




EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Gender-Sensitive Parliaments

Towards parliaments that respond to the needs and interests of both men and women in their structures, operations, methods and work





The Executive Summary contains an overview of key findings from the survey on gender-sensitive parliaments carried out by the IPU in 2009 and 2010.

It is based on a full-length publication on gender-sensitive parliaments, written by Dr. Sonia Palmieri, for the IPU (2011).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Gender-Sensitive Parliaments

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# Introduction

In 2008, the Inter-Parliamentary Union began a collaborative project to examine the gender sensitivity of parliaments around the world. The IPU worked in partnership with the UNDP-Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region and International IDEA in Latin America.

The project builds on the IPU's 30-year experience in research on gender and parliament, and directly follows on from its 2008 research publication *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*. A clear finding of that survey was that women are overwhelmingly the drivers of change in terms of gender equality in parliament, and that the time may have come to lay some of the responsibility for that change with parliaments as a whole. The question then became: what are parliaments as institutions doing to encourage and foster gender equality? What policies inform gender equality efforts? Are the institutional structures of parliaments around the world gender-sensitive?

The purpose of the Gender-Sensitive Parliaments project was to gather primary information on the ways in which parliaments can best become gender-sensitive institutions and effectively mainstream gender into their work. Primary research (including survey questionnaires, interviews with parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, and the production of country case studies) was carried out between 2009 and 2010.

The project's objectives are to:

## 1. Increase knowledge on gender-sensitive parliaments

The project aimed to investigate the gender-sensitivity of parliament in terms of its operational and institutional culture. The operational culture of parliament can be reflected in different ways, such as parliamentary facilities, sitting times, budget allocations and services available. The institutional culture refers to the unwritten rules, norms and mores adopted over time which are inherent to institutions that were primarily designed by men.

The project also aimed to distil current best practices in the area of gender mainstreaming in policy development in parliament, and examine the mechanisms that best support it, such as parliamentary committees and caucuses of women parliamentarians, or the use of gender budgeting.

## 2. Provide tools for parliaments and other stakeholders on gender-sensitive parliaments and gender mainstreaming

Based on the research conducted, the project aims to highlight examples of best practice, and distill guidelines and benchmarks which can be used to assess the gender sensitivity of parliaments and their capacity for gender mainstreaming. The guidelines would also suggest different reforms that may be made by parliaments to forge more gender-sensitive institutions.

## 3. Build capacity for gender-sensitive parliaments

The project further aimed to bolster the capacity of parliaments to become more gender-sensitive institutions, for example by supporting the capacity of parliamentary committees and caucuses to address gender equality through technical assistance and training activities. It is intended that a series of initiatives will be carried out to promote these activities in parliaments and raise awareness among key stakeholders.

Questionnaires for parliamentary authorities, parliamentary groups and individual members of parliament were designed in 2008 after consultation with both parliamentarians and gender and parliament experts. Ninety-five responses were received from parliamentary authorities in 77 countries. Seventy-one parliamentary groups from 42 countries completed the second survey, and 123 parliamentarians from 50 countries responded to the third survey. Roughly, an equal number of men and women MPs responded to the survey.

In addition to the questionnaires, face to face interviews were held with men and women parliamentarians from every region of the world. Many of these interviews were conducted as part of country case studies prepared between 2009 and 2010. Countries were selected on the basis of recent innovations in the national parliament and emerging good practices. National case studies as well as regional reports were prepared (see Appendix 1 for more on methodology). The global report reflects all of this research.

The following is a brief summary of the report and a presentation of its main findings and recommendations.





The purpose of the Gender-Sensitive Parliaments project was to gather primary information on the ways in which parliaments can best become gender-sensitive institutions and effectively mainstream gender into their work.

# Creating a gender-sensitive parliament

A gender-sensitive parliament is one that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and in its work. The term 'gender' refers to the social attributes associated with being male and female and the relationships between women, men, girls and boys. These attributes and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization. The concept of gender also includes the expectations about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviors of both women and men, and when applied to social analysis, reveals socially constructed roles. Sex and gender do not mean the same thing. While sex refers to biological differences, gender refers to social differences, which can be modified since gender identity, roles and relations are determined by society.<sup>1</sup>

A gender-sensitive parliament is founded on the principle of **gender equality** – that is, that both men and women have an equal right to participate in its structures and processes, without discrimination and without recrimination. **Parliaments that are gender-sensitive** have no barriers to women's full participation and set a positive example (or role model) to society at large. They are institutions which favour less aggressive parliamentary language and behaviour; more family-friendly sitting hours; the introduction of childcare facilities and parental leave for MPs; and gender-sensitive training programmes for all MPs.

A parliament that meets the basic premise of gender equality is one where rules are accessible to all MPs, do not exclude, restrict or discriminate against women, and provide for gender neutral language. They are organisations that accept the need to review all policies, laws and practices from a gender perspective, either through a dedicated committee on gender equality or by sharing that responsibility across all bodies of the parliament. Gender-sensitive parliaments work in accordance with **gender equality policies** which provide direction for setting priorities against strategic and well targeted interventions to achieve the goal of gender equality.

In becoming gender-sensitive, parliaments adopt the strategy of gender mainstreaming. **Gender mainstreaming** is the process of assessing and taking into account the impact on women and men of

any planned action – including legislation, policies or programmes – at all levels and in all spheres. Its ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. It is understood as strategies that put gender issues at the centre of broad policy and programme decisions, institutional structures and resource allocation. Mainstreaming gender equality in the work of parliament should contribute to effective implementation and oversight of legislation and policies that address the needs and interests of both men and women.

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## Using everyday opportunities to mainstream gender equality

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A gender-sensitive parliament is also one that promotes gender equality and aims at achieving it within society at large. To do so, it therefore mainstreams gender throughout its work processes and outputs. Members of Parliament can assume the responsibility to mainstream gender in their everyday activities: legislating, overseeing and representing.

In **legislating**, MPs are required to draft and debate laws and policies, and review and approve the national budget. From a gender perspective, MPs can initiate gender equality laws and institute gender-based analysis of all legislation; ask questions about the effect of the proposed law on men and women during legislative debates; and consider whether taxation and the allocation of expenditure is equitable for men and women, or at least does not have a negative effect on either.

MPs always need to remember who the target public of a draft law is, and be aware of how that bill may affect different sub-groups of that public, most particularly women and men, girls and boys.

The concept of gender also includes the expectations about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviors of both women and men, and when applied to social analysis, reveals socially constructed roles.



In carrying out their **oversight** responsibilities, MPs scrutinise government activity and expenditure through debates, questioning and inquiries. For example:

- during question time (or interpellation), MPs can seek to ask ministers about the effectiveness of their programmes in terms of gender equality. Raising questions in this forum attaches publicity to an issue;
- MPs can send written questions to ministers or their departments when they require more substantial responses, including sex-disaggregated data;
- during budget debates, MPs can question ministers on public expenditure and its impact for women and men, girls and boys;
- as members of a committee, MPs can ask a broad range of groups and individuals, including public agencies, academics, or private organizations about their views on the effectiveness of government programmes and activities;
- MPs can use the media to publicise their findings.

The **representative** function of parliament includes being accountable to the people, representing the needs and interests of citizens and informing constituents about debates, new laws, government spending and policies. From a gender perspective, MPs need to ensure that they understand and reflect the needs of the diverse groups in their constituency. They can do this by ensuring equal access for all citizens to their constituency office,

especially opening their doors at times when both men and women can attend.

MPs also need to ensure they have good networks with a broad range of groups in their electorates and at the national level, including representatives of national women's machineries, NGOs, unions, and academics working on gender equality issues. Women's parliamentary caucuses have been created in this vein. MPs can use opportunities such as conferences, forums, study tours, exposure visits and workshops to network with other parliamentarians, the media and civil society. Building and maintaining strong networks enables parliamentarians to keep informed about gender issues. Men and women need to work together to promote gender equality.

Ultimately, parliamentarians need to use the opportunities they have not only to ask questions but to publicize the answers they receive. Where legislation falls short of the needs, MPs have the opportunity to propose solutions through amendments to existing legislation, or by initiating entirely new laws.

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### **Making systematic change for gender equality**

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Improving the inclusivity of parliaments is a multi-faceted challenge for all. In addition to a broader, more fundamental push for democracy, it requires a combination of greater numbers of women; stronger gender-sensitive infrastructure;

# Creating a gender-sensitive parliament

and stronger gender equality policy and legislation. These recommendations are elaborated below.

## 1. Increase the number and presence of women in parliament

While the **number of women parliamentarians** has increased over time, it does not yet match the proportion of women in society more broadly. In January 2011, women accounted for 19% of parliamentarians worldwide. Facilitating women's access to parliament remains a challenge in all corners of the globe.

Over time, legislated special measures have proven effective as one mechanism to increase women's presence in parliaments. To achieve the goal of gender equality in terms of numbers, parliaments could promote legislated special measures, such as mechanisms aimed at ensuring that greater numbers of women are selected by parties to run for election in 'electable' positions on the ballot. Amendments can be made to electoral laws, constitutions and political party platforms. Legislated measures should include sanctions where parties do not meet the standards set out in legislation.

While numbers of women are important, it is also vital to have **women in positions of parliamentary leadership**. There are relatively few women presiding officers (or deputy officers) in the parliaments of the world. While they are increasingly taking up the position of committee chair, women tend to chair committees of the 'soft' portfolio areas such as women's affairs, law and justice, labour and education. The process of

appointing women to committees is dominated by the political parties and parliamentary groups. Change would entail a more transparent method that matches members' abilities, diverse working experiences, and preferences. An affirmative action measure that gives preference to women over men in cases where qualifications were equal, would also improve the acceptability of women leaders. In Iraq, for example, positions of power reserved for women are commensurate with their representation in the parliament (25 per cent).

## 2. Develop an adequate legal framework for gender equality

A number of countries have pursued **gender equality laws** which tend to cover a broad range of non-discrimination measures. Such laws have been vital to achieving progress for men and women. Where such laws have not yet been enacted by parliament, they should be. Where gender equality laws are over ten years old, they should be updated to include frameworks for gender mainstreaming.

Gender equality laws also need to address the question of gender mainstreaming in parliament. Who, or what body, is responsible for reviewing legislation from a gender perspective? Is that body supported by adequate parliamentary infrastructure, such as a committee with powers to monitor the implementation of the law, and more particularly, the gender mainstreaming framework? Some parliaments were of the view that legislative impact assessments which accompany each legislative initiative could include a gender component.

### Parliaments and women: how much progress

Overview	1995	2011
Proportion of seats held by women in all houses	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>19%</b>
Chambers with 30% or more women members	<b>7 out of 229 (3.0%)</b> • 5 single or lower houses • 2 upper houses	<b>43 out of 262 (16.4%)</b> • 26 single or lower houses • 17 upper houses
Chambers with 10% or less women members	<b>141 out of 229 (61.6%)</b>	<b>62 out of 262 (23.6%)</b>
Chambers with no women members	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>
Women presiding officers	<b>24 (10.5%)</b>	<b>38 (14.1%)</b>





## Rwanda Auditing for gender equality

In Rwanda an “internal participatory gender audit” was carried out by Parliament in 2009. The audit aimed at providing data on the status of gender mainstreaming efforts and allowing the Parliament to plan accurately and effectively to fill capacity gaps with regard to gender mainstreaming. Preliminary results provided data to confirm MPs’ assertions that “capacity issues” more than commitment were at the heart of their remaining challenges. Though the MPs and staff

surveyed reported a high degree of familiarity with common gender mainstreaming terms and concepts, relatively few indicated that they knew how to conduct gender analysis or apply gender concepts to their work in Parliament. It also highlighted the need to provide training and capacity building to staff as well as MPs. The audit also facilitated an institution-wide response to meet gender equality goals and objectives.<sup>2</sup>

**Plans of action** that detail concrete measures would also assist parliaments in identifying the gaps in their legislation and overall policy objectives.

### 3. Develop a gender-sensitive policy framework for parliament

A **gender policy** for parliament can be understood as a road map or plan that outlines the parliament’s commitment to gender equality and details a clear set of objectives and processes that are set to achieve that commitment. Under this overarching policy, there should be a suite of related policies addressing internal functioning and overall output objectives.

With regard to the **internal functioning of parliament**, policies would include prevention of harassment, the equitable distribution of resources and allowances – including access to research services, computers and office space – and expected behavior set down in a code of conduct.

While **codes of conduct** appear to be relatively common, they do not, as a rule, include references to gender equality. This is a significant weakness which requires more attention, not only by parliaments but by bodies such as the IPU. While parliaments were mostly of the view that resources and allowances are distributed equally, it is telling that women remain under-represented in those positions that attract higher allowances (such as Speaker or committee chair). Plans of action are required to ensure women are not always the last candidate to be considered

for a promotion. Policies which seek to prevent harassment are very rare, and while complaints mechanisms are in place in some parliaments, it is questionable whether these are independent of the political process.

### 4. Mainstream gender in parliament’s work

Gender equality is not guaranteed simply because there are women in parliament. It is more a question of how gender-sensitive and gender aware the parliament, its policies, and its infrastructure are.

#### **Taking stock**

A first step is to carry out an **internal assessment** of parliament’s capacity to mainstream gender. This can take the shape of an internal audit, as has been done in Rwanda.

#### **Dedicated gender mainstreaming infrastructure**

There are two main institutional parliamentary mechanisms that can assist parliaments in ensuring parliament’s outputs have been analyzed from a gender perspective: gender equality committees and women’s parliamentary caucuses. **Gender equality committees** act as an incubator for policy ideas on gender equality and help to keep gender issues on the parliament’s agenda. Their advantage lies in their ability to work closely – and establish formal relationships – with national women’s machineries, ombudsmen for equality, and non-governmental organizations. A good practice prevails in Pakistan where the gender equality committee’s reports are sent directly to the relevant Minister.

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Some committees have been able to influence policy on a range of issues including education, healthcare, and employment, to name a few. A strength of these committees is their permanent structure – they are bodies of the parliament like any other committee and have the same resources (budget and staff) allocated to them. In some parliaments, however, gender equality committees have been given slightly different (advisory) status, which changes their ability to pursue action on the recommendations they make.

Generally, however, gender equality committees were seen as being equal to other parliamentary committees, and as effective. Limits on these committees' effectiveness related to the focus of their inquiries, the number of women in parliament, the abilities of the chair and the extent to which they were supported by the parliamentary leadership. Gender equality committees can also give support and co-operate with other portfolio committees, encouraging them to consider issues of gender equality relating to their subject matter. In this case, the gender equality committee plays the role of initiating, supporting and monitoring what other portfolio committees do to mainstream gender.

Where gender mainstreaming is concentrated in the work of a dedicated gender equality committee, this committee should have the same role, responsibilities and powers of

Gender equality committees can also give support and co-operate with other portfolio committees, encouraging them to consider issues of gender equality relating to their subject matter.

other parliamentary committees and should be similarly resourced. Where possible, parliamentary staff supporting the work of gender equality committees should work with them for at least one parliamentary term to ensure that gender expertise is not lost too frequently. It is vital that these committees be recognised as permanent structures of the parliament.

The process by which these committees mainstream gender should be explicit and made clear on public information sites (including the parliamentary web site). Committees on gender equality should have systematic consultation processes with women's organizations and gender experts, particularly when reviewing draft legislation. The committees should have access to sex-disaggregated data, so that initiatives can be analysed for their cost benefits.

Where parliaments have chosen not to establish a dedicated gender equality committee, these

## Sweden

### Raising the profile of gender equality issues

The Speaker's Network for Gender Equality among MPs was established in 1995 by the Speaker, Brigitta Dahl. In the early spring of 1995, she invited seven female MPs, one from each of the parties in parliament, to a meeting. Its purpose was to discuss how these united forces could contribute to making the best use of the new and positive representation of women in parliament. Many ideas have emerged from the conversations held in this group. They have, for instance, resulted in the establishment of a network on gender equality among members of parliament.

The purpose of this network was to shed light on the conditions and assumptions governing parliamentary and political work in a broad perspective, and the possibilities of development for individual members and for parliament as a whole. The arrangement of breakfast meetings and wide-ranging seminars on gender equality, but also democracy in a wider sense, for MPs and officials of parliament was another major task. Today, the Speaker's network has been renamed the Speaker's Reference Group on Gender Equality Issues.

## Five steps in mainstreaming a gender perspective in legislation The Cambodian Checklist

### Step 1

Determine the purpose, scope and operation of the proposed law; identify the groups most likely to be affected by the proposed Bill and any likely gender implications;

### Step 2

Measure the impact of the proposed law; if available, use sex-disaggregated data, but where it is not available, consider what else could be used;

### Step 3

Ask specific questions regarding the legal drafting; make sure clear, plain and gender neutral language is used;

### Step 4

Ask questions about administration, costs, regulations and public education; consider whether women will be involved in these processes; and

### Step 5

Double check it all – make sure the ‘gender question’ has been raised at every stage of the analysis.<sup>3</sup>

issues are commonly addressed through a women’s affairs, social policy or human rights committee. While there can be an advantage to the ‘multi-portfolio’ committee in that its members can apply a gender perspective to a broader range of issues, the committee has less time to addressing specific gender concerns.

**Women’s parliamentary caucuses** are cross-party coordination groups in which women parliamentarians participate on a voluntary basis. Caucuses have brought women together across party lines and given them a framework within which to engage civil society and private sector partners. Such groups have successfully raised the need to legislate on issues relevant to women and gender equality, particularly on domestic violence, non-discrimination, healthcare and women’s rights. The inclusion of men in women’s caucuses has been beneficial to this outcome. Women’s caucuses have been most effective, however, when women deliberately put their party to one side, and made a commitment to the caucus. Where gender mainstreaming is in the hands of a women’s caucus, that caucus

should also be considered an important body of the parliament. Comments from questionnaire respondents also suggested that a clear understanding of the caucus’ mission and goals, as well as sufficient funding, can increase its effectiveness.

The survey uncovered other mechanisms to raise the profile of gender equality in parliament, including the Swedish Speaker’s Network on Gender Equality.

### **Developing tools and capacity**

Mainstreaming gender in parliament’s legislative work requires knowledge and expertise. This study has revealed varied understandings of the meaning of gender, gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive parliaments. While some parliaments are well versed in these concepts, in others there is little awareness and knowledge of gender and its relationship with the legislature’s work (technical, administrative and legislative). There is also conceptual confusion and insufficient understanding of how parliament can oversee gender issues. Parliaments may wish to

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## Mexico

### Getting the right information

The Research Center for Women's Advancement and Gender Equality in Mexico (CEAMEG) was established as another research center at the service of Congress. Its mission is to: support legislative work from a gender and human rights perspective, by providing specialized technical support and analytical information services that help ensure equality between women and men and promote the advancement of women within the framework of the Mexican state's democratic processes.

This legislative research center reports the following objective: provide deputies, commissions and committees with technical support and analytical information services related to the advancement of women and gender equality in an objective, impartial and timely manner. Since its establishment in August 2005, CEAMEG's actions have focused on three key research areas: gender mainstreaming in public budgets; women's political participation and progress in legislative harmonization.<sup>4</sup>

organise **training workshops** on some of these concepts. Training should include the message that issues of gender equality are not only the concern and business of women.

There are, unfortunately, very few examples of **'checklists'** used to verify that legislation has been adequately assessed from a gender perspective. In Cambodia, a framework was developed to guide MPs and staff in assessing the gender-sensitivity of laws. Five steps were identified, each accompanied by a set of questions to ask for a proper evaluation of the law.

There is a real concern that parliaments continue to lack **sex-disaggregated data**, which is ultimately the basis for all gender mainstreaming efforts. This needs to be redressed by relevant statistical agencies in government so that gender mainstreaming can move from theory to widespread practice.

Increasing familiarity with existing parliamentary mechanisms—such as participating in debates, asking questions of ministers, using 'call attention' notices, petitions or grievance debates—is also necessary. This can be achieved through



**induction or orientation training** that includes a gender perspective, for both new and incumbent parliamentarians. Gender-specific measures should also be institutionalized, such as **gender advisors**, (multiple) **gender focal points** on each committee, etc. Following the trend set in the parliaments of Latin America, national parliaments should also consider establishing technical units that can provide the specific information needed to advance gender mainstreaming in all areas of parliament.

### 5. Improve parliamentary culture and infrastructure

An entirely new area of research is the gender sensitivity of the culture and infrastructure of parliament. On entering parliament, MPs are expected to conform to the **institutional rules and norms**, both written and unwritten. These rules and norms create a parliamentary culture in which women note they are not always at ease. A feeling of being an 'outsider' springs from the use of **language** which can be derogatory and sexist, and the (occasional) incidence of sexual harassment. Over time, the **building of parliament** has had to change to be more accommodating

of women, including the basic provision of rest rooms for women. In addition, women MPs reported discrimination in the **distribution of resources** like office space, computers, staff and research facilities.

It would be useful for parliaments to analyse in detail the **maleness of the institution**, looking into culture, mores and practices when it comes to the everyday functioning of the institution, for instance with respect to the gendered nature of procedures, speech, rituals or ceremonies. In one parliament, it was suggested that the maleness of the institution could be analyzed by investigating the maleness of art works in the buildings of parliament or the names given to the meeting rooms.

The way in which parliament **communicates** to its representatives also needs to be reviewed, particularly the way in which gender issues are aired by both men and women. These should be given more visibility – a change that is increasingly being demanded by a more socially-responsible electorate.

## Costa Rica Building gender expertise

Costa Rica's Technical Unit on Gender Equality and Equity falls under the office of the Assembly's Executive Director. It was created to comply with requirements established as part of the Assembly's institutional planning. The Unit's overall objective is "To promote, plan, propose, coordinate, guide, strengthen and monitor gender mainstreaming in all functions of the Legislative Assembly, in compliance with the state's commitments to gender equity and equality." More specifically, the Unit aims to:

- form a technical unit on gender, with a functional, modern organizational structure to mainstream gender in all Legislative Assembly processes;
- coordinate and promote training and awareness-raising processes on gender for technical, administrative and legislative staff to develop practical tools for mainstreaming gender in legislative work;
- promote and coordinate action for institutional planning which requires gender mainstreaming;
- provide expert advice on gender to all technical-administrative legislative entities in mainstreaming gender in the legislative process; and
- create strategies for communication and coordination with civil society and organizations that facilitate public participation in gender mainstreaming in the various processes of the Legislative Assembly.<sup>5</sup>

# Creating a gender-sensitive parliament

By far the greatest challenge highlighted by respondents of this study is that relating to the **balance of work and family**. MPs typically note that they are unable to spend a great deal of time with their family. Continuing stereotypes which see women's role in the home make this particularly difficult for women MPs and they are often fulfilling both roles.

Parliaments could ease matters by rearranging the sitting hours so that there are no late night sessions or sessions during school holidays, ensuring that all members are entitled to a leave of absence to attend to their children – not just when they are born, but whenever required. Parliaments can also make particular arrangements for women returning to the workforce after maternity leave. They can allow for a proxy vote, so that a woman who is breastfeeding does not have to attend a vote in the plenary; they can dedicate special rooms to nursing mothers; and perhaps most importantly, they can institute child care centers in parliament. Parliaments could also become more exemplary in their provision of maternity/paternity or parental leave to their members, by devising their own rules which cater to the specific circumstances of the parliamentary institution.

## 6. Improve the gender sensitivity of parliamentary departments

If parliaments need to become more gender-sensitive with respect to their members, this is equally true with respect to the hundreds and thousands of people who staff them. **The work conditions** of parliamentary staff are often the same as those of public servants. It is to be remembered, however, that staff working hours can be just as taxing as those of parliamentarians when parliament is sitting. Moreover, parliamentarians have some impact on the institutional culture of the workplace of parliamentary staff. This research uncovered examples in the dress codes of parliamentary staff (where women MPs have fought to relax them) and in cases of sexual harassment perpetuated by MPs on staff.

The study also found that parliamentary work is often sex-segregated. A more equitable distribution of work, not based on sex-stereotypes, should be the clear intent of gender equality policies in these workplaces. Gender policies

Parliaments could also become more exemplary in their provision of maternity/paternity or parental leave to their members, by devising their own rules which cater to the specific circumstances of the parliamentary institution.

should see the promotion of greater numbers of women to leadership positions, even where this could be the result of affirmative action measures that prefer women over men.

There has also been limited training of parliamentary staff on gender issues. Parliaments rarely acknowledge that people with gender equality expertise have particular skills that can be harnessed in parliamentary work. It has instead been a considerable challenge to capture and maintain the professional skills of the technical gender teams. This trend must be reversed.

For these reasons, the workplace culture and infrastructure of parliamentary staff needs to be kept under constant review.

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## Sharing the responsibility for gender equality

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Gender equality is not achieved by the mere presence of women in parliament. It can only be achieved if it is understood as the responsibility of all stakeholders of society. In this respect, men have a special role to play, as do political parties.

### Include men to promote gender equality

There is an increasing acceptance (among women and men) that men need to participate in parliamentary activities aimed at ensuring gender equality. This acceptance comes as a result of changing social attitudes, and the related understanding among the electorate that women can no longer be excluded from the political sphere – indeed, that there can be a political backlash when women and gender issues are ignored by the political elite.

Men are therefore increasingly coming on board. They are co-sponsoring legislative initiatives to ensure non-discrimination – and some are even sponsoring these initiatives themselves. Men have been appointed to chair or participate in gender equality bodies of the parliament. It was suggested that changes be made to the rules of the parliament to require that both men and women be present on all parliamentary committees – including those relating to gender equality – so that all issues could be considered from a gender perspective (which, by definition, includes the views of men).

A successful initiative in encouraging men's participation has been the inclusion of men in public outreach activities to raise awareness of gender equality issues. Men have participated in celebratory activities for International Women's Day, have joined delegations to the annual meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women, and have been included on field visits to sites of obvious and manifest discrimination.

### **Increase political parties' responsibility for gender mainstreaming**

Political parties are generally not considered as open and transparent organizations. Despite the rhetoric of being open to women's participation, parties remain dominated by men. This is important as political parties are increasingly the dominant form of political organization and the mechanism through which women and men can advance a legislative platform for gender equality.

The influence of parties on MPs wishing to pursue a gender equality legislative agenda is key. The main avenue for women's participation within parties is through a 'women's wing' or 'organization'. While this strategy has some benefits, it can also

isolate women from men. Nonetheless, parties are working towards a gender equality policy by holding seminars and lectures by gender experts on important topics, and by creating strong links with academia and non-governmental organizations. Parties should push for amendments to their internal statutes and rules to ensure women's representation in both membership and leadership of their structures.

Women have discovered barriers to their equal participation in the executive, decision-making structures of political parties, either because they are heavily outnumbered by men, or because they require resources which they do not readily have at their disposal. Moreover, both women and men frequently face difficulties in tabling legislative proposals without the agreement of their party – and can face serious consequences if they do so, including expulsion from the party. Some women have in fact resorted to remaining silent for the sake of party consensus.

Gender mainstreaming, as a strategy for pursuing gender equality more comprehensively, is rarely adopted by political parties. This is often because of a lack of resources (both financial and human), and a lack of political will. In fact, some parties are of the view that there is no need to adopt gender mainstreaming practices. Other parties, however, are more aware of the need for gender mainstreaming, and are more concerned with the need to ensure monitoring and evaluation of their gender mainstreaming work. The need for monitoring networks is one area that requires far more strength and support. In addition, parties could adopt overarching gender equality plans with clear gender mainstreaming strategies, and establish dedicated party committees to oversee their implementation.



# Appendix 1

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## Research methodology

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Three sets of **questionnaires** were designed in 2008 following consultation with both parliamentarians and gender and parliament experts. These questionnaires were directed to:

1. Parliamentary authorities, seeking information on the policies, frameworks and infrastructure that may provide for inclusive parliaments;
2. Parliamentary (party) groups in parliament, seeking information on the decision-making processes and inclusiveness of parliamentary (party) groups; and
3. Parliamentarians, seeking information on the views and perspectives of parliamentarians on the inclusiveness of parliaments.

Ninety-five responses were received from parliamentary authorities in 77 countries. Seventy-one parliamentary party groups from 42 countries completed the second survey, and 123 parliamentarians from 50 countries responded to the third survey. An almost equal number of men and women MPs responded to the survey (see 'Profiling of respondents' below for more details).

Responses to each survey were entered into an online database created with the assistance of the Swedish-based internet technology consultancy firm *Transmachina* and held at [www.gender-parliaments.org](http://www.gender-parliaments.org).

In addition to the questionnaires, interviews were held with men and women parliamentarians from every region of the world. Many of these interviews were conducted as part of in country case studies prepared between 2009 and 2010. Countries were selected on the basis of recent innovations in the national parliament and emerging good practices. A regional report for each region of the world has been prepared. National case studies, distributed across the regions, were also prepared:

### Africa

- Rwanda
- South Africa (and others in preparation)

### Arab States

- Jordan

- Tunisia

### Asia-Pacific

- Australia
- Cambodia
- Malaysia
- Viet Nam

### Europe

- Belgium
- Spain
- Sweden

### Latin America

- Argentina
- Bolivia
- Costa Rica
- Mexico
- Peru

Based on visits to (and observation of) the parliament and meetings with a range of stakeholders including MPs, parliamentary administration staff and (in some cases) civil society representatives, each national case study aimed to:

- identify the main entry points for gender mainstreaming in the parliament, i.e. the avenues through which a gender equality perspective can be heard, or a forum where women members of parliament can debate issues of mutual concern, including parliamentary committees (viz. those that specialize in gender equality), caucuses of women parliamentarians, research capability, gender budgeting initiatives, plenary debates, liaison with civil society etc.
- identify how 'gender-sensitive' the parliament is, including any special infrastructure arrangements such as feeding rooms or crèches, allocated budget for gender concerns, a review of sitting times to address the needs of MPs with families, and gender neutral/sensitive language.
- seek to investigate the 'unwritten' rules, practices and mores that may be discriminating, for example 'old boys' clubs', harassment, language, exclusion, etc.



- analyze how the parliament is performing in terms of gender mainstreaming, identifying examples of good practice, and highlighting challenges that need to be addressed.

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## Endnotes

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1. Definitions taken from UN/OSAGI, UNDP and UNESCO as quoted in UNDP, *Quick Entry Points to Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in Democratic Governance Clusters*, New York, 2007 and IPU, *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, Geneva, 2008
2. Source: Case study, Rwanda
3. *From Cambodia-Canada Legislative Support Project, February 2003, "The Key Steps of Gender Analysis of Legislation"*
4. Source: Case study, Mexico
5. Source: Case study, Costa Rica

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## Image references

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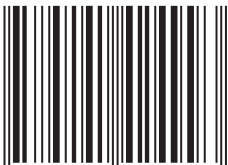
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