

Building Blocks For Gender Equality

What Political Parties Can Do to Strengthen the Participation and Representation of Women

Countries with higher levels of gender equality have higher economic growth. Companies with more women on their boards have higher returns. Peace agreements that include women are more successful. Parliaments with more women take up a wider range of issues – including health, education, anti-discrimination and child support.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon



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Introduction

***“I know from my own experience that there is
no limit to what women can do.”***

Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile, former Head of UN Women

With its adoption in 2013 of the Constitution Amendment Act which sets a 10% quota for the representation of women in parliament, Samoa has established itself as one of the regional leaders on gender equality.

Now that Samoa has taken this important step, it is a good time to explore what other measures can be implemented to support a more representative parliament and the full participation of women in all aspects of public life.

Political parties have a pivotal role to play in creating an open and inclusive political culture – one where women are welcomed and their opinions valued. It is often said, that political parties are the “gateways” to seats in parliaments.

And, indeed when the experience of countries that have successfully increased the number of women elected to parliament is reviewed, it is evident that this success is supported by concrete measures adopted by political parties with a clear commitment to gender equality.

And women inside and outside political parties are increasingly challenging these important institutions to change how they function to ensure that women participate more equally in all aspects of party activities. It isn't simply at election time that a party can demonstrate its commitment to gender equality by presenting women candidates as part of its candidate team, instead women are looking at how the party does its business on a day-to-day basis to determine if the party genuinely values the voice and participation of women.

The purpose of this manual is to provide an overview of what kinds of steps political parties can take, both inside the party and at election time, to ensure that women represent the party as candidates as well as having a genuine voice in shaping its programmes and policies. Examples are provided of approaches that parties around the world have adopted to improve the participation of women inside parties and parliaments.

1. Why Should Political Parties Take Action On Gender Equality?

The push for change has come about for several reasons. Increasing the political representation of women has been a clear priority of the international community for several decades.

As well, a number of governments around the world have set increasing the political representation of women as a goal. Either through setting quotas for participation in parliaments or passing other legislative directions to shape the election and political process, governments have expressed a commitment to a gender equality agenda.

But the short answer is also that it's also good for the political parties!

Increasingly, political parties have recognized that there are direct benefits to both the party's internal organization and building stronger voter support for the party if it is seen as taking concrete action to give women a stronger role, both as members and leaders.

Consequently, a number of political parties in countries around the world have put in place significant changes both in the day-to-day operations of their parties and at election time, to strengthen the position of women.

1.1 International Commitments

Through the United Nations and other international organizations, countries have recognized the value of building more participatory political systems through a range of general and specific commitments to increasing gender equality in parliaments and political parties.

Samoa's government has been clear in its support for a more comprehensive policy and legislative response to gender equality by the international community.

In a March 2015 speech, to the 59th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Samoa's Minister of Women and Social Development, the Hon. Tolofuaivalelei Falemo'e Leiatua highlighted the support at a regional level for gender equality. He specifically noted the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' 2012 "Declaration on Gender Equality" which reaffirmed the Leaders' commitment

to “lead, monitor and facilitate gender mainstreaming in our region at the highest level”.

And, of course, the **1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** commits UN member states to “take measures to ensure women’s equal access to full participation in power structures and decision-making”.

More recently, the General Assembly has focused on the role of political parties in creating a more democratic political infrastructure, by adopting measures that will improve the participation of women in democratic institutions, both political parties and parliaments.

There are two important commitments that relate specifically to the need for political parties to take action to improve the representation of women at all levels of these organizations.

Adopted unanimously by the General Assembly on December 19th, 2011, the UN General Assembly Resolution on Women’s Political Participation (A/RES/66/130) stresses the critical importance of taking action to address the obstacles for women to their full participation in both parliaments and political parties.

It calls on UN Member States to take a variety of measures, including:

- To review the differential impact of their electoral systems on the political participation of women and their representation in elected bodies and to adjust or reform those systems where appropriate; and
- To strongly encourage political parties to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women, to develop their capacity to analyse issues from a gender perspective, and to adopt policies, as appropriate, to promote the ability of women to participate fully at all levels of decision-making within those political parties.

And prior to this resolution, the General Assembly had also asserted its support for quotas for both the representation of women in parliaments and political parties.

The UN Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/15 calls on governments, political parties, trade unions, and professional and other representative groups to adopt a 30 percent minimum proportion of women in leadership positions, with a view to achieving equal representation.

Through these resolutions, the international community has taken a strong and clear position on the need for political parties to develop and implement “plans of action” for greater gender equality.

1.2 The Benefits to Political Parties of Taking Action on Gender Equality

In addition to these external pledges for action there are other incentives for change as political parties have increasingly recognized that greater gender equality inside the political party organization also can bring genuine benefits to the party.

By bringing women in to senior party positions, they gain experience in decision-making and balancing strategic objectives – better preparing women party leaders for positions as ministers and taking tough decisions around the Cabinet table.

Having more women involved in party policy development strengthens your party’s election programme and its appeal and resonance with women voters – providing your party with the opportunity for greater election success.

A party that is seen to be open and welcoming to women, is one where women are more likely to join – boosting membership is an important goal for most parties.

A public commitment followed by clear action to ensure greater participation by women at all levels of your party can only improve your party’s public image demonstrating that your party is “open” and “inclusive”.

1.3 Recent Trends

In some cases, parties are making these changes because they are directed to by legislation or government policy. In other cases, political parties are voluntarily adopting changes in how the party is run and how elections are conducted to increase the number of women participating at all levels.

For example, in countries where political parties are eligible for public funding, this is a tool that is also being used to encourage the parties to perform more strongly in the nomination and election of women candidates. In some countries, public financing laws are used to set clear goals for political parties, and parties that fail to meet those goals in their candidate nominations are penalised by a reduction in the amount of public funds they receive.

However, it seems increasingly that public financing is being used as a “carrot” rather than a “stick”. Political parties that meet or exceed the goals that are set are rewarded with an additional allocation of public financing.

And there are now also important regional examples where political parties are entitled to a financial reward for meeting a quota requirement for women candidates. The **Solomon Islands** has instituted a compensation system for political parties that nominate women candidates.

And it should be noted that this kind of measure is being used in a “First Past the Post” election system and isn’t restricted to Proportional Representation or “List” systems.

In the **Solomon Islands**, a political party that contests an election is entitled to . . . a temporary special measures grant of \$10,000 payable annually for every woman elected into Parliament...

Another regional example is **East Timor** where the election law is employed to encourage the nomination of women candidates. Candidate quotas are directly tied to political party eligibility for election registration.

There the quota law, Article 12 (3) of the 2006 Law on the Elections of the National Parliament (as amended in 2011), requires that one out of every group of three candidates must be a women. The list will be rejected if it does not comply with the quota provisions.

A number of European countries have taken action using either annual state funding or eligibility for election funding to push political parties into putting in place measures to increase the number of women on their candidate lists.

In **Portugal**, parties that do not have a balance between genders among its candidates can lose between 25 per cent and 80 per cent of their public funding. In December 2011, **Georgia** introduced a change to its election financing laws that would provide an additional 10 percent in state funding to parties that had at least 20 per cent of either gender on its election list.

But in addition to increasing the number of women candidates, the issue of the level of participation by women inside political parties is also now being tied to public funding. For example, some countries have linked the eligibility of political parties for public financing for ongoing political activities to a

requirement that the parties invest in supporting the participation of women within its political party structure. **Ireland** and **Italy** are two such examples. **Finland** requires its political parties to invest 12% of the allocation of public financing to support women's wings.

Other countries are examining the use of legislative directions to political parties to improve the representation of women in the party's organization, and are not simply focusing on election performance on gender equality.

In November 2014, Pakistan's National Assembly Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs unanimously adopted a bill to impose a minimum 10% quota for women standing as election candidates, and propose a 33 per cent quota of women in the "general councils" of political parties. The bill is currently in the Speaker's Office awaiting introduction to parliament.

And in some cases, access to political party registration is being tied to the party demonstrating that it meets state gender equality objectives.

Costa Rica has changed its laws to include a requirement that political parties must include effective measures in their by-laws so that the principles of equality, non-discrimination and parity are respected by all party structures. Parties that fail to comply will not be permitted to renew registration, or in the case of new parties, to register.

2. What Political Parties Can Do To Take Action on Gender Equality

2.1 How Does Your Party Rank on Gender Equality?

In order to take effective action and allow the party to develop a robust strategy for increasing the participation of women, you need to have a clear understanding of the real level of participation of women at all levels of the party's structure.

Are women represented at every level of the party's structure, especially in the senior, decision-making bodies? Women must be equally represented as both members and leaders of your party.

Are there obstacles or barriers to the active participation of women in your party, for example, are party meetings held at a time when it is difficult for women with household obligations to attend? Does your party provide child care, so that women with children can be fully involved? Can women afford to attend party meetings, or does the party need to consider some form of travel subsidy?

A full evaluation or "audit" of the participation of women in your party is the starting point. It is not a complicated process to undertake. A small committee can be set up – clearly with women members included.

After conducting this review you will be able to begin developing a strategy with clear and measurable actions to accomplish your goals. It should also include a timeframe for the party to make these changes.

If the party can develop a robust gender equality plan with the party leadership committed to making the changes required, it should also include a media strategy to inform the public about the steps the party is taking.

2.2 Effective Measures for Ensuring Gender Equality in the Operations of Your Party

- ✓ Changing your Party's regulations/constitution/statute to reflect the goals of gender equality:

These are the “foundation” documents for any political party and are generally formal legal documents that set out your Party's structure, its decision-making bodies and the rights of Party members. Some parties have “codes of ethics” as well.

It is a powerful statement of commitment to the goal of gender equality by your political party to insert in clear language a statement of principle acknowledging the value of gender equality in a democratic political party.

The **Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN)** in El Salvador includes a clause on the political equality of women in both its “mission statement” and “ethics code”.

And equally, if not more importantly, are changes in the party's structure that will guarantee the participation of women in its decision-making bodies, either through a quota or a requirement for gender equality. Around the world, women are under-represented on the bodies that have the power to make decisions in political parties. This measure is a significant indicator of real political will inside the party to advance an agenda of genuine equality between men and women.

These changes should be reflected in the party's formal legal documents. In some cases, party members may participate in supporting the proposed changes by voting at a party congress or convention, or party meeting.

Rule 6 of the **African National Congress' Constitution** (South Africa):

“With the aim of full representation of women in all decision-making structures, the party will implement a programme of affirmative action including a quota of not less than 50 per cent women in all elected structures.

Other parties, recognizing the importance of local branches or party groups as entry points to the party, have mandated the full participation of women at the local level as well. For example, Morocco's **Socialist Union of Popular Forces** (USFP) has imposed internal quotas for each of its local branches to ensure the active participation of women at all levels of the party.

These measures ensure that the life experiences and knowledge of women will also be reflected in the full range of party activities, from policy development to formulating election platforms and election campaign strategies.

In 2008 in India, the **Bhatariaya Janata Party (BJP)** amended its party constitution to set aside 33% of the party's leadership positions for women and add the head of the national women's branch as a member of the party's central election committee.

- ✓ Setting targets for women's participation at party meetings or conventions:

Important party meetings show the public face of the party and the absence of women will be clearly evident. This is especially the case if the media will be present at the event.

One approach is for the party to set targets for the participation of women at these sessions. With more women attending party congress and meetings, the party gains the added benefit of broader input into party decisions.

Again, it is important to check to see if there are barriers to women attending meetings, such as the need for child care or travel subsidies.

In the **United States**, the Democratic Party changed its party's Charter to require an equal number of men and women delegates at nominating conventions for presidential candidates.

- ✓ The Role of "Women's Units" or "Women's Wings" in advancing gender equality in Political Parties:

While there has been continuing discussion about whether separate organizations for women within political parties genuinely advances the full participation of women in a meaningful way, there are clear accomplishments that can be identified in a range of party activities.

If a party has a women's organization – it should be tied-in in some way to the central decision-making bodies, for example, a seat (or more) on the Executive body or key party committees and participation in policy-making and election planning activities. There should be an independent funding allocation to permit a robust schedule of both internal party activities and outreach by the women's organisation.

In Cambodia, the **Sam Rainsy Party's** women's wing has led advancing women in the party structure, training for women candidates, supported internal quotas for party decision-making bodies and engaged in outreach and education programs.

- ✓ Support for Training and Capacity-Building Programs for Women Members.

Women party members should be encouraged and supported to participate in training programmes to build their knowledge about the election process and skills required to be a candidate. Political parties can explore the opportunity to work with civil society groups and women's organisations to provide training for women party members.

The **Australian Labor Party (ALP)**, provides training for all women members, prospective women candidates, and the Equity Officer (when this position existed) through its women's branches. The ALP's training sessions are aimed at enhancing women's skills in campaigning, media management, public speaking, meeting procedures, fundraising, etc.

3. Political Party Strategies for Gender Equality in Elections

3.1 Strategies for Gender Equality in the Candidate Selection Process

✓ Setting Voluntary Targets for Women Candidates:

Political parties are increasingly adopting “voluntary” targets or quotas to assist in electing more women to parliaments, even in situations where there may already exist a legislated quota. In over 30 countries, political parties have taken this important step to boost the representation of women in parliaments.

For example, in OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) member states, 36 political parties in 18 countries have adopted voluntary quotas that exceed an existing legislated requirement.

Germany Party	Voluntary Quota
Social Democratic Party	40%
Left Party	50%
Alliance 90/The Greens	50%
Christian Democratic Union	33%

In 1986 in Canada, the federal New Democratic Party adopted as a party policy a commitment to meet a target of 50% women candidates. Canada is a “first past the post” electoral system and nominations are conducted by local associations at constituency level.

The party set in place a nomination policy and procedures that required an active search for women candidates prior to approval for a nomination meeting to be held. As a result of these measures, the NDP has consistently fielded the highest number of women candidates in Canadian federal elections, approaching 50% in the most recent election.

✓ Maintaining Lists of Potential Candidates.

A party official or office should be clearly designated to be responsible for maintaining lists and contact information for potential women candidates. This could also be done in collaboration with women's organizations in civil society. The women on the lists should also be included in opportunities for candidate and election training. Although the party organization itself should maintain a potential candidate list, for both men and women, this should also be a priority item for attention, for a women's organization within the party.

In **Fiji**, the FWRM (Fiji Women's Rights Movement) has begun the process of assembling a database of potential women candidates in advance of the 2018 elections. Information on capacity-building and election training sessions can then be shared with the potential candidates. The goal is to compile a list with the names of 1,000 women.

3.2 Financial Support for Women Candidates

✓ Women Candidate Funds:

Some political parties have established funds or financial subsidies to assist women candidates with the additional expenses they often have to bear in order to participate in election campaigns.

These initiatives recognize the greater challenge that women face in raising money for effective election campaigns. South Africa and Canada are two such countries where parties have recognized the greater difficulty women face in being able to mount a well-financed and robust election campaign and have established internal party funds for this purpose.

In Canada, the New Democratic Party's "Agnes MacPhail" fund provides a \$500 stipend to all women candidates to help offset election expenses.

In **Ireland**, the women's wing of the Labour Party has developed an initiative to address the particular 'five-C' challenges they have identified as disproportionately affecting women: care, culture, cash, confidence and candidate selection. The party provides training courses for women members and organizes outreach activities and fundraises on behalf of female candidates, with an emphasis on supporting new or first-time candidates.

In some countries women's organisations in civil society have established funds with the specific purpose of supporting women candidates. "Emily's List" in the United States is one such example.

As women candidates are generally at a disadvantage in raising money for robust campaigns, these funds have provided crucial assistance.

✓ **Candidate Spending Limits**

Another approach that has been used to "level the playing field", especially for first-time candidates, is where the party imposes spending limits for candidates seeking nomination.

Party spending limits may determine how much money each candidate can spend on their campaign for publicity, media, campaign materials and rallies.

3.3 Mentoring for Women Candidates

Some parties have established formal "mentoring" programs where experienced former candidates will be linked with first-time candidates to provide advice. In other situations, an informal system of relationships may occur.

It is extremely valuable for candidates to be able to have private conversations and openly express concerns and ask for candid opinions in order to be able to improve their performance.

3.4 Reflecting a Commitment to a Strong Women's Agenda in the Party's Election Programme

By presenting a strong team of women candidates to the voters, your Party is also sending a very strong message about its commitment to gender equality. Women should also be profiled in visible positions during the election – as part of media conferences with the party leader, in the party's election advertising and in election materials.

Many parties identify as part of their election manifesto or platform a separate "women's platform". This allows the party to highlight specific issues of concern to women voters and the solutions that the party is proposing.

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