

# Introduction

International IDEA was established in 1995—the same year as the world’s governments recognized that, despite the widespread transition to democracy taking place in many regions, ‘the popular participation of women in key decision-making as full and equal partners with men, particularly in politics, has not yet been achieved’.<sup>1</sup> From its very inception, IDEA believed that women’s political participation was, and remains, central to democratic governance. IDEA also recognizes that if the world’s established and emerging democracies are to be truly democratic, half of the world’s population cannot be excluded from either representation or participation.

To that end, IDEA’s Women in Politics programme seeks to collate different methods and models for enhancing women’s political participation. By bridging the divide between the academics and practitioners, IDEA aims to provide relevant policy options and data to those working to find practicable solutions to the under-representation of women. While taking into account a global perspective, it tries to ensure that the materials generated also reflect an awareness of and comparisons between the different national, regional and local contexts. This Handbook, *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, together with a whole series of handbooks that IDEA’s Women in Politics programme has produced since 1998, is a testament not only to this philosophy, but also to its persuasiveness among the multitude of people working to achieve similar goals globally, as attested by the need for this second English-language edition. This publication brings to six the total number of handbooks in the series.

## 1. An Approach to Democracy: Why Include Women?

An essential tenet of any democratic framework is the principle of human rights, including the granting and exercise of the political rights of both men and women. The development of any political agenda that does not include the perspectives, views and experiences of those who will be affected is not credible.

Despite efforts over the centuries by prominent women—and men—the recognition and exercise of women’s political, economic and social rights is by no means equal between women and men.<sup>2</sup> Women constitute half of the world’s population and comprise 50 percent of the labour force, yet make up 1 billion human beings living in poverty. Decision making and priority setting continue to be largely in the hands of men. Taking into account gendered perspectives and involving both women and men in decision-making processes are a sine qua non of any democratic framework. Hence democracy, by definition, cannot afford to be gender-blind. It must strive towards equality and representation of women and men in decision-making processes and in the opportunities to achieve both these goals.

The equal participation of women and men in public life is one of the cornerstones of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1979, and in force since 1981. Today, more than 20 years since the signing of the convention, 179 countries are party to it and bound to take measures to promote women’s participation in decision making and leadership positions.

In 1995, the UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing generated renewed pressure for the implementation of the CEDAW provisions: the Beijing Platform for Action identified ‘inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels’ and ‘insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women’ as two areas of significant concern where action was critical for the advancement of women. This was further expanded to encompass women’s participation in post-conflict state building, which finds expression in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, passed in October 2000. In the debate introducing Resolution 1325 in 2000, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated that ‘peace is inextricably linked to equality between women and men ... maintaining and promoting peace and security requires equal participation in decision-making’.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. A Decade On: Incremental Progress the World Over

Ten years on since IDEA’s founding in 1995, and seven years since the original *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers Handbook* was published in 1998, the picture regarding women’s political participation has slowly changed. Overall the past decade has seen modest progress with regard to women’s presence in national parliaments.

While in 1995 women accounted for 11.3 percent of members of parliament, this figure has increased to nearly 16 percent in 2005.<sup>4</sup> More than 30 women have served as heads of government and/or state since 1995, and in October 2005 27 women presided over houses of parliament.<sup>5</sup> Globally, women now hold more elective offices than ever before.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1: Women in Parliament in 2005, by Region of the World**

Region	Single House or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses Combined
Nordic countries	40.1%	–	40.1%
Europe—OSCE member countries including Nordic countries	18.9%	16.5%	18.4%
Americas	18.7%	18.5%	18.6%
Europe—OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	16.8%	16.5%	16.8%
Asia	15.1%	13.5%	15.0%
Sub-Saharan Africa	14.9%	14.0%	14.8%
Pacific	11.2%	26.5%	13.2%
Arab states	6.7%	5.6%	6.5%
Global average	15.8%	14.7%	15.7%

**Source:** Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), ‘Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 31 January 2005’, <<http://www.ipu.org>>.

Important progress has been made in some regions, notably the Nordic countries, where women’s representation averages 40 percent in parliament. The percentage of parliaments that have reached the Beijing target of at least 30 percent women in parliament has increased threefold in the past ten years, to 6 percent.<sup>7</sup> Yet in many parts of the world real gains in women accessing legislatures have not occurred, and largely insurmountable obstacles persist. For example, women are still least represented in the Arab states, where the regional average in lower houses is 6.7 percent. Women also remain woefully under-represented in the parliaments of the Pacific Island states, with an average of 3.2 percent (excluding Australia and New Zealand, where women’s representation stands at 24.7 percent and 28.3 percent, respectively).<sup>8</sup>

## 3. About This Handbook

### 3.1. Background

The slowly changing face of parliamentary representation was not an inevitable consequence of the broadening of the political space in democratization processes. Rather, it has resulted from sustained mobilization, institutional engineering, political party commitment and greater recognition by the international community of the need for gender equality. This international discourse has been the foundation of concerted efforts to support women's full political participation in the past ten years. Women's activism and mobilization at the country, regional and international level have been pivotal to keeping gender equality firmly rooted on the international agenda. These are the premises on which these chapters and case studies are based.

IDEA produced the first edition of this Handbook in 1998. This second edition was revised and updated in 2005. The original idea behind the publication was that women in public life require accessible and useful information on how to effect political change in decision-making bodies. There is an emphasis on the entire process of participation—from the very beginning to the end—as well as the means of making an impact. Azza Karam explains that 'it is clear that the more active and engaged women are in politics, the more there is a need for a culling and systematization of their experiences in such a way as to elaborate how it is that they make it to these bodies and what they can do once in them'.<sup>9</sup>

The Handbook is therefore a practical tool for overcoming the obstacles women encounter throughout the parliamentary electoral process, providing a number of options on how to bring about constructive change and influence in politics. It is underpinned by IDEA's unique approach to democracy assistance: it seeks to bridge the divide between academia and practitioners, providing strategies for those men and women who are committed to correcting the imbalance in politics. It seeks to answer the following questions: *What are the major obstacles women confront when entering parliament? What are the different ways of overcoming these obstacles and in which structural and political contexts? What are the mechanisms and strategies women can use to influence the parliamentary political process?*

### 3.2. Target Audiences

This Handbook brings together a variety of authors, and draws on the shared experience of women as well as men working as researchers, politicians and activists at the local, regional and global levels. The Handbook is targeted to a wide range of actors working to promote the participation and representation of women in political structures. This includes first and foremost women members of parliament and those campaigning for elected office. Also targeted are members of civil society, including activists, academics, researchers, journalists, and other stakeholders working to advance women in politics.

### **3.3. Regionalizing Outreach**

Since its initial release in English in 1998, there has been incredible interest and demand for the *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers Handbook* from those advocating for change around the world. Responding to ongoing requests for the translation of the Handbook into different languages, International IDEA has produced the following regional versions: French (2002); Indonesian (2002); Spanish (2002) and Russian (abridged in 2003). There are more than 25 country case studies from all regions of the world. The different regional versions of the book are fully downloadable on the International IDEA web site.

## **4. Outline of the Handbook**

The provision of comparative information and strategies for practitioners seeking to increase women's participation in political institutions is central. The barriers that women face in reaching parliaments have been defined as falling into two main categories: attitudinal and socio-economic factors, and political and institutional factors. Although the socio-economic and ideological factors cannot be ignored, much emphasis has been placed on the political and institutional factors that influence the levels of representation of women, and these can, and very often do, change over a short period of time.

Key themes in this Handbook include:

- the effect of socio-economic and cultural biases and overcoming the challenges in winning election to parliaments;
- the central role that political parties and electoral systems play;
- increasing women's access to decision-making bodies through the use of special measures such as quotas; and
- looking beyond the question of numbers to enhancing the effectiveness of women politicians in transforming the institution of parliament and effecting policy changes.

The information presented in this Handbook brings together the available expertise and data on the subject and also highlights areas where further research and training need to be undertaken. Thus, it is not the final tome on how women MPs can impact on the political process, nor is it primarily a research instrument. Although it incorporates the views and analyses of researchers, the Handbook is designed primarily for practical purposes, providing strategies and ideas that can be used for further action.

As already mentioned, the issue of impacting on politics necessarily involves first looking at the problems women face in getting into parliament and the mechanisms

they have used to overcome these obstacles. All too often, women who want to enter politics find that the political, public, cultural and social environment is not conducive to their participation. In **chapter 2** Nadezhda Shvedova identifies the problems that affect the political participation of women, categorized into political, socio-economic and psychological factors.

*Women in Parliament* clearly highlights the effect that institutions have on women's access to parliament. In **chapter 3** Richard E. Matland illustrates the consequences of different electoral systems. While they alone do not determine the level of representation of women, electoral systems are important because they can be, and regularly are, changed. Chapter 3 also highlights the impact of political parties as they assume the primary responsibility for candidate nomination. Parties are entrusted with perhaps the most strategic responsibility in a democracy—to prepare and select candidates for election and to support them in positions of leadership and governance.

Because of the obstacles that women face in the electoral process, special measures have been implemented to promote their presence in parliament and other elected positions. Today, quotas are one of the most effective mechanisms to ensure women direct access to political power. In **chapter 4** Drude Dahlerup examines quota systems and how they have come to play a critical role in increasing the representation of women. It provides the various arguments for and against the use of quotas. The introduction of quotas in the past ten years has met with some success. In other instances, quotas have not resulted in an increase in the number of women in politics or in their empowerment. This chapter therefore provides comparative examples of the implementation in countries of quotas around the world.

It is relatively easy to enumerate the various challenges regarding women's political participation, but it is much harder to appreciate the strengths women have and the positive differences they have made in their chosen professions. The second theme of the Handbook shifts the focus to how women can move 'beyond numbers' in parliament to make an impact on the political process. In **chapter 5** Azza Karam and Joni Lovenduski outline how women can reform the inherent 'institutional masculinity' which characterizes most legislatures by implementing a 'rules strategy'. They suggest a framework for thinking about and acting on the question of how women can enhance their parliamentary decision-making power, and identify three key areas: learning the rules, using the rules and changing the rules. The chapter presents strategies that have been tried and those that can be tried in the future, and argues for the importance of looking 'beyond the numbers'.

IDEA always strives to identify and deal with different national realities. Indeed, a great many contexts are presented in this Handbook—different political, social, economic and cultural contexts, as well as countries in transition, developing democracies and established democracies, all of which have their own impact on women's participation. In order to highlight these diversities, **case studies** from different regions of the world are included on all of the issues being discussed. Each

case study reflects not only the diverse social, political and cultural situation in each country, but also the commonalities in terms of women's needs and expectations and, in some cases, achievements. Eleven national and regional case studies are presented, including Argentina, the Arab States (Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen), Asia (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan), Burkina Faso, Ecuador, France, Indonesia, Latin America (regional comparison), Rwanda, South Africa and Sweden. A 12th case study on the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is also presented. The IPU has a long and distinguished record of working with women parliamentarians. The presentations do not advocate one particular approach over another, but rather cover the range of alternatives and best practices. In this way women and men can be informed about the issues and prepared to take action suited to their particular situation.

The Handbook aims to bring together information presented by researchers, politicians and activists working to advance gender equality in decision-making bodies. A great many views and issues are covered and strategies proposed. In **chapter 6**, Azza Karam synthesizes the material presented in the Handbook by providing an overview of the needs identified by women parliamentarians, summarizing the strategies that have been successfully adopted to make inroads within parliament, and affirming the long march to success that women have led and societies have collectively undertaken over many decades.

The Handbook is an attempt to collate information presented by researchers in the field, as well as the practical experiences of women activists, and organizations working on promoting women's participation in parliaments. Both the individuals and the institutions span the local and the international. The Handbook therefore embodies an attempt to bring together a great many threads simultaneously. Certain generalizations tend to be made in an effort to trace commonalities in experiences and results, but even so the specificity of each local circumstance, while respected and taken into account, remains difficult to capture in its entirety.

## 5. The Future Agenda

In each country the methods may be different, but very few governments around the world will deny that women's participation in the political system needs to be increased and enhanced as part of an overall evolution of the democratic process. Drawing on facts, lived realities, combined insights and experiences, IDEA hopes that this Handbook will contribute to the creation of a critical mass and the forging of strategic alliances necessary for making a difference to the broader political process—and that this information reflects the realities of women east, west, north and south.

Ultimately, the success of any endeavour is the sum total of the efforts of all those who contribute to it, and all societies are called upon to engage in an inevitable process of making our world a better place, with all key agents involved to the best of their abilities. This is where women's entry into and success in the political sphere is

headed, and this Handbook is an attempt to salute all the women—and men—who have worked in the past, and who are still part of this important journey, in these interesting times.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> United Nations, 1995. 'Fourth World Conference on Women Platform for Action', 1995, article 15, <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm>>.
- <sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1995. *Human Development Report 1995: Gender and Human Development*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- <sup>3</sup> Whittington, S., 2004. 'UN Goals for Gender Mainstreaming', Paper presented at the conference on Women and Post-War Reconstruction: Strategies for Implementation of Democracy Building Policies, Florida International University, Miami, March.
- <sup>4</sup> The statistics regarding the number of women in parliaments in this handbook are taken from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Women in National Parliaments database at <<http://www.ipu.org>>. We have endeavoured to use consistently the statistics from 31 January 2005 unless otherwise specified. See also the case study on the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in this Handbook.
- <sup>5</sup> As of 31 October 2005. See IPU, 'Women Presiding Officers of Parliaments', <<http://www.ipu.org>>.
- <sup>6</sup> The global average number of women in parliament of 15.7 percent as of 31 January 2005 had increased to 16.1 percent as of 31 October 2005.
- <sup>7</sup> See the case study on the Inter-Parliamentary Union in this handbook.
- <sup>8</sup> IPU, 2005. 'Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 31 January 2005', <<http://www.ipu.org>>.
- <sup>9</sup> Ballington, Julie, 2005. 'Ten Years of Progress: Enhancing Women's Political Participation', in International IDEA, *Ten Years of Supporting Democracy Worldwide*. Stockholm: International IDEA.





# Chapter 2

