

## Women in Power and Decision-Making

### 1. Global commitments

This chapter of the *Platform for Action* focuses on achieving effective participation by women in decision-making in elected bodies, public administrative entities, political parties, the judiciary and civil society. The *Platform* sets out two strategic objectives.

- ( Take measures to ensure women's access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.
- ( Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

Two articles of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) deal with women's participation in political and public life. Article 7 commits States parties to ensure equality between women and men in political and public life, including the right to vote, to be eligible for election, to participate in formulating government policy, to hold public office and to perform public functions. The Convention includes the right to participate in non-governmental organisations and other associations. Article 8 requires States parties to ensure that women have equal opportunities with men to represent their governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organisations. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women provided additional guidance in the implementation of the Convention in 1997 in its General Recommendation 23, which highlighted the application of the Convention to all levels of government and to the activities of a range of organisations concerned with public and political life, including public boards, local councils, and the activities of political parties, trade unions and professional associations. General Recommendation 23 also stated that: "It is the Government's fundamental responsibility to encourage these initiatives to lead and guide public opinion and change attitudes that discriminate against women or discourage women's involvement in political and public life."<sup>1</sup>

The Commission on the Status of Women continued to pay attention to the issue and adopted agreed conclusions on women and decision-making processes in 1997 and 2006.<sup>2</sup>

In its resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the Security Council called on Member States to increase the representation of women in all institutions and mechanisms dealing with the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, including as special representatives and envoys of the Secretary-General and within the field operations as military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel.

The importance of the issue has been recognized within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals. One of the indicators for monitoring Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality is the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.

The 2005 World Summit Outcome reaffirmed the commitments to increased representation of women in government decision-making bodies, including opportunities to participate fully in the political process.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Progress at the national level

Marked progress has been made since 1995 in the numbers of women elected to national parliaments. The table below includes the 20 countries that achieved over 30 per cent representation of women in 2006, which compares favourably with the very short list of 5 countries that had achieved this in 1995 (Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden).<sup>4</sup>

Rwanda achieved 48.8 per cent representation of women in the 2003 elections, a dramatic increase from the 17.1 per cent representation in 1995 that illustrated the positive results of focused and coordinated efforts to address this issue in the period of post-conflict reconstruction. Several other countries in the table are also post-conflict countries: Burundi, Mozambique, and South Africa. As noted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, for countries in transition, “the process of establishing new constitutions and institutions and rewriting the rules of the political landscape provides a golden opportunity for women to influence the process and make their voices heard, especially in the drafting of electoral and political party laws.”<sup>5</sup>

It is also notable that, in addition to the post-conflict group, there is one other country in Sub-Saharan Africa and another four in Central and South America that have passed the 30 per cent threshold and have considerably higher representation of women than a number of OECD countries with more resources and more established traditions of electoral politics, again demonstrating that the advancement of women is possible through political will and targeted action.

Almost all of the countries 20 countries included in the table have used some form of electoral quotas to ensure that women account for a certain number of percentage of candidates for office or officeholders, whether through a constitutional commitment, a provision of election legislation, voluntary action by political parties, or some combination of these.<sup>6</sup>

<b>Women in national parliaments, 2006</b>				
<b>Country</b>	<b>% women</b>	<b>Last elections</b>	<b>Electoral system</b>	<b>If quota &amp; type of quota</b>
<b>Rwanda</b>	48.8	2003	List PR	Yes – constitutional commitment, legislation establishing 30% reserved seats (indirectly elected)
<b>Sweden</b>	45.3	2002	List PR	Yes – voluntary party quotas for candidates
<b>Costa Rica</b>	38.6	2006	List PR	Yes – legislated quota of 40% women candidates on party lists
<b>Norway</b>	37.9	2005	List PR	Yes – voluntary party quotas for candidates
<b>Finland</b>	37.5	2003	List PR	No
<b>Denmark</b>	36.9	2005	List PR	No – but did have at times in the past
<b>Netherlands</b>	36.7	2003	List PR	Yes – voluntary party quotas for candidates
<b>Cuba</b>	36.0	2003	Majority *	No
<b>Spain</b>	36.0	2004	List PR	Yes – voluntary party quotas for candidates
<b>Argentina</b>	35.0	2005	List PR	Yes – constitutional commitment; legislated quota of 30% women on party lists; political party quotas for candidates
<b>Mozambique</b>	34.8	2004	List PR	Yes – voluntary party quotas for candidates
<b>Belgium</b>	34.7	2003	List PR	Yes – legislated quota of 33% women on party lists
<b>Austria</b>	33.9	2002	List PR	Yes – voluntary party quotas for candidates
<b>Iceland</b>	33.3	2003	List PR	Yes – voluntary party quotas for candidates
<b>South Africa</b>	32.8	2004	List PR	Yes – voluntary party quotas for candidates
<b>New Zealand</b>	32.2	2005	Mixed M & PR	No
<b>Germany</b>	31.8	2005	Mixed M & PR	Yes – voluntary party quotas for candidates
<b>Guyana</b>	30.8	2001	List PR	Yes – constitutional requirement for 33% quota for women on electoral lists
<b>Burundi</b>	30.5	2005	List PR	Yes – constitutional commitment, legislated quota of 30% women on party lists
<b>Tanzania</b>	30.4	2005	FPTP	Yes – constitutional quota, election law quota regulation (special seats)

PR= proportional representation; Mixed M & PR = combination of member and proportional representation;

A number of countries have used constitutional or legislative quota systems to advance progress toward more equitable representation at the local level. The Global Database on Quotas for Women provides information on 30 countries with quotas at the sub-national level, mostly low and middle-income countries but also several in Europe – France, Greece, and Portugal.<sup>8</sup>

Evidence suggests that a major factor influencing progress is the nature of electoral systems and the practices of political parties. Proportional representation systems result in a higher proportion of women than those with plurality/majority or mixed proportional systems: overall, the former have an average of 16 per cent women compared to 11 per cent for the latter based on data for 174 countries in 2003.<sup>15</sup> This is in large part because of the way the system interacts with the concerns and strategies of political parties: in plurality/majority systems the incentives to parties are to select the most “electable” candidate, whereas proportional systems allow for a greater number of candidates to be put forward. Even so, where women are placed on party lists also has a major influence on the likelihood of women obtaining a seat. Political parties thus play a key role in both types of system.

Even when elected, women are less likely than men to be in higher-level decision-making positions in national parliaments. The number of women serving as presiding officers in parliament decreased over the decade, down to 8% in 2005 from 10% in 1995.<sup>16</sup> They are also continue to be under-represented in cabinet appointments. While Sweden and Spain had achieved a gender balance in cabinet appointments in 2005, their performance is the exception rather than the rule – globally, the proportion was 14.3 per cent women as of January 2005.<sup>17</sup>

### **Numbers and effectiveness at the local level**

Elections at the local level offer a greater number of opportunities for women simply because of the greater number of elected bodies and positions, and participation at the local level has served as a training ground for many politicians, both women and men. Great strides have been made through the use of quotas at the local level in several countries. For example, Bangladesh introduced reserved seats for women in local elections in 1997, which resulted in a total of 12,828 women elected to these reserved seats in some 4,400 locations, in addition to 110 women elected to general seats (of which there were over 39,000) and 20 women succeeding in the election as chairpersons (less than 1 per cent). However, it remains a challenge for these women to function effectively because their participation is not yet well-accepted by their male colleagues and they face considerable resistance in carrying out functions and exercising authority. Many of the women elected to office come with limited experience in elected office and government structures.<sup>18</sup> In Bangladesh and many other countries, the challenge of ensuring that local governments are effective and accountable to their citizens – both women and men – includes ensuring that male members have the capacity to work effectively with their female colleagues, and that the women members have the knowledge and skills to use the relevant procedures and address local issues. The trend toward decentralization of responsibilities to the local level increases the importance of addressing this challenge.

### **Women’s share in public and private sector managerial positions**

Women’s representation in decision-making positions in the civil service and public sector bodies are also concerns of the *Platform for Action*. The limited information available to assess progress illustrates the challenges in this area. The European Commission’s database on women and men in decision-making is one of the few sources that focusses specifically on senior public service positions. Considering the proportion of women in the highest-ranked civil service position under the Minister, only 5 of 31 countries passed the 30 per cent threshold in 2006, although several others achieved this at the second highest level.<sup>19</sup> Occupation data from labour force surveys on the census provides another source of data, although data about the public sector may be difficult to extract as labour force surveys generally combine information from the

public and private sectors. The ILO has calcula

- ( develop or support programmes that provide training to women candidates in the skills needed for effective campaigning, and to elected women in the skills in effectively carrying out their functions and supporting equality objectives;
- ( facilitate linkages among various actors seeking to bring gender equality issues and women's views into the decision-making process;
- ( establish specific time-bound targets and action plans for increasing women's representation in decision-making in the public sector;
- ( establish mechanisms to facilitate consideration of women candidates in appointments to senior positions in government and public sector boards and agencies;
- ( promote awareness and support for the goal of gender equality among decision-makers through public awareness campaigns; and
- ( strengthen monitoring, reporting and knowledge about women's participation in decision-making through improved data collection, dissemination and analysis.

Aspects of several of these strategies are discussed further in the text and boxes below.

### **Influencing the electoral process**

Electoral quotas have been an important element in achieving progress in many countries, at both the national and local levels. However, quotas are only effective if they are appropriate to the particular electoral system of a country (or the level of government to which they apply). Proportional representation systems offer a broader range of options for quotas than plurality/majority systems. Even so, a quota initiative may require constitutional change or sanction, and the opportunity to introduce a quota system would therefore only arrive in the context of larger reform processes in which broad public support for them has been mobilized – as has been the case in a number of post-conflict countries. Quotas can be useful measures, but the design and implementation must be strategically pursued.

If quotas are intended to be implemented by political parties, they must be designed so that evasion is difficult. However, as voluntary implementation is preferable to implementation under compulsion, it would seem desirable to seek to build broad public support at the stage of formulating such provisions in order to facilitate implementation. Quotas can also have a downside if the nature of the quota-based system results in women members who are seen as having less legitimacy as elected representatives than their male counterparts.

Training programmes should also target men, to expose them to the complexities of gender discrimination and the necessity of and mechanisms for promoting women in public office.”<sup>25</sup>

**Conditions for the effectiveness of quotas in enhancing women’s voice in political bodies**

The UN Millenium Project’s Task Force report, *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*, provides a good summary of four major lessons of experience about the effectiveness of quotas.

- § **“A country’s electoral system strongly influences the impact of quotas.** Quotas work best in closed-list, proportional representation systems with placement mandates and where electoral districts are large – where many candidates are elected from each electora



remain informed of the views of women at the grass-roots and to communicate with them. The experience gained through their effective interventions during the Constituent Assembly formed the basis for later work in building the capacity of women leaders at the local level and potential candidates for parliament, and in incorporating gender equality perspectives in legislation before parliament.<sup>28</sup>

Many countries have established formal parliamentary bodies to consider issues related to the position of women and gender equality. These take a range of forms and many include men as well as women. An informative on-line database on the structures and mandates of such specialized bodies is maintained by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It includes, for example: the Gender Caucus in Burkina Faso, the Network of Parliamentarians on Gender Issues in Niger, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in Canada, and the Special Committee on Gender and Equality in Uruguay.<sup>29</sup> These bodies provide forums for the discussion of gender equality issues among members and potentially a forum for exchanges with civil society organisations and advocates. This can be an important opportunity for another form of participation by women in decision-making by providing opportunities for women's organisations to participate in discussions of policy decisions that shape their societies and affect their lives. This is another area in which national women's machineries can play facilitating roles through, for example, bringing women's organisations to the attention of the parliamentary bodies, or enabling women's organisations to develop advocacy skills.

#### **Supporting women candidates through training, media campaigns, and guidance – Vietnam**

In Vietnam, the representation of women in national parliament has increased from 18.5 per cent in the 1992 elections to 26.2 per cent in 1997 and 27.4 per cent in 2002; in 2004 Vietnam had the highest representation of women in parliament in Asia. Progress has been supported by initiatives of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW, the inter-ministerial committee that is Vietnam's national machinery for women's advancement). For the 1997 elections, leadership training sessions were held in six locations for 144 women candidates. The training focused on campaigning and presentation skills, and on concrete strategies to increase chances of success. For the subsequent elections, 216 women candidates benefited from the leadership training.

For the People's Council Elections at the sub-national level (provincial, district and commune), the NCFAW and the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) organised training courses on leadership skills for almost 18,000 women candidates in preparation for the 1999 elections, with further sessions held for the 2004 elections. There was also a media campaign to promote positive images of women in leadership and encourage the public to vote for women. Further support to the candidates is provided by the "Manual for Women in People's Councils" developed by the VWU. The manual focuses on women in leadership, the roles and functions of Peoples Councils, necessary skills and a better understanding of gender equality issues.

Source: National Report of Vietnam (2004)<sup>30</sup>

**Engaging journalists in discussions on gender equality to increase coverage and public debate**

In Southern Africa, a set of training workshops targeting media practitioners and women in or seeking public office were held in advance of the elections anticipated in 2004 and 2005 in seven countries in Southern Africa.



**“Nominations Service” to support the gender balance target for statutory bodies – New Zealand**





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- parliaments [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm) (accessed 28 June 2007); the 30% target for 1995 was set by ECOSOC in 1990 and is referred to in the *Platform for Action*, para. 182.
- <sup>15</sup> UNRISD (2005). *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*, p 152, 2003 data for 174 countries: [www.unrisd.org/](http://www.unrisd.org/) (search by title) (accessed 27 June 2007).
- <sup>16</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2006). *Women in politics: 60 years in retrospect*, Data Sheet 6, p.6 (both women ministers and presiding officers). [www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/wmninfokit06\\_en.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/wmninfokit06_en.pdf) (accessed 28 June 2007).
- <sup>17</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2006). *Women in politics: 60 years in retrospect*, Data Sheet 6, p.6 (both women ministers and presiding officers). [www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/wmninfokit06\\_en.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/wmninfokit06_en.pdf) (accessed 28 June 2007).
- <sup>18</sup> South Asia Partnership Bangladesh, “Capacity profile of Union Parishad elected women member,” study funded by CIDA’s PLAGE project in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, n.d.
- <sup>19</sup> European Commission, Database on women and men in decision-making (data last updated 04-12-06): [ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/women\\_men\\_stats/out/measures\\_out55\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/out/measures_out55_en.htm) (accessed 28 June 2007).
- <sup>20</sup> ILO (2004). *Breaking through the glass ceiling: women in management*. [www.ilo.org/dyn/gender/docs/RES/292/f267981337](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/gender/docs/RES/292/f267981337) (accessed 28 June 2007).
- <sup>21</sup> Catalyst (2006). *2005 Census of Corporate Officers and Top Earners for the Fortune 500.*, p.9. [www.catalyst.org/knowledge/titles/title.php?page=cen\\_WOTE02](http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/titles/title.php?page=cen_WOTE02) (accessed 28 June 2007).
- <sup>22</sup> Catalyst (2004). *The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity*: [www.catalyst.org/knowledge/titles/title.php?page=lead\\_finperf\\_04](http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/titles/title.php?page=lead_finperf_04) (accessed 28 June 2007).
- <sup>23</sup> European Professional Women’s Network, *Second Bi-annual EuropeanPWN BoardWomen Monitor 2006*. [www.europeanpwn.net/files/boardwomen\\_present\\_large120606.pdf](http://www.europeanpwn.net/files/boardwomen_present_large120606.pdf) (accessed 28 June 2007).
- <sup>24</sup> For example, see chapter 9 in UNRISD (2005). *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*. [www.unrisd.org/](http://www.unrisd.org/) (search by title) (accessed 27 June 2007).
- <sup>25</sup> United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women (2005). *Report of the Expert Group Meeting on ‘Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership.’* EGM/EPDM/2005/REPORT, para. 58. [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/FinalReport.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/FinalReport.pdf) (accessed 3 July 2007).
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- <sup>29</sup> IPU database on specialized parliamentary bodies dealing with the status of women and gender equality: [www.ipu.org/parline-e/Instanceadvanced.asp](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/Instanceadvanced.asp) (accessed 28 June 2007).
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- <sup>31</sup> Referenced websites accessed 28 June 2007.
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- <sup>34</sup> *Report of the Commonwealth Meetings on the eve of the 50<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women*, 25-26 February 2006, New York, presentation by New Zealand in Annex B-VII: [www.thecommonwealth.org/document/152447/report\\_of\\_the\\_commonwealth\\_meetings\\_on\\_the\\_eve\\_of.htm](http://www.thecommonwealth.org/document/152447/report_of_the_commonwealth_meetings_on_the_eve_of.htm) (accessed 28 June 2007). (New Zealand website referred to in box also accessed 28 June 2007.)
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- <sup>36</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union database on women in national parliaments: [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm) (accessed 28 June 2007).
- <sup>37</sup> UCLG: [www.cities-localgovernments.org/uclg/](http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/uclg/) see gender statistics (accessed 28 June 2007).