



Global Partners
Governance

Women's Participation in Political Life in Egypt and Beyond

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Foreword

Greg Power, *Founder-Director, Global Partners Governance*

Around the world, women are under-represented at every level in politics. The inadequate representation of women distorts the way in which policy is formulated, depriving decision-makers of vital evidence and expertise. By virtue of their life experiences, women have valuable perspectives that need to be brought to bear on the policy process; women are more likely to suffer financial hardship, lack property rights and take responsibility for the welfare of dependents. It is estimated that 70% of the world's 1.8 billion people living in poverty are women. More importantly, women bring perspectives, attributes and experiences on critical issues for developing countries, such as poverty, security, health, education and resolving conflict that are unlikely to be fully represented in a male-dominated parliament.

Within political parties, although women typically constitute between 40% and 50% of members, the proportion of women in leadership positions is estimated at around 10%. Women currently account for 22% of parliamentarians worldwide. Only the parliaments of Rwanda and Andorra have had 50% or more female members, and around half of the 180 parliaments annually surveyed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) have under 20%.

In Egypt, although the quota system used in the 2015 elections resulted in the highest proportion of women MPs in Egypt's history, this is still only 14.9% of Parliament. The increase in female politicians creates new opportunities for addressing some of the persistent gender inequalities in Parliament, and more broadly in society, but also emphasises how much still needs to be done. The purpose of this publication is to explore the specific political dynamics, challenges and opportunities facing female politicians in Egypt, and highlights ways in which they could be most effectively addressed.

The first chapter provides an historical analysis of the political and social context that has shaped the presence and influence of women in Egypt's politics. As in many other countries it is clear that women face significant practical problems in running for office including the costs of running a campaign, lack of effective political networks, and a lack of resources. But in addition, societal and attitudinal factors work as a disincentive to many potential female candidates. **Dr. Dina Wafa** and **Dr. Laila El-Baradei** of the American University in Cairo identify ways in which these factors can be addressed and suggest methods that could be adopted to empower women in Egypt to become a more prominent feature of the political landscape.

The second chapter draws widely on the international experience, highlighting two distinct but complementary objectives that exist at the heart of promoting gender inequality within parliaments. The first objective is to increase the number of women in politics, and their influence within the political sphere. The second is to encourage the broader adoption of gender-sensitive and gender equality policies. **Kristen Sample**, Global Partners Governance Associate and Former Director of Global Programmes for International IDEA, highlights the significant overlap between these two objectives, as they inform and shape one another. Increasing the presence and influence of women in politics seems likely to lead to more policies that promote gender equality. Equally, electoral laws, legislation and budgeting that is gender sensitive is likely to increase the opportunities for women to play a greater role within politics. But, they are not the same thing, and it is also not inevitable that one will lead to the other. They require different strategy and tactics.

The personal perspective and experience of a leading female politician is the focus of the third chapter. **Gordana Comic**, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, shares her observations on what it means to be a woman involved in politics, describing the lessons she has learned during nearly thirty years of political participation. The chapter explores her political journey as a female politician in a conflict and post-conflict environment and seeks to identify some mechanisms by which men and women can seek to make political life a more equal playing field for both genders.

The final chapter explores the role of women leaders in local councils in Egypt. Former Member of the Egyptian Parliament, former local council representative in Asyut and member of the National Council for Women, Sanaa El Saeed, explores the importance of female representation in politics and presents her personal experience at the sub-national level. She outlines the main challenges and opportunities faced by women in local government, emphasising the importance of having good female role models for aspiring politicians to follow. She concludes that progress will be made by women who are willing to trial new approaches, persisting and innovating until they succeed. She also emphasises the importance of activating the role of

civil society in conducting training for female candidates on the national and sub-national levels and the need to adopt active measures to encourage female participation in public life.

The publication's aim is to assist all those interested in this field to explore the ways in which women – and men – can drive forward the equalities agenda within public life in Egypt. By drawing on a range of international and domestic experience, our goal is to identify practical and helpful examples of how women can be empowered to contribute and shape political life in Egypt over the months and years ahead.

Chapter 1: Empowering women parliamentarians in Egypt

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Introduction

In 2015, for the first time in parliamentary history in Egypt, the percentage of women representation in parliament reached 14.9% out of a total of 596 seats available. This is considered by many to be a major achievement and a great opportunity. A total of 681 women ran for parliament for individual seats, 19 of whom won. Additionally, 56 women MPs won on lists, and 14 were appointed by the President, making the total number of women MPs in the Egyptian Parliament 89 (El-Behary, 2016; Komsan, 2016).

The number of women representatives in parliament matters. While it is not the only factor when seeking to measure the level of gender equality within an institution, having more women parliamentarians is one important way to ensure diversity and inclusivity and ensure that they get more of a chance to have their voices heard. Despite the fact that there is little evidence to prove a direct correlation between an increase in women's representation in parliament and the increased advocacy for gender issues (Waylen, 2007, p.137), many countries still aspire towards increasing participation of women in their parliaments and improving their international ranking in that regard. This is because equality in political representation is an issue of rights and justice, not just a means to deliver gender-based policies. Additionally, equal participation of men and women in decision making on matters of public concern is a main pillar of the CEDAW convention¹ enforced since 1981 and with more than 179 government signatories (IDEA, 2005).

In order to win their seats, Egypt's women parliamentarians had to overcome numerous challenges that include deeply rooted cultural and social norms (El Baradei & Wafa, 2013). These challenges – along with some of the international approaches to overcome them in other parliamentary contexts – are explored further in this paper.

Main Research Question: The important question however is to establish to what extent the current women representatives in the Egyptian Parliament are able to play an effective role, and what can be done to further empower them. The focus of the research is on those MPs elected since 2015.

Methodology: The chapter relies on a literature review which explores best practices for empowering women parliamentarians in other regions around the world and what lessons can be derived for the Egyptian context. Additionally, desk research of available reports and news articles discussing women's performance in parliament and the main cultural, economic, political and institutional challenges facing them is used. An attempt is made to map power relations and understand what interests and incentives most influence behaviour and performance.

Concept of evaluation and how to evaluate parliaments

According to the literature, parliaments have three main objectives: representing people and voicing their concerns; scrutinising and passing legislation; plus overseeing government performance and holding it accountable (Scott & McLoughlin, 2014, 23; Agnihorti, 2009, 4). Although there may be variations in the roles played by parliaments in different countries around the world, some basic universal values based on international criteria for democratic performance can be adopted.

One interesting assessment tool for evaluating parliaments focuses on six main aspects of any parliament's work: its representativeness, oversight over the executive, legislative capacity, transparency and accessibility, accountability, and its involvement in international policy (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008, 5). However, many other parliamentary assessment tools and frameworks exist and include a great deal of overlap between the parameters they

focus on: including those prepared by the National Democratic Institute, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association/World Bank Institute/United Nations Development Program in unison (CPA/WBI/UNDP Benchmarks), and the Parliamentary Center Budget Process (WorldBank, 2009, 8).

Both quantitative and qualitative indexes have also been developed to help in the assessment of parliaments. Examples of quantitative criteria include: number of days parliament meets, time spent in debates, number of committee meetings, etc. Meanwhile, qualitative assessment tries to answer questions about the quality of legislation passed, the degree of political stability in the country as a result of the parliament's efforts, to what extent the discussions are relevant to the public's needs, etc. (Agnihorti, 2009, 4).

While evaluation frameworks and mechanisms, and both quantitative and qualitative indexes, are prevalent, parliamentary evaluation is not perceived to be an easy task by any means. There is general agreement, however, that strengthening parliament so that it fulfills its main mandates and objectives is an important aspiration to pursue.

For parliaments to be able to achieve their main mandates and objectives, there are a number of prerequisites, including: the ability to maintain independence from the Executive Authority; and having the necessary resources, capabilities, willingness and commitment. In developing countries, where these conditions are not always met, parliaments can become weak and incapable of fulfilling their roles.

In evaluating the role of women parliamentarians, another factor besides their effectiveness as regular MPs trying to fulfill their different mandates may be added to the equation. Their effectiveness in promoting a more gender sensitive parliament and policies that promote gender equality – alongside their male colleagues – is also an important consideration.

Box 1: Definitions

The Inter-Parliamentary Union defines a gender sensitive parliament to be one “whose structures, operations, methods and work respond to the needs and interests of both men and women [and is] founded on the principle of gender equality - that is both men and women have an equal right to participate in its structures and processes, without discrimination or recrimination” (Palmieri, 2011,6).

Gender Equality refers to “equality under the law, equality of opportunity (including equality of rewards for work...), and equality of voice (the ability to influence and contribute to the development process)” (UNIFEM, 2005).

It is thus important to examine the context in which the current Egyptian Parliament operates.

Factors influencing the elections for – and operation of – the 2015 parliament

Voter turnout

The context in which the current 2015 parliament is working and was elected is in itself quite challenging. After the 2011 revolution there were very high rates of voter turnout in subsequent elections and referenda. However, by the time the 2014 parliamentary elections were held, these high voter turnout rates were no longer witnessed. Explanations for the low turnout varied.

Some attributed the fall in participation to ‘elections fatigue’, because of the many elections and referenda experienced by Egyptians since 2011. Others believed that people no longer maintained the same level of trust that their voices mattered. Other explanations for the low turnout mentioned technical hindrances, like organizing the elections on working days, or lack of awareness and limited time for campaigning, the complexity of the electoral system, or some Egyptians refraining from participation because of the incidents of violence in several parts of the country (Gur, 2016; Sanyal, 2016).

Voter turnout was officially announced by Egypt's High Elections Committee to be 28.3% in both phases of the 2015 parliamentary elections (Gur, 2016; Saleh, 2015) compared to 60% in the 2011/2012 parliamentary elections (Bahy, 2015).

Female voters

According to General Refaat Komsan, Election Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister, the number of eligible women voters reached 49% of the total number of voters in 2015.

Table 1: Percentage of Males and Females to the Number of Population and Voters (2015)

Number/Kind	Population		Eligible Voters	
	Number (1st May)	Percentage %	Number (1st September)	Percentage %
Males	45,214,637	51.01	28,371,091	51.02
Females	43,418,326	48.99	27,235,487	48.98
Total	88,632,963		55,606,578	

Source: Komsan, R. (2016)

Other factors

Aside from the level of voter turnout in the latest 2015 parliamentary elections, a number of other contextual factors regarding the political environment in Egypt, and the context in which the current parliament operates, should be noted.

- » Egypt continued to operate without a parliament for nearly three and a half years. When the current parliament began operating, it had to review and approve more than 300 different laws and decrees that were issued during the reign of the Former President Adly Mansour and the current president Abdel Fattah El Sisi. This had to be done in less than two weeks in conformance with the constitutional article number 156 (Egyptnews.net, 13/1/2016). Parliament approved these laws in time with the exception of one law, the Civil Service Law, which was sent back to government for modification, before being approved as well.
- » A number of laws have been passed by the current parliament which are perceived by some to be controversial, such as the law regulating protests Number 107/2013, and the recent law regulating the work of non-governmental organizations in Egypt.
- » The Muslim Brotherhood, to which the former President Morsi belonged, has been declared a terrorist organization.
- » Political opposition and political parties have grown weaker with some arguing that freedom of expression has been curtailed.

The political context in which the current parliament operates, including both its male and female members, will influence their performance. The conditions outlined above in which the election was held and the parliament has operated has had an impact on: the nature of those who stood and succeeded in being elected and appointed to key roles; the pressures exerted on the legislature; and how MPs perform. These factors must be borne in mind when seeking to analyse the role and influence of the current 89 women MPs and identify the opportunities and challenges they face.

Brief history of Egyptian women's political participation

Pre-2015

Women's political participation in Egypt is marked with their active involvement in the 1919 revolution. In 1923, the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), led by Hoda Shaarway, was formed in support of the revolution and, in 1925, demanded women's right to vote in elections (Agaty and Sharkawy, 1). In 1956 the Egyptian Constitution gave women the right to vote and to run for parliamentary elections (Agaty and Sharkawy, 1).

1957 was the year that marked Egyptian women first entering parliament, with eight women running for parliament and two winning: Rawya Attia for the Giza district and Amina Shoukry for Alexandria. In 1964, the number of women who won seats in parliament increased to eight (Agaty and Sharkawy, 2).

Only in 1979 was the quota system introduced and a presidential decree approved a minimum quota of 30 seats for women, to be increased in 1983 to 31 seats (Agaty and Sharkawy, 1). This represented one seat for each district. Under this system men were not allowed to compete for the women seats, however women were allowed to compete with men on other seats. This encouraged 200 women to run for election in 1979, where they filled the 30 seats, plus 3 additional seats, and 2 women were appointed by Presidential decree to bring the total up to 35 women MPs.

In 1984, quota lists were introduced to ensure inclusion of the marginalized, including women. As a consequence 36 women became members of parliament (Agaty and Sharkawy, 2).

However, in 1986, the quota system was abolished - only 14 women won seats in that election and 4 were appointed (Agaty and Sharkawy, 2).

Again in 2010, 64 seats were allocated to women (Agaty and Sharkawy, 1). However, in 2012 - after the abolition of the previous quota system - though 984 women ran for elections, only 2% of seats were won by women (Aboulkomsan, 2016; Agaty and Sharkawy, 2). The only semblance of a quota system was the requirement by the elections law number 108 for 2011 that political parties include at least one woman on their party lists. There was no specification where on the list the woman's name be included (Al Sawy, 2011, 19).

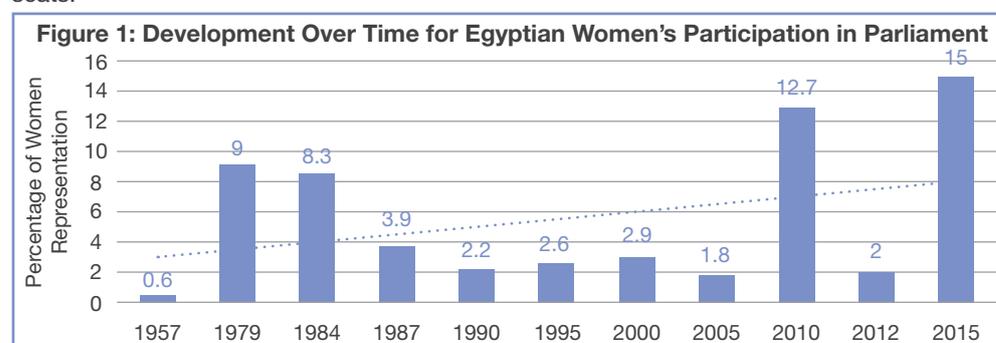
Table 2: Egyptian Women Representation in Parliament from 2000-2012

	2000		2005		2010		2012	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Number of women members	11	2.4	9	2	64	12.7	11	2.2
Elected	7	1.5	5	0.9	63	12.5	9	1.8
Appointed	4	0.9	4	1.1	1	0.2	2	0.4

Source: El Sawy (2012), 31.

Post-2015

The picture improved in the 2015 parliamentary elections with the re-enactment of the quota system for women and their managing to realize a 14.9% representation and a total of 89 seats.



By reaching 15% for women representation in Parliament, Egypt is slightly below the average for Arab countries, and lower than the percentages in other regions of the world. The highest representation for women in parliament is available in Nordic countries, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Percentage of Women Representation in Parliament in Various World Regions

Region	Single House or Lower House
Nordic Countries	42%
Americas	23.9%
Europe- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) member countries including Nordic Countries	23.7%
Europe – OSCE member countries excluding Nordic Countries	21.9%
Sub-Saharan Africa	20.9%
Asia	18.4%
Arab States	15.7%

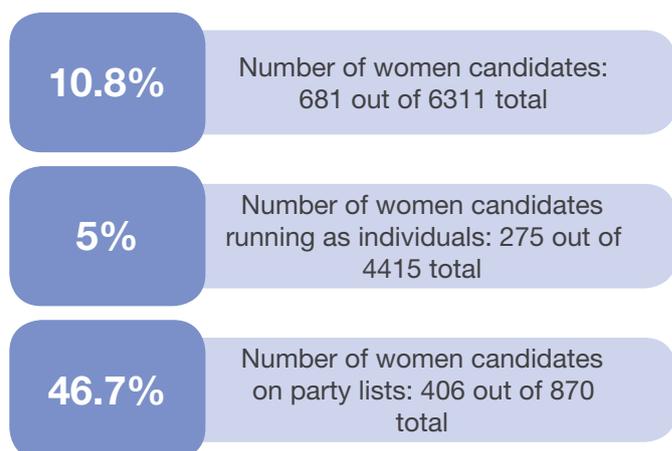
Source: Women in National Parliaments - Situation as of 1st February 2013 <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/world010213.htm>

The 2015 quota system works for both women and other marginalized groups. Within the party list system, it differentiates between 15 seat districts and 45 seat districts. The former is required to have a minimum of 7 women, 3 Christians, 2 farmers/workers, 2 youth, 1 with disability and 1 living abroad, whereas the latter is required to have 21 women, 9 Christians, 9 workers/farmers, 6 youth, 3 with disability and 3 living abroad (Aboulkomsan, 2016). There is no restriction on whether a candidate represents more than one marginalized group. In addition, the President may appoint up to 5% of the members of parliament, of whom half are women. Thus law 46/2014 of the House of Representatives guarantees around 70 seats for women (Aboulkomsan, 2016).

However, the women’s quota only applies to party list seats, amounting to only 20% of all parliamentary seats. According to the Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights (ECWR) only 50 parties nominated women for individual seats, with the Wafd party having the highest nomination of 9 women. 23 parties did not nominate any women for individual seats (Aboukomsan, 2016).

If we look at the total number of women who ran for parliament in 2015, we find that there were a total of 681 candidates making up nearly 11% of the total number of candidates. Of those, 275 ran for election on an individual basis, making up only 5% of the total number of individual candidates, and 406 ran for election as members of party lists, making up nearly 47% of the total number of party list candidates. Obviously, women candidates found it much easier to run as candidates on party lists, than as individuals.

Figure 2: Distribution of 2015 Women Parliamentary Candidates



Source: Komsan, R. (2016)

As demonstrated below in Table 4, the presidential appointment of MPs allocated 50% of the 28 seats to women, showing an intent to increase women’s representation in parliament.

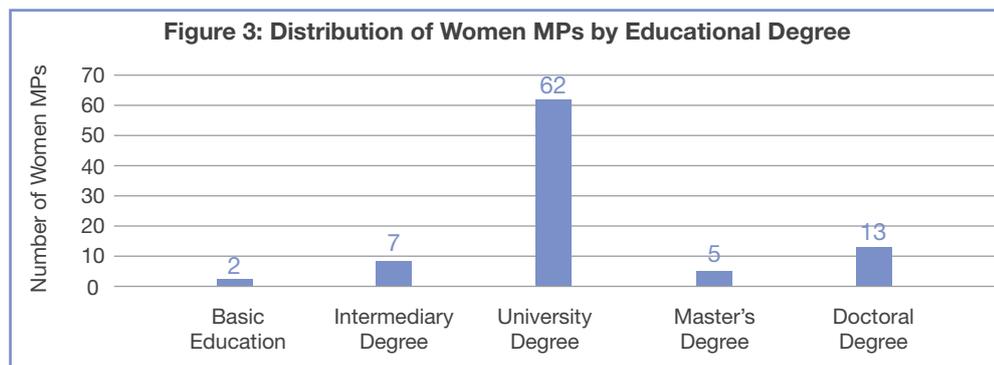
Table 4: Percentages of Women MPs Elected versus Appointed

Descriptor	Number of Women MPs	Percentage
Number of Women MPs	89 out of 596 Total	15%
Number of Women MPs Elected as Individuals	19 out of 448 Total	4.2%
Number of Women MPs Elected on Party Lists	56 out of 120 Total	46.7%
Number of Women MPs Appointed	14 out of 28 Total	50%

Source: Komsan, R. (2016)

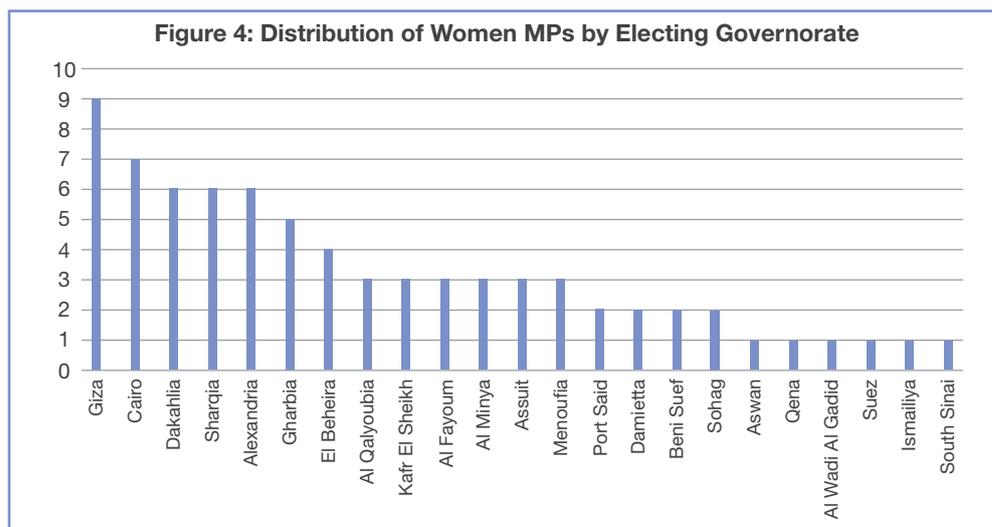
General profile of women MPs in the 2015 Parliament

The majority (70%) of the current group of women MPs have a university degree, while 20% have either a master’s or a doctoral degree, and 10% have basic to intermediary education.



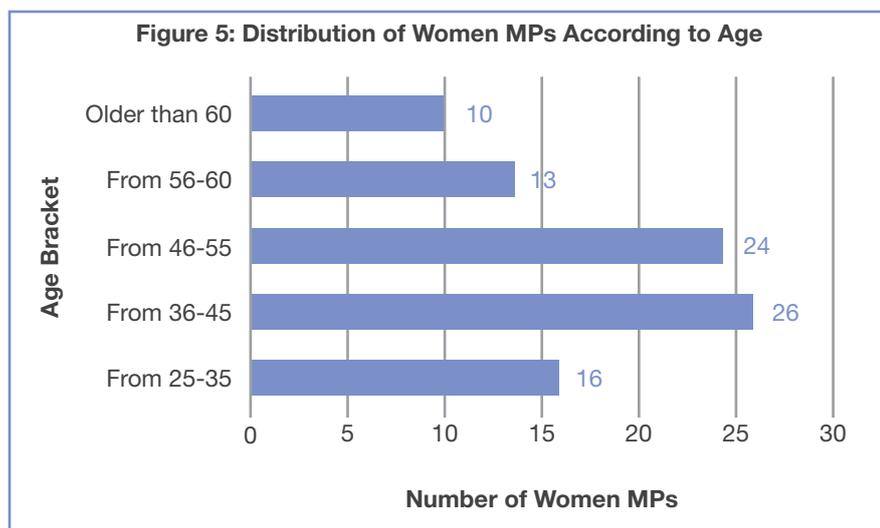
Source: Komsan, R. (2016)

The 89 women MPs come from all over Egypt, although there is a higher representation of women MPs from both Giza and Cairo governorates. Only four remote governorates have no women representatives, namely: Matrouh, North Sinai, Luxor and the Red Sea governorate.



Source: Komsan, R. (2016)

The age distribution of the 89 women MPs shows a wide spectrum with different age groups represented. MPs in the age bracket from 25-35 make up about 18%, those from 36-45 make up 29%, those from 46-55 make up 27%, and those above 56 years old make up 26%.



Source: Komsan, R. (2016)

The 89 women in parliament are made up of 19 who won individual seats, 56 who won on party lists and 14 were appointed (El Behary, 2016; Refaat Komsan presentation). Of the 14 appointed women MPs, two are from the private sector, while eight are from academia. All have joined committees related to their field of expertise, though none are in leading positions.

Some scepticism directed towards the newly elected women MPs related to the fact that 90% of them were new to parliament and would be needing at least one whole year to adjust to the parliamentary experience (Sarhan, 11 April 2016). It should be noted, however, that it is likely that newly appointed men would have needed as much time to adjust as newly appointed women MPs, and the extent of procedural and constitutional change since the last Parliament would have rendered previous experience less helpful than usual.

The 19 women MPs holding individual seats share generally common characteristics of successful women candidates: history of politics and politicians in the family, history of social work and interaction with the public, and/or other strong supporting mechanisms such as the church. "The Egyptian parliamentary elite weaves special threads to institutions such as the National Council for Women, the Coptic Church of Egypt, Business Associations ... [that] may claim influence on the parliamentary process even though they are not a formal part of parliament" (El-Sawi, 2005). Included among the women MPs holding the 19 individual seats

are: National Council for Women (NCW) and HEYA Movement² nominee Elham Menshawy; church-backed nominee Mona Gaballah who also worked extensively with the people of Mansheyat Nasser and Jammaliya³ for three years prior to elections; Eman Khedr who worked with several charity organizations; Neamat Qamar who is an active unionist; and Sanaa Bargash who is a returning MP, former NDP candidate.

Examples of women MPs' active involvement

Over the years, there have been high profile cases and examples of the active involvement of Egyptian women in parliament. Some of these cases are positive and some negative:

- » The first woman MP Rawya Attia of the 1957 parliament addressed setting up family counseling offices to assist family planning.
- » Moufida Abdel Rahman of the 1964 parliament was referred to as “Sheikhat al Mohameen” or “the lawyer guru”. She remained in parliament for 17 years and worked on several legislations including child custody in favor of women.
- » Nawal Amer of the 1964 parliament remained for 6 terms until she became the first woman Assistant Speaker. She raised several national issues and others focused on serving women, including equal pay in both the public and private sector.
- » Fayda Kamel of the 1971 parliament remained in office for 34 years. She supported the ‘khulu’ law (the abolition of the right of women to initiate a no fault divorce), which gave women the right to divorce their husbands, and the right of the children of Egyptian women married to a foreigner to gain the Egyptian nationality (Agaty and Sharkawy, 4).

In contrast to these positive cases, there are examples in which women MPs fight ‘against’ rights already gained for women. During discussion of women’s issues in the first elected parliament after the 2011 revolution, some members called for: the lowering of the age of marriage for girls from the current stipulated 16 years of age; allowing female genital mutilation on the pretext that it is an Islamic tradition; and the abolition of the right of women to initiate a no fault divorce (‘khulu’), which had been granted to women ten years earlier (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Some of these calls were voiced by women members of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the party of the Muslim Brotherhood.

One of the notorious women FJP members of parliament was reported to have called for the abolition and modification of seven different laws, all related to women’s rights. Among her proposals were the abolition of the ‘khulu’ law, not allowing women to travel alone without a legitimate male chaperone, not allowing women married to foreigners to pass on their Egyptian citizenship to their children, and not requiring a man to inform his first wife when he decides to take on a second wife, because she perceived this would threaten the welfare of the family unit (Al-Shafie, 2012). Part of the rationale behind the increased challenge to women’s rights, including the khulu law and the quota system, was their association with the name of Suzanne Mubarak, the former president’s wife, and the desire to get rid of everything associated with her name (Owen, 2012, p.183) . This trend has continued in the current Parliament, for example a female MP calling for limiting women’s custody rights.

A detailed analysis of women’s performance in the 2012 parliament demonstrated that:

- » women’s participation in discussions did not exceed 3% of the total allotted time;
- » parliamentary discussions did not focus on the impact of legislation on women, except in one instance when discussing the extension of the medical insurance to cover women headed households;
- » there was no coordination in the performance of the different women MPs;
- » no women MPs adopted or presented any legislation focusing on women;
- » their legislative performance was characterized as weak and they were perceived as needing specialized capacity building programs (El Sawy, 2012, p. 68).

Women’s caucus

Caucuses are considered privileged spaces for women legislators to advocate together for women’s issues as well as for networking with other entities and parliaments. Following a series of training workshops organised by the National Council for Women, in cooperation with the UNWomen, and attended by women MPs in the early stages of the 2016 Parliament, an informal Women MPs Caucus was created in Egypt. The aim of this Caucus was to foster cooperation and coordination between Women MPs on policy issues and legislation to ensure better representation for women’s rights and needs.

International and domestic support for women politicians in Egypt

The years 2015 and 2016 were marked by a significant increase in the level of international and domestic support for women politicians in Egypt. Before the most recent parliamentary elections in December 2015, support focused on encouraging women candidates to stand

for election and building their capacity to do so. After the parliamentary elections, and with a total of 89 women MPs sitting in the Egyptian Parliament for the first time, the support to build the capacities of women MPs and to promote gender mainstreaming was magnified. President Abdulfattah Al-Sisi has also announced through the National Council for Women that 2017 will be “the year of women” in Egypt. In light of this announcement and with the Local Council Elections expected to take place in summer 2017, more support is expected to be implemented across the country to support local council candidates and future female representatives.

International experiences and lessons learnt

The purpose of this section is to explore how different countries around the world have worked on empowering their women parliamentarians and what lessons can be derived that may be useful to the Egyptian context. Quota systems have been used in many parts of the world as a fast track to get women into parliament, but it is acknowledged that their presence alone is not the ultimate objective – more needs to be done to further empower and support them (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005). Some of the many discussed empowerment and support methods for women parliamentarians include the following:

Establishment of a strong women’s caucus

Especially when women are a minority in parliament, it can serve them well to work together and form a caucus, whether through a formal structure and arrangement, or through informal means. Caucuses can help women cooperate beyond partisan lines.

In **Brazil**, the women’s caucus for parliamentarians was given a catchy name - ‘the lipstick lobby’ - and was perceived to have been very successful in advocating for women friendly policies (Levy,2012). The Tanzanian experience speaks of how the establishment of a formal parliamentary women’s caucus in 1997, referred to as the Tanzania Women Parliamentary Group (TWPG), has managed to provide very useful services to the women MPs. This included orienting new members on the parliamentary rules and procedures, and training on how to participate in debates and how to ask questions (Yoon,2011).

In **South Africa**, following the end of the Apartheid period and the adoption of a new constitution, the African National Congress (ANC) Parliamentary Women’s Caucus (PWC) was formalized in 1996 and reportedly managed to launch a successful campaign to combat violence against women. What is important to note here is how the caucus worked on communicating with civil society organizations outside parliament with the belief that in order to promote women’s issues, strong links should be established with organizations supporting women’s issues on the ground. Among the successful tactical support tools used by the PWC were working together to draft a new law to curtail domestic violence, helping draft questions that could be used by MPs during meetings in parliament, and developing fact sheets on the problem of violence (Shifman et al, 1997). In **Rwanda** a formal caucus comprised of all women parliamentarians in both houses of parliaments was established in 1996 and referred to as the Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians. The caucus advocates on behalf of women and reviews and identifies legislation to make sure it is gender sensitive. Additionally, it provides training, technical advice and helps in establishing contacts with women’s groups in civil society (Krook & Norris, 2014).

Establishment of a special women’s committee

In some parliaments that are perceived to be ‘gender-sensitive’, special committees have been established and charged with: checking all legislation; proposing new legislation; and reviewing the budget for the purpose of protecting women’s rights (Chaminuka et al, 2015). Special gender equality committees have been used in many different countries, including: **India, South Africa, South Korea, Belgium** and others (Palmieri, 2011a).

Establishment of a network of gender focal points across parliamentary committees

Some parliaments choose to integrate gender across all committees and do not perceive a need for a specialized women’s committee. In such examples, arrangements are made to ensure women are represented on all parliamentary committees and coordinate with other focal points on women-related issues. The **Swedish** Parliament is one example where this model is followed (Palmieri, 2011a). For example, its Cultural Affairs Committee deals with issues related to boys’ and girls’ access to cultural activities, its Social Insurance Committee discusses men’s and women’s access to parental leave benefits, and its Labor Market Committee covers work related to equality issues (Palmier, 2011b,45).

Developing gender-sensitive legislation checklists

Some parliaments have developed gender sensitive legislation checklists that may be used

by parliamentarians to review all proposed legislation, identify affected groups, and estimate compliance costs and impact on different groups of stakeholders (Palmieri, 2011a).

Capacity building and research services

Parliamentarians after they join parliament often require support and capacity building whether from within the parliament itself, or from civil organizations existing outside parliament (Dahlerup & Friedenval, 2005). The Inter-Parliamentary Union states that special induction sessions should be provided to women MPs joining parliament for the first time, in addition to the regular orientation sessions provided to all (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014). In **Mexico**, an external Research Center for Women's Advancement and Gender Equality was established in 2005. This Center works with female parliamentarians to help them in various stages of the policy making process through providing them with research, analyses, information and reports (Krook & Norris, 2014).

Infrastructural support to women MPs

Aside from the above institutional support mechanisms, some parliaments have realized the need for infrastructural support to women MPs. To make women feel more welcome in parliament, some countries have revised the language used to make sure there are no assumptions that all parliamentary members are male. In **Spain**, plurals used to address both men and women have been revised and replaced by language distinguishing between both males and females. Other examples include making sure there are childcare facilities, accessible toilets dedicated to women, and nursing rooms for breastfeeding members. Operating schedules have also been revised to make sure that sessions do not extend late into the night, and do not represent a problem to women MPs by keeping them away from their families for long periods. In **Denmark**, to accommodate women who need to go home early to their families, no voting is allowed to occur after 7 p.m., while in **Australia** women MPs who are breastfeeding are allowed to give proxies to other members of their political party to vote on their behalf (Krook, 2013; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014).

Ensuring gender balance in parliamentary committee membership and establishing targets for parliamentary committee leadership positions

It is generally presumed that women who occupy leadership positions have greater influence on the legislative process than those who do not. As such, a few countries have gone the extra mile and have developed quotas or targets to enable women to occupy leadership positions in parliamentary committees. In **Rwanda**, the Constitution calls for the reservation of 30% of leadership positions for women, but through an informal policy, gender balance is maintained in the top leadership positions in parliamentary committees.

Another area of concern when dealing with women's participation in parliamentary committees, is the type of committees they participate in. There are some committee topics that are perceived to be 'soft', 'traditional' and 'women-friendly', while others are perceived to be 'hard' and 'masculine'. Health, social welfare, culture and education committees tend to fall into the first category, while defence, security, foreign affairs and economics tend to fall into the second. Efforts are made to try to encourage women to participate in all types of committees and not restrict their participation to the traditional, 'soft' types of committees (Palmieri, 2011b).

Conducting internal parliamentary gender audits

An interesting initiative implemented in the **Rwandan** parliament was to conduct an audit, facilitated by donor support to check on the extent of gender mainstreaming efforts and activities in parliament and what lessons could be learnt to introduce additional improvements. After checking the internal rules and regulations, conducting interviews and surveys of both staff and parliamentarians, they concluded that there was a need to provide training to both the staff and the MPs to overcome the weaknesses identified (Palmeiri, 2011b,56).

Challenges facing current Egyptian women MPs

Lack of financial resources

This is a continued challenge linked to the lack of financial resources that tends to be faced by women MPs as they run for parliament. Lack of individual financial resources and the control of political financial resources by parties whose preference tends to be to support male candidates as a more "guaranteed return" on investment, presents a major challenge for women to run for parliament.

The need for more technical assistance, capacity and accurate information

Like in many parliaments, more technical assistance and research could help MPs undertake their roles more effectively. It could also ensure that they did not need to rely as heavily on

party or personal assistance. According to international conventions, the chief of staff provides necessary assistance to all MPs equally. However, in previous Egyptian parliaments, according to research “the chief of staff has interfered in the hiring of hundreds of staff members based on personal and constituency considerations” (El-Sawi, 2005). Those who do not have the means to access reliable support and information can be severely hindered, with women tending to be the most challenged in this regard.

Under-representation of women in parliamentary leadership posts

Women face a further problem, as several women MPs have reportedly been encouraged to run for the same position in committees, leading to the fragmentation of votes that would otherwise have been cast for a single female MP. However, this is a challenge that could easily be overcome with some coordination of those who have an interest or concern in a particular subject, and/or those who wish to organize so that there is more women representation.

The current parliament has witnessed women participation in committees’ leadership as follows:

In the first year of the parliament (2015):

- » of the 25 parliamentary committees, 9 had female deputy chairs including: foreign relations, human rights, social solidarity, health, youth and sports, SMEs, and religious issues. Additionally, there were two women chairs of the communication and technology and tourism and aviation committees (Agaty and Sharkawy, 9).
- » Women participated in all committees except transportation and industry committees; and
- » Those committees with the highest female membership were: economy (6), culture and media (6), health (7), and SMEs (10).

In the second year of the parliament (2016) there was a lower level of female leadership, with only one chair and three deputy chairs of committees, and 3 rapporteurs; i.e. seven women leadership positions, as compared to eleven in the previous year. Again, the transportation and industry committees have no female participation; and the largest proportion of female participation goes to housing and utilities, and to human rights, each with nine women members, but none in a leading position.

Worthy of mention is that the single female committee chair is Sahar Talaat Mostafa, a business woman in the field of tourism who comes from a family of businessmen and former MPs who won the chair of the Tourism and Aviation Committee for the second consecutive year. Additionally, one of the leadership positions, seems to be one of diversity representation, which is that of Coptic MP Amani Aziz, elected secretary of the Religion Committee. Amani Aziz is the only Coptic member of the Committee.

Culture of service and female parliamentarians

This is a worldwide phenomenon in which citizens expect parliamentarians to deliver services rather than assume their principal roles of overseeing government and making laws (Inter Parliamentary Union). A culture of service parliamentarians is a common challenge that is further amplified for women. In a recent poll, when asked why they didn’t vote for women, 29.1% of respondents said this was because they did not know the candidate, 18.5% said they were not convinced with the candidate, 14.8% said because they prefer male candidates, and 6.1% said because “she never rendered us services” (Esseila p55).

The more traditional and rural the constituency, the more difficult it is for women, due to culture and education. Also, the prevalent culture in Egyptian society is one which makes a distinction between private and public affairs, asserting that the woman’s role lies in taking care of the family and home, while public work is essentially a man’s work. The community’s patriarchal culture and societal expectations can be obstacles for females during elections. The more educated and older the voter, the more likely they are to accept women participation and to vote for women. 29.1% of those responding to a recent poll saw that culture represented a major challenge to women’s participation (Esseila p 48 – 54). Accordingly, women MP representation seems to be in the larger more educated governorates of Giza, Cairo, Alexandria, Dakahleya and Sharkeya. For these reasons, the more traditional and rural the constituency, the more difficult it is for women.

Lack of public parliamentary sessions and reliance on media coverage

Broadcasting sessions is one way of showcasing MPs’ work in parliament to their constituents. It is also a method of accountability. However, the current parliament has opted to ban broadcasting temporarily, as according to the Speaker, Parliament “will lift the temporary ban on the live airing of its sessions after it has finished reviewing laws passed since July

2013” (AhranOnline, 2016). Until the temporary suspension is lifted MPs have to find other means to communicate their work with the people, particularly women MPs who have the additional burden to prove that they are as capable as their male counterparts. In this context, both MPs and citizens have turned to the media; MPs with the aim of publicizing their work and citizens as the only source from which they can learn more about the activities of Parliament and its members.

The inherited formal power structure within parliament

Commonly there are multiple layers to the formal parliament power structure, often inherited from previous systems. Mainly the flow is from the Speaker, to the deputies, to the general committee, and to the committee of ethics all the way to the executive bodies of the committees. The Speaker guides and influences the agenda, while the core parliamentary work is done through the committees. Only one female MP –Nawal Amal – has reached the more senior positions within Parliament. She became the first woman Deputy Speaker in 1964, six terms after she was first elected. No female has occupied this role or a more senior role in Parliament since.

Recommended solutions based on international experience and experts’ opinions

Ensuring gender balance across parliamentary committees and women’s leadership committees

Creating a women’s committee provides room for solidarity and collective action, as “evidence is clear on the importance of women organizing with women for their solidarity, critical consciousness and gender equality activism” (Domingo, 51). However, others see it as inadvisable, as gender issues are cross-cutting. Currently the Egyptian Parliament does not have a women’s committee as it is not believed to be necessary. The preference is that gender issues are treated as cross-cutting in nature. As noted in Kristen Sample’s article within this publication, a high number of women members on committees is needed as well as a culture of gender awareness and commitment among male and female members for this cross-cutting approach to succeed. Worldwide women leaders are in the minority, chairing just 21 percent of committees (Palmeiri 2011, 19). As noted above, women members tend to lead committees that are considered ‘soft’ portfolios as opposed to ‘hard’ areas that generally enjoy more weight and prestige (Borner and Marx, 24). In the current Egyptian Parliament only one woman heads a committee – the Tourism and Aviation Committee. For progress to be made, women need to balance their membership in the various committees so they are evenly represented, and to organize their nominations for leadership positions and lobby accordingly.

Exploring the further development of the women’s caucus and building bridges with power groups

As noted above, work has been undertaken to introduce a women’s caucus to the current parliament. However, further work could be done to develop its presence. The idea needs to build ownership from within first. The caucus will help coordinate women’s work and create synergy. It will provide an apparatus for collective action and organization that may assist current MPs and those working to nominate themselves in future rounds.

Piloting an oversight process for gender equality reforms and conducting a gender audit of parliamentary rules and procedures

Like many parliaments, the Egyptian Parliament’s procedures and standing orders do not currently make explicit provision for men and women MPs to participate under equal conditions. This includes formal mechanisms in support of gender mainstreaming in legislation and policy, as well as less obvious processes which may affect equal participation. Carrying out a gender audit or self-assessment that would include recommendations for improving rules and procedures from a gender perspective could help in this regard. The Gender Audit process could be led by the Women’s Caucus if it were to be strengthened.

Continued and perhaps increased quota system to support women representation in parliament. A women’s quota on individual seats as well as a quota mechanism on party lists that allows women more representation

The quota system is essential for women’s representation as a first step, and as a fast track, to get them into parliament. It is a prerequisite in the short run, but there are other more essential and more comprehensive macro and micro enablers that need to be present in order to ensure greater effectiveness. On the macro level, there is a need for equal opportunities for both genders to participate in public life. On the micro level, there is a need for greater capacity building directed to the elected MPs, administrative and research support, establishment of caucuses, and specialized women committees as optional measures to help women be

more effective in achieving their roles as MPs capable of holding government to account, representing their constituents and making sure policies reviewed and enacted are gender sensitive and lead to the promotion of women's rights.

Endnotes

¹ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

² HEYA is a program working on the empowerment of women in the Middle East. It has worked with some women candidates running for parliament under the NCW umbrella.

³ Mansheyat Nasser and Jammaliya are poor areas characterized by a tendency to vote based on tribal and familial affiliations. Mona Gaballah worked through her political party on several housing problems in the area.

⁴ Several laws concerning women's rights were usually associated with Suzanne Mubarak, the wife of Hosni Mubarak, for her vested interest in women and children's issues. Laws were casually referred to as the Suzanne Mubarak laws.

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Chapter 2: International examples and best practice in supporting gender equality in parliaments

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Introduction

This chapter presents international experiences in gender mainstreaming (GM) from parliaments around the world. The chapter's concept of gender mainstreaming comes from the Inter-Parliamentary Union definition of actions that "put gender issues at the centre of broad policy and programme decisions, institutional structures and resource allocation" (Palmieri 2011, 6). The aim of parliamentary GM is to produce an institution that "responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and in its work" (Palmieri 2011, 6).

The chapter draws on cross-country research based on the assumption that gender equality advocates in Egypt can benefit from access to international lessons. An important caveat however is that this review of global experiences does not negate the role of national culture in determining entry points and models for women's participation. In fact, in cultural contexts that are particularly adverse to gender equality, international experience shows that women often must chart a difficult path that complies with gender expectations—"dressing appropriately, being humble and approachable and taking part in everyday and gendered activities"—while at the same time holding firm in the confidence of their own ability to lead others (Kanyongolo et al 2016, 41).

National politics also plays a critical role; choices related to gender equality are rarely technical. Accordingly, access to research and lessons learned are useful only to the extent that decision makers 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." (Global Partners Governance 2015, 3). With this in mind, GM priorities should be selected based on an understanding of the overall political dynamics and how they relate to gender equality. Even a seemingly "minor" amendment to one aspect of gender dynamics can trigger a political ripple that impacts other aspects of parliamentary politics. Additionally, the full effects of a reform are not immediately apparent; there are likely to be unexpected consequences in the long run.

Strategies

Getting in

Though the inclusion of women in parliament is not sufficient on its own to ensure gender-sensitive policy making and institutional gender mainstreaming, it is an essential pre-condition. That is, while there is no threshold number that guarantees women's substantive impact on policy-making, it is clear that parliaments with no or minimal participation of women have a poor track record when it comes to gender equality.

One factor that impacts the number of women elected to parliament is the type of electoral system in place. For instance, systems that are first past the post (FPTP) and candidate centred tend to diminish the prospect of women candidates when compared to proportional representation systems.⁵ Gender quotas are another aspect of electoral reform that influences the level of women's inclusion in parliaments. Currently, 77 countries have gender quotas in place either through legislation or constitutional provisions (Global Database for Quotas for Women 2016).

In the case of Egypt, the gender quota has contributed to that country's highest ever percentage of women in parliament (14.9%), though the figure is still well below the global average of 22.9%. International experience provides a number of cases where women's election results have improved over time as quotas were amended and strengthened. Research on quota legislation in 80 countries found that 37 countries had bolstered their laws for more effective implementation, through increases in target percentages, application to an increased number of seats or the inclusion of placement mandates to ensure women were not concentrated at the bottom of lists (Dahlerup et al 2005).

International experiences:

Bolivia had a quota in place for parliamentary elections since 1997. However, it wasn't until approval of the 2008 Constitution — which established gender parity as a principle to be applied for all elected and many appointed posts — that Bolivia joined the ranks of the countries in the world with the highest percentage of women elected representatives (see below table). Key elements of the electoral reform included:

- An increase in the quota to 50% for both chambers. If a list is composed of an odd number of candidates, preference will be given to women.
- Vertical rank-order rules, alternating female and male candidates throughout the list.
- Expansion of the quota beyond proportional representation lists to also encompass FPTP seats through the requirement that at least 50% of the candidates in single-member constituencies must be women. (IDEA Gender Quota Atlas)

Women's representation in Bolivian Parliament (%):

Year	Lower Chamber	Upper Chamber
2005 (pre constitutional reform)	16.92	3.7
2009	22.31	41.67
2014	53.08	47.22

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, PARLINE Database on National Parliaments

Collective action

Progress toward gender equality can be achieved even in contexts where women make up a distinct minority. In fact, current research puts less emphasis on “critical mass” (achieving a specific threshold number of women elected) than on the concept of “critical acts” (defined as “initiatives that change the position of the minority and lead to further changes”) (Childs and Krook 2009). Experience in a number of parliaments around the world, for instance, has demonstrated that women (working with like-minded men in some situations) can increase their political influence through the use of strategic alliances and collective action. “Evidence is clear on the importance of women organizing with women for their solidarity, critical consciousness and gender equality activism” (Domingo, 51). Collective organisation does not require that all women parliamentarians share a commitment to gender equality. Rather, success is more dependent on “the work of a relatively small number of highly interested and resourceful individuals, who either provide the collective good themselves or play a central role in mobilizing others” (Childs and Krook 2009).

In the parliamentary context, members cooperate across party lines in pursuit of a variety of functions including:

- » Promoting legislative initiatives by defining the political agenda, setting priorities, and proposing and analysing draft legislation;
- » Facilitating public outreach through raising public awareness and promoting the engagement of civil society organizations, 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 (Gonzalez and Sample, 15-16).

There are countless variations of gender-dedicated parliamentary structures. Though these groups differ on dimensions such as purpose, structure, membership and operations, they are all cross-party 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.

Although the line between committees and caucuses can blur, a general rule is that the former tends to be an officially charted and permanent body, recognized within the parliament's formal committee structure (Gonzales and Sample, 17). A caucus has a different standing. Less formal than a gender committee, a caucus is generally created at the initiative of women members and does not fall under the legislature's internal rules.

Women's/Gender caucuses

Like committees, caucuses are cross-party vehicles for consensus building. Caucuses are often formed at the initiative of a group of women members who work together to 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 imply the lack of a dedicated budget and staffing.

A comparative study by the IPU found that caucuses have enjoyed considerable success in achieving legislative reforms, particularly related to gender-based violence (GBV) (Palmieri 2011, 39-59). Similarly a review of gender mainstreaming in OSCE countries concluded that caucuses had made particular gains in terms of “influencing policy and legislation” and “coalition building around an issue” (OSCE, 90).

International experiences:

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 (Johnson, 153). The Caucus has promoted legislation on gender-based violence, women’s health promotion, the rights of household workers, and a registry of alimony debtors. The Caucus has sought to dialogue with and engage male MPs, achieving co-sponsorship from men on 81% of the gender bills presented during the period of 2005-2010 (Johnson, 158). Frequently, the Caucus serves as a bridge between the Parliament and the general public outcomes include:

- an annual “accountability” session, reporting to the public on its legislative performance, its representation of Uruguayan women, demands from women’s organizations and its oversight of other State powers (Gonzalez and Sample, 40).
- creating the “Female Parliament” webpage within the parliamentary website in 2008 as a platform for promoting Uruguay’s female legislators and their work.
- the “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 (Gonzalez and Sample, 29)

The Third Path

In addition to committees and caucuses, a third alternative exists for promoting women’s participation and influence in parliaments. A parliament may eschew dedicated gender bodies in favour of mainstreaming gender across parliamentary committees. Although proponents argue that this option reduces the risk of “ghettoizing” women’s interests, its effectiveness depends on a high-level women members as well as a culture of gender awareness and commitment among men and women members.

International experiences:

It should not be surprising that the best-known case of concerted gender mainstreaming—in lieu of a committee or caucus model—is in a country such as **Sweden**, where equality principles are particularly well entrenched in the national culture. In 2003, the Parliament created the Speaker’s Working Committee for Gender Equality Issues (Centemero). Since then the Parliament has approved a series of Gender Equality Plans, including commitments on a number of gender mainstreaming measures such as childcare services, set voting times, and parental leave (Centemero).

Parliamentary leadership

Winning election is only the first step for a member keen to promote gender equality at the parliamentary level. Once in Parliament, members’ influence and effectiveness are also conditioned by their role in committees and the overall hierarchy. Currently accounting for 22.6% of legislators worldwide, women’s presence in parliamentary leadership is even lower. According to statistics published by the IPU, of the 275 chambers (of 191 countries) registered, women presided as speakers in just 49 cases (or 17.8%) (Inter-Parliamentary Union).

Committee leadership is another important area of consideration. The chair of a committee is responsible for presiding over its business and conduct, thus implying an influence over the legislative process as well as a potential stepping-stone to more senior political positions. On this score also, women leaders are in the minority, chairing just 21 per cent of committees worldwide (Palmieri 2011, 19). Furthermore, the gender breakdown is also unequal in terms of committee type. Women members tend to lead committees that are considered “soft” portfolios (social welfare, family, employment, culture and education), as opposed to the so called “hard” areas—foreign affairs, security, defence and economy—that generally enjoy more weight and prestige (Borner and Marx, 24).

International experiences

Very few countries have established targets or quotas for parliamentary leadership positions. The Rwandan Constitution requires that women hold no less than 30 per cent of leadership posts; in practice, there is an unofficial policy of gender balance such that when a woman holds a chair position, a man serves as deputy chair and vice versa (Palmieri 2011, 21). In Iraq, 25 per cent of all positions have been reserved for women (Palmieri 2011, 18).

In most cases, the composition and leadership of committees are determined through negotiation by political parties. One study in Malawi highlighted that members with relevant previous professional experience and technical knowledge are better positioned to lobby within their parties and the broader parliamentary structure for a committee leadership spot. For instance, the chair of the Malawian Health Committee was a community nurse, while the vice-Chair of the privileges committee had a background in human resources (Kyangolo et.al, 34). Members of the Uruguayan BBF coordinate amongst themselves to ensure that at least one woman is included in each committee.

Processes for gender legislation and budgeting

A number of parliaments have established procedures and resources aimed at ensuring that the legislation and budgets produced are gender sensitive. The most successful processes take a comprehensive approach that includes access to and use of sex-disaggregated analysis, compulsory review and verification processes, practical tools and guidelines and adequate technical support (see next section.)

International experiences:

The Cambodian Parliament has developed tools to ensure gender-sensitive review of draft legislation. Within the framework of the Canada-Cambodia Legislative Support Project, a five-step process was defined for enhanced legislative analysis (Palmieri 2012, 6):

- 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.
- Measure the impact of the draft law; if available, use sex-disaggregated data, but where it is not available, consider what else could be used.
- Ask specific questions regarding the legal drafting; make sure clear, plain and gender neutral language is used.
- Ask questions about administration, costs, regulations and public education; consider whether women will be involved in these processes.
- Double check it all – make sure the ‘gender question’ has been raised at every stage of the analysis.

Technical resources and capacity building

Given competing demands on their time and—in many cases—their limited experience in gender analysis, members require technical support in order to effectively promote gender equality initiatives. In this sense, parliaments can develop a human resources infrastructure—through effective recruitment, retention and training—for competence in gender-sensitive legislative analysis and budgeting. In some cases, parliaments have chosen to ensure that gender skills are mainstreamed through all staff, while others—as discussed below—focus efforts on the establishment of specialized units.

International experiences:

In 2009, the **Costa Rican** Parliament created the Technical Unit for Gender Equality (UTIEG) designed to “promote, plan, propose, guide, strengthen and monitor gender mainstreaming in parliamentary processes”(Borner and Marx, 42). The Unit reports directly to the Parliament’s Executive Board and provides technical advice to members and committees for legislative development as well as training on gender mainstreaming. UTIEG was a crucial advocate for the development and passage (2013) of the landmark Policy for Equality and Equity in the Parliament which outlines gender mainstreaming objectives and obligations in terms of parliamentary legislation, oversight and administration.

Some parliaments have developed guidance and tools to build the capacity of parliamentary staff and members for gender-sensitive analysis. Two examples of this are: the **South African** Parliament’s “Money Matters: Women and the Government Budget” and the **Rwandan** Parliament’s “Gender Budgeting Guidelines” (Palmieri 2011, 36). **Ghana**’s Parliament has organized gender sensitivity trainings for parliamentary staff. The Gender Training Manual developed for Ghana includes modules on gender concepts, gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting (Parliamentary Centre).

Parliamentary rules and procedures

Most parliaments have yet to adapt their procedures and standing orders to ensure that men and women members are able to participate under equal conditions. A review of the formal rules of Latin American parliaments, for instance, found that working conditions “do not take into account the growing presence of women and do not promote gender equality among members” (Borner and Marx, 53). This experience is echoed by interviews with the women members of parliament of the Tunisian National Constituent Assembly which highlighted the need for a more formalized structure and organization—including agendas and schedules of sessions in advance—to permit fulfilment of legislative, constituency and family responsibilities (National Democratic Institute, 15). For instance, members reported that delayed sessions ran late into the evening and caused security concerns for women members, while unpredictable sitting schedules also precluded travel to districts for constituency work and family visits (National Democratic Institute, 2012).

In addition to scheduling that is formalized and gender-sensitive, other types of gender-sensitive rules and procedures include codes of conduct, sexual harassment policies, maternity and paternity leave, provisions for breastfeeding mothers, and childcare facilities.

An IPU survey covering ten key dimensions reveals that only a minority of parliaments has adopted gender sensitive policies (Palmieri 2011, 91).

Policy	Yes %	No %
Sittings aligned with school calendar (n = 82)	39	61
Special arrangements for breastfeeding mothers (n = 83)	27.7	68.7
Longer stays in districts (n = 65)	23.1	76.9
Night sittings discontinued (n = 83)	21.7	77.1
Childcare facilities provided in parliament (n = 86)	20.9	77.9
Flexible working hours (n = 75)	18.7	81.3
Travel allowances for family members provided for commuting between district and parliament (n = 81)	16	82.7
Financial assistance to parliamentarians for childcare (n = 82)	8.5	90.2
Family room (n = 81)	6.2	91.4
Proxy voting for members who are absent because of childcare responsibilities (n = 85)	5.9	92.9

Far more difficult to measure—and counteract—are the informal rules at play within any parliament. Across regions, women members have highlighted the predominance of a ‘culture’ that favours men for committee appointments and plenary speaking and where the ‘real’ deal-making may take place outside of the parliament in spaces (clubs or restaurants) where women are less present.

International experiences:

As an initial key step, some parliaments have conducted participatory gender audits to canvass members and other stakeholders on the state of equity in the parliament, establish a gender baseline and develop an action plan.

The Moldovan Parliament carried out a gender audit in 2015 which highlighted effectiveness obstacles such as: the under-representation of women as Chairs, Vice-Chairs and Secretaries of Committees; the under-representation of women on “high profile/hard” portfolio Standing Committees; the lack of parliamentary Rules of Procedure that promote systematic, concrete measures to foster gender equality and the equal participation of men and women in Parliamentary life; the lack of provisions regarding the absence from Parliament of a MP in cases of maternity or paternity leave; the lack of gender analysis of draft legislative acts and proposals (United Nations Development Program).

Both Chambers of the Canadian Parliament have adopted sexual harassment policies that apply to members, staff and volunteers. The policies cover both prevention and resolution of harassment cases (Barnes and Munn-Rivard, 4).

Alliances with women's movements

The influence of women legislators can be bolstered through support from women outside the state. Women's movements, for instance, represent a key ally for achieving gender equality legislation. One study comparing gender-based violence legislation in 70 countries identified the strength of women's movements as the single most important factor explaining variation in policy development (Htun and Weldon). Additionally, civil society movements can prove instrumental in raising awareness on the importance of women's participation in politics and in mobilizing support for women's election campaigns.

International experiences:

Following a 12-year struggle, civil society organizations in **Bolivia**, led by the Coordinadora de la Mujer, in alliance with networks of women municipal councilmembers and parliamentarians secured passage of "The Law against Political Violence and Harassment against Women"—the first of its kind in the world. The law was drafted to address the dozens of documented cases of women politicians suffering violence and threats from individuals seeking to restrict their political rights. Between 2000 and 2005, 117 cases were documented, most frequently of women council members pressured to resign their seats in favour of a male substitute (Aguirre 2010)

Civil society provided the women parliamentarians with crucial support during this 12-year advocacy process, through documentation and reporting of cases, provision of support and attention to victims, mobilization of national public opinion and interfacing with international allies. The legislation passed in 2012 provides for a 2-5 year prison sentence for anyone who persecutes, harasses or threatens an elected woman or women exercising public functions and imposes a penalty of 3-8 years for physical, psychological or sexual aggression.

The role of men parliamentarians

Gender mainstreaming considers the needs and interests of both men and women. It should not be considered a "women's only" task; men also bear responsibility for gender equality promotion. Working with men is essential to ensure that so called "women's issues" do not become echo chambers of women talking about women with other women. Indeed, since men occupy most senior positions in parliaments, their support is crucial. Engaging men is important in order to lessen the risk of resistance or backlash stemming from either misunderstanding or a sense of exclusion.

International experiences:

In 2006, the **Rwanda** Women Parliamentary Forum (FFRP) secured passage of a gender-based violence law following a participatory process that included alliances with civil society, a national conference, a media campaign, and public consultations. The FFRP's strategic engagement process with male members included reframing GBV such that it wasn't perceived as a threat to male legislators, but rather a means of protection for their sisters and daughters (Wilber). During a two-month period in 2005, 76 members (71% of the total) made field visits to sensitize the population on the draft legislation and solicit citizen feedback (Pearson, 24). Approximately half of the participating MP's were men. Additionally, the FFRP formed a consultative committee that included men and women to prepare the bill through a series of monthly sessions. When the draft bill was introduced for debate in August 2006, its eight co-sponsors included four men.

Endnotes

⁵ The current Egyptian parliamentary electoral system—comprised of 448 FPTP, 120 proportional representation ("list") seats and 28 Executive-appointed seats—is less favourable to the election of women. 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"

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Chapter 3: Female by accident, politician on purpose: a personal perspective

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Introduction

What does it mean to be a woman and involved in politics? How and why does it happen? Does politics choose me, as a female, or do I choose it?

In reality, women participating in politics is an innovation. While we have had an 'in principle' legal right to participate for three or four generations, in many contexts we are the first generation of women to say *"Yes, I want to be a politician. Politics is all about my life too. It shapes my life on daily basis and I want to say what I think of it. I am a person with free will and I want to exercise that will"*. While it sounds simple and easy, especially as female participation in politics is a legal right in most parts of the world, those who try to exercise this right in practice will often face the old truth that things are not as easy as they initially appear.

While we all share the same planet, contexts differ from country to country and the level of our cultural and political development varies. In some parts of the world political life has been evolving for centuries, political parties have been able to reform themselves over decades, and societies have had the opportunity to look at the presence of women in politics as something normal, good, and routine. Other countries – for a range of reasons – have had fewer opportunities to deliver equality and to facilitate the involvement of women in public life. Nevertheless, there are still more similarities among women of the world than differences and that is one of the main reasons why female politicians should do more to cooperate and exchange experiences in order to save each other time, support one another, and learn from each other. When we talk about women in the public arena, or the life of a female politician anywhere in the world, there is more which unites us than divides us – we have a lot in common, and face similar obstacles and advantages as we travel along our political journey.

This chapter explores my political journey as a female politician in a conflict and post-conflict environment and seeks to identify some mechanisms by which men and women can seek to make political life a more equal playing field for both genders.

The start of the political journey

For many politicians – and in my own case – the political journey starts in a political party. In some societies, the political party is a place where there is structure, order and dialogue – everybody knows what will happen next, what the criteria is to become a member, how dialogue about different issues can be conducted, and, in the context of female political participation, how women will be treated once they join the party. In other parties, members are expected to follow party discipline very closely with little dialogue or debate. And many parties, however they may have evolved, have those who influence inner practices strongly – often informally – sometimes undermining existing rules or expected practices.

While women will be found in most of the political parties described above, few are running party life from the position of decision maker. Furthermore, while women's cultural and economic experiences will differ from country to country – or party to party – what the majority share in common is the struggle to prove that they are equally good (and sometimes better) at dealing with public affairs.

Different contexts, similar challenges

It cannot be denied that women in Egypt, Jordan, Poland, UK, Serbia – or any number of other countries – have totally different backgrounds and different contexts to work within. Nevertheless they share a common characteristic – they are often seen as an outsider, dropped into a man's playground without knowing the rules of the game, without being afforded equal treatment by the referee, and with the long-term aim of changing the rules of the game to make it a more equal playing field. So while contexts differ, women will often share a similar drive – *"I am a person, a free human being and I have my rights and my freedom to change my world for the better"*.

In a conflict or post-conflict context a female politician is often found combating more or less the same stereotypes as her colleague in a peaceful environment but with one huge additional task – she is often the one who takes on the role of peace builder, master of reconciliation and “founding mother” of dialogue as a basic strategic tool for democracy in society. Women in post-conflict societies are doing almost everything their fellow women do in peaceful societies but with that one huge and indispensable task for the future of her nation. She must be a peacemaker, a state builder, a party reformer, an institution fighter and – of course – a daughter, a mother, a sister, a wife, a housewife, a listener, a teacher. Put simply, she must almost be a supreme being. However, in order to succeed, men and women must share such important tasks – it is not about taking away men’s power from politics or political parties, it is about sharing responsibility for the future. As women, we have the right to contribute to the vision for the future, to shape it together with men and to work with them on an equal footing.

Obstacles

Other chapters in this publication explore the many obstacles facing women who wish to participate in politics, and some of the methods which can be adopted to overcome them. In my experience, the main challenges include:

- The assumption that a woman only succeeds with the assistance of a quota and is only participating in politics because of it. To an extent it is true - many women are only able to take up post as an elected politician as consequence of a quota. However, without a concerted effort to create a society in which quotas are no longer necessary, they remain important to achieve more equal gender representation.
- The perception that women are intrinsically less capable – in terms of knowledge, skills, personality and capacity – of dealing with political life. Education – for women and men – is crucial to overcoming this obstacle.
- The belief that a female politician is neglecting her family and children, and cannot find a balance between her personal and political life. This is a challenge for women seeking careers in all sectors and will not be fully addressed until the responsibilities of family life are shared more equally between men and women within society.
- The objectification of women. While the appearance of male politicians is rarely the topic of discussion, how attractive or well-dressed a female politician is can be the topic of much debate. This is an issue even in developed democracies, and requires fundamental societal change before being overcome entirely.
- The tension that can exist among and between women. Female solidarity should not be taken for granted – it must be built on a foundation of shared interests, undisputable party projects, shared ideas and with cautious and gentle dialogue in order for consensus to be achieved.

A personal plan and competing for roles

Whether our entrance to politics is via a political party, via a sense of personal calling, or by invitation or encouragement, we each need our own personal plan. Whatever the context, we need a vision of our place in politics and the role within the decision-making process we see ourselves as fit to undertake. To achieve this, we must know what obstacles and advantages we are likely to face.

A number of approaches can be adopted to shape this plan:

- Ask yourself whether others have faced a similar journey to you, and discuss this with them in more detail. You can look at past examples – who inspires you and how did they achieve what they achieved? How did those who disappointed you fail?
- Be introspective about your own political aspirations, taking into account your analysis of how others have fared. For women in particular, learning lessons from others and being clear about your own drive and ambition is of vital importance given the higher number of obstacles faced when seeking to enter public life.
- Make yourself aware of the rules. Understand how they are meant to be applied and observe how they are applied in practice. If the rules – written or unwritten – treat men and women differently, make sure you are aware of this and try to establish why this has happened. Identify ways of overcoming obstacles in transparent and effective ways.
- Establish who your friends and allies are and work with them to shape your future plans.

There are three basic steps that one should follow when competing for a post:

- Express your ambition – women are often assumed to be less assertive than men. You need to state your aims and objectives clearly.

- Organize your support well – your team, whether within or outside a party, needs to be motivated to work with you and for you because you are worthy. Ensure that you have men and women working with you – treat them equally in order to show a good example of equality.
- Build a two-way dialogue – talk to the people whose vote you are trying to win and listen to them in order to show that you understand them and in order to earn their trust. In my experience of societies with limited institutional or public dialogue, there can be more propaganda than exchange of views, and more fear than free will. As women often go unheard in such societies, a clear female voice can boost genuine dialogue. They can often be the first to show the empathy, solidarity, and understanding that is necessary to glue the pieces of a successful society together.

The personal is political: a Serbian case study

Through my experience in Serbia I have learned that the ability to draw on personal experience is invaluable when seeking to pursue a political career.

When I joined the Democratic Party in Serbia in 1990 – the year that ended the one party communist system in the former Yugoslavia – I was a physicist at a university, the mother of two children, and hopeful of a stable future as a mother and academic. Nevertheless, the ruling parties of the republics of the former Yugoslavia were ready for war – well-documented atrocities, war crimes, and tragedies followed. I joined the opposition party, campaigning for basic rights, freedom of speech, free elections, an end to hostilities, and support for all those affected by the armed conflict. Establishing the party organisation was one of the hardest parts of party life, travelling through Serbia looking for people who wanted to join the party. Throughout the 1990s we were arrested and beaten while protesting, but succeeded in winning 50 out of 175 local municipalities in 1996. From late March to early June of 1999 Serbia was bombed by NATO countries. When the bombing ended, Kosovo – earlier a part of Serbia – was under the control of internationals. Infrastructure throughout Serbia was left destroyed, with bridges, factories, roads, federal buildings, oil refineries etc. bombed, and thousands of lives lost.

My party continued the political fight and in 1999-2000, for the first time, addressed women in Serbia. On 4 February, 2000 a network of women from civic society, political parties, media, and trade unions gathered in a small part of the city of Subotica in the far north of the country, on lake Palic, and agreed a women’s agenda for the time after dictatorship. The declaration was named “Declaration against fear, violence and poverty” (later known as “The Palic Declaration”) and its aim was to fight against family violence and hatred in society, and to work with institutions on gender-related law, anti-discrimination law and setting the framework for fighting the high level of poverty in society. We worked together, assembled around the cause, with all other differences set aside. It is in this consensual way that women set out to make significant changes to our society.

The ruling party’s presidential election loss in September 2000 marked the beginning of another new chapter in fighting for women’s rights. We knew that we had to reform the Democratic Party to include the introduction of a women’s quota and a gender dialogue. Support from the international community was sought and help was given, but work continues to this day to implement all the reforms required for a more just and democratic society. We fulfilled the aims of the Palic Declaration and started to face the many challenges of re-building the state. These included lack of resources, lack of knowledge, party in-fighting and managing the expectations of ordinary Serbians who had hoped for a much higher standard of living than that delivered in the immediate aftermath of war.

Maintaining dialogue and drawing on men as allies

Since the turn of the century the country – and the Democratic Party – has faced numerous challenges, not least the assassination of the Democratic Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic in 2003. Nevertheless, the importance of the women’s agenda has not been forgotten, particularly the lessons learned about the role of dialogue in society both among those belonging to different political factions but also between men and women. Furthermore, women within the party have recognised that in order to make a change, enough votes in parliament are needed for the decision to be adopted. As men remain the majority in parliament, women have realised that men should be viewed as allies.

Networking and working across party lines

Since the 2012 elections, women have introduced networking in the parliament. Keen to ensure that the parliamentary quota for women achieves more than just a female presence in

parliament, wanting instead to deliver tangible differences in political and public life, female members have worked together, across party lines, to answer the question “We have a quota, now what?”. Female members have agreed that there are issues concerning women that are above party differences, and that a cooperative and consensual approach should be adopted if changes are to be delivered. This has led to the formation of the “Women’s parliamentary network” which has seen all female MPs agree to work together on issues of common interest, including:

- Combating violence against women, domestic violence and fighting all violent processes in society.
- Fighting for women’s representation on every and all levels of government.
- Supporting women’s entrepreneurship.
- Fostering health care for women with the focus on prevention and decreasing the number of women dying from breast and cervical cancer as curable forms of cancer, if detected on time.
- Helping women at the local level organize and network, spreading the power of dialogue on the grassroots.

To date this approach has been successful. We submit amendments together, we defend them with the same language, and we work with the executive as ruling coalition and opposition members. We do not give up the dialogue even when the political and public arena becomes heated – learning from our experience, we know what we owe the next generation of Serbian leaders the freedom to live without the problems created by previous generations.

Facing difficulties with dialogue

My party was a ruling party when Serbia was obliged to cooperate with the extradite all those indicted for war crimes. We fulfilled that obligation despite it being a very hard and tough job in which politicians had to explain to people why and how to cope with the bitter reality of post-war times. Women played a crucial role in this post-war period. We started the dialogue with women from Kosovo following its declaration of independence in 2008. We first met on our own, in our capacity as parliamentarians, and from 2010 OSCE took the sponsorship of our meetings. In 2009 Serbia – together with 27 member countries of the UN – formally submitted the Resolution that opened the path for dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Women continued to meet in Serbia and in Kosovo, telling our story, sharing how hard it is to start the dialogue and how good it is when you see the good resulting from that process. In cooperation with the OSCE we founded the Academy for young women leaders which gathered young women from Kosovo and Serbia for two Hague Tribunal, to weeks annually. The Academy draws together prominent women from the region and the world teaching young women leaders from both countries everything they know. They have a chance to get to know each other, to learn from each other and to try to heal each other’s wounds and scars from what their parents and ancestors have been through.

I attend the Academy each year and feel it is a privilege to talk to the young women leaders, drawing on the past, the present and future to shape a new generation that will continue to change the lives of women in Serbia and Kosovo for better and for good. My participation illustrates the importance of sharing personal experience in order to create opportunities for others to learn, save time and do something good in politics.

Growing

From my experience, growing a women’s movement one small step after another is one of the best strategies. There are three important approaches which can be adopted:

1. Do something that does not attract a significant amount of attention.

e.g. rural women can be helped to organize, to network, around the UN Day of rural women in October. As a parliamentarian you can help by organizing small markets of their home products, you can ask them if they allow you to take pictures of them and then organize an exhibition to make their contribution to society more visible, or you can introduce microcredits that could totally change their lives.

2. Stick to the principles of never-ending dialogue – dialogue is the basic strategy, the basic tool in successful societies.

e.g. as a parliamentarian you can try to find people from opposite sides and show that dialogue is possible. If it does not work with the first one, you go and look for another one – eventually there will be someone with whom you can start a real dialogue. It may not deliver consensus instantly, but that small step is “contagious” and necessary for the process as a whole.

3. Use non-violent language.

e.g. in a society in which exchanges are heated and often include statements by men focused on proving their strength and power, women can make a difference by making public statements which are carefully spoken and use non-violent language. Selecting words very carefully can change the public narrative, and taking the first small step can help improved accountability for the language used.

When I participated in the regional dialogue with women from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo – people who had recently fought in wars – I knew that only small steps would work. Whatever the nature of the conflict people rarely start the post-war dialogue voluntarily. They need time to build trust and to avoid the temptation to enter a “blame game”. This is where there can be a valuable role for women in politics – they are more often ready to sit around the table with the “enemy”, knowing that there is no way to build normal relations other than through dialogue.

When participating in such dialogue there are few unsolicited pieces of advice I would share:

1. Make a list of words and acts that you would adopt if your goal was to deliver unsuccessful dialogue.

It may look strange to create a “list of how to fail” but it can help you to focus on success. What approach would guarantee no dialogue?

- “You did...” communication – if you start every sentence with what the other did you will get nowhere, because the other will use the same tactic, leading you nowhere.
- Starting with the hardest issue which is at the core of your conflict – if you start with something you know is the most painful issue between you everything will stop there and you will deny yourself the chance of maybe resolving less painful issues.
- Choosing an unpleasant environment – uncomfortable, gloomy, dark rooms in which to conduct your dialogue. If you are physically uncomfortable it is more likely that dialogue will not work at all, you will just dream of an opportunity to leave that room.

If you try to make your own list of “how to fail in the dialogue” there may be other issues on it. However, once you have completed the exercise, you are prepared for the dialogue because you clearly know what you will not do.

2. Have a clear, simple offer

When the first meetings among women in my region in the former Yugoslavia started, I had a clear offer for everyone and it was something like this:

“We are here to make a simple decision because of the choice that is clearly in front of us. We can continue doing “business as usual” sharing among us horrible stories of what my grandfather did to yours or your uncle to my mother. If we choose that then we will know for sure that our children’s and grandchildren’s lives will be the same as ours, with conflicts and wars and without a good standard of living. Or we can say “what is done is done and while we can’t just forgive and forget, don’t we have a duty to give a chance to the next generation too?”. Can’t we talk of their quality of life being better than ours? Don’t we owe that to them? They were born after the wars, they do not know the hatred and crimes and evil which was part of our lives. What shall we do? We have a free choice to teach them to do the same or not, so what shall it be? Can we be better than our ancestors or not?”

It is not easy to debate such an offer, but everybody knows that offer is fair and sincere and that is how trust building starts. People must feel free to choose and to express themselves knowing that they have a responsibility for the future.

3. Focus on the future rather than the past.

Reconciliation and building trust are all about what lies ahead, not what has already passed.

Women as agents of change

Being a female politician means being a power that makes a difference in society. It is not easy, it is very demanding all the time, but the feeling of success is glorious. Coming from a country in transition, from a society emerging after wars, war crimes and hatred among people, I know there is nothing stronger than a woman’s voice speaking clearly on behalf of

herself and others. The participation of women in politics can represent a new chapter for societies, enabling new ideas to emerge and take root.

Politics as a whole has two main dimensions:

1. Space

Through the decision-making process you can influence the physical space in which your nation exists. You build roads, bridges, buildings; you choose what kind of agriculture you will have and what sort of housing, irrigation, architecture etc. is developed. This is what people have done since the beginning of time – they change the space they live in, very often after they have harmed it or sought to repair it. Politics is in one way or another responsible for every change in space that is made within the state. So what role do women have? We want to have an equal part in that decision-making process. We want to be asked, heard and listened to if someone, somewhere wishes to change our environment. We want to know how our space will look and why, how much it will cost and who will have to pay for it. We want to know because half of that space is ours, because we are half of human kind.

2. Social relations

Politics changes the social relations that we accept as socially desirable. It gives and takes people's rights. Once upon a time slavery was common – politics changed that. There was also a time when people thought that women should not have the same rights as men, but we fought for the right to vote, to go to school, to have a job, to own private property, to be politicians. These changes occurred because of politics – people made a stand and took decisions that sought to change women's quality of life.

By learning from women who have gone before them, and sharing experiences with those with whom they work, female – and male – politicians can improve the quality of representation and service delivery experienced by the general citizen. My life in Serbia, my dialogue with women from Kosovo, my cooperation with women from Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the region of south east Europe as a whole, has been driven by the will to share. This drive to share which has, in my experience, been exerted in the first instance by females, helps shape the wider political discourse and change male politicians' behaviour. Without female politicians acting as agents for change, such significant developments may not have emerged.

Chapter 4: Women and localities: personal experiences

Sanaa Al-Saeed, former MP, former local representative and member of the National Council for Women

Introduction

The political leadership – represented by the President of the Republic – has announced that 2017 is the year for the Egyptian Woman. Furthermore, the appointment of Mrs. Nadia Saleh as Governor of one of the largest governorates, namely Beheira Governorate, marks the beginning of women working as governors in Egypt. Finally, citizens are anticipating the law of local administration, which is being discussed by parliament, and the local elections, for which the constitution guarantees 25% of local seats for women. In this context, I believe that the opportunity is available for women to prove themselves, to participate effectively in the local elections, and to illustrate the contribution they could make to local government.

Despite the opportunities provided by the political climate, the real challenge lies in the social climate, the cultural heritage of society, and the need to empower women to confront and break existing taboos. In this context we have to identify realistic and logical answers to the following questions, without exaggeration or denial:

- Is Egyptian Society largely refusing women's participation in localities?
- To what extent is society ready to accept women's participation in localities, whether by representation or by appointment?
- Are women able to change the stereotypical image that some people have, that women cannot achieve in localities?
- What are the ways by which we can consolidate the participation of women in localities besides the quota or beyond it?

In this chapter I will seek to answer these and other questions, drawing on my personal experience as a candidate in all elections held between 2005 and 2012, including the parliamentary elections of 2010 and the local elections of 2008.

Breaking the norms

I live in Sahel Selim Locality, a small locality in Asyut Governorate. According to the development report issued by the central agency for public mobilization, the governorate has one of the highest percentages of people under the poverty line (approximately 69.7%)⁶. Sahel Selim is characterised by its rural, family, and tribal atmosphere.

I thought about entering the world of political participation by running for the people's assembly election in 2005. As Sahel Selim was divided into two constituencies, my constituency included half the two localities, Sahel Selim and El Fatth center. Its northern part - where I was elected - was called El Fatth constituency, while the southern part was added to El Badara Locality.

I was faced with many obstacles, including depressing statements such as:

"Why should we elect women? The men we elected didn't succeed, so how will women fare any better?"

"We live in a Patriarchal, authoritarian society."

"It is as if we have no men to do the job, so we elect women." etc.

These were only some of the common statements made among local circles who were inherently hostile to women's participation in public affairs. The first statement illustrated the standpoint of those fundamentally antagonistic towards the political participation of women. The second statement was popular among circles of intellectual, introverted women, who were cynical about changes, and who were satisfied with debating what they perceived to be an "unchangeable" society.

I was also confronted with those who drew on cultural heritage, misusing religious statements to serve their purpose. Doubting the capacity of women and discriminating between men and women, they would say things such as: "[women are] deficient in mind and religion", "people who are guided by women will not succeed" etc.

But as soon as the ferocity of the electoral battle increased, I found an understanding, conscious, accepting society. While this society placed many obstacles and disadvantages at women's feet, it also provided opportunities in which investments could be made to travel successfully along the long road to equal female participation. As a result of the people turning to my candidacy, and accepting it, some of my male competitors spread different rumors concerning my intellectual tendencies and party affiliation, as an attempt to thwart my unexpected success. For example, I was accused of: being a communist; urging ladies to take off their veils; being the candidate of the opposition; having minimal chance of winning the election, and so forth.

In addition to some of our society's cultural heritage which discriminates negatively against women, there are more challenges which hinder the effective political participation of women in general. Some of these obstacles faced by women include:

- » Lack of financial resources;
- » Weakness of party structure (during that time I was a member of the national gathering unionist progressive party);
- » The intransigence of the administrative authority (as an opposition candidate at that time the administration refused to hand me the voters list and register my representatives in the election committees until a complaint was filed before the administrative judiciary).

The result of the elections was a surprise for many. In spite of the obstacles listed above, and others, I came first among all other competitors in half my locality. This was also despite the fact that the other six competitors were men (including a mayor, a Sheikh - a religious leader, a major general, a deputy minister and a pharmacist from my own family). I passed the re-election cycle by a few votes.

This experience included many encouraging factors which other women built upon in order to run in the following elections. This included breaking the taboo of the notion of "our Society is a patriarchal society" as members of some prominent tribes and families participated and supported my electoral campaign.

The ability of women to participate actively with other women in a campaign, not only as candidates, but also as campaign organizers and voters, was important. My campaign team included a large female group which gained great experience in organizing and mobilizing, and proved that building election campaigns on scientific, evidence bases delivers results.

This experience encouraged me to run for the elections for the localities in 2008, as a candidate for Asyut Governorate. I stood on behalf of the rally party and was accompanied by a number of candidates from the same party - women's candidacy had become a reality in my governorate after my success in the 2005 elections for parliament. I also gained many experiences, building on my ability to compose my professional campaign team and draw on the large number of girls and women who had gained significant experience during the campaign of 2005. For the second time I was able to succeed in the elections, a battle in which women were represented by only 2495 of over 52 thousand local seats. From village to district, county to locality, and governorate to national, the percentage of female representatives did not exceed 4.7%. However, it was a starting point that merits attention and could be used as a foundation on which to build.

Thorns along the road

Despite the above, it is wrong to believe that the way to success is always smooth and full of roses. Having said that, the belief that the path is full of thorns and that success in unachievable is, in my opinion, a terrible mistake as well – almost a sin!

Whether elected or appointed, there are significant challenges – thorns – which women must constantly overcome in order to reach success as local leaders. Some of these barriers include:

- » Common heritage, which can diminish a woman's role and its importance in political participation both nationally and locally.
- » Lack of financial capacity for women, limiting disbursement in election campaigning, or placing a limit on their support, with electoral supervisory authorities declining to follow up on such activity.
- » The centralization that has characterized the Egyptian political system, which can limit the public assembly and the executive locally, and can prevent effective decision making.

- » Loss of citizens' trust in the localities, especially the executive branch, with some localities considered to be hot beds for corruption and some people's assemblies perceived as subsidiaries to their executives rather than effective scrutineers.
- » The reliance of citizens on parliamentarians for fulfilling their local interest, misunderstanding the distribution of powers between the local and national legislative branches.

From my own experience, and the experiences of other women who fought electoral battles and won them, these thorns can be overcome through:

- » Trial and error - we have to try continuously, ignoring pessimistic and obstructive voices from either side. I also believe that article 180 of the constitution of 2014 secures the strengthening of women's participation and its integration in the localities.⁷
- » Demanding the issuance of a law for local administration which responds to constitutional texts, and the activation of local authorities, especially the right of interrogation approved by article 180 of the constitution of 2014 which states that: *"Every local unit should elect an assembly through general secret ballot, for a term of four years [...] The local assemblies are concerned with following up on the implementation of development plan, monitoring different aspects of activity, practicing the tools of supervision on the executive organizations, such as: Suggestions, directing questions, briefings, investigations, withdrawal of confidence from presidents of the locality units, as per organized by law. The law also determines the competencies of other local councils, their financial resources, the guarantees and independence of their members."*
- » Specifying a limit for expenditure on electoral campaign material in the forthcoming localities law.
- » Activating the role of civil society in monitoring the electoral process, starting with setting the date to begin running for the elections, focusing on electoral campaign material, and monitoring abuses.
- » Building women's capacities and relying on scientific and practical organizing, and efficient campaign training.
- » Activating Article 176 of the constitution of 2014 concerned with implementing decentralization: *"The state secures supporting managerial, financial, and economic decentralization, the law organizes as well means of empowering administrative units for the provision of local facilities, promoting and managing them, as well as setting a schedule for transferring authorities and budgets to local administration units"*. This should be done through legislations that guarantee the shift to decentralization in a short period of time.
- » Encouraging women to engage in partisan organizations and electoral blocs, as women's work and candidacy through an organized party will help women overcome the numerous obstacles related to mobilization and building campaigns. This has become a very hard and complicated task, and needs extensive experience and facilities that may not be available to women without an organized party or a large electoral bloc.
- » Providing female role models to illustrate women's ability to represent and defend society. This would help convince people not only of a woman's right to participate, but of her ability to participate successfully too. This conviction depends upon effective participation in the elections - running strong campaigns which are underpinned by a scientific approach can convince society that women do not run elections as amateurs or just to take part, but to succeed and because they are capable of competing successfully alongside men (and excelling beyond them).
- » Working on convincing society of the importance of women's role in localities. This should be done through continuous work to prove the capabilities of successful women to solve local problems.

According to my own experience in localities in 2008, during the first three years of the local assembly of Asyut Governorate, I was one of the highest users of its scrutiny tools. This was evidenced in the assembly reports issued at the end of each year containing the achievements of the assembly. During that time, the Agenda of every meeting contained a number of enquiries, briefings, and discussions which I used to submit to the local officials in all fields ranging from health to education, roads, paving roads, water supply, sewage, and electricity. I was able to solve many problems during my period in the local assembly for Asyut Governorate, and before my resignation following the 25th of January, 2011 revolution.

For example, I was able to cancel a competition in the Ministry of Education which was set in order to employ by patronage. I submitted a request for an urgent briefing from the Ministry of Education and obliged the executive to re-run the competition with more transparency. I was also able to prevent the acceptance to the health institute of a large number of female students who did not meet the entry criteria but who had sought permission via an MP. The governor

of Asyut during that time, Major General Nabeel El Ezaby, referred the two deputy ministers of the Ministries of Education and Health for investigation after the urgent briefing.

I used to receive requests from citizens of the governorate daily, and I used to respond through offering inquires, briefings, and requests for discussion, which earned me their trust. It also made me the center of the press's attention, and the media periodically published what I used to present to the assembly. This in turn gave me a great chance for candidacy and winning the parliamentary elections among the list of Egyptian Bloc in the first parliamentary elections after the 25th January revolution.

My application to the parliament of 2012 for an urgent briefing on the lack of fertilizers in Asyut governorate was an action that was particularly noted by the citizens. The session was broadcast live, and on that same day the fertilizer tractors flowed to the Agricultural Bank of Credit and Development, and farmers started receiving the fertilizers the next day.

I also questioned the government during the same session about the deterioration of women's conditions, which causes a waste of 70 billion Egyptian pounds for the state annually³. This illustrated women's ability to stand for community issues.

I was not the only woman in the local assembly - there were another eight. While they were affiliated to the national ruling party of the time, they all played an effective role. They left a strong mark by utilizing the scrutiny tools available to them and their collective presence proved to be effective.

Female role models within local executives

If women have proved their ability to have an important role in localities at the popularly elected level, their role at the executive level is no less important. Female role models exist within local executives and have proved that women are capable of leading local society at the executive level, be it as a head of district, mayor, head of a center, or secretary general of the governorate.

The governorate of Asyut, where it could be said that the local community had historically refused women as executive leaders, is a model for other poor tribal governorates. There we find that executive women have found great acceptance among the local community, especially after experience has proven that they are capable of taking effective action and being present when needed.

As well as responding quickly to citizens' problems and working on solving them, women have proven that they are capable of demonstrating the importance of female leaders to a local community. Asyutian women have proved the importance of females as executive leaders in localities and to the city of Asyut, its most important and largest center. Mrs. Nabila Aly Mahmoud has been able to lead the capital and show that women are available all over the region. She was also able to communicate with citizens, and when she was promoted as a General Secretary to the governor, she demonstrated a level of efficiency and presence that encouraged a high degree of recognition and respect among the governorate's population.

Women in Asyut have held the positions of head of regions and cities of Sahel Selim and El Gousseya, Asyut West district and Asyut East District. They are all successful models in different areas, rural and urban, as some women were appointed by the Cabinet (in accordance with resolution no. 592 for the year 2016). They include:

- » Mrs. Nabila Ali Mahmoud who, as mentioned earlier, was appointed and successfully executed her role as assistant general secretary to the governorate.
- » Mrs. Hwayda Shafeiy Badawy, head of the city center of Sahel Selim, and previously head of west Asyut district.
- » Mrs. Manar Kamel Mostafa, head of the locality unit for East district, previously head of the information center for El Fatth city center.
- » Eng. Hala Mahmoud Abdallah, a deputy head of Asyut city center.

This experience has shown that women are capable of executive leadership in localities and the running of centers and cities. It has also eased the intensity of some of the reported corruption in localities. Where female leaders have been asked to move to positions elsewhere, there have been public requests to bring them back to their locations. For example, when Mrs. Hwayda Shafeiy Badawy was moved from Sahel Selim Locality in the south of the governorate to a larger locality to the north of the governorate (Al Gousseya center) and when Mrs. Nabila Ali Mahmoud was transferred, there were big campaigns on social media to keep them in

their places. This illustrated how citizens had come to welcome women as locality leaders, placing such importance on their activity that they demanded their return.

Positive discrimination and empowerment attempts

Finally, we have to point out that the positive discrimination for women according to the quota system is what delivered the largest percentage of women representation since introducing the locality system in Egypt. Until the last local elections in April 2008 (and in the elections which were held according to electoral lists where there were allocated seats for women but which were ruled unconstitutional) the percentage of women increased and then declined again. The percentage of women MPs decreased in parliament from 9% in the 1979-1984 parliamentary session to less than 2% in the 2005-2010 session. The percentage of women representatives in localities did not differ from their percentage in parliament. Between 1983 and 1997 it decreased in locality assemblies from 9.2% to 1.2%, but increased again from 1.8% in 2002 to 5% in 2008.⁹

While the quota and the lists were previously ruled as unconstitutional, the current constitution (2014) has allocated a quota of 25% of local seats for women. In my opinion this percentage does not reflect accurately the proportion of women in Egyptian society. Nevertheless, it can be considered a leap forward when compared to the percentage of women who succeeded in previous local elections. All civil society institutions working in the field of gender equality have to seek to maximize this percentage and build upon it, and make it a factual reality accepted by society even if the quota and positive discrimination systems were to be removed in future.

How can this be implemented within Egypt's localities, and how can women make use of this at the national level?

Civil society organizations can conduct extensive training for a large number of women in all governorates and centers by:

- » Reaching out to villages and smaller villages with trainings to cover all the localities at different levels (village – district – city – center – governorate).
- » Encouraging parties and political blocs to elect a larger number of women than that stated by the constitution (currently 25% among lists and individuals).
- » Presenting demands to parliament that the next locality election should be done according to the proportional list system rather than the absolute list system (as the proportional lists allow better representation for all categories in society).
- » Holding intensive courses for the women who won membership of local assemblies to enable them to practice their role in the committees and assemblies more effectively, and to allow women to convince society of their ability to represent citizens in the localities. Training courses must focus on:
 - practical procedures;
 - how specialized committees work in the locality assemblies;
 - applying scrutiny tools;
 - how to discuss the general budget and budgets of local units.
- » Encouraging women to run for elections as chairs and deputy chairs for local assemblies, and to participate effectively in running for elections for chairs of specialized committees.

The effective participation of women in localities will give those who won at the local level the opportunity to participate at the national level. This will motivate the political parties and blocs, as well as voters, to vote for women at the national level of representative assemblies.

Moreover, working in the localities will help women overcome the daily challenges of managing a home, family and raising children, all of which are claimed by some to be an obstacle to women's political participation. Women can also practice their role on the locality level while still being close to their homes, without the need to travel to the capital far from her place of residence and children. Moreover, the large number of locality council seats (more than 52,000) and their diversity (village – city – district – center – governorate) offers more opportunity for women to run for election and participate in politics, enabling women to take these chances without impacting excessively on their existing circumstances.

Finally, I ascertain that women who always seek to prove themselves and demonstrate their capabilities and their skills can emphasize the importance of women's roles in localities, whether in the public assembly or executive. Practical experience shows that women are able to respond to locality problems as they are usually the most affected by them. This often makes women more capable to participate in the process of solving these problems.

Accordingly, we as women interested in feminism and political participation have to expand this participation until we match our proportion within Egyptian society, which is a little less than half the population. We have to build on every brick we have laid, and work continuously to overcome obstacles and remove thorns, using every chance available to us as women to prove ourselves and participate effectively in the forthcoming locality elections.

Endnotes

⁶ <http://www.capmas.gov.eg>

⁷ Article 180 of the 2014 Constitution states that for every local council one quarter of all seats shall be allocated for women. It also makes provision for: one quarter of the seats to be allocated to youth under 35 years of age; workers and farmers to be represented by no less than 50 percent of the total number of seats; and an “appropriate representation” of Christians and people with disability.

⁸ <http://www.masress.com>

⁹ <http://www.conference.ncwegypt> & <http://www.t-series.capmas.gov.eg>

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