



IMPACT STORY



ENSURING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Photo: UN Women/Novella Nikwigize

“I can tell you, perseverance pays,” said Bernadette Gomina, who ran for the legislature in 2005 and 2010 before being elected in 2015 and reelected in 2020. “[Women parliamentarians] face challenges at many levels, including [lack of] finances and discriminatory behaviours and mindsets, but we have our part to play; we must work together to change this situation.”

Gomina is a Member of Parliament for the administrative division of Bayanga, in the south of the Central African Republic, and one of 17 women elected in the two rounds of the 2020–2021 legislative elections in the country. Of the 133 elected members of the National Assembly validated by the Constitutional Court as of June 2021, women represent close to 13 per cent, an increase from the 8.5 per cent in the outgoing government.

The Central African Republic's first-round of presidential and parliamentary elections on 27 December 2020 were mired by violence and attacks by rebel groups. In the provinces, many candidates—women in particular—were threatened, robbed and even physically assaulted. Based on those past experiences, in advance of the 2020-2021 elections, UN Women, in partnership with United Nations Police and MINUSCA established the 1325 hotline to collect reports of violence against women. The hotline, funded by UNDP under the basket fund project “Women and Elections:

Photo above: Bernadette Gomina is one of 17 women elected in the two rounds of the 2020-2021 legislative elections in the Central African Republic.

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

UN Women's work in support of the Central African Republic's 2020-2021 legislative elections was implemented in partnership with **UNDP, MINUSCA** and the **European Union** and is part of UN Women's flagship programme on Women's Leadership and Political Participation.

Results of coordinated work meant that **40%** of electoral trainers were women, **880** community volunteers performed outreach to ensure women's participation in the electoral process, and **135** political coaches were trained to provide one-on-one coaching to over **540** potential women candidates.

The 1325 hotline was established with **United Nations Police**, and the Forum for Women Parliamentarians was established in 2017 by **UN Women** and **UNDP**.

For the 2020-2021 elections, UN Women received financial support from: **UN Peacebuilding Fund, Canada, Women in Politics Fund** financed by **Sweden, Ezingo Fund** (a multi-partner trust fund) and **UNDP** under the basket fund project “**Women and Elections: My Vote, My Right**” to which the **United Kingdom, Germany, France, the European Union, Japan** and **Italy** have contributed.

My Vote, My Right,” and named after UN Security Council Resolution 1325, was also used for the dissemination of messages encouraging the massive participation of women in the elections. The hotline, still operating, is free and can receive up to 30 distress calls simultaneously, seven days a week and 24 hours a day.

Soon after becoming elected in 2015, Gomina began to address various challenges in Bayanga, including the issue that schools did not have teachers or equipment. With MINUSCA’s support, Gomina was also able to build a women’s centre, which serves as a multi-purpose facility that provides women with the space to hold meetings and income-generating activities. She has also championed “Open Days” at the Parliament so that high school girls can interact with women parliamentarians, and job-shadowing initiatives to encourage more young women to enter politics.

In 2017, with support from the Peacebuilding Fund and the Government of Canada, and in partnership with the Ministry of Women, UN Women and UNDP supported the establishment of the Forum for Women Parliamentarians to strengthen women’s political participation in the Central African Republic. Since then, UN Women has been providing technical support to build the capacities of its members and community leaders alike.

“The Forum has been an important [impartial] tool to advocate for women’s rights and a great platform for experience-sharing,” said Gomina, its Vice President during the past legislature, and in 2021 elected as its Chair.

The Forum has been instrumental in the adoption of gender-sensitive laws and legal provisions, including the National Gender and Election Strategy (2019) and the Parity Law (2016), among others, which have resulted in women representing 36 per cent of local electoral commissioners during the 2020-2021 elections, compared to 22 per cent during the 2015 elections. “When it came to the Parity Law and other laws on gender, [Forum members] all agreed to convince fellow Members of Parliament and members of our respective parties to vote in favour. It is because we worked together that today the Central African Republic has its Parity Law,” explained Gomina.

However, enforcement of the Parity Law remains a challenge. Although parties are required to have a minimum number of women on their lists, they can provide a simple explanation to the Constitutional Court as to why they have not met the quota and still get validated. In response to this shortcut, in August 2021,

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Decades of civil wars, political tensions, failure in the implementation of political and peace agreements, among other root causes, have led the Central African Republic to grapple with political instability, violence, and inadequate socio-economic and infrastructural conditions for reconstruction. This context has exacerbated discrimination against women and girls through heightened sexual and gender-based violence, limited economic opportunities and marginalization in decision-making processes.



UN Women’s Women, Peace and Security Agenda aims to address the specific challenges faced by women and girls in times of conflict and to support their meaningful participation in decision-making in all sectors.

Since 2019, UN Women and other partners have been supporting the Central African Republic Government in implementing its second **National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325**, aimed at strengthening the legal framework, coordination of work and accountability in the implementation of the resolution.

Prime Minister Henri Marie Dondra announced that a National Parity Observatory will be established to monitor implementation of the Parity Law.

“Despite all the challenges encountered during the elections, women made it a point to participate and cast their ballots,” said Salvator Nkurunziza, UN Women Representative in the Central African Republic. “Through an inclusive approach guided by the principle of Leaving No One Behind, and the establishment of the 1325 hotline, we were able to provide crucial support in the elections so that women could safely and effectively exercise their right to vote.”

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