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(d) Mainstreaming gender equality into the work of parliaments

The Declaration of the Third World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in 2010 reaffirmed the need to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women, thus promoting a genuine partnership between them in all spheres. It committed to working to achieve a world average of 30% of women in parliaments by 2015.

Throughout the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference of Speakers, due attention has been paid to mainstreaming gender equality into all aspects relating to the organization, as well as content and outputs of the Conference. The current paper aims to map progress made in achieving gender equality in politics since the 2010 Speakers' Conference, highlighting remaining challenges and opportunities.

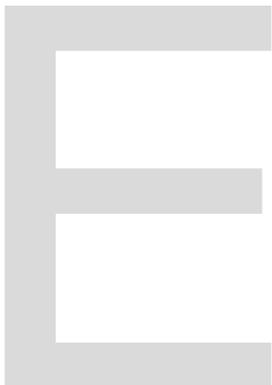
Gender equality, democracy and the IPU

Gender equality is at the heart of democratic processes. Very early on, the IPU highlighted the direct link between democracy and the balanced participation of men and women in politics, in particular in parliament. The IPU has consistently championed the need for democracy to include half of the world's population and respond to the needs of both men and women. Only then can democracy be considered truly representative and sustainable.

The advancement of gender equality is one of the key objectives set out in the IPU's Strategy for 2012-2017. Through this Strategy, the Organization demonstrates its commitment to achieving the equal participation of men and women in politics and upholding respect for women's rights and gender equality. In particular, the IPU aims to:

- i) Increase the number of women in parliament worldwide;
- ii) Support and enhance women parliamentarians' contribution to the work of parliament; and
- iii) Strengthen parliament's capacity to mainstream gender equality into its work and defend women's rights issues.

The achievement of gender equality requires action on two fronts: (1) addressing discrimination against women and supporting women's empowerment; and (2) ensuring that the objective of gender equality is taken into account in a cross-cutting and systematic way. The Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament is invited to address the question of equality in politics and to mainstream the gender equality objective throughout its proceedings and results.



Women in parliament – how much progress? Lessons learned

The Declaration of the Third World Conference of Speakers in 2010 reaffirmed the need to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women, thus promoting a genuine partnership between them in all spheres. It further stated that the proportion of women in parliament was insufficient and pledged to step up efforts to reach, as a global average, the internationally agreed target of 30 per cent of women in parliaments by 2015. This meant committing to taking action to combat all forms of discrimination against women, which prevent them from realizing their aspirations to greater involvement in public life.

2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. In 1995, when the Fourth World Conference of Women was held, women held a mere 11.3 per cent of the world's parliamentary seats. That percentage has almost doubled in 2015, up from 18.8 per cent in 2010. While progress has been achieved, the 30 per-cent target still has not been met.

Progress has been made in almost 90 per cent of the world's countries. By 2015, there were 42 single or lower houses of parliament where women occupied more than 30 per cent of the seats, compared to only 12 just 20 years ago. The share of women has surpassed 50 per cent, for the first time ever, in three houses of parliament, and exceeds 60 per cent in one (Rwanda). The world's highest-ranking countries have become a more diverse group: the top 10, of which eight were European countries in 1995, now comprise four in sub-Saharan Africa, three in Europe and three in the Americas. However, the pace of progress remains too slow. In 2014, women parliamentarians increased their share of parliamentary seats by just 0.3 percentage points, which is a cause for concern.

Three elements are common to the countries where women hold more than 30 per cent of the parliamentary seats:

- Most have a proportional list system;
- Most have implemented some sort of special measure to promote women in politics, whether in the form of legislated or voluntary quotas; and
- Many have recently undergone a transition and have taken advantage of reform to address past discrimination and challenges and adopt legal frameworks that facilitate women's political participation on an equal footing with men.

Parliaments need to consider all opportunities to pursue progress and meet the average global target of 30 per cent of women members in parliament by 2020.

Reforming legal frameworks to eliminate discrimination and support women's access to politics

Experience has shown that electoral systems do matter, special temporary measures are crucial and political momentum and opportunities for change ought not to be missed. Legal reform is a key starting point. Today, over 100 countries have implemented systems of electoral gender quotas to support the achievement of equality in politics. Several countries have gone an extra step and established parity in politics as a target. Ambitious and proactive action will go a long way towards securing a more inclusive decision-making process, which is at the heart of democracy.

Inclusiveness should be the second objective of legal reform. The aim should be parity and the representation of all women, from all walks of life. 2014 IPU studies have demonstrated that women from ethnic minorities are almost completely marginalized in politics. In contrast, the share of minority men in politics seems to be largely proportional to their proportion in society. Similarly, the 2014 IPU report on youth participation in national parliaments shows that women under the age of 45 were by far the least represented in national parliaments, at 8 per cent, compared to young men and older women, at 16 per cent each. Therein lies an untapped potential for progress.

For the past five years, the IPU has developed and implemented programmes of support to assist parliaments in reviewing their legal frameworks and implementing electoral reforms that are more conducive to an equal participation of men and women. It has done so in countries with a low percentage of women MPs as well as in countries in transition. The IPU has complemented this action with sensitization initiatives, producing awareness-raising tools and supporting MPs in leading campaigns to address stereotypes and change mentalities.

More generally, the IPU believes that progress will be achieved by addressing inequality as a whole. In order to provide a more conducive framework for women's political participation, it is crucial to ensure that women enjoy equal rights with men and do not face discrimination. Addressing the particular issue of violence against women is also a priority. For as long as women live in fear and are victims of

violence, they will not be in a position to fully contribute to society's development. Progress will also require investing in women's economic empowerment, which is at the heart of all efforts aimed at achieving gender equality and sustainable development.

With this in mind, the IPU has implemented many capacity-building projects to address discrimination in the law, supporting parliaments to meet their obligations set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The IPU has implemented national projects and initiatives in support of parliaments and their members - men and women - in developing laws to combat violence against women and overseeing their effective enforcement. Efforts have also been deployed to build parliaments' capacity to facilitate women's access to health care, especially maternal and child health care.

Lessons learned:

- Addressing discrimination in law and building a legal framework that is conducive to an equal participation of men and women in politics is key.
- Positive action measures have proven their effectiveness; the more ambitious they are the greater their impact on gender equality.
- Untapped potentials (underrepresented groups) should be specifically targeted as a way to ensure a more inclusive and equal political process.
- Building an environment where women are autonomous and free from discrimination and violence is at the heart of progress, and parliaments should make this a priority. Specific attention should be paid to supporting initiatives aimed at empowering women in economic terms.

Supporting women's overall empowerment – A necessary investment

Empowerment is crucial to facilitating women's access to politics and enhancing their impact in this field. Politics requires knowledge and skills, mentors and supporters, networks and funds. These are more often than not inaccessible to women. Well thought-out electoral processes that facilitate the election of women, training and financial incentives for women candidates, access to media ahead of elections, are all important to empowering women in political participation.

Key to the empowerment of women is mentorship and solidarity, which must be further facilitated. Political life is attracting more women and many women politicians have served as role models, which has been pivotal in opening up politics to aspiring women. Platforms created by women, such as women's parliamentary caucuses, can be used for enhancing solidarity among women, enriching their experiences and reinforcing their influence in politics. Whether at the national or international levels, more needs to be invested in these exchanges.

The IPU has been supporting women MPs in parliament through the implementation of capacity-building projects tailored to the needs of elected women. It has supported the creation of cross-party women's caucuses in parliaments. It has also facilitated sharing of knowledge and mentorship with the use of web-based platforms such as iKNOWPolitics (www.iknowpolitics.org – a network set up by IDEA, IPU, NDI, UNDP and UN Women). Furthermore, 30 years ago, the IPU created the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians, which meets every six months and brings women MPs from around the world to strategize together. This forum has enabled women to have their space of influence and to effect change within the Organization. In 2015, the IPU celebrated the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians by adopting a Call for Action, asking MPs to use their power for women's power (see: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/132/cfa-e.pdf>)

Lessons learned:

- Women MPs face new challenges and should benefit from targeted support to build their capacity and influence.
- Mechanisms and structures that facilitate solidarity and mentorship between women are powerful instruments of change and should be supported.

Building gender-sensitive processes and institutions

Political institutions and parliaments have historically functioned to meet the needs and interests of men. Leadership, rules, procedures, working hours and everything that makes a parliament a place of work must be suited to the needs and expectations of both men and women.

Parliaments need to embark on reform and become gender-sensitive institutions that respect and deliver on gender equality. In 2012, the IPU adopted a Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments (<http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/action-gender-e.pdf>). According to the Plan, a gender-sensitive parliament is one that:

1. Promotes and achieves equality in numbers of women and men across all of its bodies and internal structures.
2. Develops a gender equality policy framework suited to its own national parliamentary context.
3. Mainstreams gender equality throughout all of its work.
4. Fosters an internal culture that respects women's rights, promotes gender equality and responds to the needs and realities of MPs – men and women – to balance work and family responsibilities.
5. Acknowledges and builds on the contribution made by its men members who pursue and advocate for gender equality.
6. Encourages political parties to take a proactive role in the promotion and achievement of gender equality.
7. Equips its parliamentary staff with the capacity and resources to promote gender equality, actively encourages the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions, and ensures that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work of the parliamentary administration.

The IPU has supported parliaments in carrying out self-assessment exercises to gauge their degree of gender sensitivity and identify areas for progress. It has supported parliaments in implementing plans of action and provided training sessions to facilitate gender mainstreaming in parliament.

Lessons learned:

- Gender-sensitive institutions are more efficient institutions that better respond to the needs of men and women.
- Gender sensitive self-assessments go a long way towards identifying gaps and areas for improvement to achieve gender equality in and by parliaments.
- Parliaments should ensure that their efforts to build capacity include a gender dimension.

Developing partnerships

The responsibility of change should not lie on women's shoulders only. Gender equality is the responsibility of all and progress will only be achieved if everyone plays their part. Many stakeholders have yet to meet their responsibility and fully play their role in achieving gender equality,

Political parties should become more gender-sensitive in their composition, functioning and programmes. They need provide greater opportunities to ensure women's full and equal participation in decision-making. They need to be held accountable for achieving gender equality.

Partnership with men politicians also remains today a lost opportunity for women's full and equal participation. Men politicians are the majority of decision-makers in the world today. Without their engagement on women's rights and gender equality, all efforts to enhance women's participation are hindered. We definitely need to work more to promote among men and boys a new social construct of relationships built on respect and equality.

Other partnerships need to be strengthened between parliaments, civil society and grassroots women's organizations; with the media to educate, raise awareness and stop perpetuating stereotypes and gender inequalities; and between organizations that support parliaments, such as the IPU and UN Women.

Lessons learned:

- Parliaments should build creative partnerships for gender equality and reach out in particular to men; and
- Political parties should be challenged to fully play their role in meeting gender equality objectives.

The role of the IPU

The IPU's commitment to gender equality is longstanding. The IPU began working in the field of women's political participation back in the 1970s, making the link between democracy and a balanced participation of men and women in political processes. It has since implemented a strong programme of support which conducts research and implements projects of assistance to women and parliaments.

In parallel, the IPU has also taken the lead in reforming its own structures and paving the way for a stronger participation of women. The IPU has reviewed its functioning and rules to include gender targets and quotas. It implements internal quotas for women in elected positions and sanctions for delegations that do not include representatives of both sexes.

Women parliamentarians constitute on average 30 per cent of delegates attending IPU Assemblies. The IPU's Meeting of Women Parliamentarians and Gender Partnership Group oversee and provide guidance to the work of the IPU in the area of gender equality. IPU Assemblies held every six months allow for the close monitoring and input of MPs to the programme work of the Organization and mechanisms have been put into place to enable for gender to be mainstreamed in all IPU resolutions. Hearings with delegations from countries with few or no women in parliament allow the IPU to closely monitor and support change.

In 2013, the IPU adopted a policy document entitled *Gender mainstreaming at the IPU*, which sets a clear framework for ensuring that gender is taken into account in all of the IPU's work, whether at the political, programme or internal/Secretariat level.

In October 2014, the 131st IPU Assembly debated *Achieving gender equality, ending violence against women*. The Assembly's outcome document sets the ambitious target of achieving gender equality within one generation – by 2030. It calls for the political commitment and action of all political bodies and their leaders, starting with parliaments. To this end:

- International organizations should be held accountable for achieving gender equality and should mainstream gender within their work and structures; and
- Political mobilization should be sustained and ambitious targets set – such as achieving gender equality within one generation – by 2030.