has done, we've highlighted training. We have built gender-based analysis training into our training sessions for new analysts and new employees at Treasury Board. We call it boot camp. We've also embarked on a number of larger sessions where seasoned analysts have an opportunity to talk about the concerns around this lens and other lenses and how to pose those questions.

This year we were fortunate enough to bring in Dr. Olena Hankivsky from Simon Fraser University, who is an expert in the field of gender mainstreaming, to do a workshop at Treasury Board and help us produce some of those materials that we've built in conjunction with the Status of Women.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you.

I'm sorry, but the time is up. If there are other issues perhaps you will be able to answer them in a further question.

We'll now move to Ms. Mathysen, for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for being here, Auditor General. I must say, we've looked forward to this report for quite some time, and we're most grateful for it.

I'm also very glad to see others here today from Status of Women, Treasury Board, and...the champions, of course. It's very clear to me that there is a significant process in place in regard to what we hope to achieve, specifically that policies and programs be gender-sensitive. It would seem, however, that there may be political will missing. I would have very much liked to see some of the political masters here answering some of these questions, because despite binders of training material, and promises and pledges that go back to 1995, we still seem to have a long way to go.

Having said that, my first question is in regard to the new 2008 guide on drafting memoranda to cabinet. According to the Auditor General's report, there is no clarification with regard to how and when gender impacts are to be considered and reported to cabinet in terms of policy proposals. I'm wondering why not.

Isn't this a serious oversight? Isn't this a significant problem?

Mr. Neil Bouwer: Madam Chair, just to address the question of the memoranda to cabinet template, I should say that drafting memoranda to cabinet is a very involved process. We deal with a number of different policy issues, be they domestic or international. Therefore, the Privy Council Office is not in the habit of setting down too many rules or guidelines or directives to departments in order to ensure flexibility.

The lines that are in the MC drafting template with respect to gender-based analysis and gender issues have as much air time as issues like fiscal due diligence, or partnerships, or considerations around the federation, all of which are very important considerations, but we don't script departments in that way. It is, as I've said, more of an informal and organic process. I would say it would be impractical to provide the kind of documentation that has been suggested.

• (1140)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Ms. Fraser, in your report you indicate that there's no government-wide obligation to undertake GBA. I'm wondering if you could discuss the reasons behind no government-wide obligation to undertake gender-based analysis and what factors may contribute to the low number of government initiatives subjected to GBA.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: The decision to have a government-wide policy on this is, of course, an issue of policy. I don't know why no policy was adopted on that, but certainly, the fact that there is no policy could be one of the elements that would explain why some departments are doing it and some are not doing it. There is actually no requirement now.

We see in the response that there will be several elements. They've indicated that certain elements will be made mandatory. When we have a department, for example Veterans Affairs Canada, where there were no elements of the framework that one would expect, there has to be, not necessarily a policy, but a process in place to ensure that departments are actually considering this.

That is why we go back again to saying the central agencies have to do more than simply train their own people. They have to ensure some process by which they know what is going on within other departments and agencies, whether they are actually putting in place the framework, whether they are doing the analysis one would

expect, or if they're not, that there is some rationale behind it, that people understand why it's not being done.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: You mentioned Veterans Affairs. It would seem to me, no matter what, that there is a gender element to their policies when you consider the impact of female service workers, the wives of veterans, the families. It seems to be rather too easy, the assumption that they deal only with the male perspective in terms of veterans.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I would certainly have expected Veterans Affairs would have had a framework in place. Given that, I would say probably a significant part of their clientele is female, but also, with an increasing number of women going into the armed forces and becoming veterans, you would expect them to at least do the analysis to see if there are any additional factors that need to be considered because of that.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: So they have work to do.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: It might be something that the committee would want to follow up with them.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: What a good suggestion.

Now, in your remarks, you said that some officials expressed concerns over the leadership of the central agencies in promoting GBA, and that you believe Treasury Board and the Privy Council should provide support to Status of Women Canada to help the government meet its 1995 commitment.

What was the nature of those concerns? What kind of support would be helpful?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Madam Chair, I'll ask Mr. Domingue to respond to that question.

Mr. Richard Domingue (Director, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): What we heard through the departments was that they were looking for a clear signal from the centre that GBA was the rule of the land and that it was expected. That could explain why there's a large variation between departments. They complained that there was no leadership exercised at the centre to clarify expectations in regard to GBA.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: By the centre, you mean the....

Mr. Richard Domingue: TBS and PCO, the two of them.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Madam Auditor General, you also said that you found that selected departments provided limited information to cabinet and Treasury Board on gender impact proposals and spending initiatives. Shouldn't that have raised red flags in Treasury Board and Privy Council?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That's one of the reasons we would have liked to have seen the analysis and challenge function that was carried on. Did they question that? Of course, we did not see any documented challenge function.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you.

We will now move to our second round.

Ms. Zarac, please, for five minutes.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): I'd like to thank all of the witnesses for coming here today to answer our questions. This issue is very important to the committee.

[The Member speaks in Serbian.]

The Auditor General's report is very important to me. I find it disconcerting that of the 68 initiatives reviewed, only in 4 cases was there evidence that GBA had been integrated into the policy development process. Some of the issues reviewed were EI eligibility criteria for women and pay equity. Information of this nature is critically important to the process of making highly structured policy decisions.

We note on page 18 of Chapter 1 of the Auditor General's report that the federal Department of Finance conducted two gender-based analyses. That concerns me a little. I have to wonder if these analyses were done further to changes to EI or to the pay equity system. In the case of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, no analysis was done. So then, this is not something that was likely examined.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Madam Chair, I hope the committee will understand that I cannot disclose the specific initiatives that we reviewed.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I understand that, but since nothing has been done at Human Resources, I would assume that...Perhaps I'm wrong.

I was going to direct my question to Mr. Bouwer, since Ms. Beckton referred to him as a champion, but I see that he is responsible only for training.

I'd like to point out that in 1995, the government made a commitment to implement GBA, not merely to provide training. Implement means just that. Who then is responsible for the implementation process? Is that left to the departments that want to implement the practice of gender-based analysis? Who is responsible for ensuring that studies are carried out and that proper decisions are made?

[English]

Mr. Neil Bouwer: The responsibility for undertaking gender-based analysis—and for high-quality policy proposals in general—rests with departments and ultimately with their ministers. In the first instance, it is the responsibility of departments to ensure that gender-based analyses are undertaken. There are a number of factors that they need to consider in doing so. As central agencies, we would play a supporting role and provide a challenge function.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: What incentive is there for departments to conduct these studies and how can we be sure that they follow through with them?

According to paragraph 1.27 on page 13 of the Auditor General's report, the federal Department of Justice did set up a GBA service to ensure that analyses are carried out. However, the committee has

been dismantled. It no longer exists. Would it not be a step in the right direction to set up committees to ensure that the practice of gender-based analysis is implemented?

[English]

Mr. Neil Bouwer: These observations, Madam Chair, would be a concern to us and we would raise those with departments when we see them occurring. So either on an individual policy proposal or more globally, we would play a challenge and support function.

Status of Women Canada, of course, would support departments if they felt there was low capacity. They would come in with training and supports and advice on how to bolster the capacity.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You said we “would”; could I hear we “will”?

Mr. Neil Bouwer: We do and we will.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Okay.

[Translation]

My question is for Ms. Fraser.

Your report clearly shows that there is still much work to be done. What recommendations do you think the committee should make to ensure that proper decisions are made in the future?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I think one important thing is to clarify expectations, to make it clear to departments and agencies that they are expected to implement gender-based analysis within a certain timeframe. I could go into greater detail, but let me just say that some documentation is required.

Certain documents and memoranda to Cabinet need to be clarified, but first, we need to clarify what is expected of departments.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you. That is sound advice.

Can the committee put forward your recommendations? I also find it disappointing that for reasons...Ultimately, there is no obligation whatsoever to...We understand that some information must remain confidential.

• (1150)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Ms. Zarac, could you wrap up, please?

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Can we recommend that you have access to all of the information?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Departments provide very specific answers in many respects. Perhaps the committee could follow up with the departments and with Status of Women Canada to assess progress and obtain status reports to ensure that things get done and the practice is implemented.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you.

We will now go to Ms. Hoepfner, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I just want to say thank you, as well, to our witnesses. It's good to have you here and to be able to count on your expertise on this matter.

I wonder, Ms. Fraser, if you could comment on the challenges you may have faced in determining if gender-based analysis occurred, given that women really are made up of much more than just our gender, and our interests are made up of much more than our gender.

I understand that many policy-makers and academics around the world are recommending moving toward more of an intersectional analysis of how policy affects women. And it's interesting, because we have faced that challenge right here at this committee, where we're mandated to look at how policy affects women. We recently studied EI and the effects that has on women, and yet we really failed, I believe, to address small business owners, and that area of growth is happening with women. If someone were to look at the work we did, in one sense we were looking at women and how EI affects women, but it was quite a narrow look at it.

I wonder if that was a challenge for you—for example, if the government was providing infrastructure spending, and that was benefiting women, directly and maybe indirectly, by their occupation or where they lived or their culture. It's very hard to determine how gender-based analysis occurred, I would think, even given the committee work we have done. Did you find that to be a challenge?

And then I also wonder if Ms. Beckton can comment on that and what kind of progress we can make in representing all women and their interests when we do these analyses.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We did not question the guidance and recommendations that are in place by Status of Women Canada. They are the experts, if you will, in this area; we are not.

We looked to see if departments were putting in place the frameworks, doing the analysis that Status of Women Canada has recommended be done. We used their framework or their guidance as what we call the “criteria”, so we accepted that. We then asked if departments were doing that. We did not go into an evaluation.

That's one of the things we recommend, actually, that there should be an evaluation of this across government. That could bring in issues as to whether the current guidance and framework are still relevant today. But we started, as a starting point, from the guidance that is in place.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: In layman's terms, for example, you would go in and look specifically at whether the question was asked: how will this policy affect women? I'm just wondering, kind of in layman's terms, how that looked when you went in and did that kind of analysis.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: There's a schedule on page 11 of the English version of the various elements that we would have expected to find in a department. The first thing we did was look to see if there was a policy or a commitment in place in the department to do this.

Were there roles and responsibilities defined around gender-based analysis? For example, was there a champion? Did they have tools and methodologies available to people who were developing policy

or looking at it? Was training given and had it been given recently? Was there a champion? Had they evaluated this?

We looked to see if there was evidence of that framework. Then we picked a certain number of initiatives, asked if GBA was performed, and looked to see if it had been considered—not necessarily adopted. I mean, we were not there to say “You have to do this”, but was it considered in the policy or program considerations?

• (1155)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: So you were looking to see if the framework was there and the systems were set up. Then you went into 68 specific programs. In those, is that how you determined it? Was the question asked on how this affected women or was it a broader approach?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: No. The question was, “Was gender-based analysis performed?”

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: How did you determine if it was?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Well, we would expect to see some kind of written analysis, documented analysis. You'll see in the table that for several of them we were told it was done, but it wasn't documented in policy. But we would expect to see an analysis. This is fairly complex—

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Yes.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: —so we would expect to see some written documentation, some proof that it had been performed.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Do I have more time?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): You have about five seconds.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Can you comment briefly on how we can address the needs and the interests of a wide variety of women, not just sort of that narrow—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): That was five seconds. I'm sorry, but your time's up.

We'll now move to Monsieur Desnoyers, please, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Fraser, I read part of your report when you tabled it to the Public Accounts committee. Everyone was a little taken aback at the time by the state of this file. The situation seemed rather dire. According to the report, in only one of seven departments, in only 4 of 68 initiatives and in only thirty cases have gender impacts been considered.

While I assume that all of these analyses were done by expert GBA persons, I am somewhat concerned that TBS does not consider GBA, even though women may be adversely impacted. Did you come to this realization as you did your analysis? How could you disregard this?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: All I can tell you is that there is nothing in the way of a policy or requirement that says the government must implement the practice of gender-based analysis. Therefore, until such time as this expectation is clarified, I would have to say that not doing a gender-based analysis has no impact. Some departments do not do gender-based analyses and that fact seems to be widely accepted.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: So then, analysts like yourself disregard the negative impacts?

Mr. Neil Bouwer: I have to say that at PCO, we are very proud of the quality of our analyses.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You haven't answered my question. I was asking if you would disregard any potential negative impacts on women.

Mr. Neil Bouwer: There are many cases where we turn over our analysis to the minister, for example, our briefing to the chair of the Cabinet committee...

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: And the Minister of State for the Status of Women disregards these negative impacts?

Mr. Neil Bouwer: Status of Women Canada analysts take part in interdepartmental meetings at which topics related to women's equality, how men are impacted, and so forth, are discussed. We take everything into account.

[English]

We always ensure that the information is brought to the attention of ministers where appropriate. I have been in discussions at cabinet committees where—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: In only 4 of the 68 initiatives reviewed was there evidence of a fully integrated GBA analysis. The same cannot necessarily be said for the remaining 64 initiatives. Therefore, there could possibly be some negative impacts.

Ms. Fraser, you spoke of documents to which you did not have access. Can you tell me more about that?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: It is more that the role of PCO and, to a lesser extent, that of TBS, is not documented. The stipulation is that it is done verbally and an indication that a challenge activity has been carried out can be found in a recommendation to a minister or in another document which we cannot, and have no desire to access. We expect this analysis to be documented at PCO, to be reported on in the documents to which we do have access.

• (1200)

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Basically, you cannot say whether or not there is any record of these analyses.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: We're informed of them but of course, we haven't seen the documents.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Madam Chair, would it be possible for the committee to consult the documents to which the Auditor General did not have access?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): We'll have to find out from the clerk where we can get those documents.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: At the very least, it would be interesting to read about the discussions that took place and to get some idea of the government's response.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: My feeling is that you will not be able to see these documents, since they consist of recommendations to a minister.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Madam Chair, I would still like you to inquire if it's possible to obtain some information about this. Consider this a formal request.

The government made a serious commitment in 1995, but I have the impression that we have advanced no further than 1997 on this matter. It makes no sense. If we cannot get our hands on information that Ms. Fraser claims was not disclosed to her office, then I think the committee is poorly informed on this subject and not equipped to make fair and equitable recommendations.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you very much, Mr. Desnoyers.

Just so committee members are aware, lunch is there because we work through the lunch hour and go directly on to other meetings. Lunch is for the committee members and also for our guests, because they are going directly to question period. So it is for the Serbian delegation also.

We will now go to Ms. Mathysen for five minutes, please.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, thank you for being here.

Item 1.69 in the recommendations in the report indicates that Treasury Board Secretariat, Privy Council, and Finance should document the challenge function they exercise when they review the spending initiatives and policy proposals submitted by departments and agencies for consideration by cabinet. The response from the agency was that they disagreed, and that it's the primary responsibility of sponsoring departments to conduct the appropriate analysis in respect to new policies and programs. It seemed to me that this was rather a circuitous kind of response.

Is this acceptable? And secondly, what kind of response to this entire report would you like to see from government? How would you like to see this government react and deal with this report?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Obviously we disagree with the government. If we made a recommendation, it's because we think that the challenge function should be documented. Government does not agree with this. It doesn't happen often, but it does happen. All we can do is have a discussion before a parliamentary committee. I mean, if government says, no, they're not going to do it, we can only recommend.

I would say, though, aside from that, on the other recommendations, the agencies—I'd say in particular Status of Women Canada—have certainly agreed with all of the recommendations and have actually laid out in their response some pretty concrete actions that they plan to take. So we are pleased with the responses there. We always ask or encourage that there be more detailed action plans that give clearer indication of who's responsible, and by what timelines things will be done.

Generally, for committees—we would do this with the public accounts committee, but this committee may want to as well—we ask for kind of regular follow-ups to monitor the progress, because many of these initiatives are not going to happen in a question of weeks or even months. Some of these can take quite a long time to do, and we just want to ensure that there is that sustained attention by management to the commitments that have been made.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

I'm really pleased to see that we have two champions here. I have great faith in your commitment to doing your job and fulfilling your obligations.

From this report, it seems there are still things falling through the cracks. What do you need in order to do the job you would like to do, to really make gender budget analysis an integral and reliable part of policy-making?

• (1205)

Mr. Neil Bower: Perhaps, Madam Chair, I'll start and then turn it over to Catrina afterwards.

One of the interesting things about gender-based analysis is that it spans the entire policy development process, all the way from policy research to the development of options, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. There are lot of partnerships that have to work in order for that to work well. Part of our role in the system is to try to raise awareness and work with all those many partners.

But of course, good gender-based analysis starts with good data and good numbers and has analytical capacity at its root. It also goes to the partnerships around policy-making: we have to make sure that policy shops have the capacity and the attentiveness to follow up in those areas.

Sometimes gender-based analysis does not take a lot of capacity. In other areas, it is not straightforward, and frankly it takes some analytical depth, so we require that in order to be successful. As champions in the decision-making process, I think we have the support we need from central agencies, most departments, and certainly Status of Women Canada. I think those partnerships are working.

I'm satisfied that we are making progress and will continue to do so.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: It's a very human process, though, isn't it? You mentioned attentiveness, and that is where I suppose there are potential problems or gaps in how focused any individual or group is on the importance of what it is they're proposing or doing or following through with.

Mr. Neil Bower: Indeed, Madam Chair, I would say that the professionalism and the networks around policy-making are what matter. That's one of the reasons why I think that documentation is good, as far it goes. In fact, you will not find a stronger champion for the results of audits and bringing forward the improving of the ways government does business than central agencies, who rely on this on a daily basis. However, in this case, I would say that what we really need is to have a strong culture of policy development that includes gender-based issues and gender-based analysis. That's what we're working towards.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): I'm sorry, Ms. Mathysen, but your time is up.

We'll now move to Ms. McLeod for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate the comment regarding the culture. I think we all recognize how difficult organizational learning is, and doing shifts in organizations, and embedding things into our practices.

I have two questions that I'd like to focus on. The first would be to Ms. Sheila Fraser.

This has been a commitment from government for a long time, and we recognize that you were looking at 2006-2008, at projects that were very recent. This may be impossible for you to speculate on, but I would be very curious to know whether you think that chart would have looked very different, if you had done some trending over time that actually went back to 2000.

It's perhaps a difficult speculation, but was there evidence that a lot of this practice was actually newly embedded?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: The member is correct that it is difficult for us to comment on trends, because we did not go further back than 2006. One of the reasons we didn't was that we had even more limited access to cabinet documents prior to 2006. A new order in council came out and clarified our access in 2006, so we were able to see many more documents. If we had tried to go back further, I think we would not have gotten the kind of information we would need in order to be in a position to conclude.

We note, however, for certain departments, the progress or evolution over time. I think of the Department of Justice, for example. The report indicates that there was a lot of activity going on at one point. They disbanded many of the committees, with the idea that their work would be integrated into all of their activities. That does not appear to have worked.

It varies very much by department. Finance, for example, has made a lot of progress fairly recently. It's hard to make a conclusion overall on government.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

The next area I would like to focus on is this. We have a process and a framework, but until you evaluate your activities, you really don't know whether you're making a difference. We have INAC, which has gone that final step in evaluating their process.

I would appreciate some further comment in terms of that piece. Were they finding that actually doing the evaluation process made a difference in what they were doing and where they were going?

• (1210)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I'll begin with a response and then let Mr. Domingue give you more specific information.

Evaluation is really important in this; the member is correct. It is important to assess whether the processes and practices in place are actually having an impact or whether things need to be modified slightly.

That's why we recommend that Status of Women Canada does an evaluation more broadly about how this is working and whether there need to be changes made to current practices, guidelines, or whatever to improve going forward.

But specifically on Indian and Northern Affairs, perhaps Mr. Domingue can respond.

Mr. Richard Domingue: In paragraph 1.74, we relate some of the findings INAC made when they reviewed their practices. We basically say at the end of that paragraph that it's a challenging task for INAC and note that they claim those challenges should be addressed across government; they're not unique to INAC.

Clearly the issue of evaluating GBA is part of the framework promoted by Status of Women Canada. That's why we're making a recommendation, and TBS and PCO have agreed to act on it, as well as Status of Women, saying that they would assess the implementation of GBA across the government.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: If I have any seconds left, I would appreciate hearing from you, Ms. Beckton, on where you're going with that evaluation piece. Then perhaps I'd go back to my colleague's point: is there a need to be broader in terms of intersectoral and so on?

In whatever time I have left, I'd appreciate hearing a response.

Ms. Clare Beckton: We are looking across the spectrum of women at Status of Women. We know that women are at different places at different stages of their lives, so we look across a broad spectrum. If you look at some of the work we've done over the past two years, you'll see that very well reflected in it.

I know there was a previous question on this; when you're doing gender-based analysis, if it's done well it will also reflect whether there are different groups of women who are more adversely affected, whether there is a differential impact. For example, whether it was upon aboriginal women or immigrant women, it would be reflected as a result of your gender-based analysis.

Status of Women has committed to doing an evaluation, to looking more to evaluating. Through the kinds of processes that will be implemented, we will be able to have a better understanding of how it is working in the coming years and months.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you.

That finishes our second round.

We will now go into our third round, starting with Ms. Mendes, please, for five minutes.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Welcome everyone.

[*English*]

I have a reasonably quick question.

Once departments make decisions to look at gender-based analysis, do the central agencies, either Treasury Board or even Status of Women, have a process of monitoring it, or do they have to wait for the Auditor General to look into the subject to find out that these initiatives have become rather defunct? Is there any way to follow through?

Mr. Neil Bouwer: I would say, Madam Chair, that we monitor on an ongoing basis. There is no formal documented monitoring system. I realize this is perhaps at the heart of some people's frustration in this area, that it's not amenable to that kind of documentation. I would only say, as I did earlier, that we will look at individual files. Where we think there ought to be a GBA and there is not one, we will raise that as a challenge question, putting the onus on the sponsoring department to come forward with that kind of analysis.

We will also brief on gender impacts more generally, and where we think there's an angle to a particular policy issue that needs to be raised, we will do it.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Would you care to comment on that?

• (1215)

Mrs. Catrina Tapley: I would, thank you.

Madam Chair, I would add from Treasury Board Secretariat's perspective that we also use something called the management accountability framework. The management accountability framework is an annual exercise that departments and most agencies go through. As part of one of the 21 lines of evidence—it's on the quality of Treasury Board submissions—we include a component on gender-based analysis, as part of our analysis of how departments are performing in that area.

The other issue would be the MRRS, the management of reporting and resources system. What it does is it allows us to look at individual departments' program activity architectures and their performance measures around them. Where departments have indicated that there is a gender component to the activity, we're able to look horizontally across the system.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Thank you very much.

I have one further question, if I have the time. Do I have the time?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Yes, you have lots of time.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Will these activities be reported and integrated into the reports on plans and priorities and into the departmental performance reports? Will these be integrated as a normal procedure, so that we can track the progress of implementation?

Mrs. Catrina Tapley: Certainly the goal with MRRS is to enable you to do that, and we continue to encourage departments to include it as part of their performance measurement structure. That is the goal of the program, indeed.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Bouwer, would you comment?

Mr. Neil Bouwer: At the Privy Council Office we don't play as close a challenge function in terms of reporting for results in the accountability framework. It's more Treasury Board Secretariat's purview, so we don't report on the challenge function in that formal a way.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): You still have a minute and a half.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: I will share with Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

I'm going to go back to Status of Women Canada and back to the response that we have to the Auditor General and to the implementation plan.

I've always thought that this plan was there, but clearly there is need for a lot more. When do you expect to have a plan in place? What kind of timeline do you need? Do you need additional resources? What is required for Status of Women Canada to fully implement GBA across government?

Ms. Clare Beckton: Thank you for your question, Ms. Neville.

Obviously Status of Women will be working with Treasury Board and PCO to look at each of the steps required for implementation. One of the factors is looking at the specific needs of the individual departments and what will be required in terms of clarification, for example, of which departments do not yet have a full framework for implementing gender-based analysis. We will have to look together with the central agencies to determine the specific actions required with each particular department, and I have a commitment from my colleagues at Treasury Board and at PCO to work together on this.

I would have to ask H el ene if we have a particular time, but it certainly will not be before sometime in the late fall that we would be able to do this.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do you require any additional resources?

Ms. Clare Beckton: We will be working within the resources we currently have and we will do this in the most effective way. As was said by the central agencies, the accountability at the end of the day for doing gender-based analysis rests with the individual departments, and not with Status of Women Canada or central agencies. We play a role, obviously, in assisting them, by being a centre of expertise and helping them to build that capacity.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Ms. O'Neill-Gordon, please, for five minutes.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome to the witnesses. Thank you for taking time to be with us today.

On the weekend I had the opportunity to sit in on a panel for women and on another day I listened to another panel. I must let you know that we will be a little bit happier with the fact that their idea and their results were that they really and truly felt that we had been making progress. That made me feel good, and I'm sure it will make all of our committee feel good. There is no doubt that we still have a long way to go, but we are making progress, and that is good to know. Sometimes we just keep thinking that we are not, and we get down on ourselves, but we are making progress.

I was glad to hear you say that progress is being made. Our committee and our government are working hard, as we all know, to make a difference and to see that it does happen.

My question today is for Clare Beckton. You spoke of the results at INAC and of how well they are progressing. You spoke about INAC and how effective it has been. You noted, too, that Status of Women Canada played a role in helping them reach that.

INAC also recently introduced Bill C-8, which supports matrimonial property rights on reserves, and since INAC has been so successful and has incorporated GBA into its policy-making structure, would it be reasonable to assume that GBA was used in developing this bill? Wouldn't the use of GBA have helped ensure this bill would be as responsive to, and representative of, aboriginal women's needs as possible?

• (1220)

Ms. Clare Beckton: I would like, obviously, INAC to be here to answer the questions, but yes, we understand that they did a gender-based analysis for the bill, and that indeed would be reflected in the way the provisions of the bill appeared before the House when it was introduced. We have worked closely with INAC in terms of building their capacity, and of course, as you know we do have an interdepartmental committee that meets on a regular basis to share learning and to continue to build the capacity of all of the departments that are working on gender-based analysis.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Can you tell the committee how INAC would serve as a model for all departments, since they've done so well?

Ms. Clare Beckton: I think it's very important to have models and departments that have already advanced significantly with integrating the work of gender-based analysis into all of their policy and program development. I know that INAC is quite prepared to share their learning with other departments and to act as a source of advice with respect to other departments, how they did it and what's required, and how they can support other departments in doing that.

So yes, it's very good to have a role model of a department that has moved forward.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: So their model could be an example to all of us, and maybe something that we should be looking into.

I imagine I have time left, and I was going to go to Candice to ask the last question, if she wouldn't mind.

Do you have a question you wanted to ask?

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I do. You took me by surprise.

I guess I would like to go back to you, Ms. Beckton. Could you comment on the issue that I raised about women's issues being much more broad-based than just their gender? I think it's important, if we're going to be going ahead with policy, to make it as relevant and as current as possible.

Is that something that your department has been looking at? How can we encompass all the issues surrounding women, and not just narrow, gender-based issues?

Ms. Clare Beckton: I think we do look much more broadly than just the gender-based analysis. This is one of the tools that is used, but Status of Women works to identify gaps in policy. We have received a great deal of feedback. You know that we have programs, such as the women's program that has a community fund and a partnership fund, that also work to support women and provide direct benefit to women and encompass the broad range of activities of women, where their needs are, in communities across the country.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Taking that into account, I guess what I'm trying to get at is that if I were to explain to my constituent how gender-based analysis is determined and whether it actually occurred, I'd find it difficult.

How do I explain it? Are we looking for certain terms and documentation?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Your time is up, but you are on the list a couple of more times. Do you want to continue then?

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Okay, great. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): All right.

We'll now move to Madam Demers, please, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I somewhat agree with Ms. Neville. I have trouble understanding this. When you appeared before us, Ms. Beckton, you gave us an update on various files and you described how it would go from one department to another for final approval. The gender-based analysis should have been completed. At that time, you were convinced that the work was being done in the departments because, according to you, they were supposed to do it under the program and with the tools you provided to them. You even provided boot camps to department staff every year, despite the fact that it is a bit late to prepare the budget for the year in January or February. In any case, you provided them with boot camps in which they could participate and obtain even more gender-based analysis information. So I have trouble understanding how it is that so few analyses were done.

We had expressed concern over the number of champions appointed, and you said that it was not a big deal, because champions did not have to be appointed in order to ensure that the gender-based analysis was done. You said that department staff was aware of what needed to be done and had all the tools necessary to

do it. However, the analysis that the Auditor General undertook shows that the only departments that analyzed programs were those that had champions. That is pretty significant.

Do you intend to make sure that all of the recommendations that were made are implemented? Do you also intend to appoint other champions in other departments? We see that it makes a big difference. For the four measures or programs that were analyzed, the Department of Finance and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, both of which had champions, completed the analysis. That definitely says something. I think a lot can be gained from having people who are knowledgeable about all aspects of the problem in departments to ensure that staff properly debate the policies and programs under development. Otherwise, if they have only a vague idea about what to do, the matter cannot be given proper consideration. We need strong people. That is also part of leadership.

What do you intend to do, Ms. Beckton?

• (1225)

[*English*]

Ms. Clare Beckton: It is the departments that appoint the champions, not Status of Women Canada. We can encourage departments to appoint champions. We can also encourage them to have those with the proper expertise assist their various units. We'll also be working on the response to help the various departments clarify expectations on when it is appropriate to perform gender-based analysis and how to report the findings. For example, we could help them to ensure that they are assessing the differential impacts on men and women in their policies, programs, and legislation.

We will be working with them to ensure that they have a department-wide framework, as well as sufficient capacity, for the implementation of gender-based analysis. We feel it's important to have the support of our colleagues from Treasury Board and the Privy Council Office as we work with departments to ensure that this is developed.

We're also going to be asking each department to do a self-assessment on the effectiveness of gender-based analysis and to report to Status of Women on an annual basis so that we can get a better idea of how they're doing and where they may need further work as time goes on. For this they will use the performance measurement template that we have developed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: We asked the Auditor General to do an analysis because success appeared to be limited. Before we made the request, everything seemed to be going fine in terms of implementing the gender-based analysis. Now, two years later—because it has already been a year since we asked the Auditor General to do the...

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Madam Demers, your time is up. We'll have time for another quick round, so we'll come back to you.

We'll now go to Ms. Mathysen, for five minutes, please.

• (1230)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to get back to something that Ms. Gordon was saying, and I'm not sure if you can answer this or not. It's in reference to INAC and the fact that it was the only department to have performed an evaluation of its GBA practices, informally and formally; formally in 2008. There's been a lot of praise for INAC, and yet, when it comes to the current matrimonial real property rights legislation, the Chiefs of Ontario, the AFN, Native Women's Association of Canada, all want that to be withdrawn. As Mr. Bouwer indicated, it would seem that governments don't always take the advice of their departments.

I'm also concerned, I guess, that there's no possible way to find out what advice was given by the department to the government in regard to this particular piece of legislation, since it has caused such fury. But perhaps I should ask a question that you possibly could answer.

Mr. Bouwer, you were talking about statistics and data and the need for data. We had Stats Canada here, a number of times actually, and they indicated they were restricted in terms of budget and ability. What statistics, what data, would be helpful in terms of you doing your job? What would you need?

Mr. Neil Bouwer: Madam Chair, I would say that departments that put an emphasis on policy research, and put an emphasis on data development, tend to have more robust policy analyses that come forward. We put a lot of emphasis on evidence-based policy, so it's highly variable. I would say in general we are well served in the Government of Canada by the statistical capacity that we have, and we are well served by the policy capacity that we have that is evidence-based. So where we see good practices, we encourage it.

I would note that in the case of INAC, which is praiseworthy for many of the reasons that have been cited, they have some difficult challenges with a very heterogeneous population putting together statistics, yet they do a very remarkably good job in this area. So it isn't necessarily a one-to-one correlation. I would say that the policy-making process requires attention to policy research and statistics. It also requires, as I said, great attention and analytical detail, so all of those pieces need to fit together.

As I said, in general I think we can be very happy with the degree of statistical depth we can get. We could parse different departments and talk about them, but I think those questions would be better placed for those departments.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

One of the other disconnects that we hear about in this committee is between Finance and what they say in regard to the considerations they give when they come up with a policy as it pertains to women. Yet CEDAW as a committee has been very critical of the impacts of fiscal policy on women. I'm thinking specifically of pay equity, employment insurance, tax cuts. Tax cuts, for example, don't benefit

women because they're in a lower income bracket and they don't see the benefits of that.

Your job is to look ahead. You're the forecasters. You look at policy and you analyze it. Is there any plan to do sort of a retrospective? We have these policies. We have these budgets, particularly budget 2008-09. I'm wondering if there are any plans to look at these and say, okay, this perhaps may not have met the needs of women; whatever GBA went on, it didn't fulfill the needs of women according to the evidence we've heard in this committee, so let's go from there; let's recommend, and let's see what we can do for the next budget.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): If we could have a quick answer to that, please, we'll fall within our timeframe.

Mr. Neil Bouwer: With your indulgence, Madam Chair, I would say that's a question best put to the Department of Finance in terms of budgeting.

I would only say that every time we go through a budget season, through consultations and so forth, we bring the analytical capacity to bear to make sure that those proposals are well thought through. If we think, at that time, that, depending on the nature of the proposals, we need to look back to an analysis based on evaluation and so forth, we will undertake to do that.

• (1235)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you.

Now we will move to Ms. Hoepfner, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you very much.

I think I'm building on my previous question, and actually, my colleague Ms. Mathysen sort of made my point for me when she stated that tax cuts don't benefit women. I can tell you that there are a lot of women in my riding and, I believe, across Canada, who would disagree with that very strongly. Tax cuts do benefit women.

My concern, and what I'm trying to understand so that I can explain it to my constituents, is when we look at gender-based analysis, what are you specifically looking for to see that it was done? I know we talked about the systems in place, but how can we also show that gender-based analysis is going beyond some way of thinking that many women would disagree with? I think that has been a challenge and continues to be a challenge. We are looking at very narrow criteria.

The Department of Finance may have looked at tax cuts and said that this is good for small businesses, but they didn't say that this is good for women. Is that what you didn't see in the documentation? Is that what you were looking for?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: No. We looked to see that the analysis was done and was considered. It does not mean that if the analysis was done and it said, for example—take a worst-case scenario—that this could negatively impact women that it would be the overriding consideration. There are a number of other factors that come into account in determining policy. But it is important, and government has made a commitment, that this would be considered. We can equate it to environmental issues and to a lot of other considerations that need to come into play in developing policy.

What we wanted to see was that the analysis had been done. Government made a commitment that it would do this. We wanted to see that the analysis had been done and that there had been some consideration given to it in policy development. It doesn't mean that it was the overriding factor, and it could have been completely put aside. We just wanted to see that it was done.

You will see, in the chart on page 16 of the English version, that we were only able to see evidence in four cases out of 68 that it was done and integrated into policy options—not necessarily into the final policy itself, but considered in the policy development.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Okay. So it's probably a little more on process and systems where we have some work to do. Then maybe we can build on that so that we are integrating all the components related to women and are not looking just at single issues.

But I understand that this wasn't what you were looking at. You were looking to see that those systems were there and were being carried through.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That's right.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Okay.

Ms. Beckton, I'm not sure how long you've been with the department. I'm wondering if you can tell us what kind of improvements you have seen. I'm happy to hear that the 2006 cabinet opened up their confidential documents to the Auditor General, but I'm wondering if you have seen any improvements as well.

Ms. Clare Beckton: I'm assuming that you're referring to gender-based analysis.

• (1240)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: I am.

Ms. Clare Beckton: Yes, in the last two years I think significant progress has been made, particularly with respect to working together with central agencies to focus on the accountability elements. We understand that if you're going to have gender-based analysis, and you're going to ensure that it is working, you need to ensure that there are ways to have each department reporting on it and demonstrating the accountability that's there. I think there's been a tremendous amount of work with the central agencies, as was described this morning by Catrina Tapley and also by Neil Bouwer.

With respect to the Department of Finance, we have engaged in a considerable amount of training with the department over the past several years, which is enabling them to do the analysis and apply the gender lens. I'll just take that back to the question you raised about tax benefits for women. When you look at small businesses, and you have a small business initiative, if you understand that women are increasingly disproportionately entering small businesses

faster than men, you can see how women would benefit from initiatives that support small business.

I think it's going back to what Mr. Bouwer was saying. Having that evidence that shows how many women are in small businesses, when they have the greatest number of business start-ups, enables you to look at what the impact of an initiative of this kind will be.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you very much.

We now will now move to a fourth round that will be three minutes, and we will hold each person strictly to that.

Ms. Neville, please.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you very much.

Ms. Fraser, you said that the responsibility to do a GBA rests with the departments. How do they decide?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I think that's a really interesting question. The responsibility is clearly with them. I would refer committee to a response to a recommendation that we made, recommendation 1.79, where it's quite clear in the middle paragraph of the central agency response. It says that the assessment of department performance against gender-based analysis commitments made by the federal government is not the responsibility of the Treasury Board Secretariat.

It is the responsibility of individual departments. That's why we are recommending that there needs to be clarification around expectations of what departments are expected to do and how anyone knows if they're actually doing it.

Hon. Anita Neville: And who provides that clarity of expectation?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: It should be the central agencies, the Privy Council Office and the Treasury Board Secretariat, in conjunction with Status of Women, of course.

Hon. Anita Neville: And how did you choose which departments you would review?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Largely, I think, through the various initiatives in the budget. We ensured that we would pick departments that did have some initiatives around that. I don't think there was any particularly scientific method. We wanted to see some that might be more gender-neutral at first glance to see what they were doing as well.

Hon. Anita Neville: There were, in my mind, two notable exceptions that you didn't look at, and those were Immigration and HRDC, which are significant.

I want to come back to this challenge function for one minute. How can you ensure that departments are integrating GBA into their various submissions—Treasury Board, cabinet, whatever—if there is no challenge function, and how can we hold them accountable?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: We would obviously expect to see evidence within the department that the analysis had been done, that it was integrated into policy options. So we can see that kind of evidence. It's where we don't necessarily see the analysis or we don't know how it's been integrated into policy options. Then we really need to see the challenge function to see if it has been considered or not.

Hon. Anita Neville: When you talk about “we”, is there any further role for you—the “we”—in this audit? Do they have to report back any further? We have the responses now, but...

Ms. Sheila Fraser: No. We can only make recommendations, of course. We do follow up and ask all the departments to indicate to us whether they're making progress on meeting the commitments that they've made in response to the audits. Then after a suitable period of time, often based upon departmental action plans, we will go back to do follow-up audits to see if the departments and agencies have actually done what they said they would.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Madam Boucher for three minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have a question that has been nagging at me. You said that, prior to 2005 or 2006, you did not have access to certain documents. Was a GBA done before 2006? Were you able to do one? A little earlier, someone said that there was a plan in 1995. It is now 2009. Was a GBA audit done before you had access to those files in 2006?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: We did not do one. I do not know whether one was done as part of a department's internal audit, but this is the first time that we have studied this issue.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: So, if I understand correctly, there are no tangible figures from before 2006, prior to that audit. Is that right?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: That is correct, yes.

• (1245)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: So this goes back a long way. We can say that we are doing everything at the same time. In a perfect world, all the departments would be at the same point.

I have another question, but I am not sure who will know the answer. When a GBA is done, are the questions specific? I saw that the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs practically received a score of 10 out of 10, but Transport Canada had no's all over the place. Are the questions the same for all departments? Are their analyses comparable? Are we comparing apples with apples?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: I will answer, and Ms. Beckton may want to add something.

We audited the fulfilment of a commitment made by the federal government in 1995. Eleven or twelve years after that commitment was made, we were expecting the departments to at least have some basic elements in place. As you mentioned, our sample had at least two elements that had absolutely nothing to do with the framework put forward by Status of Women Canada. It is not a matter of the questions being the same, but a matter of the departments having a policy. Did they identify the roles and responsibilities? Do they have a champion? Do they have tools? Do they provide regular training? We were expecting these things to be in place, given how long ago the commitment was made. The commitment is ongoing; it extends beyond 1995.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Ms. Demers, for three minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Beckton, until we asked the Auditor General to audit all departments on the GBA, everything was fine. You met with us and solicited our participation so that we would understand. Everything was going fine. But since the audit, things are no longer fine. As my colleague said earlier, we are pretty much where we were in 1997, perhaps a bit further ahead.

What happened, between when we asked Ms. Fraser to do the audit and now, to make everything come apart at the seams? Why is it that you have to do all that work over again—what happened?

[*English*]

Ms. Clare Beckton: I wouldn't say that Status of Women would have said in the past that everything was working wonderfully. We recognized that there was still a great deal of work to be done. We were very pleased with the work that was being done with central agencies, because we recognized the significance of having the accountability measures in place.

We had been working with different departments, and recognizing that work needed to be done with some departments that still did not have—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: We understand that some assessment tools are not available once they go to cabinet, but would you be able to prepare some for the committee so that we could compare the measures taken with the measures proposed?

[*English*]

Ms. Clare Beckton: The answer is yes, my colleague tells me; she's the expert here on gender-based analysis.

Of course, we do have the self-assessment tool as well that various departments can use to do a self-assessment on how well they are doing. We will be working with them as well in looking at how they can better evaluate the results they're getting from the usage of gender-based analysis.

I don't think any of us would ever say we're there, but I think there has been considerable progress. We recognize that there's still a lot of work to do. I think one of the areas we've identified is this clarification of expectations, and the understanding, with some departments who work in areas that they may not traditionally have thought would have gender impacts, that we need to work with them on identifying that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Did you have a chance to review the 2009-2010 budget to see if there were places where a GBA had been done and implemented or places where it should have been done?

[*English*]

Ms. Clare Beckton: I think you will have to, again, ask the Department of Finance with respect to what evidence they have with respect to gender-based analysis.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Ms. Mathyssen for the last three minutes, please.

• (1250)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I still continue to have this feeling that we have this remarkable resource, remarkable set of tools, expectations, and accountability within departments, and yet, when it comes right down to the end of the road, things fall apart. We get policies and instruments that just don't live up to the expectations we had.

I want to follow up a little bit on what Madam Demers was asking. Certainly PCO and TBS agreed with the Auditor General's recommendations to measure progress to fulfill GBA and our commitments. I'm curious about the timeline.

When could we see the completion of this in terms of the departmental assessments? Will there be best practices used to measure the quality of these practices? How will you review the memoranda to cabinet and TB submissions? What criteria will be used to determine how well, or if, GBA was considered? And how will you document this? Will it become public?

I know it's a lot in three minutes.

Mr. Neil Bower: Madam Chair, I'll answer what I can and invite my colleagues to follow.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): You have about a minute and a half amongst you to answer that question.

Mr. Neil Bower: Okay.

I'll just say that I take some exception to the idea that things fall apart at the end. I think that—

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: I mean with the politicians. When it gets right down to the decision and the policy that goes forward, it's the politicians. It's not the departments. It's the minister, and it's the politicians. I take full responsibility.

Mr. Neil Bower: But I will comment, if you like, in terms of the documentation. I would just reiterate that I think it is impractical to expect that the informal go-between between analysts and departments should be documented. The suggestion of doing so after the fact is also impractical. If one understands the dynamic nature of the challenge function, that's something that is just part of the process.

I do welcome the report of the Auditor General, and if you read the report in its entirety you will see that central agencies and departments are, indeed, working to improve the process where improvements can be made.

I would leave it at that.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Could we just make a comment, Madam Chair, on the challenge function?

Mr. Timmins.

Mr. Douglas Timmins (Assistant Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

With regard to the comment about not documenting the challenge function if it was working so well, I would just point out that there is a table in the chapter that identifies that 13 out of 28 cabinet submissions did include gender-based analysis. Of the 15 that did not, for 10 of those we found evidence that gender-based analysis was done. If it was done and the challenge function was functioning properly, it should have been one of the ones that would have caught that and put it into the cabinet submission.

I think there is some opportunity for improvement in the process. If it's not documentation, it has to be something else that would work in that regard.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you very much.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our Auditor General and her group, as well as Ms. Beckton from Status of Women, and our central agencies for coming out today and spending a couple of hours with us. There have certainly been some good presentations and some excellent questions. Hopefully we can move forward on this issue, and we'll see some progress.

Hon. Anita Neville: They've been here for two hours.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Yes, as Ms. Neville has said, thank you so much for giving us the full two hours.

I would ask any committee members who can to stay and meet with the Serbian delegation for 15 minutes.

The meeting is adjourned.

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