



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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# Report of the Ninth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament

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We Women Speakers of Parliament, meeting on the occasion of the Ninth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament on 4 and 5 September in Geneva, have come together to discuss how to enhance and support women's economic empowerment. Our meeting came at a pivotal moment as in 2015 we will turn the page on the Millennium Development Goals and celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action.

We fundamentally believe that the economic empowerment of women is at the heart of progress for the achievement of gender equality as well as sustainable development.

Though there is no single solution to addressing the multitude of challenges faced by women with regard to their economic empowerment, the following priorities and objectives were identified as key:

1. The economic empowerment of women first lies in the full realization of women's economic rights. It also requires transforming power relations and addressing structural inequalities – in households, markets and States as well as in all sectors of the economy. The objective is to enable women to have viable incomes, decent work and be decisive actors who shape the terms and conditions of their participation in economic life.

## **A strong and effective legal framework**

2. The prerequisite to achieve this objective is to develop a strong and effective legal framework that is conducive to women's economic empowerment. This means a legal framework that:
  - (i) is not discriminatory: For this to be achieved, existing laws have to be reviewed to eliminate discriminatory provisions or indirect discriminatory effects;
  - (ii) supports women's economic empowerment. For this, the legal framework needs to include specific legislation and policies to ensure women's access to means of production, land, financing, technology, training and employment;
  - (iii) addresses all forms of discrimination: This means a legal framework with no loopholes, and one which provides for the possibility to implement temporary special measures and gender mainstreaming.
3. While legislation is necessary, it is not sufficient, as there is often a gap between legislation and its effective implementation. Law and policy implementation monitoring is greatly needed and our oversight role as

parliamentarians makes this our responsibility. We can facilitate implementation by including enforcement mechanisms in the legislation and promoting the adoption of rules and protocols. We must scrutinize the budget to ensure that adequate financial and human resources are allocated to effectively implement legislation. We must ask the difficult questions and hold governments to account.

4. We also have to develop strategies to improve our oversight role, including by relying on a dynamic women's parliamentary caucus and collaborating closely with grassroots women's organizations that can provide valuable and reliable information and data.
5. Information is key to develop effective laws and assess their impact. We need to build our national statistics capacities. We also need to have access to comparative research that can inform our legislative and oversight work. Access to a database of legislation on women and their economic empowerment, and of best practices, in particular with regard to implementation measures, would be of great use. We call on international organizations, including the IPU, to assist in providing us with such a tool.
6. We must also make sure that laws are known and used. We must therefore ensure that legislation is disseminated, easily accessible and well understood by the people, including through sensitization and educational campaigns, translation into local languages and public debates.

#### **A favourable environment**

7. To build a favourable environment for women's economic empowerment gender should be mainstreamed in all legislative and policy-making process, including the budget. This will help ensure that women have access to adequate support and facilities, especially in the field of education and health.
8. Facilitating women's access to work begins with providing them with education, not only to lift them out of poverty, but also to ensure their economic empowerment and security. Education is a powerful equalizer tool. It is at the heart of changing mentalities, addressing stereotypes and discrimination, and building a culture of equality and tolerance. Education should serve to empower girls but also to inculcate principles of equality in the young generation. School curricula should therefore include education on human rights and gender equality.
9. Economic empowerment of women also requires reducing women's lack of physical security and increasing their ability to move freely and without fear. Protection of women in the workplace is a cause for concern, especially with regard to sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation. Measures and legislation must be taken to criminalize such behaviours. Efforts also need to be inclusive and cover all areas of work. Sexual harassment laws should include a watchdog mechanism for both the private and the public sectors.
10. Economic empowerment of women is also linked to the challenge of reconciling family and work. We must explore incentives to enable a more balanced sharing of family responsibilities between the State and families

and between men and women, including paternity and parental leave entitlements, child care arrangements, maternity protection, and investments in infrastructure and services. Implementing such policies may require sensitization and educational initiatives aimed at changing mentalities and gender role stereotypes.

11. As Women Speakers and parliamentarians, we also have a special responsibility to pay particular attention to our work space and the way it functions, with a view to ensuring that it facilitates women's participation. Our parliaments need to be gender-sensitive and offer facilities and some flexibility to allow women MPs and women members of the parliamentary staff to reconcile family and work obligations. The provision of certain facilities such as day care centres or the limitation of late/night meetings are some initiatives that could be considered.

#### **Supporting women at work**

12. To facilitate and promote women's entrepreneurship we need to implement targeted measures. These can include affirmative action, programmes to ensure that women and men have equal access to resources, ICT, loans, support and opportunities to run businesses, micro-credit facilities, and training programmes. The creation of specific funds and banks to support women's economic activities should also be considered.
13. We need to address the fact that women still perform the vast majority of unpaid economic and care work, the latter being an ever-increasing burden on women given the steadily expanding ageing population. Giving visibility to unpaid work is therefore a priority, not only in terms of its contribution to the economy but also in terms of how it prevents women from entering the paid labour force. When they do enter the labour force, women continue to carry the heavy burden of unpaid work. This situation should also be recognized and remedied. We need to consider what the best policies are to enable women to participate in the paid workforce; we also need to develop mechanisms to include unpaid care work in the formal accounts of national economic activity.

#### **Enhancing women's economic leadership and mentorship**

14. Women's representation in economic leadership positions remains extremely weak. We need to open up the way for an increased presence. Women in leadership positions have the power to change things and concretely respond to the interests and challenges faced by other women whose voices are not heard or taken into account. To facilitate access to leadership positions, the adoption of temporary special measures should be considered. These would need to be the result of a broad-based consultation and buy-in from various stakeholders.
15. Mentorship between women should also be supported. Mechanisms should be developed to facilitate exchange of experience and guidance among women. Transferral of skills to young women should be a priority.

#### **Influencing the international arena**

16. In the context of globalization, international actors strongly influence countries' development agendas, without necessarily being subject to scrutiny or having national interests as their first priority. It is important therefore that parliaments, and the IPU, have a say in major international

processes and forums. This includes dedicated forums for gender issues, such as the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

17. Parliaments need to be involved in major decision-making processes in the economic and financial arenas. This means that we have to increase our own involvement in, and oversight of, the international loan system in order better comprehend its impact at the national level, including on women's economic empowerment. In this context, we agreed to invite the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund to our next meeting to further discuss this issue.

**Leading by example**

18. As Women Speakers of Parliament we have a particular responsibility to lead, show the way, serve as role models, take bold decisions and shape public opinion. We must pursue our efforts to make gender equality a reality. We commit to making this our priority and will report on progress achieved at our next Meeting.