



REPORTS ON RECENT IPU SPECIALIZED MEETINGS

**(c) REGIONAL SEMINAR FOR FRENCH-SPEAKING AFRICAN PARLIAMENTS
ON "GENDER SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS"
(Libreville, Gabon, 13-15 June 2013)**

1. The IPU and the Parliament of Gabon organized a regional seminar for French-speaking African parliaments on: Gender-sensitive parliaments. The seminar was held from 13 to 15 June 2013 in the National Assembly of Gabon in Libreville.
2. The seminar was part of efforts by the IPU to transform parliaments into more gender-sensitive institutions.
3. The seminar was attended by 75 parliamentarians — 33 women and 42 men — and parliamentary officials from 13 countries¹. Gabonese government officials also attended the seminar. International experts and parliamentarians from participating countries took part in the proceedings.
4. Using the IPU report Gender-sensitive Parliaments — A Global Review of Good Practice as a basis, the participants identified the different dimensions of effectively mainstreaming gender equality in parliamentary bodies, working methods and proceedings. They shared their experiences and views on strategies for mainstreaming gender in parliamentary institutions.
5. The discussions focused on four main themes: (1) the status of women's participation in parliament and its bodies; (2) the establishment of a legal and political framework conducive to gender equality in parliament; (3) mechanisms and strategies for mainstreaming gender equality in all parliamentary work; and (4) partnerships for developing strategies to promote gender equality in parliament.
6. Participants reiterated that it was vital for parliaments to meet the needs and expectations of both men and women in their composition, bodies, working methods, operation and action. Parliaments should become models of gender mainstreaming for other national institutions.
7. To achieve these objectives, the participants agreed on the following points:
 - (a) A high level of participation of women must be ensured in parliaments. Electoral laws must be reformed to overcome barriers to and constraints on the election of women. Ambitious and effective quotas should be adopted, based on the principle of alternating lists, including at the top of lists, together with sanctions for non-compliance. Raising awareness among the public, political parties and opinion leaders is also an effective strategy for promoting women's participation and changing attitudes.

¹ Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Morocco, Rwanda, Senegal and Tunisia.

- (b) Once in parliament, women should have the opportunity to occupy decision-making positions in order fully to contribute to parliamentary work. The use of quotas in parliamentary bodies can also guarantee women's access to key positions.
 - (c) Reconciling family and professional life for parliamentarians should be facilitated, not only for their work in parliament but also for activities in the political parties and constituencies. Such reconciliation can be facilitated by adapting facilities in parliament, for example by installing breastfeeding rooms or nurseries. It can also be achieved through work schedules that take into account family responsibilities. A fair distribution of family responsibilities between both parents is also helpful.
 - (d) Internal policies to prevent discrimination and harassment in parliaments are important for providing good working conditions for both women and men, parliamentarians and staff alike.
 - (e) In order to strengthen the work of parliaments on gender equality, internal policies that take account of gender must be developed. These policies allow for the definition of specific goals, planning for the action to be taken and the establishment of measures and implementing mechanisms, such as specialized gender committees or caucuses. These mechanisms must be given the necessary means and effective analysis tools and have a mandate to follow up the action taken and assess it.
 - (f) Parliaments should have the right working methods and necessary level of expertise for effectively mainstreaming gender. In cooperation with governments, they should make efforts to grant access to sex-disaggregated data as a basis for the work of parliamentary committees. Parliaments should conduct a self-assessment on the basis of the method defined by the IPU to identify their specific needs and plan the measures needed to address them.
 - (g) Parliaments should be more active in terms of gender equality. They must take legislative initiatives and exercise stronger controls over the work of the government on the issues of women's rights, gender equality and gender mainstreaming.
 - (h) Political parties should include more women. The role of male parliamentarians or members of political parties is crucial for including more women and better taking gender equality into account. Men must support their female colleagues as candidates or parliamentarians. They must also commit to gender equality and promote it in parliament, the political parties and among the population.
8. Participants ended their deliberations by calling on the IPU to pursue its efforts in helping parliaments to become more gender-sensitive institutions. They requested IPU support for conducting self-assessments and drawing up action plans in their respective parliaments. They requested that the IPU disseminate widely the conclusions of the seminar and undertook to share them with their respective parliaments.



PARLIAMENT OF GABON

GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS Regional Seminar for French-speaking African Parliaments

Libreville (Gabon)

13-15 June 2013

*Organized by the Parliament of Gabon and the Inter-Parliamentary
Union*



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY
UNION

FINAL SEMINAR REPORT

Rapporteur Ms. Pauline-Olive NONGOU née LOUEMBET,
Member of the National Assembly of Gabon

From 13 to 15 June 2013, the National Assembly of Gabon played host to the Seminar on Gender-sensitive Parliaments for French-speaking African Parliaments. The event, co-organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliament of Gabon, brought together a total of 75 parliamentarians: 33 women and 42 men. Parliamentary staff from 13 countries were also in attendance.

From the very outset the participants concurred on the importance of promoting gender equality and gender sensitivity in and through parliament. They expressed their satisfaction at being able to gather – both women and men - to discuss those issues together in a constructive spirit of cooperation.

The participants agreed that it was important for parliaments to meet the needs and expectations of men and women in their composition, bodies, working methods, action and the way they generally function. They underscored the crucial role parliament could play in serving as a model to other institutions.

Using as a basis the IPU study Gender-sensitive Parliaments – A Global Review of Good Practice, the participants started off by debating what constitutes a gender-sensitive parliament. For them, it is one that:

- Promotes parity and has an equitable participation of women and men members in all its bodies;
- Actively encourages the recruitment of women to senior posts;
- Fosters an internal culture that is respectful of women's rights, promotes gender equality and takes into account the needs and situation of parliamentarians – men and women – to help them strike a balance between their professional responsibilities and family obligations;
- Has a strategic gender equality framework;
- Mainstreams gender equality in all its work;
- Recognizes and encourages the contribution of male parliamentarians who defend and make the most of gender equality; and
- Encourages political parties to show initiative in terms of promoting and achieving gender equality.

A number of objectives would have to be met and measures taken for parliaments to become gender-sensitive institutions. The participants reviewed examples of good practice in their own parliaments and others in different regions.

Women's presence in parliament and its structures

Several of the parliaments in attendance had made considerable progress in terms of women's participation. The Seminar provided an opportunity to compare the strategies deployed and reform undertaken. In all cases, it was highlighted that civil society organizations and women's associations were strategic and essential allies in any effort to enhance women's representation.

Among effective legislative reforms undertaken, the participants noted the adoption of ambitious quotas based on lists with women and men candidates in alternating positions, including at the top of lists, and carrying sanctions for cases of non-compliance. Sensitizing the wider public, political leaders and opinion leaders was also considered an important strategy for promoting women's participation and changing mentality. In both cases, it was crucial that the parliament and its members set themselves clear targets and publicize this widely to encourage political parties, opinion leaders, the media and the public at large to help meet them.

Several participating parliaments had a woman Speaker or Deputy Speaker. The participants concurred that women in decision-making posts in parliament served as role models and could pave the way for other women. For example, the President of the Senate of Gabon, who at times served as acting President of the Republic, ably demonstrated effective female leadership in the highest office of the State.

There were women chairpersons and deputy chairpersons of parliamentary committees, sometimes proportional to their numbers in parliament, but also often in fewer numbers. The participants welcomed the measures taken by certain parliaments which, in a bid to guarantee women's access to key posts, also applied electoral quotas to parliamentary bodies such as the Bureau and committees.

A framework conducive to gender equality in parliament

The participants lamented the difficulties encountered by parliamentarians in reconciling professional and family life. That, they observed, was due to the sheer number of meetings, not only in parliament, but also within political parties, which often took place late in the evening. Furthermore, certain participants regretted that once in their constituencies, parliamentarians were so engrossed in political activities that they had neither the time nor the energy to dedicate to their family life.

In general terms, it was useful to have facilities that were adapted to needs in parliaments, such as breastfeeding rooms, in order to help balance work and family life. In Africa, family support was a valuable asset that helped many parliamentarians pursue their political career knowing that their children were being cared for by relatives. The participants considered that it was, however, indispensable to promote a fair distribution of family responsibilities between both parents.

The participants noted the importance of internal gender-sensitive, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies in the context of the cultural specificities of each country.

Mainstreaming gender equality throughout parliament's work

The participants discussed ways of mainstreaming gender throughout parliament's work. The idea was to place equality at the centre of decisions, bodies and resource allocation. It was important to set or strengthen equality targets through a legislative framework guaranteeing gender equality and non-discrimination, based notably on international conventions such as

the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The participants underscored the importance of developing or strengthening equality laws and ensuring that they were accompanied by plans of action and implementing mechanisms. They considered that it was also crucial to develop a framework within parliament to guarantee a gender-sensitive approach, set concrete objectives, take measures and where necessary establish an implementing mechanism such as a dedicated committee.

Such mechanisms would need a mandate, requisite resources, effective analysis tools and the ability to guarantee follow-up and evaluation. Moreover, apart from the institutional aspect, the parliament should take legislative initiatives or review existing laws and exercise oversight of government action in the area of gender equality. In both cases, it would be useful for parliament to draw up a plan of action or roadmap for planning, follow-up and evaluation purposes.

The budget was a valuable tool for bringing a gender dimension to policies by ensuring that adequate resources were allocated to relevant women's or gender activities. Once again, the participants pointed to crucial needs often not met in parliaments in terms of expertise and particularly sex-disaggregated data. Lastly, the lack of resources, especially in developing countries, could hamper the adoption and proper execution of gender-sensitive budgets.

The participants set up a working group on the needs of their parliaments. They concluded that it was vital to put in place a dedicated gender committee and to build the capacities of women and men parliamentarians and administrative staff, in particular on gender issues. It was equally important to have access to research on cases of existing inequality. Mentoring was a strategy that could be implemented with verve, and although not widely used, was effective both for women with political experience and those who were new to politics and parliament.

The participants observed that the fact of conducting a self-assessment based on the method defined by the IPU was one way of identifying specific needs and planning what measures could be taken to meet them.

Building partnerships for gender equality in parliament

The participants discussed parliamentary bodies dealing with gender equality in parliament, in particular gender equality committees and women's caucuses. In the framework of their group work, they felt it was essential to promote and support the latter. It was important to support chairpersons of such bodies for them to play a pivotal role and serve as models and references for equality issues.

Also as part of the group work, the participants discussed the role of male parliamentarians and political parties in equality issues. They concluded by underscoring the need to encourage political parties to take measures aimed at including more women in their ranks. They placed special emphasis on the role of male parliamentarians or members of political parties during elections, whom they considered should strongly support women candidates. That would avoid stereotypes about token women, which could give rise to the application of certain forms of quotas.

The participants ended their deliberations by calling on the IPU to pursue its efforts in helping parliaments become more gender-sensitive institutions. They requested IPU support for conducting self-assessments and drawing up plans of action in their respective parliaments.

Lastly, the participants requested that the IPU disseminate widely the conclusions of the Seminar and undertook to share them with their respective parliaments.