

# Realizing Gender Responsive Governance & Gender Equality Representatives in Democratic Society : A Concrete situation of Women Empowerment & Participation in Politics

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## Abstract

Gender equality and female empowerment are now universally recognized as core development objectives, fundamental for the realization of human rights, and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes. Political equality is best guaranteed in a democracy. All citizens should have the right to participate in all affairs of the state without any discrimination on grounds of sex, race, religion, creed etc. Everything should be open to all people. It means the enjoyment of political rights such as right to vote, right to contest in the election, right to hold public offices etc. It enables people's political participation and the principle of universal adult franchise is a manifestation of political equality. Women's empowerment is closely related to, but goes beyond, gender equality to cover not just women's condition relative to men's, but their power to make choices and their ability to control their own destiny. It must go hand in hand with efforts to address gender inequality. Women should be empowered to make choices and decisions and to use their rights, resources and opportunities. Important elements of women's empowerment include access to and control over resources, meaningful political participation, the reduction of women's unpaid care responsibilities, and the ability to have control over their own bodies such as living free from violence and making decisions in relation to fertility. The right of women to participate in political life is guaranteed by several international conventions. But transforming an abstract right into a reality requires hard work on the ground. Political parties are key to women's participation in politics, as it is political parties that recruit and select candidates for elections and that determine a country's policy agenda. However, within political parties women tend to be overrepresented at the grassroots level or in supporting roles and underrepresented in positions of power. Without access to establish networks of influence and with very limited resources, few role models and mentors, and sometimes even limited family and community support, it is understandable that women's participation in political parties has remained well below that of men. How women participate in political parties and how those parties encourage and nurture women's involvement and incorporate gender-equality issues are key determinants of women's political empowerment. They are also key to ensuring gender-equality issues are addressed in the wider society.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Definitions

**Gender equality:** concerns women and men, and it involves working with men and boys, women and girls to bring about changes in attitudes, behaviors, roles and responsibilities at home, in the workplace, and in the community. Genuine equality means more than parity in numbers or laws on the books; it means expanding freedoms and improving overall quality of life so that equality is achieved without sacrificing gains for males or females.

**Female Empowerment:** is achieved when women and girls acquire the power to act freely, exercise their rights, and fulfil their potential as full and equal members of society. While empowerment often comes from within, and individuals empower themselves, cultures, societies, and institutions create conditions that facilitate or undermine the possibilities for empowerment. Women's empowerment is closely related to, but goes beyond, gender equality to cover not just women's condition relative to men's, but their power to make choices and their ability to control their own destiny.<sup>4</sup> It must go hand in hand with efforts to address gender inequality. Women should be empowered to make choices and decisions and to use their rights, resources and opportunities. Important elements of women's empowerment include access to and control over resources, meaningful political participation, the reduction of women's unpaid care responsibilities, and the ability to have control over their own bodies such as living free from violence and making decisions in relation to fertility.

**Gender integration:** involves identifying, and then addressing, gender inequalities during strategy and project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Since the roles and power relations between men and women affect how an activity is implemented, it is essential that project managers address these issues on an ongoing basis.

**Gender Responsive Governance (GRG):** It is a process that embodies measures, attitudes and practices of different stakeholders, both men and women, at different levels of governance with a clear purpose to impact issues that foster women's empowerment and promote gender equity and social justice. It is a process that promotes and sustains the ability of women to fully participate in the governance and development process, enhances their ability to raise critical questions about inequity and collectivise without fear and pressure, and ensures gains from services.<sup>7</sup>

**Democratic Society:** Democracy is more than a set of constitutional rules and procedures that determine how a government functions. In a democracy, government is only one element coexisting in a social fabric of many and varied institutions, political parties, organizations, and associations. This diversity is called pluralism, and it assumes that the many organized groups and institutions in a democratic society do not depend upon government for their existence, legitimacy, or authority.

### 1.2 Equality like liberty is an important theme of democracy

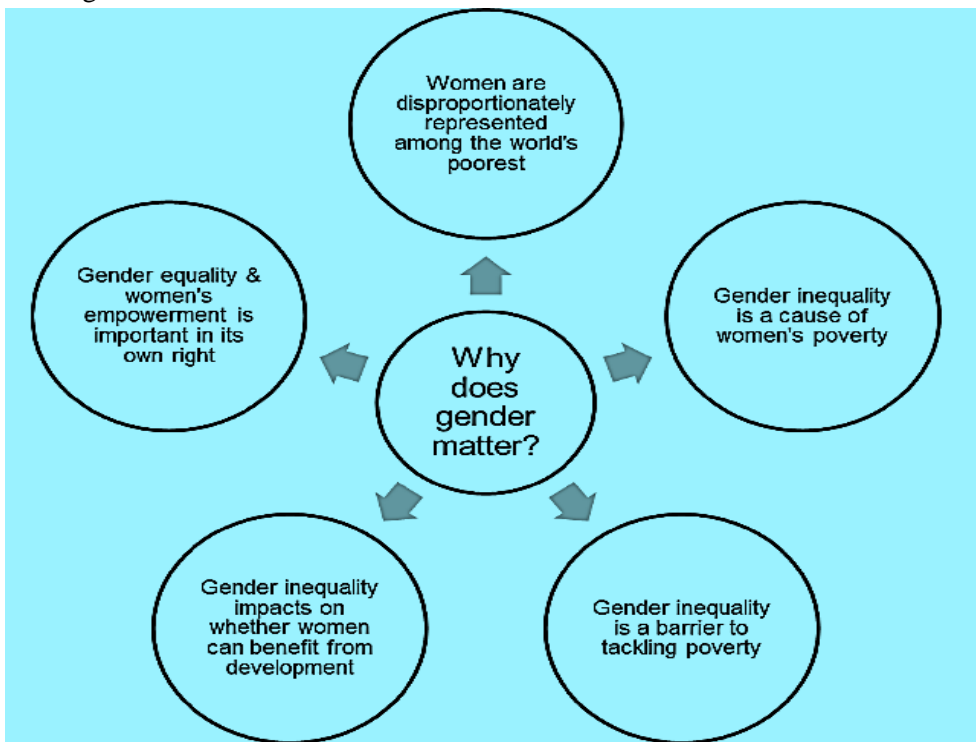
Liberty and equality were understood to be one. Both the terms were considered to be of great importance since 19th century. Broadly speaking, equality implies a coherence of ideas that cover spheres ranging from man's search for the development of his personality in the society in which the strong and the weak live together, and both have the right of being heard. Advancing democratic governance requires creating and sustaining an environment of inclusive and responsive political processes and promoting the empowerment of women. The inclusion of the perspectives of women and their participation in politics are prerequisites for democratic development and contribute to good governance. Political parties are the most important institutions that affect the political participation of women. In most countries they are responsible for candidate recruitment and selection, and decide on which issues are placed on the policy agenda. How women participate in political parties or how

political parties encourage and nurture women's involvement is a key determinant of their prospects for political empowerment. Because of the influential nature of political parties on women's political empowerment, civil society organizations (CSOs), international organizations and development assistance providers have heightened their focus on the role of political parties. Globally, women remain side-lined from the structures of governance that determine political and legislative priorities. In the world's parliaments, women hold 19 percent of the seats – up from 16 percent in 2005. The proportion of women ministers is lower, averaging 16 percent.<sup>2</sup> The proportion of women heads of state and government is lower still and has declined in recent years, standing at less than 5 percent in 2011. The low numbers continue in the face of three decades of lobbying and efforts by the international community to eliminate discrimination and empower women. In 2000, the United Nations recognized the central role of women in development by including the empowerment of women as one of the Millennium Development Goals, yet no region in the world is on track to achieve the target of 30 percent women in decision-making positions. Although some notable exceptions and good practices in this area are discernible, several bottlenecks remain to women's full and equal participation as contestants. Stereotyping gender roles and biases are prevalent, albeit to varying degrees, in all the countries of the world and are reflected in social, economic, and political life. In many countries women continue to be discouraged from direct competition with men and from public exposure and interactions, and are instead assigned roles that steer them away from decision-making and towards support roles such as child and family care and housekeeping in the private sphere. While the formal support of political parties is by no means the only factor that affects women's political participation given these manifold and multi-layered gender roles and biases, such support is required to overcome the barriers to women's participation in politics and in political party life. The proportion of women members of parliament has a great influence on the nature of the debate in politics. Given the low levels of women's presence in parliaments and other decision making bodies, parties need to be proactive in ensuring that gender equality is addressed in governance. No society can develop sustainably without increasing and transforming the distribution of opportunities, resources, and choices for males and females so that they have equal power to shape their own lives and contribute to their communities. A growing body of research demonstrates that societies with greater gender equality experience faster economic growth, and benefit from greater agricultural productivity and improved food security. Empowering women to participate in and lead public and private institutions makes these institutions more representative and effective. Increasing girls' and women's education and access to resources improves the health and education of the next generation.

Women also play critical roles as effective peace advocates, community leaders, and champions of civil and human rights. Women's representation in national legislatures and local governments has increased during the past two decades. For example, women's share of seats in national legislatures increased from 10 percent to 17 percent worldwide between 1995 and 2009, and all but 1 of the 10 countries without women's suffrage in 1980 have since granted women the right to vote. Still, in 2011, women held only 19.4 percent of the seats in lower and upper houses of parliaments globally.<sup>23</sup> To redress imbalances, 104 countries currently have provisions to promote women's representation in legislatures at the national or subnational level; for instance India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal reserve 33 percent of legislative seats for women at the municipal and district levels. Women also remain considerably underrepresented in other political bodies, holding less than one fifth of all cabinet positions worldwide. Furthermore, despite numeric gains, the quality of women's participation in political affairs is often lacking due to a variety of constraints including lower levels of political experience and access to mentoring.

## 2 Creating an Organizational Foundation for Gender Equality

How political parties operate and function is determined by external regulation and internal rules, processes and culture. External regulation includes the constitution and laws relating to the electoral system, party financing, and party organization. Internal processes depend on the party’s ideological foundations, historical influences, levels of regulation and internal bureaucracy, level of patronage, degree of influence of party leaders, and level of decentralization. The degree of internal party democracy is determined through practices like internal information and consultation processes, internal (formal or informal) rules and structures for the organization decision-making within the party and transparency in the party’s functioning at all levels. In terms of party organization, an additional consideration is the extent to which the party is inclusive of different societal groups, particularly in terms of candidate recruitment, and how the party reaches out to and includes women in its internal organization.



**Figure 1: Why does gender matters**

Positions of power in political parties can often be informal, centralized and supported by well-established relationships and networks of influence that are inaccessible to new arrivals, and particularly to women. Without access to the institutional knowledge and memory embedded in such networks, and with very limited resources, few role models and mentors, and sometimes even limited family and community support, it is understandable that women’s participation in political parties has remained well below that of men. The implementation of strategies to promote women’s empowerment in political parties can lead to greater internal democracy and transparency. By developing strategies for women’s inclusion, the participation of party members in decision-making may become more formalized, such as through elections for leadership positions or candidate recruitment for upcoming elections. Many parties also work actively to enhance the role of other marginalized and under-represented groups. Strategies for increasing women’s participation employed by parties can range from legal reforms, such as the adoption of legislated candidate quotas, to voluntary internal reforms, such as formalizing a women’s wing as part of the party structure or guaranteeing women’s presence in decision-making structures.

### 3 Global Status of Women in Politics

The modern global conversation around women’s rights and political participation has been taking place for almost 40 years. Beginning in 1975 with the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), it has continued with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and led most recently to the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals. Through the conferences, declarations and action plans, a consensus has emerged that 1) women should be able to play an equal role in politics; 2) temporary special measures, such as quotas, are an effective means to increasing women’s political roles; and 3) quota legislation is insufficient on its own to achieve the full and equal participation of women in politics.

Within politics women can play a variety of roles: as voters, political party members, candidates and office holders, and members of civil society. Although the exception, laws restricting women’s rights to vote and to stand for election persist in a handful of Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia<sup>1</sup> and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>2</sup> In emerging democracies, women have acquired voting rights only in the past 50 years, whereas in more established democracies, women have had the legal franchise for almost 100 years. In more than half of countries worldwide, voter registration is compulsory.<sup>3</sup> In countries where voter registration is not mandatory, measurements of the percentage of registered voters who actually voted (“voter turnout”) sometimes shows a gap between the number of men and women who vote. □ For instance, a 2013 survey in Libya conducted by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) showed that while 88 percent of men voted in the 2012 GNC Elections, just 66 percent of women voted. Explanations for this gap in voting turnout range from structural or legal barriers to social or cultural norms; but the gap is evident across most demographic categories, including age, education, household income, and so forth.<sup>4</sup> Research conducted by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) in 2002 shows that many countries have seen a gradual shrinking of the disparities in voting participation between women and men in the post-World War II era, and in some countries, such as Norway, women are outpacing their male counterparts in the voting booth.

**Table 1: Percentage of women in parliaments by region**

Region	Total	Single/Lower House	Upper House/Senate
Americas	24.1%	23.9%	25.0%
Asia	17.9%	18.4%	14.1%
Europe	23.2%	21.9% (w/o Nordic)	21.5%
		.0% for Nordic countries	
Middle East	13.2%	15.7%	6.8%
Pacific	15.3%	12.7%	36.0%
Sub-Saharan Africa	20.4%	20.9%	17.5%

Women generally have the right to join a political party and seek elected office in their own right. Where data are collected, the number of women candidates for national office seems to be increasing. Research in the United States shows that the number of women who ran for Congress in 2012 reached an all-time high,<sup>6</sup> and in the United Kingdom and Afghanistan, the number of women seeking an MP position peaked in 2010.<sup>7 8</sup> Similar data are not readily available for the majority of countries, although they are expanding.<sup>9</sup> Recent data from a limited pool demonstrate that the percentage of

women running for office compared with male candidates at the national level varies widely (from France with 40 percent women candidates and Vanuatu with 3 percent) and that the success rate can also vary (from 100 percent in Gambia to 0 percent in Vanuatu).

At the end of 2012, the global average of women in parliament stood at 20.3 percent, up from 19.5 percent in 2011.<sup>10</sup> Regional averages range from a low of 13.8 percent for the Arab states (although Morocco stands out with 17 percent) to a high of 42.0 percent in the Nordic countries (with Sweden at the top with 44.7 percent).<sup>11</sup> With the exception of 2007, the average annual rate of increase in recent years has been 0.5 percentage points

Even in countries with high numbers of women in national office, women generally do not have high levels of participation at the local level, and particularly not in mayoral positions. Regional averages for the proportion of women among locally elected councillors' in Africa for example ranged from a low of 8 percent in Northern Africa to a high of 30 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. A 2010 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study in the Asia-Pacific region specifically shows large variation of levels of women in local government. In terms of sub-national women's representation, India is first at almost 40 percent followed by Pakistan, Afghanistan, Australia and New Zealand, with most other Asia-Pacific countries falling below 20 percent. In Latin America and the Caribbean, averages of 25 percent of city councillors were women in 2011. Mexico and Costa Rica each had 38 percent, followed by Suriname, Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, all above 30 percent.<sup>17</sup> In the United States, the level of women in state legislatures varies greatly from a high of 41.5 percent in Colorado to a low of 11.8 percent in Louisiana. In 2011, about one quarter of the United Kingdom's local councillors were women, but only 13.2 percent of elected council leaders were women.<sup>18</sup> In Mauritania, 30 percent of the seats in municipal councils are held by women.<sup>19</sup> In South Africa, 38 percent of local councillors were women after the 2011 elections, a decrease from the previous level of 40 percent in 2006.

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) lists the global average of women mayors at less than 5 percent; many countries including Morocco and Afghanistan have only one or two women serving in this position nationwide.<sup>21</sup> Besides Latvia (25 percent), Mauritius (40 percent), New Zealand (26 percent) and Serbia (26 percent), all of the 77 other countries or areas with available data had fewer than 20 percent women mayors.<sup>22</sup> The 2003-2008 regional averages of women as mayors compiled by the United Nations from UCLG and national sources.

#### **4 Need for Women in Politics**

As women's contributions toward a strong and vibrant society are increasingly well documented, understanding of why women's meaningful participation is essential to building and sustaining democracy is growing. Women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines and more sustainable peace.

Women's meaningful participation in politics affects both the range of policy issues that are considered and the types of solutions that are proposed. Research indicates that a legislator's gender has a distinct impact on policy priorities. While women lawmakers are not a homogenous group with the same perspectives and interests, they do tend to see "women's" issues—those that directly affect women either for biological or social reasons—more broadly as social issues, possibly as a result of the role that women have traditionally played as mothers and caregivers in their communities.<sup>39</sup> In addition, women see government as a tool to help serve underrepresented or minority groups.<sup>40</sup> In an the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) poll of members of parliament conducted between 2006 and 2008, which compiled the views of parliamentarians from 110 countries, women self-identified as

being the most active in women's issues, gender equality, social and community matters and family-related matters.<sup>41</sup> Women lawmakers, therefore, have often been perceived as more sensitive to community concerns and more responsive to constituency needs.

According to the same IPU survey, female parliamentarians tend to prioritize social issues such as childcare, equal pay, parental leave and pensions; physical concerns such as reproductive rights, physical safety and gender-based violence; and development matters such as poverty alleviation and service delivery.<sup>42</sup> In places such as Rwanda and South Africa, an increase in the number of female lawmakers led to legislation related to land inheritance and reproductive rights.<sup>43</sup> Only five years after the women's suffrage movement achieved the rights of women to vote and run for office in Kuwait, newly elected female legislators introduced new labor laws that would give working mothers mandatory nursing breaks and provide onsite childcare for companies with more than 200 employees. A study from Stockholm University showed an increase in the budget for education expenditures as the number of women in the Swedish Parliament increased. As more women reach leadership positions within their political parties, these parties tend to prioritize issues that impact health, education and other quality of life issues. Strong evidence suggests that as more women are elected to office, policy-making that reflects the priorities of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities also increases. Given this attention to a broader range of policy issues, it is not surprising that when women are empowered as political leaders, countries often experience higher standards of living with positive developments in education, infrastructure and health, and concrete steps to help make democracy deliver. Using data from 19 member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), researchers found that an increase in the number of women legislators results in an increase in total educational spending.

In India, research showed that West Bengal villages with greater representation of women in local councils saw an investment in drinking water facilities double that of villages with low levels of elected women, with roads that were almost twice as likely to be in good condition. The study also revealed that the presence of a woman council leader reduces the gender gap in school attendance by 13 percentage points. In addition to bringing a gender perspective to policy-making, women's leadership and conflict resolution styles often embody democratic ideals in that women have tended to work in a less hierarchical, more participatory and more collaborative way than male colleagues.<sup>47</sup> Women are also more likely to work across party lines, even in highly partisan environments. Since assuming 56 percent of the seats in the Rwandan parliament in 2008, women have been responsible for forming the first cross-party caucus to work on controversial issues such as land rights and food security. They have also formed the only tripartite partnership among civil society and executive and legislative bodies to coordinate responsive legislation and ensure that basic services are delivered.<sup>48</sup> Around the world, women lawmakers are often perceived as more honest and more responsive than their male counterparts, qualities that encourage confidence in democratic and representative institutions. In a study of 31 democratic countries, the presence of more women in legislatures is positively correlated with enhanced perceptions of government legitimacy among both men and women.

It has been observed that women tend to be deeply committed to peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction and have a unique and powerful perspective to bring to the negotiating table. Women often suffer disproportionately during armed conflict and often advocate most strongly for stabilization, reconstruction and the prevention of further conflict. Peace agreements, post-conflict reconstruction and governance have a better chance of long-term success when women are involved. Furthermore, establishing sustainable peace requires transforming power relationships, including achieving more equitable gender relations.

## **5 Strategies for Increasing Women's Participation**

While creating the ideal conditions and institutional structures for women's participation can be difficult and take time, concrete strategies can be implemented in the short term that can contribute to greater numbers of women in public life. Support is needed from both international and local groups to encourage women's participation in politics as well as to continue to pressure political institutions to reform or implement policies that remove roadblocks to women's leadership. Individual citizens or civil society organizations can play a key role in increasing women's political participation by supporting women candidates and those that support women's rights, advocating for legislation that increases equality and holding their elected leaders accountable for their campaign promises and good governance. Organizations have helped women candidates through public education campaigns, the training of women candidates and financial support. Strategies for working with political parties focus on building the skills and capacity of women party activists and potential candidates, as well as reinforcing among party leaders the value of women as voters, party leaders and candidates. Training workshops focus on campaign skills such as public speaking and organizing voters through social media. Multiparty and/or single party programs assess the parties' strengths and weaknesses in recruiting, retaining and promoting women; help parties reform their internal policies and practices to be more transparent and inclusive; and create effective strategies that attract, retain and promote women as members and voters.

The following strategies – drawn from the case studies and other research – are designed to provide guidance to political parties on actions that can be taken to address gender inequality in the candidate recruitment process. In addition, these strategies provide ideas for actions that could be undertaken by development assistance providers, party foundations, and CSOs in their work with, and support to, political parties.

### **A. Galvanize political party support for candidate quotas and formalize in party statutes**

Party constitutions and statutes reflect the official principles and policies of a political party. The adoption of gender equality principles in the party constitution and bylaws is important for articulating the vision of the party and for putting in place the necessary policies for achieving that vision, such as quotas. Some political parties in El Salvador, India, and Morocco have included such statements and provisions supporting gender equality and promoting women's political participation in their vision statements and party bylaws. Where quotas are legislated, political parties have usually had to update their party nomination procedures to ensure compliance with the law. In addition to legislated quotas, hundreds of political parties in more than 30 countries have voluntarily adopted their own policies of quotas for women. In such cases, the party sets its own Candidate quotas may be: Voluntary: They are adopted on a voluntary basis by political parties and should be reflected in candidate nomination rules and/or party constitutions. Legislated: The constitution, electoral or party legislation establishes a minimum target for the inclusion of women as electoral candidates.

### **B. Establish guidelines for candidate recruitment in party nomination committees**

Candidate recruitment rules differ from party to party. Regardless of the process, however, guidelines that are clear and transparent and incorporate rules guaranteeing women's participation are a significant advantage. When the rules are unwritten and candidate selection is in the hands of a few party leaders, it is very difficult for women to compete on equal footing with men as they are typically excluded from the 'all boys' networks. Opening the process up so it is more participatory can combat the tendency for leaders in some parties to handpick their candidates according to undefined criteria. Rules should set clear targets to be achieved. For example, in Canada's Liberal Party, a candidate recruitment committee was created to ensure diversity in candidate recruitment and that the rules regarding inclusion of women candidates were followed. In Croatia, the Social Democratic Party

adopted a 40 percent voluntary quota of the “underrepresented gender” for all candidates’ lists for parliamentary elections and local assemblies. The reference to the “underrepresented gender” was intended to prevent objections from those who might have been concerned that a quota system was discriminatory, referring only to the election of women.

**C. Adopt measures for women’s participation in decision-making structures**

Related to the inclusion of a formal statement on gender equality is the adoption of measures to ensure women’s participation in the governing boards and decision making structures of the party. The level of women’s representation in such structures provides insights into the degree to which the political party is committed to gender equality. Globally, women are under-represented in leadership positions within political parties, although they usually constitute between 40 and 50 percent of party members. The proportion of women in party leadership positions is estimated at around 10 percent, although this number increases in parties that have adopted rules guaranteeing women’s participation within internal decision-making structures. The participation of women in governing boards is important for several reasons, notably to ensure that women’s perspectives contribute to shaping party policies, priorities, strategies, and platforms.

**D. Cultivate strategic alliances with men**

In a number of parties, male advocates for policies such as candidate quotas or reserved seats have played critical roles in building internal party support for these policies. If the participation of women is to be understood by party leadership as a benefit to the entire party, not solely to the women members, men must be involved in championing reforms. In the Labour Party in Australia, the Liberal Party in Canada, and the Socialist Party in Spa in, women have worked with male party leaders who have championed quota reforms. In Mexico, PAN women members also worked to educate and lobby their male counterparts to support the quota reform and to get the support of the ranks of the party. This support was essential to the passage of the law through parliament. The dual approach of working with political women and men inside the party, together with CSO support from outside, can yield great results.

**E. Expand the pool of women candidates and provide skills training**

Some political party leaders have argued that there is a shortage of willing and trained women candidates with the requisite confidence and experience to stand for election, which in turn can mean that the party does not reach its quota targets. This may be especially pronounced in post-conflict states where women tend to be side-lined from transitional processes unless political parties actively recruit women members to their ranks. It is important that, in addition to implementing candidate quotas, other supportive mechanisms for women’s political participation are encouraged. In countries where quotas have not been implemented, such measures take on more significance. Strategies to expand the pool of women candidates and build their political capabilities include training and support for outreach activities in Cambodia, or technical advice and guidance on advocacy strategies in Morocco, where a coalition of women’s CSOs and party activists received support from international organizations during their campaign to promote quotas. In Canada, the Liberal Party appointed a Women’s Candidate Search Director to help recruit women to the party. In Indonesia, the PDIP’s Women Empowerment Department works with the party’s training branch to develop and implement a training program for women candidates to increase their political skills. Brazil’s Party of the Republic (PR) organized motorcades for gender awareness in some states, which aimed to encourage women to join the party and to identify local women leaders who could become local candidates. Training sessions were offered to interested women on party doctrine, goals, and

achievements. Political parties could also usefully support a network or community of women candidates who have run for election, whether or not they won. Parties could enlist their support to nurture connections with constituencies and encourage future women candidates.

#### **F. Apply gender responsive budgeting practices**

Parties can also reflect on how their funds are expended in relation to women, through an analysis of how all of the party's expenditures are going to benefit men and women party activists, and how resources are allocated to women-specific party structures. An analysis of campaign expenditures from a gender perspective would also be a valuable exercise. Parties can initiate gender responsive budgeting practices in government, as in Serbia where parties participate in local level gender equality commissions, which work to ensure that women are benefiting from public funds. Public funding is one mechanism used to level the playing field in the electoral period, usually directed to parties represented in parliament. Public funding is provided usually without any obligation for the recipients, but it could be regulated in such a way as to encourage parties to address women's political empowerment.

### **6 Requirement of Gender Responsive Governance**

Advancing democratic governance requires creating an environment of inclusive and responsive political processes and the empowerment of women. The inclusion of the perspectives of women and their participation in politics are prerequisites for democratic development and contribute to good governance. Yet globally, women remain under-represented in decision-making bodies. Research has shown that the number of women in parliament does matter; at the very least, the more women there are in parliament, the more likely the party is to address women's issues and to change the gender dynamics in the chamber. The proportion of women members of parliament has a great influence on the nature of debate in politics. Parties are influential in determining which issues form the political debate: they formulate policy, set governance priorities and therefore are strategically placed to address the concerns of women. In practice, political parties have a mixed record in addressing gender issues in governance. Women the world over have realized that as a minority in parliament, there are strategic advantages to forming alliances and coalitions to affect policy change. Women's caucuses can be effective forums for bringing women together across political party lines to channel their interests and concerns, as well as to mainstream gender in policy development and oversight of government action. Concretely, caucus activities may include providing capacity support to women parliamentarians, conducting analyses of bills, holding hearings with CSOs, convening public workshops on relevant issues, defining common positions on issues so that women members may seek to influence their own party leaders, and overseeing government action on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. When women enter parliaments, they tend to enter domains which operate along gendered lines, i.e. a political environment where the institutional culture and operating procedures may be biased against them. Conducting a review of the political climate may be necessary to ensure that the conditions in which women operate are conducive to their participation. Giving consideration to issues such as the sitting times of parliament, the location of facilities for women members, and parental leave provisions can lead to positive reforms to promote women's participation. Removing the barriers to women's participation is therefore crucial for creating gender-friendly parliaments that respond to the needs and interests of both men and women. The number of women holding seats in parliament can go up and down during a parliamentary term. Women members may resign or take up a ministerial position and thereby have to vacate their parliamentary seats. In these instances (where no by-election is held), political parties can ensure that women replace

women in the vacant seats. A party can also decide that any vacated seat will be filled by a woman as a way to increase the proportion of women members. Political parties may also consider ways in which they can ensure the retention of women members in future elections. There is usually a higher turnover rate of women parliamentarians than men, and asking the women themselves what kind of incentives or support they need might reverse this trend.

## 7 Further Recommendations

As referenced earlier, a need exists for relevant data on women in political life. While evaluating impact is important for all democracy programs, it is particularly important for women's political participation since there is insufficient baseline data showing the progress and impact of women in politics. Many gaps exist in new and developing democracies which makes it difficult to compare women across regions as well as to track changes in the same country over time. Political statistics on almost everything except the number of women elected at the national level are not readily available. Collection of the following statistics would help us to better understand existing gaps and better target policy responses:

- the share of women registered to vote;
- the share of women and men who vote (voter turnout);
- the share of women as political party members and leaders;
- the number of women who seek or are nominated to political office; and
- the share of women who hold elective office at the sub-national level, including mayor.

Moreover, the extent to which barriers that women who seek to be involved in politics face are the same or different at the various levels of government has not been examined sufficiently. For instance, most political parties do not have the strength of leadership at the branch level that they have at the national level. Might this be an entry point for potential party leaders and candidates? And what role could special temporary measures such as quotas have for women outside the capital? Countries with sub-national quota laws<sup>83</sup> should be studied to gauge their impact on women's political participation and societal views about women leaders.

## 8 Conclusion

The inclusion of the perspectives of women and their participation in politics are prerequisites for democratic development and contribute to good governance, and political parties are the primary vehicles for political participation. It can be politically and financially advantageous for political parties to promote women's empowerment initiatives actively throughout the electoral cycle. By openly and formally supporting women's participation through reforms, political parties can alter public opinion, generate

new support bases, attract new members, increase the flow of public funding to the party, and improve their standing with other countries, among other political and practical benefits. The formal support of political parties is required to overcome the barriers to women's participation in politics. Gender biases are prevalent in all the countries of the world and are reflected in social, economic, and political life. In many countries women

continue to be discouraged from direct competition with men and from public exposure and interactions, and are instead assigned roles that steer them away from decision-making. A good number of cases show that reforms to increase women's participation in political parties have gone hand in hand with initiatives to improve the gender responsiveness of party platforms. The most meaningful strategies simultaneously combined reforms to political institutions and the provision of targeted support to women party activists, candidates, and elected officials that

addressed the socio-economic and capacity challenges faced by women. Political parties across the world have demonstrated that no one starting point is better than another as long as there is commitment to gender equality. Successful parties have been creative in their approaches to women's empowerment and matched those approaches to their respective history and contexts. Despite the diversity of strategies and approaches, however, it is important to note that established measures such as quotas have repeatedly been shown to be effective in putting more women into positions of power.

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