

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM LEGISLATIVE
GENDER COMMISSIONS AND CAUCUSES



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Preface

The persistent under-representation of women, in both elected and appointed public offices as well as party leadership positions, reveals that challenges must be addressed to achieve gender equality in politics. In Latin America, women remain absent from or under-represented in government and party decision-making positions. They hold a scant 24 per cent of ministerial posts and fewer than 10 per cent of mayoral seats in most countries.¹ Although between 40 and 50 per cent of active party members are women, they hold no more than 30 per cent of main party leadership posts, except in Costa Rica, Honduras and Mexico.²

Although still under-represented in Latin American legislatures, their numbers have been increasing and in 2008 women held 20 per cent of the seats in lower houses or unicameral legislatures.³ Such growth has not been uniform in all countries, and numbers have fluctuated in some. Nor has the increasing number of women parliamentarians always translated into effective initiatives for ensuring that women's interests are adequately represented. Congresswomen have established specific commissions to address gender issues in some countries, while in others more informal groups, such as gender caucuses, address issues of particular interest to women. The extent to which these groups include or engage women parliamentarians varies from country to country, as do their strength and effectiveness.

NDI firmly believes that equitable participation by women in politics and government is essential for building and sustaining democracy. It has made a long-term commitment to working with women worldwide through its various programmes. Since 1985, NDI has organized innovative projects around the world to increase the number and effectiveness of women leaders within political parties and civic organizations, and of women voters and women elected to public office, in recognition that as more women become involved in public life, institutions will better respond to citizens' concerns. To help develop more inclusive political environments, NDI encourages alliances among women of different ideologies and parties, which allow them to support one another in political life regardless of political affiliation. This strategy has led to the creation of various coalitions of women who have worked together for the development and passage of public policies that are critical to advancing gender equality.

Since its founding in 1995, International IDEA has worked in the area of democracy and gender to identify obstacles to women's full political participation. To promote

gender equality in politics, International IDEA fosters debate and the sharing of experiences about the obstacles faced by women, suggesting viable technical solutions to political stakeholders and providing tools that enhance the role of women as political leaders. International IDEA's activities in Latin America involve the creation of knowledge, as well as analyses of and debate about proposals in areas such as electoral reform, political parties and women in parliament. International IDEA believes it is necessary to promote women's participation in parliament and enhance their ability to mainstream gender in their initiatives. Regionally, it has created venues for discussion among parliamentary women's caucuses and has helped countries to create and strengthen such caucuses. With the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), it is carrying out a study to determine the degree to which gender is mainstreamed in the structures, legislation and actions of national parliaments in various countries around the world.

United by a common interest in assisting organizations engaged in political representation, and especially in women's participation, NDI and International IDEA have joined forces on various occasions. Because of the importance of access to information and comparative experiences, in 2007, NDI and International IDEA – along with the IPU, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) – created the International Information Network on Women and Politics (iKNOW Politics),⁴ which now has more than 6000 members in more than 150 countries.

To continue exploring this issue, NDI and International IDEA, in collaboration with the Chamber of Deputies of Mexico, organized a regional conference of women parliamentarians, 'Women Working Together: Promoting Gender Mainstreaming in the Legislature', in Mexico City on 26–28 February 2009. The purpose of the conference was to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices about how women organize effectively in legislatures to promote gender-sensitive legislation.

Twenty-two women deputies and senators from Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay participated in the conference. Round-table discussions identified the challenges women face when they work together in their parliaments, such as the lack of strategies for minimizing competition among themselves, the fact that party and legislative agendas tend to sideline the priorities of gender commissions or caucuses, and the need for cooperation with civil society groups. After analysing the outcomes from the event, the two organizations agreed it would be helpful to jointly develop a best practices guide that would provide information and real-life experiences about how groups of congresswomen have organized to mainstream gender issues in their parliaments.

In this document, NDI and International IDEA have collected and organized information on strategies to better obtain influence in parliaments. We hope this guide is useful and provides ideas that Latin American legislators, both men and women, can use to promote their gender equality agenda more effectively, thus ensuring that gender is a constant element in the debate and agendas, and that it becomes an essential component of all legislation.

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This guide is the result of interest by NDI and International IDEA in collaborating on a document about best practices that would provide Latin American legislators with ideas and experiences to help them organize and successfully promote a gender equality agenda while they are in office.

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Introduction

Political participation by all citizens, men and women, is essential for strengthening democratic systems and institutions that claim to be inclusive and representative.

Although women make up 50 per cent of the world's population, in the political sphere they remain under-represented as political leaders, party leaders, candidates and elected officials. This under-representation is one of the main obstacles to a public agenda that addresses issues of interest to women.

NDI and International IDEA firmly believe that equitable participation by women in politics and government is essential for building and sustaining democracy. If democratic

'In my experience, the fact that I was a leader in congress allowed me to influence certain pieces of legislation and get them onto the committees' daily or weekly agendas'.

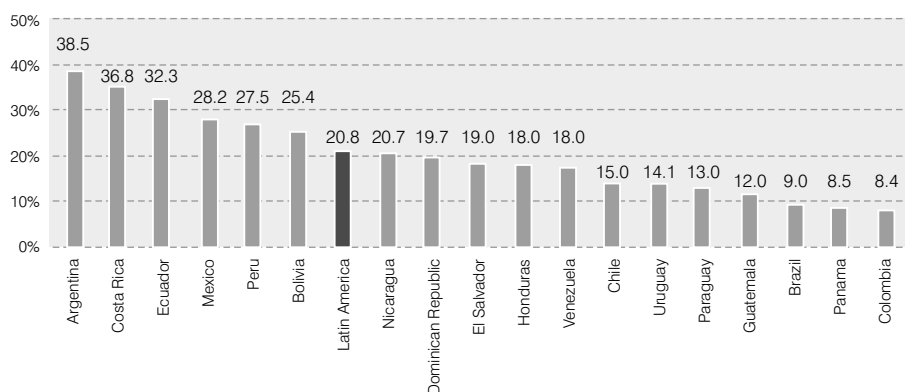
Central American congresswoman
See IPU, Politics: Women's Insight,
2000, pp.30-31

governments are to respond to citizens, they must be truly representative. This means recognizing that women must participate in democratic development processes on an equal footing with men. Women's contributions are crucial for building strong societies.

International norms, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),⁵ the World Action Platform from Beijing⁶ and the Quito Consensus,⁷ promote parity in representation of men and women and highlight the role of legislatures in achieving the gender equity required of all signatory states.

In Latin America, women hold 20 per cent of the seats in the lower houses of congress or unicameral legislatures. The process of increasing women's representation has been accelerated in 12 countries by affirmative action measures, especially the use of electoral quotas.

Graphic 1: Percentage of women in parliaments (lower house or unicameral), February 2010



Source: See Inter-Parliamentary Union (www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm)

The impact of women's participation in various spheres of public life, especially parliament, has become increasingly evident in recent decades. Many examples from across the world show that women can help to ensure that politics are:

More representative, by introducing new issues and different perspectives. Although having more women in elected office does not guarantee that they will represent women's interests, it is an essential first step. Gender issues or matters of particular interest to women, such as domestic violence, sexual and reproductive rights, non-discrimination in the workplace, and childcare policies, which have traditionally been excluded or considered non-priority issues by male legislators, have found a place on legislative agendas through the efforts of women legislators, often with support from women's civil society organizations. Studies in countries such as India, Norway and the United Kingdom have shown that increasing gender equality in government can lead to public policies that are more responsive to women's needs.⁸ Women have also promoted gender mainstreaming in key areas of national policy other than those traditionally considered women's issues, such as peace processes, arms control, financial regulation, the environment and economic policy.

More democratic, by promoting laws that foster gender equality and serve as the basis for the design of public policies that promote a culture that accepts and facilitates women's empowerment. Prominent women can serve as models to encourage citizens to take ownership of their rights and participate more actively in a country's political life. Studies in the United Kingdom have shown that in districts with female representatives, women also seemed to be more active citizens, demonstrating greater political interest and willingness to help in campaigns.⁹

More transparent, because, as some studies indicate, women can be particularly effective at promoting openness and accountability in government.¹⁰ According to one analysis, data from several countries show lower levels of corruption when there are more women in parliament.¹¹

These concerns and an analysis of women's contributions to building more effective representative democracies led us to re-examine the results of the regional conference of women parliamentarians, 'Women Working Together: Promoting Gender Mainstreaming in the Legislature', as well as prior work undertaken by International IDEA and NDI with women parliamentarians from different countries and existing studies, to develop this guide and highlight the importance of defining mechanisms for comparing and understanding what is happening in other countries. This guide has two goals: to provide information about gender commissions and caucuses; and to serve as a tool to help legislators, both male and female, implement best practices for promoting gender equality. It does not pretend to address all mechanisms for mainstreaming gender in parliaments or to serve as an academic study of commissions and caucuses. On the contrary, because one size does not fit all for such groups, the goal is to provide information and ideas about initiatives in which legislators have jointly promoted gender equality in their respective parliaments.

We hope the best practices described in this guide will:

- Provide more detailed information about establishing cross-party venues for dialogue and consensus building.
- Promote discussion and reflection on best practices for the establishment and working of gender commissions and caucuses.
- Inspire legislators to use some of the best practices, adapting them to the needs and processes of their own parliament.

Chapter 1 presents arguments for the organization and participation of women in cross-party legislative venues and describes options for achieving this, highlighting experience from Latin America and a few countries from other regions of the world. Chapter 2 describes experiences and best practices related to gender commissions and caucuses, based on actual cases.

Chapter 1

WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER IN PARLIAMENT: FORMS OF ORGANIZATION

Objective: to provide descriptive information about different ways in which women parliamentarians organize to advance their interests more efficiently.

1. Why do women organize in the legislature?

As is noted in the introduction, it is important that there is a significant number of women in the legislature, because they can influence the issues on the agenda and the draft legislation that is presented. Nonetheless, the presence of women in the legislature does not guarantee changes in the visions and practices of parliaments, which are institutions designed by men and which remain dominated by men in areas including their structure and internal functioning.¹²

In addition, in many Latin American countries, the number of women legislators remains too small to substantially or effectively change the agenda and dynamics of the legislature. This leads us to ask whether it is possible for women to bring about change in the legislature even when they are a minority. How can women legislators have an impact on their parliaments, especially when they are few in number?

Research in various countries around the world show that major changes often depend on the collective efforts of parliamentarians who have decided to work together to promote specific reforms. At the same time, gender commissions and caucuses have expanded their influence in many areas.¹³ When we refer to commissions, we mean those institutionalized legislative groups with functions that include detailed analysis of draft legislation, proposing new policies and laws, issuing opinions and monitoring public administration. When we speak of caucuses, we refer to informal groups of women legislators who channel the women's interests and concerns within parliament. These groups have a variety of functions.

Commissions and caucuses:

- Help define the issues on the political agenda and set priorities, carry out detailed analysis of draft legislation and propose new policies and legislation. They raise public awareness and keep citizens informed.

- Facilitate the participation of civil society organizations in the development of the public and political agenda.
- Act as a safeguard to ensure that affected groups and individuals are aware of any legislation being debated that affects them; in particular, they are a visible and accessible contact point for women on issues that affect them.
- Monitor compliance with legislation and executive branch actions on gender issues.

The work of many gender caucuses goes beyond developing and promoting public policies. They often sponsor programmes, meetings, activities and workshops to help women in parliament become stronger political actors, acquire skills and legislate efficiently, understand and work within internal parliamentary rules, bring about change in male political cultures and practices, and build solidarity and gender awareness. For example:

- The Women's Caucus of Uganda holds workshops for women delegates on speechmaking, building a voter base, forging coalitions, parliamentary procedures and related matters.¹⁴
- In Morocco, the Parliamentary Women's Network organized a workshop to train participants on conflict resolution and negotiating techniques.¹⁵
- In Uruguay, the Bicameral Women's Caucus has held seminars on gender and gender budgeting and has proposed ways to mainstream gender in reforms of criminal and procedural legislation.

The best-practices section of this guide provides more detail about these and other initiatives.

2. What are the options?

Women in legislatures have found organizing across party lines to be useful for advancing issues of interest to them in parliament. Different experiences around the world show that there is no single model of organization. Instead, there are multiple options for structuring the cross-party venues for consensus building.

In their broadest sense, cross-party forums of women legislators comprise a spectrum from formal, structured bodies, such as gender commissions, to informal, possibly less structured bodies, such as gender caucuses. Along the spectrum are many varied permutations of ways to build consensus.

As Table 1 shows, the two models have common elements and differences. For example, commissions tend to be permanent and are part of the organic structure of congress, while caucuses, although they may be recognized by parliamentary leaders, are generally not part of the permanent structure of the legislature.

Table 1 Comparison of main characteristics of commissions and caucuses

Model Characteristic	Commissions	Caucuses
Nature	Tend to be officially chartered bodies within the parliamentary structure. In many cases, they begin as ad hoc commissions.	Tend to be recognized by the legislature, although with a different standing than a commission. Because they are established at the initiative of legislators themselves, their continuity depends on having legislators who are committed to and value such structures.
Purpose	Creation, promotion and oversight of legislative framework to foster gender equality and changes to guarantee more equitable conditions for women in all spheres of public and private life. Their influence on the work of other parliamentary commissions is often limited.	Formed to promote a gender equality agenda in the legislature or to enhance the work of women in congress.
Structure	Replicate the structure established for congress: leadership or coordinating body, vice presidents, technical secretaries, and so on. The leadership selection process may be subject to negotiation among party caucuses.	Very diverse, depending on the criteria and by-laws established by each caucus. In its most basic form, there is usually a spokeswoman. Leadership and leadership selection processes are established internally.
Membership	Cross-party venue. Membership tends to reflect the make-up of congress. The possibility of being a member depends on a decision by the legislator's party to join the commission, as long as the maximum number of members is not exceeded. Mainly women, but with a significant number of men.	Cross-party and even multi-sector venue (including civil society). Formal membership may be automatic or voluntary. Membership is open to all women in parliament. Men tend to participate less than in the commission model. In some cases, former women legislators are invited to participate.
Attributes	Generally has the power to present draft legislation and monitor executive branch public policies on gender equality; often reports on whether a piece of legislation on gender issues should be approved.	Depending on the structure, it may propose draft legislation, although it may not necessarily introduce the legislation in the full legislature. Generally does not issue reports of the sort issued by commissions.
Decision-making processes	By majority, although consensus is generally sought.	By majority or consensus.
Resources	Has a budget allocated by congress, and an administrative staff and infrastructure.	Does not have a set budget. Can establish mechanisms for obtaining contributions from members and may receive assistance from international organizations for activities.

Source: compiled by NDI / IDEA.

It should also be noted that in some countries, women's or gender commissions began as caucuses or special commissions. In Mexico, the Gender and Equality Commission was a special commission during two legislatures, until 2000, when it was established as a standing commission. In Uruguay, one of the first initiatives of the Bicameral Women's Caucus was to request the creation of a Special Gender and Equality Commission in the House of Representatives. Because the caucus was not part of the legislature's institutional structure, the creation of a commission that would allow formal access to legislative processes and channels for interaction and control, within parliament and in the legislative branch and other government bodies, was considered necessary.

This does not mean that caucuses always result in the establishment of a gender commission. In Ecuador, the Specialized Permanent Commission on Women, Children, Youth and the Family was dissolved in July 2009 but a Parliamentary Group for Women's Rights was subsequently created to promote a gender agenda. In some cases, a caucus is formed even though a standing commission already exists in parliament. A gender caucus and a gender commission are neither mutually exclusive nor contradictory; they are complementary and act in accordance with their respective strengths and limitations.

Table 2 Comparison of commissions and caucuses, by country

Country	Type of Parliament	Commission	Caucus
Argentina	Bicameral	Chamber of Deputies: Commission on Family, Women, Children and Adolescents Senate: Population and Human Development Commission	Women's Caucus
Bolivia	Bicameral	Chamber of Deputies: Gender and Generational Affairs Committee i	Union of Parliamentary Women of Bolivia (Umpabol)
Brazil	Bicameral	Chamber of Deputies: Permanent Commission on Social Security and Family ii	Women's Caucus
Colombia	Bicameral	Senate: Seventh Commission on the Public Servant Statute, Public Servant Wages and Benefits, Trade Union Organizations, Social Security, Sports, Health, Housing, Women's Issues and Family iii Chamber of Representatives: Seventh Commission on the Public Servant Statute, Public Servant Wages and Benefits, Trade Union Organizations, Social Security, Sports, Health, Housing, Women's Issues and Family.	Ad hoc Commission on Gender Equality, Social, Political and Labor Rights, Mental Health and Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health iv
Costa Rica	Unicameral	Special Permanent Women's Commission v	None
Cuba	Unicameral	Commission on Youth, Children and Equal Rights for Women vi	None
Chile	Bicameral	Chamber of Deputies: Family Commission vii	None

Country	Type of Parliament	Commission	Caucus
Ecuador	Unicameral	No	Parliamentary Group for Women's Rights (men and women)
El Salvador	Unicameral	Commission on Family, Women and Children viii	None
Guatemala	Unicameral	Women's Commission ix	Women's Caucus
Honduras	Unicameral	Ordinary Women's Commission x	None
Mexico	Bicameral	Chamber of Deputies: Gender and Equality Commission xi Senate: Gender and Equality Commission	Bicameral Commission Women's Parliament of Mexico xii
Nicaragua	Unicameral	Permanent Commission on Women, Children, Youth and Family xiii	None
Panama	Unicameral	Permanent Commission on Women, Children's Rights, Youth and Family xiv	None
Paraguay	Bicameral	Chamber of Deputies: Social Equality and Gender Commission Senate: Permanent Equality, Gender and Social Development Commission xv	None
Peru	Unicameral	Women and Social Development Commission xvi	Round Table of Peruvian Parliamentary Women (MMPP)
Dominican Republic	Bicameral	Chamber of Deputies: Permanent Gender Equality Commission Senate: Permanent Commission on Family Affairs and Gender Equality xvii	None
Uruguay	Bicameral	Chamber of Deputies: Special Gender and Equality Commission xviii	Bicameral Women's Caucus (BBF)
Venezuela	Unicameral	Permanent Family, Women and Youth Commission xix	None

Source: Compiled by NDI and International IDEA.

A. Commissions: purpose, structure, membership and operations

Parliamentary commissions are institutionally established working groups that are responsible for debating and providing information about draft legislation or other proposals submitted to them. Traditionally, commissions were established to address thematic areas set out in the internal constitution or rules of a country's parliament.

The roles of commissions vary somewhat from country to country. The main ones include:

- Reporting on laws and proposing legislative initiatives.
- Legislative oversight to ensure accountability, which may include the power to call ministers or other government officials to appear in parliament, to convene public hearings, and to offer critiques and alternative proposals.

— A budget for the commission's activities may be established, based on its work plan.

In the past decade, commissions have been created by Latin American parliaments to address gender issues. The name varies from country to country. As Table 2 shows, in some countries they are called women's commissions, in others they are gender commissions and in others such issues are addressed in commissions on the family and children.

The work of the commissions mainly focuses on specific legislation on women's issues and, to a lesser extent, the adoption of gender equality criteria in other legislation. These parliamentary bodies have varied tasks and there is no single pattern or role. In general, they not only focus on drafting legislation and proposing reforms to current legislation, but also analyse bills presented by legislators, propose modifications to their content or wording and provide information about them to the full parliament. They also develop contacts with the political and social sectors affected by such laws. There is a steadily increasing awareness in civil society of the important role played by these commissions, and civic groups often approach them with suggestions.¹⁶

Unlike gender caucuses (with some exceptions, such as Ecuador), commissions tend to include men. According to a report published in 2008 by the Inter-Parliamentary Union,¹⁷ which includes a survey of 93 gender and women's commissions worldwide, among 50 per cent of the commissions that address gender issues, approximately 50 per cent of the members are men.

B. Caucuses: purpose, structure, membership and operations

In some countries, female legislators and women who are active in politics have chosen a model that is less formal than a gender commission. Like commissions, gender caucuses are cross-party venues for consensus building, but they usually do not fall under the legislature's internal rules. Often legislators who decide to form a gender caucus can determine its structure, decision-making mechanisms, integration, operation and specific areas of activity.

This flexibility has resulted in the creation of varied examples of working models. In Colombia or Uruguay, for example, the caucus is bicameral and includes all titular female legislators in both houses, while Argentina has a unicameral Senate caucus.

The Parliamentary Women's Caucus of Malawi has a president, vice president and programme officers for each sub-committee, while the Parliamentary Women's Forum

of Morocco has only a president and representatives of the agencies from which it is composed. In Peru, the Round Table of Peruvian Parliamentary Women (*Mesa de Mujeres Parlamentarias Peruanas*, MMPP), created in 2006, consists of women legislators from all parliamentary party groups and they elect the group's president annually. In Uruguay, the Bicameral Women's Caucus is a horizontal coordinating body without formal officers, although informally designated legislators serve as its spokespersons.

Membership can also be highly diverse. The examples mentioned above are of caucuses that consist exclusively of women legislators, but others, such as the Association of Parliamentary Women of Uganda, allow men to participate as honorary members. The same is true in Ecuador, where the Parliamentary Group for Women's Rights consists of male and female legislators, and has a coordinating group made up of seven female legislators and one male legislator. The Political Women's Caucus of Indonesia and the Network of Parliamentary Women and Civil Society in Afghanistan include not only women in parliament, but also representatives of civil society organizations, while the Association of Women Legislators and Former Legislators of El Salvador (*Asociación de Legisladoras y ex Legisladoras de El Salvador*, ASPARLEXSAL) includes both past and present women parliamentarians. The same is true of the Association of Parliamentary and Former Parliamentary Women (*Asociación de Parlamentarias y ex Parlamentarias*, APARLEXPAN) in Panama.

These examples indicate that the structure and scope of a caucus are determined by its members.

C. A third way

Although this guide focuses on commission and caucus models, there is a third model for promoting women's participation and influence in the legislative branch of government. In Sweden, for example, legislators have rejected the idea of creating a structure specializing in gender and equality issues. This rejection was based on the perception that commissions or caucuses act as 'ghettoes' that marginalize women's interests by formally complying with the legislature's obligation to include gender, but do not necessarily ensure in practice that initiatives receive thorough, integral treatment or that gender is mainstreamed in legislation.¹⁸

Instead, the Swedish Parliament has chosen to mainstream gender in all parliamentary commissions. Gender equality issues were gradually assigned to specific parliamentary commissions, such as the Health and Welfare Commission or the Justice Commission,

taking into consideration each issue and the commission to which the activities correspond. This practice is not, however, formally established in the rules of the Swedish Parliament.

Although this model has some advantages, it also poses risks, because it depends greatly on the presence of women and men with high levels of gender awareness and the necessary skills for including the gender perspective and analysis in legislative proposals. Gender mainstreaming may be lost or diluted when many proposals are under discussion, especially if it competes with other priority areas. Analysis of the conditions in which the Swedish model emerged reveals that specialized commissions were less necessary because of the high percentage of women (47 per cent) in the Swedish Parliament and the country's long history of progress on gender issues.¹⁹

One, still incipient, example in Latin America is the Ecuadorian National Assembly's Legislative Technical Unit. During the restructuring of the legislature, it was decided that a Women's Commission was no longer necessary because it made gender a separate issue instead of mainstreaming it. To mainstream gender in all legislation, and to take into account the large number of women in the National Assembly (32 per cent), many of whom are committed to gender issues, the decision was made to create a permanent technical unit to report on the gender impact of all legislation introduced in parliament and review the language used in the legislation to ensure that it is not discriminatory. The unit's reports are technical and non-binding, and the unit consists of experts rather than legislators.

D. A mixed model? The benefits of having a gender caucus even when a gender commission exists

Once a legislative branch has a body with certain constitutional and regulatory powers for promoting a gender equality agenda, the question of whether women legislators also need other cross-party consensus-building avenues arises.

The experiences of Uruguay and Peru indicate that a gender caucus adds value to the work done by commissions, especially when effective mechanisms for coordination between the two groups exist. In the Uruguayan Parliament, the five female legislators who participate in the Special Gender and Equality Commission are also active members of the Bicameral Women's Caucus, which enables them to promote initiatives on which consensus has been built within the caucus.

Experiences from Latin America and other regions indicate that caucuses can complement the efforts of a gender commission, adding value by:

1. Facilitating frank and direct communication among women legislators, transcending partisan interests, especially on draft legislation related to women's rights and social policy.
2. Creating a forum for addressing the discrimination that most women legislators face because of their gender.
3. Facilitating gender mainstreaming by including and gaining the support of women who do not serve on the commission.
4. Making women more visible as a group, both within parliament and in the public eye. This can be an excellent way to facilitate assistance and training for any women legislators that may have less experience on gender issues, through workshops on useful tools for legislative work, round-table discussions on issues of national interest, or mentoring programmes. This provides an opportunity to 'pass on the torch' or ensure the continuation of the work of outgoing women legislators.
5. Offering greater autonomy and freedom, as more flexible forums than commissions allow the members to develop less constrained work and dialogue dynamics than those established by internal parliamentary rules.
6. Facilitating the establishment of networks, which can include civil society organizations, since they are not bound by the internal rules of parliament.²⁰
7. Promoting the development of a joint agenda on issues around which consensus has been built, so legislators can support them in their own commissions.

There are examples from Latin America of the benefits of having a parliamentary group of women. In Brazil, for example, the women's caucus often votes as a bloc. By doing so, it has promoted legislation to establish a gender quota for candidacies in all offices subject to proportional representation and a law on violence against women. The caucus has also mobilized to ensure that the Brazilian budget included funds for social programmes and gender equality initiatives. It played a decisive role in ensuring that the 1988 Brazilian Constitution included women's rights, through a provision known as the 'lipstick clause'.²¹

In Uruguay, the Bicameral Women's Caucus worked from 2000 to 2002 to approve a law against domestic violence and a law that would allow all Uruguayan women to take a day off from work for their annual gynaecological exam.²² In Colombia, the joint efforts of the Women's Caucus and grassroots women's organizations, along with the commitment and support of other women in parliament, was crucial to winning approval for a comprehensive law on women's right to a life without violence.

3. Organization of collective work: How to achieve the best organizational structure

As demonstrated above, collective work ranges from structured formats to much more flexible forums. Although the more formal structures may facilitate efficient management of gender issues in parliament, through commission functions that range from promoting initiatives to monitoring government actions, the flexibility offered by gender caucuses allows women in the legislature to determine the model that is most useful and productive for them. Regardless of the format that is chosen, however, certain factors should be considered when establishing a parliamentary women's group:

1. Determine the mission, vision and goals. Whether it is part of a formal commission or an informal caucus, it is important that the legislators have a common vision and mission, common goals and a shared view of the work they expect to do together to advance the gender equality agenda. For a legislative gender caucus, these definitions should be established at the beginning of the process of establishing the group. In the case of a commission, this discussion will take place once the members are determined, so they can establish a common agenda. For example, in 2006, in the Gender and Equity Commission of the Mexican Chamber of Deputies, after a highly competitive electoral process the women legislators presented their issues of interest to their party caucuses and then decided to work together based on points of consensus, such as gender-sensitive budgets or guarantees for women in the armed forces.
2. Analyse the political implications. It is necessary to consider the political context and how it will affect or be affected by the group's structure. It is also important to analyse how other legislators and political and social stakeholders will perceive the group, taking into account the group's diversity and representation.
3. Define internal work dynamics. One key factor in the consolidation of the group is a clear definition of internal rules for its work, including such aspects as frequency of meetings, selection and rotation of leadership, decision-making processes and their implementation, designation of spokespersons, and so on.

In Costa Rica, the Women's Commission of the Legislative Assembly works by consensus. Advisers to the commission members work together beforehand to ensure that the members can approve draft legislation by consensus. In Peru, the Women and Social Development Commission develops an annual work plan establishing its goals and the issues to be addressed during the legislative session. It meets once a week, all the legislators on the commission participate, and other legislators interested in the day's agenda can speak but not vote.

In Uruguay, the Bicameral Women's Caucus works on the basis of a concept of 'unity' and has no officers or internal hierarchy. The position to be taken on gender issues is based not on consensus, but on respect for the differences and constraints of each member within the framework of a shared conviction, with the goal of placing these issues on the legislative agenda for discussion. This strategy has enabled the caucus to overcome challenges that could have caused division, such as the presentation or discussion of draft legislation on issues including quotas or abortion, about which all members do not agree.

In Malawi, the caucus meets at least once during each legislative period, on the first Wednesday of the session, but the caucus president can call additional meetings. When the legislature is not in session, the president can also call a meeting with the approval of other members. With support from NDI, the caucus completed plans for its structure and surveyed its members about potential priority areas. Those identified by the survey were widows and inheritance, child support and custody, and marriage and divorce. These results allowed the caucus to focus on the issues that were most important to its members and to reach consensus on issues.²³

To give women in Nepal more opportunities to reach leadership positions, presidents of the Women's Caucus are elected for one-year terms. The caucus president and vice president cannot be from the same party. Other elected officers include the secretary, treasurer and public relations officer. The Nepali caucus does not have a legislative or meeting agenda because its members have decided not to focus on developing proposals for legislation. NDI has assisted the caucus with seminars and programmes to help the caucus members develop their skills and their voter base.²⁴

Various countries have cross-party groups of women legislators that help strengthen the presence and voice of women in legislative bodies. There are also multi-sector groups in which representatives of civil society organizations participate, giving the legislators more contact with citizens and issues of interest to them.

The Parliamentary Forum of Women of Rwanda has five governance structures. *The General Assembly* is the highest-ranking and includes all women legislators in the forum. *The Executive Committee* consists of nine women legislators and is responsible for forum management. The third structure consists of five *Permanent Committees*: women's empowerment and capacity building; advocacy and association with other groups; gender and legislation; monitoring of public policy; gender strategies and budget; and research, documentation and technology. The fourth structure is the *Auditing*

Committee, which consists of three women legislators who are responsible for the forum's financial affairs, ensuring that the decisions of the General Assembly are implemented, and resolving conflicts that may arise within the forum. The last structure is the *Executive Secretariat*, which is responsible for day-to-day forum management.²⁵

In Finland, where there had not previously been a formal women's caucus in parliament, in 1991 women legislators established the Network of Women Deputies of the Parliament of Finland. There has always been cooperation among women in the legislature, and the network has given this greater structure. It organizes seminars and meetings and coordinates cooperation with legislators from other countries. The network's activities are managed by an executive committee elected annually by the General Assembly. Each party caucus is also represented in the network by one experienced women legislator and one newly elected representative. The president and vice president of the network hold their positions for one year, and their selection rotates among the party caucuses.²⁶

In Uruguay, women legislators in the Bicameral Women's Caucus maintain close ties with the Network of Political Women, a cross-party coordinating group of active women party members who hold office at all levels of the political system. In 2009, they organized a conference with the women elected to participate in their parties' national conventions. This cooperation has been crucial for raising awareness among women politicians who are not necessarily committed to gender issues, building their capacities as political stakeholders, and developing common visions of the country's political agenda on gender equality.

Although there are many and diverse experiences of women's commissions and caucuses, it is possible to identify best practices that have allowed them to overcome obstacles that might have derailed their activities. These are discussed in chapter 2.

Chapter 2

BEST PRACTICES: IDEAS FOR GENDER WORK ACROSS PARTY LINES

Objective: To propose best practices that enable women legislators to overcome obstacles and more effectively promote gender mainstreaming in the legislature.

CHALLENGE: TO ESTABLISH CONSENSUS ON ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

BEST PRACTICES

The Network of Women Deputies in the Finnish Parliament organizes informative luncheons to foster debate in parliament about important current issues. Cabinet ministers are sometimes invited to these events.

- Foster personal relationships among women leaders in informal and social venues (such as conferences, activities, workshops, etc.).
- Reactivate the agenda established by the signing or ratification of international conventions and commitments. Gender commissions or similar bodies should help ensure enforcement of CEDAW and use it to raise awareness and establish gender equality legislation. Women legislators can also identify discrepancies between legal commitments and the implementation of such laws and policies, through oversight of international norms such as CEDAW and the Quito Consensus.
- Base debate on research and concrete data, which implies agreeing on the sources of information to be used and seeking technical advisers to provide these inputs for political dialogue.
- Establish internal mechanisms and procedures to streamline communication among members, decision making and consensus building.
- Define procedures for scaling up the discussion of issues.
- Define the range of action for the body, agreeing to table issues or initiatives that are strongly tied to ideological or partisan positions.

When election conflict erupted between two of the three main political forces in Mexico in 2006, the Gender and Equity Commission decided not to carry the conflict over into its work, and its members devoted several sessions to defining a common agenda based on issues on which the different parties agreed, establishing that no issue tied to ideological positions would be taken before the commission.

While the Namibian Parliament's Gender Commission addresses gender issues from a partisan political perspective, the Women's Caucus plays the essential role of analysing, from a general perspective that sets aside political differences, issues such as the budget, CEDAW and its implications for legislation, women's rights, and oversight of enforcement of laws on gender issues. The group presents proposals and makes collective statements in the name of women, and disseminates information about relevant legislation to the public.

See IPU, "Women in National Parliaments"

CHALLENGE: DEVELOPING VIABLE, ATTRACTIVE PROPOSALS AND ADVOCACY WITHIN PARTY CAUCUSES

BEST PRACTICES

- Define moments for clarifying and building consensus on a shared vision of conceptual issues related to the gender equality agenda.
- Establish communication with government institutions, academics and civil society organizations as well as experts in various fields to develop stronger proposals.
- Define strategies for contacting, convincing and/or gaining the commitment of caucus members' party leaders and other party members.
- Include in discussions and decision-making groups men who recognize the importance of women's political participation.
- Use tools to systematically map key stakeholders and identify windows of opportunity.
- Develop and implement communication strategies for placing gender issues on the public agenda and making the cross-party group's work more visible.
- Generate support and public pressure on issues of interest to the group, involving women who have a high public profile at the national level.
- Establish contact with legislators from other countries and international organizations in order to gain international support for proposals.

In Ecuador, a technical support team has been formed to develop specific proposals for mainstreaming gender or including gender in legislative initiatives and presenting them to the Parliamentary Group for Women's Rights, the members of which subsequently present these proposals during debate in the legislature or in reports drafted as part of legislative procedures.

- Identify legislators from other countries who, because they are members of ideologically related parties, can generate an impact at the international level to encourage their parties to support these positions.

The Ad hoc committee in the Colombian parliament promoted forums around the country to identify, interconnect and enhance actions for the implementation of the Law for Women's Right to a Life Free of Violence in departmental and municipal governments. The committee therefore not only worked for the approval and promulgation of the law, but also continued efforts to ensure its implementation by strengthening ties with women and other social stakeholders around the country, decentralizing its activities.

CHALLENGE: ENSURING THE ABILITY TO CREATE A SOCIAL SUPPORT BASE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL OF PROPOSALS

BEST PRACTICES

In Uruguay, the Bicameral Women's Caucus prepares annual and five-year reports on its activities to ensure accountability. In 2008, with support from international agencies, the 'Female Parliament' web page was created as part of the official Uruguayan Parliament website, as a platform for promoting Uruguay's female legislators and their activities. In that year, the caucus also conducted a citizen survey with the slogan, 'Women, your vote has a voice', in which Uruguayan women were invited to submit their concerns, demands and proposals with a commitment that they would be communicated to the parties, which would use them as the basis for setting the agenda for the next legislative period.

- Develop regional or local chapters or establish relations with similar groups to disseminate information about advocacy efforts and extend support networks outside parliament.
- Develop mechanisms for frequent contact with grassroots movements and organizations interested in gender issues. Through mutually beneficial relationships with civil society, it is possible to obtain information, mobilize groups and even gain voter support for the re-election of women legislators (if this is allowed by law). Gender commissions and caucuses also often offer an entry point to civil society groups seeking to increase their influence in parliament.

- Develop awareness-raising and education programmes as well as mechanisms for accountability before the public and the media to change public opinion about the role of women in politics in general and in the legislative branch of government in particular.
- Establish alliances with women's movements to mobilize public opinion.

The Women's Caucus of Brazil worked with the Feminist Centre for Research and Advice (*Centro Feminista para la Investigación y la Asesoría*) to win approval for several laws advancing women's rights, including laws on gender violence and sexual harassment, women's health and maternity benefits

See UNIFEM, *Who Answers to Women?* chapter 2, p.27.

With the creation of the Panamanian Women's Political Training School, sponsored by the Association of Women Legislators and Former Legislators of Panama (*Asociación de Parlamentarias y ex Parlamentarias de la República de Panamá - APARLESPA*), two international certificate programmes in election campaign strategies and skills for women have been organized, allowing newly elected deputies to develop skills for increasing their influence in the assembly and present draft legislation that has a direct impact on gender policy.

- Periodically send information to media directors, political editors, journalists and columnists, so the caucus's proposals are included on the media agenda.
- Develop rankings, specific measurements or monitoring initiatives that show the public the positions of different parties and political sectors on proposals made by the women's caucus.

CHALLENGE: MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN ALL LEGISLATIVE WORK AND MORE BROADLY, IN GOVERNMENT POLICY AND OPERATIONS

BEST PRACTICES

- Coordinate the support of other commissions. One way of doing this is to hold hearings with other commissions to include gender in the discussion. For example, it is very important to coordinate with the Budget Commission to present gender issues during budget debates.²⁷

In Ecuador, assembly officers have been included in the parliamentary group, which consists of the first vice president and presidents of legislative commissions. Meetings have also included the president of the assembly, the second vice president and other presidents of legislative commissions.

In Mexico, when the 2009 budget was being debated, women legislators on the Gender and Equity Commission contacted and formed an alliance with women members of the Finance Commission to channel proposals for allocating resources to programmes for women.

In recent years, the Equality Commission of Spain's Chambers of Deputies has won approval for the Equality Law and the Integral Law against Gender Violence, as well as a provision that, as of 2008, all approved legislation, including the budget, must include a gender impact report prepared by the executive branch. These gains were due not only to the increased number of women in the legislature, but also to the political will of male and female legislators interested in gender issues and equality, which led other groups in parliament to support initiatives promoted by the Equality Commission.

In Bolivia, thanks to the efforts of the Chamber of Deputies' Gender and Generational Affairs Committee, the legislative agenda is developed in parliament in coordination with civil society and the chamber's Human Rights Commission. Because this agenda included laws that are priorities for women, work was also done at the national level to disseminate information and create opportunities for discussion and consensus building.

- Use the international normative and legal framework to promote the creation of national structures to help obtain commitments on gender equality.
- Establish alliances with ombudspersons. Ombudsperson offices can offer legislative advice because many have units specializing in women's rights. In most countries, these offices present annual or thematic reports, which provide input for development of legislation.
- Coordination with universities and human rights groups. Although these organizations have not always mainstreamed gender in their work, in the area of human rights they can help to position women's issues not as secondary matters but as crucial structural issues for society.

This chapter demonstrates that women in legislatures face multiple challenges. We have examined some of the most common with insights on how they have been addressed. The conclusions explore these experiences more fully, indicating points to consider when working in commissions and caucuses.

Conclusions

The experiences described above demonstrate that women's collective efforts in the legislature are crucial not only because of their impact on public policies that effectively respond to citizens' demands and interests, but also because of their effect on the consolidation and progress of women's leadership. Nonetheless, cross-party work within the legislative branch faces many challenges: building consensus while maintaining equilibrium between commitment to gender issues and party visions; keeping gender issues on the public agenda; and creating a sustainable critical mass of women legislators committed to advancing a gender equality agenda.

While models must be tailored to the national context, the following general considerations should be kept in mind:

1. Reaching agreement on a minimum set of basic points included in international conventions can be a useful starting point.
2. When placing issues on the agenda, it is crucial to have hard data, so the proposals are not seen simply as the opinions of a group of women who see themselves as "victims", but as the views of political stakeholders who bring issues of interest to citizens – in this case, women's issues, which must no longer be marginalized – to the public agenda.
3. It is much more effective to build alliances and have support from male politicians or men from other fields.
4. In a winning formula, the women's caucus is not simply a forum for coordination and alliances within the legislature, but develops relationships with other women in public office as well as territorial and sub-regional organizations to channel their demands and proposals.
5. Legislators' day-to-day work tends to be exhausting and takes up all of their time and that of their teams. It is therefore helpful to find a person or team that can work permanently on caucus affairs, preparing technical input, so that legislators can debate them and place them on the political agenda.

6. It is always preferable to establish a small number of strategic actions per legislative period, rather than trying to address an extensive agenda, since most women legislators do not work only on women's issues.

Women in legislatures worldwide have used diverse practices to make progress on priority issues and decrease the gender gaps in their countries. This should serve as an incentive to increase the number of women in parliaments and support their efforts so they can propose actions that ensure the continuation of the achievements of their predecessors.

Finally, we invite women legislators to continue to share their success stories and the lessons they have learned in their efforts to promote issues of interest to them in the legislature.

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Notes

- ¹ See Llanos and Sample (2008a), pp. 10–11.
- ² See Llanos and Sample (2008b), p. 21.
- ³ Inter-Parliamentary Union, (2008), pp. 14–15.
- ⁴ iKNOW Politics was established to increase the number of women participating in political life and help them enhance their effectiveness. It has created a virtual forum for access to resources, sharing of experiences, dialogue and the creation of knowledge about political participation. iKNOW Politics brings together women from around the world who are dedicated to politics, offering them valuable resources, advice and the opportunity to share interests and experiences. For more information see <<http://www.iknowpolitics.org/es>>.
- ⁵ On 18 December 1979, the United Nations General Assembly approved the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, which took effect on 3 September 1981. The convention is the most basic and broadest document on women's rights and establishes an action plan by which states guarantee that women enjoy those rights. See <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/sconvention.htm>>.
- ⁶ The Action Platform, approved unanimously with the Beijing Declaration at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, is a plan to strengthen the role of women. It defines a series of strategic objectives and measures to be adopted no later than 2000 by governments, the international community, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to eliminate obstacles to women's progress. See <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/reports/platesp.htm>>. Commitments made by countries at the Tenth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in Quito, Ecuador, to reduce inequality between women and men in various areas, including politics, economics, work, peace and security, and recognition of human rights. See <<http://www.eclac.cl/cgi-bin/getprod.asp?xml=/publicaciones/xml/9/29489/P29489.xml&xsl=/mujer/tpl/p9f.xsl&base=/mujer/tpl/top-bottom.xsl>>. UNIFEM (2009), pp. 27–29. For an example in Latin America see Johnson (2006), pp. 173–198.
- ⁹ See Norris (2004), <<http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/news/experts>>.
- ¹⁰ See 'El perfil de gestión de las mujeres en los gobiernos locales', pp. 3–4.
- ¹¹ Dollar, Fisman and Gatti (1999).
- ¹² See Shvedova (2006).
- ¹³ IPU (2008), pp. 63–73.
- ¹⁴ Tripp (2001), p. 150.
- ¹⁵ NDI, 'Women's Caucus Report' (2003) in NDI (n.d.), p. 1.
- ¹⁶ See García Prince, pp. 15–17.
- ¹⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union, (2008), p. 69.
- ¹⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, (2008), p. 69.
- ¹⁹ Sweden ranks first in both Social Watch's annual study, 'Gender Equity Index, 2008' and the World Economic Forum's study on gender and equality, 'Global Gender Gap Report, 2007'.
- ²⁰ Successful legislation that advances women's rights has been the result of mutual support not only within the legislature, but also from government officials, civil society activists and women in the judiciary, the media and academia. See García Prince, p. 20.
- ²¹ For more information about the women's caucus in Brazil see Marx, Borner and Caminotti (2007).
- ²² Castellanos (2006), in NDI (n.d.), p. 4.

²³ 'Women's Caucus of Parliament Terms of Reference' (no date), in NDI (n.d.), p. 2.

²⁴ Hesse, (1997), in NDI (n.d.), p. 3.

²⁵ Rwandan Women Parliamentarians Forum (2007).

²⁶ NDI-Morocco, 'Information Seminar on Women Parliamentarian's Groups'.

²⁷ Gender-sensitive budgeting reflects acknowledgement of the different needs, interests and situations of men and women in society, as well as the underlying inequalities that stem from these, and allocates resources to address them. It also recognizes men's and women's differentiated contributions, paid and unpaid, to the production of goods and services, as well as human labour, and takes these into account in allocating resources. Access to data broken down by sex and to budget projections is crucial during these processes. See the presentation on gender-sensitive budgeting by the UNIFEM Andean Region, 'Presupuestos Sensibles al Género', p. 6., available at <http://www.unifemandina.org/un_archives/Power%20Point.pdf>.

Appendix

Bibliographic sources for comparative table of commissions and caucuses, by country

- i Bolivia. Senate: <http://www.senado.bo/sitioweb/comisiones.php>
Chamber of Representatives: <http://www.diputados.bo/Default.aspx?tabid=364>
- ii Brazil. Chamber of Deputies: <http://www2.camara.gov.br/comissoes/cssf/membros>
- iii Colombia. Senate: <http://www.senado.gov.co/>
- iv Colombia is an interesting case. There is only one solid caucus, but there is no specific women's commission. Although Colombia had an "ad hoc bicameral commission for the defense of women's rights in Colombia," it stopped meeting "failed" in late 2008 because of legal difficulties. Since then, various political stakeholders have been working on a proposal for a Parliamentary Women's Rights Commission and a Legal Commission for Women's Equality. Source: <http://www.analitica.com/mujeranalitica/noticias/8751331.asp>. Colombian Senate. Noticias 2008 http://201.245.176.98/prontus_senado/site/artic/20080410/pags/20080410184012.html
- v Costa Rica. <http://www.asamblea.go.cr/comisiones/mujer.htm>
- vi Cuba. National Assembly of the People's Power (attached): <http://www.asanac.gov.cu/>
- vii Chile. Chamber of Deputies: http://www.camara.cl/trabajamos/comision_portada.aspx?prmID=415
- viii El Salvador. <http://www.asamblea.gob.sv/ComisionesLegislativas/Permanentes/FamiliaMujerNinez.aspx>
- ix Guatemala. Congress: http://www.congreso.gob.gt/gt/comision_1.asp?id=20
- x Honduras. National Congress: <http://www.congreso.gob.hn/comisiondelamujer.htm>
- xi Mexico. Senate: <http://www.senado.gov.do/wfilemaster/Ficha.aspx?IdExpediente=10021&numeropagina=1&ContExpedientes=0&Coleccion=55>
Deputies: http://sitl.diputados.gob.mx/LXI_leg/integrantes_de_comisionlxi.php?comt=20
- xii <http://www.consortio.org.mx/parlamentos/2004/convocatoria.pdf>

- xiii Nicaragua. http://www.asamblea.gob.ni/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=546&Itemid=194&limit=1&limitstart=10
- xiv Panama. National Assembly: http://www.asamblea.gob.pa/actualidad/lista_comisiones_2009.pdf
- xv Paraguay. http://www.congreso.gov.py/silpy/main.php?pagina=por_comisiones&paginaResultado=resultado_consulta&tipoConsulta=1&sCamara=S&sComision=17&sOpcion=0&txtFechaDesde=&txtFechaHasta=
- xvi Peru. http://www.congreso.gob.pe/comisiones/2004/mujer/plan_trabajo.htm
- xvii Dominican Republic. <http://www.senado.gov.do/wfilemaster/Ficha.aspx?IdExpediente=10021&numeropagina=1&ContExpedientes=0&Coleccion=55>
- xviii Uruguay. Deputies: <http://www.parlamento.gub.uy/forms2/asest2.asp?EnMemoria=s&Cuerpo=D&Comision=921>
- xix Venezuela: Commissions: http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_sobi2&catid=50046&Itemid=39

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

Founded in 1983, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a non-profit international organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., with offices in more than 70 countries. Its mission is to promote and strengthen democracy. Through a worldwide network of volunteer experts, NDI offers technical assistance to leaders of political parties and civil society organizations that promote democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with supporters of democracy in every region of the world to strengthen political and civic organizations, monitor elections, promote citizen participation, and ensure openness and accountability in government.

Democracy depends on legislatures that represent citizens and oversee the executive branch, independent judiciaries that safeguard the rule of law, transparent and responsible political parties and elections in which voters freely choose their representatives. Acting as a catalyst, NDI supports institutions and processes that enable democracy to flourish.

NDI's work mainly focuses on:

Forming and strengthening civic and political organizations: NDI helps create stable, well-organized, broadly based institutions that are the foundation of active civic life. Democracy depends on these mediating institutions, which create bonds between citizens and government and among themselves to offer channels for participation in public policy.

Promoting free and fair elections: NDI promotes open, democratic elections; studies and makes recommendations about electoral codes for political parties and governments; and offers technical assistance to political parties and civic groups seeking to organize voter education campaigns and election monitoring programmes. A world leader in election monitoring, NDI has organized international delegations and collaborated with national organizations to observe elections in dozens of countries, helping to ensure that results at the ballot box reflect the will of the people.

Supporting openness and accountability: NDI responds in solidarity to requests from leaders of governments, parliaments, political parties and civil society groups seeking advice on issues such as civilian-military relations, legislative procedures and communication with

voters. NDI also works with legislatures and local governments that are seeking to operate more professionally and transparently and respond more effectively to citizens.

International cooperation is vital for promoting effective, efficient democracy and demonstrates to emerging democracies that while autocratic governments are inherently isolated and fear the outside world, democracies have allies and are part of an international system of solidarity. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., and with offices in every region of the world, NDI complements its staff members' extensive skills with volunteer experts from around the world, many of whom are veterans of the fight for democracy in their own countries, who contribute valuable points of view about the development of democracy.

International IDEA

What is International IDEA?

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy around the world. Its goal is to strengthen democratic institutions and processes. International IDEA acts as a catalyst for democracy building by providing knowledge, skills, experience and a platform for debate about issues. It works with policy makers, donor governments, United Nations agencies and organizations, regional organizations and other institutions dedicated to democracy building.

What does International IDEA do?

Democracy building is complex and involves many areas, including constitutions, electoral systems, political parties, legislative norms, judiciaries, central and local governments, and formal and traditional government structures. International IDEA is dedicated to these issues and offers those who participate in the democracy-building process:

- knowledge in the form of manuals, databases, websites and networks of experts;
- policy proposals to encourage debate and action on democracy; and
- assistance with democratic reforms, in response to specific requests from countries.

Work areas

International IDEA's most important areas of experience are:

Constitution-building processes. A constitutional process can lay the groundwork for peace and development or sow the seeds of conflict. International IDEA provides knowledge and formulates policy proposals for constitution building that is truly national, sensitive to gender and conflict prevention, and responsive to national priorities.

Electoral processes. Election design and management has a major impact on the entire political system. International IDEA seeks to ensure professional, independent election management, adapt electoral systems and build public trust in the electoral process.

Political parties. Political parties form an essential link between voters and the government, but surveys throughout the world show little public trust in these organizations. International IDEA analyses their functioning, public financing, management and relationship with citizens.

Democracy and gender. International IDEA recognizes that for democracies to be truly democratic, women – who make up more than half the world’s population – must be represented on an equal footing with men. International IDEA develops tools and resources for promoting women’s participation and representation in political life.

Where does International IDEA work?

International IDEA works worldwide. It is headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden, and has offices in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Women make up 50 per cent of the world's population. In the political arena, however, the percentage of female political leaders, party leaders, candidates and elected officials is far smaller. In Latin America, women hold only 20 per cent of the seats in lower houses of congress or unicameral legislatures. In light of this imbalance, gender commissions and caucuses have been established in congresses in Latin America and other regions of the world in an effort to respond to women's needs and interests.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) have drawn up this guide because equitable participation by women in politics and government is essential to building and sustaining democracy. Based on the experiences of gender commissions and caucuses, this guide is designed to serve as a tool to help legislators develop best practices for gender equality.

International IDEA

International IDEA is an intergovernmental organization with 25 member countries. The Institute supports democratic institutions and processes worldwide by providing resources to strengthen capacities, developing policy proposals and supporting democratic reforms. International IDEA's main areas of expertise are electoral processes, political party systems, constitutional processes, gender and democracy.

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

NDI is an international non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C.. It works in more than 70 countries to promote and strengthen democracy. Thanks to a worldwide network of volunteer experts, NDI offers technical assistance to leaders of political parties and civil society, promoting democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with pro-democratic people in every region of the world to strengthen political and civic organizations, monitor elections, promote civic participation and ensure government accountability and transparency.

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