



Promoting Gender Equality in Parliaments

Jacqui Smith and Kristen Sample

1. Introduction

GPG's Guide to Parliaments series explores the key processes and functions of parliaments around the world. The Guides highlight the main elements affecting design and delivery of effective parliamentary strengthening projects. In this Guide we consider:

- the importance of gender equality in parliaments.
- the range and effectiveness of methods used to increase women's representation in parliament.
- the decisions made by individual women MPs in thinking about how to organise their parliamentary and political life and to maximise their impact as MPs and politicians.
- how parliaments could be reformed or reorganised to support the involvement of women.
- how women parliamentarians have used cross-party collective bodies to increase their impact on promoting and monitoring legislation and raising engagement of women in parliamentary activities through civil society organisations.

This guide deliberately combines the expertise of two authors: Kristen Sample, who has worked for 20 years supporting women political leaders in many parts of the world, and Jacqui Smith's direct experience as an MP and Government Minister in the UK, and now as a GPG associate. We would welcome feedback on our approach.

2. Why does gender equality in parliaments matter?

Though women account for over half of the global population, they only represent 22.7% of the world's parliamentarians.¹ The causes behind this imbalance are myriad and multi-faceted, based on culturally rooted gender norms, political institutions, and economic disparities. In other words, a woman who is elected to parliament has beaten the odds.

In 1995, the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing made the following declaration:

Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.

Gender equality is not just about the rights of those women excluded from the political process – although this does represent a considerable personal and political deprivation of rights which should be tackled. It is about ensuring a more effective and a more credible political and parliamentary process. It is therefore of interest to all regardless of gender.

Women are over half the world's population. Their involvement in legislatures and in political decision

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making is essential to ensure that a broader range of experiences and interests are considered. This leads to more informed policy making and stronger parliamentary scrutiny.

As the UK Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith had responsibility for counter terrorism, crime and policing and immigration. Like her male predecessors she developed policy across these areas, however she was also the first Home Secretary to place a special emphasis on developing a cross government approach to tackling violence against women. In bringing experience from a gender perspective and campaigning background she broadened the perspective of government policy.

Parliaments and politicians across the world have a continuous struggle to assert and maintain their legitimacy and credibility. A more representative parliament – one which more closely resembles those it aims to serve – is more likely to gain public support and recognition.

Women parliamentarians report being often approached by young women (and men) who are interested in a political career and who ask them to act as a mentor or to offer advice. It is important not to underestimate the power of role models in encouraging more women to believe that there is a place for them in the political world and in parliament.

3. Some caveats:

Implicit in this Guide is the belief that lessons learned in one country can provide relevant insights to others. Nonetheless, there are a number of considerations that temper the utility of these lessons:

- Choices related to parliamentary decisions are rarely solely technical. Access to research and lessons learned are only useful to the extent that MPs are open to listen, dialogue and work together for solutions. It is essential to keep in mind that meaningful change happens through “changing behaviour, not simply by changing rules or structures.”²
- There is no ‘one size fits all’ legislative vehicle for promoting gender equity in being elected to parliament or in the ability to influence legislation and the political environment. The ability and willingness of women MPs to promote gender-sensitive legislation is conditioned by myriad aspects of the national context including the relationship between the Legislative and Executive branches, the role of parties, and particularities of the electoral system design.

- Contexts are fluid; a measure that works today may fall short tomorrow. By the same token, a collaborative initiative once stalled may find new life as political dynamics evolve and windows of opportunity emerge.

4. Which factors will tend to improve women’s representation in parliaments?

In this section we consider which factors are likely to increase the proportion of women standing for and being successfully elected to legislatures.

4.1. Quotas and electoral system

The design of an electoral system is not gender neutral. The choice between a candidate-centred, first-past-the-post system versus a more party-centred proportional representation system impacts women’s prospects for election, along with many other electoral ‘details’ such as district size, and whether lists are open or closed.³ Although these are seemingly technical issues that require a high degree of specialisation, their repercussions couldn’t be more political.

Seen as a form of “compensation for the structural barriers women face in the electoral process,” gender quotas require that a candidate list or other political body must include a certain number of women.⁴ There are currently 27 countries with quotas enshrined in their constitutions (up from 15 in 2009), 67 quotas incorporated in electoral legislation (up from 44 in 2009), and 106 political parties in 52 countries (including the UK) using voluntary party quotas.⁵ Constitutional quotas are most likely to be in operation in countries which have recently-written constitutions, or where the severity of the problem is agreed to warrant such a step.

There are two general alternatives for the design of quotas:

- *Legal candidate quotas* focus on the nomination stage of the process, requiring that women constitute a certain percentage of nominees in a party’s candidate lists.
- *Reserved seats* are often referred to as ‘results-based quotas’ in that they guarantee that a certain percentage or number of seats are set aside for

women.⁶ Reserved seats may involve ‘women only’ elections for a predetermined number of seats or a form of the ‘best loser system’ which means that a certain number of seats are set aside for the women candidates who received the most votes, even if they received less than male candidates.

In many cases, quotas are used in conjunction with proportional representation or a mixed system of constituency and list election. Majority electoral systems such as first-past-the-post are probably the most difficult systems to make work with quotas. In the UK the Labour Party has used a system of party quotas. The UK parliament is elected on the basis of a first-past-the-post, single member constituency. This has traditionally made it more difficult to use methods such as balancing or zipping⁷ in a party list to ensure women’s representation in parliament. In 1997, the UK Labour Party introduced a policy of all women shortlists in half of the seats they expected to win in the election. This led to a big increase in Labour women representation with a threefold increase in the number of Labour women MPs. The system is controversial, has been subject to legal challenge, and has not been adopted by other UK political parties. However, it has been the only factor which has significantly increased women’s representation in the UK parliament and it means that Labour has a much larger female representation than any other party in the UK parliament.

In order to have an impact, quotas must be carefully structured and strictly enforced. The most effective compliance mechanism includes close supervision by the electoral management body (EMB) and subsequent rejection of candidate lists that do not meet legal requirements.

Alternatively, 11 countries apply financial penalties to parties that fail to comply with quota provisions.⁸ In France, Belgium, Spain and (from 2016) Ireland, for instance, the penalty for non-compliance is the loss of some element of state funding, and in Ireland the requirement for quotas was actually included in the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 rather than as part of equality legislation. The disinclination in the UK to introduce state funding of political parties therefore also militates against effective legally binding quotas.

It is clear that quota systems, particularly when combined with amenable electoral systems, can and do make a significant difference to the representation of women in national parliaments. However, neither quotas nor electoral systems are a panacea

for women’s political representation. There are other factors, which also impact on the likelihood and strength of women’s representation.

4.2. Positive action including training and support

A policy of quotas or positive discrimination can be controversial. Some parties and systems focus on ‘softer’ action including training and support for potential women candidates.

This has the potential to increase the supply of women putting themselves forward for election. Unlike many other professional roles, it is not always clear to women (or indeed men) what the role involves and what will be necessary in order to achieve selection and election. This tends to mean that women often need some sort of family experience or strong mentoring before they understand what they could be taking on.

This can be partly ameliorated by ensuring that women are able to access information, training and advice. In the UK, for example, both the main political parties offer training and advice to potential women candidates (and in fact to others from non-traditional backgrounds). It can also include senior women acting as mentors to more junior women who are interested in a political career. However, this puts additional pressure on women politicians who are already likely to be extremely busy not least because there will usually be fewer of them than their male colleagues.

Madeline Albright, the first woman US Secretary of State famously said “there’s a special place in hell for women who don’t help other women”. However, while solidarity and mutual support between women is vital, it is also important to ensure that the job of promoting women’s representation isn’t just left to women within parties and the political structure. As we argued earlier, it is a task for everyone who wants a more effective and credible democratic system – male and female.

4.3. Money

It is important for parties to recognise that women may face a disproportionate disincentive to run for election because of the need to access funding even to get selected. The reasons for the imbalance include men’s greater wealth in general, the tendency of parties to prioritize support for male candidacies, men’s stronger ties to moneyed networks, and the incumbency advantage that men generally hold⁹.

Countries around the world have adopted

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different types of gender-friendly political finance systems. In some cases, a portion of public funding is earmarked for activities that support women's political participation¹⁰. And finally, a few countries have sought to make campaigning less expensive for women through a reduction in nomination fees¹¹ or child care¹².

On the civil society side, the group Emily's List has raised money from donations and then distributed it to women seeking selection to fight seats for U.S. Congress. Parties should consider how to minimise the costs for individual candidates of seeking election and whether it is appropriate to make some contribution to the costs of candidates.

4.4. Political party commitment and culture

As parties are responsible for selecting their candidates, a culture of promoting and valuing women as candidates within a party will be an important part of ensuring that they are selected to stand in elections. In the UK, Labour Women's Network within the Labour Party has campaigned to ensure that women are represented in leadership positions within the party and as elected representatives. In the most recent leadership election, they ensured that all four candidates to be leader signed a 'Power pledge' which publicly committed them to ensuring that their senior teams were 50% women and that women would be supported through positive action to gain elected seats. This type of action is important to change culture and to achieve change within political parties.

5. Barriers inside parliaments

As gruelling as the path to parliament might be, the trials do not end on election day. Although men and women legislators are expected to carry out the same functions, they tend to work under very different conditions. A brief rundown of the disproportionate barriers that women MPs face include:¹³

- Unequal access to financial resources, limiting a woman MP's ability to provide constituent outreach and services.
- More limited support from the political party, diminishing prospects for leadership roles within the party caucus or legislative committees, or support—in terms of mobilization and votes – for her prioritized initiatives.
- A higher burden for childcare and domestic work, restricting a woman MP's ability to travel and work extended hours.
- Cultural norms that view women as subordinate to men in many countries,

translating into harsher scrutiny and criticism on the behaviour of women in politics.

- Gendered differences in press coverage, focusing on a woman MP's personal life and appearance, both of which undermine her image on substance.¹⁴

These challenges underscore some of the difficulties that a woman MP faces in trying to build a successful parliamentary career.

6. Making an impact as a woman MP

On entering parliament, a woman MP will need to decide where she wishes to focus her efforts to achieve impact. Later we will focus on how women MPs can organise collectively and across party groups. In this section we consider the individual decisions that an MP might take to determine her personal political priorities to make an impact.

Women will make different decisions about the extent to which they want to focus on issues of gender. As an MP, Jacqui felt strongly that whilst she wanted to represent issues that could be broadly characterised as affecting women, she did not want to be seen solely as a woman MP. There are many ways that women can make a broader impact and they should resist being 'pigeonholed'.

An effective MP will decide what issues or campaigns they particularly want to pursue. Whilst constituents will want their MP to address a wide range of issues in holding the government to account and representing them, an MP cannot give equal priority to everything. For example, on entering parliament in 1997, Jacqui focused particularly on education and sat on the committee which scrutinised education legislation. She also joined the select committee which scrutinised the work of the UK Treasury (the Finance Ministry).

Subsequently she became a Minister and worked in a wide variety of different ministries. She brought her specific experience as a woman politician to bear on these policy areas, but was not limited to these issues.

Other women may seek leadership positions within their party or within parliament. Getting women to be better represented in parliament is important, but only the first step in ensuring that women also have a role in the most powerful political positions. There is still much work to be done to ensure that women are in political leadership positions too.

7. Changes to parliament to ensure that women can operate effectively once elected

Parliament is often an unusual workplace with particular pressures and lacking some of the support structures in place for other professional people. This can have a particularly detrimental impact on women's willingness to enter that 'workplace' and on the retention of women MPs once elected.

In the UK parliament, there have been a number of recent initiatives to improve equal access. In 2016, *The Good Parliament*, a report by an academic seconded to the House of Commons, provided recommendations for a more representative and inclusive parliament, with institutional leadership to be provided by a newly created Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion.¹⁵ In 2014, a group of UK parliamentarians carried out an inquiry into how parliament could be improved to create a better and more representative House. It focused particularly on how to ensure the election and retention of women MPs, but many of the issues considered would also make parliament a better working environment for male MPs too – particularly those with family responsibilities.¹⁶

A series of factors have been identified which together increase pressure upon MPs and in some cases, could prompt them to consider that life as a member of parliament is not something they want to embark on or to continue.

7.1. Unpredictable parliamentary calendar

It is inevitable that the need to consider urgent government business and the consideration of topical issues and events will mean that it is not always possible to timetable parliamentary business in advance. However, there have been moves in the UK parliament to produce an annual calendar of sitting days and to give some certainty about the times of sessions and votes.

In some parliaments, the dates of recesses are not decided until a matter of weeks in advance and in some it is not unusual for sittings of parliament to go on through the night. This obviously makes it difficult for members of parliament to organise childcare or other family responsibilities.

Increasing the predictability of the parliamentary calendar as far as possible can be an important way to improve the life of a member of parliament.

7.2. Managing two geographically distinct workplaces

The predictability of the calendar also helps with another factor which makes it difficult to combine the life of an MP with family responsibilities – the fact that many MPs will have constituencies which are some distance from the parliament. As an MP with young children, Jacqui needed to decide whether to bring her children to live in London where the parliament was or to leave them in her constituency 100 miles away from London during the week. Either way, the MP will need to spend time away from their family which will tend to be more difficult for women.

7.3. The perceived 'masculine' culture of parliament

In some parliaments the behaviour of MPs to each other can be noisy and even aggressive. This can be alienating for many MPs and members of the public too. However, it can be particularly intimidating to women who may also be subject to sexist comments and intimidation.

Where the parliament has a code of conduct, it should reflect the requirement for respectful debate and behaviour. It is also the responsibility of the speaker of the parliament to insist on behaviour which is not intimidating to any member of parliament.

7.4. Support for MPs in carrying out their role

The issue of funding can also act as a barrier to women once they have become MPs. An effective MP needs staff, support with research, offices in both parliament and their constituency and help with transport and housing costs. The parliament should also provide adequate training and advice for MPs on the facilities available to them and best practice in carrying out their role. There is rarely a 'job description' for an MP and different MPs will choose to carry out their role in different ways and will have different responsibilities and interests. However that does not mean that there isn't advice on how others have effectively carried out the role.

Ensuring that all of these things are in place will limit the requirement for MPs to call on their own personal resources which can act as a barrier to women in parliament.

7.5. Support for MPs with primary caring responsibilities

For some of the reasons outlined above, it can be difficult for MPs with family caring responsibilities to carry out their role without considerable support e.g. with child care. Parliaments need to think about how they provide expenses or facilities to support MPs with these roles.

In many parliaments there is no system of maternity or paternity leave. MPs have to depend on the flexibility of their role and the support provided by their staff to fill any time that they take off to care for a new baby. Jacqui has experienced this. Her son was born in June and she was able to use the parliamentary recess period in July, August and September as informal maternity leave. This is not an adequate arrangement.

All parliaments should consider how they support MPs to combine their work as an MP with family and caring responsibilities.

8. Collective action by women parliamentarians to promote leadership and gender equality

In a number of countries, women MPs have found that personal agency alone is insufficient to make a difference in parliament. In these cases, women MPs often choose to expand their individual influence by partnering with female colleagues (or men who are sensitive to gender issues) to promote a common agenda aimed at the following.¹⁷

- Promoting legislative initiatives through influencing the political agenda and proposing draft legislation;
- Raising public awareness and the engagement of civil society organisations, with particular emphasis on the participation of women on issues that affect them; and
- Monitoring compliance with legislation and executive branch commitments to gender issues.¹⁸

There are countless variations of gender-dedicated parliamentary structures. Though these groups differ on dimensions such as purpose, structure, and operations, they share cross-party membership and generally fall into one of two broad categories: committees and caucuses. Some parliaments operate with either a committee or a caucus, others with both and still others with neither. In some cases, a women's caucus may evolve into a formal committee, as happened in Argentina and Colombia.¹⁹ In Uruguay, on the other hand, the women's caucus successfully advocated for the

creation of a permanent Gender and Equity Committee, but continued to operate as a complementary body.²⁰

Dedicated gender equality committees have been created in more than 30 countries with powers that include proposing legislation, reviewing legislation and budgets, monitoring implementation of laws, requesting briefings from government officials, and investigating complaints.²¹ Some are called 'Women's Committees', while others have opted for the title of 'Gender Committees' or 'Equalities Committees'.²² While both deal with issues related to women's interests and needs, the specific focus of these committees "depends mainly on the understanding and vision of their members regarding such issues."²³ The scope of these committees also varies widely, with some parliaments creating multi-portfolio committees that group gender with issues, such as family, children, human rights, culture, health and welfare.

Like committees, caucuses are cross-party vehicles for consensus building. Caucuses are often formed at the initiative of a group of women members who collectively define its structure, decision making processes, membership, mandate and specific areas of activity. While flexibility can be an advantage, the informal nature of caucuses may also mean a lack of a dedicated budget and staffing. A comparative study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union found that caucuses have enjoyed considerable success in achieving legislative reforms, particularly related to gender-based violence (GBV).²⁴ Similarly a review of gender mainstreaming in countries belonging to the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) concluded that caucuses had made gains, particularly in terms of "influencing policy and legislation" and "coalition building around an issue."²⁵

Although the line between committees and caucuses can blur, the following table outlines the general differences between gender committees and gender caucuses (see table on page 7).²⁶

In addition to committees and caucuses, a third alternative exists for promoting women's participation and influence in parliaments. A Parliament may eschew specialised gender bodies in favour of mainstreaming gender across parliamentary committees. Although proponents argue that this option reduces the risk of 'ghettoising' women's interests, its effectiveness depends on a high percentage of women members as well as a culture of gender awareness and commitment

Characteristic	Committees	Caucuses
Nature	Tend to be permanent, officially-chartered bodies within the parliamentary structure.	Tend to be recognized by the legislature, although with a different standing than a committee. Because they are often established at the initiative of legislators, their continuity depends on level of commitment of legislators.
Purpose	Creation, promotion and oversight of legislative framework related to women's or gender issues.	Formed to promote women's issues or a gender equality agenda, as well as enhance the effectiveness of women legislators.
Structure	Follows structure of other committees, with a president, vice president, secretary etc. The leadership selection process is subject to negotiation among party groups.	Ranges widely, depending on the by-laws established by each caucus. There may be a single coordinator or peer coordination. Leadership is determined internally within the caucus.
Membership	Cross-party membership tends to reflect the make-up of the parliament and is limited in number along the lines of other standing committees. Mainly women members though some men also.	Membership open to all women in parliament. Men tend to participate less than in the committee model.
Attributes	Power to draft legislation and monitor implementation of legislation by Executive Branch.	Builds cross-party consensus on legislation to be later introduced by formal standing committees.
Resources	Has a budget allocated by parliament, and an administrative staff and infrastructure.	No set budget, can establish mechanisms for obtaining contributions from members or donor agencies.

among men and women members. In other words, mainstreaming gender into other committees does not happen 'by default', but rather requires concerted efforts aimed at setting obligatory standards and ensuring compliance. Unsurprisingly, the best-known case of effective gender mainstreaming—in the absence of a committee or caucus model—is Sweden, a country where equality principles are well entrenched. Given the limited number of successful cases, this 'third path' of gender institutionalisation is not a focus of this Guide.

9. Lessons learned

On the face of it, parliamentary rules in most countries appear to be non-discriminatory and egalitarian, providing men and women with the same opportunities for effective exercise of their legislative responsibilities. In practice however, since men and women in parliament generally face a set of very

different circumstances, it is important to develop structures and ways of working that allow women legislators to maximize their effectiveness. In many countries, cross-party cooperation through committees and caucuses has provided a 'strength in numbers' boost that can help promote gender equality.

Case studies from around the world provide insightful examples of how women legislators have been able to nurture and leverage collaboration to achieve their goals in parliament. As always, *politics matters* with results riding on political incentives and unwritten norms at least as much as the formal rules and processes. Following are a number of strategies that women legislators have employed to overcome the barriers faced by women's committees and caucuses currently in existence around the world.

9.1. Frenemies

Beyond partisanship, there is an oft-cited perception in politics that women don't work well together. Though yet to be substantiated by rigorous research, the idea is that women politicians compete amongst themselves, more than with their male counterparts. Among the explanations offered for this theory is the scarcity of top leadership positions for women ("only space for one woman at the table") and the tendency of parties to use women to attack women politicians from other parties in the media. Even putting gender aside, elections are played as zero-sum; more votes for one candidate mean less for the others. With this in mind, what can women legislators do to ensure natural political rivalries don't undermine collaboration? The Bicameral Women's Caucus of Uruguay (BBF), which dates back to 2000, offers a number of important lessons in terms of shared leadership and conflict resolution (see below)²⁷. A number of caucuses have also put in place processes to foster trust such as monthly lunches or off-site retreats. Whenever possible, these bridge building measures take place soon after an election, early in the legislators' terms, to ensure relations begin on the right foot.

The Bicameral Women's Caucus (BBF) of the Uruguayan Parliament is viewed as one of the most successful in Latin America. The Caucus was created at the initiative of three women members, representing the country's three principal political parties. Each of these parliamentarians had experience in inter-party dialogue and gender advocacy. Women MPs defined the parameters and modus operandi of the Caucus, which included: open membership to any woman MP; horizontal leadership with no officers or internal hierarchy; consistent multiparty participation in all activities, particularly public events; a respect for differences of opinion; and a common agreement to avoid public spats on gender issues.

9.2. The ties that bind

Cross-party cooperation can represent a threat to party discipline. As a result, the extent to which women legislators are able to collaborate across party lines is often conditioned by the strength of the party system. Nonetheless, numerous country cases demonstrate that there is space for individual agency and that cooperation can take place even in polarised contexts. One strategy that committees and caucuses have employed is initially focusing on legislative initiatives that are less controversial and polarising. In many cases, this search for

common ground has centred on gender-based violence legislation, rather than more contentious issues such as women's sexual and reproductive rights. The Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA), for instance, was able to achieve an "absolute cease-fire (between parties) in order to push the gender issue," opening the way to passage of the Domestic Violence Act in 2010.²⁸ Additionally, as in the case of the women's caucuses of Uruguay and Argentina, legislators may choose to further legitimise their demands by anchoring initiatives in binding treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that the State has already ratified.²⁹ Alternatively, a parliamentary committee or caucus may choose to prioritise monitoring and reporting of an international treaty, to promote its effective implementation. For instance, the Equity Commission of the European Parliament established monitoring and reporting processes to oversee CEDAW implementation, including a report on gender mainstreaming within the institution.³⁰

9.3. Peer pressure.

In some contexts, gender committees gain influence by coordinating closely with other standing committees. This can include convening common sittings to debate the content of a bill and ensure that a gender perspective is taken into account. In Uruguay, the BBF's strategy included ensuring that each committee included at least one woman member in order to facilitate coordination with and lobbying within the committees. The case of Mexico illustrates the importance of coordination, particularly for the development of gender-sensitive budgets. According to Mexican law, information on federal public spending must be disaggregated by sex to permit an informed evaluation of the differential impact that public resources have on women and men. During budget debates, members of the Gender and Equity Committees work closely with women members of the Finance Committee to promote proposals for allocating resources to programs for women. This case also illustrates the essential role that access to sex-disaggregated data plays in ensuring legislation is responsive to the needs of both men and women.³¹

9.4. What about the men?

In the vast majority of parliaments (191 of 193), women are the minority within a legislature.³² The support of male colleagues is critical to garner sufficient votes as well as for ensuring that policies are truly gender-oriented (reflecting the needs and interests

of men and women) rather than designed as 'women only'. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that men also bear responsibility for gender promotion. Leaving them out of the conversation creates echo chambers of women talking about women with other women. Women's committees and caucuses have developed a number of savvy strategies to enlist male members of parliament as gender advocates. In Ecuador, the Parliamentary Group for Women's Rights has been instrumental in translating the country's gender sensitive constitution into legislation. The Group stands out for its high proportion (46%) of male members, including the President and Second Vice President of the Parliament. According to the Group's Coordinator, 27 of the 64 laws (42%) approved between 2009 – 2012 had an explicit gender focus.³³ The Rwandan Women Parliamentary Forum (FFRP) achieved the support of male legislators for a gender-based violence law by framing the issue in a way that wasn't perceived as a threat to male legislators, but rather as a means of protection for their sisters and daughters.³⁴ In 2005, 76 men and women MPs (71% of the total) visited communities to educate the population on the draft legislation and solicit their feedback.³⁵ Approximately half of the participating parliamentarians were men. When the draft bill was presented for debate in 2006, four of its eight co-sponsors were men.

9.5. Branching out

Gender committees and caucuses can expand their influence through close coordination with the Executive Branch's national machinery (generally a Women's or Gender Ministry). In Costa Rica, the National Women's Institute (INAMU in Spanish) has designated a liaison to the parliamentary Women's Committee to facilitate permanent coordination. In some contexts, gender committees and caucuses have focused on their role of Executive Branch oversight. In India, for example, the mandate of the Parliament's Committee on the Empowerment of Women includes reviewing reports from the National Commission for Women (NCW), recommending measures that should be taken by the government for improving the status of women, assessing the performance of the NCW and reporting on the work of welfare programmes for women.³⁶ Some women's committees and caucuses have found it strategic to coordinate with women working at the sub-national level. In Bolivia, the Union of Women Parliamentarians (UMPABOL in Spanish) worked closely with the Association of Councilwomen (ACOBOL in Spanish) to secure passage of the Law against Political Violence and Harassment

against Women.

9.6. Civilizing Parliament

Civil society support can provide a critical boost to the power of women parliamentarians. One study comparing gender-based violence legislation in 70 countries identified the strength of women's movements as the single most important factor determining variation in policy development.³⁷ UWOPA in Uganda has been strategic in developing a win-win relationship with national women's organisations. Civil society activists benefit from access to information regarding the parliamentary agenda and actors, while UWOPA takes advantage of civil society research and technical assistance for drafting bills.³⁸ The BBF in Uruguay sees itself as a bridge between the Parliament and the general public, particularly women. Each year on March 8, the BBF holds an "accountability" session, reporting to the public on its legislative performance, its representation of Uruguayan women, demands from women's organisations and its oversight of other State powers.³⁹ The Caucus has also carried out a "Women, Your Vote Has a Voice" campaign in which Uruguayan women were invited to submit their concerns, demands and proposals for consideration by the parties for setting the agenda for the next legislative period.⁴⁰

9.7. Tech Support

Given the many competing demands on their time and—in many cases—their limited experience in gender analysis, members require organisational and technical support in order to effectively promote gender equality initiatives. In this sense, the effectiveness of gender committees and caucuses is enhanced by access to qualified human resources. In Costa Rica, the Women's Committee is able to count on the support of the Parliament's Technical Unit for Gender Equality (UTIEG in Spanish) which was created to "promote, plan, propose, guide, strengthen and monitor gender mainstreaming in parliamentary processes."⁴¹ The Unit provides technical advice to members and committees for legislative development as well as training on gender mainstreaming. While parliaments generally assign a budget, staff and infrastructure to standing committees, the circumstances of gender caucuses are generally more precarious. UWOPA in Uganda is an exception to that rule, having developed a secretariat with a full-time coordination charged with coordinating advocacy, convening monthly membership meetings and producing annual reports.⁴²

The support of male colleagues is critical to garner sufficient votes as well as for ensuring that policies are truly gender-oriented (reflecting the needs and interests of men and women) rather than designed as 'women only'.

About the authors



The Right Honourable Jacqui Smith was elected to the UK parliament in 1997 and served as a Member of Parliament for 13 years until 2010. During that time she was also a Minister in the UK government for 10 years including as the first female Home Secretary (Minister of the Interior) in the UK. She continues her interest in women's representation and parliaments through work in Jordan and Egypt and is on the national management committee of Labour Women's Network in the UK. Labour Women's Network aims to increase women's participation within the Labour Party and, particularly, those elected to positions in national and local legislatures.



Kristen Sample has 20 years' experience in the areas of democratic governance, gender and development programming. From 2012-2014, she served as Director of Global Programmes for the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) responsible for overseeing global comparative research on trends in democratic governance. From 2004- 2012, she oversaw International IDEA's gender activities throughout Latin America, working with parties, parliaments, election commissions and civil society organizations in ten countries. She has published extensively on issues related to political representation and gender.

Endnotes

¹ “Women in National Parliaments Database” by Inter-Parliamentary Union, consulted on July 19, 2016: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

² “Enabling Change: A Behavioural Approach to Political Programming” by Global Partners Governance, 2015, p. 3

³ For a review of the countless variations of electoral systems and their impact on the election of women, see two publications by International IDEA: “Electoral System Design” and “Designing for Equality: Best Fit, Medium Fit and Non-Favourable Combinations of Electoral Systems and Gender Quotas”

⁴ “Quotas as a Fast-Track to Equal Representation for Women: Why Scandinavia is No Longer the Model” by D. Dahlerup and L. Freidenvall in “Women, Gender and Politics: A Reader,” 2005, p. 31

⁵ Centre for Women and Democracy: <http://www.cfwd.org.uk/>

⁶ “Designing for Equality: Best Fit, Medium Fit and Non-Favourable Combinations of Electoral Systems and Gender Quotas” International IDEA, by S. Larsrud and R. Taphorn, p. 8

⁷ A “balanced list” is one in which there is an equal number of male and female candidates. “Zipping” is the practice of alternating women and men on party lists.

⁸ “Women in Politics: Financing for Gender Equality” in “Funding for Political Parties and Election Campaigns”, by J. Ballington and M. Kahane, 2014, p. 317

⁹ Ballington and Kahane

¹⁰ In Brazil, the political finance provision is broadened to stipulate that at least 10% of media air time should also be devoted to women’s empowerment (Ballington and Kahane).

¹¹ In Togo, the nomination fee cost is reduced for women (Ballington and Kahane).

¹² In Minnesota, child care can be covered by campaign funds, as a legitimate campaign expense (Ballington and Kahane).

¹³ See “Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments” by J. Ballington, 2009, Inter-Parliamentary Union and “Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers. A Revised Edition” by J. Ballington and A. Karam, 2005, International IDEA.

¹⁴ See “Women for President: Media Bias in Nine Campaigns,” by E Falk, 2010, University of Illinois Press and “Unseeing Eyes: Media Coverage and Gender in Latin American Elections” by B. Llanos, 2011, International IDEA.

¹⁵ The Good Parliament, Professor Sarah Childs, July 2016. <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/news/2016/july/20%20Jul%20Prof%20Sarah%20Childs%20The%20Good%20Parliament%20report.pdf>

¹⁶ “Improving Parliament: Creating a Better and More Representative House” All Party Parliamentary Group, Women in Parliament, July 2014.

¹⁷ While this article focuses on the collective efforts of women legislators to promote women’s leadership and gender equality, it should not be inferred that women are a monolithic group. Not all women MPs choose to advance other women’s interests, nor do they define those interests in the same way.

¹⁸ “One Size Does Not Fit All: Lessons Learned from Legislative Gender Commissions and Caucuses” by K. Gonzalez and K. Sample, 2010, International IDEA and National Democratic Institute, p. 15-16.

¹⁹ “Fact Sheet: Bancadas, Comisiones y Unidades Tecnicas de Igualdad: Rutas para Institucionalizar el Trabajo Legislativo por la Igualdad en America Latina” by United Nations Development Program (UNDP), p. 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “Gender Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice” by S. Palmieri, 2011, Inter-Parliamentary Union, No. 65, p. 40.

²² This article will use the terms “gender committee” to refer to both “gender committees” and “women’s committees”. Likewise the term “gender caucus” will also include “women’s caucuses”.

²³ “Parlamentos Sensibles al Genero: El Estado de la Cuestion en America Latina” by J. Borner and J. Marx, 2011, International IDEA, p. 40.

²⁴ Palmieri, 39-59.

²⁵ “Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women’s Political Participation in the OSCE Region” by Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2013, p. 90.

²⁶ Gonzalez and Sample, p. 17.

²⁷ Based on “La Bancada Femenina en Uruguay: Un Actor Critico para la Representacion Sustantiva de las Mujeres en el Parlamento” by N. Johnson, 2014, in America Latina Hoy, No. 66, p. 153-157.

²⁸ “Women Changing Policy Outcomes: Learning from Pro-Women Legislation in the Ugandan Parliament” by V. Wang, 2013, in Women’s Studies International Forum, Vol. 41, p. 118.

²⁹ UNDP Fact Sheet.

³⁰ Consolidated Reply of the E-Discussion on ‘Parliamentary Oversight of Gender Equality’” by iKNOW Politics, 2016: <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/learn/knowledge-resources/discussion-summaries/consolidated-reply-e-discussion-parliamentary>

³¹ Gonzalez and Sample, p. 38.

³² Women in National Parliaments Database, Inter-Parliamentary Union

³³ “De 64 Leyes Aprobadas en la Asamblea Nacional 27 Contienen Enfoque de Genero: Paola Pabon” in Asamblea Nacional: Republica del Ecuador, 2013, http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ec/es/noticia/de_64_leyes_aprobadas_en_la_asamblea_nacional_27_contienen_enfoque_de_genero_paola_pabon.

³⁴ “Lessons from Rwanda: How Women Transform Governance” by R. Wilber, 2011, Vol 2, Issue 2.

³⁵ “Demonstrating Legislative Leadership: The Introduction of Rwanda’s Gender-Based Violence Bill” by E. Pearson, 2008, Initiative for Inclusive Security, p. 24.

³⁶ Palmieri, p. 40-45.

³⁷ “The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combatting Violence against Women in Global Perspective” by M. Htun and S. Weldon, 2012, in American Political Science Review, No. 106.

³⁸ Wang, p. 118.

³⁹ Gonzalez and Sample, p. 40.

⁴⁰ Gonzalez and Sample, p. 29.

⁴¹ Borner and Marx, p. 42.

⁴² Wang, p. 116.

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Joe Power

+44 (0) 207 549 0350
gpggovernance.net
hello@gpggovernance.net

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Global Partners Governance

Development House
56-64 Leonard Street
London
EC2A 4LT

 +44 (0)20 7549 0350

 hello@gpgovernance.net

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www.gpgovernance.net