



SUMMARY REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT: BEYOND NUMBERS

BURKINA FASO WORKSHOP AND HANDBOOK LAUNCH

4 March 2003, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

On 4 March 2003, a workshop was held to launch and disseminate key findings of IDEA handbook *Les femmes au parlement : Au-delà du nombre (Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers)*, organized by International IDEA and the Centre pour la Gouvernance Démocratique (CGD: Center for Democratic Governance), sponsored by the Minister for Women's Promotion.

Workshop Aim

The workshop promoted and disseminated key findings of the handbook "Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers" – an International IDEA book that was regionalised for audiences in francophone Africa during 2002. The activity aimed to provoke a constructive dialogue on the findings, and to ensure its appropriation by Members of Parliament (women and men), leaders of political parties, civil society activists and the media. The workshop also developed recommendations aimed at promoting the political participation of women in decision-making structures in Burkina Faso. International IDEA and Stockholm University's new website on Quotas for Women was also showcased at the event. The workshop was held at the UNDP Conference Room in Ouagadougou.

Agenda and Proceedings

The workshop took place during one day. The agenda was divided into three key sessions (see agenda attached):

1. The first session included the Welcome and Opening Addresses, and the Handbook launch
2. The second session focused on **Women in Politics: Obstacles, Strategies and Opportunities**. The session provided an overview of the obstacles that affect women's participation in politics, particularly in the case of Burkina Faso, and identified some of the strategies that may be used to overcome these obstacles, including the use of electoral quotas for women.

3. The third session focused on **Women in Parliament: Bukinabé Experiences**. It examined the experiences of women in parliament, and how women have sought to make a difference in politics.

Summary of Proceedings

Session 1: Opening Remarks

The opening ceremony included the participation of the Minister for Women's Promotion, as well as the Deputy Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), members of the government, representatives of the diplomatic corps, political parties, civil society, and members of the national legislature, both women and men.

1.1. In his welcoming address, **Mr. José-Maria Aranaz**, defined International IDEA's mandate to promote and consolidate democracy and to improve electoral processes worldwide. To this end, IDEA participates in the debate on the representation of both men and women in democratic decision-making, and seeks to identify strategies that will positively affect women's political representation. In this context, in 1998 IDEA produced a handbook in English entitled *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. This manual has been translated and adapted for the French-speaking public in a version published in 2002. Two Burkinabé women contributed chapters to the revised handbook.

1.2. The Executive Director of the CGD, **Prof. Augustin Loada**, highlighted the timeliness and importance of promoting women's political participation for the CGD. He spoke of the CGD's activities in Burkina Faso, and explained that further information will be found on the website at www.cgdbf.org.

He explained the objective of the workshop, which was mainly to disseminate the conclusions of the handbook, to provoke a constructive dialogue on the different options for reform, and to develop recommendations on how best to include women in political life in Burkina Faso. For its part, the CGD is committed to according greater attention to the question of women's political participation in its activities.

To conclude, Augustin Loada expressed the desire to see the recommendations and conclusions of the democratic dialogue organized by the CGD examined attentively by the different actors and decision-makers in Burkina Faso's system of governance, before thanking the partners of the CGD, namely IDEA, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, and the UNDP.

1.3. The Minister for Women's Promotion, **Mrs. Gisèle Guigma**, gave the keynote address to the participants. Referring to the initiative of the CGD, she underscored the opportunity to assimilate the lessons that each person has been able to draw from this manual, and adapting it to the exigencies of women's political participation in Burkina Faso. At the urging of her predecessors, she expressed her desire that the results of this democratic dialogue go beyond drawing up a wish list, to actual implementation of the recommendations.

1.4. Ms. Nestorine Sangaré spoke about the role of women in Burkinabé politics. She contextualized what is at stake, noting that "the new values, induced by democratization, emphasize

the equal rights of male and female citizens in the conduct of public affairs,” and that there is, in Burkina Faso, a legal framework favorable to the political involvement of women. She then showed some tables on women’s participation in politics in Burkina Faso as citizens, voters, leaders of political parties and candidates in elections, decision-makers, and leaders of civil society. Their contribution thus takes many forms, and there have been many gains.

Finally, she proposed alternatives which essentially would entail making a break with “the sub-culture of subjection and political passivity, so as to embrace conscientious and active citizen participation.”

1.5. Ms. Julie Ballington, the manager of IDEA’s Gender and Political Participation Project, provided an overview of the contents and key findings of the handbook, and then introduced the new global website on Electoral Quotas for Women (www.quotaproject.org) which has been developed by IDEA International and the University of Stockholm, in Sweden.

Julie Ballington explained that the Handbook is a practical tool that provides options on how to overcome the obstacles women encounter throughout the parliamentary electoral process, and provides a number of options of how to bring about constructive change and to influence politics. During 2002, three new regional versions of the handbook were produced in Spanish, French and Indonesian. These various versions of the handbook are available through the IDEA website (www.idea.int/gender).

The handbook addresses the following issues through four main chapters:

- Firstly it examines the obstacles that affect women’s participation in parliament, including political, socio-economic and psychological factors.
- Secondly, it examines the nature of electoral systems, and how recruitment processes by political parties affect women’s political representation.
- Thirdly it examines the concept of the quota system, and how quotas have come to play a critical role in increasing the representation of women.
- And lastly the handbook looks beyond the question of numbers to how women parliamentarians can be effective in parliament and make an impact.

In addition, several country case studies as practical examples of strategies that have been employed in various regions. The French-speaking version contains two case studies from Burkina Faso, a case study on quotas in Africa, and a case study on the introduction of the Parity Law in France.

The website on Electoral Quotas for Women was then introduced. In an effort to increase knowledge about women’s participation, IDEA has commenced a new project on electoral quotas for women. The project is the first global comparative analysis of quotas and how they work in practice, which is being conducted in partnership with Stockholm University in Sweden.

The website provides up-to-date and comprehensive details on countries that have introduced quotas for national elections, and specifies the type and target of the quota provision. It also provides information on the electoral system in use, the representation of women in parliament, political parties that have implemented quotas for candidates for election.

She explained that all information is available on the web, specifically at www.idea.int, www.idea.int/gender and www.quotaproject.org.

Finally, she expressed the hope that this manual and the site will help bolster women's political participation, through the process of sharing experiences.

Session 2: Women in Politics: Obstacles, Strategies and Opportunities

This session provided an overview of the obstacles that hinder women's involvement in politics generally, and provided an overview of the participation of women in the 2002 election. It identified some of the strategies that may be considered to overcome these obstacles and opportunities for reform.

2.1. Ms. Marlène Zébango made a presentation on “the obstacles to women's participation in parliament.” One initial finding is that the political representation of women in French-speaking Africa and in Burkina Faso in particular is far below that of men. The preconceived notion of politics with a male face continues to prevail, which are affected by the following factors:

- **The Absence of Cooperation with Civil Society:** It was noted that contact between women in political and women's associations is not permanent and strong, like many western countries which are more structuralized.
- **Political Parties:** Typically political parties do not support the participation of women. Politics is often viewed as a male domain and women are deterred from participating.
- **Electoral System:** The electoral system can be viewed as an obstacle for women, particularly because the electoral code does not allow independent candidacies, preventing strong women leaders from participating in politics.
- **Socio-Economic Conditions:** Poverty and unemployment hamper women. There are also difficulties in women obtaining the required funds to contest elections, and the burden of household chores leaves little time for political.
- **Traditional Roles of Women:** Male sometimes prevent women from playing their role in politics, and constrain the way they should participate in politics, e.g. not to show emotion because they should behave like men. Women often lack confidence preventing them from considering entering politics.
- **Media:** It was argued that the media does not play a supportive role for women nor do much to highlight the issues that affect women.

Ms. Zébango noted that although many governments say that they are committed to the issue of gender equality, there is much that women can do to take responsibility. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should play a key role in the advancement of women in politics. Some of the strategies include:

- **Training:** Specific training for women in politics is needed. Women must also be willing to take up positions in politics, and to play their role as women and not succumb to a male style of politicking.
- **Quotas:** Quotas are a strategy that can be considered to correct the imbalance between men and women.
- **Co-ordination:** Women should liaise with women's organizations and the media to develop an effective strategy for change.

Ms. Zébango concluded by noting that the handbook shows the effect of political parties in the advancement of women. To help women advance, political parties must give women the possibility to participate like men. Ultimately, the increase the representation of women in parliament, synergy is required between political parties and women's organizations, and the state should also play an active role.

2.2. Because of logistical problems, the speaker on “Quotas for Women: A Strategy for Change”, Ms. Aissata Diop, was unable to attend the workshop. **Prof. Augustin Loada** therefore made a presentation on this topic.

Prof. Loada provided a definition of quota as being a strategy to recruit women in politics to constitute a certain percentage or number, often between 30 and 40 percent. After defining the notion of quotas and their objectives, he presented arguments for and against quotas, distinguishing between quotas instituted by the Constitution, by statutes and regulations, and by the political parties. The arguments in favour of quotas include:

- They are non-discriminatory as they ensure equality of result.
- They ensure a presence of women.
- Women should have equal representation as they constitute 50 percent of the population.
- Women's experiences are necessary in politics.
- Political parties are the gatekeepers to election and therefore should include women and other under-represented groups.

He then presented the arguments against quotas:

- Quotas are discriminatory because women are advantaged.
- Quotas are not democratic as voters should have the right to determine candidates.
- Quotas imply that gender/sex considerations are more important than qualifications.
- Quotas can lead to conflicts.

Prof. Loada then explained some countries' experiences with quotas. He noted that there are many legislated quotas in existence in Latin America, and many political party quotas have been implemented in Western Europe and in some French-speaking countries like Senegal, following the recommendation of Socialist International. However, it is important that quotas are actually implemented in practice as there is no effect if they are not applied. He also noted that it is important for women to come forward as candidates. The countries that have instituted quotas have sometimes faced the difficulty of finding enough women candidates. This constraint can be overcome if the parties commit themselves to active recruitment and training of women who aspire to politics. Finally, he noted that in those countries with quotas, the women's movement must ensure that they result in a critical mass of 30% to 40% women elected, that the implementing legislation is precise, and that sanctions be provided for in the event that the provisions are not respected; otherwise, quotas run the risk of failing to achieve their goal. In the march to parity, quotas are a strategic albeit transitional stage.

2.3. Professor Loada provided an overview of “Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems: Lessons from the 2002 legislative elections”. He began by asking that if the proportional representation system used is supposedly favourable for the election of women, why is the representation of women in Burkina Faso so low?

Prof. Loada explained that the road to parliament for women follows three crucial steps: nomination as candidates, selection by a political party, and then the election process.

- **Nomination as a Candidate:** In many cases, it is not easy for women to become candidates: Society often imposes restrictions on women, and they also require funding which is often hard to obtain. However, the presence of strong NGOs and CSOs can encourage women to run and provide support and training if required, and experienced women from civil society should be encouraged to run as candidates.
- **Selection by Political Parties:** Rules for the selection of candidates in political parties are important for women to know and use to their advantage. However, in Burkina Faso these rules are not clear-cut, and are oftentimes decentralised. Furthermore, the criteria for selection can work against women, such as the need for name recognition, money and the cultural view of women.
- **Election Process:** If women are selected as candidates, and place in 'electable' positions are party lists, they will be elected. However, the electoral system, may have a major impact on the number of women elected. The Burkinabé electoral system appears to be favourable to women, to the extent that the latest electoral reforms have increased the size of the electoral districts. This allows more room for political parties to manoeuvre to strike a balance among the various interests within them, including the interests of women. Moreover, the choice of a closed list gives greater assurance to women candidates, as voters vote for political parties and not individual candidates on a party list.

Even though the electoral system is *a priori* favourable to women, it appears to have had a limited impact on the political representation of Burkinabé women. Several factors can be cited to explain this situation, including:

- The lack of political will on the part of the political party leaders to forward women candidates.
- Sociological factors associated with the weight of past practices and incumbents.
- The weak mobilization of women to support women candidates and create alliances between civil society and political parties.
- The electoral code which does not provide for independent candidacies.

2.4. A series of **interventions** were made concerning the case of Burkina Faso, including by Ms. Madeleine Ouédraogo, former deputy, and Ms. Véronique Kando, currently a deputy. Some of points raised in the interventions by the participants included the need for women to be active in the economy to exercise power; that qualifications for candidature in political parties should be based on merit and personal ambition; that women should be more active and join political parties, including smaller ones, and that education is important not only for support potential women candidates but also to change perceptions about women.

Session 3: Women in Parliament: The Burkina Faso Experience

This session focused on the experiences of women in parliament. What has been the experience of women MPs in Parliament? Have women made a difference to politics? What strategies are there for reforming the workings of parliament?

3.1. Mrs. Marie Madeleine Ouédraogo spoke of the experience of women deputies in the National Assembly in Burkina Faso. While the number of women in parliament remains low, it is interesting to note that from 1978 to 2002, the number of women in the National Assembly increased from one to thirteen. A woman has been vice-president of the parliament, and she noted that the women in parliament have sought to affect change on various issues including the electoral code, poverty and health issues, and have been active in inter-parliamentary associations. One can perceive a significant evolution of women's participation in the leadership bodies of the legislature, and in legislative activities generally. There are, nonetheless, shortcomings in terms of organization and lack of solidarity between MPs, where individualism sometimes overcomes common causes which is necessary to tackle problems. The low number of women in politics is also not an advantage for affecting change.

3.2. Ms. Suzanne Coulibaly provided a presentation on how women in parliament are able to make a difference and influence politics. She began by questioning what it is that women should do as MPs, why make a difference and for whom? According to her, the role of women in politics is quite specific, because in addition to the classic role of deputy, they must answer to particular expectations from the women's movement and lobby, and immediate expectations on the part of the civil society, especially in terms of social issues. There is a new situation in Burkina Faso where the MPs in parliament come from five different parties: In the previous legislature all ten women came from the same party, the CDP. There is added pressure where MPs typically govern according to the political party. There is now a new challenge where women MPs need to move beyond the party to act together. Thus they can make the difference exploiting their unique strengths such as mastery of procedures, education and instruction, advocacy actions and better organization.

3.3. Several **interventions** were made during the debate session, with high-quality commentators and comments, and responses by the speakers. They addressed many interesting issues, including the following:

- **Communication:** it was noted that many people are not informed about what happens in the national assembly, let alone what women MPs are doing. It was suggested that more communication is needed with the public to show what they are doing as MPs in parliament.
- **Quotas:** were highlighted as a real policy instrument with the potential to increase the numbers of women, however it was cautioned that they should be used in the right context and in collaboration with men. It was also argued that quotas should first be implemented informally in political parties, before they can be legislated.
- **Networking:** The importance of establishing a network of women legislators from different political parties was again emphasised.
- **Training:** was noted as an important need for women, as was implemented in Nordic parliaments.
- **Co-ordination:** was again mentioned as an important activity, not only between women in politics, but also for political parties to meet with civil society and the media.
- **Perceptions:** the struggle against anti-women clichés and stereotypes must continue, and politics should be held up as an area of development, with a call for greater commitment to gender equality from those whose conduct is characterized by probity and the struggle for social justice, to contend with the view of politics as “dirty” and “rotten.”

After a summary by the moderator, **Mr. Paul Kiemdé**, invited everyone to read the handbook and to take in its contents.

Session 4: Group Discussions

To conclude the workshop, a brainstorming session was held in plenary session, the main issues being: What can be done to advance the cause of women? What recommendations should be made? What resolutions? What ideas should be put into an action plan?

This session, chaired by experts from the CGD, Ms. Haridata Dakouré, Ms. Amina Ouédraogo, and Ms. Nestorine Sangaré, included the presence of the Second Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. The main issues focused on: NGO support to women candidates and MPs, the role of political parties and financing during elections, education and quotas. The potential role of the CDG in the future was also discussed, and it was suggested that the CDG should take the lead in the institution of a legal quota for women in Burkina Faso.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE WORKSHOP

The participants, after a dialogue on the different options offered by the handbook, recommended the following actions:

1. Financial Support:

- Take women into account in the decision-making structures of the parties and in the parties' lists of candidates (number of women in electable places) as one of the criteria for distributing the state subsidy to finance political party activities and to finance their campaigns.
- Grant a bonus, in distributing state subsidies for the political parties, to those that have done the most to increase the number of women in electable places on the lists of candidates.
- Give specific financial support to women from the state, development partners, women in business, NGOs, etc., for financing to support campaigns and non-campaign political activities.

2. Education and Training:

- Train elected women and women political leaders (leadership, advocacy, communication, managing election campaigns, etc.).
- Expand training for girls and women interested in politics.
- Provide civic education in primary schools and in public and private secondary schools.

3. Quotas:

- Raise awareness about the potential benefits of adopting informal quotas, statutory quotas, and/or constitutional quotas in Burkina Faso and elsewhere in Africa.
- Raise awareness in the political parties about the need to recruit women candidates, and placing them on the ballot in electable places.
- Raise awareness in the political parties about the idea of informal quotas.

- Foster the institution of quotas in the UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union).
- Raise awareness in the political parties to accept legal quotas, in the long term.

4. Networking

- Promote and reinforce the idea of synergies between civil society organizations and elected women.
- Create and/or reinforce frameworks for consensus-building and sharing of experiences among women in elective office through a women's caucus or other body;
- Bolster the capabilities of women in elective office.

5. Advocacy

- Advocacy to be provided vis-a-vis the authorities, development partners, and political parties, to improve the political participation of women.

6. Electoral System

- Expand the dialogue regarding the impact of electoral systems on women's political representation to the entire political class.

7. Bolster capacities

- Provide institutional support for women's organizations and organizations of women in elective office.
- Share experiences among them.

8. Communication

- Improve communication about the work of women in elective office.
- Design and implement a communication strategy for women in elective office.

9. Research

- Provide research on women's political participation and compile a data base on women in politics.