UN WOMEN

WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP

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The issue

Women's political empowerment and leadership is fundamental to achieving gender equality, but globally women are significantly under-represented in political and electoral processes.

As of 2015, there were more women politicians than in any point in history, representing 22 percent of the world's national parliamentarians; by comparison, in 1995 just 11 percent of national parliamentarians were women. Millions more women are elected at sub-national levels.

Despite this progress, however, women remain significantly under-represented as voters, candidates, elected representatives and electoral administrators worldwide, and are largely excluded from the most senior decision-making positions within the executive government.

Some electoral systems are not conducive to women participating in equal numbers. Political parties may not nominate women to winnable positions. Women candidates tend to have less access to financial resources for electoral campaigns, and face a number of practical barriers. Media organizations oftentimes perpetuate negative gender-based stereotypes.

A combination of institutional and structural constraints, as well as cultural and attitudinal barriers that suggest women should not have a role in public life, result in their leadership being challenged in the home, the community and in the public realm.

Our strategy for change

Advancing women's political empowerment and leadership requires action on multiple fronts.

UN Women has identified four priority outcome areas, which will require actions from a coalition of partners to achieve transformative change:

1. Support development and implementation of robust legal frameworks and administrative arrangements, including relevant reforms to constitutions, laws, regulations or party statutes, and policy actions such as setting numerical targets for women in leadership positions with temporary special measures (TSMs) and reforming party statutes.

UN WOMEN'S FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME INITIATIVES
Women's political empowerment and leadership is one of UN Women's Flagship Programming Initiatives designed to ensure that UN Women can deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This Flagship Programme will support national governments to address multiple SDG targets across multiple goals.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROGRAMME, CONTACT:
Julie.Ballington@unwomen.org

220 East 42nd Street
New York, New York 10017, USA
Tel: 646-781-4400
Fax: 646-781-4444
www.unwomen.org

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2. Expand and diversify the pool of qualified and capable women to run for election, including through initiating programmes that boost women's confidence and capacity to lead, enhancing their campaign strategies and techniques and promoting linkages with supportive civil society organizations.

3. Transform gender norms so that women are accepted as legitimate and effective leaders, including through developing campaigns that sensitize the media and electorate on the need for women in public life at all levels, and by working with men and male champions.

4. Support women leaders in gender-sensitive political institutions, including parliament, political parties and Election Management Bodies (EMBs), to create opportunities for women to work at different levels of government. Attracting, promoting and retaining women leaders, and highlighting the constructive contribution they make to decision-making, will help create role models.

How the programme works

The Programme will be implemented through a portfolio of country and regional projects. A Policy Support Unit will provide regional and country offices with technical support and advisory services to improve data collection, monitoring and evaluation, knowledge production and research capacities.

FAST FACTS - WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

- As of December 2015, women hold 22.6% of all parliamentary seats (IPU 2015).

- Women account for only 7.8% of Heads of State and 5.1% of all heads of government (IPU 2015).

- Women comprise 17% of all ministers (IPU 2015).

- Women are more likely to work collaboratively and across party lines to address issues like gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws and electoral reform (IPU 2008).

- Globally, social norms that relegate women to domestic and care work, reduce women's mobility and ability to network, reinforce inequality through gender-based violence and restriction of choices, and perpetuate legal discrimination limit women's representation in politics and government (World Bank Group 2014).

The Programme is designed to be aligned with Goal 1 of UN Women's Strategic Plan, "Women Lead and Participate in Decision-Making at All Levels," and SDG Goal 5.5, "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life."

Partnerships for change

To create the enabling environment for such processes and outcomes to occur, UN Women will leverage its coordination and implementation mandates with a range of partners.

UN Women has strong country presence and established networks at the international, regional, and national levels and proposes to implement this initiative in partnership with relevant international organizations, regional parliamentary assemblies, national civil society organizations, UN community entities and implementing partners such as national parliaments, electoral bodies, political parties, networks of women politicians and media organizations. In addition, UN Women may pursue links with academic and research institutions.

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iKNOW POLITICS

UN Women hosts the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) secretariat. iKNOW Politics is a knowledge hub helping to advance women in politics worldwide. A one-stop-shop for information and expertise, it facilitates exchange, dialogue and knowledge creation for those engaged in promoting women's political participation.

www.iknowpolitics.org

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