



# “ Women for a Change

Nowhere in the world  
are women on par  
with men in political  
decision making

”

Written by Lila Rabinovich

# One World Action believes that women in politics make a difference

**N**owhere in the world are women on par with men in political decision-making. Women's representation in parliaments globally stands at 15%.<sup>1</sup> While in some countries – Rwanda, Sweden – the representation of women in legislative bodies exceeds 40%, in others – Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia – it is lower than 2%.<sup>2</sup> One World Action believes that women make a difference to governance in a range of ways. Our work in Central America, Asia and Africa illustrates this very clearly. Our Standpoint focuses on how women in political power can be supported and encouraged to put women's human rights on the agenda of national governments.

One World Action is interested in how women's empowerment can be achieved through formal and informal political processes ranging from participation in national government structures to mobilising around access to basic services. We see political empowerment as key to sustainable empowerment in the social, economic and cultural spheres, key to pro-poor policy change and key to eliminating poverty.

## Why women make a difference?

The impact of women's low participation in decision-making is wide-ranging and complex. Women's interests, priorities and needs, which are in many cases different from those of men, are invisible to governmental and legislative bodies.

In a world in which 70 per cent of the poor are women, lack of representation of women's economic, social, political and human rights interests effectively results in their marginalisation. Improving women's representation in political decision-making is critical to ensure that gender equality is achieved.

A recent study in Argentina, for example, shows that women legislators are much more likely to support pieces of legislation dealing with women's rights and family issues than are men. Women legislators and ministers can push forward gender sensitive and family friendly legislation and policy on issues such as equal pay for work of equal value, maternity leave, social security, access to health care, family law, domestic and sexual violence.<sup>3</sup> A study of six Southern African countries shows that where women are represented in higher numbers, they make a marked difference to governance. Areas in which this difference is noticeable include: the breadth and depth of gender justice reforms; changes in the attitudes of men parliamentarians to gender issues; and the success of gender mainstreaming in all areas of policy.<sup>4</sup>

But the problem of under-representation of women in government is compounded by their political isolation once within governmental structures. The challenge lies in increasing the ability of women to be more effective political actors. The qualitative impact of women parliamentarians on broad decision-making is just as important as the quantitative issue of women's representation.

Gender disparities in political representation also reflect a 'misallocation of resources' in democratic systems as women's talents, perspectives and experiences are not made full use of in mainstream policy-making.

As Brigitta Dahl, Speaker of the Swedish Parliament puts it:

*The most interesting aspect of the Swedish Parliament is not that we have 45% representation of women, but that a majority of women and men bring relevant social experience to the business of Parliament. This is what makes the difference.<sup>5</sup>*

Gender parity in political representation is, at a more general level, important for the achievement of democratic justice. Policy and legislation in economics, education, health, labour, monetary and fiscal issues, as well as foreign policy affect women in different ways from men. Women MPs can provide a much-needed gender-sensitive perspective on all policy and legislative areas. Equality for women and men in political representation is fundamental to address this serious democratic deficit worldwide.

## Why is women's representation in Parliament lower than men's?

*Women leaders are seen to better represent the interests of women citizens, to introduce women's perspectives into policy-making and implementation, and to help to expand opportunities for women at all levels of society.<sup>6</sup>*

In no country is the political playing field conducive to full and equitable participation of women in government. However, the political environment women have to navigate varies from country to country. Different factors in each country make for this variation, such as economic development, educational levels, parliamentary systems, cultural norms and values, and the constitutional framework.

While this variability is recognised, obstacles to women's political parity with men can usually be grouped into three broad categories: political, socio-economic and socio-cultural.

## Political obstacles

- **'Masculine model' of political life**, which tends to be competitive and confrontational rather than collaborative and consensus building. This includes broad issues ranging from the use of sexist language by men MPs to the lack of structures in parliaments to support women and men MPs with child care responsibilities.
- **Lack of party support** especially with regard to financial support for women candidates. This negatively affects the number of women elected to parliament because, as research by IDEA indicates, the number of women in government typically correlates to the number of candidates; the more women candidates there are, the more women elected representatives<sup>7</sup>. Fawcett Society reports that one of the central reasons for the low levels of representation of women in the UK Parliament is that women are systematically discriminated against across all the main parties.<sup>8</sup> In Afghanistan, there is a marked lack of systematic efforts on the part of established political parties to recruit and support women candidates. In the rare instances in which they do, women are isolated and relegated to marginal roles, not politically prominent ones.

■ **Inadequate access to political networks** including limited contact and cooperation with grassroots groups especially women's groups. This is needed to secure a strong lobby for the advancement of women's political participation. In India, women MPs tend to be middle-class or upper-caste professionals that have little or no links to civil society women's movements. Others with access to political power belong to families of the political elite.<sup>10</sup>

■ **The nature of the electoral system** may or may not be favourable to women candidates. Many argue that *proportional representation* is more favourable to the election of women than other systems, such as *first past the post*. The South African Fifty-Fifty Campaign, led by national NGOs, won an important victory when it got the support of the African National Congress (ANC) to retain the proportional representation (PR) system in the 2004 elections, instead of holding a constituency-based election. A preference for PR is based on the fact that this system tends to favour minorities and women.

■ **Lack, or poor implementation, of positive action measures** aimed at increasing women's participation in parliament. While the legislative and policy framework exists in many countries, implementation is often inadequate and inefficient. Efforts to increase the numbers of women in parliament are often not sustained and systematic but marginal and half-hearted. In 1997, a law was passed in Brazil that obliged all political parties to reserve a minimum of 30% in all elections, including municipal ones, from 2000 for women candidates.<sup>11</sup> However, no party actually complies with the quota because the law fails to stipulate sanctions for non-compliance.<sup>12</sup> Similarly in Honduras, the government approved a law of a 30% quota for women candidates for national parliament in 2000. The law has failed to have the expected effect as it did not raise the number of women elected to parliament, which currently stands at 9 out of 123 legislators (7.3%).<sup>13</sup> As in Brazil, there is no system in place to sanction non-compliance.

## Socio-Economic obstacles

- **Poverty and lack of financial resources** is one of the key factors affecting women's political participation.

Razia Faiz, former Bangladesh MP says:



*Women move from their father's home to their husband's home to their in-law's home. They are like refugees. They have no base from which to develop contacts with the people or to build knowledge and experience about the issues. Furthermore, they have no money of their own; the money belongs to their fathers, their husbands or their in-laws. Given the rising cost of running an effective campaign, this poses another serious hurdle for women in the developing world.<sup>14</sup>*

According to UN statistics, 70 per cent of the world's poor are women. Poverty is increasingly feminised and negatively impacts women's chances at equal political participation.

- **High level of illiteracy and lack of education severely** limit women's ability to participate effectively in political processes.
- **Women's multiple responsibilities** including childcare, house work and work in their communities can sometimes prevent them from participating actively in political processes at local and national level.

## Socio-cultural obstacles

- **Gender stereotypes** and prevalence of so-called traditional values that restrict women's ability to operate in public life. Pre-determined social roles for women are difficult to challenge. In India, a cultural 'male bias' means women face great obstacles to political participation, from opposition to women in leadership positions within political parties, to the threat of character assassination.<sup>15</sup> In Indonesia, there is a strong ideological legacy from the Suharto years that classifies women primarily as mothers and wives. Given this ideological construct, it is not surprising that few women enter the realm of politics and decision-making, let alone become leaders.<sup>16</sup> While both countries have had women Prime Ministers, thus opening a legitimate space for the debate of women's political participation, there is still much resistance to the view of women as independent political actors and decision-makers.

- **Women's lack of confidence to run for office.** There is widespread consensus that lack of confidence is a common cause for women's low rates of participation in political activity. Studies in Central America, for example,

show that a common grievance of women politicians is that they lack the confidence necessary to effectively negotiate with their male colleagues.<sup>17</sup> The patriarchal and machista culture is resistant to the participation of women in political decision-making. Even where minimum quotas for women have been introduced as legal requirements or by voluntary decisions of individual parties, the numbers of women in elected positions remain very low.

- **Role of the media.** The media fails to adequately cover women's issues and gender — related policy and legislative initiatives, preventing greater public awareness of these issues.

## Assessing the Gains: Are women in politics making a difference?

The low level of representation of women in parliament is not the only concern. A parallel problem is that the effectiveness of those women who are elected to parliament is often diminished by discrimination, isolation and lack of resources. The political impact of women parliamentarians varies from country to country — depending on factors such as the socio-political context, the number and type of women in parliament. The challenges facing women in politics do not end with their election into parliament. Enhancing women's participation in parliamentary and decision-making structures is a fundamental and urgent task.

In all countries, parliament tends to be a male domain. They often lack family — friendly policies and facilities such as child care, flexitime and in some cases even women's toilets. In some extreme cases, women election candidates or parliamentarians suffer threats of physical violence. This can lead to constraining their activities and even discouraging others from running for office. In Iraq, where women constitute over 55% of the total population, presenting themselves as candidates for elections is an extremely stressful and often dangerous experience. By law each party or coalition must nominate at least one woman for every three candidates. But women are routinely threatened with violence and occasionally suffer attempts on their lives. Several female candidates were victims of attacks in the months before the elections.<sup>18</sup> In post-Taliban Afghanistan, the situation is similar. The political environment in the country remains extremely hostile to women, in particular those involved in politics. Local factions pose a security threat to politically active women. Governmental and social discrimination, moreover, continue to challenge the effectiveness of women's political participation. Women activists and parliamentary candidates routinely suffer death and violence threats. Very often these threats are extended to their supporters and families.<sup>19</sup>

Party and parliamentary systems also suffer from a 'male bias'. Sexist language is a major area of concern in many parliaments worldwide. While in many cases sexist language goes unchallenged, in others it is confronted. In 2003, Brazil witnessed a scandalous incident in Parliament, in which a male senator called a female colleague a 'tramp' during a debate on a new bill. Brazilian women senators and deputies joined in a protest against this derogatory language and behaviour.<sup>20</sup> Similarly women MPs in the British House of Commons took their grievances regarding men MPs' inappropriate behaviour and sexist language to the media.<sup>21</sup> The public, previously unaware of this, disapproved of the MPs' sexist attitudes.

The male bias is also reflected in the fact that women are often politically isolated in their own parties and not given support to pursue gender initiatives. Further, women parliamentarians are commonly assigned to soft committees dealing with issues such as family and welfare which tend to have minor political importance.

**Soft committees** are under-valued both by men parliamentarians and by the media. The work of women in these committees tends to be dismissed as relatively unimportant, and their achievements overlooked. Normalising the idea of a 'political woman' is a major challenge. It requires positive action by both men and women in government and in wider society.

In Sweden, women and men participate equally in all areas of policy-making. The country's budget committee, for example, is composed of almost equal numbers of men and women, showing that women have moved beyond participation in 'soft' committees. The most important political work in the Swedish Parliament is done by its standing committees, which work on all issues from national security to economic policy to family law and where women hold 44% of the seats on these committees.<sup>22</sup>

The links between women parliamentarians and women's grassroots organisations have great bearing on their exercise of political power. Generally, strong ties between them can add political leverage to women MPs as well as provide them with much needed resources. Women MPs in South Africa, for example, have made the most out of their position in decision-making by forging strong alliances with women within and outside their parties, and with women's groups in civil society. In fact, lack of adequate information in the early days of the post-apartheid era meant that women MPs relied almost exclusively on information provided by civil society groups and NGOs.<sup>23</sup> An example of this is the Women's Budget Initiative, a joint venture between women parliamentarians and non-governmental organisations.<sup>24</sup> Similarly in Brazil, civil society

**Studies in Central America show that the most common complaints of women MPs and leaders are that they are politically isolated, and that women's networks and alliances are often too weak to support their effective exercise of power**

organisations teamed up with the Caucus of Women Parliamentarians to advocate gender-responsive budgets.

## Gender Budget Analysis

An area in which the presence of a critical mass — 30 or 40 per cent — of women can make an important difference is in the promotion of gender budget analysis. Gender budget analysis refers to an evaluation of the effects of a government's expenditure on promoting equality for women and girls in relation to men and boys. It thus allows a government and citizens to assess how policies need to be adjusted and resources reallocated to achieve gender equality. Women in parliament can add substantial weight to a government's adoption of gender-sensitive budgets.<sup>25</sup>

## Women's rights vs. party loyalty?

An issue generally overlooked is whether the presence of women in parliament translates into greater support for gender-sensitive initiatives or legislation. Many women in the Indian National Parliament, for example, have been reported to say that while they are interested in women's issues and in advancing gender agendas, their allegiance is as 'party' women before anything else. They are reluctant to challenge party policies and therefore do not defy party discipline when voting on specific issues. Moreover, the fact that party allegiance is so strong means that the possibility of strong co-operation among women MPs and between them and civil society organisations, is limited.<sup>26</sup>

Women MPs' strong party allegiance, and in some cases personal interests and ambitions, can prevent gender-sensitive agendas from being effectively voiced and represented in governmental bodies. There are exceptions to this. In Honduras, for example, women MPs have formed the Honduran Forum of Women of Political Parties (Foro Hondureño the Mujeres de los Partidos Politicos — FHMPP), a coalition of women from different political parties fighting together for the political rights of women.

Many Honduran women MPs recognise that several of their colleagues put party allegiance before support for gender-responsive policy. They often refuse to advocate the adoption of a quota system for women candidates by their parties because they believe it would be detrimental to the party's chances of success in elections.

**One woman MP has said:**

**“If we were to adopt the quota system we would be setting the basis for losing the elections. I would rather win the elections, even if it is to the detriment of my own gender”.**

The members of the FHMPP have thus joined forces in the struggle to increase the representation of women in Parliament, as well as to advocate the full and effective integration of women parliamentarians into all decision-making processes.<sup>27</sup>

Weak democracies, where horizontal accountability is deficient, also pose serious obstacles to women legislators' leverage in decision-making processes. In some countries, such as Argentina, the office of the President is seen as the central element in the political system leaving the parliament as a secondary actor with limited authority and mandate. This is a major impediment to the effective exercise of political power by women legislators. The impact they can make in gender-sensitive legislation and policy processes is inextricably linked to the strength of the parliament as a whole. Reinforcing democratic institutions and good governance in general should be simultaneous with boosting gender equality in political representation.

**What can be done and by whom?**

The challenge of increasing women's representation and participation in parliaments worldwide is becoming more and more urgent. In a world concerned both with strengthening good governance and democratic justice, and with promoting gender equality and women's rights, boosting women's presence and effectiveness in decision-making has enormous importance. Debates about how to achieve this have gained momentum since the 1995 Beijing Conference. Numerous policy recommendations for governmental, non-governmental and international bodies have emerged. The consensus is that *“increasing the level of female representation and participation in decision-making bodies requires well-developed strategies and information on which measures have worked successfully in different countries with different political systems”*<sup>28</sup>. Several strategies are commonly identified as able to bring about much needed positive change.

**Quotas**

Quotas exist to ensure that women will constitute a certain percentage of members of a body or institution, such as party lists, parliaments, governments or committees. They aim to recruit at least a *critical minority* of women (30 or 40%) in order to prevent their isolation in political processes and their presence as *tokens* in the political system. They also make these bodies or institutions responsible for the recruitment of women rather than placing the burden on individual women.

**Critical Minority**

A ‘critical mass’ or ‘critical minority’ of women in parliaments — that is women occupying 30 or 40% of seats — can have great impact on the situation of women. ‘Critical mass’, or ‘critical minority’, refers to the estimated minimum number of women in parliament necessary for women's interests, perspectives and priorities to be adequately voiced and taken into account in policy-making. A smaller proportion of women in parliament can easily be politically isolated and their effectiveness in bringing women's interests to the fore, much diminished. Thenjiwe Mtinso, former Deputy Secretary General of the ANC, notes that the mere *“politics of women's presence”* in parliament is important.<sup>29</sup> Only 15 countries worldwide have achieved a critical mass (30% or more) of women in parliament: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Costa Rica, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Iraq, The Netherlands, Norway, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Spain and Sweden.<sup>30</sup>

There are two broad types of quotas: *voluntary quotas* for parties, trade unions and others, and *constitutional parliamentary quotas* which legally oblige parties to reserve a set number of parliamentary seats for women candidates. The former is used by parties in Iceland, Mozambique, Sweden and South Africa. The latter is used in Argentina, Costa Rica, France and Rwanda. Some countries like France, South Africa, and Pakistan also have a system of sub-national quotas applied at local or district level.<sup>31</sup>

Quotas are often perceived as problematic as they can be seen as going against the democratic principle of equal opportunity by discriminating in favour of women, as well as creating significant intra-party conflict. Quotas are also sometimes used strategically by parties and governments to recruit ‘manageable’ women at the same time as appearing to support increased women's participation and representation. The latter is the case in several Arab countries.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, research indicates that the more women candidates there are the more women will be elected.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the idea of quotas does not necessarily conflict with people's democratic right to choose any representative they want. Intra-party conflict and the strategic use of quotas by parties and governments are seen as low short-term costs for great long-term gains.

**Civil society pressure**

Quotas are not enough to increase women's participation and representation in political decision-making. Firstly, sustained pressure from women's civil society organisations is required. In Scandinavia, high levels of women's participation and representation were achieved not through constitutional reforms but through the actions and lobbying of women's groups within parties and larger society.<sup>34</sup> Contrary to popular belief, Sweden did not reach its high levels of women's representation in parliament through constitutional quota requirements. Only some parties in Sweden opted to establish a quota system to increase the number of women candidates, but others did not and still achieved very high representation of women in parliament — the Centre Party is one such example. The movement to increase women's representation in Sweden began in the 1970s. During the early 70s, campaigns by women's groups and by women's sections within parties resulted in a jump of women MPs from 14% to 21% in the 1974 elections, and has been growing ever since. Women currently hold 45.3% of parliamentary seats.<sup>35</sup>

**Citizen action**

In four countries in Asia — The Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand — One World Action's partners are combining cross-learning activities among civil society and state reformers with the development and promotion of new mechanisms for citizen participation appropriate to the governance setting of each country. Critical to the success of the programme is ensuring the active participation of women as citizens. Women are poorly represented at all levels of government, there is little serious consideration of women's concerns and conservative groups actively seek to push back many of the advances that women have achieved. This programme aims to provide women with the capacities to engage in local level decision-making with the aim that local development planning and policies more closely reflect the specific needs of women in the community.

**Political Parties**

Can make an important contribution by adopting a system of quotas and providing active support such as, training, resources and contacts to women candidates. In the UK, positive action was taken in 1997 by the Labour Party with the adoption of all-women shortlists for half of their winnable seats. This resulted in the number of women in Parliament doubling from 62 to 121 (or 9.2% to 18.1%).<sup>36</sup> After the election an employment tribunal ruled that this measure was potentially illegal which led the Labour Party to drop all-women lists. In 2001, the number of women in Parliament fell for the first time since 1979. However, after an intense

campaign, the use of all-women lists by parties was legalised in 2002.<sup>37</sup> The Labour Party also launched Emily's List (EMILY — Early Money Is Like Yeast — it makes the dough rise) in February 1993.<sup>38</sup> Emily's List is intended to overcome one of the most serious obstacles to the increase of women's parliamentary participation; their lack of financial resources. The List helps women Labour Party members raise money to cover the costs involved in running campaigns for Parliamentary selection. Another example of the difference political parties can make is provided by the South African ANC. The proportion of women in the South African parliament has increased greatly since the end of apartheid, due mainly to the new government led by the ANC which implemented a voluntary 33.3% quota for lists within the party.<sup>39</sup>

**Trade Unions and NGOs**

Can provide women — in particular women leaders — with training on how to run for office, manage campaigns, use technology, advocate, network, understand the parliamentary system and the internal regulations of government and utilise the media to their advantage. They can also provide information and organise awareness-raising campaigns on the problems of women's under-representation in government; the potential policy difference a critical mass of women in government can make; and the necessity of women's increased representation in political life leading to strong democracies. Awareness-raising campaigns on women's civic and political rights targeted to poor women, are also necessary.

The Zambian National Women's Lobby is a good example of this. They have produced a Women's Rights Charter and a National Gender Policy to ensure increased representation and participation of women in decision making at all levels. They provided capacity building workshops for female aspiring candidates and for women elected to office. Over 2,000 women have been trained since the establishment of ZNWL and provide gender training for local leaders (chiefs, headmen, etc), ZNWL members and aspiring and elected councillors and MPs. In addition to this, they provide material and moral support to women standing for elections at local government and parliament.

NGOs can also play an advisory and support role to government. One World Action partner Rede Mulher is perceived as one of the key women's organisations in Angola and is being called upon by the government and by international organisations to represent Angolan women and ensure that their concerns are addressed. They have supported the constitution of the Committee of Women

Parliamentarians (CMP) which engages with political parties and challenges their approach to gender. The Committee is made up of representatives of the women's branches of political parties and was formally created in April 2002. The CMP has been strengthened as a group and is now playing an important role in public debate. It is one of Rede Mulher's most active members and it engages continuously with political parties to discuss their agendas and their approach to gender.

Trade unions tend to be heavily male-dominated which can diminish their participation in the struggle for increased political representation of women. This could change if unions themselves adopted a system of quotas, either voluntarily or by law. In Argentina, for example, trade unions are by law obliged to have at least 30% female representation at all levels.<sup>40</sup>

Building alliances between women's groups and women politicians is fundamental. Mentoring, networks and workshops, for example, are some ways to create alliances. It is also important to associate with sympathetic men in Parliament for increased support. Strengthening synergy between all advocates of women's equal representation is key to achieving this goal.

## Governments

Can commit themselves to the promotion of gender equity in governmental and public administration bodies. They can take positive action towards building a critical mass of women in decision-making, take measures that encourage political parties to actively recruit and support women candidates and leaders, and ensure that affirmative action measures are implemented. The provision of women-friendly operational mechanisms and structures within government, such as child-care facilities, family-friendly working hours serve to support women's participation in politics.

Constitutional guarantees are of utmost importance for parity between men and women in all areas of social, political and economic life. Apart from circumstances directly related to childbirth, married women in Sweden are covered by the same labour, tax and social security legislation as men. No entitlements are targeted at women in their capacity

as wives. The state uses separate taxation, generous public day-care provision for pre-school children, and extensive programmes of parental leave to encourage married women and mothers to remain in gainful employment. Sweden enjoys a "gender-neutral concept of social citizenship".<sup>41</sup>

After years of Taliban rule and no legal protection for the right of women to participate fully in the country's political life, Afghanistan enacted a new Constitution in January 2004. Article 22 guarantees men and women equal rights and duties before the law. Articles 83-43 reserve approximately 25 percent of the seats in the Wolesi Jirga (House of the People) for women. The president must appoint additional women to the Meshrano Jirga (House of the Elders).<sup>42</sup>

Progress in this direction, however, is often piecemeal. In Indonesia, a new electoral reform bill mandates that 30% of the candidates for the 2004 elections had to be women. While this system of quota does not go far enough, as for example mandating that 30% of seats in parliament must be reserved for women, many hail this reform as a very important step.<sup>43</sup>

At a broader policy level, it is paramount for governments to tackle these challenges simultaneously through improved access of girls and women to education and better health systems, and through economic security for women and their increased participation in economic life. The principle of equality between men and women in all aspects — social, political, economic — must be enshrined in law and enforced through policy and further legislation. Article 44 of the new Afghan constitution provides that the state must promote education for women; a key step in a country where women's literacy rate stands at an appalling 14%.<sup>44</sup>

The South African post-Apartheid government has developed gender sensitive policy and legislation in areas that have been almost completely neglected under Apartheid. Examples of these are welfare programmes to assist single mothers, health services that can be readily accessed by women and children in all areas, and legislation on such issues as rape, marriage and divorce, property rights, and domestic violence.<sup>45</sup>

## The National Association of Women Councillors and Mayors of El Salvador

(Asociación Nacional de Regidoras, Síndicas y Alcaldesas Salvadoreñas, ANDRYSAS)

*Founded six years ago, this is the oldest of this type of association in the four countries represented in Suchitoto. ANDRYSAS was created in 1998 during the First National Congress of Women Councillors in which 130 women from 68 municipalities participated. During its first year, the Association combined organisational work with a campaign to encourage women to vote and in support of women candidates from the different parties. Since then, the membership has grown to 320 members, mostly current councillors but also including a number of ex-councillors.*

One World Action. Women and Local Democracy — Lessons from Central America, 2005

## Local Government

The participation of women in local government and leadership positions can be a training ground for women candidates in national politics, providing them with useful expertise and know-how. One World Action's work in Central America shows how associations and networks of women working in and on local government are strengthening their members' abilities in administration and management and in the promotion of gender equity. Among their principal achievements is their success in bringing together women from diverse parties to work on women's rights despite the women's loyalty to their parties and the rivalry and different visions of those parties example ANDRYSAS in El Salvador.

## The media

As a shaper of public opinion can contribute to deepening understanding of women's rights issues and gender equality. It can promote understanding of the importance of women's issues and women's political representation for society as a whole. The media can be actively involved in the struggle for women's political parity with men by starting or supporting public awareness and information campaigns. Moreover, good media coverage can compensate for the often limited financial resources for women's political campaigns and agendas. In Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt and Jordan, media support for women candidates and MPs is wholly inadequate for the effective promotion of their campaigns and agendas.<sup>46</sup>

## International conventions

Are powerful agenda-setting instruments. They have influenced the adoption of quota systems in many countries worldwide.

■ In 1979 members of the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which 179 countries have ratified. The Convention sets up an agenda for governments to eliminate discrimination against women and includes a chapter on equal access to and equal opportunities in the political sphere.<sup>47</sup>

■ In 1995, 189 countries adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, described as an agenda for women's empowerment, emphasising the need for full and equal integration of women in all decision-making processes. While all 189 governments agreed to the principle of equal representation of men and women in government, the political representation of women has increased a mere 0.5% annually since then.<sup>48</sup>

■ In 2000, 191 governments agreed on the United Nations Millennium Declaration which commits them "to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable".<sup>49</sup> The Review Summit taking place in September 2005 will assess progress towards this and other goals. Women's rights activists are arguing that the goals will not be achieved if women's empowerment is not central to our efforts to achieve them.

## Conclusion

The pursuit of gender parity in political representation is crucial to the advancement of women in all areas. The extent to which women's interests are effectively represented in government impacts on the realisation of their rights, including the right to education, health care, protection from sexual and other types of violence, sexual and reproductive rights, access to credit and equal pay for work of equal value. It is necessary that gender activists and women MPs exchange and share ideas and information on initiatives that have been effective in improving women's representation in different countries.

### Five priority actions to support women for a change

1. Political Parties can make an important contribution by adopting a system of quotas and providing active support such as, training, resources and contacts to women candidates.
2. Governments can commit themselves to the promotion of gender equity in governmental and public administration bodies at national and local levels.
3. Governments must comply with international conventions which are powerful agenda setting instruments.
4. Trade Unions and NGOs can provide women — in particular women leaders — with training on how to run for office, manage campaigns, use technology, advocate, network, understand the parliamentary system and the internal regulations of government and utilise the media to their advantage.
5. The media as a shaper of public opinion can contribute to deepening understanding of women's rights issues and gender equality.

## Women's Representation in National Parliaments in Europe

Country	% Women	Election years
Sweden	45.3%	2002
Denmark	37 %	1998
Finland	36 %	1999
Netherlands	36 %	1998
Germany	31 %	1998
Spain	28 %	2000
Austria	27 %	1999
Belgium	23 %	1999
Portugal	19 %	1999
UK	18 %	2001
Luxemburg	17 %	1999
Ireland	12 %	1997
France	11 %	1997

Source: Women's Representation in British Politics

(Fawcett Society: <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/pdfs/P-BC-Women%27s%20Representation%20in%20British%20Politics.pdf>)

After the 2005 General Election, women are 20% of MPs

(Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/cawp/UKhtmls/MPs2005.htm>)

## Women's Representation in Selected National Parliaments Worldwide (2004-5)

Country	% Women	Election years	Election law quotas
Brazil	8.6 %	No	Yes, 30%
Honduras	9 %	No	Yes, 30%
India	8.8 %	No	No
Indonesia	11.1 %	No	Yes, 30%
Iraq	31 %	Yes, 25%	Yes*
South Africa	30%	No	No**

Source: Quota Project:

<http://www.quotaproject.org/country.cfm>

\* The Electoral Law, Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 96 — Section 4 (3) — states: No fewer than 1 out of the first 3 candidates on the list must be a woman, no fewer than 2 out of the first 6 candidates on the list must be a woman and so forth until the end of the list.

\*\* In post-Apartheid South Africa the proportion of women in Parliament jumped from 3% to 30% due mostly to the adoption of a quota system by the African National Congress party.

## Regional Averages of Women's Representation in National Parliaments Region

Region	% Women
Nordic Countries	39.9 %
Europe (OSCE members incl. Nordic countries)	18.5%
Americas	18.6 %
Asia	14.9 %
Sub-Saharan Africa	14.8 %
Pacific	13.2 %
Arab Countries	6.5 %

Source: Women in National Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union: [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm)

## Appendix cont.

- <sup>1</sup> 2004 figure: Women in Politics — Overview, International IDEA
- <sup>2</sup> Women in National Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union
- <sup>3</sup> 'Moving Into Power', Inter-American Development Bank
- <sup>4</sup> Morna, Colleen. (ed) Ringing up the Changes: Gender in Southern African Politics Johannesburg: Gender Links
- <sup>5</sup> Nadezda Shvedova: Obstacles to Women's Participation in Parliament in Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers, International IDEA: 1998
- <sup>6</sup> Moving Into Power, Inter-American Development Bank
- <sup>7</sup> Nadezda Shvedova: 1998
- <sup>8</sup> Campaigns: Women and Politics, Fawcett Society
- <sup>9</sup> Between Hope and Fear: Intimidation and Attacks against Women in Public Life in Afghanistan, A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper 2004
- <sup>10</sup> Shirin Rai: Class, Caste and Gender: Women in Parliament in India, International IDEA: 2002
- <sup>11</sup> Global database of Quotas for Women, International IDEA and Stockholm University
- <sup>12</sup> Clara Araujo: Quotas for Women in the Brazilian Legislative System (paper presented at International IDEA workshop, Peru, 2003, Quota Project)
- <sup>13</sup> Un Desafío: La participación de la mujer en el sistema de partidos, Inforpressca
- <sup>14</sup> Nadezda Shvedova: 1998
- <sup>15</sup> Shirin Rai: 2002
- <sup>16</sup> Sharon Bessel: Women in Parliament in Indonesia: Denied a Share of Power (Asia Pacific School of Economics and Governance Discussion paper)
- <sup>17</sup> Moving Into Power, (Inter-American Development Bank
- <sup>18</sup> Iraqi Elections: Human Rights Concerns (Human Rights Watch News: 21.01.2005
- <sup>19</sup> Between Hope and Fear: Intimidation and Attacks Against Women in Public Life in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch Briefing paper 2004
- <sup>20</sup> Diana Cariboni: Women in Central America: Politics, a Territory Still to be Conquered (Inter-Press Service News Agency
- <sup>21</sup> Beatrix Campbell: The Revolution Betrayed, The Guardian, October 11, 2003
- <sup>22</sup> Equality between Women and Men, SWEDEN.SE
- <sup>23</sup> Mavivi Myakayaka: Women Empowered — Women in Parliament in South Africa, International IDEA
- <sup>24</sup> The Women's Budget Initiative in South Africa, Gender Advisory Project, Sbvgender
- <sup>25</sup> Budlender, Debbie, The Women's Budget Cape Town: IDASA: 1996
- <sup>26</sup> Shirin Rai: 2002
- <sup>27</sup> Un Desafío: La participación de la mujer en el sistema de partido, Inforpressca

- <sup>28</sup> International IDEA
- <sup>29</sup> Lowe Morna, Colleen: Quota Debate Heats Up As Elections Swing Into Gear, Gender Links
- <sup>30</sup> Global Database of Quotas for Women: Quota Project. This data refers to countries with laws on quotas. See IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union) for percentages of women in Lower or Single House
- <sup>31</sup> Global Database of Quotas for Women: Quota Project
- <sup>32</sup> Drude Dahlerup: Using Quotas to Increase Women's Political Representation, International IDEA
- <sup>33</sup> Nadezda Shvedova: 1998
- <sup>34</sup> Larita Freidenvall: Women's Political Representation and Gender Quotas — The Swedish Case (Working paper Series 2003:2, Research Programme — Gender Quotas — A Key to Equality? Stockholm University, Department of Political Science
- <sup>35</sup> Equality Between Men and Women, SWEDEN.SE
- <sup>36</sup> Fawcett Briefing: The Need for Positive Action, Fawcett Society
- <sup>37</sup> The number of women in MPs increased by ten — from 118 to 128 — in the 2005 general elections. Almost one third of Labour MPs are now women, Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics
- <sup>38</sup> Emily's List UK
- <sup>39</sup> Mavivi Myakayake-Manzini: Political Party Quotas in South Africa International IDEA: The Quota Project
- <sup>40</sup> Argentina: Mujeres Tendrán 30% de Presencia en Sindicatos, Hoy Mujeres
- <sup>41</sup> Lena Sommestad: Gender Equality: A Key to Our Future? SWEDEN.SE
- <sup>42</sup> Between Hope and Fear: Intimidation of Women in Public Life in Afghanistan, Human Rights Water 2004
- <sup>43</sup> Global Database of Quotas for Women, International IDEA Quota Project. See also Women in Indonesian Politics, National Democratic Institute
- <sup>44</sup> The illiteracy rate among men in the country stands at about 42%, also extremely low. AFGHANISTAN: Marking International Women's Day, IRIN News
- <sup>45</sup> Mavivi Myakayake-Manzini: Women Empowered — Women in Parliament in South Africa, International IDEA: 1998
- <sup>46</sup> Gehan Abu-Zayd: In Search of Political Power — Women in Parliament in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon (International IDEA
- <sup>47</sup> Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations
- <sup>48</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, The United Nations Womenwatch. See also: Women Around the World Fact Sheet, The Centre for Legislative Development
- <sup>49</sup> United Nations General Assembly: United Nations Millennium Development Goals, UN

## Website References

Asia Pacific School of Economics and Governance — <http://apseg.anu.edu.au>

Centre for the Advance of Women in Politics — <http://www.qub.ac.uk/cawp>

Centre for Legislative Development — <http://www.cld.org>

Emily's List — <http://www.emilyslist.org.uk>

Fawcett Society — <http://www.idea.int>

Gender Advocacy Programme — <http://www.gender.co.za>

Gender Links — <http://www.genderlinks.org.za>

The Guardian newspaper — <http://www.guardian.co.uk>

Hoy Mujeres — <http://www.mujereshoy.com>

Human Rights Watch — <http://hrw.org>

Inforpressca — <http://www.inforpressca.com>

Inter-America Development Bank — <http://www.idea.int>

International Idea — <http://www.idea.int>

Interparliamentary Union — <http://www.idea.int>

Interpress Service News Agency — <http://ipsnews.net>

IrinNews — <http://www.irinnews.org>

KIT — <http://www.kit.nl>

National Democratic Institute — <http://www.ndi.org>

Quota Project — <http://www.quotaproject.org>

Sbvgender — <http://www2.gtz.de/gender> — budgets

SWEDEN.SE — <http://www.sweden.se>

UNDP South Africa — <http://www.undp.org.za>

UNESCO — <http://www.unesco.org>

United Nations Womenwatch — <http://www.un.org/womenwatch>

Written by Lila Rabinovich for One World Action. For more information contact: Helen O'Connell at [hoconnell@oneworldaction.org](mailto:hoconnell@oneworldaction.org)

“

”

**ONE WORLD  
ACTION**

One World Action  
Bradley's Close  
White Lion Street  
London N1 9PF  
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7833 4075  
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7833 4102  
[www.oneworldaction.org](http://www.oneworldaction.org)  
Charity Reg. 1022298

ISBN 1898 776 61 2