

Women in Parliament: Making a Difference

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Although women remain significantly under-represented in today's parliaments, women are now looking beyond the numbers to focus on what they can actually do while in parliament – how they can make an impact, whatever their numbers may be. They are learning the rules of the game and using this knowledge and understanding to promote women's issues and concerns from inside the world's legislatures. In so doing, they are not only increasing the chances of their own success, but are also paving the way for a new generation of women to enter the legislative process. How can women maximize their impact on the political process through parliament? What strategies are most useful in increasing their effectiveness? What lessons can women MPs share with those aspiring to enter the field? In what ways have women impacted on political processes? This is our focus in this chapter, as we move from the road to parliament to making inroads in parliament.

Making Inroads in Parliament

The actual impact women parliamentarians can make will depend on a number of variables, including the political context in which the assembly functions, the type and number of women who are in parliament and the rules of the parliamentary game.

When women in different parts of the world struggled to win the right to vote, they expected that the right to vote would inevitably lead to greater women's representation. Their expectations were not met, as chapters in this volume have illustrated. Instead, women embarked on another long and difficult struggle to actually get women elected to parliament. Part of this effort involved convincing women voters to support women as their representatives. In most countries, much of the work centred on political parties, the typical channels of entry to national legislatures. Women inside and outside political parties organized and mobilized themselves to change long-established party methods of political recruitment.

Once women entered parliament, their struggle was far from over. In parliament, women enter a male domain. Parliaments were established, organized and dominated by men, acting in their own interest and establishing procedures for their own convenience. There was no deliberate conspiracy to exclude women. It was not even an issue. Most long-established parliaments were a product of political processes that were male-dominated or exclusively male. Subsequent legislatures were, for the most part, modelled on these established assemblies. Inevitably, these male-dominated organizations reflect certain male biases, the precise kind varying by country and culture.

Until recently, this “institutional masculinity” has been an invisible characteristic of legislatures; it was embedded, pervasive and taken for granted. Only recently have legislatures' masculine biases come under scrutiny. Indeed, in most countries, the political role of women in legislatures became a public issue only in the second half of the twentieth century.

In 2002, women constitute 14.3 per cent of legislative members worldwide. In the Nordic countries, their numbers

are highest at 38.8 per cent, while in the Arab states their representation is only 4.6 per cent.¹

As with previous efforts to try to get women elected to parliament, today women inside parliament are organizing, mobilizing, motivating and advancing women from inside the world's legislatures. They are devising strategies and taking action to promote issues relevant to women and facilitate changes in legislation.

The actual impact women parliamentarians can make will depend on a number of variables that vary from country to country. These include the political context in which the assembly functions, the type and number of women who are in parliament and the rules of the parliamentary game. Each of these factors has a significant bearing on the extent to which women MPs can make a difference once elected. Because these factors vary significantly from country to country, it is difficult to make generalizations that are universally relevant regarding how women MPs can maximize their impact.

In addition, there is very little research and information available on what sort of impact women have made. Underscoring the need for more knowledge and understanding in this particular field of women and decision-making, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) said in a report that there is an urgent need for case studies on “women making a difference” in politics.²

Extrapolating from what is available in this field and based on interviews and discussions with women MPs around the world, we have identified some of the strategies and mechanisms women are using and can use to impact on the process. We have formulated a strategy, what we refer to as the “rules strategy”, to organize and present these ideas. The case studies on South Africa and Norway that follow illustrate some of these strategies in action.

Critical Mass

The extent of women's impact will depend very much on the number of women in parliament who are motivated to represent women's issues and concerns.

Feminists often argue that pioneer women parliamentarians became surrogate men – that they were socialized into the legislature and became indistinguishable from the men they replaced. We doubt this. Men are known to behave differently when women are absent. Because it upsets gender boundaries, the presence of even one woman will alter male behaviour; the presence of several women will alter it even further. West European experience shows that where women MPs have a mission to effect change even small numbers can produce significant results.

While the presence of even one woman can make a difference, long-term significant change will largely be realized when there is a sufficient number of women in parliament who are motivated to represent women's concerns. This need for a significant minority of women to affect political change has been referred to by feminist political scientists as “critical mass”. According to Drude Dahlerup, the test that a critical mass of women is present is the acceleration of the development of women's representation through acts that improve the situation for themselves and for women in general. These actions are critical acts of empowerment.

In her studies of women MPs in Scandinavia, Dahlerup found that women politicians worked to recruit other women and developed new legislation and institutions to benefit women. As their numbers grew it became easier to be a woman politician and public perceptions of women politicians changed.³

Rules Strategy

In this chapter, we have formulated a strategy to help maximize women's impact on the legislative process. The full development of this rules strategy requires a critical mass of women working on and promoting women's concerns.

Simply put, the strategy consists of three parts: learning the rules, using the rules and changing the rules. By rules we mean the customs, conventions, informal practices and specific regulations that govern the way a legislature functions. These include law-making processes, division of labour in the assembly, hierarchy structures, ceremonies, disciplines, traditions, habits and the norms of the assembly including its internal functioning and its relationship to other parts of the government and to the nation it has been elected to serve.

This strategy of learning, using and changing the rules is based on the belief that there is a need for change and that an objective in electing women MPs is to secure change. There are essentially four types of change that will make a difference to women. They can be categorized as institutional/procedural change, representation change, influence on output and discourse.

1. **Institutional/procedural change** refers to measures that alter the nature of the institution to make it more “woman-friendly”. Cultural changes, such as greater gender awareness, should be accompanied by procedural changes designed to accommodate women members. Increased gender awareness is not simply a matter of including women, but also a sensitivity that women are no more a universal category than are men and that class, age, ethnicity, race, physical ability, sexuality, parenting and life stage, have a determining effect on women's lives, much the same as they do on men's lives.

2. **Representation change** involves specific actions to secure women's continued and enhanced access to the legislature. These include encouragement of women candidates; a conscious use of role model capacities; the promotion of sex equality legislation, parity or equality regulations; and appropriate changes in electoral and campaigning laws. Representation change also includes actions in parliament that are designed to place women in important parliamentary positions and to secure their presence in government. It must also include changes in political parties that bring more women to legislatures. Parliamentary women often use the power their representative status gives them to support improving political opportunities for women in their parties. Similarly, parliamentary women may organize to support women for higher office. Parliaments constitute a crucial pool of recruitment to higher office.
3. **Impact/Influence on output** refers specifically to the “feminization” of legislation and other policy outputs, i.e., the extent to which laws and policies have been altered or influenced in women's favour. This includes both putting women's issues on the agenda and ensuring that all legislation is woman-friendly or gender-sensitive.

Table 5.1 Four Areas of Change that will Impact on Women's Participation

Institutional/Procedural	Making parliament more “woman-friendly” through measures to promote greater gender awareness.
Representation	Securing women's continued and enhanced access to parliament, by encouraging women candidates, changing electoral and campaigning laws and promoting sex equality legislation.
Impact/Influence on Output	“Feminizing” legislation, by making sure it takes into account women's concerns.
Discourse	Altering parliamentary language so women's perspectives are normalized and encouraging a change in public attitudes towards women.

4. **Discourse change** involves changes both inside and outside of parliament. Not only should efforts be made to alter parliamentary language so that women's perspectives are normalized, it is also necessary to make use of the parliamentary platform to alter public attitudes and to change the discourse of politics so that a political woman becomes as normal a concept as a political man. Such “speaking out the window” uses the parliamentary opportunity of greater access to the mass media and to the general public to raise awareness of women's issues and of women's political capacities in public debate.

Table 5.2 Women: Making Impact through Parliament

	Institutional/Procedural & Representation	Influence on Output and Discourse
Learning the Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in training and orientation exercises on internal parliamentary codes of conduct (e.g., how to ask for the floor); develop public speaking and effective communication; and relate to and lobby male colleagues. • Network with women's organizations. • Mentoring and shadowing by more senior MPs. • Understand and handle media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinguish between women's perspectives and women's issues. • Caucus with media, national as well as international organizations. • Bring to attention sexist discourse. • Establish presence within different committees (e.g. budget, defence, foreign affairs). • Clarify value and importance of “soft” committees.
Using the Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a point of nominating and voting for women in internal elections, within parties or intra-parties. • Draw attention to absence of women in key positions. • Invest in committee work. • Push for and establish government equal opportunity positions and women's ministries. • Campaign to expand existing structures to include women's concerns. • Set up networks to train in more convincing and less adversarial types of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence parliamentary agendas: introduce women's concerns (e.g. changes in parliamentary work schedules). • Establish public enquiries on women's issues and use findings to place issues on government agendas and within legislative programmes. • Speak for, co-sponsor and sponsor bills. • Seek partnership with male colleagues. • Make public issue out of certain concerns by cooperating with media (e.g. ways of referring to women in parliament, sexual harassment issues).

	debate.	
Changing the Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change candidate selection rules for entire party, especially for leadership positions. • Introduce quota systems on certain committees or issue of proportionality for men/women representation. • Establish a woman's whip. • Establish national machinery to monitor implementation and ensure accountability; institutionalize regular debates on progress into parliamentary timetable. • Establish mechanisms to encourage female speakers (e.g. giving them priority over male colleagues). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the providing of financial incentives to programmes/projects designed to facilitate women's decision-making endeavours (e.g. for leadership-training schools, increasing government subsidies to political parties with more women in leadership positions/candidates; introducing a specific women's budget earmarked for enhancing women's decision-making). • Cooperate with women's movement to change image of women as “only” housewives, to portray them as effective and efficient politicians and to normalize the image of a woman politician. • Be proud of identity as a woman, instead of attempting to imitate men and hide or deny womanhood. • Expand legislation to include emerging issues of importance to women (e.g. conflict and peace-making, human rights, special women's budgets).

Learning the Rules

The first step is for women MPs to understand how the legislature works in order to be able to use this knowledge to operate more effectively.

Legislatures debate policies, make laws, examine their implementation and effects, provide a recruitment pool for government and scrutinize the activities of government. Most legislatures have a budgetary function; they are responsible for both the formal allocation of the budget and for auditing government spending. They are organized into front and back benches, government and opposition and functional and procedural committees. Through such structures, debate, monitoring, interrogation and interpolation are organized. MPs tend to specialize in particular issue areas and make their parliamentary reputations on the basis of their performance in the various structures and processes of the legislatures.

For women to be effective parliamentarians, they must clearly understand the functions of the legislature and they must learn the rules of the game – both the written and unwritten codes, procedures and mechanisms on how to get things done in parliament. They must first learn the internal practices of parliament in order to equip themselves to utilize these rules better and to devise effective strategies to change the rules to advance women's interests and goals. These ideas are elaborated below, grouped under each of the four main areas of change, namely institutional/procedural, representation, influence on output and discourse. In the margins, we highlight some of the specific strategies that we suggest within each category to facilitate easy access and readability.

Institutional/Procedural

The first step is for women MPs to understand how the legislature works in order to be able to use this knowledge to operate more effectively within the legislature. MPs can acquire this knowledge in a variety of ways, including specific training and orientation programmes as well as more general socialization processes. For example, it is common for legislative leaders and other officials to offer orientation to new members on how the assembly works. Often, political parties also provide such training.

Learn about the legislature through orientation programmes; and through training by political parties.

Training by political parties is particularly useful since it offers insight into how the MP's party understands the procedures and how the party itself fits into the procedures. Since the organization of legislative work often depends on party composition, parties have a significant influence on procedures. In some parts of the world political parties offer special skills training especially for women, since

they may be less experienced in legislative procedures than men. However, in many parts of the developing world most

parties do not have the resources, nor the willingness, to offer such training. In fact, as many of the case studies point out, very often party allegiance can handicap the development of political discourse in general and of any assistance to women MPs in particular. Political parties in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, for example, do not allow for any structural improvements and still operate with the assumption that women's perspectives and women's issues do not deserve any specific priority. This has obvious repercussions on the procedure inter-party, as well as intra-party and within parliament itself.

Networking is a crucial mechanism of training and socialization for women MPs. Networking provides quick access to knowledge that may otherwise take years of experience to acquire and enables women MPs to come together to discuss their concerns and share their knowledge and expertise, thus greatly enhancing their potential for effectiveness. Networking of women MPs across party lines has been successful in a number of countries including Sweden, France,

Network with women MPs and mentoring (shadowing) by more experienced women MPs.

the Netherlands, South Africa and Egypt. The issues are as diverse as rape laws, electoral reform, personal status and other country-specific issues (such as women's rights to issue passports without their husbands' permission in Egypt and social, political and economic rights for Dalits in India). Also noteworthy is the formation of "support groups" composed of women professionals and MPs, especially from European countries. In the words of one Finnish MP, Riitta Uosukainen: "The fact

that these women are able to get together across party lines, across professional areas and support each other not only personally, but also seek to do so professionally, is invaluable."

Mentoring (i.e. supervising, befriending and giving advice and guidance) by more experienced women MPs is another important way of providing special training for women MPs. In the Netherlands, for example, a system of "shadowing" has been developed whereby women who are hesitant to be nominated for elected office are assisted by elected members to gain confidence.

One structure that seeks to provide a space for women to exchange ideas and strategies across nations is the International Forum of Women Speakers of Parliament. This body works to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of women locally and internationally and also provides mentoring and support not only to each other, but also to other women MPs.

In addition to programmes especially geared for women, orientation exercises involving both men and women are also important. In joint training sessions, women are encouraged to address their areas of interest and to network with male counterparts, as well as to learn how to break through established "codes of conduct".

Participate in joint training sessions for men and women.

At the same time, male deputies are made aware of women's issues and the importance of enabling women deputies to act effectively in the legislature. The latter in particular is an important step in overcoming the sense of threat that many male deputies feel vis-à-vis women colleagues, since it provides an opportunity not only to raise awareness of

gender issues, but to indicate the extent to which they are interlinked with most other social, economic and political concerns. Thus training and orientation of male parliamentarians plays an important role in the mainstreaming of women's issues and perspectives.

In addition to information about both the written and unwritten rules and procedures of parliament, women may also find training in voice projection and public speaking particularly helpful. Many

Enlist in voice projection and public speaking exercises.

women have difficulty speaking authoritatively and some find it difficult to make themselves heard in large legislative chambers. New entrants, in particular those in developing democracies, confess that they find it difficult to be given the opportunity to speak and to know the ins and outs of parliamentary speaking procedures. The effectiveness of former actress Glenda Jackson in the British House of Commons, for example, proves that a trained woman's voice can have as much impact as a man's.

Learn how to handle the media.

Some women MPs in established democracies have also organized media-training sessions. This involves, among other things, seminars and workshops where MPs are informed about "media-speak" (i.e., what kind of information the media is interested in

and how best to deliver it) and advised on how to network with media personalities and on which ones are more sympathetic to women's issues.

Representation

Institutional rules, customs and procedures determine the key legislative positions and functions such as committee assignments and participation in floor debates. Recruitment to these important positions may depend on any one or a combination of factors including party position, seniority and faction, ability, support for the government, national or local profile and issue expertise. While the appropriate strategy will depend to some extent on the number of women in

the legislature, at a minimum women should identify key positions and functions and strategize on ways to get women into these positions. If existing channels are not open to promoting women into key positions, new avenues should be developed. In some countries, such avenues could be parliamentary or governmental women's committees. In other cases, nationwide umbrella organizations (non-governmental) or strong grass-roots organizations can act as catalysts to get women into key areas. Further avenues could be opened through training and educational programmes, or through pressure for representation by the media. International pressure could also be used to encourage governments to include women at all levels of power and decision-making.⁴ Knowledge about these positions and ways to get women in can be shared by mentoring, caucusing and networking. This enables women MPs to maximize their impact. Sympathetic men in crucial positions are invaluable allies.

Identify key positions in parliament and develop channels to get women in.

Women in key positions not only enhance their own ability to make an impact but they also facilitate opportunities for other women to speak out. For example, a study of the Colorado State legislature measured differences in the speaking behaviour of members of legislative committees by sex, seniority, interest and party. In one study it was found that women did better at controlling the dialogue and making themselves heard when other women were present, visible (sitting where they could be seen) and in positions of authority.⁵ This research also showed that male dominance of conversation, discussion and meetings enhanced their power and undermined that of women even where the formal positions of men and women legislators were equal.

Use the media to increase women's visibility.

One way of building women's careers and thus their advancement into key positions is by learning how to use the media to increase the visibility and confidence of women parliamentarians. Since women employed in the media field have their own problems of self-establishment and advancement they may be sympathetic to MPs interested in women's concerns. In fact, one of the key problems in the media is the lack of women in decision-making posts, which effectively means that decisions concerning editorial content and production issues are largely controlled by men. Hence there may be room for women MPs and media personalities to network on the basis of common interests and concerns.

Stress the importance of "soft" committees, while working to establish the presence of women in all committees.

Typically, women's interests have led them to what is still perceived as the less prestigious (and less powerful) social policy areas of specialization, i.e., committee assignments such as education, health and family affairs. Many women MPs believe it is necessary to establish women's presence in the more prestigious and traditionally influential sites within parliaments, such as finance and foreign affairs. Others argue that the distinction itself cannot be justified. Norwegian political scientists have made the important point that describing "soft" values as weak values ignores the facts that these areas, in which Nordic women are most active and in the majority, account for the largest share of public expenditure – education, health and social services at local and regional levels. Women choose these areas because they prefer them and they accept making the very difficult decisions such as whether to prioritize care of the elderly or day care.⁶ The traditional distinction between "hard" and "soft" values is old-fashioned and inaccurate and should be contested by women representatives. Ideally a twofold strategy must be developed: on the one hand, the importance of such areas needs to be continually stressed; on the other hand, simultaneous efforts should be made to ensure women's active participation in all policy areas.

Impact/Influence on Output

Distinguish between women's perspectives and women's issues; and educate MPs about both.

In order to discuss the impact of women representatives it is useful to make a distinction between women's issues and women's perspectives. Women's issues are issues that mainly affect women, either for biological reasons (for example, breast cancer screening, reproductive rights) or for social reasons (e.g. sex equality or childcare policy). Women's perspectives are women's views on all political concerns. Some research indicates that although broadly the same issues are significant for both sexes, women's perspective on issues differs from that of men. For example, research carried out in Britain in 1996 showed that although both women and men prioritized economic issues, women were more concerned about part-time work, low pay and pension rights, while men were more concerned about unemployment.

MPs need to have knowledge and understanding about both women's issues and women's perspectives – if only, as most contributors to this volume have expressed, to see the other half of reality – in order to produce output that has a favourable impact on women. The kind of impact MPs will wish to have will inevitably vary by party. Professor Skjeie found that women representatives from different political parties emphasize women's issues such as childcare, but they do so from different perspectives and with different policy implications. Hence, conservative women, for example, stress

women's needs as mothers, while those from the socialist parties stress their roles as workers.⁷

Stay informed about women's issues, by maintaining close links with the women's movement and women's organizations.

But the need for knowledge and information exists regardless of party perspective. Women MPs have successfully used various means of becoming informed about women's issues and perspectives. Most important in this regard is what contributors to this volume have highlighted: maintaining close links with women's organizations of all kinds and drawing on their expertise and resources. Such linkages with the women's movement also enhance the legitimacy of MPs and keep them in touch with changing, often varying, women's concerns. Other sources of information are academic experts on different issue areas, particularly those working with women's studies, who are often willing to make their knowledge of issues available.

European parliamentarians have made use of the goodwill and knowledge of academic experts to draft policies on such matters as domestic violence, female bondage, care of children and the aged, pensions and women's health issues. Some of the most active pro-women European Union Commissioners, such as Swedish Anita Gradin, make a point of involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic experts in their work to further the women's issues through their respective portfolios and agendas. Some politicians keep themselves informed by sponsoring seminar series on the issues, a process that also extends their contacts and networks within the women's movement. Research on policy issues is a major political tool and can be gathered and used by MPs by participating in conferences organized by women's organizations, experts and politicians and by caucusing with other MPs who have similar interests. Caucusing by women MPs is part of both learning and using the rules. Deputies interested in a particular issue, for example employment or women's health, might meet to identify important upcoming votes and committee discussions and decide on tactics and strategies to influence the outcome.

Discourse

Parliaments have their own distinct language, a product both of their specialized tasks and functions and also of their culture and their traditional male membership. For example, in Britain the House of Commons has a discourse

Reveal sexist discourse; and learn speech and debating techniques to quell it.

characterized by a formal set of titles, modes of address and rules of debate. It has also acquired, from many years of male domination, a barracking, sexist and lavatorial "humour" that women MPs find offensive, especially when it is used on them. Familiarity with speaking and debating techniques can help to curtail such "yahoo" heckling. British women have successfully used the media to draw attention to the sexism in the House of Commons by revealing these practices to women in the media and to other journalists eager to criticize ill-behaved MPs. The result was a series of press and broadcasting items about the childish and sexist behaviour of male MPs. The public, previously unaware of this, disapproved of their MPs' behaviour.

Using the Rules

By learning how to use the rules, women can seize opportunities to participate on key committees and positions, make themselves heard in discussions and debates and fully utilize their skills and abilities.

Gaining familiarity with the rules is the first part of a longer term process to enhance women's position and to highlight women's issues and perspectives. The next step is to learn how to use the rules for maximum impact. One of the problems that many women parliamentarians face is that they are not allocated time in discussions and debates and they are not given the opportunity to participate on key committees and in key positions. Thus they are not able to fully utilize their skills and abilities and their contribution cannot be accurately assessed. By learning how to use the rules, together with other women deputies and the media, women can break this vicious circle. Many of the tactics for using the rules, discussed below, can be shared across national boundaries.

Intergovernmental organizations such as the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Union, the United Nations and international NGOs can play a vital role in helping women learn how to use the rules by facilitating the sharing of information. Their meetings bring together experts and politicians to network and exchange ideas and their publications make these discussions about women's needs, strategies and achievements available to a wider audience.

Institutional/Procedural

Formal and informal parliamentary roles are often allocated by established rules and procedures. There is, nevertheless, some room for influence and intervention which women should maximize. For example, women MPs should make a

Make a point of nominating and voting for women in internal elections.

point of nominating and voting for women in internal elections, of suggesting women's names for informal positions, and of drawing attention to the absence or relative absence of women in key positions. Particular attention should be given to opportunities available in committee work, as there is considerable evidence from the long-established democracies that women do better in committee work than in

debating chambers. Having said this, women should not abandon debating chambers since this is where parliamentary reputations are often made and where the media often direct their sustained attention. The skill of debating in general is a particularly important one and can be encouraged and sponsored through parliamentary networks linked up to schools, that is, through the curricula, as well as through leadership institutions. Women's parliamentary networks can also play a crucial role in supporting women speakers and in changing to less adversarial styles of debate.

Invest in committee work; but do not abandon debating chambers.

Since government careers tend to follow from legislative careers, the advancement of women through the range of committees and through the legislative hierarchy is an important component in their qualification for high office. Equal opportunity

positions in government and ministries for women's affairs and their shadow counterparts in opposition parties, are other positions that have been well used by women politicians to advance their interests and their careers.

Push for and establish equal opportunity positions in government and ministries for women's affairs.

For example, between 1992 and 1997 four Labour women MPs in the UK were shadow ministers for women. All four were appointed to important government positions (two at cabinet level) when Labour won the elections in 1997. This indicates that such positions need not be a ghetto for women, but may instead be a means of advancement.

Representation

Rules have been used to increase women's representation in a number of ways. In this area, a three-track strategy has proven effective:

- Pressure political parties to ensure that women are nominated for winnable seats in the legislature.
- Design procedural mechanisms to ensure the presence of women in the full range of parliamentary positions.
- Design legislation that creates new structures to ensure that women's interests are represented.

The expansion of political structures has proven an especially useful means of securing women's representation. In the Indian Government of June 1997, four posts were created in the central Government Ministry to introduce women into the newly created positions. In Britain, during the 1990s, the shadow cabinet was an

Campaign to expand existing structures to include women.

elected body. Following pressure from women's advocates, Labour increased the size of the shadow cabinet and introduced a requirement that all ballots cast in shadow cabinet elections must include a minimum number of votes for women (first three, later expanded to four) or they would be invalid. This mechanism both ensured women's

membership of the cabinet and their representation of various constituencies. As we mentioned above, when Labour won the general election in 1997, women members of the shadow cabinet were given full cabinet positions.

In Costa Rica, a practice that the Vice-President should be a woman has been established. Dutch experience shows that the creation of parliamentary committees on women's issues is one way of making positions available for women. Such committees scrutinize all legislation for their gendered content and thereby aid the extension of women's agendas. They also enhance awareness of the gendered nature of many political issues. The committees feed into the legislative process and also play a part in generating public discussion on such issues.

Concern has been expressed by women deputies in many countries that such devices may serve only to separate and "ghettoize" women's issues and the politicians who support them. Although ghettoization may be a risk in the short

Serve on women's ministries to gain valuable experience. Carry this increased awareness to other positions.

term, experience indicates that over time, such work becomes accepted and, in fact, affirms and legitimizes broader gender issues. Moreover women gain valuable experience by serving on women's committees, reserved places and women's ministries.

They may then extend their influence by working with other committees on

different issues, for example by monitoring the implementation of the “Beijing Platform for Action” or the “European Union Medium-Term Action Plans on Equality between Women and Men”. Women's committees need not be seen as permanent structures, but while in existence they enable women to display their skills and thus serve as launching platforms for careers in other political areas. Moreover, women who have experience on sex equality portfolios carry this increased awareness and knowledge of women's issues to other ministries, thus advancing the process of mainstreaming women's concerns.⁸

As we have said before, how much can be accomplished necessarily depends on the number of women who are actually elected to parliament. But even small numbers of women MPs can have a major impact. Where there are only a few women the advantage of high visibility can be used both in placing women in key positions and in raising women's issues. High visibility sometimes brings unexpected benefits. One example is when UK Labour opposition leader Neil Kinnock was unable to subject Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to sustained pressure, because although a gifted orator and debater, he felt inhibited by Thatcher's sex and his own ingrained habits of courtesy toward women. While he used his skills against powerful male adversaries, he was never able to direct them at her. Such benefits are likely only to be a temporary advantage.

Impact/Influence on Output

Knowledge of procedural rules has frequently been used to influence the parliamentary agenda by introducing women's concerns into otherwise gender-blind debates – forcing debates on issues such as reproductive rights, equal pay, childcare – as well as by proposing sex equality legislation and amendments.

Influence parliamentary agendas by introducing women's issues into debates.

Parliamentarians have established public enquiries into women's status and condition, then used the results to push through legislative programmes. Once the issues are on the agenda, the behaviour of other politicians changes. After all, it is

more difficult politically to come out against equality for women than it is to prevent equality issues from getting onto the agenda in the first place. The classic example of this occurred in the American Congress debate on the 1964 Civil Rights Bill. In order to prevent the bill from becoming law, anti-civil-rights representatives proposed that sex equality be added to the race equality provisions of the bill. Their belief was that sex equality would help to sink the bill. In fact, once the sex equality amendment was accepted, few politicians were willing to oppose it publicly. Ironically, sex equality provisions may have helped the bill to pass.

Speak in favour of, sponsor and co-sponsor bills.

In some cases, activities such as co-sponsorship, speech-making and sponsorship of bills by women have been much more effective than their actual votes. One study looking at the support for women's issues in the 101st U.S. Congress found that, although differences in roll call voting on feminist issues between women and men were small, women were significantly more likely than men to co-sponsor feminist bills, to make speeches on behalf of feminist legislation and to sponsor feminist legislation.⁹

There are many instances in some parts of the developing world however, where women MPs shy away from any association with bills on women. This is largely due to the lack of a critical mass, as explained earlier, as well as to a certain stigma associated with “those feminists”. This further underscores the need for raising awareness about the interlinkage between women's issues and every other issue handled by parliament. The budgetary and economic interests for example, are not and should not be seen as only “male” concerns since they affect everyone. Similarly, health, social welfare and education do not only affect women. It is interesting to note that such limited perceptions of social issues may actually reflect an old political hierarchy which places “external affairs” on a higher pedestal than the internal condition of citizens – a reason why the current and largely scholarly, concern with issues of citizenship deserves the attention of both men and women deputies.

Reveal linkages between women's issues and all other issues.

Discourse

In certain countries, cultural norms of equality between men and women, or discourse on rights, meritocracy and conventions about representation may be avenues that can be used to alter parliamentary balances. For example, research in the U.S. on legislative elections following the Anita Hill–Clarence Thomas¹⁰ hearings reveals a major increase in the number of women candidates, in support for women candidates from women voters and in public and media attention that women candidates received. Public discussions of the Hill–Thomas hearings highlighted the absence of women from the Senate and from other high offices, the research suggests. Images of a male Senate committee cross-examining Anita Hill about her experiences of sexual harassment contributed to making the representation of

Make a public issue of concerns, such as sexual harassment.

women in government a major theme of the subsequent election in 1992, which the press dubbed the “year of the woman”.

Danish women deputies have also succeeded in altering the parliamentary discourse. Drude Dahlerup notes how prior to the entry of significant numbers of women into the Scandinavian parliaments, most politicians did not have the vocabulary to speak about issues such as discrimination, inequality, sexual harassment or sexual violence. Most had problems even using the word for women and preferred to use euphemisms. Today, Nordic politicians know how to say the word for woman. Over time in the Nordic states the increased presence of women has altered the style of campaigning, bringing in expressions of warmth and compassion as well as family references.¹¹ This does render it less adversarial. In the Netherlands, study of legislative debates reveals how women's interventions have been associated with changing the way in which abortion policy is debated, notably its shift from a medical or religious issue to an issue of choice.¹²

The participation of women politicians in major international conferences has also had an important effect on challenging public notions of what women can do. One example is the way in which perceptions about the women's movement in Egypt and in other Arab countries changed following the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) that was held in Cairo in September 1994. Prior to this conference, many Egyptian women MPs

Get involved in international conferences to highlight women's potential and capabilities.

and indeed the general public, had at best been ignorant of the women's movement and at worst been downright disdainful of its capabilities. Those involved in the women's movement held a similar view of women parliamentarians. The ICPD was an opportunity for women MPs to actually witness what women's NGOs had managed to accomplish and to network with them on issues of common interest. It also enabled the women's movement to realize that they could have potential allies

in women MPs since they shared many interests and goals. Regardless of what may have actually happened later on, at least there was a perceptible change in awareness on the part of both the MPs and the women's organizations. Equally important was a shift in public awareness and perception of women as activists and as politicians. The ICPD demonstrated to the general public that women's issues (whether it was changes in family law, reproductive rights, or female circumcision) were part of their general concerns and that rather than a bunch of loose women clamouring for change, those articulating these concerns were capable and intelligent women who deserved to be listened to and taken seriously. Women's issues and the women's perceptions gained a certain credibility that was not on the agenda of public consciousness prior to this international networking event.

Changing the Rules

Women's experiences in a variety of parliamentary roles will build up political capital which can be used to secure further advancement, to help change existing rules and structures and to assist new generations of women politicians.

The presence of women and the introduction of women's concerns will inevitably challenge existing arrangements and procedures. At a minimum, parliamentary timetables, places of meeting, childcare provisions, working hours and travel arrangements may be changed to make these more suitable for women.

One of the most significant changes that we have noted is the networking of women across party lines. This is a relatively rare event, but recent British parliaments have seen examples of informal cross-party cooperation on such issues as violence against women, abortion, stalking, rape, equal pay and employment law.

Institutional/Procedural

Establish a woman's whip.

Changes in parliamentary structures and procedures might include the introduction of proportionality norms for men's and women's membership in committees, the establishment of women's whips (responsible for organizing the parliamentary votes of women in a particular party) and formal or informal quotas for women in various legislative positions. Quota systems have been used effectively in Germany at local and national levels and via political parties in France and Belgium. In countries where compulsory quotas are politically difficult, voluntary targets can be set. These should be dated with realistic timetables for implementation.

Introduce proportionality norms or quotas for men/women representation.

Mechanisms to monitor the implementation of quotas that are accountable to the assembly should be established. This ensures that regular discussions on progress are part of the parliamentary timetable. Setting up committees on women's issues and national sex-equality offices that are also accountable to parliament have similar effects. Accountability to parliament ensures that their work is scrutinized, debated and

publicized, providing numerous additional opportunities for discussion of women's concerns. For example, the South African government has implemented a national machinery that proposes changes in legislation and which supervises and ensures implementation, through a system of checks and balances. The case of South Africa reveals how simultaneous functions, both inside and outside parliament, can operate – in South Africa a new constitution was drafted, a woman's empowerment programme was set up in consultation with women parliamentarians and an Office for the Status of Women was created to mainstream women's concerns and ensure follow-up. A Commission on Gender Equality was also established in 1997 to promote gender equality and to advise and make recommendations to Parliament or any other legislature with regard to any laws or proposed legislation which affects gender equality and the status of women. An important challenge is to ensure that these institutional mechanisms maintain their links with grass-roots activists, so that MPs are aware of what takes place outside parliamentary walls.

Establish mechanisms to encourage women to speak.

Changes in procedure can be effective in and of themselves and they can also have a wider impact on society. For example, Janet Beilstein formerly from the United Nations Department for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW) reported to the August 1997 International IDEA conference in Stockholm that when a woman raises her hand to speak in discussions in the German Bundestag she is automatically shifted to the top of the list of male speakers. This practice seeks to overcome women's diffidence about speaking in male-dominated groups by maximizing their opportunities to participate. It has become so ingrained in MPs that they repeat the practice even when they are outside of parliament.

Break down distinction between "hard" and "soft" issues.

More fundamental changes involve changing the way in which certain issues, namely those closer to women's concerns and in which women have an expertise (e.g. education, welfare policy, family policy) are viewed in the parliamentary hierarchy. As we have mentioned, the distinction between "hard" and "soft" issues is difficult to sustain and is likely to break down. This process will develop from increased interest in "soft" issues by all politicians, as women deputies become more successful in pushing them up the parliamentary agenda. Agenda changes are closely related to output changes.

Representation

Networks of women MPs have been successful in changing candidate selection rules to assist women's access to political office. Special measures such as quotas or minimum proportion rules for both sexes on candidate lists, reserved places for

Change candidate selection rules to assist women's access to political office.

women and earmarked public funds for political parties have been operationalized. Political parties have been at the centre of most of the effective strategies to enhance women's representative capacities. Parties have developed strategies to promote women internally into decision-making positions in the party organization and externally into elected assemblies and public appointments. Generally they have been more radical, committed and imaginative in devising policies to bring women into internal party positions than to nominate women as candidates for elected office. Their most effective action has been the introduction of various kinds of quota.

Quotas are, in most cases, temporary measures designed to overcome imbalances that exist between men and women. They are an effort to change the political equilibrium between women and men.¹³ In 1992, quotas were used by at least 56 political parties in 34 countries according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The two countries with the highest levels of women's representation in 2002 (Sweden and Denmark), both include parties that have used voluntary quotas of some kind. Often quotas are introduced in a two-stage process. First, minimum proportions of women are set for internal bodies; then, with the support of the newly installed women officials, they are extended to the party's lists of candidates.

- In Denmark, the first party to introduce quotas was the People's Socialist Party, which agreed in 1977 that all party bodies and electoral assemblies should have a minimum representation of 40 per cent from each sex. In 1979, 64 per cent of the party's representatives in parliament were women. In 1984, quotas were introduced for the selection of candidates for the European Parliament and in 1988 they were introduced for local elections.
- Norway also began with quotas for women for party boards, which made it much easier later to adopt quotas for elected bodies.

Both the level of compulsion and the size of a quota can be raised incrementally as the idea gains acceptance.

- The German Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) has a quota of 40 per cent for internal party councils and committees. Since 1998, the SPD has sought to achieve a minimum 40 per cent representation of each gender in all functions and mandates within the party.
- The Dutch Labour Party adopted a recommendation that 25 per cent of all seats inside and outside the party

should be held by women. In 1985, the recommendation was strengthened to become an official quota. The quota was raised in the 1990s to 30 per cent representation and in 1998 the Party Board adopted a further recommendation that 50 per cent of candidates' lists at the national level should be comprised of women.

- The British Labour Party agreed in 1989 to introduce quotas for women on all internal bodies, sometimes by increasing the size of the body, sometimes not. By 1993 it was possible to introduce a policy of all women shortlists in half of the party's vacant winnable seats, a policy that was overturned by the courts at the beginning of 1996.

Mechanisms for quotas vary by the type of electoral system. In single-member constituency first-past-the-post systems there are relatively few options, but in party list systems devices such as women's lists, placing women at high positions on closed lists and "zip lists" (a woman in every other position) are often used.¹⁴ The policy to enhance women's representation is most controversial where the introduction of new women means displacing men who are already established.¹⁵

One way of avoiding such displacement is by increasing the size of the relevant representative body; another way is to

Increase size of representative body to avoid displacement of men; or create new organizations for women.

create new organizations for women. When the British Labour Party introduced compulsory votes for women into its shadow cabinet election rules it also increased the size of the shadow cabinet. Similarly when it introduced new regional policy forums, these had minimum proportions of women members. This effect extends well beyond legislation as parliaments have been used to promote media discussion of feminist and other women's issues in the media. The spread of images of political women has

increased public expectations that there will be a substantial "feminization" of parliament, which will in turn result in discussions on equal political representation.

In general, European governments have been reluctant to introduce laws compelling quotas of women in electoral office. France and Belgium are exceptions. (It is worth noting that Belgium is a country that is used to quotas to protect the representation of its Flemish and Walloon communities.)

In June 1999, the French constitution was amended, whereby the law now "favours the equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and elected offices and positions". The parity principle requires that 50 per cent of candidates on lists forwarded for election must be women, otherwise lists of candidates will be rejected, or political parties will face financial sanctions.

Impact/Influence on Output

One clear indication that women have influenced output is the fact that quotas exist for women in political parties and parliament. Output changes are inevitable as women become more and more effective in promoting women's issues and concerns. Once women's issues are raised and sustained on the agenda, they rapidly secure the interest of all politicians. This interest can apply to a wide host of issues: political, economic, social and even cultural.

Recent research indicates that the most effective way to influence output and promote women's equality is to provide

Encourage financial incentives for programmes geared for women.

financial incentives to programmes geared towards women. For example, to enhance the education of girls, the Indian Government pledged to match and double any contribution made to the building of girls' schools. The Dutch Government previously used the system of public funding of political parties to earmark special funding for the promotion of women candidates by all parties. South Africa has

introduced a women's budget to fund projects that cater to the particular needs and interests of women.

Discourse

The most important change affecting discourse has been the overturning of implicit rules limiting appropriate topics of

Expand topics of debate to include issues relevant to women.

debate to matters in the "public" sphere. In cooperation with women's movements, parliamentarians in some countries have extended the agenda of legislatures to discussions of domestic violence, stalking, rape, consent in marriage and the rights of lesbian mothers.

Further change in the area of discourse can come about once women themselves become increasingly proud of their identities as women. In her article in a Dutch feminist magazine (*Opzij*), European parliamentarian Hedy D'Ancona surveys some of the most influential women Euro-MPs. She argues that by not being shy of their "womanhood", but rather being proud of their identity as women, women have enhanced their work, impact and performance.¹⁶ Women are often apologetic rather than proud or assertive of their identity as women. A change in a woman politician's self-

perception, Shvedova maintains, remains key to changing public perception and reaction to women and their contributions.

A woman's sex identity and her "outsider" status can even enhance electoral attractiveness, particularly in times of constitutional crisis. As new political entrants, women are often not associated with the corrupt and autocratic practices of collapsing regimes. Instead they can become symbols of modernity, honesty, democracy and caring, all images that are invaluable to reform movements.

The process of increasing the proportion of women in legislatures is part of a larger phenomenon of changing political images so that politics starts to be regarded as a normal activity for women. To take hold, such an attitude-shift requires reinforcement in the mass media and agreement within the women's movement that politics is an appropriate activity for women.

Criteria for Measuring Success

«I am convinced that when we have established and are working with a system based on real equality, then the quality of women's participation will be raised.»

Birgitta Dahl, Speaker of Parliament, Sweden

To claim that women representatives make a difference in political processes, it is necessary to establish clear criteria to measure their impact. A fundamental component of such criteria is that women parliamentarians act, at least some of the time, in women's interests. In formulating such criteria, it should also be recognized that: (1) there are many, sometimes conflicting, women's interests to be represented; and (2) that the very presence of women in a traditional male environment creates gender awareness and alters expectations.

As we have mentioned, what women can actually achieve will vary according to their numbers in parliament. Numbers are always an important, a necessary, if not sufficient criteria for sustained impact. As Dahlerup has said, it takes a substantial minority of women to ensure that critical acts of representation are undertaken. As the numbers of women grow we should expect increased participation by women in all aspects of parliamentary life, including interventions in debate, the proposing and sponsoring of legislation, access to parliamentary resources and occupancy of leading positions.

One criteria for determining success is that women's impact must be detectable in legislation on women's issues; this will become more prominent and frequent as women become more and more active and effective. Furthermore, with women's growing effectiveness, all legislation will increasingly take women's perspectives into account. An especially telling indication of women's impact will be an increase in men raising women's issues and exhibiting sensitivity to women's perspectives.

An important facet of success will involve interaction between the different agents of change: governments, women MPs, women's organizations and other members of civil society, locally, regionally and internationally. It should always be remembered that partnership between women and men is a key ingredient in the process of change and impact. Many women MPs openly acknowledge that to attempt to work alone, without men, is not feasible.¹⁷

Strategies to Enhance Impact

The following are some of the main strategies to help women maximize their power and effectiveness as representatives:

1. **Raise awareness.** Campaigns with the media should focus public attention on the importance of balanced participation and representation of women and men. Political parties or women's organizations could be financed to mount such campaigns and related activities. NGOs interested in encouraging the participation of women in political life have often been active in awareness raising. To encourage such campaigns, women and men politicians must be pro-active in identifying and establishing relations and promoting these issues with key members of civil society as well as with media producers and presenters. An example of this is the "Movement for Equal Rights – Equal Responsibilities" in Cyprus which aims to promote public awareness that women can be politicians.
2. **Work in partnership with men.** This entails designing programmes, whether inside or outside specific political forums, that take into account men's concerns and perspectives with respect to solidarity with women politicians.

This idea is now gaining credibility with the growing realization that women need the support of their male colleagues, partners and electorate to enhance the effectiveness of their strategies and increase the value of their social and political message.

3. **Enlarge the pool of eligible**, aspirant women. This means enhancing women's interest in becoming politicians as well as increasing their involvement in politics. Eligibility for and involvement in politics are partly a matter of access to general resources such as education, income and time; and partly a matter of specific resources such as knowledge and information about politics and political experience. Policies to enhance women's access to higher education, to paid employment and to various social and economic organizations provide a context for political participation that is increasingly hospitable to women. However, even where they lack adequate resources to participate politically, women are devising creative strategies to mobilize resources that would facilitate their access. For example, in India, some women draw upon transitional networks of extended family, neighbourhood links and other "women-centred" spheres to enable them to gather the resources they may require.
4. **Take positive action.** Quotas have been particularly effective in increasing women's presence in legislatures. In Sweden, women used several means to press their parties to nominate women candidates and place them in favourable positions on party lists. One way was to simply put forward women's names, a tactic that was very important in the early stages. They also conducted campaigns to promote women candidates and issued proposals to get women into better positions on party lists. Finally, they acted as watchdogs and protested whenever reversals occurred. This process of securing substantial increases in women's electoral fortunes was achieved without recourse to formal compulsory quotas. Recommendations, arguments and the threat to press for quotas succeeded in setting targets requiring women to get 40 per cent of the nominations. Once these targets were set, considerable progress was achieved.¹⁸
5. **Amend laws to allow positive discrimination.** Such practices are rare in politics. In general, governments do not use the law to compel parties to promote women, not least because such policies often run against other legal principles. The latest defeat in the British courts of the British Labour Party's policy of "forcing" women onto their lists (simply because they are women) in order to increase their numbers in parliament and in the party itself is not unusual. In Italy, the 1993 law to impose quotas of women on candidate's lists was overturned by the constitutional court in 1995; a similar regulation by the French Socialist Party was overturned in 1982. However, some countries have introduced laws requiring that women hold a certain proportion of seats on government-appointed bodies. Such laws were introduced in Denmark in 1985, Finland in 1987, Sweden in 1987, Norway in the 1980s, the Netherlands in 1992 and Germany in 1994. Published statistics in these countries indicate that women's participation in such bodies has risen steadily since. Governments can also use incentives. This is particularly easy where there is state funding of political parties. For example, the Dutch Government was able to make financial support for political parties dependent on their efforts to increase the proportion of women in their electoral bodies.
6. **Raise the general standard of living and access to resources of all women.** The high achievements of Scandinavian women stem from a combination of government policy, party initiative and demographic changes. The remarkable position of women in Scandinavian politics rests on social/demographic foundations involving considerable changes in the structure of women's family, economic and social lives. These are probably irreversible. The policies on equality of representation have included government equality reforms operating in conjunction with the influence of the women's movement, functioning both autonomously and through the political parties. To some extent there is feedback between demographic and political change as policies have included explicit attempts to change demographics and the gendered division of labour both in the family and in paid employment.
7. **Build and maintain links with women's organizations.** The maintenance of ties to the women's movement is crucial both for their support and for information on issues; similarly, the women's movement needs bases in political parties and in the legislature.
8. **Caucus and network.** This allows women MPs to share information, ideas, resources and support. Networks may be party-based, cross party (very rare), local, regional and international. Meetings, conferences, seminars, newsletters and electronic mail links are useful networking devices. Consultations with women's organizations and research gauging the needs of women (demand) and their practical constraints (supply), enable women MPs to target their efforts to activities that will be most useful and effective.
9. **Use the mass media effectively.** Women MPs must use the mass media, particularly the resources offered by organized media women broadcasters, editors and journalists, to communicate their concerns and highlight relevant issues. As well as enhancing the image of women MPs and promoting their political ideas, the mass media is instrumental in educating and mobilizing voters, particularly in rural areas – an important concern particularly in developing countries where women, with limited resources, may have difficulty reaching out to these voters.
10. Establish women's committees and other machinery accountable to the legislature. This provides opportunities for women deputies to gain experience and for women's issues and perspectives to be debated and publicized.

11. **Collect, monitor and disseminate statistics and facts about women's political participation and representation.** This enables women's advocates in parliament to analyse the position of women in decision-making and to define problems, devise appropriate solutions and seek political support for their preferred solutions. In particular, a collation of data on how women MPs have actually managed to make a difference through their legislatures is an ongoing need.
12. **Mainstream gender issues.** Ensure that gender issues are integrated within different political, social and economic concerns, in order to reveal the interdependency and linkages with other issue areas.

The ultimate objective of enhancing the quality of women's political participation is a goal that must be worked towards constantly. Much the same way as men's political input is in constant need of improvement, women should not be complacent about their contributions to the political process; nor should they take whatever gains achieved for granted. Political participation is a process that is evolving and developing. The actors involved in this process should be prepared always to strive to keep ahead of the changes. The women and men involved in this process should work together to be agents of change, constantly aware that obstacles are but means to realize new and evolving strategies. Women and men politicians have achieved a great deal in the area of women's participation. Politicians of both sexes have contributed to advancing women's political participation in general and within legislative structures in particular. Although the road ahead is long, the lessons learned from the accumulation of experiences, can and will, significantly illuminate and facilitate the many paths ahead.

Endnotes

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