

## **Workshop report for the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia funded Workshop Program**

### **Exploring the gender dimensions of intergovernmental relations: Australian and international perspectives.**

**Convenors: Professor Louise Chappell (UNSW), Professor Deborah Brennan (UNSW), Professor Kim Rubenstein (ANU)**

Exploring the gender dimensions of intergovernmental relations was the focus of a successful two-day workshop held on 16-17 May 2013 at the University of New South Wales, led by Louise Chappell (SISS, UNSW) and Deborah Brennan (SPRC, UNSW) with Kim Rubenstein (Law, ANU). The Gender and Intergovernmental Relations workshop was supported by the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia Workshop Program; the ANZSOG research program; the COAG Reform Council; the UNSW Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Collaboration Research Scheme along with the UNSW Gilbert + Tobin Centre for Public Law and the ANU Gender Institute.

The interactive workshop brought together policy experts, politicians and leading Australian and six international scholars to assess the interaction between gender, federal and multi-level governance arrangements across key social policy areas.

Day One focused on ‘Gendering the Council of Australian Government’s (COAG) Reform Agenda.’ Key questions under discussion included:

- 1) What are the gender dimensions in key COAG policy domains?
- 2) What difference does a gender analysis make to the framing, priorities and prescriptions across policy areas?
- 3) How can a gender analysis enhance reporting and other accountability requirements in each of these policy areas?
- 4) What are the essential features of an intergovernmental gender policy analysis and accountability framework?

The session started with presentations by Andrew Lynch from UNSW Law School and Deborah Brennan who put the work of the COAG Reform Council in context from an intergovernmental and from a gender perspective.

A highlight of the first session was a presentation by Mary Ann O’Loughlin, COAG Reform Council Executive Secretary, who reported on the Council’s first gender analysis on the transition from school to work and further study. The analysis highlighted the significant variation between boys and girls access to post-school work and education opportunities and between these cohorts across jurisdictions. As a result of the significant findings of this initial research, as well as a request from the COAG Select Committee on Women’s Issues, Mary Ann explained the COAG RC is now undertaking a gender analysis of key performance indicators under the COAG Reform Agenda and will collate these in a report for COAG. Louise and Deborah will

work with the COAG Reform Council to disseminate the results of its gender report when it is released later this year.

The following two workshop panels brought together UNSW colleagues, Bettina Cass and Karen Walker, with policy experts in the areas of disability and homelessness to analyse the gender aspects of these policy areas, which have been deemed by COAG to be areas of national priority. Presenters on the disability panel included Rosemary Kayess who addressed the influence on the new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Peoples with Disabilities on domestic policy-making, from Therese Sands on the absence of a gender and intersectional analysis from disability policy across jurisdictions, and from Lesley Hall on the advocacy of disability groups, including in relation to the NDIS, to develop more gender sensitive disability policy responses.

The panel on homelessness included presentations from Vivienne Milligan on Australia's shrinking social housing sector and constricted rental market and its gender implications, from Sue Cripps on the intersection between changes in single parent payments and homelessness and from Ludo McFerran about the underlying causes of homelessness for women across states and territories.

Day one ended with an illuminating panel discussion, moderated by Louise Chappell, involving Anna Bligh former Premier of Queensland, Peter Shergold, former Secretary of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and UNSW Constitutional expert, George Williams who provided insights into the political, bureaucratic and legal aspects of the 'black box' of Australian intergovernmental relations. Peter addressed the role of senior bureaucrats in helping to shape the agenda of intergovernmental relations and the challenges they face in implementing political agreements. Anna discussed the need for opaqueness in COAG and other intergovernmental forums in order for politicians to 'clinch a deal' on key national reform initiatives. George outlined some of the existing challenges and weaknesses in Australia's existing intergovernmental relations system and the need for reform in certain areas to address the current 'democratic deficit'.

Day two of the workshop focussed on broader comparative and transnational perspectives on gender, federalism and multi-level governance and involved leading international and national feminist scholars working in the areas of gender and intergovernmental relations.

The papers compared developments across of Australian, Canadian, German and EU, South African, and United States cases to ask the following questions:

- 1) Under what circumstances are issues of gender equality placed on intergovernmental agendas in federal and devolved states?
- 2) Are there specific co-ordination needs and challenges in women's policy areas?
- 3) What mechanisms can be put in place to achieve 'joined-up' and more coordinated national responses to women's policy areas in federal and devolved states?
- 4) How can emerging intergovernmental frameworks be structured to take account of

these and other gender related concerns?

Carol Weissert, editor of *Publius*, the pre-eminent journal in the field of federalism studies, served as rapporteur for the day and acknowledged the exciting and ground-breaking work that is being carried out in this field. Carol presented a range of options for taking this field forward including further developing the theoretical and methodological frameworks and undertaking more research into specific areas including the interaction between civil society and intergovernmental institutions and the effects of this interaction of policy outcomes.

Presenters included:

Rianne Mahon (Political Economy, Waterloo, Canada) on the OECD;

Sabine Lang (Politics, University of Washington, US) on Germany and the EU;

Jill Vickers (Emeritus Professor, Politics, Carleton, Ottawa) on theorizing Gender and intergovernmental relations in across federal systems;

Gretchen Ritter (University of Texas, Austin) and family policy, federalism and the US Constitution;

Amanda Gouws (Politics, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa) on Intergovernmental Relations and the making of domestic violence policy in South Africa.

Marian Sawer (Emeritus Professor, RSSH, ANU) on Australian Women's Intergovernmental Machinery.

Rapporteur: Carol Weissert (Politics, Florida State University)

Louise Chappell, Deborah Brennan, Kim Rubenstein, Meryl Kenny, and Alan Fenna all served as discussants across the program.