

WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN POLITICS

WORLDWIDE EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES



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WHERE DO WE STAND?

"A worldwide assessment of women's inroads into politics and its respective determining factors"

By the end of June 2007, 17.3 percent of worldwide legislators were women or, in other words, 6.412 women compared to 30.156 men.

Worldwide, women remain excluded from political and societal formal and informal decision-making processes as leaders, legislators, mediators, ministers and chief executives. Women are still perceived to be the exception from the "male rule" as politics, political leadership styles and policies are understood in male-centred terms. This is true for nearly all societies irrespective of their predominant culture, religion or human development level.

Nevertheless, political women have made substantial inroads in the last two decades on a worldwide scale, increasing their numbers in parliament, government and ministerial positions and contributing decisively to women- and family-friendly legislation and policy-making. Evidence from various regions such as Latin America, Europe and sub-Saharan Africa indicates that women parliamentarians change politics, agenda-setting, legislation and policy-making. In South Africa and Europe, discriminatory laws against women were repealed and more protective legislation for working mothers/women introduced through women parliamentarians initiatives.



In nearly all regions, women legislators contributed to a more social welfare-oriented legislation and policy-making for the whole of society, in particular marginalized social groups like the poor, women, ethnic or religious minorities and the elderly. In Scandinavia, South Africa and South Asia, societies witnessed a less confrontational policy and leadership style, a more issue-, community and consensus-oriented work culture and decision-making as well as more family-friendly time management of parliamentary schedules through an increased presence of women in parliament.

By the end of June 2007, 17.3 percent of worldwide legislators were women or, in other words, 6.412 women compared to 30.156 men. In Nordic Countries women represent 41.6 percent of parliamentarians, followed by Europe with 20.1 percent, the Americas with 20.0 percent, sub-Saharan Africa with 17.6 percent, Asia with 16.6 percent, Pacific with 14.6 percent and the Arab States with 9.6 percent. (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> as of 30.07.2007) Currently, 35 women preside over the 189 existing parliaments in all world regions, holding 13.4 percent of the 262 available posts of parliamentary president or of one of the Houses. (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/speakers.htm> as of 30.07.2007) Thirteen Women Prime Ministers and Presidents (6,7% of 193 States) are currently in charge of political decision-making in various world regions: Michelle Bachelet in Chile (President since 2006), Helen Clark in New Zealand (Prime Minister since 1999, third term in office), Luisa Diogo Dias in Mozambique (Prime Minister since 2004),

Status and success of female political actors is largely determined by socio economic factors, the dominant political culture and by the institutional set up of a country.

Tarja Halonen in Finland (President since 2000, second term in office), Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Liberia (President since 2006), Mary McAleese in Ireland (President since 1997, second term in office), Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in the Philippines (President since 2004), Angela Merkel in Germany (Prime Minister since 2005), Hang Myong-sook in South Korea (Prime Minister since 2006), Maria do Carmo Silveira in São Tomé and Príncipe (Prime Minister since 2005), Portia Simpson-Miller in Jamaica (Prime Minister since 2006) and Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga in Latvia (President since 1999, second term in office).

Women politicians and female political aspirants still face many hurdles to be selected as a candidate and to make an impact once elected. In a way of creating a "historic jump" (Drude Dahlerup), affirmative action in the form of constitutional, electoral or political party quotas for parliamentary mandates were introduced in many countries worldwide, primarily since the 1990s. Currently, 97 countries have quota provisions with an average female representation of 19.3 percent. (<http://www.quotaproject.org/country.cfm> as of 30.07.2007) The different paths to an electoral mandate, with or without quotas leave women with different room of maneuvering and perceived legitimacy. In general, the status and success of female political actors is largely determined by three sets of factors: (a) socio-economic such as education, professional experiences, income and financial resources; (b) the dominant political culture and its values, norms, behaviors, attitudes on politics, political behavior and gender-ideology; (c) the

The institutional set-up of a country in which politics takes place such as the political system, party system, election system (e.g. quota provisions), recruitment and nomination practices for legislators and executives.

CASE STUDY: PAKISTAN

Since 2002 women hold 21.3 percent of parliamentary seats (17 percent in the Senate) due to a reserved seats provision, representing various political parties across the ideological spectrum. According to a UNDP Report (2005: 72), women's wings of political parties have proved ineffective for women legislators to raise women's issues and to discuss them with female party members. Therefore, several committees were created by women's wings, headed by women legislators, within the central parties such as the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML-Q) or the main opposition party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

Due to current power politics and the general lack of cross-party networking and alliance-building, no Women's Parliamentary Caucus has emerged on the national level despite several attempts from women parliamentarians and civil society organizations from 2002 onwards. Nevertheless, women parliamentarians managed to successfully introduce important women's issues into parliamentary and public debate as well as on the legislative agenda.

key women politicians such as Mehnaz Rafi from the ruling party and Sherry Rehman from the main opposition party, among others, strategically joined hands to pass women-specific legislation, e.g. with regard to honor killings and the Hudood Ordinances.

Furthermore, forums and platforms at governmental, parliamentary and civil society level exist, although no national cross-party women's alliance could be institutionalized so far. At provincial level, a cross-party caucus, the All Balochistan Political Women Forum, was established by various women provincial legislators from different parties across the ideological spectrum in Balochistan. Forums and Caucuses set up in other provinces with the help of one of the major women organizations, the Aurat Foundation, were not successful and dissolved soon after their creation in 1998. But several women politicians from the local, provincial and national level remain active in advocacy and lobbying networks of Aurat Foundation, such as the Legislative Watch Group in the provincial capitals Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta, attend workshops or consultations organized by women organizations and benefit from the latter input and public lobbying for their own legislative work. (UNDP 2005: 73-74, 78)

WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

“Key factors for women parliamentarians political impact”



Given the differently organized spaces in public and private life for women and men, women politicians play a crucial role for the “common women” to gain access to the state and its institutions, to enhance their political participation and are often role models. Evidence gathered from the experiences and practices of women parliamentarians worldwide suggests that women politicians' success and political impact largely depends upon (a) their links to civil society, in particular women's movement and their constituencies as well as (b) the use of their critical mass in parliament through effective networking and caucusing across party lines and with society at large (including media) for lobbying, legislation and policy-making. Furthermore, the sociopolitical context in which women parliamentarians operate can have positive or negative effects: economic and political circumstances, legislature's procedures and rules, background/experience/number of women representatives (Azzam/Lovenduski 2005: 188).

A parliamentary women's caucus or a governmental women's policy network are important steps towards women's political effectiveness.

Anne-Marie Goetz (2003) formulated the concept of *women's political effectiveness*. The ability for a woman parliamentarian to voice important policy issues and follow them through depends on the strength of the gender equity lobby in civil society, the credibility of women politicians and their policies in the political competition and electoral politics and the capacity of the state and the political system to respond to new policy issues, accommodate a new set of political actors and to implement gender equity policies. Building a substantive and effective critical mass and voice depends on coalition- and alliance-building across the arenas and various tiers of legislatures and executives on the local, provincial and national level ("chain of responsibility and exchange"). A parliamentary women's caucus or a governmental women's policy network are important steps.

INFO BOX: CAUCUS AND POLICY NETWORKS

A **caucus** is an “exclusive meeting of the members of a party or faction for organizational and/or strategic purposes”. There are different kinds of caucuses in various worldwide parliaments: within one political party of a specific group of party members, for example women; cross-party alliances of either ruling or opposition parties or of different parties or parliamentarians for shared strategic purposes and political interests. A caucus can be of formal or informal nature, with official membership and regular meetings or with an informal, ad-hoc or temporary basis of those parliamentarians “who share common interests and come together in attempting to influence the agenda”. (McLean/McAllister 2003: 67-68) The formation of a women's caucus depends on various factors: the partisan environment in the legislature, level of resistance/threat from male colleagues, former legislative legacies of cooperation and alliance-building. In cases of strong political competitiveness and partisanship in a parliament or one-party rule combined with strong leadership, the formation of formal or informal caucuses can become difficult. (Thomas/Welch 2001: 171, 177)

A **women's policy network** is “a constellation of expert or interested groups and individuals, public and private, forming around a policy area. The working of a policy system is characterized by continuous interchanges among members at every stage of the policy process, from agenda building to implementation. From the perspective of the interest group, membership in such a policy system offers 'insider' status. Ready access to elected officials, managers and sympathetic bureaucrats can provide information on new regulations, policy shifts, and effective strategies.” (Boles 2001: 78)

Often enough, women parliamentarians in the developing world have to operate in a difficult political and societal environment with a very limited space of agency. Under circumstances of post-conflict, autocratic or highly polarized, even misogynist political landscapes, it is a huge challenge for female legislators to advance a new, divergent agenda or to create a critical mass for women-friendly policy-making and the political mainstreaming of women's issues. It has also to be taken into account what personal and structural constraints women parliamentarians face, e.g. their support basis, the compromises and commitments undertaken to receive an electoral ticket, the mandate received and its strength within the given political system, their affiliated party ideology and loyalties, available resources etc. For example, women elected on reserved seats are largely perceived as tokens or proxies. In many African and Asian countries they are considered to lack a constituency-based legitimacy and political authority and to exercise a weak political mandate which seems to bind them even more to party power-holders and party policies. Reserved seats are often seen as the sole avenue for female legislators with the general seats remaining the monopoly of male legislators. Considering all this, women face an uphill-battle to become politicians in their own right, implementing their own political interests and agenda and to successfully enter mainstream politics by being re-elected on a quota or, preferably, a general seat.



INFO BOX: CRITICAL MASS AND CRITICAL ACTS

The majority of women activists and academics have always called for an increased number of women legislators of up to 30 percent, a **critical mass**, so that women are enabled to make an impact in politics. Recent research evidence nevertheless indicates that women as *critical actors* can also make a difference through **critical acts** and strategic collaboration even as a small minority in parliament. Critical acts of individual or a (small) group/caucus of female legislators are those which manage to mobilize necessary resources to change the situation of women and lead to further changes, e.g. quota provisions, recruitment of women to political offices, gender equality legislation. (Childs/Krook 2006: 2, 7-8)

As examples from other West European experiences show, where few women managed to form strategic partnerships within and outside of parliaments to effect pro-women change, a critical mass or women's caucus is not a necessary precondition, although an enabling factor. (Karam/Lovenduski 2005: 189) In the provincial National Assembly for Wales, "cross-party sisterhood" is exercised while no women's parliamentary caucus is in place. Active individual "equality champions" engage outspokenly in favor of women's issues in parliamentary debates and initiate critical acts with their legislative work.

While the political competition and party loyalties run very high in parliament, women from different parliamentary factions unite nevertheless to support and advance gender equality matters and respective women-friendly legislation. (Chaney 2006: 702, 704)

Understanding possible bargains, thinking strategically:

- What is the common ground shared with colleagues from other parties on important political and societal issues?
- Which policies can be implemented successfully in the given sociopolitical context and are accepted by dominant sociopolitical stakeholders?
- Who are alliance partners in- and outside the parliament, e.g. media, civil society activists?
- What are informal, symbolic measures and unconventional means which can be used to create space for certain policy interests and their ratification and implementation?

Worldwide examples from developing and developed countries show that women can make a difference in public policy making even in cases of small numbers or token representation.

Worldwide examples from developing and developed countries show that women can make a difference in public policy-making even in cases of small numbers or token representation. This depends on (a) the type of women who are motivated to represent women's interests and concerns in opposition and on the treasury benches; (b) the commitment of women parliamentarians to give high priority to women's rights, lobby in- and outside of parliament for certain legislative initiatives and raise political and societal awareness for certain issues; (c) the level of collective organization and commitment, i.e. the extent to which they work together through a caucus and with women's organizations. In other words, without committed cooperation, no women-friendly legislation and policy-making!

CASE STUDY: SOUTH AFRICA

Post-apartheid South Africa is a major success story of women's political representation and effective participation. After the third democratic elections in 1994, the proportional representation election system with closed list, the ANC quota provision and the party's commitment to gender equality resulted in women representing now 33 percent of legislators, 29.6 percent of cabinet ministers and 61.5 percent of deputy ministers. (Meintjes 2005: 231)

Since the first democratic elections in 1994, which gave universal suffrage to all South Africans, women parliamentarians and ministers, accompanied by an active civil society and women's movement, introduced a series of groundbreaking laws and policy changes fighting gender-based discrimination and promoting crucial women's issues to be set on the political and legislative agenda. One key factor behind this success story was a strategic coalition and cooperation of women activists and women politicians across the spectrum of races, ethnicities and political ideologies. In a divided and polarized society such as multi-racial and multi-ethnic South Africa, such an alliance was a big challenge as common interests among women, given their diversity, was limited and mistrust, given the long years of violent conflict and political repression, widespread.

In 1992 the Women's National Coalition (WNC) was established by members of 92 civil society organizations, regional coalitions and political parties as an interactive forum which launched a Women's Charter for Effective Equality (bill of rights). This Charter was the result of intensive consultation with several thousand women across the country to document their policy and legislative needs such as equality at work, in property, tax and inheritance laws and to combat violence against women. The Charter served as a lobbying tool in parliament and to monitor government policies and led to similar initiatives in Namibia, Zambia and Kenya.

In 1993 women forced their way to the negotiation table for the democratization process and formed a separate women's caucus which successfully insisted on the principle of gender equality over customary law to be enshrined in the new constitution, the establishment of a gender advisory body for government policies and opened public debate for gender concerns.

The African National Congress (ANC), then-major opposition movement and in power since 1994, has a strong Women's League, its own parliamentary women's caucus and a think tank-cum-caucus to advance a women's agenda which, for example, suggested legal initiatives for the transition negotiations and the constitutional drafting. After the first democratic elections in 1994 women parliamentarians joined efforts to hold parliamentary procedures and structures more accountable to women's

needs: working hours were limited to maximum 6 p.m., women toilets and childcare facilities established. But the cross-party Parliamentary Women's Group encountered difficulties due to conflicting women-related positions and policy interests of the various political parties, tensions between caucus members from treasury and opposition benches, a lacking institutionalized structure and resources as well as resistance against the very existence of the caucus from some male political leaders "the anti-party thing is stronger than the pro-gender thing" comments one ANC MP (quoted in Geisler 2000: 622). Consequently, it has been the partisan ANC Women's Parliamentary Caucus which successfully engineered gender equality initiatives and is the key pressure group inside parliament and its committees for pro-women legislative changes. In addition, the multi-party Joint Standing Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and Status of Women serves as parliamentary forum to identify and lobby for women-specific legislative priorities and to monitor government policies. As a result, several key legislations were passed addressing sexual harassment at the work place, women's reproductive rights, domestic violence and financial maintenance for mothers and women in customary marriages, recognition of customary marriages. Furthermore, women's budgets were introduced as obligatory for government budgets and policy programs for free health care for pregnant women and children until the age of six.

These policy successes originated from intense lobbying of the ANC Women's Parliamentary Caucus and the coordinated efforts of ANC women parliamentarians with women activists in civil society, male parliamentarians and South African President Thabo Mbeki. (Meintjes 2005; Hassim 2003; Meintjes 2003; Geisler 2000; Seidman 1999)

One challenge for effective caucusing, as shown in the case of South Africa, is the diversity of women parliamentarians themselves which brings along different positions and perspectives vis-à-vis women's issues and their possible legal and policy regulation. Women differ in sociopolitical background, life experiences, (gender) role perceptions as public representatives, values, ideological and political/party loyalties. Women parliamentarians on general seats might consider themselves primarily accountable and responsible for the whole constituency (and not for women only) which is different to those elected on women-specific quotas. Others might be reluctant to be publicly identified with women's issues "because it might be detrimental to their careers in environments dominated by men" (Thomas/Welch 2001: 167).

"Where women office-holders constitute a critical mass and are able to work together informally or are organized into a formal caucus, women may be more likely to make a difference."

(Susan J. Carroll 2001: xvi)

Another challenge, hardly within the power of women parliamentarians, is the institutional context in which women politicians operate, the freedom and strength for asserting one's own ideas and agenda and political maneuvering for parliamentarians and level of accommodation of women and their political interests within political parties, government and state bureaucracy. In highly polarized or adversarial environments, a substantial number of supportive female colleagues and collective legislative work, also with male colleagues, become even more important to achieve an impact and pass women-friendly legislation. (See Lovenduski 2005: 14-16; Meier 2005: 59; Carroll 2001: xv, xxi; Thomas/Welch 2001: 176, 178; Thomas 1991: 960ff)

CASE STUDY: UGANDA

Uganda holds a no-party-system due to claims that parties will exacerbate ethnic conflict. In the mid-1990s seats were reserved for women to participate in the Constituent Assembly, but women also came through the openly contested seats making up 18 percent of its deputies (52 women).

"Most of the women joined a non-partisan Women's Caucus, which was very strongly supported by the women's movement, particularly when it came to lobbying for gender equity clauses in the constitution. The Women's Caucus was instrumental in ensuring that a number of key provisions were included in the constitution: a principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sex; equal opportunities for women; preferential treatment or affirmative action to redress past inequalities; provision for the Establishment of an Equal Opportunities Commission; as well as rights in relation to employment, property and the family." (Goetz 2003: 117-118)

The Women's Caucus could rely on information gathered beforehand by the Women's Ministry consultations on women's opinions about necessary legal change. The caucus was successful in introducing affirmative action in the form of reserved seats for women in local government and ministerial positions.

But critics emphasize that women's political effectiveness is hampered due to the fact that women's seats were simply 'added on' to political decision-making bodies instead of opening necessary space for women within the bodies thus allowing competition and mainstreaming of political women. (Goetz 2003: 122)

After parliamentary elections (with reserved seats provisions for women), a Women's Caucus was also established in parliament but remained largely inactive between 1996 and 2001. Women legislators were not successful to reunite in parliamentary committees on important issues for women such as land rights. The main reason lies not with the women politicians, but rather with the political set-up as legislators need the support of the ruling movement for their initiatives (which is lacking). In 2001 a new initiative started, the Coalition for Political Accountability to Women, which aims to support women parliamentarians addressing gender equity concerns. (Goetz 2003: 124, 126)

"But the current compromised status of women in politics in Uganda offers an important lesson: though women can benefit enormously from direct presidential patronage, their effectiveness in promoting gender equity agenda is low if they have not institutionalized a presence for themselves (...)." (Goetz 2003: 136)

“When a caucus
bands together, the
result is political clout
a weapon with the
potential to
overcome skewed
groups.”

(Thomas 1991: 973)

In the new and emerging democracies in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, most successful women politicians have strong links with civil society, in particular the women's movement, or crossed from social activism/opposition to political activism, often through quota provisions, in the wake of democratizations. They used the window of opportunity for strategic policy-making.

For instance, quotas introduced in many Latin American countries resulted in a rise of female legislators with successful political careers; property and inheritance laws have been revised and laws on sexual offences and gender-based violence were introduced in sub-Saharan Africa. In Chile, political women from centre-left parties formed the Caucus of Women for Democracy together with independent women activists to insert women's interests into political parties' election manifestos, called for a women's ministry and joined hands with women from other political parties for legislation on maintenance for abandoned wives and families (Waylen 2000: 774, 784). While in Argentina women from political parties and non-governmental organizations successfully joined efforts with the governmental National Council for Women to introduce a strong quota law in 1991 and ensure its compliance in subsequent elections (Waylen 2000: 776f).

Furthermore, Argentinean women members of the Constituent Assembly formed a cross-party alliance in 1993 to ensure that the quota law and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) were enshrined in the new constitution a cooperation which continued in subsequent parliaments in an otherwise women's policies unfriendly presidential system (Waylen 2000: 777, 782).

Public opinion polls show, many women parliamentarians are perceived by the public as important and valid political alternatives to the corrupt, violent, ineffective traditionally male political elite and are therefore re-elected and given more responsibilities as head of parliamentary committees, ministers or within political parties' executive councils.



LOOKING FOR SUGGESTIONS...

Key Instruments for Women Parliamentarians Effectiveness

Women parliamentarians' political work can have an impact on politics and society at different levels:

- "reactions to women politicians, with a decline in sexist treatment and sexual harassment;
- the performance and efficiency of female politicians, with fewer women leaving politics;
- the social climate of political life, with the arrival of a more consensual style and family-friendly working arrangements;
- political discourse, with a redefinition of 'political concerns';
- the policy-making agenda, with a feminization of the political agenda; and
- The influence and power of women in general, with the broader social and economic empowerment of women". (Dahlerup quoted in Childs/Krook 2006: 7)



With regard to legislation on women's issues, one can distinguish between women's rights bills (e.g. equal pay, violence against women, reproductive rights) and bills on women's traditional interests, reflecting women's role as caregivers (e.g. health care, education, housing). A women parliamentarian thus addresses women's issues if her legislation- and policy-making reflects the wishes and needs of the female electorate in a traditional or a feminist understanding. (Tremblay 1998: 439-440)

INFO BOX: NETWORKING AS A TOOL

"Networking is a crucial socialization mechanism for women MPs. Networking provides quick access to knowledge that may otherwise take years of experience to acquire and enables women MPs to come together to discuss their concerns and share their knowledge and expertise, thus greatly enhancing their potential for effectiveness. Such networking takes place both within and (less frequently) across party lines. Cross-party alliances of women MPs have been successful in a number of countries including Sweden, France, the Netherlands, South Africa, Croatia and Egypt. The issues are as diverse as rape laws, electoral reform, institutional reform, personal status and other country-specific issues (such as women's rights to apply for passports without their husbands' permission in Egypt and social, political and economic rights for Dalits [so called 'Untouchables'] (...) in India)." (Karam/Lovenduski 2005: 194)

One successful instrument has been the establishment of standing committees on women such as the above-mentioned in South Africa which monitors the government commitment towards the implementation of CEDAW, worked for family-friendly working hours and childcare facilities in parliament. Nevertheless, isolation or marginalization of women's issues should be avoided and therefore also be discussed in other relevant parliamentary committees responsible for legislative changes, e.g. committee on public planning/infrastructure, labor or finance in the case of income-generating projects or education for women. (UNRISD 2005: 158)

INFO BOX: GENDER EQUALITY COMMITTEES

As part of a women's political machinery, special committees were established within government, ministries and parliaments of many countries worldwide. Their membership can consist of diverse political actors coming from major parliamentary factions, government officials and specialized bureaucrats as well as co-opted experts and lobbyists from civil society. In several countries, such committees were formed to monitor the compliance with CEDAW or to advance specific women's policy projects such as gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in South Africa, European Union member states and candidate countries.

"Formal and informal gender equality committees were successfully established in sub-Saharan Africa and the Netherlands, while the assemblies of Scotland and Wales have broadly-based equality committees which, under pressure from women representatives, take a close interest in equality. Also effective are committees of women legislators such as those found in New Zealand, Australia and the USA. In other cases, nationwide umbrella organizations (non-governmental) or strong grassroots organizations can act as catalysts to get women into key areas."(Azzam/Lovenduski 2005: 196)

A less formal instrument was introduced in Sweden by Brigitta Dahl, former speaker of the parliament. She invited "guests to discuss different aspects of gender equality but also democracy in a wider sense" to parliament while a child care centre was established to allow women parliamentarians from distant constituencies to have their children close. (Wangnerud 2005: 246) These informative public forums can also be instrumental to interest and win over male colleagues for the advancement of women- and family-friendly legislation. Input-training on gender issues and orientation on public speaking, media interaction or image projection should also be offered to male colleagues who are often crucial power brokers and necessary/strategic allies for legislative initiatives. (Karam/Lovenduski 2005: 196)

INFO BOX: SUPPORT GROUPS AND MENTORING

Support groups, consisting of women professionals and parliamentarians, have been formed mainly in Europe. As Riitta Kosukainen, a Finish MP, emphasizes, support groups play a crucial emotional as well as professional supportive role: "The fact that these women are able to get together across party lines, across professional areas and support each other not only personally, but also seek to do so professionally, is invaluable!" Furthermore, mentoring groups have been established in which senior politicians or women in leadership positions supervise, advice and guide juniors in their career projects and paths, encouraging them to proceed in difficult times and increase their effectiveness. (Karam/Lovenduski 2005: 194)

"One such practice is in place in the German Bundestag when a woman raises her hand to speak in discussions she is automatically shifted to the top of the list of male speakers. This practice seeks to overcome women's diffidence about speaking in male-dominated groups by maximizing their opportunities to participate. It has become so ingrained in MPs that they repeat the practice even when they are outside parliament."

(Karam/Lovenduski 2005: 204)

Changing procedures and rules to give women parliamentarians the necessary space and enabling environment to make an impact in politics is often difficult to achieve because of multiple resistances from conservative groups in the political system and society as well as from male colleagues. Often, women's issues are sidelined in favor of other, allegedly more 'urgent' tasks of national interest or out of fear of a conservative/fundamentalist backlash as experienced in post-communist Europe and in predominantly Muslim Asia. In many new and emerging democracies and countries in transition from decades of conflict, women often lack the necessary skills to engage in public; the rules of the game are often still fluid and legislative procedures have to be learned on the job with few supportive training, time and staff resources at hand.

Women Making Impact Through Parliament Some Guidelines from IDEA

	Institutional/Procedural and Representation	Influence on Output and Discourse
Learning the Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Participate in training and orientation exercises on internal parliamentary codes of conduct; develop public speaking and effective communication; and relate to and lobby male colleagues. ▫ Network with women's organizations. ▫ Mentoring by more senior MPs. ▫ Understand and handle the media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Distinguish between women's perspectives, women-specific needs and gender issues. ▫ Caucus with media, national and international organizations. ▫ Draw attention to discriminatory discourse against women. ▫ Establish a presence within different committees (e.g. budget, defence, foreign affairs). ▫ Clarify the value and importance of 'soft' committees.
Using the Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Make a point of nominating and voting for women in internal elections and within parties. ▫ Draw attention to absence of women in key positions. ▫ Invest in committee work. ▫ Push for and establish government equal opportunity positions and women's ministries. ▫ Campaign to expand existing structures to include women's concerns. ▫ Set up networks to train in more convincing and less adversarial types of debate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Influence parliamentary agendas: introduce women-sensitive measures (e.g. changes in parliamentary work schedules to suit working mothers). ▫ Establish public enquiries on women's issues and use findings to place issues on government agendas and within legislative programmes. ▫ Speak-for, co-sponsor and sponsor bills. ▫ Seek partnership with male colleagues. ▫ Make public issue out of certain concerns by cooperating with the media (e.g. on ways of referring to women in parliament, sexual harassment issues). ▫ Link gender inequalities to other inequalities. ▫ Form alliances with other excluded groups to seek representation. ▫ Use the media as a part of the effective outreach strategy to widen women MPs' constituencies and public support bases.

Changing the Rules

- Change candidate selection rules for the entire party, especially for leadership positions.
- Introduce quota systems on certain committees or issue of proportionality of men/women representation.
- Establish a women's whip, i.e. a manager for parties/legislatures responsible for the politicians' commitment to women's agendas.
- Establish gender equality committees.
- Establish national machinery to monitor implementation and ensure accountability; institutionalize regular debates on progress into the parliamentary timetable.
- Establish mechanisms to encourage female speakers (e.g. giving them priority over male colleagues).
- Participate in institutional and procedural reform and modernization processes to ensure the resulting changes are women-friendly.
- Encourage the providing of financial incentives to programmes/projects designed to facilitate women's decision-making endeavours (e.g. for leadership-training schools, increasing government subsidies to political parties with more women in leadership positions/candidates; introducing a specific women's budget earmarked for enhancing women's decision making).
- Cooperate with the women's movement and the media to change the image of women as 'only' housewives, to portray them as effective and efficient politicians and to normalize the image of a woman politician.
- Be proud of identity as a woman, instead of attempting to imitate men and hide or deny womanhood.
- Expand legislation to include emerging issues of importance to women (e.g. conflict resolution and peace-making, human rights, special women's budgets).

(Karam/Lovenduski 2005: 192-193)

“European parliamentarians have made use of good will and knowledge of academic experts to draft policies on such matters as domestic violence, female bondage, trafficking in women, care of children and the aged, pensions and women's health issues”

INFO BOX: ACADEMIC EXPERTISE AND INPUT

Successful legislation- and policy-making does not only imply networking and strategic alliance-building within and outside of parliaments, but also an up-to-date knowledge of women's issues and possible regulations and solutions. Academic expertise of scholars from different areas, disciplines and academic institutions can help to develop effective and efficient legislative/policy proposals, to understand complex social problems, to conduct surveys or feasibility studies on intended policy programs and their outcomes.

“European parliamentarians have made use of good will and knowledge of academic experts to draft policies on such matters as domestic violence, female bondage, trafficking in women, care of children and the aged, pensions and women's health issues. Research on policy issues is a major political tool and can be gathered and used by MPs by participating in conferences organized by women's organizations, experts and politicians and by caucusing with other MPs who have similar interests.” (Karam/Lovenduski 2005: 198)

CASE STUDY: NORTH AMERICA

In **Canada**, female members of the Liberal Party were elected to parliament in huge numbers in 1993 and subsequently organized the party-based Liberal Women's Caucus to promote their gender equality agenda and to "function as an internal watchdog that monitors the impact of proposed legislation on women, and lobbies key players within Cabinet and the Party Caucus to ensure that the concerns of women are reflected in the government's legislation" (Steele 2003: 9). Two thirds of the caucus members were members of women's groups. The Liberal Women's Caucus is institutionalized as an official caucus within the Liberal Party.

"It is for this reason that it was able to create a structure of encouragement for female Liberal MPs enabling them to take a position on women's issues in the House of Commons. In addition, the very existence of the Women's Caucus may have exerted certain pressures on elected female members in other parties, emboldening them to take similar positions on women's issues in the House (...)." (Tremblay 1998: 446)

But caucus members encountered a limited space of agency to promote social programs (child or health care) given the party's neo-liberal agenda to downsize cost-intensive welfare programs. (Steele 2003: 9)

In the **USA** various forms of women parliamentarians alliance-building and networking exist on various levels from societal lobbying to campaign funding for female political aspirants such as the National Women's Political Caucus as advocacy organization, EMILY's List and Women's Campaign Fund as women's political action committees apart from a parliamentary women's caucus in the US Congress. Across the country, research shows that those women legislators were the most successful in terms of women- and family-friendly legislation- and policy-making who organized themselves with female colleagues. (Carroll 2001: xii-xiii; Bratton/Barnello 2002; Thomas 1991)"The meetings among women legislators took different forms. In some states [of the USA] women met through formal women's caucus; in others, they met informally. Often the meetings were bipartisan; sometimes they were partisan. Nevertheless, regardless of the form they took, the meetings seem to have offered women legislators' mutual support for working on women's rights legislation." (Carroll 2001: 14)"The existence of a women's caucus appears to be related to the successful passage of women's legislation. (...) Among the top states in production of legislation on women, children, and families, all but Washington had a women's caucus. And in Washington, women made up more than 30 percent of the legislative membership, the highest proportion in our sample of legislatures; moreover, they appeared to work together to pass legislation of interest to women." (Thomas/Welch 2001: 178)

In 1977 female members of the Lower House, the Congress, established the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues (CCWI) to link congresswomen with women's groups. This formalized caucus holds membership fees for female and male members, which allows the CCWI to hire staff, produce publications and to organize public advocacy events. When the number of elected women legislators increased in 1992 to a new record, the influence of the caucus grew even stronger due to a higher number of organized congresswomen. As a result, the caucus influenced key debates in Congress on "health equity, family and medical leave, and domestic violence and sexual assault. Yet, while members also took up the banners of, among other issues, financial aid for college students with children, childcare for participants in national job training programmes, tax code reform and reproductive choice". (Parry 2005: 253-254)

BEYOND LEGISLATIVE WORK

“Women's political machinery and other supportive institutional structures and women parliamentarians”



Women's movements and women's policy agencies, such as commissions on the status of women, women's bureaus and women's ministries, also play a crucial role for women parliamentarians to make an impact in politics for legislation, policy-making and policy-implementation.

Women's political machineries are important supportive institutional structures to jointly advance a women-related political agenda within government and ministerial structures, which are predominantly gender biased, women-unfriendly institutions, which inhibit that women's issues are accommodated and implemented successfully. Women's political machineries function as a centralized, cross-sectoral approach only if they have sufficient authority and resources to monitor, analyze and (re)direct policy-making and policy-implementation in the different government agencies in charge. (Weldon 2002: 1159f)

Further advantages of such a coordinated engagement of women parliamentarians are that interaction and participation generate “deeper knowledge of the issues and concerns” of various groups of women, allow better formulated legislative project/policy program proposals and enhance public legitimacy.

As practiced in Australia and Canada, a regular exchange and institutionalized discussion forums between civil society women's organizations and government/bureaucracy officials enhanced interaction and decreased dependency from government good will or individual relationships. (Weldon 2002: 1157, 1160)

In addition, successful policy-implementation requires strategic cross-sectional institutional support and sufficient political clout:

"Policies addressing violence against women, the protection of reproductive freedom, and economic equality between men and women usually require coordination among a number of major government departments. Government response to violence against women, for example, requires action in areas as diverse as criminal justice, education, and income assistance policy." (Weldon 2002: 1159)

Women's organizations serve as external lobbying and pressure group, provide valuable and diverse input from the grassroots (*idem*: 1160), training opportunities and enlarge a women's parliamentarians public support base and constituency.



CASE STUDY: INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION (IPU)

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is the international organization of sovereign parliaments, established in 1889, and currently holds membership of 140 parliaments and 7 regional parliaments. It serves to foster the contact and coordination among parliaments and its members towards the development of parliamentary democracy, cooperation and peace. (<http://www.ipu.org/english/whatipu.htm> as of 30.07.2007).

One of its groups is the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians, a lobby group within the IPU, which established a Gender Partnership Group in 1997, constituting of male and female members. The Meeting of Women Parliamentarians serves as a platform for exchange of experiences and practices of women parliamentarians as well as a "think-tank for strategies to improve women parliamentarians' presence". (Palmieri/Jabre 2005: 225)

Its international work focuses on post-conflict countries such as Rwanda, Burundi and East Timor where the IPU offered trainings on public speaking, preparation and delivery of campaign speeches, development of communication strategies and techniques, field trips to constituencies and participation of women legislators in public debates, training on parliamentary procedures and budgetary processes. In Rwanda and Burundi, the organization supported to strengthen the organizational capabilities and legitimacy of the Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians and the Association of Women Parliamentarians from Burundi which both mobilize political women for gender issues. Document centers on gender issues were established in all three post-conflict countries. (Palmieri/Jabre 2005: 226-227)

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<http://www.idea.int/gender/index.cfm>

<http://www.iknowpolitics.org/>

<http://www.ipu.org/iss-e/women.htm>

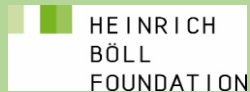
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Women entered parliaments
and make a difference
in politics around the world.
This toolkit gives an introduction
into the following questions on
inroads made by women legislators:
What have been their experiences
and practices to exercise their
mandate and to join efforts with
their legislator colleagues to
implement their political agenda?
What key instruments do women
parliamentarians use in countries
in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin
America to be political effective?
In how far do additional supportive
institutional structures such as
women's political machineries help
them in their efforts?



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