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Conclusion

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In 1965, women accounted for 8.1 percent of all members of national legislatures worldwide. In 2002, this figure has increased to 14.3 percent. This minimal progress after nearly 40 years means that the ideal of equality remains a long way off.

In Latin America, the participation of women in the lower chambers of legislatures increased from 9 percent in 1990 to 15 percent ten years later. This significant progress in a relatively short time, largely owing to the adoption of quota systems in 11 of the 18 democratic countries of Latin America, is a welcome development. Nonetheless, within the region the positive results of implementing quotas vary from country to country. Many obstacles remain to gender equality in public decision-making positions and to women's participation in politics. Moreover, for those women already in public office, the challenge is to use their power effectively.

The purpose of this handbook has been to offer a general overview of women's access to national legislatures and the gains in increasing that access worldwide. The situation in Latin America is a central component of the study. It has also highlighted the key challenges women face when seeking election to decision-making bodies, notably parliament. In so doing, it has suggested some concrete strategies for overcoming these obstacles, changing the political environment, and promoting real and not just formal equality. It has also sought to move beyond the quantitative dimension in analyzing political participation, to the qualitative aspects, i.e. those aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of women who enter government. The six chapters in this volume, supplemented by country case studies from Latin America and other regions have dealt with different dimensions of the process, from overcoming the obstacles to getting elected and breaking down the barriers, to how women can most effectively contribute to the legislative process.

Identifying the Obstacles

Many obstacles have been discussed in this handbook that impede women's access to legislative bodies. Although public perceptions regarding women in politics in Latin America are changing for the better, women continue to be elected in lower numbers than men. This trend is not only regional, but also global, with just a few exceptions. In effect, both those women who serve as legislators and those who wish to enter public life find that political, socio-economic and socio-cultural obstacles are significant obstacles to their participation.

In Latin America, special mention should be made of the predominance of the “masculine model of politics”; a lack of co-operation with public organisations including women's groups, and the absence of well-developed education and training systems to encourage women's leadership. Poverty and unemployment, or the dual burdens of balancing domestic tasks with professional obligations, continue to impact on women's political participation.

A *“male model of politics”; the lack of coordination with public organizations including women's groups, and the absence of well developed education and training systems are some of the obstacles to women's political participation.*

This is particularly pronounced with regard to the inclusion of indigenous women into political life. Indigenous women constitute almost half of the population in several countries in Latin America, but their participation in public life remains to be addressed. These women face barriers not only as women, but also because of their ethnic identity. Although recent decades have witnessed the growing recognition of the distinct interests and concerns of indigenous

peoples, and their own cultural traditions and forms of social organization, for the most part they continue to be excluded from legislatures.

Another key aspect in analyzing women's political participation is the role of the political parties. Although the role and functioning of political parties is questioned in many countries, they remain central to representative democracies, since they are the main vehicles by which citizens elect or dismiss governments, maintaining firm control over the nomination of candidates for elected office. Equally important, political parties are a key variable for advancing gender equality in decision-making. As political parties are the gatekeepers to elected office – since they choose lists of candidates – they hold the key to the political advancement of women. As illustrated in this handbook, the stage at which party gatekeepers choose the candidates is perhaps the most crucial for getting women into legislatures, as their inclusion and placement on party lists is of vital importance for getting elected. So long as political parties remain highly gendered institutions, women's access to leadership positions will be impeded. Although some parties are taking measures to address the low number of women in their ranks, the rate of progress remains slow. Political parties also need to provide sufficient financial resources for women candidates.

Electoral rules also affect women's chances of election. Countries that use proportional representation electoral systems tend to elect women in larger numbers than countries with majoritarian systems. In effect, women constitute 20 percent of the legislatures in proportional representation systems, 15 percent in mixed systems, and 11 percent in majoritarian systems. Chapter 3 showed that in PR systems, political parties are encouraged to balance their party tickets, including candidates from different social groups, among them women, to attract voters. Where women are placed on political party lists, and whether the lists are open or closed, also has an important effect on the representation of women. By contrast, in majoritarian systems political parties field candidates who have a realistic chance of winning; in many instances, they nominate men for the most important posts. Nonetheless, although studies show that women have a better chance of getting elected in proportional representation systems, there is a need to analyze the question in greater depth for developing countries with PR systems.

Breaking Down Barriers

With regard to the political participation of women, important advances were made in the 1990s in legislatures in Latin America. This is particularly so where women lobbied political parties to adopt quotas rules for internal elections. A further advance was the adoption of quotas at the national level by eleven Latin American countries. Affirmative action mechanisms such as quotas have the potential to significantly increase the number of women elected to legislatures, and thereby support the achievement of a critical mass of women. In Latin America, as a result of the adoption of quota systems in 11 countries, women's participation in the legislatures increased 8 percent in the 1990s. But for this type of arrangement to be implemented, in many cases an extensive effort was required to raise awareness and bring pressure to bear. This was especially so in Argentina when they engaged in a lobbying effort to get the parties to adopt rules for the use of quotas in the internal party elections.

However, it must be remembered that the quota system is not enough, as the Latin American region demonstrates significant variations in their implementation from one country to the next. The effect of quotas depends upon political parties' adherence to them, the nature of the enforcement mechanisms, and the general culture of the organization in which they are adopted. If women are not nominated for election in large numbers and placed in 'electable' positions on political party tickets, their numbers will continue to lag behind those of men. This is expressly illustrated in Costa Rica's elections, where, after the Supreme Electoral Court ruling of 2000 requiring political parties to place women in 'electable' positions on party lists, the number of women increased from 19 to 35 percent in the 2002 election. Strict enforcement mechanisms are also required to ensure the proper implementation of quotas.

Although there is no guarantee, affirmative action mechanisms such as quotas have the potential to significantly increase the number of women elected to legislatures, and thereby contributing to the attainment of a critical mass of women.

One important factor that can help increase the number of women seeking election is the nature of the women's movement and organizations that focus on seeking and supporting women's political participation. Major advances have been made where there is coordination and organization between women legislators and their political parties, as well as between women legislators and interest groups outside the legislature. Women's organizations can provide women politicians with a support base, support their candidacies, and help build confidence. Women's organizations may also provide assistance and resources needed to launch a successful campaign, and to give women greater visibility and

legitimacy. These initiatives can be reinforced by international organizations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which can play an important role in caucusing, networking, and enhancing the work of women parliamentarians. The IPU also stresses the need for partnership between women and men as an important factor to accomplish change and have an impact on politics.

Making an Impact

Moving beyond the questions of numbers necessitated an examination of what women can do once they are in parliament, and how they can make a difference. Women's presence can make a difference in redefining political priorities and setting the legislative agenda. Women need to learn the rules of the parliamentary system, and to use them to promote women's interests and influence in decision-making processes. To support women's endeavors to change the rules or discourse in the legislature, training and orientation activities may be needed to enable women to distinguish between women's issues and women's perspectives, and to network with the media and women's organizations. In Latin America, the larger numbers of women in the national legislatures in the 1990s coincided with the adoption of laws on issues such as domestic violence and reproductive rights. In effect, as mentioned in Chapter 1, in the 1990s 16 Latin American countries adopted laws to help victims of domestic violence, and launched programs to improve reproductive health. In addition, many constitutional reforms in the region during this period included amendments to support the principle that men and women should have equal rights.

A number of strategies may be considered to change the rules. The strategies for changing the rules may include the establishment of a national machinery to monitor implementation of policy and to give support to women's caucuses, implementing a quota within parliamentary committees in which there is an under representation of women, and expanding legislation to include emerging issues of interest to women. Further strategies that may help women make an impact in politics include general awareness raising, research and training for women, targeting the media and constant caucusing and networking among women legislators, organizations, and interest groups working to enhance the political participation of women.

For example, in South Africa institutional changes to the workings of parliament since 1994, as well as the development of a women's budget initiative and the creation of national machinery (including the Office on the Status of Women and the Commission on Gender Equality) have ensured that the interests of women are taken into account in the development and implementation of government policies. In Norway, the political participation of women rests on a widely shared credo that gender constitutes an important political category that should be fully represented in politics. In Latin America, government mechanisms have been created whose task is to encourage gender equity, especially in carrying out international agreements and treaties signed by the Governments of the various countries of the region. In addition, legislative committees have been set up to address women's issues. Nonetheless, the development, achievements, and scope of institutions of this type are generally limited by the lack of necessary resources and their lack of political authority.

Lessons Learned

One of the most important lessons from Latin America is that women are not yet close to reaching a critical mass in the legislatures. Although considerable progress has been made, the variations across the region are pronounced. At one end of the spectrum are countries like Costa Rica and Argentina, where the quota system has served to dramatically increase the participation of women in the legislature to 35 percent and 31 percent respectively. At the other end are countries such as Brazil and Paraguay, with 7 percent and 3 percent respectively, where political parties have complied minimally with quota provisions, or placed women low on political party lists.

In Costa Rica and Argentina, the development of a quota system with a placement mandate and enforcement mechanisms has served to dramatically increase the participation of women in parliament to a critical mass of over 30 percent.

With respect to political parties, the examples from the region where quotas have been adopted and are implemented, such as Argentina and Costa Rica, clearly demonstrate that enforcement mechanisms are a *sine qua non* for their effective functioning. Several political parties in countries such as Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua adopted their own party mechanisms to ensure a minimum representation of women in their internal elections. Yet a party-by-party analysis of the effectiveness of these mechanisms remains to be done.

In Latin America, the issue of campaign finance is another prominent obstacle faced by women interested in participating in elections, since, generally, access to such resources by the various candidates – who, like the drawing up of the lists, are controlled by the parties' executive organs - is conditioned by allocating more financing to those hopefuls who have previously held a seat, mostly men.

It is necessary to expand the pool of possible women candidates. All too often, many of the women who have entered and remain in politics have been part of a class that must surmount cultural, social, political and economic barriers. In Latin America, training, gaining political experience, securing access to media, and other resources are key for supporting women candidates, getting them elected, and helping them reform the political agenda.

Many women legislators have made positive contributions in the legislative bodies. The rise in the number of women representatives has coincided with the adoption of laws on a number of social issues of special relevance to the female population, such as laws on equal rights and opportunities in the workplace, and laws on maternity, health care, and family. Nonetheless, experiences in countries such as Guatemala and Colombia, which are analyzed in this handbook, illustrate the challenges still pending in terms of amending the rules of governing legislative operations, the formation of women's alliances within parties and across party lines, and the change in attitude on the part of their male colleagues. Establishing an institutional gender machinery has had a positive effect in many countries, and is an important means of supporting the reforms. Nonetheless, in some countries, much work remains to be done to support the adequate financing and effective functioning of these institutions.

With regard to the media, it is vital to create and encourage an awareness about the issue of gender equality, and to highlight the issues of concern for women and men. The media has an important role to play to make known the work of women legislators and to educate and mobilize the electorate. Further research is required on the attention and coverage the media gives women's participation in politics in the region.

Within the ranks of parliament, many women have made positive contributions. The rise in the number of women has coincided with the adoption of laws on a number of social issues of special relevance to women, such as laws on equal rights and opportunities in employment, and other issues such as maternity, health care, and the family.

Furthermore, in Latin America women leaders have demonstrated that as politicians they are not only concerned with women's issues, but have also developed comprehensive agendas for government and state affairs. Opinion polls have shown continued support for women in leadership positions, such as ministers of the interior, defense, and foreign affairs, contributing to positive public attitudes about women in politics in the region. Most of the population (57%) supports the idea of increasing the number of women who hold political posts: 66 of every 100 persons surveyed are of the view that women are more honest than men, and 85 percent consider them to be better decision-makers.

However, in this context it is apparent that advancing the women's agenda is still predominantly in the hands of women, and is not an issue that all the men have decided to support. Hence the need to develop alliances among political leaders of both sexes aimed at attaining the full inclusion of women in political life. In the context of such alliances, the power of numbers should be translated into the power of reform.

In Latin America, the processes of democratic transition and consolidation have not translated automatically into a greater presence of women in positions of power, nor can it be said that gender equality is a priority on the political agenda of every country. In addition, the explosive levels of poverty, and the feminization of poverty, as well as social exclusion, have an especially detrimental impact on women and their opportunities to improve their living conditions.

The information and analysis presented here demonstrates the need for greater social mobilization in support of gender equality. The implementation of civic education and voter education campaigns by NGOs, directed to civil society, grass-roots participation, activism, and work through networks of contacts among women legislators are decisive elements in the process of consolidating the presence of women in positions of power, and help to ensure this power is used effectively. Organizations such as the Women's Leadership Conference of the Americas, the Inter-American Dialogue, and the Inter-American Development Bank have made important innovations on bringing together women leaders to fight to have greater attention accorded to issues of interest to women at the highest level, and to efforts to monitor progress in this area. Control over the implementation of international commitments, as well as the strategies for developing the institutional machinery needed for the advancement of women, should be incorporated into any concerted effort to improve their access to power.

The Road Ahead

The diverse contributions in this volume indeed raise many areas where further analysis is required. For example, it is apparent that the different ways in which women can affect political processes, and their achievements in this regard, constitute an area that requires further research. Today, many ask what women have contributed to politics. As more and more women take up positions such as president, vice-presidents, and important ministerial posts until recently considered “male,” the extent to which these experiences have transformed politics remains to be explored. Furthermore, how women ensure an impact on the political process beyond their formal representation in parliament remains an area for further investigation.

It is also evident that the countries of Latin America have had many important experiences regarding the use of quotas from which we can draw important lessons. While many proponents see quotas as an important measure to quickly, and effectively, increase the representation of women, the experiences in this handbook highlight that quotas hold the potential, but by no means guarantee, the effective increase in women legislators. Important to consider are enforcement and placement mandates of quotas, otherwise all too often they are ignored by political parties.

Equally significant and requiring attention are the development and implementation of policies that target economic and social inequalities, the allocation of resources to achieve gender equality, the design and establishment of the institutional machinery for implementation of policies and monitoring mechanisms for compliance with commitments, both domestic and international. Although some progress has been made with regard to affecting the legislative agendas in Latin America, there is still a way to go to effectively make inroads in parliament to ensure that social transformation takes place that benefits all citizens. Sub regional Parliaments like the Parlacen (Central American Parliament), the Andean Parliament, the Amazonian Parliament and the Indigenous Parliament, and the regional parliament, Parlatino (Latin American Parliament) can also work as important platforms to promote gender equality and the active political participation of women.

The strategic objectives stated in the Beijing Platform for Action provide the basis for concerted efforts toward achieving equal opportunities and equitable access to positions of power for women. Included in the specific goals established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council is having 30 percent women at all decision-making levels. Equality is a democratic value that societies should maintain and nurture; accordingly, developing public policies to achieve gender equality continues to demand considerable attention and action. It is now time to translate legal equality into de facto equality. Without the participation of women in social and economic development, the goal of building inclusive democracies will continue to be elusive.