



## **IS PARLIAMENT OPEN TO WOMEN? AN APPRAISAL**

Conference for Chairpersons and Members of  
Parliamentary Bodies Dealing with Gender Equality

28–29 September 2009

Geneva





Created in 1889, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is the international organization that brings together the representatives of parliaments. The IPU is the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue and works for peace and cooperation among peoples with a view to strengthening representative institutions.

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Inter-Parliamentary Union

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## Foreword

Ever since the first United Nations World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City thirty five years ago, the international community has been striving for the elimination of discrimination against women and for women's economic and political empowerment. In 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Plan of Action called on States to increase women's participation in decision making and leadership and to ensure women's full participation in political life. In 2000, the United Nations, recognizing the central role of women in development, included the empowerment of women as one of the Millennium Development Goals.

The world conferences on women have provided political visibility to women's rights worldwide, yet there has not been a commensurate increase in the representation of women in parliaments. In 1995 women accounted for 15.9 percent of parliamentarians worldwide; by 2009 they accounted for 18.5 percent, hardly a mark of great progress.

The year 2010 represents a milestone since it is 15 years since the commitments and pledges were made in Beijing. Given that women's access to and influence in parliament has been so frustratingly slow, can we really be satisfied with the progress achieved?

The Inter-Parliamentary Union adheres to the principle that democracy requires the inclusion of both men and women in decision making. It therefore works to promote a gender partnership by facilitating women's involvement in parliament and political life. As part of its efforts to strengthen parliament's

capacity to promote gender equality, the IPU holds annual seminars for members of parliamentary bodies that deal with gender equality matters. The 2009 conference, *Is Parliament Open to Women? An Appraisal*, held in Geneva from 28–29 September, brought together around 80 parliamentarians from 38 countries.

The conference appraised progress made in terms of women's parliamentary participation across the world since the Beijing Conference. The objective of the meeting was to answer the question: is parliament open to women? As the readers of this report will discover, the answers to this ostensibly simple question are multifaceted and diverse.

The IPU wishes to thank both the experts for their presentations and the participants for their enthusiastic interventions. The Seminar would not have been possible without the generous support of Irish Aid and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

We hope that this report will serve as an inspiration to members of parliament in their efforts to integrate gender equality into every aspect of parliamentary life. ■



**Anders B. Johnsson**  
Secretary General  
Inter-Parliamentary Union





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## Summary of the Conference

The meeting brought together some 80 members of parliament and parliamentary staff from 38 countries to discuss and assess progress made in terms of women's parliamentary participation. The meeting elected Ms. L. Kilimo (Kenya) and Mr. M. Affey (Kenya) as its rapporteurs. They presented the following summary remarks at the meetings closing session:

The theme of women's access to and participation in parliaments was timely in the run-up to the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. Under the Beijing Platform for Action, States undertake to promote gender equality and to increase women's participation in decision-making bodies. The seminar therefore appraised progress made in terms of women's parliamentary participation across the world since the Beijing Conference, took stock of special measures that have been taken to open parliaments up to the participation of women and identified remaining challenges.

The objective of the meeting was to answer an apparently simple question: is parliament open to women? The seminar first began by considering the question from a quantitative point of view. Despite incremental progress over the past 15 years, the average of 18 per cent women members of parliament remains well below the 30 per cent target established in the 1990s. It also recognized that the pace of progress was too slow, and that with an average increase of less than one percentage point per year, the 30 per cent target would not be reached for another 15 years.

From a numerical point of view, yes, parliament is open to women. Compared with other spheres of political decision-making – where for example 16 per cent of ministerial posts were held by women and just 4 per cent of Heads of State were women in 2008 – parliaments are more open. However, progress needs to be stepped up and the many challenges

that women face in accessing parliaments need to be addressed in order to respond to them in the most concrete and effective way.

In the discussions about **challenges** faced by women, a key point raised was that regardless of region, level of development and cultural background, women face similar challenges in running for parliament in all countries. It was also recognized that women running for election were usually held to higher expectations from society and were often scrutinized far more closely than men seeking election. This pressure often results in women having to work harder and more than men, which nevertheless ultimately serves them well in their careers.

One of the overarching challenges highlighted was the prevailing **cultural attitudes** regarding the roles of women and men in society. These affect the nature and forms of women's political participation and impact their levels of success in seeking positions of power. Cultural attitudes affect not only how women are perceived by the electorate, by also by political party leaders and the media. Some participants even noted that women were seen as intruders in the field of politics. Others underscored that the electorate often overlooked the specific and valuable contribution that women could bring to politics. Cultural attitudes also impact on how women see themselves, affecting their confidence and resolve to pursue a political career. Discussions highlighted the importance of challenging stereotypes and mentalities by promoting different forms of **education**, including providing education for women and girls, implementing civic and voter education programmes and promoting gender equality in the school curricula and within the home.

Participants also discussed the challenges of balancing **public and private** responsibilities, which was one of the main perceived deterrents identified

by women. Although it was noted that both women and men have multiple commitments that are time-consuming and can make it difficult to pursue a political career, the challenge of balancing family and public responsibilities was often felt hardest by women. The support of the family was seen as crucial for women with political ambitions.

**Political parties** were identified as the main gatekeepers to elected office, but often did not seem to be doing enough to promote and support the candidatures of women. Political parties were largely seen as operating as men's clubs where women have yet to make their way. They were criticized for often overlooking the value of women candidates, and opting for the safety of male incumbents rather than taking the perceived risk of supporting women aspirants.

Running for election is increasingly costly and women are affected by a shortage of **financing** and campaign support. Some participants highlighted that societal roles often mean that women are not in charge of family resources and often do not have access to money to fund their campaigns. Discriminatory laws in some countries limit and even forbid women's access to property and land ownership. Combined with women's lesser earning power, banks often do not grant them loans, adding a further challenge to women seeking office. These have an even more pronounced impact on women running as independent candidates.

The **media** and the stereotypes it perpetrates constitute a challenge to those seeking election, both men and women. However, the mainstream media was particularly prone to cultivating a negative and stereotypical portrayal of women politicians, with a tendency to put them down and not focus on their political achievements. Participants recognized that it was necessary to learn to work with the media, and use it as effectively as possible, with a "don't get angry, get smart" approach.

Other factors that were highlighted as impacting on women's political participation included the role of **civil society movements**, which can be an important political support. Violence against women in politics and in campaigning was also underscored as an increasing challenge in some countries.

Having identified the main challenges, the participants then focused their attention on the possible responses. On an encouraging note, over the past decade solutions have emerged and a variety of special

measures have been implemented. Electoral **gender quotas**, for instance, have become an increasingly used policy measure to promote women's participation in parliaments. Of the 25 countries to have reached 30 per cent or more women members of parliament, 22 have applied quotas in some form or another. Quotas are a simple and effective answer to the complex historical problem of inequality in decision-making. Gender quotas can also be framed in a gender-neutral way, thereby safeguarding the participation of both women and men.

For quotas to be effective, they have to work with the **electoral system** in operation. Proportional representation systems, which are recognized as the most favourable for supporting the election of women, are also the easiest under which to implement candidate quotas. For quotas to be successful, they must have strict enforcement mechanisms, which include placement mandates, financial sanctions and the rejection of lists that do not comply with the law. They also need to be understood by the electorate. Quotas are not a miracle solution but by levelling the playing field they can fast track women's participation in parliament. They can also facilitate more internal party democracy by formalizing and making recruitment rules more transparent.

In terms of other special measures, the seminar also discussed other incentives to promote women, such as **political finance**. Funding can be used as an incentive to encourage women's participation, whether it is public, private or a combination of both. Finance legislation can include incentives for political parties to earmark specific allocations to support women's candidacies. Spending limits can also be implemented as a way to level the political playing field. The option of including a gender-sensitive finance component in laws and policies on political participation was also mentioned.

**Political parties** can do much more than implement quotas to promote women's candidacies. Internal party democracy leads to more inclusiveness and can thereby favour women's increased participation. Parties should be encouraged to implement specific training programmes (such as communication or leadership training) that specifically target women. Mentoring between women can also serve as an important way to cultivate new leaders. Political parties should work with women not only during elections, but also keep them engaged between elections.

Another potential entry point for enhancing women's participation in national politics is experience gained in **local government**. Local government may serve as a launching pad for women to become national leaders and a stepping stone for accessing national parliament. Furthermore, measures adopted to encourage the higher participation of women at the local level can open the way to implementing such measures at the national level. It was recognized that this is an area that requires further research.

The question of whether parliaments are open to women was then considered from a second point of view, moving beyond the question of numbers. The participants assessed the extent to which parliaments are including the contributions of women and how parliaments are addressing gender equality issues.

Participants noted that when women take up their seats in parliament, they usually enter a male domain with a potential set of new challenges. Parliament's **rules and procedures** were typically established by men, and "men's clubs" still in operation in some parliaments by nature exclude women. It was underscored that women need to learn and use these rules, but it may also be important to revise and rewrite the rules of parliament for the benefit not only women, but also for men.

Given the low numbers of women members in most countries, parliaments were by and large viewed as enduring male bastions. Participants noted that the **critical mass** of women, of at least 30 per cent, was important for several reasons. In parliaments with low numbers of women members, there sometimes are not enough women to take part in all parliamentary committees, or women have to spread themselves thinly taking on several committee assignments. A critical mass of women members is also needed to begin to change political priorities and place women's concerns on the parliamentary agenda.

Women must display **solidarity** and support each other. Participants highlighted the advantages and benefits of acting together and uniting for change, even across party lines. The importance of cross-party caucuses of women parliamentarians was underscored as carving out a space for women to cooperate closely and define common priorities in pursuing gender equality. Establishing a clear mandate and defining rules for the operation and structure of women's caucuses is vital for them to function effectively and contribute substantively to the work of parliament.

In addition, the importance of engaging and collaborating with **men as partners** for change was noted and participants called for greater efforts to be made to involve men in gender equality work.

Parliamentarians have a crucial role to play in the promotion of gender equality and in overseeing the implementation of policies and programmes to ensure that they meet the standards and goals set. Much of the detailed policy work and oversight is done in **parliamentary committees** and it is here that gender equality strategies need to be implemented. Specialized parliamentary committees on gender equality are an important mechanism for gender mainstreaming. To be effective in their work, they require sufficient funding and support. However, in some parliaments, monitoring and implementation is not done in specialized gender committees, but through mainstreaming gender equality in the existing committee structures. There is, however, no single model – it varies from country to country depending on parliamentary practice. A particular challenge was ensuring that mainstream committees are also accountable for gender equality issues, and that they do not become systematically relegated to specialized gender committees.

The achievement of gender mainstreaming also depends on **coordination** with other committees in parliament. The example was cited of convening common sittings with other parliamentary committees to debate the contents of a bill and ensure the inclusion of a gender perspective. Other gender mainstreaming mechanisms could include alternating positions of power in the parliament between women and men, such as ensuring that committees Chairs and Vice-Chairs are of either sex. Including the Chair of the gender equality committee as a member of the bureau of parliament was also suggested.

The third aspect it examined was related to the institution of parliament itself. How gender-sensitive are these institutions? The participants began by defining the notion of **gender-sensitive parliaments**. A gender-sensitive parliament responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and in its work as a nation's primary legislative institution. When looking at gender-sensitive parliaments we need to consider two components: (1) gender mainstreaming, as in parliament's ability to mainstream gender in policy development and the work of parliament, and (2) parliamentary

working arrangements, including parliament's operational and institutional culture.

Participants heard about a very interesting initiative at the **Swedish Parliament**, where an internal process to assess the gender sensitivity of the Parliament was instigated. The results of the assessment highlighted that women faced several challenges in parliament: they usually struggled to reach high positions within the parliament; they viewed themselves and their work as being invisible; they were often subject to ridicule and belittling, and they often did not have access to full information about parliamentary work. This resulted in a document with "15 proposals for gender equality in Parliament". A gender equality plan must be adopted for each parliamentary session, which requires reporting and follow-up, falling under the responsibility of the Secretary General of Parliament.

The meeting also highlighted the importance of **partnerships** in order for parliament to fully contribute to national efforts to promote gender equality. Parliamentarians can be isolated and need to develop cooperation with government and civil society. There is a need to work closely with national women's machineries and women's ministries, as they have complementary roles to play. Cooperation with ombudspersons and the judiciary was also highlighted.

Finally, the importance of **disseminating the findings** of the seminar to all members of parliament was noted, and delegates agreed to report back to their parliaments to ensure that members are aware of the meeting and its summary and recommendations. It was also noted that it is important to share country experiences, especially in countries undergoing constitutional and political reform. ■

# Opening Remarks

**Anders B. Johansson**

Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

The year 2010 will be yet another milestone. It is 15 years since the Beijing Conference on Women and the Platform for Action and 35 years since the first women's conference in Mexico. The conferences on women have had the merit of providing political visibility to women's rights worldwide. Thirty five years later, however, can we be satisfied with the level of change? In 1975, the issue of women in decision-making positions was barely discussed – if at all. At the time, it was not an issue and there were certainly no data to present on the situation. This prompted the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to begin work on women in politics and women in parliaments, starting with research and the collection of data to take stock of the situation.

Since that first conference in Mexico there has been an increased focus on women's representation in, and impact on, decision-making structures. At least initially, however, this focus did not lead to any substantial increase in the representation of women in parliaments. In 1975 women accounted for 10.9 percent of parliamentarians worldwide: 10 years later it was 11.9 percent. Maybe because of this, the 1985 Nairobi conference saw the beginning of more sustained action towards equality in decision-making structures as governments and parliaments pledged to promote gender equality in all areas of political life.

The commitments and pledges of states to promote gender equality were consolidated in the Beijing Plan of Action, which was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. States were called on to increase women's capacity to participate in decision making and leadership, and to take concrete steps to implement special measures to ensure women's access to and full participation in power structures such as parliaments. The commitment to ensuring the equal participation of women and men in political

life also finds expression in the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which has received near universal endorsement.

In 2000, the United Nations recognized the central role of women in development in the Millennium Development Goals, which include the empowerment of women as one of the measurable goals. The proportion of seats held by women in parliament is one of the key indicators in measuring progress in this regard. In 2009, women accounted for 18.6 percent of the members of parliament. But this is proportion is far from enough. We should not accept a pace of progress of less than one percentage point per year. At that rate parity will be achieved only in 2030. We cannot wait that long. Democracy cannot be entrenched or sustained without the participation of women.

Eighteen percent remains short of the 30 percent target that governments set themselves in the Beijing Plan of Action. It is, however, still a fair proportion compared to other decision-making positions. Only nine percent of mayors in the world are women and women are still largely absent from the highest levels of government. Only 16 percent of ministerial positions were held by women in 2008 and only 4.5 percent of the Heads of State were women.

Parliaments are therefore more open to women than other areas of decision making. More importantly, parliaments are the obvious place to require and benefit from the balanced participation of men and women. This prompts the apparently simple question: is Parliament open to women? A first way to consider the question is to focus on percentages and figures. In this case, it is fair to say today that, yes, parliaments are open to women. Only nine single/lower houses are exclusively composed of men, but in over 40, less than 10 percent of members are



women. Parliaments are no longer an exclusively male domain but they are far from being gender balanced. Women's political participation remains hampered by multiple factors. Women's campaigns often suffer because of a shortage of financing, cultural barriers and conflicting demands on the time of women candidates due to their domestic and social responsibilities. Political parties are often men's clubs where women still have to make their way. Media coverage tends to portray women using stereotypes that can prevent women from obtaining and maintaining positions of power.

In recent years, some solutions have been found to these problems. Political will at the top is more visibly supportive of women's political participation and concrete initiatives have been taken to address challenges. Quotas and other temporary special measures, for instance, are proven means for supporting women's engagement in politics. Eighteen of the 24 parliaments that boast 30 percent or more women in their lower houses applied quotas in some form. There are other mechanisms as well. This meeting will discuss some creative solutions.

A second way of responding to the question requires us to go beyond the numbers. Openness is not only a question of access. It is also important to assess the degree to which women have real as opposed to symbolic opportunities to contribute to the work of parliament. Can women provide effective input to policy development and setting political priorities? This question must be examined more closely, and it is arguable that we have spent less time and effort and developed fewer solutions on this point. Historically, women have been sidelined from the structures of governance that determine political and legislative priorities. Here again, challenges remain. When women enter parliament, they enter a world that historically has been governed by men's rules and perspectives. To make women's voices heard in parliament requires existing practices to be challenged, rules to be changed and the building of a space of their own.

A third dimension to be considered is to examine the institution of parliament itself. How gender-sensitive are parliaments? How do men promote gender equality issues? Is there a common platform for gender equality in parliament? Are there mechanisms that facilitate the mainstreaming of gender issues

in parliament? Do parliamentary committees dealing with gender issues benefit from strong support in parliament? Are they effective gender-mainstreaming mechanisms? One issue given even less consideration is that of parliaments as workplaces. Places of power, such as parliaments, contain inherent male biases that have to be identified, challenged and reconstructed.

Parliaments themselves have to implement family-friendly and gender-sensitive measures. The level of gender sensitivity should also become a measure of good institutional performance. This is an area that has to be further explored and where creative solutions must be found. Parliament is the right place to start and will lead the way to change in other workplaces.

The question of women's equal political participation is not just a question of women's rights. It is at the core of democratic governance and progress. In 1997, the IPU consolidated its views and the experience of women's political participation in the Universal Declaration of Democracy, article 4 of which explicitly endorses the link between democracy and 'a genuine partnership between men and women in the management of public affairs'. This principle has informed the work of the IPU for the past decade.

As an organization, the IPU has tried to promote women's participation within its own structures. This has resulted in the adoption of special measures within IPU governing bodies, a revision of its rules and ways of functioning to facilitate a more gender-balanced participation and the mainstreaming of gender issues in its work. Gender equality is one of the organization's priorities. The IPU continues to closely monitor its ways of working. It is a constant battle which requires the contribution of all. In seeking solutions, whether within the IPU or within parliaments, men have probably not been engaged enough. The keyword is partnership and we still have a long way to go.

The small, albeit important, presence of men at the conference demonstrated that women's political participation is still perceived largely as a women's issue. The conference will provide for fruitful debate which will result in the identification of new ideas and initiatives to support women in parliament. There are no miracle solutions but joining forces will lead the way to progress. ■



**CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES TO  
PARLIAMENT: CURRENT TRENDS**

**1**



# Overview and Debate

## Overview of the Session

This session examined the obstacles that women face entering parliaments, including socio-cultural barriers, such as gender stereotypes and structural barriers, such as political parties and electoral systems. The session addressed the following questions:

- What are the primary socio-cultural challenges, such as dual burden and stereotyping?
- What are the main structural barriers, such as electoral systems and influence of money in politics?
- What role do political parties play as gatekeepers to politics?

The panelists for this session were Ms. Kareen Jabre, Manager, Gender Partnership Programme, IPU; Ms. Linah Kilimo, Assistant Minister for Cooperative Development and Marketing and Member of Parliament, Kenya; and Ms. Kay Hull, Member of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Australia. Ms. Jabre provided statistics detailing the progress towards gender parity that has been made in national parliaments since 1945. She also outlined some of the main factors impeding women's participation in politics. Ms. Kilimo discussed the current situation of women in politics in Kenya. Ms. Hull then drew on her personal experience of campaigning to describe some of the challenges that women face when standing for election to parliament and provide advice on how they may be overcome.

Ms. Jabre showcased statistics that illustrated that between 1945 and 2009, there was a six-fold increase in the proportion of women parliamentarians in lower houses, and a nine-fold increase in upper houses. The world average for women in both houses of parliament was 18.6 percent in 2009. The data indicates that there has been a **slow pace of progress** towards parity across all continents, with the percentage of

women increasing by a global average of less than one percentage point per year since 1995. Although the percentage of women in parliaments has been increasing across all regions, there are still major disparities. One-quarter of all parliamentary chambers have less than 10 percent women members, and nine parliaments still have no women at all.

In terms of **ministerial** portfolios, women were again under-represented: in 2008, women held only 16 percent of all posts, the vast majority of which were 'soft' portfolios such as social affairs or education. The numbers were also very low for the top executive position, where only 4.7 percent of heads of state were women in 2008.

Of the 25 parliamentary chambers that had reached the 30 percent threshold in 2009, 75 percent had adopted **special measures** to promote women's participation. This statistic demonstrated the importance of parliamentary initiatives and suggested that parliamentarians should be more proactive in adopting measures to overcome factors preventing women's participation in politics.

Ms. Jabre outlined the main challenges women faced at the various stages of the **candidate recruitment** and electoral process. As aspiring women passed through the steps necessary to become a candidate and then elected as a member of parliament, their progress was often impeded by challenges posed by their social-cultural environment, the need to reconcile the demands between a political career and family life, and difficulties in gaining financial and moral support. The way in which a political party functioned, a country's electoral system and how transparent the selection process is, were other factors that affected a woman's chances of becoming a candidate and being elected.

Ms. Kilimo noted that women in Kenya face many of the **challenges** already outlined, including

lack of support from family members, domestic obligations and patriarchal social-cultural attitudes which were critical of women seeking a career in politics. For many women, their chance of participating in politics was curtailed from a young age as they often had less access to education as compared to males. Girls were often taken out of school by their parents in order to be married and that put them at a significant disadvantage later in their lives.

**Political parties** were, furthermore, closed organizations and the ‘old boys club’ mentality that still persisted represented a major challenge for women aspirants and candidates. Important decisions regarding nominations were often made during exclusively male social meetings. Many women consequently felt discriminated against within their own parties. It was also common for women candidates to be intimidated by their male counter-parts and several women had, during previous campaigns, given up their political ambitions because of negative stereotyping in the media, physical abuse and destruction of their property.

The Kenyan society was still largely influenced by **patriarchal values**. Candidates were usually chosen by exclusively male leaderships who were reluctant to support women candidates. Campaigns were, moreover, prohibitively expensive. Since men control wealth in most families and it was difficult for women to obtain loans, female candidates were frequently bound by the permission or support of their husbands for funding.

Ms. Hull was the first woman from the National Party in New South Wales to be elected into the Australian Parliament. She described her path into parliament as one requiring perseverance and rapid learning to overcome the challenges she faced as a woman candidate. Some of the **challenges** included a ‘boys club’ mentality within her party, where norms and rules of behavior seemed to apply to men but not to women; lack of support of women’s groups to assist lobbying for women candidates and a ruthless media. In order to overcome these challenges, she noted that it was essential to develop key skills in such areas as mediation, conflict resolution, negotiation and marketing.

It was important for candidates to be strategic in their **campaigning** and to know how – and to whom – they should promote themselves. Standing for election takes courage. It requires an ability to focus on the positive aspects of a campaign and

learn how to adjust an approach if it is not working. For example, if the media acts as a barrier by propagating damaging stories, negative stereotypes, or misinformation, other campaigning techniques (such as door knocking and organizing forums) should be relied upon instead. Once elected, it was important to maintain courage in parliamentary work. Sometimes it would be necessary to vote across party lines, and in those cases women should not accept being intimidated by their colleagues into voting against their better judgment. Time was another key factor. Political campaigns required financial resources, a significant amount of time, and the support from friends and family. Lastly, it was necessary to achieve a balance between family life and political life.

## Plenary Debate

Participants noted that the biggest obstacle facing the majority of women aspirants and candidates was still how to **finance their campaign**. This was especially true for women in countries where laws relating to family, property and inheritances prevented them from having their own funds or having collateral with which they may take out a loan. In general, candidates did not know how to effectively run and fund a political campaign. Participants suggested that successful men and women could be invited to workshops to teach aspirants how to manage their campaigns.

**Cultural stereotyping** of women remained a problem in all regions. In many countries, the notion of a female political leader still met with resistance. Participants suggested that women could minimize the effects of these cultural stereotypes by becoming more aware of their individual strengths and rights. Women should be encouraged to share their experiences and advice with each other and with the electorate to inform them of the valuable contribution they could bring to politics. Developing role models could help aspirants build confidence. There have also been some examples of civil society organizations that have lobbied successfully for more support for women candidates, particularly in securing funding and encouraging parliaments to adopt gender-sensitive quotas. Solidarity between women at all stages of the political process, from aspirants and parliamentarians, was crucial.

Women candidates must make sure that they did not marginalize the male electorate. In order to be successful, women candidates should gain the respect of their male colleagues and the male members of the population. Political parties remained the gatekeepers to elected office, and it was therefore important for women candidates to strike a balance between having confidence in themselves and their identity, and being able to transcend the gender divide to focus on factors that unite the party and the electorate.

**Education** was a key component for developing policies to combat discrimination and gender inequality. Education was crucial for both men and women in that it teaches them of their respective, and equal, rights and duties. It was suggested that reforms of the educational system should be a central part of policies targeting discriminative practices.

Participants highlighted that **religious or customary laws** that discriminated against women must be reformed, and discrimination perpetuated through religion or custom must be addressed through education programmes.

Participants also noted that there were structural factors, such as electoral systems, which hindered women's electoral success. Parliamentarians may give consideration to adopting legislation and undertaking electoral reforms to enforce principles of equality, such as through the adoption of electoral quotas. Some countries had, however, found that, on their own, quotas were not sufficient. Laws on quotas should therefore be accompanied by **enforcement mechanisms** to ensure compliance. In Brazil and Burkina Faso, for example, parties were subject to financial penalties and sanctions if they failed to comply with the quota requirements. ■

# Women in Politics 15 Years after Beijing: Progress and Setbacks

**Kareen Jabre**

Manager, Gender Partnership Programme, IPU

This intervention aims at providing some statistics and data on women in parliament and in politics since 1945 and in particular since the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. It presents trends of progress and setbacks and discusses some of the main challenges that women face when running for election, based on research carried out by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and other organizations.

There has been significant progress since 1945 on increasing the proportion of women in parliament, from around 3 percent of women in parliament, on average, across both upper and lower houses to 18.6 percent in 2009. This represents a six-fold increase – a relatively slow rate of progress.

It is significant that there is an unequal division within the regions of the world. The Nordic countries have an average proportion of 42 percent women in their parliaments, and this percentage has been increasing year on year. Two regions of the world are above the world average: the Latin American countries and the European countries, with 22 percent and 21 percent, respectively. Two other regions have reached the world average of 18.6 percent across both houses – Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The remaining two regions, the Pacific and the Arab states, have made progress in recent years but are far from the world average.

There have been some significant achievements in recent years. In 2009, 15 percent of parliamentary chambers worldwide had 30 percent or more women members. This is a first and represents important progress. The lower house in Rwanda became the first to elect a majority of women parliamentarians in September 2008, putting Rwanda at the top of the list with women making up 56.3 percent of parliamentarians. Rwanda also elected a woman Speaker for the first time in its history. The first upper chamber to appoint a majority of women in parliament

was the Bahamas. It had a 60 percent presence of women in parliament in 2009.

There are also poor performers. In a quarter of all parliamentary chambers in 2009 women made up less than 10 percent of members. These are the ones that bring the world average down. Nine lower houses of parliament had no women members in 2009. The vast majority of these are in the Pacific Islands states, and some are in the Arab states.

A closer examination of the 25 countries that have 30 percent or more women in their lower or single houses of parliament brings light to several common characteristics. First, it is interesting to note that just over half of these countries are developing countries. While this was not the case a few years ago, more and more developing countries are taking the lead in promoting women's political participation. The Nordic states, which historically have been in the top five or six in terms of the highest percentage of women in parliament, no longer have the monopoly in terms of top positions. Rwanda is followed by Sweden, but then there is South Africa and other African countries. A second interesting factor is that six of the 25 countries are post-conflict countries. Some post-conflict countries have taken the opportunities presented by reconstruction to address the challenges that women have faced in the past and to try to remedy them while building a new and fairer society. Last but not least, 75 percent of those 25 countries have adopted measures to promote women's political participation, be they legislative measures or voluntary political party measures.

The situation of women in government is relatively similar to that of women in Parliament. The IPU and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women produced a map in 2008 presenting data on women in the executive and women in parliament. Based on the figures collected for the map,

16 percent of ministerial portfolios worldwide were held by women. This was up from 15 percent in 2005. In Finland, Norway and Granada, women held more than 50 percent of ministerial posts – up from two countries in 2005. Twenty-two countries had cabinets with 30 percent or more women ministers in 2008, compared to 16 countries in 2005. Only 13 countries had no women ministers at all, and this is down from 19 countries in 2005. In sum, this again amounts to slow progress but progress nonetheless.

The ministerial portfolios held by women are mostly what are called “soft portfolios”. This is a confirmed trend over a number of years. Women have a greater chance of being ministers of women’s affairs, social affairs, education, and so on, than foreign affairs ministers, finance ministers or budget holders. As for women as heads of state or government and leaders of parliaments, the numbers are extremely low: 4.7 percent, 4.2 percent and 10.7 percent, respectively. It becomes difficult for women to make it higher up in terms of the level of responsibility at the top of the State.

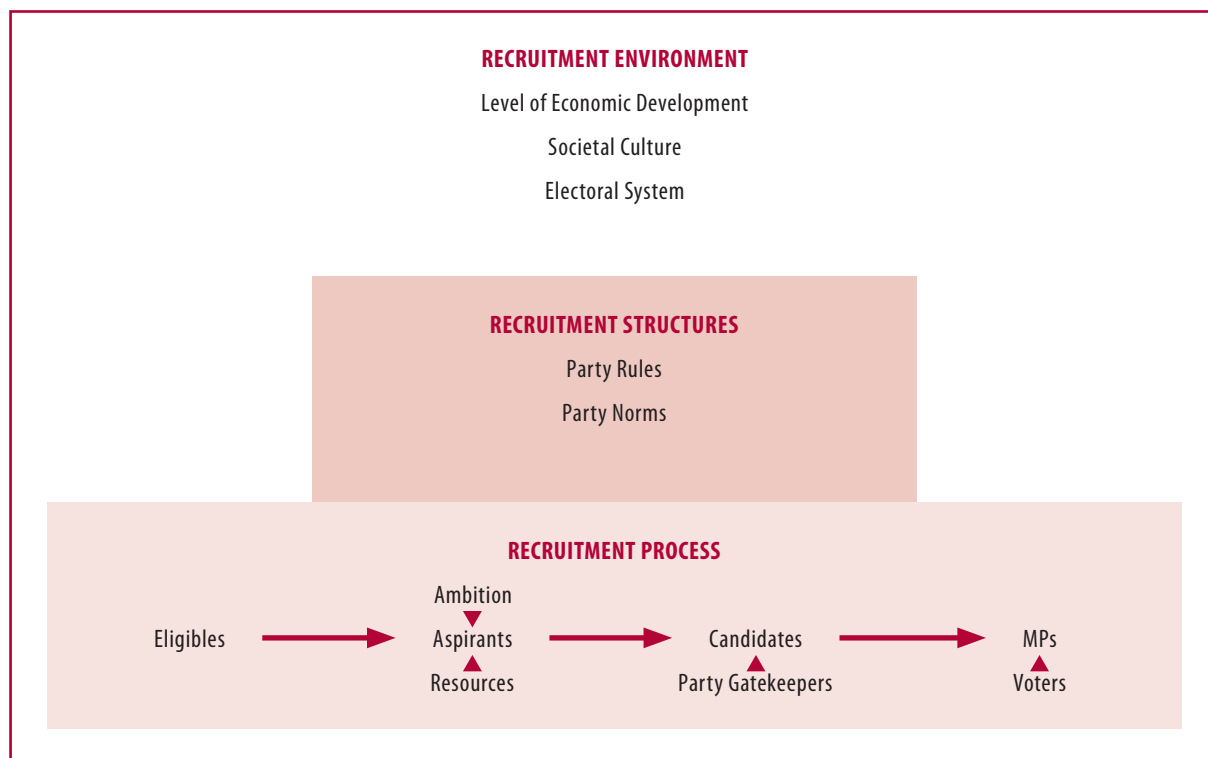
Local government is an area where it is more difficult to find research and data worldwide on the presence of women. Around nine percent of the mayors in the world are women. The International

Union of Local Authorities says that there are more women elected to local councils than to national parliaments. However, the lack of comprehensive and comparable data makes it difficult to identify trends and progress.

From a more qualitative point of view, many challenges have been identified that affect women’s political participation levels. The diagram shows three areas which each have different elements that impact on women’s political participation: first, their environments – where women are, the level of economic development, the societal culture, the electoral system; second, the recruitment structure – how candidates are recruited for election, the party rules and the party norms; and, third, the recruitment process – the different steps from eligibility to aspirant, and then from aspirant to candidate and from candidate to member of parliament. These are the different steps that need to be analysed, and for each of these steps there is a need to identify the challenges that women face.

- Step one: from being eligible to run to aspiring to run. What challenges have been identified by research? The one that is raised most often is the system of values and practices in politics, or the

**Figure 1:** The Recruitment Process: From Aspirants to Candidates<sup>1</sup>



social and cultural environment. Another common problem is reconciling politics and family responsibilities. Getting financial support is also key, as is support from women's organizations and building confidence. Security has also been raised as an issue, as politics can be seen as violent and somewhat dangerous.

- Step two: from aspirant to candidate. If you want to run, how do you become a candidate and what are the elements that affect a woman's selection? The role of political parties is certainly key. The electoral system, whether it is a proportional or a first-past-the-post system, the level of visibility that a woman has in her own party and the external support that she has all influence whether a woman will be selected as a candidate, as well as the selection process for candidates in political parties – and how transparent it is.
- Step three: how to go from becoming a candidate to being elected to parliament. Elements that impact on a woman's election include the electoral system, the level of party campaign support she receives, the available funding, the cultural environment and the level of political will.

Finally, what are the perceived deterrents to women entering parliament? In 2008, the IPU carried out a survey of men and women parliamentarians entitled *Equality in politics*. It asked them what the

major deterrents were for them in terms of running for election. Their priorities were very different. For women, the major deterrents identified were domestic responsibilities and how to manage private and public life, followed by cultural attitudes regarding the role of women in society. For the men, the two main challenges identified included the lack of support of the electorate and access to finance. Questions of the family and how to balance private and public life were not raised as issues by the men.

In conclusion, there is much to be optimistic about but trends seem to highlight that, if new measures are not taken to promote women in politics, we might face stagnation or even reversals of progress. There is a need to remain vigilant, and a need to monitor these challenges regularly and take initiatives to move them forward. There is no single solution, but a mixture of elements will allow for change and progress. ■

## Endnotes

- 1 Adapted from J. Ballington and R. Matland, "Political Parties and Special Measures: Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes," Presented at UN Expert Meeting: *Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes in Post-conflict Countries*, OSAGI & Department of Political Affairs Expert Group Meeting, January 2004, New York.



# The Challenges Faced by Women Running for Election

**Linah J. Kilimo**

Member of Parliament and Assistant Minister for Cooperative Development and Marketing, Republic of Kenya

Kenya's parliament has 224 members, only 22 of whom are women. Women stand for election at both the parliamentary and the local authority level. To become a candidate in any election one must be nominated by a political party. Nearly all the leaders of the political parties are men. Women often struggle to be nominated by their parties as candidates for election, and this makes it difficult for women to win seats, and there is no provision for independent candidates to contest elections. A lot of women who wish to run for election are blocked by their failure to secure a nomination from a political party.

Women have less access to education than men, restricting women's professional advancement and their opportunities to enter institutions involved in politics. In many pastoral communities, parents prefer to educate boys instead of girls. The education of girls is often discontinued so they can be married at an early age in order to earn wealth for their families. The political advancement of many women is therefore hampered by a lack of education and of support from their families.

Women suffer from discrimination, abuse and violence during elections. Some spouses do not allow their wives to engage in politics when their children are young. Campaigns are time-consuming and women continue to bear the responsibility for home and family duties. This lack of support from spouses means that those who opt for political life often have to choose between politics and family. Some families have broken down because of a woman's involvement in politics. Some women give up their political ambitions because of abuse and violence.

Kenyan society is patriarchal. Most of the electorate believes that leadership is for men and that women should deal with domestic chores. One woman candidate for president was asked by a member of

the public during the campaign to explain who would take care of the country when she was expecting a baby or on maternity leave. In one constituency where a woman was standing for one party, constituents asked her husband to stand for another party because they did not want a woman to be their representative in Parliament. This divided the family and eventually both lost the election. The family remained divided after the election.

Many women suffer from violence and destruction of property by supporters of their opponents. During the most recent elections, in 2007, a number of women candidates were hospitalized with injuries linked to campaign violence. Sometimes, their vehicles and houses were damaged during the election. A number of women gave up their political ambitions for this reason.

Women candidates are intimidated by their male opponents. There is a lot of propaganda leading to negative publicity. False information about the private lives of women candidates is published in the newspapers in order to intimidate them and force them to give up their campaign.

Elections are very expensive. Inheritance laws favour men. Wealth in the family is controlled and shared out by men. Women rarely inherit property from their fathers. In marriage, women are at times denied a share of the family property. It is difficult for a woman to inherit her deceased husband's property without a marriage certificate, but when a woman dies her husband retains all the family property with or without a marriage certificate. Normally, all the property acquired by the family is registered in the husband's name. This means that many women have no property to sell in order to get the funds required to run for election, while men can easily dispose of family property. Many women exhaust their funds



along the way and have to drop out before the voting. They also find it difficult to obtain loans from banks because of a lack of collateral.

In a society where female genital mutilation is still rampant, any woman who has not gone through the rite is considered to be still a child. The electorate is reluctant to support them because of this belief that they are children. Those who run for election are insulted even by children. This can be very discouraging and force the women to withdraw their candidature.

Most of the pastoral communities are divided into clans. Other communities also have a clan system. The Councils of Elders in those clans consist only of men. These councils select the candidates to stand for parliamentary and civic elections. Voting

is carried out according to the directives given by the elders. Many councils are reluctant to support women as candidates. This has been very discouraging for the women who seek elected office.

However, there is hope. The current parliament is gender friendly. A Committee on Equal Opportunity has been formed to deal with marginalization and discrimination, including women. The government has formed a Gender Ministry, which is led by a woman. All the Commissions formed by the current parliament have 30 percent women representation. Kenya is in the process of reviewing its Constitution, and a requirement for 30 percent representation of women in parliament is contained in a draft constitution which will soon be voted on in a referendum. ■

# The Road to Parliament: A Memoir

**Kay Hull**

Member of Parliament, Australia

This paper focuses not on the difficulties I have encountered in politics, but on my journey from wife and mother, to business owner operator, to Deputy Mayor on my municipal Council, to becoming the first woman in the National Party in New South Wales to be pre-selected and then elected to the Australian Parliament.

Graeme, my husband, and I started a car repair business in 1978. We worked very hard to rapidly expand the number of people we employed. I was the bookkeeper and financial manager as well as a mother to our three sons. In just two years we were employing 35 panel beaters and spray painters. It was in 1980 that Graeme broke his back. I was forced to take over the running of the entire business, seven days a week, which had me on call to our customers 24 hours a day. I had to learn to drive a tow truck and to know every part of a car so that I could write quotations for repairs.

At first I did not have the confidence. I had to learn new skills such as mediation and conflict resolution – no one is ever at fault in a motor vehicle accident, it was always the other drivers fault; marriage counselling – there is nothing like the stress of smashing your spouse's car; and negotiation – there has to be a resolution to all these issues because no one is happy. Strangely, it is these very same skills that I currently use every day in my role as a member of parliament – no one ever comes to my office happy about what the Government is doing, they would like me to fix it now and it must be my fault that change is affecting their lives.

My husband was off work for a very long time and I managed to keep everyone employed and make a profit as well. When he was able to return to work, however, I was no longer required to run the empire I felt I had created. I had found that I was very good

at business but now I was redundant. I had to make some decisions. My boys had grown up – my youngest son was 15 years old. I had been working 16 hour days. I could not just fade into the background or insignificance.

Timing is everything: there was a local council election taking place, I rallied my family together and we decided that I should run for a position. I devised a campaign centred around being the voice of business owners. I campaigned by holding forums on planning issues of concern, escalating local taxes, parking problems, traffic control and the need for regional business development opportunities.

My boys walked the streets putting my campaign flyers into mailboxes and my poster on every available post. We were a formidable team. There were over 40 candidates for 15 positions and only one woman had previously been elected – so we faced some challenges. However, I had built a reputation for hard work in our business. Three months after we started my campaign I was elected to the Council with the second highest vote – only 30 fewer votes than the popular incumbent mayor.

I threw myself into delivering my promises. I devised a tourism strategy to attract major events and turned our city into a sports event capital. We were 'the city of good sports'. We were hosting an event every weekend as a result of me going to national sporting bodies with a new package that promoted our benefits. I was very successful at marketing – another skill I had been forced to learn.

I chaired planning committees and confronted the issues that were inhibiting the growth of businesses. I became active in all regional development issues and became a solid voice for industry progression. I was elected Deputy Mayor and then the state premier offered me a ministerial appointment to his

Tourism Board and I became the Tourism Commissioner for Regional New South Wales. I travelled from town to town conducting community economic development strategic planning workshops for the state government.

It was here that I began to realize that country people were being totally marginalized and forgotten. We were being denied adequate access to health, education infrastructure, transport networks and business development opportunities and, most disturbingly, our children were being denied the opportunity to go to university and to work in the regions. I began to voice my concerns on these injustices and became a vocal critic of the government that had appointed me to my position.

Again, timing is everything. The Federal member of parliament decided to retire and my family believed that I should try to win the seat. I had already been approached by a small party that only stands in country seats. The principles of the National Party inspired me. In short, they say 'if it is not good for regional people we will not support it'. This is my view entirely. However, there was a problem – the National Party had never had a woman stand for pre-selection. They were very conservative and it was widely believed that I would not succeed.

We decided I would give it a go. I spent five days a week on the road. There were no formal women's groups that I could go to for support, but even if there had been it was the men who were going to be my biggest challenge. I had to get them to vote for me on merit. I visited citrus farms, rice paddies, cornfields, vineyards and vegetable farms. I called meetings in the middle of harvests on the many issues that farmers were facing, such as trade barriers, lack of water and a lack of fast freight services. I visited all the meat processing plants and convinced the union floor manager to let me speak with the workers about employment conditions. I did the same with the automotive industries. I faced heckles and ridicule: 'what would I know I was a woman'. I would respond 'you ask me any question and see what I know'.

I was soon getting more support from the general electorate. At the pre-selection, 250 party members voted on the candidates: four men and myself. I had lobbied farmers, business men and women and generally anyone who would listen to contact as many of the preselectors as possible. I felt that if the selectors could see that I was already working hard among

the electorate then they could not exclude me simply because I was female. In addition, I had researched and studied as much on current areas of concern as I could. I knew I had to know more than the men, which may not be fair but does you no harm. They simply could not match me in the debate and questioning from the floor. I became known as very feisty.

Five months after nominating myself I was pre-selected as the National Party candidate for Riverina. The battle started. I was then on the real campaign trail, competing with nine men who represented the major parties, minority parties and independents. There had never been a woman standing for the seat, much less elected. I worked so hard and made so many mistakes, but the main problem was the media. They did not care how many things I did right or how good my policies were – they would only report the mistakes I made.

I quickly determined that if I had to depend on the media to win, I would never be elected. I had financed all my campaign costs up to this point, but now the party knew I had a strong chance of winning the seat, so they started to finance the campaign.

I followed my own campaign agenda, I door-knocked all day every day. I set up my stand on street corners and handed out my material. I rode on the back of a truck with a loudspeaker. I held business forums on tax issues, red tape and bureaucracy; women's forums on access to childcare; and young people's forums. I would generally get a lot of people. Sometimes I would only get three or four people but I would interact with them just as passionately as if there were 1000 in attendance.

Sometimes I would wonder 'why am I doing this', but my family were always there to get me back on track. In the months between pre-selection and the election I drove 95,000 kilometres on my own. I had personally knocked on 10,000 doors and held 40 forums. We did three mail outs to every householder – 95,000 voters in a catchment of 250,000 people over 75,000 square kilometres.

Then came the finale in the campaign. Unbeknown to me, my boys had produced a handwritten letter outlining why I was the person to vote for. They detailed their personal views on my courage and attributes, how they believed no one could do the job better than me, and how much they trusted me – so the voters should too. They had it printed and they pooled their money to have it delivered to

every mailbox in the week before the election. I believe this wonderful gesture by my sons sealed my success in the election.

We had started with a commitment to each other as a family and we have been able to continue that strength. My husband does the major part of keeping our family intact, and they never allow me to get carried away with my own importance. They certainly keep me grounded. I know my boys were older when I entered the political arena, but with effort from everyone you can have a close family and politics as well – but it does take effort and interaction. You have to keep reassessing the relationship to ensure it is working for everyone.

My message is that as a woman you have to work harder to achieve, but that this hard work will also be the reason why you succeed. It is not fair that many men do not have to do this, but women have made some great advances and we need to recognize that our hard work and success will make it easier for other women to follow us. If we allow ourselves

to become resentful of the disparity, we are spending good, positive energy in a negative and unproductive way. Let us just get on with our task of increasing the number of women in politics.

We are women who have beaten the odds. We are from all walks of life and from many different cultures. We have a diversity of life experiences and we are of different ages and generational beliefs. Some have and will continue to face more prejudice and challenges than many of us could imagine. We have different levels of education. Some of us are academically smart, some of us are street smart, but all of us are a valuable piece in the jigsaw of life – without us the picture is not complete but we are not the whole picture. The thing that we can do that will benefit women the most is to be true to ourselves, have the courage to speak when we know we should and, by not allowing ourselves to be the lost piece of the puzzle that makes the picture forever incomplete, to have never walked away knowing we should have used our voice but did not. ■



**OVERCOMING BARRIERS:  
ELECTORAL GENDER QUOTAS**

2

# Overview and Debate

## Overview of the Session

The session examined the effect and impact of electoral gender quotas – a specific policy measure that has been widely implemented in the past 15 years to increase women’s access to parliament. The session paid particular attention to the following questions:

- What are electoral gender quotas and what form do they take?
- How effective have quotas been in accelerating women’s access to parliament?
- What strategies and lessons can be shared about passing quota legislation?

The chairperson for this session was Ms. Jayanthi Natarajan, Member of the Rajya Sabha, India. The panelists were Professor Drude Dahlerup, Department of Political Science, Stockholm University, Sweden and Ms. Daniela Payssé, Member of the House of Representatives, Uruguay. Ms. Dahlerup presented the conclusions of her research on the various types of electoral quotas and their effectiveness, and Ms. Payssé discussed Uruguay’s experience with implementing quotas.

Ms. Dahlerup noted that achieving gender equality is a slow process that requires dedicated political will over many decades. The need to accelerate the rate at which women gain access to parliament has resulted in much attention being given to special measures, such as electoral gender quotas, which were usually fast and effective remedies to the problem of women’s historical under-representation in political decision-making.

Using **gender quotas** implied setting a fixed goal for the recruitment of women into positions of decision-making. Achieving a higher representation of women in parliament has been a global objective for decades. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action included the

principle that national policies and legislation should be decided jointly by men and women, and must reflect equally their different perspectives. Although there was no consensus on whether a **critical mass** of at least 30 percent women in parliament could definitively change the outcome of national policies, there has been a growing awareness that the increased presence of women has had an impact on how policies were made and which priorities are set. Gender quotas were often regarded as relatively simple mechanisms that were able to produce tangible and easily measured quantitative results.

Ms. Dahlerup outlined the **different types** of quotas, such as legal candidate quotas (which ensure that a certain proportion of candidates for election must be women), voluntary party quotas (where parties voluntarily aim to have a certain proportion of women candidates) and reserved seats (where seats are set aside in the legislature for women only). Quotas worked best with rank order rules specifying that women must be placed in winnable positions on a party list (such as the ‘zipper’ list where women and men must be alternated throughout a list).

Ms. Payssé presented the evolution of the adoption of the recently passed quota law in **Uruguay**, which took several years to pass. The closed party list electoral system presented an obstacle for the implementation of quotas for women, as the party leadership decided on the rank order of candidates on lists, and once decided is very difficult to change. If women were not placed in winnable positions on the closed lists they had very little chance of being elected. It was therefore necessary to ensure that women were placed in winnable positions on the list by specifying which spots they should occupy. The measure that was adopted made it mandatory that women hold one out of every three in the top 15 places on the list. The law will apply to the elections in 2014.



## Plenary Debate

Participants noted that quotas had usually proven to be **effective temporary measures** for addressing disparities in the proportion of men and women in politics. Quotas must work with the electoral system and adapt to the local context, as well as be adequately supported by enforcement mechanisms. There was evidence that quotas did level the political field by reducing the impact of some of the structural barriers which prevent many aspiring women from succeeding in their candidature.

However, some opponents have raised concerns regarding the nature of quotas and their overall ability to effectively combat inequality. The preferential treatment of women was seen to be discriminatory against men because it set limits to their level of participation in politics. However, it was noted that quotas could be devised to be **‘gender neutral’**, i.e. applying equally to men and women; for example, one sex may not hold more than 70 percent or less than 30 percent of the seats in parliament.

It was also noted that quotas redressed an existing and **historical imbalance** in access to political power, and were justified in order to give women the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in the practice of politics. An additional advantage of quotas was that they could result in more transparent rules of candidate recruitment. This had the potential to also benefit male candidates who might otherwise have been discriminated against by elite groups of decision-makers.

There was also debate about whether quotas were appropriate for countries at all levels of economic development, in particular countries that were grappling with problems such as high rates of illiteracy or maternal/infant mortality. It was noted that a first step towards improving the situations in these countries was to ensure that women were participating in parliament, thereby raising the concerns of

the illiterate and poor. It was noted that the political and economic empowerment of women must go hand in hand.

Another concern raised was how to choose the quota system that best matched a specific political and electoral context. Many **types of quotas** existed and there was sometimes confusion as to the most effective method. Participants noted the importance of sharing country experiences across different electoral systems. For example, it was noted that majority/plurality electoral systems presented specific challenges for women candidates, and they were systems in which it was difficult to implement a quota. Good practices do exist, however, and can be widely shared. Proportional representation systems were recognized as the best electoral system in which to implement candidate quotas. Parliamentarians were reminded that international institutions and independent experts were available to assist with those decisions and the reform process.

Some countries faced the problem of **stagnation** once quotas were adopted. As such, quotas are effective for reaching the required minimum figure for women in parliament, but may set a ceiling for women beyond which it was difficult to move. The major challenge for countries was thus how to push beyond the legal minimum and achieve parity. It was clear, however, that quotas were not a remedy on their own. Quotas, which primarily address structural factors, must be supplemented by more nuanced measures that took into consideration national contexts and cultural attitudes. In this regard, past experience had demonstrated that parliamentary initiatives for implementing policies were crucial, but those policies must have the support of women outside politics, such as in business or civil society. Women were constantly achieving in all sections of society and it was important for members of parliament to learn from their constituents. ■



# Is Parliament Open to Women? Quotas in Global Perspective

**Drude Dahlerup**

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## Introduction

The good news is that women's political representation is increasing all over the world. The bad news is that women still constitute only a small minority of parliamentarians, and that the rate of increase is very slow – from 13 percent in 1999 to 19 percent in 2009. In recent years, a new perspective on women's underrepresentation has developed. There has been a discursive change from blaming women to scrutinizing the institutions that in their norms and practices are not sufficiently inclusive of women or other underrepresented groups. The United Nations Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 is illustrative of this change of focus.

The global trend of introducing electoral gender quotas is one of the current answers to the problem of the underrepresentation of women. Although highly controversial, electoral gender quotas have been adopted with amazing speed in the past two decades. By 2009, around 50 countries had adopted such quotas in their Constitution, electoral law or party law. These are so-called *legislated gender quotas*. Formal gender quotas have been introduced by countries as diverse as Argentina (1991), Belgium (1994), Costa Rica (1996), France (1999), Rwanda (2003), Iraq (2004), Uzbekistan (2004) and Spain (2007). In many other countries one or more political party represented in parliament has adopted *voluntary party quotas* for its electoral lists.<sup>1</sup>

Quotas imply setting a fixed goal for the recruitment of women or other underrepresented groups on candidate lists or among those elected in order to rapidly change an unwanted inequality. Electoral gender quotas are thus an affirmative action policy for public elections. Quota rules may also be gender neutral, in which case a minimum and maximum quota is set for both sexes, for instance, no more

than 60 percent and no less than 40 percent of either sex.

In a way, electoral gender quotas are a simple answer to a highly complex problem: that of women's historical exclusion from public life. Furthermore, the implementation of quotas as an affirmative policy is easy to evaluate, since it is a matter of counting the number or proportion of women on a candidate list and among those elected.

It is important to stress that electoral gender quotas do not solve all the problems for women in politics. Nor do quotas overturn a male-dominated political system once and for all. Under certain conditions, however, quotas might successfully and rapidly alter a situation of women's underrepresentation.

It is also important to realize that although gender quotas are introduced by male dominated assemblies for many different reasons, national and sometimes international women's organizations have been active everywhere.

## Women in the Parliaments of the World

Table 1 shows the regional averages for women's parliamentary representation. The table reveals that the differences between the regions of the world are not as large as might be expected, and that an increase in representation, albeit modest, has taken place in all regions. The Pacific region and the Arab countries are at the bottom of the table, although, statistically, the highest increase in the past decade has taken place in the Arab world – from 3.7 percent to 9.7 percent.

For a long time, the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands were alone at the top of the world rankings in terms of women's political representation. These countries are now being challenged by other

**Table 1: Women's Representation in Parliament, 1997 and 2009 (Regional Averages, Single or Lower House)**

	1997	2009
Europe	14.3	21.0
Americas	13.5	20.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	10.8	18.3
Asia	9.7	18.0
Pacific	12.8	13.0
Arab world	3.7	9.7

Note: World Average: 1997 = 11.3%; 2009 = 18.5 % (single or lower houses).

Source: <www.ipu.org>.

countries, many of which are situated in the global South (see table 2).

Table 2 shows the 15 countries in the world with the highest representation of women in parliament, that is, around 35 percent and over. It shows that all the new entrants at the top of the world ranking use some type of electoral gender quota, either legal, that is, legislated quotas binding on all political parties in the country, or a voluntary party quota.<sup>2</sup> However, a high level of women's representation can also emerge without quotas, as was the case in Denmark and Finland. It is common knowledge that an electoral system based on proportional representation (PR) is in general more favourable to increases in women's

representation. The low levels of representation of women in the parliaments of India, the United States and the United Kingdom illustrate this point. The difficulties in combining a single member constituency system with any type of gender quota will probably further widen the gap between the two electoral systems in terms of women's representation. It is much more difficult, for example, for 40 percent of candidates to be required to be women when each party has only one candidate per electoral district. While 80 percent of countries with proportional electoral systems have some type of gender quota in use, only 25 percent of countries with single member districts have such quotas.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2: Women's Representation in Parliament: The Top 15 Countries (Single or Lower House)**

Country	% Women in parl	Quotas	Electoral system
1. Rwanda	56.3 (2008)	Legal Quotas	Proportional representation
2. Sweden	47.3 (2006)	Party Quotas	Proportional representation
3. South Africa	44.5 (2009)	Party Quotas	Proportional representation
4. Cuba	43.2 (2008)	NA	Plurality/majority vote
5. Iceland	42.9 (2009)	No Quotas	Proportional representation
6. Finland	42.0 (2007)	No Quotas	Proportional representation
7. Argentina	40.0 (2007)	Legal Quotas	Proportional representation
8. Costa Rica	38.6 (2006)	Legal Quotas	Proportional representation
9. Norway	37.9 (2005)	Party Quotas	Proportional representation
10. Denmark	37.4 (2007)	No Quotas	Proportional representation
11. Angola	37.3 (2008)	Legal Quotas	Proportional representation
12. Belgium	36.7 (2007)	Legal Quotas	Proportional representation
13. Netherlands	36.7 (2006)	Party Quotas	Proportional representation
14. Spain	36.3 (2008)	Legal Quotas	Proportional representation
15. Mozambique	34.8 (2004)	Party Quotas	Proportional representation

## Types of Gender Quota

Comparative gender quota research has shown that quotas have been introduced in all types of political system. When designing an electoral gender quota system, the choice between legislated quotas and voluntary quotas is the most important distinction, since the former are binding on all political parties and allow for legal sanctions in cases of non-compliance, while voluntary quotas often start with a decision by just one single party. Nonetheless, questions must also be asked about where in the electoral process the quotas are applied: aspirant quotas, for shortlists and primaries; candidate quotas, which may be legal or voluntary quotas; and reserved seat quotas.

Figure 1 shows the preferred quota type in different regions of the world by six categories, which, in turn, are based on a combination of two dimensions: first, the mandate, that is legislated quotas versus voluntary party quotas; and, second, where in the electoral process quotas are introduced: aspirant quotas, candidate quotas or quotas as reserved seats for those elected. The regional patterns in figure 1 can be explained by the similarities in electoral systems but are also the product of a regional learning process.

Aspirant quotas aim to secure a minimum number of women among the pool of candidates who are up for selection by the voters in a primary election, as in Panama, or by the nominating bodies of a political party. The best known in the latter category is the all-women shortlists used by the British Labour Party for half the vacant seats in the run-up to the 1997 election, although this was challenged through an industrial tribunal.

In Latin America, legislated candidate quotas are a widespread and preferred type of gender quota. Argentina led the way in 1991, and legislated candidate quotas are now common in Latin America.

In Europe, voluntary candidate quotas are the preferred quota system – if any type of quota system is introduced at all. Social Democratic, Left and Green parties have led the introduction of voluntary gender quotas. A contagion effect may lead other parties to follow suit, but many bourgeois parties have rejected quotas as illiberal. In Scandinavia, where all political parties have a relatively high percentage of women in their parliamentary groups, several bourgeois parties have introduced “soft quotas” in the form of recommendations and targets in order to compete for votes.<sup>4</sup>

Quotas in the form of reserved seats are the most common quota type in the Arab world, Asia and East Africa. In Rwanda, two women are elected by a special electorate from each electoral district – a total of 24 women. In 2003, in the first election under this system, 15 women were also elected to non-reserved district seats, and in the 2008 election 21 women were elected in this way, contradicting the idea that reserved seats will become a glass ceiling for women. In Afghanistan, at least two women candidates must be elected per district. In Morocco, the political parties have reserved 30 seats on a so-called national list, elected nationwide, for women candidates. However, women’s organizations have complained that the quota is used as an argument against nominating women to the district seats.

Reserved seat systems are increasingly based on elections. It is therefore incorrect to argue that in such systems women parliamentarians gain their seat without competition. What is new is that this is a competition between women. At its best, it places women’s issues at the forefront of electoral campaigns. It has been argued that even if reserved seats for women violate men’s formal rights to compete for these seats, de facto electoral competition between male candi-

**Figure 1:** Regional Variations in Preferred Quota Type<sup>a</sup>

Mandate by / level	Aspirants quotas	Candidate quotas	Reserved seat quotas
Legal quotas (Constitution or law)	1. Primaries (Panama, Paraguay)	3. Latin America	5. Arab region, South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa <sup>b</sup>
Voluntary party quotas	2. Women’s shortlists (UK)	4. Europe Southern Africa	6. Morocco: Charter signed by the political parties

<sup>a</sup> According to the predominant type of quota. A region placed in two categories indicates that two quota types are used equally or almost equally. No clear pattern in the Pacific Ocean Region.

<sup>b</sup> Reserved seats in one-party states are categorized as legislated quotas.

Source: Drude Dahlerup (2006), p. 294 (updated)

dates remains far more prevalent across the world. More generally, whether electoral gender quotas represent equality of opportunity or equality of result is open to a wider discussion.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, it is important to choose a quota type that matches the individual country in order to avoid gender quotas remaining purely symbolic. If a quota system is unclear or has no real effect, it is important to ask whether this was the intention.

## Examples of Good Practice

Rwanda, Sweden and Costa Rica represent some of the best cases of gender quotas. They have all achieved a very high level of representation of women. They also represent three different types of electoral gender quota. Rwanda has reserved seats, increasingly based on elections. Two women must be elected from each district. In Rwanda, 56.3 percent of parliamentarians are women, making it the number one in the world. Sweden has voluntary quotas for party candidate lists. Parties on the left practice ‘every second a woman’, that is, a 50 percent voluntary party quota for candidate lists. Right leaning parties do not have quota rules, but to a large extent also alternate male and female candidates on their lists. In Sweden, 47.3 percent of parliamentarians are women, making it number 2 in the world. Costa Rica has a legislated candidate quota of 40 percent for all parties. There are strong sanctions for non-compliance, including the possible rejection of a party’s list. In Costa Rica, 38.6 percent of parliamentarians are women, making it number eight in the world.

A quota system without rank order rules may lead to no change in women’s representation. Quota regulations that require, for example, that 40 percent of all candidates on a list be women may not lead to any women being elected if all the women candidates are nominated at the bottom of the list or compete in non-winnable seats. The political parties usually know very well where the safe or winnable seats are. Seats won at the previous election are most worth striving for.

There are many types of rank order regulations in force in the world. For instance, a Zipper System, that is, alternation throughout the list, is used by most *Green parties* as well as most political parties

in *Sweden*. In *Belgium*, the top two candidates on any list cannot be of the same sex. By extension to the whole list, this would become a 50 percent quota. In *Spain*, the quota is 40:60 for every five posts on a list. If there are fewer than five ‘eligible posts’, the ratio applied must be as close as possible to 40:60.

Sanctions for non-compliance are important to the implementation of a quota system. In cases where quotas are applied by law, a number of different types of sanction are available:

1. Rejection of the list (Costa Rica, Spain, Slovenia, France at the local level)
2. Places shall remain empty (Belgium)
3. Financial penalty (France at the national level, Portugal)

## Conclusion

Electoral gender quotas are just one strategy used to increase women’s representation in political assemblies. They cannot stand alone as an affirmative action method, but must be followed up with other changes, for instance, concerning campaign financing, safety measures for candidates who run for election because of the intimidation of female candidates, and so on. Nonetheless, gender quotas have proved to be a method that can lead to historic leaps in women’s political representation and thus break historical patterns of the underrepresentation of women. ■

## Endnotes

- 1 For a global overview, see Dahlerup, Drude (ed.), 2006. *Women, Quotas and Politics*, London and New York: Routledge; and the website on electoral gender quotas operated by International IDEA, Stockholm University and the Inter-Parliamentary Union at <<http://www.quotaproject.org>>.
- 2 In table 2, a country is defined as having voluntary party quotas if at least one of the political parties represented in parliament makes use of gender quotas.
- 3 Dahlerup, Drude (2007). “Electoral Gender Quotas: Between Equality of Opportunity and Equality of Results”, *Representation*, 43(2) (July 2007), pp. 73–92.
- 4 See Freidenvall, Lenita et al. (2006), “The Nordic Countries: An Incremental Model”, *Women, Quotas and Politics* (note 1), pp. 55–82.
- 5 This is discussed in Dahlerup, pp. 73–92.

# Women and Quotas in Uruguay<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

The approval of the Law on Political Participation (presence of both sexes) in Uruguay in March 2009 responded to the need, emphasized for more than 20 years by women politicians, women's organizations and international agencies, to implement mechanisms to achieve greater equality between men and women in access to elective political office in Uruguay. Despite the high levels of participation by women in political parties, women have been systematically less prevalent in elective offices than men despite the reinstatement of democratic institutions and procedures since the end of the dictatorship. This imbalance – prevalent in most of the world's parliaments – was identified during the 1990s as a failing of democratic systems.

An Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) seminar held in Uruguay in March 2009 brought a reminder that the difficulties faced by women in gaining access to political decision-making positions are not exclusive to Uruguay. Argentine Senator María Cristina Perceval, for example, asked “Why is it important for women to enter parliament? One answer is that the more women enter parliament the clearer the signal of social change, offering empirical evidence that when our countries democratize, more women participate, and when democracy is restricted, fewer women occupy decision-making positions.” Colombian Senator Gina Parody offered this reflection: “Men and women ask different questions. The Women's Caucus has changed the agenda and included other items. One woman in politics changes other women. Many women in politics changes politics.”

## Impact of Women in Politics

Dr. Niki Johnson, Coordinator for Political and Gender Affairs at the Political Science Institute of

the Universidad de la República, Uruguay, observed that in many debates in Uruguay the fundamental question is the potential impact of electing more women to office. This has prompted analysis to determine whether women make a difference once elected to parliament. The central questions in this research were: Do women make a significant contribution to the legislative agenda and processes? Can gender-based differences between the roles played by men and women parliamentarians be identified? Do women legislators better represent women in their legislative activity?

In the past decade, several public opinion surveys conducted in Uruguay have shown that both men and women are supportive of political participation by women. These surveys also reveal a majority of opinion in favour of some form of affirmative action or a mechanism such as gender-based quotas to increase political representation by women. In addition, Uruguayan men and women believe that men and women pursue different political issues and that sex is a relevant dividing line between opinions on public issues.<sup>2</sup>

Given the majority support among Uruguayan citizens for increasing the number of women in parliament, research was carried out to gauge the level of support for affirmative action measures to bring about this result. A survey conducted in 2008 by the Office of Political and Gender Affairs of the Political Science Institute (APG-ICP), with support from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) revealed that, while a significant proportion had no opinion on the quota concept (35.4%), among those who expressed an opinion, a large majority expressed support for the concept (76% in favour, 24% against).

In research on the values and issues pursued by women in politics, two-thirds of those interviewed



said that women pursue issues that are somewhat or entirely different from those pursued by men. This is not just a chance perception of the Uruguayan public. Studies of the parliament in Uruguay by Niki Johnson show that women legislators are more proactive and have a more diversified legislative agenda, particularly in terms of sponsoring legislation on gender-related issues.

Most citizens associate women politicians with a profile and agenda different from their male peers and support the concept of a quota. The evidence presented above suggests that the continued reluctance of much of the Uruguayan male political hierarchy to give urgent priority to correcting the gender bias in political representation is far from being in tune with public opinion.

## Electoral Politics

Voting in Uruguayan elections is based on the closed list proportional representation system. Voters may only choose candidates from lists previously established by the competing political parties. They may not single out individual candidates on a list or alter the positions occupied by male and female candidates. The chances of a candidate being elected thus depend on his or her position on the list. One relevant indicator for measuring gender equity, in terms of the effective exercise of the political right to seek elective office, is therefore the distribution of men and women candidates on the electoral lists.

Uruguay was the first Latin American country to enshrine unrestricted women's suffrage. Women voted for the first time in 1938. The first women legislators entered parliament in 1942. However, up to the time of the dictatorship, the presence of women in parliament never exceeded the level achieved in 1942 (3.1 percent). No women were elected as full members in the first elections held after the dictatorship (1984). Subsequent legislatures were characterized by a continuous but moderate growth in the number of women representatives until the most recent national elections, when 14 women were elected as full members - one fewer than in the previous election. In the parliament formed after the 2004 elections, women represented 11.1 percent of all full members elected to the Chamber of Deputies (11 out of 99 members) and 9.7 percent of those elected to the Senate (3 out of 31 members).<sup>3</sup>

The current proportion of women full members in the Chamber of Deputies (12.1 percent) places Uruguay 90th in the IPU's World Classification of Women in Parliament. Uruguay ranks below not only the world average for women in parliament (18.5 percent) but also most countries in the region. The stagnation observed at the national level and the ups and downs recorded for most of the departmental legislative bodies do not reflect any cumulative growth in women's representation. This means that without some kind of affirmative action mechanism, such as a quota, it is unlikely that the presence of women in decision-making positions will increase significantly.

## The Quota Concept in Uruguay

The Law on Public Participation was adopted in March 2009. Women of all political parties promoted debate on the issue within their parties and in the broader public arena. With support from feminist and women's organizations in heightening public awareness, and backed up by a growing body of knowledge about the multiple factors hindering access for women to political positions in Uruguay, they sponsored legislation to adopt a quota mechanism. Women in growing numbers changed their positions from opposition to support for the quota. Many men also recognized the sexist and anti-democratic bias of the country's political system.

To date, four leftist and central-leftist political groups have adopted some form of quota mechanism, permanent or temporary, to ensure access to electoral lists and party leadership positions for both sexes. In terms of effectiveness, the quota had no impact on the two smallest of these groups, the lists of which won only two or fewer seats in parliament. The remaining two groups, however, approved the quota as a permanent criterion for the composition of both their electoral lists and their internal leadership organs.

The first to do so was the Partido Socialista (Socialist Party, PS). In 1992, following internal discussion at all levels, it agreed to establish a quota mechanism based on "mirror-image" representation: the composition of the party's permanent leadership organs and electoral lists would reflect that of party membership in the district concerned, with the percentage of women at least equal to the percentage of women

party members. This decision had a positive practical impact on the levels of women representatives. In 2006, the FA's Artiguista faction approved a similar mechanism for its internal elections and electoral lists. In this case, the campaign to win adoption of the quota mechanism was conducted by members of the group *Área Mujer*. A quota of one-third was established for elections to the faction's new leadership organs. As a result, 35 percent of its 40-member national council, and one-third of its 15-member executive board, are now women.

The quota legislation approved by parliament was not the first legislative initiative of its kind. A total of five such bills have been introduced since 1988, proposing the adoption of various versions of a quota mechanism for electoral lists.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Parliamentary Approval Process, 2006–2009**

The law on equal participation for both sexes (quota legislation) was introduced simultaneously in both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies on 8 March 2006. The bill's five articles provide that in the case of lists for elections to parliament, departmental councils and local councils, no more than two out of every three positions can be occupied by persons of the same sex. This provision applies at least to the first 15 positions for both full and alternate membership. For parties' permanent leadership organs, it also requires parties to ensure the presence of women and men in proportions equal to those recorded for party membership in the district concerned.

Consideration of the bill in the Senate Committee on the Constitution and Legislation began on 22 May 2007 and did not conclude until 8 April 2008. During that time, the bill underwent a series of amendments to secure the consensus needed for adoption. The most important was to confine the measures to the next two national and departmental elections and to primary elections and elections for the party leadership organs. It was also established that the measure would apply to the lists of candidates for full and alternate membership and that, in the case of lists with only two candidates for full membership, the candidates could not be of the same sex. An amended bill was finally approved in the Senate's Committee on the Constitution on 22 April 2008.

Discussion on the amended bill began in the full Senate on 14 May 2008. Since there was no agreement, and since special majorities (two-thirds in each chamber) are required in the case of amendments to electoral law, the chamber voted to recess until 21 May. During the debate, an alternative bill was introduced by PN Senators to apply the quota to constitutionally established primary elections starting in 2009 but to postpone application to the national and municipal quota until the elections of 2014 and 2015, respectively, limiting its application to those elections only. According to the PN Senators this proposal was developed to achieve internal party consensus.

The PN Senators made it clear that in their opinion this was the best possible alternative under the circumstances. As Senator Heber put it 'they are asking for the maximum, but not for all or nothing'. Under the sharp gaze of women present in the chamber, PN Senators argued that their proposal was intended as a "gradualist" approach, permitting a "process" of incorporating women into the political parties. According to these Senators, the application of the quota to the primary elections in 2009 would address the "substance" and "fundamental objective" to which the law aspired – by involving women in their party conventions, where fundamental decisions are taken. The PN Senators also justified their proposal by the fact that change in Uruguay is not easy or certain, but gradual, and that establishing the quota for elections so imminent would not send the correct signal, because it would not allow participants to know the rules of the game beforehand and could give the impression of a self-interested measure. The debate was marked by tense moments and comments laden with gender stereotypes, angering the women in attendance in the gallery.

With respect to the causes for the limited presence of women in political positions, PN Senator Heber said that equal participation by men and women was observed among the younger generation but ultimately reached a point where women "disappeared". According to the Senator, this was not a reflection of aptitude but of the fact that women play a fundamental role in the family that is at odds with party politics, which often entails lengthy meetings late into the night, precluding the participation of women.

FA Senator Mujica said that while he was prepared to consider the measure he had his doubts, since



it concerned a “cultural matter”. Senator Mónica Xavier, also of FA, stressed that the real issue was one of “power” and “rights”. She could therefore not accept “the affirmation of the idea that we women have to win our place in politics [ . . . ] the matter must be recognized as one of rights and that all of us, men and women alike, must have the opportunity to take our rightful places.” She concluded that “our responsibility is to pave the way for women so that something that should be noble, like politics, does not create the obstacles we see today. For that reason, the legislation before us is a good start in the right direction.”

The original bill was put to a vote during the session of 28 May. The bill required 21 votes to be approved by a two-thirds majority, but received only 19 of the 30 votes cast. The bill introduced by the PN, with a few amendments introduced in the chamber, was then put to a vote and approved by 28 of the 30 votes cast. The bill established the application of quotas for primary elections (national and departmental conventions), as well as elections to party leadership organs. This provision came into effect in 2009 with no expiry date. It will take effect for national and departmental elections in 2014 and 2015, respectively, but on a one-off basis with an understanding that the 2015–2020 legislature will evaluate the measure’s effectiveness.

On 3 June 2008 the bill was introduced in the Chamber of Deputies and referred to the Committee on the Constitution, Codes, General Legislation and Administration. Six months after the initiative’s approval in the Senate, the political participation bill had still not been considered in the Chamber of Deputies.

On 3 December 2008, Deputy Beatriz Argimón presented comments made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on Uruguay’s fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh reports, presented in 2008 in a single Country Report. One of CEDAW’s recommendations was that “special temporary measures” be taken to accelerate the establishment of equality between men and women. It “urged the Uruguayan State to accelerate the approval of legislation on quotas and political parties.”

On 10 December 2008, to close a year of intensive work, the Uruguayan Women’s Political Network, an organization composed of women from all political parties, meeting in the Legislative Palace as part

of International Human Rights Day, denounced the delay in considering the political participation bill and issued a public statement urging its rapid approval.

During a Committee meeting on 11 March 2009, Deputy Argimón reiterated calls for the bills consideration. It was unanimously resolved to refer the bill to the plenary of the Chamber of Deputies. The bill was finally passed by the Chamber of Deputies, without amendment, on 24 March 2009, securing 75 out of 78 votes and thus the two-thirds majority required for electoral legislation. The only article to receive unanimous support (76 out of 76) was article 1, which declared it a matter of general interest to achieve equitable participation for both sexes in the composition of the legislative branch, of municipal, departmental, and local autonomous councils (elective) and of party decision-making bodies.

## The Electoral Court

Two days after the bill was approved in parliament, the Electoral Court issued implementing regulations for the primary elections of all political parties. The law on quotas (Law 18,476) provides for the inclusion on electoral lists of “persons of both sexes within every group of three candidates, for full as well as alternate membership”. The Electoral Court regulations were totally restrictive in their interpretation of the three-candidate groups as including candidates for full as well as alternate membership. Parliamentarians regarded the interpretation with surprise and indignation, as a potential additional obstacle to women’s participation in conventions as candidates for full membership.

The Electoral Court ruled that one-third of the women on a list had to be candidates for full membership, but without specifying the positions on the list that they should occupy. Women could therefore be included as candidates for full membership as the lowest third of the names listed on the ballot.

The Bicameral Women’s Caucus issued a statement to express its “profound disagreement with the conduct of the members of the Electoral Court, who had defined discriminatory criteria in their regulations totally at odds with the spirit in which the legislators had drafted the provision.” Women legislators asked that their points be considered and warned that if these criteria were not modified they would file complaints with the international bodies responsible for monitoring compliance with the conventions ratified by Uruguay.

## An evaluation: the 2009 primary elections

The primary elections held on 28 June 2009 permit a preliminary evaluation of how the new provisions are being applied. These elections were included in the Uruguayan electoral system as part of the constitutional reform of December 1996. Apart from determining each party's presidential candidate for the national elections, the primaries also elect the members of each party's National Deliberative Organ (NDO) and Departmental Deliberative Organs, commonly referred to as national and departmental "Conventions". This is the third electoral cycle to include primaries, making it possible to evaluate the impact of applying the quota compared with the two previous elections (in the case of the FA, the PN and the PC) and with the 2004 elections (in the case of the Partido Independiente, Independent Party, PI).

Analysis has revealed that the top three three-candidate groups, that is, the first nine positions, included fewer women candidates than the list as a whole. Overall, however, it is clear that application of the quota has reduced the gap between the proportion of women on the list as a whole and the proportion of women in the top positions. Considering the fact that women have historically been excluded or marginalized on the lists, and that this was what the law was intended to correct – and given that the law establishes that each three-candidate group of positions must include candidates of both sexes – the following can occur: (a) lists that include the minimum number of women candidates, one per three-candidate group; (b) lists that include only one woman per three-candidate group and that always place her in the third position; and (c) lists that include more than the minimum number of candidates allowed by law, that is, at least one of the first three three-candidate groups includes two women candidates.

The vast majority of ballots included only the minimum number of women required to comply with the law, and placed only three women in the top three three-candidate groups for full membership. This was the case for more than 90 percent of the FA and PN ballots and more than 80 percent of the PC ballots. Even in the PI, more than half the ballots followed this pattern. This suggests that political parties applied the quota in a basically mechanical fashion in the primary elections of 2009, resulting in a greater presence of women Convention members, an average of nearly one-third across the four parties.

## Conclusions

As is noted above, the law approved in March 2009 created an important distinction between primary elections (constituent or party elections) and parliamentary or departmental elections. In the case of the former, the quota is to become a permanent criterion to be applied from 2009. For the latter, which involves more powerful elective offices, the quota will not apply until the 2014–2015 electoral cycle and is a one-off event. The measures appear to be inconsistent with the concept of affirmative action that supposedly inspired them. CEDAW, which was ratified by Uruguay in 1981, defines affirmative action as measures that entail differential treatment with the intention of correcting existing inequality. Such measures are therefore temporary but without a defined expiration date – they can be dispensed with once the inequality they are intended to correct has disappeared. Nonetheless, despite the important limits on the bill's scope and potential impact on women's representation, women could be expected to enjoy growing influence over the composition of national and departmental electoral lists as they gain a greater presence in the internal decision-making spheres of their parties.

National elections are to be held on 25 October 2009 to elect the President and Vice President, renew the Senate and Chamber of Deputies and elect the members of the Electoral Councils. The deadline for presenting the party lists to the Electoral Court was one month in advance of that date. A preliminary examination of these lists suggests that there will be no substantial changes to the parliament in terms of a greater presence for women. The current percentage may in fact decline. This begs the question: did the explicit mandate for greater participation by women as a means of democratizing politics not permeate the political parties? Or must we consider this a revanchist manoeuvre by the political parties, faced with the prospect of legally binding quotas in 2014? ■

## Endnotes

- 1 This paper is based on a document prepared by the Bicameral Women's Caucus for the Meeting of Women delegates from all political parties, held on 16 September 2009 in the Legislative Palace of Uruguay.
- 2 Such attitudes are not new among the Uruguayan electorate. A survey conducted in 1997 by the consulting firm Factum,

for example, revealed that some 53 percent of Uruguayan men and women agree with the quota concept. A survey by the consulting firm Cifra provided similar results: 57 percent of those interviewed (men and women) said there should be more women in parliament; only 9 percent said there should be fewer. A survey conducted in late 2007 by APG-ICP/International IDEA found that nearly 60 percent of Uruguayan men and women consider the current number of women in parliament to be too low. Only a small percentage (20 percent) considered the current number appropriate or too high.

- 3 Only the Frente Amplio (Broad Front, FA) saw an upward trend in women's participation throughout the period. Between 1994 and 2004, however, it increased by less than a single percentage point. The level of women's representation in the Partido Colorado (PC) and Partido Nacional (National Party, PN) remained below 12 percent during this same period and in both cases declined in the most recent elections.
- 4 The first bill (C.R.R. 3093/1988) proposed that the national law regulating the electoral system include a maximum quota of 75 percent for either sex, applicable to every fourth of the first 12 positions on the list. For lower positions, men and women candidates were required to alternate. This bill was tabled without reaching committee consideration. In the next legislature, a second bill (C.R.R. 2235/1992) proposed "a regime based on the values of equality and justice" to resolve the under-representation of women as a

problem "not only for women, but for society as a whole". Like the first bill, it proposed a maximum quota of 75 percent for either sex, this time applicable to the first eight positions. The bill was passed by the Chamber of Deputies but referred to committee in the Senate. The third bill (C.R.R. 2280/2002; C.S.S. 1181/2003) was signed by the five members of the Women's Caucus. As originally drafted it proposed a maximum quota for electoral lists of two-thirds for either sex, applicable to every third position. For party leadership organs it established the "mirror-image" criterion adopted by the PS in 1992. This bill was the first to be debated and voted on in the Chamber of Deputies, and for the first time political leaders were required to take a position on the issue in the plenary. Only one article was approved: article 4, which declared it a matter of general interest to promote "equitable participation by both sexes in the permanent leadership organs of political parties". This truncated version passed the Senate Committee on the Constitution and Legislation but was not taken further. A fourth bill (C.R.R. 3343/2003) proposed the creation of a fund to finance training and political leadership development for women, especially young women. Its article 4 provided that the lists presented for parliamentary elections should include no more than three persons of the same sex among the first four positions, and that public funding to political parties that failed to comply should be reduced by 25 percent. The bill was not taken up.





**OVERCOMING BARRIERS: OTHER SPECIAL  
MEASURES AND STRATEGIES**

3



# Overview and Debate

## Overview of the Session

In light of the existing difficulties in implementing electoral quotas, the session examined other measures that have been used or proposed to enhance women's access to parliaments. The session addressed the following questions:

- What are other forms of special measures to promote women in parliament?
- What role does money in politics play, and can campaign finance reforms help?
- What other measures can political parties implement, such as training and campaign support?
- What difference can the media make?

The chairperson of this session was Baroness Lindsay Northover, Member of the House of Lords, United Kingdom. The panelists for this session were Dr. Marcela Tovar, Director of the Latin American Studies Program at Queens College – City University of New York; Ms. Colleen Lowe Morna, Executive Director, Gender Links, South Africa, and Ms. Alyson Kozma, Program Manager, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). Ms. Tovar discussed campaign finance reform as an instrument for achieving gender equality in politics and outlined good practices. Ms. Lowe Morna outlined two studies carried out by Gender Links into local government, training and capacity-building and the media to assess if any or all of these could be used to promote women's access to parliaments. Ms. Kozma discussed the results of an NDI study on best practices to provide support to women candidates and women in political parties.

Ms. Tovar explained that campaigns were very costly and the lack of economic resources was one of the biggest obstacles to winning an electoral race. One

of the keys to expanding women's presence in politics was to facilitate their access to **financial resources** at pivotal stages of the campaign process. The question of financing concerned both men and women candidates. However, women faced some specific challenges that merited consideration on their own.

There were three phases of a political campaign: deciding to run, winning a party nomination and conducting an electoral campaign. Women faced complex challenges at each of these phases. Experience had shown that a number of these challenges could be overcome by implementing comprehensive **financing strategies** designed to empower women candidates. For example, women often did not have sufficient agency over family resources. Therefore, when deciding to run for election, they would frequently hesitate over investing family resources, asking for credit, or assuming extra expenses for domestic help, and women needed to be empowered in this area.

To win a nomination, women must build recognition among constituencies, which required a significant **investment of time and money**. That was a particular barrier to women as many felt that, in comparison to men, they had less access or control over financial resources and powerful money networks. For similar reasons, women who succeeded in winning a nomination had often felt at a disadvantage when conducting their electoral campaign.

In terms of a financing strategy, "**early money**" was crucial in all three phases. Political parties and other funding networks could help women overcome those perceived barriers by ensuring that female candidates had sufficient access to financial resources from the outset of the electoral process. It had been demonstrated that the amount of early financial support that a woman received largely determined the amount of money she would continue to collect over the course of the campaign.



Women often stated that they were best served by financing strategies that were aimed specifically at **training** and at the nomination phase of their campaigns. In Brazil, Costa Rica and Panama, for instance, political parties had specified that a certain amount of financial resources should be designated specifically for the political training of women candidates. Of the three most common funding types – public, private, and combined public/private – public funding had been shown to be the most advantageous for women. However, this was only true if transparency was enforced by **accountability mechanisms** within parties to ensure that women had equal access to the funds that their party received. Aside from public funding, other political measures that could be taken to included the establishment of term limits (to combat the influence of male incumbents who were difficult to unseat) and limits on campaign spending. Other incentives included state subsidies and free or additional broadcasting time, awarded to those parties that reached and sustained a high level of female participation in parliament.

Ms. Lowe Morna explained that **quota systems** were the most rapid and direct measure to increase women's representation in parliament. However, there were other measures, although the results may not be as dramatic or quick. Measures relating to local government, training and capacity-building, and the media could be implemented and could indeed result in increased women's representation.

Data regarding women's participation in **local government** was notoriously difficult to collect and detailed statistics were scarce. However, preliminary research indicated that local government may hold some interesting opportunities for women to launch their parliamentary career, though it was an underutilized platform. The range of percentages for women's representation in local government varied greatly between countries in different regions and at different stages of economic development. It was consequently difficult to draw any concrete conclusions, although there were some noticeable trends. When the political will existed, there was usually more willingness to implement special **gender sensitive measures** at the local level. There had been cases where quotas had been adopted at the local level, later paving the way for implementation at the national level.

**Training and capacity-building** to support women's electoral candidacies had frequently been

implemented. However, it could be difficult to determine the extent to which these training programmes accomplished their goal. Funding for training programmes often depended upon the availability of donor funding, and, in the context of national politics, training and capacity-building programmes must be firmly rooted in political parties in order for the results to be beneficial and sustainable. More research should be carried out on **mentorship** as a formal strategy for providing ongoing support for female parliamentarians. Women have stated that what they required most was practical training (how to draft reports or take advantage of new technologies, for instance) and on-the-job support. Mentoring could potentially be very effective in reaching those objectives.

Women's representation in the **media** was another area of concern. A significant proportion of women politicians reported being unhappy with their treatment by the media and were not sure how to improve relations. Women often felt that they were ignored or else portrayed in a very bad light so as to reinforce negative stereotypes. The media was prone to cultivating a negative and stereotypical portrayal of women politicians, tending to put them down rather than focus on their political achievements. It was therefore necessary to learn to work with the media, and use it as effectively as possible, with a "don't get angry, get smart" approach.

Ms. Kozma presented the conclusions of a survey on strategies to overcoming barriers to women's political participation. It revealed that **political parties** remained the gateway to political power, yet there were still a number of obstacles preventing women's meaningful integration within their parties. An increased perception of women as active political leaders could only come from their visibility and participation within their own parties, and that was inhibited by factors such as a lack of transparency during the nomination and campaign process.

**Internal party reform** was crucial to advancing women's participation in politics. A priority for parliamentarians should be how to create transparency and a more merit-based atmosphere which gave women an opportunity to participate. There were a number of best practices on how to change internal party dynamics to make them more inclusive of women.

Women had specified that communication, internal party reform, cross-party cooperation and building leadership skills through mentoring were all valuable

strategies for empowering women within their political parties. In this regard, consistent **communications training** across the span of a political career was an important confidence-building measure. It was important for women to work in training groups among themselves, as well as with men, so that they had the opportunity to develop certain skills and then apply them in a collaborative context.

It had also been noted that, in general, women were more willing than men to reach **across party lines** to form common solutions to common problems. Uniting women across parties was a key technique to maximize their power both within their own parties and within parliament. Another good practice was to encourage women to train each other. This was a very effective way of passing down skills and advice on how to balance personal and political roles. Women have asked for tools to help them handle their conflicting responsibilities. Solidarity among women should, therefore, be encouraged to help develop the capacity and preparedness for politics.

More women could also be encouraged to stand for election through the establishment of a **mentoring system**. Mentors or role models had proven to be an effective way of engaging the youth to help change socio-political attitudes and educate the younger generations on the importance of political participation. Parliamentarians should think creatively about networking and advocacy strategies that could be used to cultivate new gender-sensitive leaders.

Parliaments across the world were implementing good practices, yet more still needed to be done. One of the most pressing priorities was for parliamentarians to spend more time **integrating men** into efforts to promote women's political progress. Any meaningful progress must have the understanding of men otherwise the push for gender sensitive policies risked

isolating women from their male counterparts and undermining efforts to increase women's participation.

More work also needed to be done to create stronger **partnerships** between political parties and civil society organizations. More awareness needed to be raised at the grassroots level regarding the voting process and the challenges that women faced. Initiatives, such as the iKNOW Politics resource, have proven to be very useful for outreach purposes and for building virtual and real networks.

## Plenary Debate

Participants noted that maltreatment by the **media** was an issue of serious concern. Members of parliament noted that they often had felt as though their contribution to politics was ignored or underreported. There was recognition that the media was unlikely to change by itself, and parliamentarians should therefore take the initiative to challenge the media about its treatment of politicians. It was important for parliamentarians to remain proactive and vigilant in order to demonstrate that a lack of respect would not be tolerated. Participants noted that they would seek to improve their communication skills and learn how to use the internet to engage with new media platforms in order build their profile and counteract negative stereotyping.

With regards to **cross-party collaboration**, experience had demonstrated that competing political priorities often made it difficult for parliamentarians to work together across political party lines. However, participants noted that cross-party caucuses of women parliamentarians offered important fora to build support for common objectives and generate support for new policies and priorities.

### Overcoming Barriers: Implementing Special Measures

Financial	Training and capacity building	Internal party reform
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide 'Early Money' for nomination campaigns</li> <li>• Consider provision of public funding</li> <li>• Implement limits on campaign expenditure</li> <li>• Provide incentives for political parties to include more women, such as additional media time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize communication &amp; leadership skills</li> <li>• Media Relations</li> <li>• Ensure outreach to civil society and NGOs</li> <li>• Provide training on fundraising and campaign management</li> <li>• Consider using women to train each other</li> <li>• Seek cross-party collaboration</li> <li>• Provide mentorship training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalize candidate recruitment processes</li> <li>• Allocate funding for women candidates, or women's capacity building</li> <li>• Consider implementing voluntary quotas</li> <li>• Ensure gender equality accountability mechanisms</li> </ul>

**Funding** strategies were very important to help women finance their campaigns and win election. Participants noted the need for incentives for political parties to include more women to be integrated into a multipronged strategy which also included measures on party reforms and electoral systems. None of those strategies were definitive solutions; and in some countries it may also be necessary to address a perceived apathy of women to take part in political life despite the existence of funding schemes. Children should be encouraged to take interest in politics and to participate any way they can. As many women

have few options for formal education or professional training, **outreach** activities may be needed to encourage a more active participation by women and girls. Principles of gender equality should also be enforced from a young age: “gender equality starts at home”. Ad hoc special measures were not sufficient for achieving a genuine change towards parity – such a goal required a change in mentality. Schoolteachers should start teaching children about principles of equality. Teachers, parents and parliamentarians should provide younger generations with role models they could follow so as to strengthen ideas of equality. ■

# Campaign Finance for Women: Challenges, Incentives and Recommendations

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## Introduction

Campaign finance has been identified as a central component for achieving gender equity in the political realm. Despite the fact that women's representation in national parliaments has significantly increased, the lack of economic resources is one of the main obstacles to achieving gender parity in parliaments.

This paper outlines the funding challenges that women face in electoral processes and highlights the successful finance strategies that increase women's participation in parliaments. These strategies may not be universal in their application, but they provide valuable lessons for women candidates participating in parliamentary electoral processes.

## Funding Challenges for Women

Women confront traditional gender inequities, which are reflected in their access to economic resources when participating in political activities. Women and men face different financial challenges at key moments of their political careers: deciding to run, winning the nomination and running election campaigns.<sup>2</sup>

When making their decision to run, women feel hesitant in relation to various factors, such as investing family resources which they do not feel they individually own, asking for credit and risking their own or their family's capital, raising funds on their own behalf, paying for domestic or care work they will not be able to do themselves, leaving their jobs and being able to re-enter the labour market should they not be elected.

The costs of nomination campaigns have proved crucial to women's participation in electoral processes.

The performance of women in the early stages of campaigning will to a great extent define the number of women who run and are elected. Building reputation and recognition among constituents and party members requires constant work, as well as significant amounts of time money to be spent by potential candidates.<sup>3</sup> Women have underlined the importance of "early money" at the start of their campaigns. To respond to these economic needs, women have implemented mechanisms to provide women candidates with early money, such as Political Action Committees (PACs) in the United States, for example EMILY's List or the WISH List. Providing early money to women increases their chances of obtaining more money during the election campaign.

The importance of election campaign costs is context-specific. The relevance of economic resources varies for women at this stage depending on whether measures have been adopted that work in favour of women, such as public funding, quota systems, campaign limits on money and time, closed lists or proportional representation. In contexts where women are not supported by these measures, economic investment at the campaign stage becomes more important and relevant to the running of successful electoral candidacies.

Moreover, other social factors can represent a higher need to invest money in electoral campaigns. It is known that identity markers such as income level, race and ethnic group, level of education, dominant language skills, geographic location, sexual orientation, age, consanguine/family relations and phenotype count a great deal in women's political participation throughout their careers, including whether a woman is well-positioned to acquire campaign funds during electoral campaigns.

## Funding to Increase Women’s Participation in Parliament: Lessons Learned

Providing women with financial resources to participate in the electoral process is key to increasing their access to parliament. Nonetheless, access to campaign finance is only one of many components in getting women elected. A set of measures that would benefit women candidates include but are not limited to: (a) quota systems in the structures of political parties and their candidate lists; (b) quotas for those decision-making positions subject to either popular election or appointment; (c) adoption of legal mechanisms, such as national electoral laws or decrees, that include specific measures on campaign finance for women, and on gender equality; and (d) training for women candidates to engage in fundraising and to strategically manage their campaign resources.

The nature of the electoral system also plays a role in women’s access to financial resources within their parties, since they may or may not be favourable to women candidates. An important distinction should be noted in this regard between the Single Member Plurality systems and the Proportional Representation systems. In the former, women are confronted by a candidate selection process in a winner-takes-all situation in which they will have to compete individually to gather their own resources, mainly private funding. In the latter, a woman candidate might be regarded as one among many team members whose individual expectations to generate resources are lower and whose campaign expenses are usually taken care of by their party.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, closed lists rather than open lists tend to favour women since they guarantee that women will not have to compete against men or women within their own party.<sup>5</sup>

Women have also gained advantages from measures taken in relation to public funding and setting limits on campaign resources and campaign time periods. In general, women candidates agree that public funding helps their candidacies. Nonetheless, they note that public funding alone may not be sufficient to promote women candidates – since they often have less power within their political parties, which control the allocation of funds. Unless internal mechanisms are set up within the political parties to control equal access to public resources, powerful groups, which are most frequently male-dominated groups, could end up receiving most of the resources.

The Center for Legislative Development in the Philippines and the UNDP-Asia Pacific Gender Equality Network suggest that economic limits should be applied to every national and local election campaign, as well as to donations used for “party building”, voter registration, membership campaigns and payments to party-related “think tanks”. For example, in Mexico the law limits the amount of contributions from non-governmental organizations and bars funding from foreign citizens, religious officials and private businesses. Sanctions include economic penalties and fines, suspension of public funding for political parties or the revocation of a party’s registration. Countries with contribution limits in 1995 included India, Taiwan, Japan, Israel, Russia, Mexico, Brazil, France, Italy, Spain, Turkey and the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Accountability and transparency are required in campaign finances to guarantee democratic electoral processes and reduce gender imbalances. Electoral monitoring bodies require accountability mechanisms to ensure that gender equality measures are being implemented correctly, especially as they relate to allocating direct and indirect financial resources to women candidates.

Denmark, New Zealand and the United States have adopted “reporting of campaign fund” mechanisms, where sources of funding are disclosed and there is public reporting of accounts by candidates, political committees and political parties. In Denmark, parties are required to submit a list of all donors’ contributions. In New Zealand, every registered party is required by law to have the financial returns of the party audited. At the federal level in the United States, campaign committees, including parties and PACs, must present the Federal Election Commission with quarterly reports on funds raised and spent.<sup>7</sup>

## Good Practices

The following are examples of various strategies that have been successful in increasing women’s political participation in parliaments:

### The Caribbean

- In Haiti, the electoral law permits a party’s candidates discounted registration fees if their lists include a minimum percentage of women registered. Candidates must pay a filing fee, the amount of which depends on the position being contested.



If the candidate is not from a political party, the filing fee increases tenfold. Conversely, the filing fee is reduced by two-thirds for women candidates representing political parties. At least 30 percent of the candidates from the political party must be women in order to receive this discount.<sup>8</sup>

- In Suriname and Guyana, where a system of proportional representation is in place, small parties are able to obtain more funding than is available in countries operating without such a system. This is important because in smaller parties women have to be ranked near the top in order to have a good chance of winning a seat.

## Africa

- Cowan is an association founded in Nigeria in 1982 as a response to the perceived marginalization of women and widespread conditions of abject poverty, especially in the rural communities. Cowan is active in 32 states in the country and has at least 260,000 registered members. It promotes traditional saving schemes and has developed African Traditional Responsive Banking. This has allowed women in politics to have access to loans from Cowan during the campaign in order to meet with their male counterparts to enable equal participation in decision making. This strategy has had positive and sustained results mainly at the local level where rural women have been elected.
- South Africa introduced a women's budget which provides financial incentives to women's political projects. These incentives may be targeted directly at women's representation by tying the public funding of political parties to the number of elected women legislators.
- In the 2008 elections in Zimbabwe, women activists from The Women in Politics Support Unit together with The Feminist Political Education Project bundled financial support to selected candidates from the four major political parties contesting the election. Despite the chaotic political situation in the country and the lack of funding that women accessed, an international donor supported their initiative.

## Europe

- In the Nordic countries, which have high numbers of women in their parliaments, political parties

receive a state subsidy or other forms of assistance, such as free and equal broadcasting time on television and radio for campaigns or party-related activities such as research.<sup>9</sup>

- France has amended its Constitution to require that 50 percent of all candidates must be women. Political parties that do not comply face financial sanctions. This mechanism has been effective with small parties that have limited resources. Larger parties with more abundant resources are inclined to pay the fines and break this constitutional rule.
- In Italy, political parties receive an allotted subsidy for initiatives to promote women's participation. The amount is equal to at least 5 percent of the electoral funding received.
- Indirect resources for women's campaigns can be provided by parties or by national, federal or local governments allocating financial resources for promoting gender equity or covering the operating costs of gender equity mechanisms in a political party. In Spain, the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) has a Gender Equality Office which coordinates different activities with women candidates and supports them in their governmental activities.

## Latin America

- Some political parties in Costa Rica have internal regulations that designate financial resources for women's activities within parties and electoral processes. The national law that promotes social equity, Ley de Promoción de la Igualdad Social, sanctioned in 1990, triggered innovative measures within a number of parties. The statutes of Liberación Nacional (article 171), Movimiento Libertario (article 72), Partido Acción Ciudadana (article 37) and Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (article 52) designate financial resources for training activities for women candidates.
- Panama's electoral law was reformed in 2002 to establish subsidies for political parties, 25 percent of which is earmarked for training activities and 10 per cent of which is for women's training workshops and activities.<sup>10</sup> El Partido Arnulfista went further, designating in its internal statutes that 30 percent of the state subsidies should be for women's political training. In order to achieve the goal stated in the electoral law, women may use these resources in forums and seminars, and



at congresses and other training activities that promote gender equity.<sup>11</sup>

- In Nicaragua, the women's commission of the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista has created a leadership school for women, and the Partido Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional has created mechanisms to work with women's organizations to train women and organize electoral activities.
- In Brazil, a legislative initiative states that women must account for at least 30 percent of the candidates that a party fields. Under the current law a party must offer women 30 percent of the candidacies, but is not obliged to actually field them in winnable positions. Ten percent of parties' advertising and five percent of the public campaign funds they receive must be used to promote women and their professional training.

## North America

- Canada's experience is of measures adopted in electoral legislation. These advances have been traced to the Canada Elections Act of 1974,<sup>12</sup> which provides for childcare expenses to be included in the personal expenses of a candidate for election. The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing in Canada noted that the cost of childcare imposes an unequal burden on many women seeking elected office and proposed that childcare is a necessary expense in seeking nomination as a candidate which should be considered a legitimate tax deduction.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the New Democratic Party has implemented a financial assistance programme in which women and candidates from minority ethnic communities are eligible for reimbursement for childcare expenses incurred in seeking a nomination, travel costs in geographically large constituencies and the costs incurred in seeking a nomination in areas where a New Democratic Party incumbent is retiring. The party also funds three times as much election expenses for women and minority ethnic candidates so as to take advantage of generous tax credit afforded to parties.<sup>14</sup>
- Women's organizations in the United States have established PACs to directly finance women. PACs are organizations that solicit contributions from individuals and make contributions to candidates.

Many PACs are affiliated with businesses, trade unions or other organizations, but some – known as non-affiliated PACs – are independent of any association with another organization. One distinct subcategory of PAC is women's PACs, which contribute money only to women candidates. This modality has become one of the most successful methods for financing women with early money, especially within the Democratic Party. Each election year they are able to finance more women candidates and get more women elected to the US Congress.

## Recommendations

### What women in parliaments can do

- National legislation on political campaign finance and party expenditure should coincide with international conventions and agreements that promote gender equity in political participation, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform of Action, and the Millennium Development Goals. In the Americas, legislation should coincide with the principles of the Summits of the Americas 2001 Declaration of Quebec, 2004 Declaration of Nuevo León and 2007 Quito Consensus.
- As parliaments are responsible for preventing all forms of gender discrimination, any policy or national plan formulation process concerning political participation should include a gender-sensitive finance component that secures the presence of women candidates and decision-makers, as well as their training and a system of monitoring.
- Effective measures to support women's election, such as legislation in favour of public funding, limits to contributions and expenditure in nomination and election campaigns, and quotas in political parties or cabinets, should be considered and secured in constitutional or legislative reform.
- Wherever public funding of political parties exists, including government subsidies, legislation should establish incentives to support women candidates. For example, the amount of public funding or reimbursement of election campaign expenses should be linked to the percentage of women candidates put forward by each party and/or elected to parliament.<sup>15</sup>

- States should maintain their commitment to women's political participation at a minimum percentage of 30%, as outlined in the Beijing Platform of Action.

## What women in political parties can do

- A gender equity policy should be included in the statutes of political parties, ensuring that women candidates can benefit from an equitable internal distribution of resources. Party resources would thus more equitably support the promotion of women running as party candidates, contribute towards women's nomination processes, during which women often require resources to establish a political reputation both inside and outside their parties, and contribute towards electoral processes.
- Parties committed to gender equality should: ensure equal access to income resources for women and men, designate a specific amount of resources for women candidates as an affirmative action and incorporate gender equality criteria into parties' internal transparency and accountability mechanisms.
- Establishing an effective and functional women's caucus would empower women candidates and help to ensure equal access to the party's resources, guaranteeing that financial management has a gender perspective.
- Strategizing with women from other parties would be beneficial to all women candidates and has proved an effective method for institutionalizing means for securing financial resources across parties. ■

## Endnotes

- 1 This document is based on research by the author financed by the Women's Parliament Forum, the Network of NGOs of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations Democracy Fund and the Women's Environment and Development Organization.
- 2 Barreiro, Line. 2004. "Representación de Mujeres para Gobernabilidad Democrática" Ponencia en *Seminario Internacional sobre Gobernabilidad Democrática e Igualdad de Género*. Santiago de Chile: CEPAL; Barrow-Giles, Cynthia. 2005. "Political Party Financing and Women's Political Participation in The Caribbean" in S. Griner and D. Zovatto

(eds.) *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns in the Americas*. San José, Costa Rica: Internacional IDEA. pp. 211–227; Baker, Ashley. 2006. "Reexamining the Gender Implications of Campaign Finance Reform: How Higher Ceilings on Individual Donations Disproportionately Impact Female Candidates" in *The Modern Americas* (fall 2006). pp. 18–23.

- 3 Ballington, Julie. 2003. *Gender Equality in Political Party Funding in Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns*. Stockholm: IDEA Handbook Series. pp. 158–159, 161.
- 4 Ballington (note 3); Author interview, Lesley Abdela, Sheevolution, United Kingdom, 29 August 2007.
- 5 Author interview, Kristin Sample, International IDEA, Perú, 1 August 2007.
- 6 See the Women in Government Source Kit, available at URL <<http://iknowpolitics.org>>.
- 7 See note 6.
- 8 Selwyn, Ryan. 2005. "Disclosure and Enforcement of Political Party and Campaign Financing in the CARICOM States" in Griner and Zovatto (eds.) p. 174.
- 9 See note 6.
- 10 The electoral law from 1997 was modified through Ley 60/2002, ordinal c., numeral 4, article 169.
- 11 García, Ana Isabel. 2004. "Financiación Política y Perspectiva de Género" in Griner and Zovatto (eds.). pp. 158–171.
- 12 Ballington (note 3). p. 162.
- 13 Op. Cit.
- 14 Young, Lisa. 2005. "Campaign Finance and Women's Representation in Canada and US" in Griner and Zovatto (eds.). p. 137.
- 15 Pintat, Christine. 1998. "A global analysis: What has worked for women in politics and what has not, 1975–1998". Paper presented at the Second Congress of the Global Network of Women in Politics held in Manila, 28–30 August 1998. p. 6.

## Additional Reading

Ace Electoral Knowledge Network, <[http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/pc/topic\\_index](http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/pc/topic_index)>  
 International IDEA, <[www.idea.int/gender/index.cfm](http://www.idea.int/gender/index.cfm)>  
 International IDEA, IPU and Stockholm University, *Global Database of Quotas for Women*, <[www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org)>  
 IFES Program on Political Finance and Public Ethics, <[www.moneyandpolitics.net/index.php](http://www.moneyandpolitics.net/index.php)>  
 International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, <[www.iknowpolitics.org](http://www.iknowpolitics.org)>  
 Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in National Parliaments*, <[www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm)>  
 National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), Global Programs for Women's Participation <[www.ndi.org/global/women/women.asp](http://www.ndi.org/global/women/women.asp)>

# Is Parliament Open to Women? Supporting Women's Political Participation

**Colleen Lowe Morna**

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## Introduction

In the 14 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995, the proportion of women in parliament has increased by a mere 3.6 percentage points: from 15 to 18.6 percent. If democracy is understood as government for the people by the people – women and men – it could be concluded that only one country, Rwanda, has achieved democracy. This east African country is the only one in which the number of women in parliament slightly exceeds that of men, consistent with women being slightly more numerous than men in the general population.

This paper focuses on the strategies other than electoral systems and quotas that can be used to promote women's participation in political decision making, in particular training and capacity-building, whether local government can be a stepping stone to national politics and the role of the media.

I do not believe that any strategy short of special measures that involve electoral systems and quotas can deliver significant change in a short space of time to women's representation in political decision making. The point is illustrated by the graph below on

women's representation in parliament and local government in the 15 countries of Southern Africa, where Gender Links works.

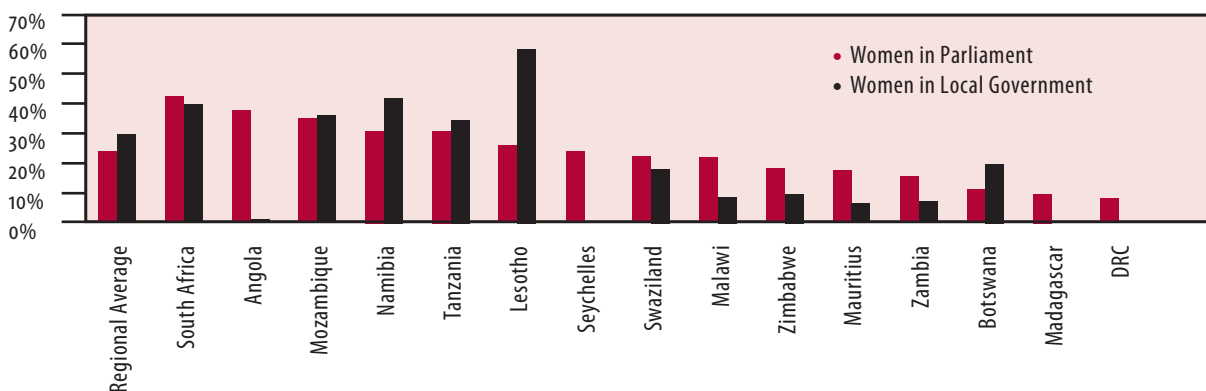
The graph shows that there are four instances in the case of parliament and three in the case of local government in which women's presence exceeds 30 percent.

The table shows that in every case in which a 30 percent representation of women has been either achieved or exceeded in parliament or local government, a quota of some kind has been employed. It also shows that in the majority of cases, the quota is applied in conjunction with a system of proportional representation (PR). The two cases (Tanzania and Lesotho) of quotas in a constituency-based system show that quotas can be successfully employed in any electoral system. The key factor therefore is political will.

## Capacity-building

I am sceptical about capacity-building as a strategy for increasing women's political participation, especially if presented as a panacea for women's underrepresentation. The simple logic that there are too

**Graph 1: Women in Decision Making in SADC in 2009**



**Table 1: Electoral Systems and Quotas**

Country	Percentage of women in parliament (30% or more)	Percentage of women in local government (30% or more)	Type of quota	Electoral system
South Africa	44%	40%	Voluntary ruling party quota of 50% at both levels	PR at national; PR and FPTP at local
Angola	36%	n/a	Voluntary ruling party quota of 30%	PR
Mozambique	38%	n/a	Voluntary ruling party quota of 30%	PR
Namibia	27%	40%	Legislated quota of 30% and voluntary ruling party quota of 50% at local level	PR
Tanzania	33%	n/a	Constitutional quota of 30%	FPTP
Lesotho	25%	58%	Legislated quota of 30% at local level	FPTP

Note: FPTP = First past the post; PR = Proportional representation

few women in decision making, so they need training to run for office has been applied many times over, at great cost but with few tangible benefits.

The failing of this strategy is that it targets women, rather than patriarchy, as the root cause of women's underrepresentation in political decision-making. There is no school that men attend to prepare them for careers in political decision making. Why should women be any different? Of course it is true that one of the consequences of patriarchy is that women are socialized to occupy private spaces, to be shy of the public arena and to be self-effacing and non-assertive. There are some skills that might assist women in taking the plunge into politics, but they cannot be taught in isolation from strategies that challenge men's dominance of power and decision making structures. Quotas are a very direct way of challenging men's hegemony over decision making positions.

It is also necessary to examine *how* non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations have gone about providing support to women leaders, and with what effect. More research is needed into the effect of programmes of support to women in politics, but initiatives have tended to have a short-term focus on women as candidates rather than on the ongoing support they need in office, or on retention and even exit strategies. There also tends to be a focus on how to run campaigns rather than on how to be effective agents of change. The methods used have tended towards traditional, top-down training, rather than a support approach. Some of the more innovative approaches to adult

learning, such as expert on-the-job support, coaching and mentoring, or study and experiential visits have not been used as effectively as they might. Capacity-building has almost exclusively focused on empowering women in decision making rather than on what men need to do to share these spaces and to become agents of change.<sup>2</sup>

### Local Government as a Stepping Stone

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that local government is an excellent training ground for national politics. This therefore begs the question: why has local government been so absent from gender and governance discourse? It is important, however, not to oversimplify the link. Graph 1 shows not only that there are wide variations between countries when it comes to women in decision making but also that these are even more marked in local than in national politics. At the local level, women's representation ranges from 2 percent in Angola to 58 percent in Lesotho.

The 2006 study by Gender Links, *At the Coalface: Gender and Local Government*, shows that where governments have been willing to take special measures, they are more likely to do so at the local rather than the national level. Cases in point are Lesotho and Namibia, which legislated quotas at the local but not the national level. The study concludes that, unfortunately, this is not a result of a recognition of the importance of women's effective participation at the local level. Instead, it is an indication that local

### **Box 1: The City of Johannesburg Strives to get the Balance Right**

The collaboration over several years between the City of Johannesburg, the largest metropolitan council in Southern Africa, and Gender Links is an example of an attempt to overcome some of the shortcomings of traditional approaches to capacity-building for women in decision making roles. The collaboration began in 2006 with a 12-month long on-the-job training programme for men and women councillors led by the then speaker, Nandi Mayathula-Khoza. Built around the core activities of the council, the training, undertaken in partnership with the University of the Witwatersrand, involved gender analysis and communication and leadership skills. Key outputs included a book of reflections by councillors on gender in their life and work, and a draft gender policy that is now being taken forward by political leaders and the administration. In the 2008 local government elections, Johannesburg achieved gender balance in both the Council and the mayoral committee, becoming one of the few metropolitan councils that can truly claim to be getting the gender balance right. The city has appointed a gender manager and adopted some flagship projects, including the 365-day campaign to end gender violence and the mainstreaming of gender in a major economic project – the upcoming soccer world cup. While this began as a donor-funded project, the City has shown its commitment to gender mainstreaming by retaining the services of Gender Links as strategic advisers in its gender mainstreaming project. The key lessons learned include the need for a long-term perspective that is linked to capacity-building and relevant to the work of political decision making, and that involves men and builds gender into institutional practice, rather than an ad hoc, elections-driven approach.

politics is not seen as equally important as national politics. In instances in which women's participation in local politics is still very low, this reflects the even greater obstacles that women face at the local level where forces of custom, culture and tradition are often more intensely concentrated. As Jo Beall puts it:

*Decentralisation is frequently presented as an important vehicle for increasing women's representation and political participation. However benefits for women are not always obvious. Local government is in an ambiguous position. It is the part of the state that is located closest to the people and to organised civil society. As such it has the potential to engage more effectively with women who are often confined through their domestic responsibilities to public engagement close to home, but because of its closeness to society the local state can also become too close to social institutions. In Africa, the latter can be deeply patriarchal, illustrated for example by the role of traditional authorities both in every day life at the community level and in local government. When local government is impervious to progressive social change it may be an unreliable site for the pursuit of gender equity, particularly in contexts where women are making gains without the formal institutions of state. As such it tends to be a litmus test not only for democratic decentralisation but for engendered democracy more generally.<sup>3</sup>*

### **The Role of the Media**

Every politician has a love/hate relationship with the media. The media can make you or break a politician.

In the case of women in politics this is even more acute. An Inter-Parliamentary Union study on barriers to women's political participation showed that 14 percent of women parliamentarians described their relationship with the media as good and 53 percent as average while 33 percent were unhappy about their relationship with the media.<sup>4</sup> The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) showed in 2005 that although women globally constituted 16 percent of all parliamentarians, they made up only 12 percent of all politicians quoted in the media. This suggests that even when women are present in a particular occupational category they are not heard in proportion to their strength within that category. Women in politics provide the media with a problem. They challenge masculine authority and they defy easy categorization. Women politicians are regularly demonized and branded as 'unfeminine' or 'iron women' – ruthless, belligerent and doggedly determined.<sup>5</sup>

Much has been written about Hillary Clinton's relationship with the media, notably in her bid to win the nomination as presidential candidate for the Democratic Party in the U.S.A. in 2008. There is considerable evidence to suggest that she got a raw deal. Charles Gibson, the ABC News anchor who reportedly refused to share the anchor desk with a woman, asked Clinton sceptically, 'would you be in this position were it not for your husband?'. An opinion article in *The Oklahoman* referenced her 'frequent wearing of dark pants suits to conceal her bottom-heavy figure.' The *New York Times* charged that as First Lady, Clinton showed off 'a long parade of unflattering outfits and unnervingly changing hairdos.' A *Washington Post* editorial opined: 'Obama, here comes Mama. And she doesn't play'. MSNBC's Tim Russert and *Vanity Fair* columnist Christopher



Hitchens referred to Clinton as sappy and bitchy, respectively. An entire website was set up to publicize unflattering images of Clinton, an examination of which showed that the images were of Clinton either tired or exuding power and strength. It is noteworthy that the media found the latter equally threatening.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The barriers to women's participation in political decision making are rooted in patriarchy. Empowering women, preparing them for higher office through local government and challenging sexist stereotypes in the media are all strategies that can help to gnaw away at male hegemony. Nonetheless, rapid change can only come about as a result of special measures to challenge the status quo. Quotas are an effective way to bring about rapid change to women's exclusion from political decision-making. In the longer term, however, it is important to adopt a multiplicity of strategies for ensuring acceptance of the simple fact that

until women are equally represented in all areas of decision making, democracy has not been achieved. ■

## Endnotes

- 1 Colleen Lowe Morna is Executive Director of Gender Links and editor of the Gender Links publications *Ringing up the Changes: Gender in Southern African Politics* (2004) as well as *At the Coalface: Gender and Local Government in Southern Africa* (2007).
- 2 For example, these findings resulted from a workshop held towards the end of 2009 in Johannesburg, convened by Gender Links with Hivos and Akina Mama wa Afrika, which brought together more than 20 organizations involved in this area of work to reflect on efforts to support women in decision making positions.
- 3 Jo Beall. 2005. *Decentralising Government and Centralising Gender in Southern Africa: Lessons from the South African Experience*; United Nations Institute for Social Development, Occasional Paper 8.
- 4 IPU, 2000. *Women's Insight*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva.
- 5 See Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) research, 2005 and 1999.



# Assessing Women's Political Party Programmes: Best Practices and Recommendations

**Alyson Kozma**

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

## Introduction

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) embarked on an assessment of its women's political party programme efforts in order to better understand effective approaches and measure the impact of such initiatives across a number of regions. The assessment was designed to identify the specific elements and approaches that were most effective in encouraging women's participation and leadership in political parties.

Over the course of three months,<sup>1</sup> 81 interviews were conducted in Morocco, Indonesia, Serbia and Nepal in order to learn from experiences with women's political party programming and to identify: (a) the approaches that have worked well; (b) the approaches that have not worked or have worked less well; and (c) which strategies could be adopted by or enhance women's political party programmes in other countries.<sup>2</sup> Interviews and research revealed how women across the regions share challenges in achieving positions of political leadership and strategies for overcoming these barriers.<sup>3</sup>

The women's stories intersect in a number of areas. First, women in these countries are more politically engaged today than they have been in the past, but this has not been accompanied by an increase in the number of women political leaders. Second, an increased perception of women as political leaders can only come about with women's true integration into political parties. Third, internal party reform is critical to women's advancement, but obstacles such as the lack of transparency, internal democracy, merit-based advancement and decentralization limit women's rise within political parties. Fourth, increased communication and cooperation among women across political party lines has been viewed as a notable suc-

cess. Finally, democratic advancement has coincided with and contributed to a much needed cultural shift in attitudes regarding gender.

## Best Practices

### Consistent communications training

Consistent training in and ongoing practice of public speaking can help women gain the confidence they need to participate more in political party and other meetings, where they report often having to fight to be heard. Communications training includes helping women to speak in public and to talk persuasively in their own families. Based on respondents' comments, women's opportunities to be independent, persuasive communicators are often the greatest predictor of her level of self-confidence and, eventually, her degree of political engagement. Respondents are also interested in building message-development skills, as many feel underprepared in this area. Women want assistance in developing messages around their particular strengths as *women leaders* and with how to use these perceived positive qualities to make themselves more politically appealing to voters, constituents and other political actors.

### Focus on building leadership skills

Respondents wanted to see an enhanced focus on women's leadership potential and opportunities, starting with training. Women's leadership development seeks to build women's skills and self-confidence to empower them to take on leadership roles in their families, their communities and in public life. Leadership training is most useful when it encompasses key areas of successful leadership, including commu-

nication, mobilization, coalition-building, strategic planning, advocacy and fund-raising. In addition, leadership training is most valuable when it focuses on raising awareness of the existing and valuable leadership roles that participants hold in their families and communities; women's unique perspectives and attributes as leaders; the existence of multiple leadership styles and identifying participants' personal leadership styles; and opportunities and challenges for women leaders. For respondents, the most effective leadership training includes developing skills around public speaking, advocacy and campaigning. The sharp increase in self-confidence that arises as a result of training is consistently noted as its single greatest impact.

### **Uniting women across political parties**

Respondents expressed a strong demand for efforts that help to unite women across political parties. Such multiparty work contributes to distinguishing women political actors, who have often demonstrated increased capacity to interact with each other as peers, rather than view each other solely as competitors. This interaction contributes to the positive perception of women in politics by party leaders and citizens alike. The successes of women coming together across political party lines have been significant, and many respondents noted the unique capacity of women to undertake such cross-party work. Given the minimal attention that political parties often pay to issues of particular interest to women, it is important to encourage women to work on these issues across ideological lines.

### **Working with parties on internal reform**

Resistance by political parties is considered a primary hurdle for women who hope to enter political life. Respondents across the countries highlight that male dominance within political parties, patriarchal attitudes and political party elitism make women's entry into politics and rise to leadership positions difficult. Continued resistance to women's leadership within political parties creates a sense of urgency among respondents, who stress the importance of spending more time working with political parties on women's leadership and internal reform initiatives instead of spending time solely with individual women or groups of women leaders.

### **Training women to train other women**

Real political advancement requires both political education and self-confidence, and many respondents say women still need to bolster themselves in both these areas. Working with politically experienced women is critical to training new generations of women political leaders and to helping women mentor each other. Creating and strengthening a cadre of women master trainers boosts the trainers' self-confidence and sense of investment in efforts to increase women's political participation. Trainees, in turn, are inspired by seeing women from their own parties and communities possessing and actively sharing advanced skills and knowledge.

### **Developing the capacity and preparedness of elected women**

As more women are being elected or appointed to political leadership positions, respondents highlight the importance of capacity-development. Respondents describe the need for extended training, particularly as women often have had little or no opportunity to develop the type of specialized skills necessary to succeed in public office. Such skills may be office-specific, such as rules of procedure or drafting and passing legislation and budgets, or more generalized, such as public speaking and staff management. This is linked to the generally expressed need for more frequent training, particularly at the grass-roots level, with an increased focus on advocacy training.

### **Exchanging information internationally**

Sharing experiences and knowledge is tremendously important to respondents, who often emphasize training by international organizations as being highly valuable for their political learning. Respondents stated that the solidarity and sense of empowerment gained through learning from and interacting with female colleagues around the world is both personally inspiring and professionally useful. The value of this shared experience allows women political leaders to learn from the challenges, successes and models of their counterparts, and helps to build an international network of women leaders.

## **Engaging youth to help change socio-political attitudes and behaviour**

While respondents acknowledge that resistance to women's political leadership among longstanding political leaders will take time to change, younger leaders represent a generation that may be more progressively minded and therefore more likely to favour women's political and social equality. Youth programmes serve as a highly effective avenue for increasing women's political participation and leadership. They not only create an effective venue for young women to see themselves as capable political leaders, but also help to sow the seeds of gender equality among future political leaders from the earliest stages of their political careers.

## **Recommendations**

### **Integrate men into efforts to promote women's political progress**

While respondents greatly value women-only training opportunities, they would also like to see more political training opportunities for women that reach out to and involve men as a way to increase gender sensitivity and support for women's political leadership among male counterparts. Both gender-integrated and gender-specific training approaches are considered highly constructive in developing women's capacities and changing men's views of women's leadership abilities. Both are considered critical to long-term success.

### **Strengthen partnerships between civil society organizations and political parties**

Women are also making great strides outside political parties. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are viewed as vehicles for women's leadership and have emerged as places for women to cultivate their political, social and personal power. Respondents suggest that stronger links between parties and CSOs may be important in advancing women's issues and creating a common women's agenda, because women tend to have stronger leadership roles in CSOs than they do in political parties.

### **Increase rural and grass-roots outreach**

Respondents report that women at the grass roots and in rural areas are not adequately engaged by outreach

efforts. This is of considerable concern for respondents, who argue that provincial areas pose a core challenge to women's political progress. Enhancing outreach efforts to focus on citizens who live outside urban areas, particularly through partnerships, would increase women's political participation and engagement where the need is greatest.

### **Engage women before and between elections**

Respondents stress that it is critical to engage in ongoing, sustainable work with political parties to build women's leadership before and between elections so that the stage is set for the full participation of women in all aspects of political decision making. Although immediate engagement during and around elections is vital, respondents urge starting as early as possible on training on campaigning, elections and lobbying as well as on addressing issues that could potentially inhibit electoral participation by women. Findings suggest that early and sustainable engagement is more likely to help shape long-term attitudinal changes around women's political strengths and viabilities than the short-term, election-related strategies of political parties, which tend to focus on obtaining votes.

### **Create opportunities for income-generation and political financing for women**

Limited access to funding and the lack of opportunities for income-generation hinder women's entry into and advancement in politics, particularly in parties. These are cited as key barriers to political advancement for women. A lack of financial resources not only dissuades women from running for office, but also affects their ability to build a political profile and knowledge-base. Fund-raising training has helped to mitigate the significant barriers to women's political engagement and to expand their potential participation and influence. Women also lack the consistent funding mechanisms that facilitate women's empowerment and political inclusion. To this end, consideration should be given to the establishment of specific initiatives geared towards financially empowering women and helping them to identify funding streams that will help women acquire financial autonomy.

## Provide tools to manage personal and political roles and responsibilities

In addition to political parties, respondents say that society at large fails to support women's political interests. Moving to a life that adds the duties of public office to family responsibilities can be burdensome for women. The disproportionate household and familial responsibilities of women pose one of the most significant barriers to their political participation. Women need practical tools, such as conflict resolution and time management, to assist them in this area, and to change the repressive social messages regarding women's roles in the home and in public.

## Facilitate opportunities for networking and advocacy practice

Women often do not have access to the entrenched social, political and economic networks that advance the political careers of their male counterparts and therefore need opportunities to create both alternative networks and the skills to navigate existing male-dominated networks. Formal and informal networking and lobbying gatherings help to provide the support and information intrinsic to networking, and also help women to mitigate, to some extent, their lack of financial resources. Networking not only builds name recognition among peers and potential voters, but can also lead to relationship-building and the creation of formal or informal organizational structures, such as caucuses or clubs, to which male politicians often already have access.

## Cultivate Women Role Models

Some attribute the absence of women role models to continued gender inequality, a lack of social and familial support, and a patriarchal society that makes it personally and logistically difficult for women to commit to a life in politics. Women's absence from key political positions not only denies them political credibility, but also, respondents fear, makes women less visible as leaders and therefore unable to act as the positive role models that communities, particularly women, need. Respondents affirm that women look to each other as role models. Women want to be mentored and they seek the support critical to their struggles with social and political change. There is hope that more women in politics will raise social consciousness and elevate the status of women as politicians and role models.

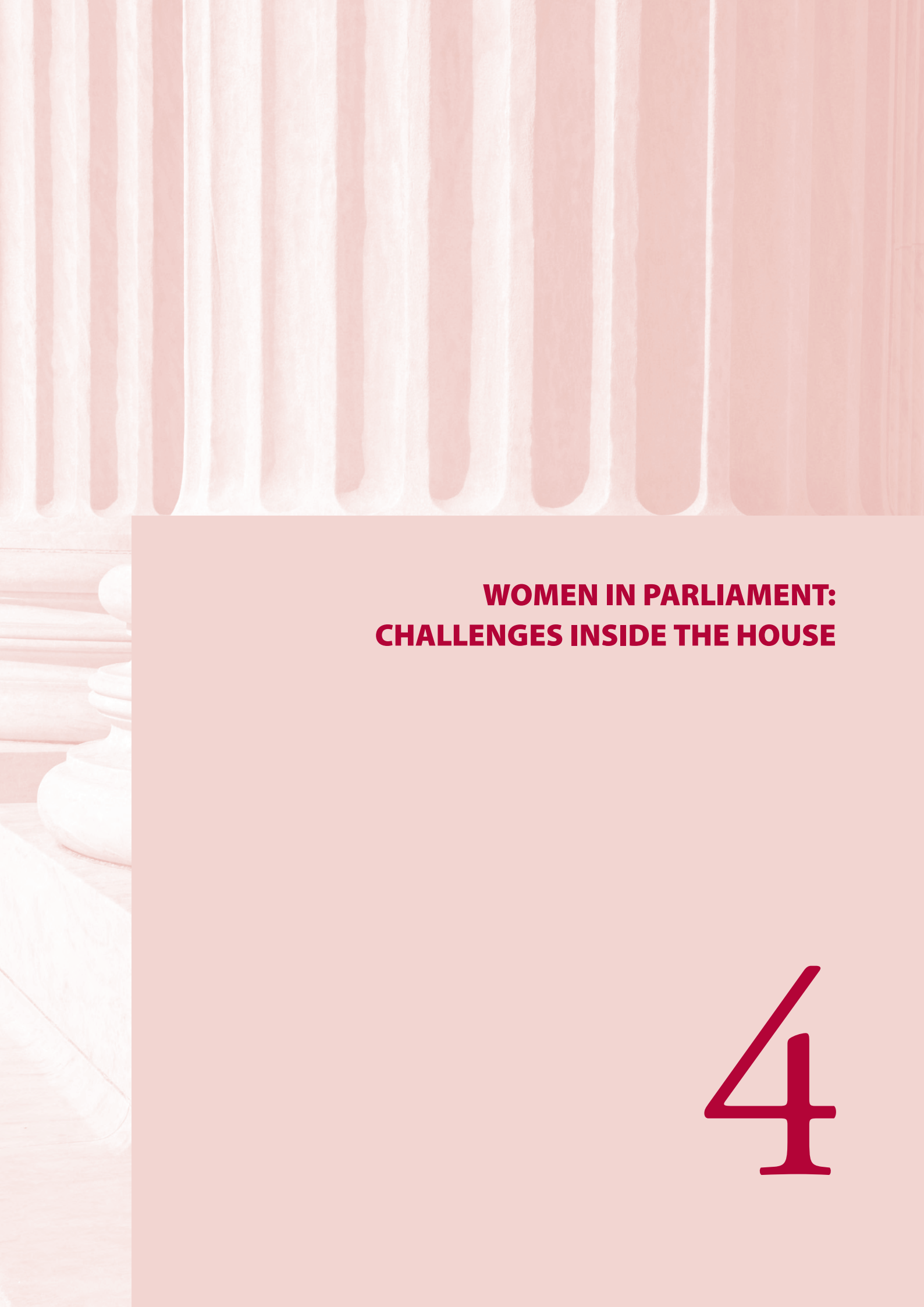
## Conclusions

The consistency of the best practices and recommendations found across the four, very different, countries makes it possible to apply them across countries and continents worldwide. The best practices in women's political participation programmes compiled above include strategic approaches that are both widely effective and necessary elements of successful women's political party programming efforts. The combination of these best practices and recommendations provides a roadmap for developing effective women's political participation programmes that have the potential to empower both individual women leaders and communities and to transform the social and political landscape into one that is more inclusive, more democratic and ultimately more sustainable. ■

## Endnotes

- 1 Interviews were conducted by NDI staff and consultants between December 2007 and March 2008. For the full report, Kozma, A., McCollom, S. and Haffert, K. (2009), *Assessing Women's Political Party Programs*, as well as country narratives and quotes from respondents, see URL <<http://www.ndi.org/node/15121>>.
- 2 The criteria for country selection were: (a) regional representation of NDI's geographic presence around the world; (b) length of time that NDI has been operating in the country; and (c) continuity of women's political party programmes in that country. Based on these criteria, Morocco, Indonesia, Serbia and Kenya were originally selected. Due to the political volatility following the December 2007 election, a scheduled visit to Kenya was not possible during the timeframe of this project. Nepal therefore replaced Kenya as an interview site.
- 3 Three categories of individuals – referred to as respondents throughout the report – were selected and interviewed: (a) NDI Staff – NDI staff members, both women and men, the majority of whom had specifically worked on or managed women's political party programmes; (b) NDI Programme Participants – women with past and/or present involvement in women's political party programmes. Most participants had a significant level of educational achievement. Most had held high- or mid-level positions within a political party and/or were parliamentarians; and (c) External Experts – women and men actively involved in each country's social, political and community affairs who had not been directly involved with NDI programmes. Respondents in this category include party leaders, journalists, leaders of non-governmental organizations and academics. They may or may not have been familiar with NDI.





**WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT:  
CHALLENGES INSIDE THE HOUSE**

4

# Overview and Debate

## Overview of the Session

When women entered parliament, they typically entered a domain where the vast majority functioned according to rules established by men. The session examined the challenges that women confronted once they took up their seats in parliament. It addressed the following questions:

- Are parliaments still male bastions, 15 years after Beijing?
- How do the traditional rules and practices of parliament affect women's participation?
- Does a critical mass of women members (30%) matter?

The panelists for this session were Ms. Kareen Jabre, Manager, Gender Partnership Programme, IPU; Ms. Massuma Al Mubarak, Member of the National Assembly, Kuwait, and Ms. Irène Yameogo, Member of the National Assembly, Burkina Faso. Ms. Jabre drew on two studies carried out by the IPU on perceptions of equality in politics to outline some of the principle challenges that women faced once they entered parliament. Ms. Al Mubarak described some of the challenges that women had faced in the recent elections in Kuwait. Ms. Yameogo provided some lessons learned from Burkina Faso.

Ms. Jabre presented the results from IPU surveys published in 2000 and 2008 which indicated that when women entered parliament, they faced new challenges that were different from those they had faced while running for election. Parliament had a very particular cultural environment and modus operandi that had historically been determined by men. The essential function of parliament was to channel divergent views into politically negotiated solutions; it therefore worked inextricably within a context of power, which pervaded relationships between

political parties as well as between individuals. Women reported that, in handling these power relations, their participation was often constrained by a number of factors. These could be grouped into the following main categories: rules and practices, behavior and attitudes, practical obstacles, and personal challenges. In order to succeed in parliament, it was important to understand and learn how to work within the **rules and procedures** that guided the functioning of parliament. Since parliaments were traditionally male-dominated structures, women entering the arena faced the additional challenge of acquainting themselves with these regulations. Several women parliamentarians noted that parliaments still had influential 'old boys' clubs', whereby important decisions were often made in fora which did not include women. A primary concern for women parliamentarians was thus how to overcome that exclusion and to build confidence and ensure that their perspectives were taken into consideration in the work of parliament. Although that was slowly starting to change, persevering in a political environment insensitive to gender concerns was still a major challenge that women faced. Parliaments were, moreover, often described as confrontational workplaces characterized by political maneuvering, aggressive debates, and a general lack of gender sensitivity. The behavior and attitudes of both male and female parliamentarians tended to have sexist undertones.

Participation in parliament did not necessarily translate into an ability to advocate for women and push for gender sensitive legislation. **Legislating gender issues** required the strong support of the ruling party, women parliamentarians and their male counterparts. The governing political party remained the key factor in determining which laws were passed. Since women often did not occupy prominent places in the decision-making structures of their



parties, it was difficult for them to push for change and prioritize gender sensitive concerns on the party agenda. Furthermore, parliamentarians had found that a **critical mass** of women within parliament was important when it came to pushing for legislation on gender equality. Women's capacity to advocate for change was linked to the proportion of women in decision-making positions. Women often reported difficulties in pushing for gender sensitive legislation when there were just a handful of them in parliament. Women parliamentarians could also harness their influence by reaching across party lines on key gender concerns so as to ensure the greatest amount of support possible.

Ms. Al Mubarak presented ways in which traditional attitudes can affect a woman's status and participation in politics, and demonstrated the importance of equal participation of women in parliament by drawing on her experience in Kuwait. Women parliamentarians in several societies faced a plethora of challenges including limited facilities for technical or vocational training, limited employment opportunities, discriminatory laws, and, in particular, conservative **social customs and traditions**. Those challenges influenced the extent and effectiveness of women's participation in politics. Women parliamentarians often suffered as a result of conservative attitudes that did not recognize their equal standing in society and their ability to affect politics for the benefit of the society at large.

Traditional values and mores in Kuwait maintained the parliament as a male bastion, and that was only just beginning to change. An important lesson that women had learned while struggling for political representation in Kuwait was the necessity to recognize the reasons for their exclusion and know how to take advantage of potential **opportunities**. In times of political instability, when a state was typically in crisis, there was a need for restructuring. Those moments had provided an opportunity to change the status quo, and women had taken advantage of the series of parliamentary renewals, gaining enough experience and exposure to win four seats in the May 2009 elections.

Now in parliament, the women parliamentarians were strategizing as to how to use their positions of power to advocate for more change. Consideration was being given to best way to begin addressing discrimination against women, such as holistically through the implementation of a **general law** on women's economic and social empowerment, or the adoption

of amendments to existing laws in an effort to remove discrimination.

**Umbrella laws** on the status of women had the potential to address many issues at once and provide a strong foundation for mainstreaming gender and combating discrimination in the future. However, it was often very difficult to push through such holistic laws without making compromises on key provisions. Such laws risked becoming weakened by political opposition and therefore could result in ineffective tools for countering discrimination against women.

**Amendments** to existing laws had the ability to be much more detailed in their formulation and application, ensuring that loopholes were closed and protection for women strengthened. However, in societies heavily influenced by traditional values unsympathetic to women's right to political participation, there were frequently many different laws containing discriminatory components and those would all have to be amended in order to remove all barriers to women's participation. Progress was usually slow, with piecemeal and incremental gains. Those constant negotiations also risked exposing divisions between female parliamentarians, thereby undermining efforts to build and promote solidarity. There was no best practice that applied to all countries and contexts. Parliamentarians needed to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of both of options. It was, however, crucial for parliamentarians to take an active stand in the drafting process of new laws to ensure that they all contained a gendered aspect. That would prevent the need for future amendments.

Ms. Yameogo presented the experience of women in parliament in Burkina Faso, and highlighted a number of key points to be considered when discussing how to overcome the cultural and traditional barriers limiting women's participation in politics.

The **challenges** that women parliamentarians in Burkina Faso faced included physical violence and intimidation as scare tactics to dissuade women from legislating on certain issues; lack of access to key leadership posts; and a lack of support from colleagues and other women. In order to effectively increase the participation of women in parliament and ensure that they have access to key positions of power, parliamentarians needed to consider pushing for the implementation of quotas, the success of which had already been demonstrated in many contexts, or at least for the implementation of other special mea-

sures that addressed different sources of discrimination. For example, it might be necessary to implement stronger laws or enforcement mechanisms to ensure that girls and women have increased access to education and professional training. Systems should be put in place to support women in understanding the codes of behavior in politics. A budget should also be assigned to offer financial incentives to political parties to ensure that quota systems are respected.

## Plenary Debate

Participants reiterated that unwritten rules, mores and procedures were some of the biggest challenges women faced once they entered parliament. They agreed it was important for women to learn from each other about how to work within the established rules while carving out new methods and gender sensitive practices. Capacity-building programmes should emphasize solidarity and encourage women to reach across party lines to build agreement on what gender sensitive changes could be implemented. For example, parliamentary recesses could be aligned to coincide with the school holiday calendar, creating an enabling environment for parliamentarians with families.

Some participants noted that achieving a **critical mass** of women in parliament did indeed matter, but the skill sets and experience of elected representatives was also important. There was no guarantee

that attaining a certain proportion of women members of parliament would result in laws and practices that were more gender-equal. Moreover, in order for women to bring about genuine change, it was not only their number or skills that mattered, but also the positions they held in parliament and the committees on which they served. Frequently, women were strongly represented in committees dealing with social issues, such as family and education, but significantly under-represented in other committees, such as economy and foreign affairs. More women were needed in all committee assignments.

Other participants noted that to avoid the “ghettoization” of women’s issues in the legislative process, implementing **gender mainstreaming** was absolutely essential. A critical mass of women in parliament could fight against that apparent reflex to group and sideline gender issues. More women acting together could push for reforms to ensure that a gender perspective was integrated into every law, and that laws relating to gender equality were properly enforced.

Lastly, it was noted that in many countries there remained a gap between women’s *de jure* and *de facto* rights. Parliamentarians should therefore put more emphasis on the implementation and **enforcement** of key laws. Some countries had appointed ombudsmen who had an oversight role: investigating acts of discrimination against women, raising awareness about any norms or customs that may exist, and drawing particular attention to laws in need of enforcement. ■

# Challenges Faced by Women in Parliament: An Overview

**Kareen Jabre**

Manager, Gender Partnership Programme, IPU

This presentation is a brief introduction to some of the challenges faced by women in parliament, as identified by women and men parliamentarians. When women enter parliament, they face a new world with its own set of rules and procedures, one that has historically been dominated by men. Once elected to parliament women have to address a new set of challenges.

The presentation is based on the results of two surveys carried out by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The first was carried out in 2000 for the publication *Politics: Women's Insight*. Close to 200 women politicians were surveyed from 65 countries from all regions of the world. Another survey was carried out for *Equality in Politics, 2008*. This time, close to 300 men and women parliamentarians were surveyed from around 100 countries. Forty percent of those surveyed were men.

The first point that comes across very strongly when women are asked about their first perceptions of parliament concerns the very particular nature of parliamentary work and the environment that they face. Parliaments are in essence a platform where conflicts are channelled into politically negotiated solutions, and where diverging or conflicting interests are transformed into policies and legislation that is applicable to all. Work in parliament will therefore be linked to power relations which tend to predominate. These include power relations not only between political parties but also between different political sensitivities and between individual parliamentarians. The gender imbalance in terms of power relations comes into play when women enter parliament. Thus, women's first reaction is that the environment they face – the culture of parliament – is a male dominated culture.

Women respondents identified several sets of what may be called objective or subjective obstacles to their

effective contribution to the work of parliament. In IPU's survey carried out in 2000, the first set of obstacles identified principally concerned rules and practices. The first challenge identified by women was the importance of getting to know the rules and mastering the parliamentary procedures. When women come into parliament they are often unaware of how the institution functions and how to use the rules of parliament to their best advantage. These are the official rules. There are also unwritten rules and practices or areas or spheres that are not necessarily accessible to women, where decisions are taken in an informal way. These constitute another challenge to women's effective input.

Another element highlighted by women was the notion of political party manoeuvres, which women once again are unfamiliar with and need to become acquainted with. The nature of the debates was also highlighted as it tended to be confrontational and sometimes negatively targeting women's capacities. These are experiences that were shared with the IPU in the survey in 2000. It is possible that things may have altered somewhat since then.

The second set of obstacles relates to behaviour and attitudes. Many women spoke of sexist attitudes and highlighted the conservative attitudes of men parliamentarians and constituents, many of whom saw only limited public roles for women. The cultural perceptions of both the men parliamentarians and the population as a whole limit the breadth of opportunities for women parliamentarians. Another obstacle that limits women's work is the lack of awareness of women's and gender issues on the part of both parliamentarians and the general public. This lack of awareness also limits women parliamentarians' capacity to push for policies related to women's rights.

A third set of obstacles identified is relates to practical problems: how to juggle political and family

responsibilities. These remain valid once in parliament – the fact that there are no childcare support facilities, the financial limitations that women might face, which again do not facilitate their participation in parliament, and the strains on personal life that entry into politics can provoke.

The last obstacle is linked to women's self-confidence. Some women, on entering this mainly male domain, have felt challenged, that they did not have enough stamina to continue or that they needed to seek support in order to make their voice heard.

Pushing for policies linked to gender issues can also be challenging. For success to be achieved, men and women highlighted the need to have the ruling party's support as well as the support of women parliamentarians, of male parliamentarians and of civil society groups.

*When there are few women in parliament, their lobbying strength and their availability to participate in committee work is limited. . . . Women*

*parliamentarians often spread themselves too thin by taking on too many committee assignments and thus end up burdened with heavier workloads than their male counterparts.”*

—IPU, *Gender Equality in Politics*, 2008.

The number of women in parliament was also identified as a key factor in terms of pushing policies through. Women felt that if there were not enough of them in parliament, it made it even harder for them to push for policies linked to gender issues. If there are only two or three women in parliament, it is difficult for them to be on all the committees. They are spread very thin and cannot be everywhere in terms of their capacity to lobby, strategize and push within their different political parties. Thus, once again the notion of a critical mass of 30 per cent, which is seen as the mass at which women can have a significant impact, was highlighted as one of the main constraints in terms of women acting in parliament. ■

# The Role of Women: Expectations and Challenges

**Masouma Al-Mubarak**

Member of the National Assembly, Kuwait

## Introduction

The status of women in developing societies is affected by social customs, traditions, the limited facilities for technical and vocational training, limited employment opportunities and discriminatory laws. Historically, these factors have hindered efforts to integrate women into the mainstream development process of the country.

Women are forced to pay a high price for social customs and traditions, which have stronger effects than written laws. For most of the post-independence era, the role of women in society has been affected most by the lack of political commitment to improve their status. This is true in developing countries where social customs and traditions have played a major role in hampering the advancement of women. Through their roles in business, government, education, science and the arts, women are advancing their own progress and that of societies throughout the world. Educated and empowered women are vital to achieving sustainable development and democracy in all countries.

It is a fact that no society can prosper when women do not contribute to its progress. It is also true that women hold only a very small percentage of public offices, very few women are involved in politics and even fewer run for elected office. There are variations from one country to another, and many factors contribute to this, but there is common ground that this trend must be revised and that women have to help each other by sharing experiences and exchanging ideas in order to achieve this goal.

The participation of women in government and politics strengthens democracy, fuels prosperity and encourages greater tolerance. However, holding a political position is not the only form of leadership for women. Women can and should contribute their time, talents and experience in all types of profes-

sion and voluntary work, and they can play a decisive role as voters. Women are powerful as role models. Many people have been inspired by strong and determined women in their lives. One of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals directly addresses the issue: 'Women need to be politically empowered by far greater participation and greater equality has to be achieved'.

## Kuwait

Kuwait has been the centre of a vigorous women's rights movement since 1954, when a small group of courageous young women rebelled against the veil and the *Abaiya* (a traditional long black garb). On 16 May 2005 women in Kuwait were finally granted their political rights, after a battle of almost 35 years. The enfranchisement of women marks a major political milestone in the history of Kuwait. It is of huge importance in advancing women's political rights in the conservative heartland of the Arab world. In 1971, Kuwait was the first Gulf State to propose the right to vote for women, but the proposal was repeatedly rejected by parliament. The Constitution of Kuwait does not discriminate between women and men with respect to their citizenship rights, but social customs do. The courageous women who fought for their political rights were regarded as not true Muslims.

Kuwaiti women played a major role in liberating their country after Iraq's invasion in 1990 and during the ensuing war in 1991. They put up a strong resistance against occupation and struggled on every front for the safety of their country.

## The achievements of women in Kuwait

After the discovery of oil, Kuwait's transformation from a small seafaring community into a booming



economy increased the demand for an educated workforce. Education for women, which began reluctantly in 1936, has changed women's perceptions of themselves and their role in society. Kuwaiti women have formed a wide array of professional, educational and welfare associations through which they have had a direct impact on the shape of Kuwaiti society, and these have encouraged habits of active and equal participation in society.

Women make up more than 50 percent of Kuwait's population. They are active in the Kuwaiti workforce, and about 70 percent of students at university level are women. More than 85 percent of honors graduates are women. Women are no longer restricted to those jobs traditionally reserved for them, such as teaching and nursing, but hold all types of positions and profession in the public and private sectors, in the oil industry and running independent businesses. Women are represented in virtually every professional category, and they hold prominent positions. The appointment of two woman members of the Municipal Council, and shortly afterwards of the first woman Cabinet Minister, in 2005, were real breakthroughs in the struggle for gender integration in politics. These appointments marked the beginning of more active political participation by women through voting and running for parliament in the July 2007 elections.

Unexpected political developments led to early elections in June 2006. A decision to automatically register all Kuwaiti women who were eligible to vote enabled 29 women to stand for election. None of these, or of the 28 women who ran in the June 2008 elections, was elected, but the experience was a valuable one.

In March 2009 the national parliament was again dissolved and early elections took place on 16 May 2009. This time only 19 women stood for election, but four were elected, making a historic breakthrough as the first women members of the Kuwait National Assembly. This made news domestically, regionally and internationally. It was a joyful moment for those men and women who believe in democracy and equality, but not for those who were against the principle of political rights for women. A number of parliamentarians from this school of thought walked out as the first woman MP was sworn into office. This was as a sign of their disagreement with women's membership of the parliament and also because two of the women parliamentarians were not wearing a

hejab (head scarf). This negative reaction faded, at least in public, but it takes time to overcome the deep-rooted prejudices.

One of the first obstacles faced by the first women parliamentarians was running in in-house elections. My decision to stand as Deputy Speaker was a shock even for those who support women, and it was clear that no one was ready for such a move. I was fully aware of this, but wanted to put it on record that women are looking for leadership roles because they have the ability and are fully qualified. Another experience was the elections to the Parliamentary Committee for Women's Affairs. All four of the woman members of the assembly were elected, in addition to three men. I was elected the committee's Chairperson despite strong objections from two of the male committee members, who said that they would not accept a woman leading the committee. This was ironic as the committee was established to protect and further women's rights. As is noted above, change takes time.

### **The role of the Committee for Women's Affairs**

Historically, this Committee was not even on the radar screen of the National Assembly. It only succeeded in becoming so after the granting of political rights to women in May 2005. This made women voters an attractive asset to those running in elections. The first committee was established in June 2006, but the committee remains temporary. On being elected to the committee, an early suggestion was made to amend the bylaws of the parliament to include the committee among the roster of permanent parliamentary committees, thereby cementing its importance to the nation.

The main tasks of the Committee for Women's Affairs are to discuss issues related to discrimination against women, suggest amendments to discriminatory laws and improve the status of women in practice through the implementation of the principle of equal opportunity. The committee is currently studying two proposals for social and civil women's rights, as well as several proposals to amend discriminatory articles in several laws, such as the Public Housing Law, the Civil Service Law, the Passport Law, the Labour Law, the Social Security Law and the Immigration Law, which affect the stability of families comprised of Kuwaiti wives married to non-Kuwaiti husbands. A decision was made unanimously to invite all women's

associations and concerned non-governmental organizations to share with the committee their thoughts and points of view on the proposals submitted to the Committee. Fourteen bodies were invited and given copies of the proposals, and asked to submit written comments. This procedure will facilitate the tasks of the committee and better serve our constituents. The committee also succeeded in putting women's issues on the priority list of the assembly, which is comprised of 23 priorities for the session starting in October 2009.

## **The Future Role of Women**

Women are a major part of their nation, communities and families. The next generation of women will be a key factor in the effective development of the country. They have an important role to play in resolving national and grass-roots level issues and will emerge as equal partners in national development. Women should be treated as equal partners in nation-building and sustainable development, and they will accept no less.

Kuwait's Five Year Development Plan has allocated an entire programme to support and develop the role of women in society, and to incorporate them into the workforce by training 19,416 women during the timeframe of the current plan. In 2005 the Ministry of Planning stated that Millennium Development Goal number 3 (Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women) is one of the main targets to be achieved by development indicators.

Until women are fully represented in local, national and international decision-making bodies, their issues will not be priorities and the necessary resources will not be allocated. Research shows that worldwide women in legislatures give more attention than men to social issues that affect the quality of life, education, health, job opportunities, the environment and the crime rate. When women lead, their sisters, families and communities are more likely to benefit.

What will it take for the women in Kuwait not just to go to the polls, but to run for office and lead their nation? Increasing women's leadership takes more than voting rights. It is important to mobilize community support for women in governance roles. Women must seek leadership at the highest institutional levels, and appointment to both national and international bodies.

The empowerment of women means that they have an important role in preparing themselves for the responsible task of participation in political affairs. There is a need to identify their true role in the political arena. Women's participation in politics is much more than simply winning elections or nominating women candidates. The challenge that lies ahead is to supplement existing training on methods of campaigning and political strategy, awareness, the media and fund-raising, as significant segments of political training, with creating a wider social awareness in the overall population of the importance of their political duties in order to select and choose their best representatives. ■

# Is Parliament Open to Women? The Experience of Burkina Faso

**Irène Yameogo**

Member of Parliament, National Assembly,  
Burkina Faso

The year 1991 marked a return to normal constitutional order in Burkina Faso after seven years of an exceptional regime. In 1992, the parliament was established. Since then, the democratic process in our country has been following its course uninterruptedly with parliamentary elections held every five years. Thus, our country is in its fourth legislature of its fourth republic.

This presentation highlights the experience of the past 18 years of women's participation in parliament.

## Challenges: Current Trends

During the first legislature (1992–1997), the percentage of women parliamentarians in the National Assembly stood at about 3 percent. That proportion rose to 8 percent in the second legislature (1997–2002). During the third legislature (2002–2007), the proportion of women in the National Assembly climbed to 13 percent. Women account for 15 percent of members of the current legislature (2007–2012). After the World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, women's representation in parliament has progressed steadily. Nevertheless, this increase was unable to reach the critical mass of 30 percent in parliament.

## Main socio-cultural barriers

Women face several socio-cultural barriers in participating in political life. They come in several categories. Relevant studies and assessments make mention of the following:

- Distribution of work based on traditional gender roles
- Onerous burden of household chores makes it difficult to reconcile them with political and professional activities

- Lack of confidence of women in themselves
- Women's perception of the political arena
- Insufficient numbers of experienced women
- Inadequate financial means available to women.

## Main structural barriers

By ratifying international conventions, Burkina Faso has undertaken to enshrine the principle of gender equality in domestic law, abolishing all discriminatory laws, adopting appropriate legislative measures to prohibit discrimination against women, taking appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women perpetrated by a person, organization or enterprise of any kind.

However, on the structural level, between 1995 and 2008, no law intended to redress the situation had yet been passed. For a long time, the Constitution remained the principal structural barrier to the implementation of these conventions. Through the adoption on 16 April 2009 of the bill on introducing quotas in parliamentary and local elections in Burkina Faso, this barrier seems to have been overcome. The most significant structural barriers remain inadequate financial resources at the disposal of women candidates in parliamentary elections and the insufficient support provided to women candidates during election campaigns.

## The role of political parties in accessing political life

In accordance with the Electoral Code, only political parties can present candidates for municipal elections. They are therefore the ones entrusted with drawing up election lists. In this respect, they play an important role in the current situation of women in parliament. Among the causes of weak women's representation in parliament, studies have always pointed to the weak representation of women on election lists.

## Electoral Gender Quotas

The national assembly adopted on 16 April 2009 a bill on the introduction of quotas for parliamentary and local elections in Burkina Faso. This quota will be applied to the parliamentary elections in 2012.

### Electoral gender quotas and the form taken according to the Act of 16 April 2009

- On the philosophical and ethical level, “. . . the quota is considered by law as an affirmative action measure intended to enable one gender, without any distinction whatsoever, to take part in the management of public affairs via elected representatives.” (Article 2, unofficial translation).
- On the level of principles and standards to be respected, “all candidates’ lists presented by a political party or grouping of political parties, for parliamentary or local elections, must include at least 30 percent of candidates of one gender.” (Article 3). “The practical modalities for applying quotas are provided for by the Electoral Code.” (Article 4, unofficial translation).
- On the level of sanctions, the Act provides: “Any party or grouping of political parties whose lists do not respect the provisions of the present Act shall lose 50 percent of public financing for political party activities and election campaigns” (Article 5). The Act also provides that: “Each political party or grouping of political parties that has surpassed the 30 percent quota under Article 3 of the present Act shall benefit from additional financing”. (Article 6, unofficial translation).

### Can these quotas speed up women’s access to parliament?

The new law requires women constitute 30 percent quota of candidates on the lists, but does not guarantee 30 percent of seats as a result. Incentives by political parties and sanctions should speed up access for a higher number of women to parliament. However, one cannot predict the results.

### Strategies and lessons learned regarding the adoption of the Act on quotas

The strategy that led to the adoption of the Act of 16 April 2009 on quotas can be presented in five stages as follows:

1. Agreement among the associations that called for quotas following the Beijing Conference in 1995

2. Pressure was exerted on political parties. The institution of parliament was either seized of the subject or seized itself of the dossier.
3. Two ad hoc parliamentary committees were set up successively to make quota proposals:
  - The first in 2005 under the third legislature;
  - The second in 2008 under the current legislature (fourth legislature).

The working methods of these committees consisted of:

- Making use of existing documents dealing with quotas;
  - Conducting interviews with political parties, development partners and civil society to gather their views;
  - Examining the various concerns;
  - Drafting the bill and submitting it to the Bureau of the National Assembly.
4. The government’s opinion was sought on the bill pursuant to the provisions of the Constitution.
  5. The Act was passed.

With respect to lessons learned, the third stage was the most important, notably the part that included meetings with political parties. This stage was the most difficult and the most determining insofar as reconciling the views of the opposition and the ruling party was concerned in order to reach a consensus on the quota ceiling and the modalities for its implementation.

## Other Special Measures

The ad hoc committee that enabled the Act to come into being did not confine itself to drafting the bill. It also proposed accompanying measures to bolster implementation of the quotas. These include:

En masse schooling for girls;

- Strengthening the policy of positive discrimination that favours girls;
- En masse literacy for women;
- Socio-professional training of women;
- Adoption of a political code of conduct that promotes women in executive positions within political parties;
- Increasing budget allocations to the ministry with responsibility for promoting women and the min-

istry for human rights to enhance support to women in the political arena;

- Removal of financial advantages from political parties that do not respect the quota;
- Financial support to women in the top and second positions on lists;
- Sanctions on all parties that do not respect the provisions of the Act by not admitting their lists;
- Financing of profit-making activities for women;
- Financing of women's entrepreneurship.

### The role of money in politics and reform of the mode of financing election campaigns

Inadequate financial resources have been recognized as a barrier to the full participation of women in parliament. In other words, money plays a pivotal role in politics. This role was recognized by the ad hoc committee during its work of drawing up the bill. The question is taken into consideration in the proposed accompanying measures, namely:

- Increase of budget allocations to the ministry with responsibility for promoting women and the ministry for human rights in order to enhance support to women in politics;
- Withdrawal of financial benefits to political parties that do not respect the principle of providing financial support to women in the top and second places on lists;
- Imposition of sanctions on all political parties that do not respect the provisions of the Act by not admitting their lists for election;
- Financing profit-making activities that benefit women;
- Financing women's entrepreneurship.

The question is also taken into consideration in Articles 5 and 6 of the Act:

- Article 5 provides for financial sanctions against parties that do not respect the provisions of the present bill;
- Article 6 provides for a financial incentive for those parties that surpass the 30 per-cent quota and modalities for this financing.

### Other measures that political parties can take

The 30 percent quota on election lists is not the only measure that can be taken. Political parties can introduce internal quotas exceeding those set by the Act. This idea was already promoted by women's associations and organizations at the 2000 communal elections and the 2002 parliamentary elections through their lobbying and advocacy activities with political parties and the National Assembly. This sensitization has led certain political parties to promote, even before the Act on quotas was passed, internal quotas of up to 50 percent. The idea was tried and tested at the 2000 communal elections, which resulted in a very significant increase in the number of women councillors.

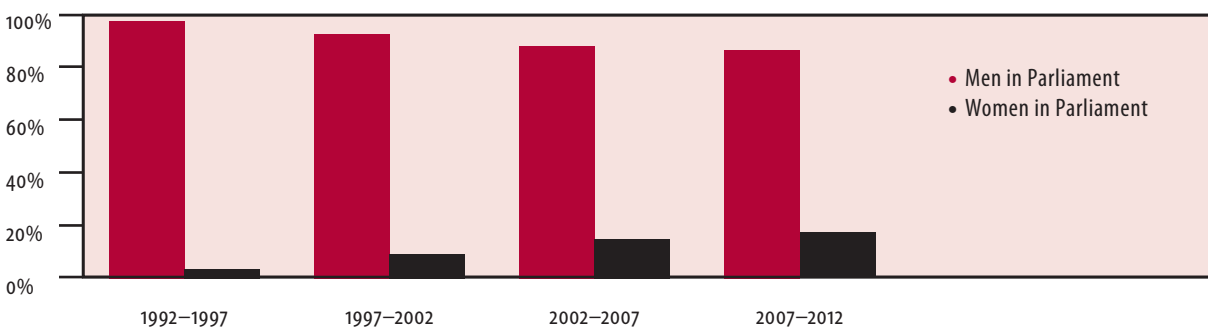
### The impact of the media

The media broadcast the activities of the Parliament, which led to the passage of the Act on quotas. Indeed, it was the National Assembly that engaged the media in this initiative. However, a communications plan should be developed to promote the election of women during election campaigns.

### Difficulties to Overcome at the National Assembly

The decline in the number of men representatives to the benefit of women owing to the voluntary policies applied by political parties to place women on

**Graph 1:** Comparison of the Proportion of Women and Men in Parliament





election lists has been evident since 1992 albeit at a slow pace. Nevertheless, parliament remains largely male-dominated (85%).

### **Traditional rules and practices of parliament that affect women's participation**

The Standing Orders of the National Assembly is *the* instrument that organizes parliamentary life. It does not contain any gender-based discriminatory provisions.

### **The importance of a critical mass of women (30%)**

To the extent that the Act has not entered its implementation phase, it is difficult to make a value judgement of the critical mass of 30 percent. However, beyond this percentage, it is the contribution in terms of ability to positively influence the country's future that should be the goal. That is why care is taken to promote not only quantity but also quality. Efforts should be made in the area of capacity-building. The question was examined by the ad hoc committee, which suggested the following accompanying measures:

- En masse schooling of girls;
- Strengthening the policy of positive discrimination in favour of women;
- En masse literacy of women;
- Socio-professional training of women;

- Sustained political and civic training of women;
- Adoption of a code of political conduct that fosters the presence of women in executive positions in political parties.

### **Legislative Work: Facilitating the Consideration of Gender Issues**

Parliament seeks to integrate women in its legislative work and implement mechanisms to better mainstream gender issues.

Women are regularly represented in the Bureau of the National Assembly and the bureaux of general committees. Measures have also been taken to include women in the delegations to regional, continental and international parliamentary events.

### **The role of committees and groups**

An Act has just been passed which allows committees and groups henceforth to undertake the following activities:

- Draw up indicators to assess implementation of each provision of the Act and accompanying measures;
- Carry out information activities on implementation of the Act and its accompanying measures;
- Question the government about implementation of the quotas. ■





**LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY OUTPUTS:  
FACILITATING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

5

# Overview and Debate

## Overview of the Session

The session examined some of the initiatives that had been taken to improve the gender sensitivity of the legislative process. It reviewed gender-mainstreaming strategies, highlighted institutional structures that had been put in place to facilitate gender mainstreaming – such as specialized committees and women’s caucuses – and provided an overview of monitoring impacts from a gender perspective.

- How are parliaments faring in terms of mainstreaming gender into their policy work and what mechanisms can be implemented to enhance gender mainstreaming?
- What role can committees and caucuses play, such as gender-based analysis and monitoring of impacts?
- What lessons learned can be drawn?

The chairperson for the session was Mr. Mohammed Affey, Member of the National Assembly and Chairperson of the Committee on Equal Opportunity, Kenya. The panelists for were Dr. Bahiya Al Jishi, Member of the Shura Council, Bahrain, and Ms. Dina Akkelidou, Member of the House of Representatives, Cyprus. Dr. Al Jishi discussed the progress made by the parliament in Bahrain and outlined some lessons on mainstreaming gender that had been learned in the process. Ms. Akkelidou presented the situation in Cyprus and discussed what lessons had been learned from the implementation of the National Plan of Action for the Equality of Men and Women.

Dr. Al Jishi explained that to assist in the mainstreaming of gender equality and promotion of the status of women, the Bahraini parliament had adopted the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Women that was overseen by the Supreme Council for Women. The Strategy served to monitor the

implementation of gender sensitive legislation and uphold the principles of the Beijing Platform for Action. The establishment of that strategy attested to the progress that had been made in the Shura Council to recognize equality between men and women. Many challenges still faced the country, and the parliament was grappling with how best to legislate on gender while retaining the support of all of society and with how to guarantee the rights and full participation of women outside the Shura Council in contexts more strongly influenced by religious and traditional values.

Nonetheless, there had been growing acceptance for the principles of gender equality and the important role that women played in politics. The presence of women in parliament had increased respect for women in all spheres, and had raised expectations of what they could accomplish as political leaders. The presence of women in parliament had also had a direct effect on the **legislation** that had been adopted and the committees that had been established, including a permanent committee on women and children established to review national laws and ensure compliance with international standards regarding the status of women and children.

One of the key lessons learned while pushing for progress was the importance of ensuring that gender issues were not amalgamated into ‘women’s blocks’ separate from mainstream discussions on social issues, but that they were presented as matters of concern for the whole of society. It was important for parliamentarians to **build alliances** with male colleagues and demonstrate the links that existed between legislation on gender equality and matters of the economy, labour market, health, and well-being of the whole society. In conservative societies, legislating on gender was often most effective when discussions on women’s rights emphasized how barriers to women’s equal

participation translated into losses for the society at large.

Ms. Akkelidou explained how the National Action Plan monitored the enforcement and implementation of gender equality measures in Cyprus. The Plan had been introduced as a comprehensive measure to address the lack of progress at the national level in significantly improving the status of women and their level of participation in public life. There were a number of lessons that could be drawn from this effort.

National Action Plans should aim to create an enabling environment for women throughout all levels of society by designing and enforcing policies that promoted the democratic principle of gender equality. Crucially, the goals of the Action Plan should reflect the goals of regional and international agreements, such as the European Roadmap for Equality and the Beijing Platform for Action.

Those plans should be comprehensive in their goals, recognizing the links that existed between education, training, civil and political rights, and participation in decision-making as equally important measures for combating discrimination and violence against women.

Action Plans were most effective when they were overseen by specialized parliamentary committees or ministries that had been established to monitor and coordinate gender-mainstreaming efforts. The role of parliament was to pass legislation and ensure that laws were effectively implemented. Action Plans should be seen as mechanisms to help parliaments in that task. Committees should be established and mandated to examine draft legislations and recommend amendments where possible. Parliamentary committees should also carry out an oversight function, ensuring compliance with national and international standards. Action Plans should be linked to those motives and it was therefore crucial that members of parliament be kept up to date with the accomplishments of the plan and the challenges it still faced. Routine progress appraisals were thus important to ensure that the appropriate measures were taken and gender mainstreaming was addressed strategically and systematically.

Action Plans should not function in isolation, but rather should be accompanied and informed by **other activities** such public debates, academic research, and training programmes which seek to regulate, inspect, and mediate on issues of gender equality. The realization of the Action Plan goals should be a priority for parliamentarians.

## Plenary Debate

In the discussion, participants noted that in order to be effective when drafting laws regarding gender equality and gender mainstreaming, it was important to have a clear idea of the needs of women and how they were affected by the laws already in place.

**Public debate** on that matter was crucial to ensure that all views were taken into consideration and draft laws had the support of the population. It was crucial to include men in the debate and in the drafting process.

For many countries, the primary challenge was the **implementation** of laws that had been passed by parliament. Some participants noted that there was a lack of political will to implement gender sensitive legislation. There were a number of measures that parliamentarians could take to ensure that laws were monitored and enforced.

The first option for enforcing implementation was to establish **national action plans** to assist parliament in its oversight function. It was important that those plans be comprehensive strategies founded on international principles and that they serve to improve implementation of gender sensitive legislation and promote the principle of gender equality.

A second option was to strengthen the role played by women's **caucuses and parliamentary committees**. Women's caucuses and parliamentary committees were effective mechanisms for addressing matters of concern, yet they were often underutilized. Caucuses and committees could be used as fora for cross-party discussion and negotiation. As such, they had the ability to unite women parliamentarians and build strong support for gender equality measures. They could also draw public attention to important issues by sponsoring debates and working closely with the media.

A third option was that of **constitutional reform**. Gender mainstreaming had often been facilitated by reforming the constitution to include explicit mention of gender equality principles. Such constitutional reforms provided a stronger basis for mainstreaming and assisting parliaments in implementing legislation quickly. Some participants noted that, although effective, undertaking constitutional reform was very complicated, time-consuming and required widespread support of women and men. In this regard, another option would be to focus on passing legislation to supplement the principle of gender equality without amending the constitution. ■



# The Role of Women Parliamentarians in Advocating for and Safeguarding Women's Rights

**Bahiya J. Aljishi**

Member of the Shura Council,  
Kingdom of Bahrain

## Introduction

The parliamentary system in Bahrain is a bicameral one in which the lower chamber, the House of Representatives, is elected by constituencies and the upper chamber, the Shura Council, is appointed by the King. In terms of the stance towards women's and gender issues in parliament, the situation in the two chambers is quite different. There is only one woman member in the House of Representatives. Although she is highly qualified and has proved her strengths, and she is capable of carrying this responsibility, alliances on women's issues face difficulties as they are subject to the views and opinions of the religious groups, which constitute the majority of the House. The concept of gender is subject to debate among religious and conservative groups, who see it as more than just equality between men and women.

The situation is different in the Shura Council as there are no religious or political groups and there is no prepared agenda to control the work of the Council. Liberal thought dominates, which helps in discussing women's and gender issues freely and without reservation. Thus, the structure of the Shura Council has led to reliance on it when it comes to discussion of issues related to women and gender. Male colleagues provide every possible support, which allows for work as a team with complementary skills. If there is any sensitivity, it is not visible and does not affect working relationships.

## The Role of Women in the Shura Council

I was first appointed to the Council in 2002 as one of the first group of four women. With the encouragement and support of my colleagues, I decided to run for the post of Second Deputy Speaker of the Council against a colleague who had been in the

Council for more than one term and was well known, while I was still new. We received an equal number of votes, which led to a ballot by lottery that went in his favour. This experience indicated the trust Council members had in women even though they did not know me well or have first-hand knowledge of my performance. They acted out of trust and a desire to enhance the role of women in the Council.

In the next legislative term another woman ran for the position of Second Deputy Speaker and was elected unanimously. As a result, a woman has had the opportunity to chair the Council on several occasions. This action was welcomed and commended by everybody in the Council and widely in the media. One of the Council's two representatives in the Arab Parliament is a woman, while both representatives from the lower chamber are men.

Chairing committees is another issue, where women have held the seat of Deputy Chair of several Committees for more than one term. I was elected Chairperson of the Services Committee, which is one of the most important committees due to its role in dealing with legislation related to issues, such as health, education, employment and housing, that concern the whole of society. I have not sensed any sensitivity in chairing my men colleagues. On the contrary, cooperation, coordination and respect have prevailed, making my mission easier. This has been reflected in the performance of the Committee.

Women were appointed to the Shura Council after the 2002 elections, in which no women candidates were elected. Out of a belief in the role of women, and as part of His Majesty's reform programme, the King appointed six women to the Shura Council. The number of women appointees was increased to 10, constituting 25 percent of the Council.

These appointments helped to place women at the heart of the Path of National Action as active partners whose opinions are respected. The presence of women in the Shura Council and their participation in its discussions reflect their ability to interact with all social issues without a need to categorize them, placing them in the right perspective in the light of the responsibilities and rights of citizenship. This gave the women members the opportunity to have a say on gender-related legislation and to achieve results that do not contradict the principle of equality, especially when it comes to discussing budget allocations to programmes aimed at women.

Hence, the role of women is represented in their efforts to gain the trust of their colleagues by adopting and regarding women's issues as social ones that have a bearing on every member of society. In this regard, they have achieved tangible successes. Women have efficiently used all the parliamentary mechanisms available to them, such as proposing laws and posing questions to ministers about matters of importance to the public.

The success of women in the Shura Council has built and enhanced trust in the abilities and capacities of women. Women were the centre of attention and found themselves under constant scrutiny in terms of their efficiency. It was a big challenge for them to prove that their performance deserved the position they occupied. The presence of women in the Shura Council raised high expectations. Consequently, it was of great importance that this experience should be a success and prove positive so that stereotypical images of women could be changed, particularly in political life, which, in turn, it was hoped would be reflected eventually by the success of women candidates in future elections.

Pioneering women who had the opportunity to reach this position were required to work on eliminating suspicions and to focus on all issues without reservation. Hence, women members announced from the beginning that they had no intention of setting up a women's bloc. They would instead like to be considered as members of the legislative authority and as citizens. On the other hand, women are more susceptible to pressures from civil society, especially women's societies which consider them to be representatives of women and exponents of their problems regardless of the wider public interest. Women in the Council are exposed to pressures to adopt issues that may not be fair even though they seem beneficial

to women. In the final analysis, such measures may contribute to undermining and minimizing the role of women in the development process and could result in turning women into an unwanted element in the labour market.

Despite all such problems, communicating with civil society occupies a large part of the agenda of women members. Communication takes the shape of inviting concerned societies to attend meetings of committees in order to obtain their views when proposed laws are being discussed. In many instances, the suggestions of civil society have been taken into consideration. No law was presented to the Council without incorporating the discussions with these societies. This happens all the time at meetings of the Services Committee because of its areas of responsibility (outlined above).

The Supreme Council for Women (SCW) is the official body responsible for women's affairs. The relationship between the Council and the SCW is built on constant consultations and cooperation, and seeking the views of the SCW on proposed laws. It is important to support the National Strategy for Empowering Bahraini Women, which was built on Beijing Declaration, and to transform its Plan of Action into legislation.

## **The Women and Children's Committee**

Women members of the Council used an article in the Bylaws that allows the formation of ad hoc committees for certain purposes to suggest the establishment of a Women and Children's Committee in the Council. It consists of men and women members and is led by a woman. The committee studies enacted laws and legislation and ensures their consistency with international Conventions and Declarations, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to ensure a fair legal status for women and children.

As a result of the Committee's efficiency and effectiveness, there have been demands to change its status into a permanent committee. It was recently suggested that it should be represented in the Bureau of the Council. The committee now has a say in all new legislation to ensure its suitability for the needs of women and children and protect them against discrimination and unfair treatment.

## Conclusion

It is worth noting that some issues attract the attention of women members not because men do not care, but because women are more able to appreciate their importance. Women parliamentarians are keen to build alliances with colleagues to change the perception of such issues from feminist issues to societal ones. In addition, many women parliamentarians in Bahrain believe that granting women more privileges is against their long term interests because these could become an obstacle for them in the labour market and a barrier to their promotion and rise to decision-making positions.

The increase in the number of women members gave them an opportunity to serve on all of the committees of the Council, such as the Environment, Legislative, Economic and Foreign Affairs committees, where they have a major role to play and their opinions are taken into consideration, and to participate in the general discussions of the Council, where their views are highly respected. Women members have been working as a team to:

- Coordinate with bodies concerned with issues under discussion;
- Study the experience and laws of other nations to benefit from their expertise;
- Seek expertise from international agencies; and
- Invite experts and legal advisers to participate in the discussions of Committees.

As Chairperson of the Services Committee, I am fortunate to work with a group of active and dedicated men and women members. This has helped to a great extent in drafting laws and providing our input and views. Nevertheless, we have always de-

bated the pros and cons of the privileges given to women, especially in the Labour Law regarding issues of leave and working hours. We have also had our differences about early retirement schemes for women. I personally regard it as a waste of the energies of women at an age of maturity and experience and above all an obstacle in the way of women reaching higher positions in their careers. Unfortunately, many women in the community regarded this as a setback in our work and a bias against women. They raised the slogan of “Women against Women”, not realizing the rationale behind our stance which took a lot of effort and time to explain.

We also have to confront religious attitudes that require the implementation of Sharia, and its interpretation, in all legislation. We do not want to consider women as fragile creatures but as human beings who have rights and duties. We intend to establish the concept that women are concerned with all legislation. The Family Law, for example, does not concern women and children alone but the whole family and ultimately all of society.

The question remains how to identify the best means to guarantee the full participation of women in activating legislation and making democracy a tangible reality, and how to work to avoid the segregation of issues related to women from the mainstream of society in order to avoid contradictions and without contravening the concept of democracy. Thus, in our work we do not seek to legislate special laws for women, but instead to build a legal system that is fair and can safeguard women’s rights.

I paint a rosy picture of Bahrain’s legislative system. The picture in the lower chamber is quite different. There, a lone woman faces the many obstacles that are common to many parliaments. ■

# Gender Mainstreaming in Parliament: Experience from Cyprus

**Dina Akkelidou**

Member of Parliament and Chairperson of the House Standing Committee  
on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, Cyprus

This paper presents the situation in Cyprus with respect to gender mainstreaming. It focuses on the work of the Standing Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women of the House of Representatives and its contribution to introducing a gender perspective in parliament and overseeing government activities.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are issues of general concern. They are among the major challenges that the world faces today. In the Republic of Cyprus, the principle of equal treatment and the prohibition of any form of discrimination, direct or indirect, against any person on the ground of gender are safeguarded by article 28 of the Constitution.

Moreover, Cyprus has ratified all the international and regional (European) human rights conventions, including those on gender equality and, most importantly, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (ratified by Law 78/1985), which has been instrumental in promoting gender equality in Cyprus. At the national level, CEDAW provides the basis for government policies on the legal transposition and implementation of measures to advance the status of women and achieve greater equality between men and women.

Since its establishment in June 2006, the Standing Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women has contributed to the enactment of a significant amount of national legislation. The Committee's field of competence covers the status of women and gender equality issues that fall within the competence of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, as well as questions relating thereto that fall within the realm of other ministries, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, and even questions that may be looked into by other committees due to their multifaceted nature, such as questions of human rights that specifically affect gender

equality. The committee's mandate entails the exercise of parliamentary scrutiny of government policies through the examination of draft legislation and budgets and through the discussion of relevant issues at the committee's own initiative. In terms of parliamentary oversight, the committee also supervises compliance with relevant national and international standards and makes relevant recommendations to the government with respect to gender equality and the elimination of all forms of gender discrimination, except, due to a constitutional restriction, in cases where any such recommendation might cause an increase in public expenditure.

The committee cannot examine individual complaints per se but, should a written complaint reach it, it may transmit it to the appropriate authorities or, if the complaint constitutes a question of wider interest, the committee may hold a discussion on its own initiative or even have questions asked by committee members addressed to the competent ministry or ministries. The committee is in close cooperation with the Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman), who keeps the committee regularly informed of her decisions and, at the invitation of the committee, participates in exchanges of views.

The dissemination of information on the committee's work to the public may take the form of press releases or statements to the press by the Chair or individual members. Additionally, the committee may participate in public discussions regarding issues of wider interest in the press or on radio or television. The committee's discussions on the status of women or gender equality may include exchanges with non-governmental organizations, and exchanges with its counterparts from other countries, the EU or international parliamentary organizations as well as participation in specialized conferences at home and abroad.

The committee's work has intensified since the accession of Cyprus to the European Union (EU), as has the enactment of relevant legislation. The Treaties of the European Union and EU Regulations contain explicit provisions for the safeguarding of full equality between men and women. These have supremacy over national law and have direct effect in Cyprus. Cyprus has had to transpose and successfully implement numerous EU Directives in its legal system, which emphasize equal pay for work of equal value, equal access to employment, equal conditions at work, special protection for pregnant and breastfeeding women and the provision of certain social security benefits.

The principle of equality between men and women is legally protected in Cyprus and, at the same time, is no longer a political issue. Government policy and its vision is indisputably aimed at promoting real gender equality in all areas and at all levels. The legal framework is there and it is binding at both the national and the international level. There are also mechanisms and institutions at the national level for coordination and monitoring, as well as instruments at the international level for supervision and implementation purposes. The critical question now is how to transform the existing legislative and institutional norms into practice: how to translate rhetoric into action.

There is now an increased understanding of the need to systematically take the gender element into account in major strategy discussions and parliamentary debates. This is a key development which has generated positive outcomes. For example, a more gender-responsive budget has already been proposed, although there is still room for improvement. Resources have been allocated to different gender-mainstreaming activities, responding to women's particular and diverse needs, including free breast and cervical cancer testing for all women, training programmes for working women, encouraging women's businesses and funding research into issues of special interest to women on a more systematic basis.

Unquestionably, the accession of Cyprus to the EU and the clear guiding principles on gender equality, together with the political will to respond to our binding commitments, have led to significant change at the legislative, administrative and societal levels. Nonetheless, despite these positive steps forward and major and constructive developments, significant gaps between the legal framework and practical measures

persist. We have not succeeded in allowing gender equality to be infused into society to the desired level. It is evident and statistically proved that the involvement and participation of women in public life, especially in decision-making processes and high-level positions, are particularly restricted.

In the light of this reality, and in order to promote genuine equality between men and women in all sectors of public and social life and therefore contribute to the successful enforcement of existing legal frameworks, the National Action Plan of the Equality of Men and Women, 2007–2013, was prepared. This plan constitutes a national initiative for integrating gender-mainstreaming policies in all areas of activity. Its screening and implementation have been among the priorities of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women.

The National Action Plan fully and directly reflects the spirit of the Beijing Declaration. At its core is the modernization of social models and the optimal use of human resources, irrespective of gender, coupled with the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. The National Action Plan includes objectives, activities and organs that will lead to action in six pivotal areas, as well as mechanisms for the realization and monitoring of the plan and its financing. The pivotal activities of the Plan are:

1. The promotion of the equality of men and women in employment and vocational training;
2. The promotion of the equality of men and women in education, science and research;
3. The promotion of equal participation by and representation of men and women in the political, social and financial sectors;
4. The combating of all forms of violence against women, including trafficking;
5. The promotion of equal access to and equal implementation of civil rights for men and women;
6. Changes to social stereotypes and the shaping of a collective social consciousness for the benefit of women.

In September 2009, during one of the weekly sittings of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, committee members were briefed on the current status of and recent developments in the Plan by a representative of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order. They were also informed of the government's intention to establish a Permanent



Ministerial Committee on gender equality. The findings of an interim report on the progress achieved through the National Action Plan will be prepared and presented by an independent body in the course of 2010.

Questions remain over why transformation on the ground is so time-consuming. There have undoubtedly been positive developments in the legal and institutional frameworks, but a snowball effect has not occurred. Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is now more than ever a necessity. It is not just vital for women themselves, but also crucial for the effective development of society in all fields.

To this end, routine appraisals of implementation mechanisms and the progress achieved must be at the core of our efforts. The role of national parliaments can be decisive in supporting efforts that seek to regulate, inspect and mediate in gender-related issues. A gender-sensitive democracy, deeply rooted

in the political culture of the people, is the safest way to ensure societal stability and prosperity. This makes it of paramount importance to create an enabling environment and design and enforce policies that promote a culture of democracy and peace in education systems as well as all social and political structures and processes.

While continuing to work on the policies and measures initiated in the recent years, the starting point for a new era in gender equality issues should be the younger generation. If tomorrow's adults can be raised with gender awareness and sensitivity, the rest will follow. Education is the keyword. Families and schools are the core of a new society that must take shape gradually but definitively and without delay. This should be taken not as a 'back to square one' approach, but as a reinterpretation of an old and successful recipe or as 'relearning the alphabet with new methods'. ■





**GENDER SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS**

6

# Overview and Debate

## Overview of the Session

A gender sensitive parliament was one that responded to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and work. The session identified which changes could be made, or facilities introduced, to ensure that parliaments were responsive to the needs of women and men.

- What changes to the rules and practices of parliaments can be made to make them more gender-sensitive and family-friendly?
- How can barriers to women's full participation in parliament be removed?
- What reforms have been adopted to 'modernize' parliaments, such as adopting a gender action plan, changing sitting times or introducing childcare facilities?
- What benchmarks can be identified to measure the gender sensitivity of parliaments?

The chairperson for this session was Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Vice President of the National Council of Namibia. The panelists were Ms. Julie Ballington, Programme Specialist, Gender Partnership Programme, IPU; Ms. Hillevi Engström, Member of the Riksdag, Sweden, and Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams. Ms. Ballington presented the concept of a 'gender sensitive parliament', and outlined the results of an IPU research survey on the issue. Ms. Engström detailed some of the reforms that had been made in Sweden to modernize the national parliament and make it more gender sensitive. Ms. Williams then presented her personal experience as a member of parliament and presented recommendations on how parliamentarians could help overcome barriers to women's full participation.

Ms. Ballington explained that a '**gender sensitive parliament**' is one that responded to the needs and

interests of both men and women in its structures, organization and operations, and mainstreamed gender concerns into its work as a nation's peak legislative institution. The sensitivity of a parliament towards gender concerns could be examined in several areas: its effectiveness at gender mainstreaming, its operational procedures and its institutional culture.

**Gender mainstreaming** concerned the ability of parliament to use mechanisms (such as parliamentary committees, caucuses, ombudsmen, gender budgeting and external experts) effectively to mainstream gender in policy development and the work of parliament. Emphasis was put on the operational procedures and working arrangements of parliament as a measure of sensitivity as parliaments were workplaces that had been traditionally dominated by men, and where work obligations were often prioritized over family responsibilities. This was demonstrated by the long-held traditions regarding timetabling and the timing of debates and hearings which were often held at peak family times, such as weekends or evenings. Lastly, the institutional culture was measured by the influence that unwritten rules or norms which traditionally stem from male-dominated structures had on the functioning of parliament. Some of the issues included the existence of 'old boys' networks', mock belligerence and confrontations.

The increasing presence of women in parliament had started to influence certain ways in which parliaments functioned, most noticeably in the lessening of aggressive language and behavior and in the introduction of new rules on parental leave. Nonetheless, crucial components such as parliamentary sitting times remained relatively unchanged despite the difficulties both men and women parliamentarians faced in balancing their family and political commitments.

Ms. Engström explained that reforming parliaments to bring them up to date with the requirements

of men and women was a complicated process and continuous work in progress. In Sweden, survey research had been undertaken to garner the perspectives of parliamentarians on the treatment of women and men, which was a good tool for identifying priority areas to be addressed in parliament. The survey went beyond quantitative measures to focus on qualitative factors, such as the nature of discrimination (for instance operational, behavioral, or structural) and the many forms in which it could be manifested (such as abuse, exclusion, or ridicule).

A working group had been established to follow up the findings of the survey research. The survey report formed the basis of an action plan which specified 15 proposals that parliamentarians should consider in order to address the concerns of their colleagues and work towards gender equality in parliament.

Some of the reforms that Sweden had implemented to make parliament more family-friendly included the provision of subsidized childcare facilities, the possibility to take parental leave without resigning, and a standardization of rules regarding working hours and sick-days to bring them closer to the rules guiding the rest of the workforce. It had taken a number of years and dedicated political will to implement those reforms.

Ms. Mensah-Williams noted that there was often pressure on female parliamentarians to conform to ideas of male political leadership, or else risk being sidelined. Although it was daunting for many women parliamentarians to fight against their own colleagues

and risk exclusion and ridicule, this was an important battle to undertake, as every success served to bolster future opportunities. The perseverance of women in the Namibian parliament, for example, had helped engender the topic of debates and the language used during sessions; introduce laws and motions to address traditionally taboo issues of domestic violence and marital rape, and gain financing for outreach programmes to combat urgent problems such as trafficking of women.

Ms. Mensah-Williams noted that it took courage to stand up and confront traditional ideas of women's role in society, yet women parliamentarians should be encouraged to do so and to invent imaginative solutions that challenge the legitimacy of discriminatory attitudes in the practice of politics. The aim of creating a gender sensitive parliament should be to sensitize men and ensure that they acknowledged and were responsive to factors affecting the status of women.

## Plenary debate

In the debate it was noted that change required, first and foremost, the confidence of women to stand up for their rights and coordinate efforts so as to affect change and **initiate reform**. Examples of good practice existed, for instance the revision of parliamentary sitting times, which had served to contribute to a more family-friendly work environment. Those types of reforms should be tested and emulated in different parliaments.

### Attributes of Gender Sensitive Parliaments

#### Gender mainstreaming

Policy development, mechanisms to promote women's input e.g. committees and caucuses

1

#### Parliamentary working arrangements

##### *Operations*

Parliamentary facilities, sitting times, budget allocations and services

##### *Institutional culture*

Refers to the unwritten rules, norms and mores

2

### Components of gender sensitive parliaments



National plans, strategies and policies had been demonstrated to be effective in raising awareness about issues of discrimination and presenting possible solutions for addressing them. Those plans should be focused on monitoring legislation enforcement, such as quotas, and codes of practice that assisted women in overcoming barriers to their full and effective participation. Parliamentarians were reminded that that required **political commitment** to the advancement of women in politics, and efforts should constantly be made to ensure that will existed. Women who held leadership positions in parliament had a responsibility to use their power to encourage change.

The **media** could be a very effective tool for mobilizing public opinion and encouraging members of government to take action. It was important to listen closely to the will of the electorate, both men and women, and prioritize legislation based on its need, effectiveness and feasibility.

### **IPU Strategy: Parliaments Take Action on Violence against Women**

In 2006, IPU Member Parliaments committed themselves to fighting violence against women by adopting a resolution on “How parliaments can and must promote effective ways of combating violence against women in all fields”. The IPU strategy for taking action on violence against women, launched in 2008, was a direct follow-up to that pledge.

Recognizing that violence against women and girls remained the most widespread human rights violation, threatening the rights, health, quality of life, and the very life of women, irrespective of their location,

### **Take Action on Violence Against Women**

The IPU strategy for combating violence against women seeks to support the work of parliaments and their members by:

- Building and strengthening partnerships between parliaments and civil society
- Organizing regional and national seminars
- Providing technical assistance for parliaments on violence against women and children
- Mobilization participation in public activities and campaigns.
- Produce websites and campaign materials to assist parliaments in spreading awareness
- <http://www.ipu.org/VAW/>

nationality, age or social status, the IPU launched a campaign and a programme of work to support parliaments in their efforts to end all forms of violence against women.

The IPU strategy sought to drive change by building on parliaments’ and parliamentarians’ political leadership at the international, regional and national levels. Parliaments were mandated to enact laws to address and punish violence against women; they therefore played a very crucial role in combating all forms of violence. To assist them in this objective, the IPU strategy outlined measures for constructing strong legal frameworks, securing effective implementation of legislation, and reinforcing awareness and visibility of the dangers that many women face. Some of those measures included the organization of regional and national seminars; provision of technical assistance for parliaments on violence against women; production of website and campaign material; and mobilization of participants for public activities and campaigns. ■

# Women in the House in Namibia

**Margaret Mensah-Williams**

Vice-President of the National Council, Namibia

I became a member of parliament many years ago when I was elected to the National Council, which is the upper house in the Namibian bicameral system. I was nominated with only two other women and was then elected Deputy Speaker. At the time, this was historic as no woman had been Speaker or Deputy Speaker before. Needless to say, the men were not very happy but they kept quiet.

When I was elected Deputy Speaker nobody told me that I would have to preside the next day. Until the day I was sworn in, I had not even seen the inside of the parliament building. I had gone to the staff members to ask for a copy of the rules and procedures. While I was in the tabling office, one of the staff members said, “By the way, you do know that you have to preside tomorrow?”

I took the rules. I read them and internalized them. I sat in front of the mirror the whole night and I practised presiding for the next day: what to say, what to do, how to give the floor, and so on. The next morning as I entered the chamber I could see many people thinking: “Today we are going to show her that women do not make it”. When I was called to preside, everything went smoothly. At the end, someone asked me, “How did you know how to do that?”. I said, “Well, women are born leaders.” He never suspected that I had not slept the night before, but I would not tell him. I had to do this for the women and the girls in the Republic of Namibia, and for women all over the world.

I hate that when it comes to women, people say “we need a competent woman”, but when it comes to men it seems that they do not need to be competent. There are also gender-sensitive men, however, and I am very happy that it was such a man who proposed me as Deputy Speaker. Today there are women deputy presiding officers in both houses of parliament. There are also more women parliamen-

tarians. However, there are still unwritten rules. You do not speak before the men. You should not take a handbag into the chamber – but I carry my bag and I think my body language tells people that they should not try to ask me to leave my bag outside.

We do not need to behave like men. We should still behave in a fair way. Gender-sensitive parliaments need to vent gender issues as a means to make men more gender-sensitive as we go along. According to my observations, things changed in parliament when women arrived. The type of debate changed. Women have produced more people-centred motions because women have emotional intelligence. The quality of the debate has also changed. The way the men speak has changed: they used to say “he, he, he”, but whenever someone said “he”, we said “or she” until it became a refrain in their minds and men started saying “he or she”. In a way that does not offend, you make men aware that there are women in the house. I do not know how they cannot see it because women are beautiful flowers in addition to having brains. The laws have also changed: there are now the Married Persons Equality Act, the Rape Act, the Domestic Violence Act and the Maintenance Act.

## Women in the House Rulings in the House

As Deputy Speaker, whenever I am presiding I give preference to women to enable them to speak first. The men did not like this but later became used to it. I would do this because men would give the floor to other men. When women spoke they would be heckled, so we started to heckle back. Knowing the written rules gives you an advantage. You simply pick your rules and say that no member may interrupt unless the member has indicated under which rule

he or she is doing so. In this way, the men have started to listen to women.

### **Mainstreaming gender issues in parliament**

We now have a gender-sensitive budget. We provided gender budget training to all members of the National Council, and the men apparently enjoyed it much more than the women. Now they are all gender-sensitive. There is also a tenders committee.

### **Outreach**

The women parliamentarians have started an outreach programme to take the laws that we have passed to the people. We exchange ideas with the people to see whether the laws are working. We educate women on all of the new laws mentioned above. The issue of trafficking, especially human trafficking, is well covered by the media. We have started to establish a rapport with the media.

### **Solidarity**

Solidarity is very important for women because we have children and we have families. It is very important to value yourself first and foremost, to know your stance in life and to have a passion for what you do. This educates your family to be gender-sensitive. Because we are saying this outside, at home we must not speak a different language. We must not allow the boys to play soccer while the girls clean the kitchen.

I have started to interact with a youth group on Facebook. Everybody laughed when they saw me on Facebook, but in this way I can educate the youth on what a gender-sensitive budget means, what education for everybody means, what access means, what parliament is and the right of women to be part of decision-making. I think that this has increased support for women's roles in the future and for the girls. In my family, there is a belief that women are the best constituents of each other. These are some of the ways that I seek to support women. ■

# Gender Sensitive Parliaments

**Julie Ballington**

Programme Specialist, Gender Partnership Programme,  
Inter-Parliamentary Union

## Introduction

Since the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, there has been much emphasis placed on women's access to parliaments, and how to increase the numbers of women elected. There has been some research into the effectiveness and influence of women in parliaments too, but less attention has been paid to the gendered nature of political institutions, particularly parliaments, how they function in practice, and how they are indeed 'gendered' institutions.

For the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a gender sensitive parliament is one that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, organization and operations, and mainstreams gender concerns into its work as a nation's principal legislative institution. This paper examines the concept of a gender sensitive parliament and outlines some reforms that can be undertaken to make parliaments more responsive to the needs of women and men.

The IPU has undertaken research in this area, and is seeking in particular to identify the most important requirements for a gender sensitive parliament. In 2008, the IPU published the results of a research survey of some 300 parliamentarians on gender equality in politics.<sup>1</sup> In the survey, parliamentarians were asked to identify what they believed to be the most influential factors in shaping a more gender sensitive parliamentary agenda and for ensuring that the views and concerns of women are reflected in policymaking and the work of parliament. The respondents highlighted the following areas as key:

1. The support of the ruling party in parliament;
2. The work of parliamentary committees, including committees that specialize in gender equality and the status of women;

3. The work done by women's parliamentary caucuses, which are cross-party networks of women;
4. New rules established for the functioning of parliament.

## Defining a gender sensitive parliament

There are at least two components of a gender sensitive parliament. The first concerns the ability of parliament to **mainstream gender** into policy development and its general work. Different mechanisms can be established to support mainstreaming, such as parliamentary committees and caucuses of women parliamentarians, or the use of gender budgeting. In addition, such activities as the use of gender experts and gender disaggregated data are important.

The second component is a parliament's operational and institutional culture, which we term parliamentary working arrangements. The **operational culture** of parliament can be reflected in different ways, such as in the organization of parliamentary facilities, its sitting times and budget allocations and the services available. **Institutional culture** refers to the unwritten rules, norms and mores that have been adopted over time and stem from institutions that were primarily designed by men. This paper focuses on institutional culture, which is little researched and of which there are very few examples of good practice.

## Working Arrangements

In terms of parliamentary working arrangements, the starting point is that parliaments are workplaces that have primarily been shaped by men. They are organizations that follow long-held traditions, includ-

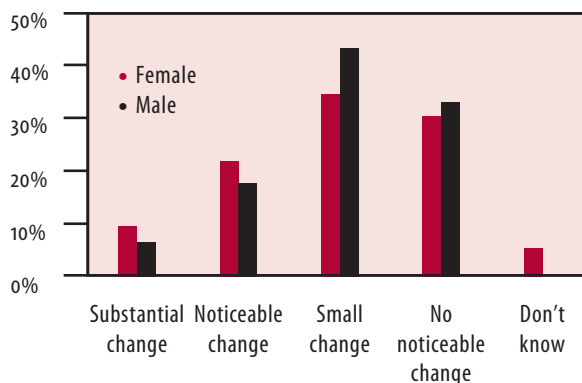
ing the timetable of sitting days and the timing of debates and hearings. Parliamentary cultures often emphasize a club-like atmosphere where work inside the building is to be prioritized over other responsibilities. In many cases these priorities and patterns date back to the years before women gained access to parliaments.

Survey respondents were asked whether a gentlemen's club or old boy network dominated in their parliament. The results showed that women were far more likely to see evidence of a gentlemen's club than male parliamentarians. This can go beyond just networks of men, and be felt in the language used and in dress codes. Some women parliamentarians reported that discriminatory practices still exist in their parliaments, such as not being allowed to take their handbags into the chamber or being prevented from wearing trousers. Others report that one feature of parliamentary life that potentially alienates women from the process is the language used in parliaments, and the often confrontational approach taken in the chamber.

For parliaments to evolve into gender sensitive environments, different aspects of the organization of parliamentary work need to be reorganized and updated to accommodate the needs of both men and women. One might assume that as women enter parliaments in greater numbers, parliaments will evolve into more gender sensitive institutions. Unfortunately, the results of the 2008 IPU survey show this not to be the case.

Survey respondents were asked whether the presence of women had brought about a change in the rules and practices of parliament. The results, which are broken down by the sex of the respondents in Figure 1, are disappointing. Only eight percent of respondents believed that there had been a 'substantial change' brought about by the increase in the number of women, while 20 percent believed there had been a 'noticeable change' – with a higher concentration in Europe and Africa. Nearly 40 percent believed there had been a 'small change' and 31 percent had noted no 'noticeable change.' Although there have been sporadic attempts to modernize some parliaments, by and large it is evident that 'adding women' to parliament is not enough – much more needs to be done to improve the gender sensitivity of parliaments by changing cultural mores and modernizing operational arrangements.

**Figure 1:** Rules and practices have changed with an increase in the number of women



The survey respondents were also asked to identify among the changes evident as a result of there being more women in parliament, which they felt the most. Table 1 indicates that, overall, both men and women believed that women's presence had been most influential in bringing about a change in parliamentary language, and slightly less instrumental in introducing parental leave provisions for parliamentarians.

Significantly, parliamentarians reported the least change in the sitting hours of parliament. The issue of sitting hours is important because the survey also asked whether parliamentarians had difficulty in balancing their family and political commitments. The response was that half the women respondents and 40 percent of the male respondents admitted that they did face such difficulties. This illustrates a systemic problem that affects both men and women, and that innovative practices need to be considered by parliamentarians in order to enable them to be more responsive to the needs of their fellow members. So what changes could parliaments consider to institute "family friendly" gender sensitive reforms?

### Sitting times

In terms of changes to sitting times, a few parliaments have made improvements. Women parliamentarians are more likely to feel that parliamentarians should work similar hours to other professions, that the working week should be shorter and that night sittings should be discontinued.

In South Africa, for instance, the parliamentary calendar has been reorganized to match the school calendar so that parliamentarians are either in recess or have constituency time when students are on vacation. Debates finish much earlier in the evening to



**Table 1:** Changes resulting from women’s participation in parliament

Parliamentary language and behaviour is less aggressive.	2.5
Maternity/paternity leave provisions for parliamentarians have been introduced.	2.3
More training opportunities are provided.	2.1
The rules and practices of parliament have changed.	2.0
Childcare facilities have been introduced.	2.0
Dress codes take into account the needs of women and men.	1.9
The sitting hours of parliament have changed to take into account the needs of women and men.	1.7

The score indicates the average level of activity that respondents attached to each of the policy areas on a four-point scale, where a great deal was scored as 4, noticeable change as 3, small change as 2 and no noticeable change as 1.

accommodate parliamentarians with families, and childcare facilities have been put in place. In Australia, the sitting hours of the House of Representatives used to be distinctly family unfriendly. The hours were amended in 2003 to ensure the House rose no later than 9.30 p.m. – instead of 11 p.m.

## Childcare

Changes such as providing on-site childcare or revising parental leave provisions could be considered to help both men and women parliamentarians balance their family responsibilities. The provision of childcare facilities is important as it provides further flexibility for parliamentarians, especially when parliament is located far from home constituencies. One study finds that “of all the possible work place innovations, few make a stronger statement about family-friendly practices than having childcare facilities paid for and arranged by the institution.”<sup>2</sup> Some survey respondents highlighted the role of parliament in setting an example for other public and private sector workplaces. As a woman respondent from Saint Lucia noted: “I believe that parliament must lead by example in setting up day care places for women parliamentarians so that while they are dealing with the business of running the country they can feel secure that their children are safe. This can also work well for the men who can also assist their wives in taking care of the children. This can be extended to all public offices so as to encourage and increase productivity.”

## Conclusion

If they approach it at all, legislatures usually approach the issue of gender sensitive parliaments by introducing piecemeal mechanisms for improvement. The survey notes that removing the barriers to women’s participation is crucial for creating gender friendly parliaments that respond to the needs and interests of both men and women. Creating a gender sensitive parliament includes the creation of a working environment that is family friendly and free of harassment and violence. It also requires the evolution of a new institutional culture with language and practices that encourage the best in both men and women. Such changes could usefully be measured by undertaking institutional performance reviews of parliaments using benchmarks and performance indicators. The IPU is continuing its research into and development of indicators on gender sensitive parliaments, and further information is available at [www.gender-parliaments.org](http://www.gender-parliaments.org). ■

## Endnotes

- 1 IPU, Julie Ballington, 2008. *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliament*, IPU: Geneva.
- 2 Colleen Lowe Morna (ed.), 2004. *Ringing up the Changes: Gender in Southern African Politics*, Gender Links, Johannesburg.

# Gender Sensitive Parliaments: The Swedish Experience

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There is no quick fix for gender questions. They have no easy solutions and our various parliaments have to tackle them in circumstances that are often quite different. Nor is it an issue that can be dealt with as a project, with a clear beginning and a clear end. It is in fact a process that must proceed continuously and eventually be integrated into the ordinary work of a parliament. Gender equality efforts must be kept up constantly in parliament, in the family and in the workplace. A younger generation is not automatically more aware of gender equality than an older one. On the contrary, it can be the case that the more experience you have of life, the more aware you become.

It is also important to state clearly that a gender-sensitive parliament is not primarily a women's issue. It is an issue for both men and women, in which solutions must be sought in cooperation and understanding so that both men and women are able to combine family life and responsibilities, such as those of a member of parliament. This is not a women's issue, but an important issue for women. Ultimately, gender equality is a question of human rights.

The Swedish Parliament has 349 members. The balance between men and women is almost 50:50. Some parties have adopted a type of quota system – a 'take-it-in-turns' procedure that is also known as a zipper system or a zebra system. Other parties have adopted other solutions. This is up to each individual party. There is no legislation regulating the proportion of women to men in parliament.

The proportion of men in parliament across the world is 82 percent. This is, of course, quite unacceptable. It is ultimately an unresolved question of democracy. In Sweden there is strong external pressure on political parties to take responsibility for gender equality and women's opportunities, in both society and politics. Media scrutiny and the work being done by the women's movement are particularly

important factors. Nothing will happen if you rely on chance. Few people will share their power unless they have to.

It is not only the proportion of women that is important but also the position of women and men in politics. Is there an even distribution in different policy areas? Do women and men have equal power and influence? Is there an even gender distribution between the Chairs of the various parliamentary bodies?

Sweden passed its first gender equality legislation in 1980. This only applied to workplaces, but one of the ideas contained in the Act's preparatory materials was that if women obtained a better position in the workplace, this would lead to better opportunities in the rest of society.

Around 1999, the Swedish Parliament opened a kind of daycare centre where parliamentarians can leave their children for longer or shorter periods of time. The service is subsidized but not free. It also has important symbolic value as proof that the Swedish Parliament is making a real effort to allow everybody to serve as a member, including the parents of young children. Members, both men and women, have the option to take parental leave, in which case a substitute from their constituency can deputize for them. Parents are also eligible for time off to care for sick children, with the same conditions as employees in Sweden.

Around 1994, the Speaker at the time, Birgitta Dahl, initiated a discussion about how to make the best use of the high level of women's representation. The Speaker's Women's Network was set up and held breakfast meetings and seminars for parliamentarians and employees. These activities were continued by the next Speaker, Björn von Sydow. In the autumn of 2003, the Network published a document raising questions under the heading *A Gender-equal Working Environment in the Swedish Parliament*. These questions were also raised in Private Members' Motions.

It is commonly said that crises are important for development, and this is what happened in 2004. One of Sweden's largest newspapers, *Svenska Dagbladet*, sent a comprehensive questionnaire to all women parliamentarians. It was completed by 155 out of the 158. With very few exceptions, the women declared that the male power structure in the Swedish Parliament influenced its work. Women found it more difficult to reach senior posts, and the most prestigious positions went to men. Many respondents (97, or 62 percent) stated that they had received worse treatment purely because they were women. Examples included a number of the techniques of domination or negative control observed by Berit Ås, a Norwegian researcher and former member of parliament: (a) invisibility, those who are not seen or shown interest feel insignificant and insecure; (b) ridicule, people made to feel embarrassed, ashamed and uninteresting; (c) exclusion from information or 'being left out of the loop'; (d) imposition of guilt and shame, if you feel systematically inferior it is easy to feel guilt and shame; and (e) double punishment, 'damned if you do, damned if you don't', that is, women being criticized for not giving priority to their children while at the same time being criticized for not giving priority to their political duties. The newspaper article and the questionnaire gave extra impetus to the work in parliament. There was a lot of media publicity.

In 2005, in-depth interviews were conducted with a randomly selected group of parliamentarians – both female and male. The results were compiled and a seminar was held on the basis of the study. This became an element in the gender equality programme adopted by the Riksdag Board. Many people considered that men in the Riksdag find it easier to reach positions of power, and that there are visible and invisible male structures supporting men. By contrast, women are shown lower levels of tolerance, make higher demands of their surroundings and themselves, find it harder to be seen and to get attention, find that age is used against them to a greater extent, and lack the established network contacts that give a person authority, power and influence. Most respondents, both men and women, experienced difficulties in combining the duties of a parliamentarian with parenthood and a family. Parliamentary duties require a family's total support.

A working group of officials was tasked with drafting a document. This resulted in the report *15 Proposals for Gender Equality in the Riksdag*. A major line of thinking in the report is that parliament as an

institution should work methodically and continuously with such issues. The Riksdag Board should lay down a gender equality programme for each electoral period. The objective is to promote gender equality in the Riksdag primarily in relation to qualitative aspects, which means that men and women parliamentarians must have the same material conditions for performing their duties.

The programme must be reported on and followed up. According to the proposal, the Secretary General of the Riksdag should have primary responsibility for the Gender Equality Programme. It is important that responsibilities are clearly designated, that those responsible have both the power and the opportunity to make real decisions, and that resources are made available for the work. Once again, it must be emphasized that there are no quick fixes.

After the 2006 election, the new Speaker, Per Westerberg, set up a reference group for gender equality issues with a member of each Riksdag party. All seven of the people in the group are women. Perhaps this fact in itself demonstrates that we need more men who have both knowledge and commitment.

An action programme has been drawn up for the electoral period 2006 to 2010. This programme has an institutional part, a part relating to ongoing efforts and a part that specifies more detailed measures. The measures include: the production of in-depth gender equality statistics; internal research in the Swedish Parliament containing consequence analyses with regard to gender equality; ongoing monitoring of research in the policy area; and a gender equality conference, within the framework of the Swedish Presidency of the European Union, held in Stockholm in November 2009.

The Swedish experience demonstrates that there is still much room for improvement, but that there has also been some progress. Women are here to stay. Improvements and developments in this area are both necessary and possible, but an explicit strategy is required. Individuals with a clear mandate must be responsible for implementing the strategy, and resources must be made available.

Regardless of the measures undertaken, attitudes are what matter. Common sense and good judgment cannot be instilled by way of legislation or created in action plans. It is also important that people in leading positions want to take a principled stand and are capable of doing so. It is crucial that the Speaker, the party leaderships and other influential individuals play an active part in making the Swedish Parliament a model workplace for both women and men. ■

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