



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Tenth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament

INNOVATING FOR GENDER EQUALITY:

Making development, peace and democracy a reality for women and men

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BACKGROUND NOTE

Theme 1: Democracy: Innovating for more gender-inclusive decision-making processes and bodies

Sustained progress in women's access to leadership and decision-making positions remains a challenge in every country, despite growing acknowledgement that democracy and development can only benefit from gender balance in decision-making.

In the political arena, research has found that parliaments and local councils deliver better on gender equality when women are represented in higher numbers and hold higher decision-making positions. According to IPU research, increased numbers of women MPs tend to enhance a parliament's capacity to deliver on gender equality and women's human rights, as well as child rights, labour laws, education and health care.

In the private sector, research has shown that companies with more women on their boards outperform their rivals.

What, then, needs to be done to break the glass ceiling?

Relevant targets under the new Sustainable Development Goal 5

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.

5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

Areas for discussion

- **Women leaders in political life.** As women leaders in parliament, we are in a good position to address this issue in our own institutions. Women are 22% of parliamentarians with only two houses having more than 50% of women members (Rwanda 64% and Bolivia 53%). Only 16% of parliaments are headed by women. There is also a tendency for women to chair committees on "soft issues".
About 120 countries have some form of quota, and some are moving towards parity (Bolivia, Tanzania) or a 40-60 ratio (Spain, Croatia).
Funding for women's political participation is also key. Additional media time has been subsidized for women in countries like Brazil and Timor Leste. Nomination fees are lower for women candidates in Togo and Kenya. And NGO micro-financing for women candidates has been encouraged in Nigeria.
An interesting example of women's leadership can be seen in Iraq, which has reserved positions of power for women in proportion to their representation in parliament.
 - o How can women MPs' potential as role models best be tapped?
 - o What other innovative means can be used to enhance women's participation and leadership in parliament?

- **Women leaders in the private sector.** *After Norway set a binding gender quota of 40% for company boards, other European countries, as well as Malaysia and Brazil, have followed, at least with respect to State-controlled firms.*
 - o What new incentives can be tested? Are quotas the answer?

- **Making public and private institutions gender-sensitive.** The key to ensuring equal opportunities and promoting a shift in the perception of women and men, and their roles, is to make parliaments and enterprises more open to both sexes. Accommodations with respect to maternity and paternity leave, childcare, working hours and other such aspects can help women gain greater access to leadership positions.

Examples of such arrangements in parliament include proxy voting or replacement during parental leave. Proxy voting has been tested in Australia; replacement of an MP by a colleague or the next on the list is allowed in such countries as Colombia, Denmark and Estonia.

The parliaments of Costa Rica, Germany, Rwanda and Ukraine have set their own gender equality policies and established monitoring mechanisms in many cases.

In the business sector, measures promoted by the French Federation of Enterprises include proactive information to male employees on their right to paternity leave and the rights of both men and women to be paid 100% of salary during parental leave. Such recommendations are part of the concrete gender equality measures that French law requires be included in collective labour agreements and company plans of action.

 - o How can gender-sensitive policies, procedures and practices in parliament or in the private sector best promote women's leadership?
 - o Are policies and plans of action coupled with monitoring mechanisms a good answer?

- **Redefining gender roles is also part of the gender equality and development agenda.**

UN statistics indicate that women spend at least twice as much time as men on domestic work, and when both paid and unpaid work is considered, women work longer hours than men do. In Africa the ratio is 1:4. In Asia 1.5:5, and in Latin America 2.5:6. In more developed countries women devote twice as many hours as men to household chores (5 and 2.5 hours, respectively).

According to an ILO survey of 87 countries in 2014, only five countries, all European, provide for more than 2 weeks of paternity leave. Four countries provide between 11 and 15 days: Azerbaijan, Bolivia, France and Kenya.

 - o How can men be engaged in sharing household responsibilities? Is compulsory parental leave for men a good starting point?
 - o What other innovative means can be used to change mentalities?