



Issue Brief on *Elections*

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Introduction

Women's equal participation in political life, as voters, candidates and members of electoral committees, plays a crucial role in the advancement of women and the reconstruction of society following armed conflict. Universally, women remain underrepresented in political and decision-making positions, which results in the perpetuation of policies and practices that do not serve the needs of women and men equally. This disparity is especially dangerous in post-conflict settings where the voices of women must be heard in order to ensure equitable and sustainable reconstruction. In the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), more than 180 governments agreed that "Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning". Women's equal participation in decision-making is essential for justice and democracy and is a necessary component for women's interests to be taken into account after factions have laid down their arms. The Inter-Parliamentary Union offers comparative data on the percentage of women in each national parliament as well as information on women's participation in all political life. If the participation of women and the integration of women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making continue to be lacking, the goals of equality, development, and peace cannot be attained.

"There is much more to be done to ensure that women are accepted as equal partners in key decision-making processes. Especially in post-conflict situations, where new constitutions and legislative structures are being created, it is critical that women are present at the peace table and in post-war policy-making. Real progress towards gender equality will be seen when women have more say in the decisions that affect their lives."

Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director of UNIFEM

Election related content in the Independent Experts' Assessment of the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building



Fact Sheet

- In most countries, elections are planned a few years after the signing of a peace agreement to give citizens a chance to choose the leaders that will take them into the next phase of reconstruction. Post-conflict elections can be an opportunity for women to express newly found political impact or it can be a time where advances made during conflict and post-conflict periods can be stripped away.
- Women face particular barriers at the polls due to coercion by male relatives, threats or intimidation and less access to information and education. In post-conflict settings, when the foundations of a new society are being built, surmounting such barriers is of vital importance if new constitutions and legislation are to reflect the experiences, insights and needs of women.
- During conflict, women often gain valuable and relevant leadership and organizing skills, which can be translated into policy-making roles in the post-conflict period. However, women and men have differential access to resources, education, formal political parties and the media. As a result, women candidates face particular challenges when running for elected office. In addition, women candidates face discrimination and even reprisals for stepping out of traditional gender roles, even if non-traditional behaviour became the norm during wartime.
- Quotas have been one of the most successful mechanisms for guaranteeing a minimum percentage of women in official negotiations and elected positions. Quotas have ensured women's participation in the Arta peace conference in Somalia. In South Africa, the African National Congress's support for a quota led to 29% representation of women in the first parliamentary elections in 1994. In Mozambique, the Organizacao da Mulher Mocambicana recruits women for elected positions and now women make up 30% of legislative bodies. As of 2002, quota or reservation systems were in place in more than 25 countries; quota systems are controversial and have mixed success.
- After the civil war, Salvadoran women have been very active in promoting gender equality within the electoral system. Women in El Salvador fought for a quota system for the 1994 parliamentary elections and were unsuccessful; 21 women made it onto the party lists, representing 25%. Women's organizations began to build a coalition to press for women's demands called Mujeres '94; this coalition worked to increase female voter participation, persuade parties to include women's demands in their platforms, and elect women candidates. In preparation for the 1997 elections, the Farabundo Marti para la Liberation Front (FMLN) created the slogan, "Woman, vote for yourself." In the 1997 elections, women were elected to 29% of the positions.
- In Nicaragua, female Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) members struggled to increase the number of women holding elected office. In 1994, FSLN women succeeded in persuading the party to allocate 30% of all party positions to women; they also pressed to make sure that the quota was observed in the selection of departmental and municipal candidates. The Women's Coalition was formed in 1996 with the aim of combating discrimination against women and supporting women's rights in the political arena. The 1996 elections resulted in the election of 64 women, 35.6% representation.



- In 2001, Rwandan women represented 27% of elected councilors at the district level. The May 2003 constitution calls for 30% (24 out of 80 seats) representation in decision-making posts and in the Chamber of Deputies. Women in parliament, civil society, and government have developed cross-sectoral initiatives and are playing significant roles in post-conflict governance. Structures and initiatives that have been developed include:
 1. A parallel system of women's councils and women-only elections guaranteeing a women's mandate for all elected bodies.
 2. A triple balloting system guaranteeing the election of women to a percentage of seats at the sector and district levels.
 3. The Ministry for Gender and Women in Development and gender posts within other government and ministerial structures, at all levels.
- Elisabeth Domitien, the first appointed women Prime Minister and the first black women ruler of an independent state. She was the Prime Minister of the Central African Republic from January 1975-April 1976.
- Sirimavo Bandaranaike was elected as the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka in 1965. She was the first women Prime Minister and the first female Defense Minister in history.
- The record level of women members of parliament was reached in 2003, when Rwandan women were elected to 48.8% of seats in the Lower House. The number of parliaments overall has of course also risen, from 26 in 1945 to 184 in 2005¹. The percentage of women MPs worldwide over the years is as follows:
 - 1945: 3.0%
 - 1955: 7.5%
 - 1965: 8.1%
 - 1975: 10.9%
 - 1985: 12.0%
 - 1995: 11.6%
 - 2005: 15.7%
- Her Royal Highness, Princess Marie Ranariddh stated that, "At the 1993 {Cambodian} National Elections, women formed 55% of the total electorate; by participating in the peace process in large numbers, women were instrumental in bringing back the peace process to a war-torn nation"
- In 1993, before the elections in Cambodia, local women associated politics with fear and violence and saw them as synonymous. For this reason, women felt that they had no place in that realm. However, returnee and expatriate women were less susceptible to the fear surrounding elections; the confidence of the returnee women inspired local women into political activism.
- The following differences, stated by the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women and the Department of Political Affairs in a report on Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes in Post-Conflict Countries, 20 February 2004, are likely to impact negatively on women's participation in electoral processes in post-conflict situations:



There is an expectation that elections will build or consolidate the peace, and this is often seen as the key requirement. As a consequence, the “success” of an election may be judged not so much on the basis of the criteria, which normally apply in democratic countries, but on the extent to which it has contributed to the political process of ending conflict.

Democratic commitment is fragile, with participants prepared to subvert the electoral process for short-term political gain, or even denounce or withdraw from the process.

Military involvement with electoral processes is likely to arise. When the police have a high profile role, where there is no shortage of either recent combatants or weapons and where there are still groups committed to violent means, the security climate is likely to be an obstacle to the participation of women.

Political parties tend either to be derived from movements associated with a political struggle, or to be small, disorganized bodies, often based around regions, tribes, clans, religious groups, language groups or high profile individuals, and sometimes amounting to little more than patronage networks.

There are large numbers of displaced persons either within or outside the country. These groups typically include predominant numbers of women and children. The existence of residency requirements in many electoral laws gives rise to a significant risk that they will be disenfranchised.

Institutional development is limited. There may be a history of human rights violations, and the judiciary may be weak, poorly trained, corrupt, politicized, representing, in the worst cases, a system of rule by law rather than rule of law. In such situation, the ability of women to obtain proper protection of their legitimate rights is likely to be severely limited.

Public campaigning tends to proceed through meetings, rallies, and marches which may be difficult for women to attend.

Fraud, corruption and intimidation are generally widespread. In situations where women are already disempowered, it may be very difficult for them to resist pressures of this type.

There may be a partisan use of state resources, in a manner which is likely to entrench the status quo.

The electorate often contains a substantial illiterate component. In cases in which women have suffered this sort of deprivation of opportunity, they will be particularly disadvantaged.

The reality of post-conflict mission funding is that international resources often arrive late or are insufficient. The challenge is to ensure that women's participation is seen as a core activity of the post-conflict mission, and not merely a desirable soft option to be cut when “hard choices” have to be made.



Treaties and Institutions

- The Beijing Platform for Action calls for a 30% minimum representation of women in decision-making bodies. Some NGOs have expressed dissatisfaction for the 30% as there has been a lack of progress since Beijing; these NGOs call for gender parity, with a range of 45 to 55% as acceptable in a democracy.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) draws on comparative experience, analyses democracy trends and assistance, and develops policy options, tools and guidelines relating to political participation, electoral systems, political systems, and post-conflict democracy building.²
- The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Plan of Action to Correct Current Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Political Life was adopted in 1994 in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.³ The Platform of Action covers the prerequisites for equal participation between women and men, the legal basis needed for equal participation, steps to be taken at national and international levels and follow-up procedures.

South Africa: The Municipal Structures Act states that political parties must ensure that women comprise 50% of lists submitted for election at the local level;

Namibia: In 1992 and 1998 local authority elections, a legislated affirmative action provision required political parties to include at least 30% women on their party candidate lists.

- Party quotas, which have been voluntarily adopted by political parties include:
South Africa: in 1994 the African National Congress implemented a 33.3% quota;
Mozambique: in 1999, Frelimo Party introduced a 30% quota on electoral lists.

Tools and Checklists

- UNDP: Drafting Gender Aware Legislation: How to Promote and Protect Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
- UNDP Project on Governance in the Arab Region: Good Governance Practices to Enhance and Deepen Building Women's Constituencies: Lessons-Learnt and Future Steps.⁴
- A Guide to Women's Voting Rights in Arabic (National Democratic Institute)⁵
- Women's Campaign Manual, Nairobi, Kenya, 1997 (NDI)⁶
- Women's Candidate Training Programme Trainer's Manual, Nepal, 2000⁷
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance/ Participation and Election Processes⁸
- Official documents from the Expert Group Meeting on "Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes in Post-Conflict Countries", held in Glen Cove New York, 19-22 January 2004.⁹



- Women and Elections: Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections, OSAGI and the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs, June 2005¹⁰

UNIFEM Action

UNIFEM programmes promote women's leadership in all sectors, with the goal of giving women an equal voice in shaping the policies that affect their lives and choices. Two key priorities characterize UNIFEM's support for women's leadership:

1. Peace and Security: Strengthening the gender focus in prevention and early warning mechanisms, improving protection and assistance for women affected by conflict; by making women's and gender perspectives central to peace processes and supporting gender justice in post-conflict peace-building.

2. Gender Justice: Women's empowerment and equal participation in leadership and political decision-making position are necessary elements for ensuring that gender equality is integrated into policymaking and constitutional, electoral and judicial reform.

To increase women's opportunities to influence the direction of society and to remove obstacles to women's access to power, UNIFEM advocates for gender responsive legislation and constitutional revisions that create pathways for development to empower women and their organizations. UNIFEM supports a range of programmes to build gender awareness and develop gender equality allies among public servants. Projects in all regions strengthen synergy among women's machineries, women parliamentarians, and women's civil society organizations. Through training, regional exchanges, and support for constituency building, results can be seen in areas ranging from national development plans to decentralization.

- In the Pacific region, UNIFEM is strengthening women's political empowerment through capacity-building, training of parliamentarians and voter education in Fiji, Samoa and the Solomon Islands.
- In Rwanda, UNIFEM supported the Gender Desk and its assistance to the Women's Forum of the Transitional National Assembly in the successful campaign for a new inheritance law guaranteeing women's rights to land. UNIFEM also supported women's participation in drafting a new constitution and their active role in peace-building and reconciliation.
- In Kenya, in preparation for the parliamentary elections in December 2002, UNIFEM partnered with local organisations, for example the Kenya Women's Political Caucus, to provide media advocacy, election monitoring, training and capacity building for women running for election. The result was a clear increase in the number of women elected to parliament, the first ever appointment of six women to cabinet, and the establishment of a Ministry for Gender, Sport and Culture.
- In Timor-Leste, the United Nations Transitional Administration (UNTAET) announced that quotas would not be used in the national election to help elect women, UNIFEM and the UNTAET gender advisor organized training workshops for women who considered running for office. UN Special Representative, Sergio Vierira de Mello, used incentives to get women on the ballot; he promised transportation and media access to parties who not only ran women candidates, but placed them near the top of their lists. Though only 24 of the women trained were elected, those women returned to their towns and ran voter education for women.



- In 1992 and 1993, UNIFEM supported a variety of activities to promote the role of Cambodian women in the lead-up to the Legislative Elections and promote their participation in the new political environment post-elections. These activities formed the basis of "Gender Issues in the General Election". This project conducted information and media campaigns to raise women's awareness of issues surrounding the elections. UNIFEM also provided training to women who were involved in the projects as well as gender sensitivity training to international and local staff members of NGOs. All of these activities culminated in the National Women's Summit in March 1993, where Cambodian women discussed the "Five-Point Plan". After the elections, UNIFEM supported women in the drafting of the constitution and trained women in constitutional law. UNIFEM also provided an expert to help draft a "Women's Code" which is a set of specific legal considerations for women.
- In Iraq, beginning in July 2003 UNIFEM collaborated closely with the growing number of women's organizations that were organizing for reconstruction and the rebuilding process. Despite the very real threats posed by continuing violence, Iraqi women persisted in their efforts to participate in and influence the reform process. With UNIFEM support, the Iraqi Women's Network held a meeting on 30 March 2004 at which representatives from women's NGOs set a common agenda for women's participation in the elections processes. UNIFEM then acted as a broker to enable local women's groups to advocate for their agenda to the UN system, including Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, and Ms. Carla Perelli's Elections Advisory Team. UNIFEM and women's organizations (including the Iraqi Women's Network and the Advisory Council for Women's Affairs in Iraq) followed up these meetings with initiatives to increase women's participation in the selection process. Nomination forms for both the Electoral Commission and the Interim Government were distributed among Iraqi women, public relations campaigns were undertaken to encourage women to nominate themselves for positions, and women received guidance in filling out and submitting the forms. These efforts were rewarded: on 1 June, six women were among the 30 ministers named to the new Iraq Interim Government; of the 1,878 nominations received by the UN electoral assistance team, 111 (6 per cent) were female nominees, and two women were named to the nine-member Commission. UNIFEM also worked to promote a focused media strategy and raise awareness about the rights and roles of women in elections and other civic processes. UNIFEM supported the creation of leaflets, brochures, posters and booklets by the Iraqi Ministry of Municipality and Public Works and by civil society organizations, as well as funding a documentary film on women's views about the election, which aired in mid-December. Field reports from Iraq indicate that, where security and transportation were not an impediment, women were active voters – voting first and making up most of the voters - during the January 2005 election. Looking forward, UNIFEM is supporting the development and launch of the first women's radio station in Iraq, which will continue to be a key source of information for women on future elections.
- UNIFEM also placed a strong focus on women's participation in the October 2004 presidential elections in Afghanistan. Workshops on "Women's Rights in the New Constitution and the Elections" were held in five UNIFEM-supported IDP Women's Community Centres, located throughout the country. As in Iraq, UNIFEM pursued a strategy of working with the media in Afghanistan to promote respect for women's rights and to encourage women to be full and equal partners in all processes of governance and post-conflict reconstruction. Through collaboration with two Afghan Ministries, UNIFEM supported the establishment of the Afghan Women Journalists' Forum and is brokering relationships with other UN agencies – such as UNAMA Civil Education Unit, UNFPA and UNICEF – so that the network can play an active role in promoting women's participation as candidates and voters in next year's parliamentary elections. In the months leading up



to the presidential election, UNIFEM supported a local NGO to hold gender awareness training sessions for elections commissioners to create an enabling environment for women's participation. UNIFEM also organized an open discussion between women activists and 10 out of the 18 presidential candidates, before a group of more than 150 male and female journalists. The discussion – the first event of its kind to publicly address women's rights – was broadcast on national television and prompted public discussion of women's empowerment in Afghan society. UNIFEM's contributions to the widespread efforts to encourage women's voter participation were ultimately rewarded: of some 10 million registered voters, approximately 40% were women and participation by women on election day was high, albeit uneven due to security concerns.

- Women make up 26% of the national parliament in Timor-Leste, among the highest proportion of women legislators in the region. With village elections being held throughout the country as part of an effort to decentralize government, UNIFEM is working with East Timorese women's rights advocates – including national and regional alliances of NGOs that have come together to support women's political participation – to sustain this important gain and to support women decision makers at the local level so that they can effectively represent a women's agenda. UNIFEM and local partners from government and civil society trained potential women candidates in two pilot districts to become more engaged and successful leaders, focusing on commitment to transparency, consultation with civil society, responsiveness to gender concerns and accountability to their constituency. The staggered nature of the village elections allows UNIFEM to incorporate lessons learned even while implementing this project. In 2004, trainings were piloted in two districts and twice as many potential women candidates participated as had been expected.

UN Resources

- Security Council resolution 1325 (31 October 2000): The Security Council reaffirms the importance of the role of women in conflict prevention and peace-building. The Security Council stresses the importance of equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and the need to increase women's roles in decision-making with regard to conflict resolution and prevention. This resolution also urges the appointment of women in decision-making bodies and peace processes.
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action¹¹
- Convention on the Political Rights of Women¹²
- Report on the Elections of the Commune Council¹³
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination of Women (CEDAW)¹⁴
- United Nations Volunteers and Electoral Assistance¹⁵
- Electoral Support and Equality between Women and Men¹⁶
- How UNDP Supports Parliaments¹⁷
- Increasing Women's Participation in Government: What Strategies Would Work Best for Afghanistan?¹⁸



- 5 October 2001. Security Council urges all Men and Women of Kosovo to vote in November 17 Elections. Press Release.¹⁹

Recommendations

Recommendations on Women and Elections in Conflict Situations made by the Independent Experts and other Actors, Institutions and Organizations - On Elections the Independent Experts call for:

- National electoral laws and international electoral assistance to establish quotas to achieve gender parity in decision-making positions, beginning with a minimum of 30%, to ensure voter registration and education for women, to increase the ratio of women in electoral commissions.
- The Secretary-General to increase the number of women in senior positions in peace-related functions. Priority should be given to achieving gender parity in his appointment of women as Special Representatives and Envoys, beginning with a minimum of 30% in by 2005 to achieve gender equality by 2015.
- Gender equality to be recognized in all peace processes, agreements and transitional governance structures. International and regional organizations and all participating parties involved in peace processes should advocate for gender parity.
- A United Nations Trust Fund for Women's Peace-Building, which would leverage the political, financial and technical support needed for women's civil society organizations and women leaders to have an impact on peace efforts nationally, regionally, and internationally would be established.
- UNIFEM to work closely with the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) to ensure that gender issues are incorporated in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction in order to integrate gender perspectives in peace-building and to support women's full and equal participation in decision-making. And for the UNFPA to strengthen its work in emergency situations in order to build women's capacity in conflict situations.
- Peace negotiations and agreements to have a gender perspective through the full integration of women's concerns and participation in peace processes. Women's peace tables should be established and enabled through financial, political, and technical assistance.
- The UN and donors to invest in women's organizations as a strategy for conflict prevention, resolution, and peace-building.

Recommendations from the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action:

Incorporate the needs and priorities of women and girls as ex-combatants, "camp Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making:

By Governments:

- Commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, and in the judiciary, setting specific targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women with a



view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action, in all governmental and public administration positions.

- Take measures, including, where appropriate, in electoral systems that encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective public positions in the same proportion and at the same levels as men.
- Protect and promote the equal rights of women and men to engage in political activities and to freedom of association, including membership in political parties and trade unions.
- Review the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation of women in elected bodies and consider, where appropriate, the adjustment or reform of those systems.
- Monitor and evaluate progress in the representation of women through the regular collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative and qualitative data on women and men at all levels in various decision-making positions in the public and private sectors, and disseminate data on the number of women and men employed at various levels in Governments on a yearly basis; ensure that women and men have equal access to the full range of public appointments and set up mechanisms within governmental structures for monitoring progress in this field.
- Support non-governmental organizations and research institutes that conduct studies on women's participation in and impact on decision-making and the decision-making environment.
- Encourage greater involvement of indigenous women in decision-making at all levels.
- Encourage and, where appropriate, ensure that government-funded organizations adopt non-discriminatory policies and practices in order to increase the number and raise the position of women in their organizations.
- Recognize that shared work and parental responsibilities between women and men promote women's increased participation in public life, and take appropriate measures to achieve this, including measures to reconcile family and professional life.
- Aim at gender balance in the lists of national candidates nominated for election or appointment to United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and other autonomous organizations of the United Nations system, particularly for posts at the senior level.

By political parties:

- Consider examining party structures and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women.
- Consider developing initiatives that allow women to participate fully in all internal policy-making structures and appointive and electoral nominating processes.
- Consider incorporating gender issues in their political agenda, taking measures to ensure that women can participate in the leadership of political parties on an equal basis with men.

By Governments, national bodies, the private sector, political parties, trade unions, employers' organizations, research and academic institutions, sub-regional and regional bodies and non-governmental and international organizations:



- Take positive action to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision-making positions.
- Create or strengthen, as appropriate, mechanisms to monitor women's access to senior levels of decision-making.
- Review the criteria for recruitment and appointment to advisory and decision-making bodies and promotion to senior positions to ensure that such criteria are relevant and do not discriminate against women.
- Encourage efforts by non-governmental organizations, trade unions and the private sector to achieve equality between women and men in their ranks, including equal participation in their decision-making bodies and in negotiations in all areas and at all levels.
- Develop communications strategies to promote public debate on the new roles of men and women in society, and in the family as defined in paragraph 29 above.
- Restructure recruitment and career-development programmes to ensure that all women, especially young women, have equal access to managerial, entrepreneurial, technical and leadership training, including on-the-job training.
- Develop career advancement programmes for women of all ages that include career planning, tracking, mentoring, coaching, training and retraining.
- Encourage and support the participation of women's non-governmental organizations in United Nations conferences and their preparatory processes.
- Aim at and support gender balance in the composition of delegations to the United Nations and other international forums.

By the United Nations:

- Implement existing and adopt new employment policies and measures in order to achieve overall gender equality, particularly at the Professional level and above, by the year 2000, with due regard to the importance of recruiting staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible, in conformity with Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations.
- Develop mechanisms to nominate women candidates for appointment to senior posts in the United Nations, the specialized agencies and other organizations and bodies of the United Nations system.
- Continue to collect and disseminate quantitative and qualitative data on women and men in decision-making and analyze their differential impact on decision-making and monitor progress towards achieving the Secretary-General's target of having women hold 50 per cent of managerial and decision-making positions by the year 2000.

By women's organizations, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, social partners, producers, and industrial and professional organizations:

- Build and strengthen solidarity among women through information, education and sensitization activities.
- Advocate at all levels to enable women to influence political, economic and social decisions, processes and systems, and work towards seeking accountability from elected representatives on their commitment to gender concerns.



- Establish, consistent with data protection legislation, databases on women and their qualification for use in appointing women to senior decision-making and advisory positions, for dissemination to Governments, regional and international organizations and private enterprise, political parties and other relevant bodies.

Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership:

By Governments, national bodies, the private sector, political parties, trade unions, employers' organizations, sub-regional and regional bodies, non-governmental and international organizations and educational institutions:

- Provide leadership and self-esteem training to assist women and girls, particularly those with special needs, women with disabilities and women belonging to racial and ethnic minorities to strengthen their self-esteem and to encourage them to take decision-making positions.
- Have transparent criteria for decision-making positions and ensure that the selecting bodies have a gender-balanced composition.
- Create a system of mentoring for inexperienced women and, in particular, offer training, including training in leadership and decision-making, public speaking and self-assertion, as well as in political campaigning.
- Provide gender-sensitive training for women and men to promote non-discriminatory working relationships and respect for diversity in work and management styles.
- Develop mechanisms and training to encourage women to participate in the electoral process, political activities and other leadership areas.²⁰

Agreed conclusions from the Forty-Eighth Session on the Commission on the Status of Women,

1-12 March 2004. Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building. Department of Political Affairs. EGM/ELEC/2004/REPORT. 20 February 2004.

In regard to post-conflict peace building, The Commission on the Status of Women calls on Governments, as well as all other relevant participants in these processes.

Concerning elections:

a. ensure equal access of women in all stages of the electoral process including to consider the adoption of measures for increasing women's participation in elections through, inter alia, individual voter registration, temporary gender specific positive actions and access to information, representation in bodies administering elections and as election monitors and observers, as well as encouraging political parties to involve women fully and equally in all aspects of their operations;

b. ensure equal access for women to voter and civic education, provide women candidates with full support, training and financial resources, and eliminate discriminatory practices hampering women's participation either as voters or candidates.

Concerning reconstruction and rehabilitation

a. ensure the full participation of women on equal bases, in the reconstruction and rehabilitation process;



- b. ensure the equal access of women to social services, in particular health and education, and in this regard, to promote the provision of adequate health care and health services and assistance for women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations and counseling for post-conflict trauma;
- c. facilitate equal employment opportunities for women to achieve their economic empowerment.

Recommendations adopted by the Expert Group Meeting on Enhancing women's participation in electoral processes in post-conflict countries from 19-22 January 2004:

A. The Role of Actors

It was recommended that *all* actors including government actors, international actors, and civil society actors should:

- Be guided by the relevant laws and instruments that give full expression to the rights of women as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, and establish mechanisms for ensuring that those rights will, in practice, be enjoyed.
- Be guided by the recommendations of the Ottawa Expert Group Meeting on Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring the Participation of Women: a Framework for Model Provisions.
- Work proactively for the inclusion of women as part of delegations to international and national peace negotiations, including by structuring negotiations to include women as participants and by providing incentives to parties to the conflict to include women on their negotiating teams.
- Help protect and empower women refugees when negotiating United Nation's Status of Mission Agreements with neighbouring countries, for example, by preventing forced returns and ensuring availability of voting rights to women in refugee camps.
- Create platforms to ensure women's voices are heard, through meetings, events and publicity, and by consulting and being seen to consult with women leaders and women's groups.
- Support transitional bodies, constituent assemblies and other such institutions by enhancing their capacities and supporting their women members, and encourage gender balance in their composition.
- Mainstream gender into peacekeeping mission budgets and include provisions for gender units/advisers and gender mainstreaming activities throughout the mission.
- Ensure effective donor coordination which should be clear on the priority attached to advancing women's participation and gender equality.
- Consider using opinion polling and focus groups to identify issues of importance for women in post-conflict countries and to develop ways to be responsive.



- Support and foster domestic civil society organizations with a view to strengthening their involvement in developing women's political rights.

B. Legal Framework

The expert group meeting recommends that a legal framework should:

- Ensure gender balance in all bodies created as part of the design or implementation of the constitutional, political, legislative and electoral laws and regulations. To ensure this outcome special measures including the use of quotas and incentives should be explored.
- Ensure that women participate and hold decision-making positions in all committees, commissions or other fora that are established, including in drafting committees and create specialized bodies to advance the rights of women.
- Have specific provisions on non-discrimination and the full equality between women and men, in accordance with international standards on human rights and women's rights.
- Ensure that citizenship rights of women and men are equal in all respects.

With regard to the electoral process, the legal framework should:

- Eliminate procedures that might constitute indirect discrimination such as an excessive requirement for signatures of citizens.
- Ensure that campaign financing laws do not directly or indirectly discriminate against women, such as requiring an unreasonably high monetary deposit taking into account that women often have less access to resources than men.
- Include provisions to assist illiterate voters, and ensure that these provisions are not abused.
- Include provisions to ensure polling stations are established and located so as to provide easy access for women voters.
- Establish a complaints and appeals process that can provide rapid and genuine redress to individuals whose electoral rights have been violated. Procedures should be simple, clear and rule-based and should operate in a way that inspires the confidence of the electorate. Women should participate as members of any administrative or judicial body considering election complaints.

The expert group recommends that:

Government actors should

- Ensure that the relevant laws and instruments give full expression to the rights of women as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, and establish mechanisms for ensuring that those rights will, in practice, be enjoyed.
- Review the legal framework for proposed constitutional, political, legislative and electoral laws and regulations to identify elements which may hamper women's participation, and amend legislation to correct problems identified.



International actors should

- Within their mandates, encourage the adoption of a legal framework that guarantees equal participation by women in elections.
- Encourage the formation of new institutions and strengthening of existing institutions, including ministries of women's affairs, national commissions on women, and ombudsman offices and other innovative institutions that can contribute to empowering women and advancing their political rights.
- Undertake or offer to assist with a gender analysis of the legal framework on elections, to help identify any shortcomings or indirect discrimination and suggest remedies, and provide advisers on human rights and women's rights to improve legal frameworks.
- Encourage and facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, particularly within the same region on ways to advance women's participation in elections. For example, open lists and proportional representation systems have been shown to lead to the election of greater numbers of women than majoritarian systems, although both systems are accepted as meeting international standards.
- Provide information on special measures and encourage their adoption. It has been shown that special measures, including quotas for women on party lists or reserved seats for women, can lead to a significant increase in women's participation as members of parliament or other elected bodies. Special measures are acceptable under international standards such as article 4 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Such measures can also be among the most effective means of increasing women's participation and the election of women candidates. These measures can be applied at local or regional levels as well as at the national level.
- Pursue further research on
- Special measures with a view toward evaluating their effectiveness;
- How different constitutional and political legislative frameworks affect the level of women's participation and representation;

Civil society actors should

- Organize public consultations, and lobby for women to participate and hold decision making positions in all committees, commissions or other fora that are established, including in drafting committees during the reform process.
- Identify and support (including through training) qualified women to participate in these fora. Effective strategies for influencing domestic reform can include developing education outreach campaigns, and reaching out to the international community and other civil society organizations for support.
- Support gender equality through issuing position papers and lobbying on:
- Application of international legal instruments;
- Internal party democracy including candidate recruitment and party rules;



- Election monitoring and observation mechanisms;
- Application of special measures, including gender quotas and party ballot composition;
- Monitor the Government's implementation of peace agreements and mobilize public support for the full implementation where agreements have included women's equitable political participation.
- Ensure that women who are refugees, internally displaced persons, non-registered voters, or those without official identification forms and/or birth certificates are not excluded or disenfranchised due to barriers of citizenship.
- Develop a media strategy that highlights the application of international norms and standards or specific constitutional or electoral reform proposals.
- Develop coalitions and alliances among sectoral groups and non-governmental organizations, to unite, for example, women's groups and human rights organizations, to galvanize support for constitutional and electoral reform.
- Provide training for members of electoral commissions on international laws and standards on gender equality issues as well as state obligations.

C. Political Representation and Political Parties

The expert group meeting recommends that political parties should:

- Be required, as a condition of registration, to have a constitution specifying their position on gender equality. Where possible, such requirements should be incorporated in the document or instrument which is likely to be seen by all political players as being most binding.
- Adopt internally democratic structures (e.g., open and transparent candidate nomination procedures) in order to advance the participation of women rather than closed decision-making structures.
- Identify gender issues in their platforms and select women candidates using transparent criteria, party-list placement in winnable positions and other mechanisms to promote their election such as a "zippered" list, in which the names of men and women alternate, which provides the best possibility of electing greater numbers of women.
- In their party rules, mandate that the membership of party management and party policy committees is gender balanced and that women are included in decision-making roles. They should ensure that women candidates have access to resources and special training opportunities. These should include strategies that reach out to include women.
 - If a party Code of Conduct exists, include standards on participation by women and gender equality.
 - Take into account that experience has shown that women's political participation can often be most effectively advanced at the party level through setting voluntary quotas or targets on the proportion of women candidates who will appear on party lists. Targets are most effective if linked to a specific timeframe and accompanied by training and resources for women party members and candidates.



In order to ensure that political parties incorporate gender perspectives, the expert group meeting recommends that:

Government actors should

- Ensure that elections be conducted over a timeframe long enough to enable political parties to be firmly established and developed in a manner which does not merely replicate the structures which preceded or arose during the period of conflict.
- Implement processes which give political parties the strongest incentives, including access to state resources, the state media at election time, and public funding, to involve women fully in all aspects of the parties' operations. This includes, if necessary, making mandatory requirements (relating, for example, to nomination of women candidates and internal party democracy) which a party must satisfy to gain or retain legal recognition.
- Provide sufficient resources to women's organizations which are involved in supporting, researching or encouraging the greater participation of women in electoral processes, not only at election time but also between elections.
- Provide resources to all parties on an equitable basis for the training of women in the skills required to become candidates and undertake public campaigns to emphasize the legitimate role of women as candidates, to break down stereotypes, and to encourage women to become candidates. Where a party has a women's wing, make resources available to strengthen its activities.
- Explore systems for guaranteeing representation of women in the legislature, including legislated or voluntary party quotas within a list system of proportional representation, or reserved seats within a majoritarian or plurality system. Where quotas are adopted for implementation, the enforcement mechanism should be clearly specified.

International actors should

- Establish and support programmes to develop cross-party cooperation among women candidates, including training through cross-party caucuses, and support men and women members of parliament and activists in developing cross-party networks and policies on issues of special concern to women.
- Encourage research on the circumstances under which women's wings of political parties help advance women's political participation, as these entities have in some instances promoted the advancement of women and in others, relegated women to a subsidiary place in the party.
- Assist with training
- All political party members and candidates – men and women – on gender-related issues including gender awareness;
- Journalists on effective coverage of women candidates and issues of special concern to women, as well as training on gender sensitivity;
- Women candidates on how to deal effectively with the media. More research is needed on the quantity, content and presentation of the coverage of women in elections by the media;



- Security forces on gender aspects of elections in post-conflict societies, including developing model codes of conduct for police and military;
- Consider sponsoring a gender-sensitive security liaison focal point within the police or military for political parties and candidates, as well as safe havens in dangerous areas where women candidates campaign.

Civil society actors should

- Advocate and lobby to ensure that critical gender issues are addressed in political party platforms. They can hold elected officials accountable between elections by monitoring and publishing performance on issues of importance to women against party platforms.
- Lobby for media access and free public media to all political parties as part of election process. Consider incentives such as extra airtime to parties who propose women candidates and support training for women candidates on media issues.
- Support women's wings to ensure that they are linked to main decision-making bodies within their political parties, and that they know how to influence the candidate selection process so as to avoid being marginalized in party decision-making.
- Because of ties to the community-level, serve as a link between women candidates and the grassroots, and provide an incentive to women to run as candidates and use this link to mobilize voters and raise resources for candidates.
- Once women are elected to office, encourage, establish and support programmes to develop cross-party cooperation among women candidates and potential candidates, including network and training through cross-party fora. In addition support men and women members of parliament and activists in developing cross-party networks and policies on issues of special concern to women.
- Help elaborate strategies for elected women officials to ensure that they function effectively as legislators and prepare for re-election campaigns.

D. Voter and Civic Education

The expert group meeting recommends that voter and civic education programmes should:

- Start early, cover the entire election process and include the roles of women as candidates and voters.
- Use inclusive language and images that include both women and men and develop specific material targeted at women. Use a variety of methods and media that are sensitive to the needs of all citizens.
- Address not only voter registration and voting procedures (such as informing women that their vote will be secret and a matter of their individual choice), but also focus on other specific issues of concern in a country.
- Create safe resource centres to facilitate women's access to voter education programmes.
- Review curriculum materials to ensure they are gender sensitive and explicitly address the rights of women to vote and to be candidates in the electoral process, as well as in the broader political process and develop curriculum materials suitable for long-term civic education in schools.



- Provide sufficient resources so as to meet the objective of universal coverage. Voter and civic education should be seen as an ongoing activity, not just as a one-off process at election time.
- Involve women's organizations from the outset in the design and implementation of voter and civic education campaigns and ensure that women are involved on an equal basis in its delivery.
- Provide sessions for women only and ensure the locations and times of voter education sessions allow women's full access. Where necessary, child-care arrangements should be incorporated in planning for voter education.

The expert group recommends that:

Government actors should

- Provide sufficient and sustained resources for gender sensitive, neutral and accurate voter and civic education to ensure that all voters understand their electoral rights and responsibilities, and are able to cast valid votes.

International actors should

- Support comprehensive gender-sensitive voter education programmes that ensure women's full participation in the design and dissemination of the programmes.
- Support civic education campaigns that include information on the benefits of democracy, reconciliation and peace-building. Information should be gender sensitive and should combat stereotypes.
- Develop specific tools and creative means to help get voter and civic education messages to the public, in all relevant languages. These might include plays, radio and television messages, and establishing internet cafés which are safe and accessible for women. Monitor and assess whether messages are getting through effectively to the voters.
- Develop and support training opportunities for women through partnerships and exchange programmes.
- Support links between the party leadership and women at the grassroots level to enhance mutual understanding of election-related issues.

Civil society actors should

- Monitor the content and design of government publications on voter and civic education to ensure that they are accessible and gender-sensitive.
- Develop training programmes in civic education that address education and skills fundamental to living in a democracy (specifically, literacy skills) in addition to immediate voter education training.
- Develop gender-sensitive voter education messages that
- Highlight the capacities of women as candidates and political representatives;



- Encourage women to run for office;
- Emphasize that votes are secret, individual, and personal (i.e. not "family votes");
- Inform the population that elections are a peaceful process for governments in transition, and if conducted in a free and fair manner, the results would be accepted as conclusive and final;
- Teach women not only how to vote but also the responsibilities of the electorate and elected officials;
- Involve male community leaders, party officials, and religious leaders, in endorsing and participating in training and education programmes for women;
- Design training targeted at men and "local notables" on women's capacity as voters and candidates.
- Insist that electoral commissions conduct a wide-reaching public education campaign targeting women as well as men to ensure that all citizens understand and have access to voting procedures. Electoral commissions should make the training material available in local languages.
- Collaborate with teachers and academics to develop curricula on civic education (e.g. model parliaments) that emphasize women's right to equal political participation.

E. Election Administration

The expert group meeting recommends that election management boards should:

- Have a stated objective on gender balance at all levels and put incentive packages in place to enable women who wish to seek employment or a career in electoral administration to do so.
- Develop a policy on gender, dealing both with strategies for enhancing the role of women within the election management board, and for enhancing women's participation in the election process.
- Where security is a concern, give priority to ensuring that people are able to register and vote safely.
- Train its staff to ensure the correct implementation of procedures intended to facilitate women's participation in the election process.
- Ensure the secrecy of the vote is reinforced by having appropriately laid out polling stations. Polling officials should know that they, not the voters, are responsible for ensuring that the secrecy of the vote is maintained and that any irregularities which arise are promptly and effectively dealt with.
- Ensure ballots bear photographs and party symbols, to reduce the need for assisted voting of the illiterate and to better enable voters to identify their preferred candidate or party.
- Explore mechanisms for providing incentives to increase the turnout of women voters. For example, where positions in a legislature are to be filled on a sub-national level, consideration could be given to apportioning the seats among the provinces, after the election, on the basis of total turnout, so as to give political players an incentive to support voting by women.



- Facilitate intercountry networking between staff of different election management boards, with a particular focus on mechanisms which will allow women staff of different election management boards to share and learn from each others' experiences.
- Collect sex-disaggregated statistics on the election process, covering such matters as different levels of registration or turnout among men and women, which could highlight strengths or weaknesses of existing electoral arrangements from a gender perspective.
- Critically evaluate voter registration and polling procedures to ensure that they should not disadvantage women in practice. Where necessary, special procedures, such as the use of mobile registration and polling teams, or the establishment of separate registration or polling stations for men and women, should be explored. Where the latter approach is adopted, strict procedures should be implemented to ensure that the facilities provided for women are not inferior to those provided for men.

The expert group meeting recommends that:

Government actors should

- Establish gender-sensitive electoral procedures which do not discriminate against women, whatever their situation, and which are administered by neutral bodies which are sensitive to gender issues and where women are fully represented at all levels.
- Ensure that all agencies of the state which are involved in any aspect of the electoral process, including, for example, police investigating alleged electoral transgressions, are trained to respect the electoral rights of women, and adopt a gender-sensitive approach.
- Ensure that independent monitoring mechanisms be established to identify and report on gender bias in the media in relation to the electoral process.

International actors should

- Ensure United Nations peacekeeping missions that are involved in supporting elections in post-conflict countries
- Include a specific reference in the mandate to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security;
- Give priority to enhancing the full participation of women in all aspects of the electoral process;
- Ensure gender balance and deploy personnel who are gender sensitive;
- Train personnel on gender issues and develop a curriculum for such training;
- Report on gender perspectives and gender balance in their regular reporting to Headquarters;
- Provide sufficient up-front funding for elections, and in particular funding from the outset for promoting women's participation in elections.

Civil society actors should



- Advocate that the election management board ensures that gender perspectives in the voting process are fully incorporated.
- Identify qualified women candidates for election management boards and advocate for their equal inclusion. Identify and encourage women to run for positions on electoral commissions, registration centres and polling stations, including as chairpersons.
- Collaborate with the national election management board to develop a code of conduct for election administrators and political parties that includes gender-sensitive language.
- Monitor the implementation of registration processes so that they are non-discriminatory towards women.

F. Election Observation

The expert group meeting recommends that election observation missions should:

- Ensure gender balance and address gender issues in guidelines, including generic guidelines issued by international organizations, which define how election observation should properly be conducted.
- Receive training on gender issues, and on the electoral rights of women.
- Develop checklists that draw their attention to critical points of the election process at which women may be disadvantaged.
- When determining whether an election has been free and fair, give full weight to the extent to which women have been able to exercise their rights .
- Include gender considerations especially in determining possible irregularities such as in family voting, arbitrary application of rules and harassment of women attempting to vote.
- Collect sex-disaggregated statistics on the election process, covering such matters as different levels of registration or turnout among men and women, which could highlight strengths or weaknesses, from a gender perspective, of existing electoral arrangements.
- Evaluate an election from a gender perspective and disseminate the results.

The expert group recommends that:

Government actors should

- Facilitate the observation of elections, in a manner which gives due priority to gender issues, by observation groups in which women are adequately represented at all levels.
- Invite international and domestic observer groups to observe their elections.

International actors should

- Support the conduct of observation missions designed to look specifically at women's participation in elections.
- Encourage all governments to invite international observation missions, and encourage observation by non-partisan domestic observer groups.



- Continue to support the process of transition, democratization and equality after the election is over, including by giving support to women elected as legislators.

Civil society actors should

- Organize briefings by women's organizations and prominent women leaders for the election observation teams, both international and domestic.
- Actively seek credentials as non-partisan election observers, bearing in mind that for security reasons, ideally, there should be more than one woman observer at each polling station.
- Review election monitoring reports and advocate for reform.

NGOs

- National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)²¹
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)²²

Endnotes

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