

International IDEA, 2002, Women in Parliament, Stockholm (<http://www.idea.int>). This is an English translation of Julie Ballington, 2002, "Introduction" in *Les Femmes au parlement : Au-Delà du Nombre*, International IDEA, Stockholm, Sweden, 2002. (This translation may vary slightly from the original text. If there are discrepancies in the meaning, the original French version is the definitive text).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Julie Ballington

«Women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interest to be taken into account.»

Beijing Platform for Action, 1995

The equal participation of women and men in public life is one of the fundamental tenets of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, in force since 1981. Today, after more than 20 years since the signing of the Convention, with 165 ratifications by states, women in all parts of the world continue to be largely marginalized and under-represented in the realm of politics.

In 1995, 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 critical for the advancement of women. In 2002, despite the achievements on the legal front at both international and national level and years of activism and mobilization, the participation of women in politics as equal partners with men has not yet been achieved.

Today, the linking of democracy with gender equality is a generally accepted principle. An essential tenet of any democratic framework is the principle of human rights, including 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 no longer credible. Yet in spite of efforts over the centuries by prominent women – and some men too – the recognition and exercise of women's political, economic and social rights, is by no means equal between women and men.¹ Women constitute half of the world's population, comprise 50 per cent of the labour force, yet make up one billion human beings living in poverty. Decision-making and priority setting continue to be largely in the hands of men.

W*omen want to influence the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their families, the political economy and destiny of their communities and nations, as well as the structure of international relations. Political participation and representation is essential for the achievement of these ends.²*

Globally, women constitute 14.3 per cent of parliamentarians. Most regions average a similar percentage to the global average, with the exception of the Nordic countries, where women have secured, on average, nearly 40 per cent representation in their legislative bodies. At the other end of the spectrum are the Arab countries where a mere 4.6 per cent of legislators are women.³ Francophone Africa is no exception to the global trend. With an average of 8.5 per cent representation of women in lower chambers of parliament, the region reveals the fact that women's inclusion and full participation in the public sphere constitutes one of its major democratic and development challenges.

In this context, there is much work ahead: strong government action, commitment by political parties, and social

transformation in the perceptions that have dominated our constructions of societal relations. There is a need to leave behind traditional patterns and understanding of the position and role of women and men in society. The quality of women's participation in politics will also be valued when there is a shift in traditional perceptions of power and by dispelling notions that public life is largely reserved for men. A key challenge for francophone Africa is the continued consolidation of democracy that includes and supports the participation and mobilization of women from different societal statuses and origins. We hope that this handbook contributes effectively in confronting this challenge, by providing shared experiences, strategies and opportunities for international and regional solidarity.

Aim of the Handbook

Given International IDEA's mandate to contribute to the ongoing debate on how to advance gender and democracy issues in general, and responding to the need of how to promote women's equality and representation in particular, the *Women in Parliament: Beyond numbers* handbook was produced as part of the work programme in 1998 under Azza Karam. The aim of the handbook is to present in an accessible manner, ways in which women can impact on political processes through their participation, and to identify the specific needs of women parliamentarians and the areas in which they require further assistance and information.

The handbook builds on the many analyses that have been conducted with regard to increasing the political participation of women. Yet it also seeks to move beyond the question of numbers by examining strategies that may enhance the impact of women politicians. A variety of insights and methods are presented from different political, social, economic and cultural contexts. Consistent with International IDEA's approach, the handbook does not prescribe the best way of achieving change, but is rather a tool that presents a range of strategies and options for reform and action.

Regional Versions

Since its release in English in 1998, there has been an overwhelming interest and demand for the *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* handbook from those advocating for change around the world. Responding to the request for the translation of the handbook into different languages, International IDEA has embarked upon a series of regional versions, including this French version for francophone countries. The structure and comparative content of the original handbook has been mostly retained, including updates and revisions to the text required since its first publication in 1998. As a means of providing further practical examples and information from francophone countries, the global nature of the information is complemented with the addition of regional case studies from France and Africa. These additions to the original version have necessitated a change in the country case studies included in the first version of the handbook.

The *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* 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. In particular, the experience of women members of parliament is brought to the fore in this version through their contribution as authors of country case studies. The handbook is targeted to a wide range of actors working to promote the participation and representation of women in political structures. This includes foremost women members of parliament, or 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.

Outline and Focus of the Handbook

The handbook retains its focus of examining firstly how to increase the numbers of women in parliament, and secondly and importantly, presenting examples and experiences of how women can affect political processes while working through parliamentary structures. Yet beyond just focusing on change and effect relating to what is often viewed as "women's issues", it examines change processes in the broader context of policy and legislation relating to political, social and economic issues. The themes of identifying the key obstacles that affect the entry of women to parliament, and strategies that may be used to overcome them, are addressed. Furthermore, mechanisms that help women affect the political processes in parliaments, are also examined. With these themes in mind, the handbook focuses on the following key areas:

Obstacles to the Participation of Women in Parliament: All too often, women who want to enter politics find that the political, public, cultural and social environment is not conducive to their participation. Chapter 2 identifies the problems that affect the political participation of women, categorized into political, socio-economic and psychological

factors.

Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems: How political parties recruit their candidates, together with the nature of the electoral system, greatly affects the political representation of women. Chapter 3 examines the process of recruitment of candidates by political parties for election, which is perhaps the most crucial stage for getting women into office. Together with this, the chapter also examines how electoral systems can affect women's political representation.

Applying Quotas: Today, quotas are one of the most effective mechanisms to ensure women direct access to political power. Chapter 4 examines the concept of the quota system, 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, and provides comparative examples of their implementation in countries around the world.

Making a Difference in Parliament: Despite their limited number in most regions in the world, women parliamentarians can be effective in parliament and make an impact. Chapter 5 shifts the focus from increasing the numbers of women, to how women can strengthen their decision-making power in parliament, and provides examples of how to act on these issues.

International experiences: There are many important experiences to be shared from international organizations working in the field of women in politics. One such organization is the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which has taken the lead in compiling information on women in politics on a comparative basis. Chapter 6 of this handbook examines the work of the IPU in the field of women in politics, and presents some of the IPU's recommendations in this regard.

Case studies: Eight country case studies are presented in this handbook: four from francophone countries and four from around the world. The case studies from the Arab world (Chapter 2), India (Chapter 3), and Norway and South Africa (Chapter 5) reflect the diverse social, political and cultural situation of the countries, and the recent advances that have been made in terms of women's participation in politics. The case studies are intended to support the arguments presented in the chapters.

The case studies from French-speaking countries illustrate the obstacles women encounter en route to parliament and provide examples of strategies that may be employed to overcome them. The first case study on Burkina Faso (Chapter 2) examines the participation of women, and identifies some of the main challenges that confront them in the political arena. It suggests different strategies to effect political change, including a revision of the electoral code and developing communication strategies among women. A second case study from Burkina Faso (Chapter 3) examines the recruitment of women candidates by political parties during legislative elections. It examines the key variables in the process of political party recruitment, and provides suggestions to promote the participation of women in Burkina Faso. Chapter 4 is complemented by two case studies. The case study from France focuses on the significance of the Parity Law instituted in France in 2000, which favours the "equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and elective positions". It provides an outline of the reforms implemented, and examines their practical application during the 2001 municipal and senatorial elections and 2002 legislative elections. This is followed by a comparative case study on the use of quotas in francophone Africa, with an emphasis on Senegal. The issue of quotas and the ideal of parity are a recurrent theme in the region, and the importance of enforcement mechanisms is brought to the fore in this case study.

The handbook is an attempt 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 this handbook. The conclusion attempts to synthesize the material presented in the handbook by providing an overview of the needs identified by women parliamentarians, suggesting the strategies that have been successful, and by identifying the key challenges that lie ahead.

Endnotes

1. UNDP. 1995. *Gender and Development*, New York: UNDP Human Development Report.
2. UNDP. 2000. *Women's Political Participation and Good Governance: 21st Century Challenges*. Available at <http://magnet.undp.org>.
3. Inter-Parliamentary Union. February 2002. *Women in National Parliaments*. <http://www.ipu.org>.