



Afghan women leaders testifying before the European Parliament.

Strategies for Policymakers

BRINGING WOMEN INTO GOVERNMENT

About the Series

Strategies for Policymakers condenses a decade of research and direct input from leading peace builders into concise recommendations for ensuring the extensive involvement of women in peace processes. Each guide consists of a set of best practices highlighting policies and programs proven to increase women's participation, as well as stories of countries that have shown these mechanisms better involve women in all stages of the peace-building process.

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Top recommendations

These policies are proven to increase women's participation in government (a complete list of recommendations can be found on page 4):

1. Demand women's inclusion in transitional institutions, especially constitution-drafting bodies.
2. Support constitutional provisions, such as parliamentary and executive branch quotas, that guarantee women's participation in all branches and at all levels of government.
3. Establish election mechanisms that advance women's representation, including quotas for political parties, indirect elections, and proportional representation systems with closed ("zippered") lists, which alternate the names of male and female candidates.
4. Support electoral systems that require voters to select male and female candidates.

Introduction

Women bring important skills, attributes, and perspectives to the governance process. Few times offer policymakers as good an opportunity to increase the number of women participating in government as those windows immediately after conflicts. Those women who have successfully entered government have tended to build governance systems that are more stable and transparent, and more often accepted as legitimate by society. They have demonstrated the ability to bridge political divides, highlight women's concerns, facilitate a consultative and participatory approach to policymaking, and press for government accountability. Despite their documented contributions, they are largely excluded.

In October 2000, the UN Security Council mandated women's full participation in peace building in Resolution 1325. Few policymakers, however, know how to fulfill this obligation. This guide intends to provide the international community with concrete strategies to successfully bring women into government.

Making the Case for Women in Government

Transitions to democracy are strengthened when women are active in government. As elected or appointed officials, they can increase the legitimacy of nascent institutions, decrease government corruption, broaden the political agenda, and promote consultative policymaking. Post-conflict democracies often boast the greatest number of women in legislatures, as the transition from conflict creates an opportunity to increase their representation.

Our research shows that a critical mass of women in governing institutions promotes collaboration across ideological lines and social sectors. Less than two years after the Rwandan genocide, women legislators established the Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians. The FFRP has screened laws to eliminate discrimination, promoted women's and children's rights, led consultative processes, and developed legislation against gender-based violence—the first legislation to originate in the parliament rather than the executive.¹ Sudanese women followed suit, establishing the only all-party caucus in the national assembly since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005.²

Women engage a wider range of stakeholders in the governing process. The increased participation enhances public trust in new institutions and legitimizes the political process. In Kosovo, Vjosa Dobruna led the Department for Democratic Governance and Civil Society during the transition. Drawing from civil society experience, she organized consultations on human rights and other issues. Dobruna notes that these processes sparked a cooperative relationship between government and grassroots organizations: “For the first time, a ministry included marginalized minorities. We asked them what they wanted, and we listened to their responses.”³

According to the World Bank, increased participation of women in government is linked to lower levels of graft.⁴ Indian local government councils (*gram panchayets*) headed by women have fewer incidences of bribery than those headed by men.⁵ Research in Rwanda confirms that women are perceived to be less corrupt, particularly at the local level.⁶ These findings suggest that women could reduce corruption and increase faith in government.

When women are involved in the governing process, they broaden the political debate to address constituent matters, social concerns, and local issues. In Colombia, Argentina, and Costa Rica, women legislators assign higher priority to women's, children's, and family issues and are more likely than their male colleagues to initiate related bills.⁷ Local women government officials in India are more focused on providing social services. They have expanded the political agenda to include water infrastructure, children's education, and gender and matrimonial issues.⁸ In Namibia, women spearheaded efforts to combat employment discrimination and land reform as well as gender-based violence. Field research from Rwanda shows that women candidates and officials are perceived to be more likely than men to address the social and economic welfare of constituents.⁹

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While women's presence in government can improve policy and processes, a critical mass must be brought in to reap the benefits of their contributions. Policymakers should seize the window of opportunity following conflict to promote women's participation aggressively.

Best Practices

1. The post-conflict period can offer an exceptional opportunity to increase women's participation in government. That window must be seized quickly; if women are marginalized from the outset, they are unlikely to be included later.
2. Involving women in constitution drafting after a conflict can bolster their participation in government and produce legislation relevant to their concerns and those of civil society.
3. Pressure from the international community can ensure that governments promote women's inclusion. Advocacy by key players in civil society and the international community can increase female representation in government.
4. Proportional representation systems can facilitate women's election. Within such systems, closed versus open party lists are more conducive to the election of women when women are placed high or are included on a "zippered" list, which alternates the names of male and female candidates.
5. Election mechanisms that require all citizens to vote for men and women can accustom people to voting for women, facilitating their election.
6. Creating local government positions can be effective in bringing women into elected office; they gain experience and confidence, while developing constituencies.
7. Collaborative structures such as parliamentary caucuses can enhance cross-party collaboration and give women a forum within which they can build a common agenda.
8. Legal reforms to advance women's role in government can be more successful if implemented with full cooperation from civil society, which can be instrumental to educating the public.
9. Government ministries that promote women's empowerment can be effective only when supported financially and politically.
10. International backing for women's participation in government can be more effective when provided using local partners.

How to Bring Women Into Government

Using policies

1. Demand women's inclusion in transitional institutions, especially constitution-drafting bodies.
2. Support constitutional provisions, such as parliamentary quotas, that guarantee women's participation in all branches and at all levels of government.
3. Establish election mechanisms that advance women's representation, including quotas for political parties, indirect elections, and proportional representation systems with closed ("zippered") lists, which alternate the names of male and female candidates.
4. Support electoral systems that require voters to select male and female candidates.
5. Encourage political parties to move female candidates to the top of election lists and into leadership positions.
6. Encourage heads of state and government to exercise gender parity in executive appointments.
7. Create local political structures as entry points for women aspiring to government service.
8. Advocate for and support ministries of women's affairs and gender focal points in other ministries to advance gender mainstreaming.
9. Include indicators on women's political participation in national development plans and poverty reduction strategies.
10. Require trainers and capacity builders to track the percentage of male and female participants in programs.



Africa's first democratically elected female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia).

Through programs

1. Fund urban and rural campaigns that publicize women's contributions and ability to lead.
2. Establish mentoring programs through which successful female politicians encourage others to run for office.
3. Offer practical support to female candidates and government officials, such as transportation, child-care, extra security when needed, and access to mass media.
4. Cultivate non-partisan women's legislative caucuses and support them technically and financially.
5. Provide financial and technical backing for civil society consultations on legislative initiatives.
6. Increase women leaders' effectiveness in government through training and training of trainers for women's organizations on legislative processes, coalition building, advocacy, and public speaking; involve men in training to strengthen their support for women's participation.

Example One: Rwanda

The 1994 mass extermination of 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus was horrific both in the lives lost and the legacy of trauma for those who survived. The majority of survivors were women who had suffered extreme physical and emotional hardship. From 1994 to 2003, the Rwandan Patriotic Front's transitional government directed a reform process to decentralize authority and broaden participation in government. Women's political engagement became a principle part of the government's agenda.

In 2003, the first parliamentary election after the genocide gave women 49 percent of seats in the lower house of parliament, making Rwanda the world leader in women's political participation. The international community and civil society responded with programmatic support that helped women's participation in government be more effective. In 2008, women were elected to 56 percent of seats in the lower house of parliament, making Rwanda the first and only country in the world to have a majority of women in its parliament.

Mechanisms for promoting women's inclusion

Through government policies and programs

Constitution drafting: Women were instrumental in developing Rwanda's constitution, as civil society advocates and as members of the Constitutional Commission, the body responsible for drafting the constitution. Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe (Pro-Femmes), an umbrella group of 40 multi-ethnic non-governmental organizations (NGOs), brought together its civil society leaders, the Ministry of Gender and the Promotion of Women (MIGEPROFE), and the Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians (FFRP) to advocate for gender reforms in the constitution.¹

Constitutional provisions: The 2003 constitution mandates that 30 percent of all posts in decision-making organs be reserved for women. Of the 80 seats in the lower house of the legislature, 24 are set aside. The constitutional directive also has been used to seek 30 percent women's representation in the judiciary, the executive branch, and on political party lists.

Triple balloting: At the local level, women are guaranteed a percentage of seats via a triple ballot on which voters choose one general candidate, one female candidate, and one youth candidate. A subsequent indirect election results in a district council chosen from among sector-level winners. Such a process guarantees women 30 percent representation (see Figure 1).

Women's Councils: These assemblies are elected by women. They feed into local government through reserved seats for local council leaders, ensuring an official link between these women's concerns and local government (see Figure 2).

Ministry of Gender and the Promotion of Women: The Ministry works with gender focal points within other ministries to monitor women's issues. The Ministry also pursues women's political empowerment through sensitization campaigns with all levels of government staff and the general public.

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With advocacy involving allies

Innovative strategy: The strategic visions of women political leaders and political parties have been crucial in enabling women to expand their role in government. Lobbying has ensured that the constitutional quota of 30 percent women's representation is reflected throughout the government and by political parties. Successful advocacy has ensured that women candidates are not relegated to the bottom of electoral lists. Additionally, women and political parties have sought to ensure that stronger candidates run for slots open to competition rather than seats reserved for female candidates; this has enabled women to capture far more seats than the quota provides.

Government support: Explicit and tacit backing, particularly from President Kagame's party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, has been critical for women's recent advances.² Kagame said of his administration, "We fully recognize the critical roles women must play in our society."³ Female leaders are also able to leverage their standing as members of the RPF to advocate for women's inclusion.⁴

International encouragement: Civil society and international community encouragement helped realize the current gains. International actors supported an inclusive constitutional drafting process. In 2001, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) coordinated two seminars with the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) and FFRP on "The Process of Gendering a New Constitution" and funded a committee to draft constitutional provisions based on surveys and public forums.⁵ In 2003, the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) lobbied to increase the number of women at the constitutional review conference from 6 to 20 percent and financially supported 70 female attendees.

Using capacity building

Training for women leaders: Along with discrimination and poverty, lack of education and limited skills building are common obstacles to greater women's involvement. UNDP, with Dutch government support, and UNIFEM play leading roles in overcoming these challenges.⁶

UNDP was a leading supporter of women's capacity-building initiatives for the 2003 electoral campaign. Along with the IPU and the FFRP, UNDP organized a campaigning workshop for 80 women parliamentary candidates.⁷ The program also provided transportation for women,⁸ an often overlooked impediment to their participation. Other donors, such as Norwegian People's Aid and its "Women Can Do It!" program have also supported women candidates and voters.

Promoting women in the male-dominated *gacaca* courts, a grassroots justice mechanism, has been a focus of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Women's Gacaca Awareness Project trains female *gacaca* judges, screens topical films at schools, and organizes civic education campaigns.

Support for institutions: Bolstering key institutions helps ensure women's meaningful participation in all levels of government. The UN High Com-

Promoting women in the male-dominated gacaca courts, a grassroots justice mechanism, has been a focus of the United States Agency for International Development.

missioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) 1997 "Rwanda Women's Initiative" covered MIGEPROFE's operational costs, while UNDP enhanced the skills of ministry staff.⁹ UNHCR and UNIFEM offered legal expertise for inheritance law reform as well as technical and financial support for the Ministry's public meetings. UNDP and UNIFEM partially funded the Forum's development of gender-based violence legislation, which was informed by a series of public consultations.¹⁰ The IPU established a documentation center in 2000 for the Forum and trained a librarian.¹¹ In 2006, UNDP gave technical and financial support to the Forum's five-year strategic policy plan.¹²

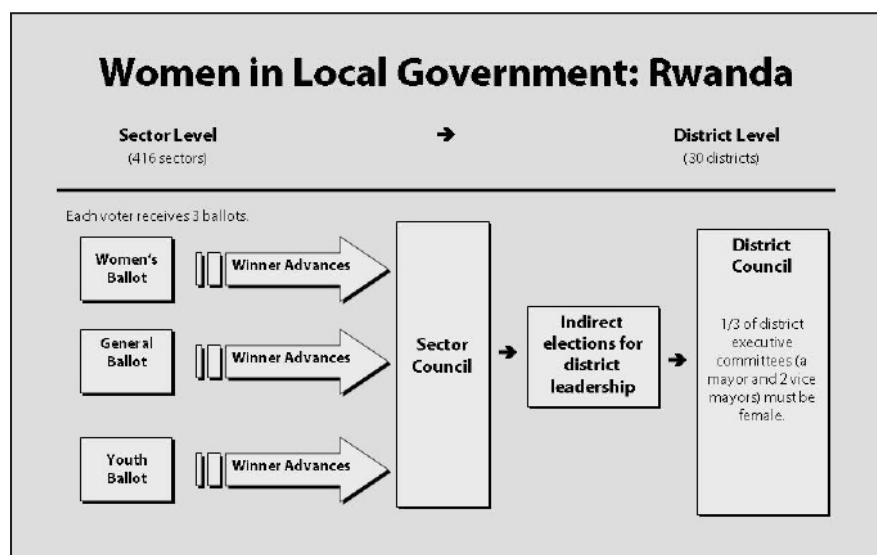


Figure 1.

Benefits of women's participation

For women and women's rights

- **Enhanced women's rights.** Female leaders in government reformed discriminatory inheritance laws, advanced children's rights, and are developing plans for family law reform.¹³ Rape is now classified as a "category one" crime and prosecuted as a genocidal act by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.
- **Gender mainstreamed in national policy.** In addition to the constitutional provisions ensuring women's participation in all levels of government, gender concerns are also reflected in the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, and its subsequent Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy, which the UN cites as examples of gender equality.¹⁴
- **International discourse informed by Rwandan experience.** In early 2007, female parliamentarians hosted "Gender, Nation Building, and the Role of Parliaments," an international conference showcasing their role as leaders.

For the nation as a whole

- **Broader perspectives inform policymaking.** Women bring a different set of concerns to the table. Health care spending increased from three to 12 percent of the budget in 2006, and current legislation focuses on poverty and children's rights.¹⁵
- **Reconciliation promoted.** Women's cross-sector, multi-ethnic, and

multi-party initiatives, like Pro-Femmes and the FFRP, encourage dialogue and unity.

- **Legislative branch strengthened.** In 2006, the FFRP introduced a bill on gender-based violence, the first piece of legislation to originate in the legislative rather than the executive branch.¹⁶
- **Government's image improved.** Women are viewed as being less corrupt and better at reconciliation than men, thereby improving the government's reputation among citizens.¹⁷

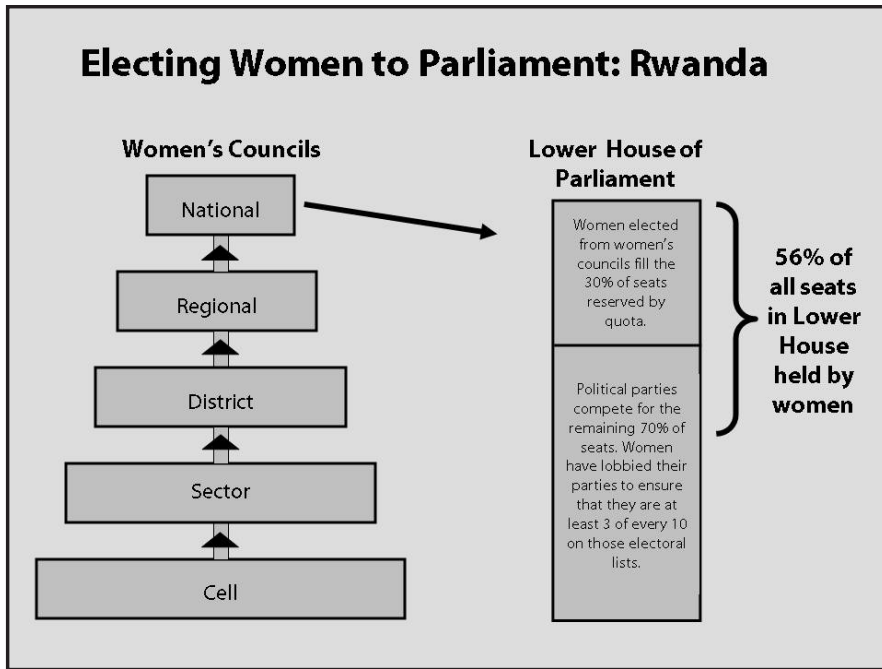


Figure 2.

Opportunities for improvement

- **Increase funding and coordination of donors.** International funding fell short of initial pledges.¹⁸ Donors could use MIGEPROFE—with UN assistance—to coordinate gender-focused projects more effectively.
- **Complement women's legislative gains with awareness campaigns.** Public education campaigns could increase support for and on-the-ground implementation of reforms in rural areas, especially from men.¹⁹
- **Meet logistical needs.** Given the difficulty women face in traveling to rural areas to build their constituent base, funds could be earmarked to support travel and childcare.

Example Two: Cambodia

After 40 years of civil war and despotic rule by the Khmer Rouge, democratic elections in 1993 delivered a fragile peace to Cambodia. Since then, the country has undergone political and economic decentralization. Although the political climate is still marked by a lack of cross-party cooperation, the growing number of women in local government is progress for the fledgling democracy.

Lobbying has ensured that the constitutional quota of 30 percent women's representation in government is reflected in the composition of the Cabinet, legislature, judiciary, local government, and political party lists... Women and political parties have sought to ensure that stronger candidates run for slots open to competition rather than seats reserved for female candidates; this has enabled women to capture far more seats than the quota provides.

Women have increased their representation in Cambodian government substantially over the past five years. Despite the rejection of a proposed quota, women backed by civil society and the international community are finding creative ways to enter politics. NGOs, government officials, and political parties are contributing to capacity-building programs, political advocacy, and policies that promote gender parity.

Mechanisms for promoting women's inclusion

Through government policies and programs

Decentralization: In 2001, the Cambodian government empowered local governments through a decentralization program. Communes, a new level of local governance, provided women an entry point into government structures. While the first commune elections of 2002 resulted in less than nine percent female council members, in the 2007 elections that percentage nearly doubled and in 2008 the percentage continued to increase (see figure 3).¹

Government policy incentives: Gender equity was included in the Governance Action Plan of 2001, which identified more women in public-sector decision-making roles as a measure of success. Commune Development Committees determine priorities for local development projects; since 40 percent of committee members are women, as mandated by law, these local efforts give women the opportunity to gain experience and build their reputations as community leaders.² Benchmarks for female representation at the commune level are included in the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals—another commitment to supporting women in government.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs: The Ministry plays a crucial role in the promotion of women in government. Fostering the relationship between government and civil society, the Ministry works with NGOs to prepare women for effective leadership and lobbies for quotas. Since 2004, the UNDP Partnership for Gender Equity has supported the Ministry and local NGOs to promote gender mainstreaming, leadership training, and public awareness. During Mo Sochua's tenure as its head, she established gender focal points in other ministries, introduced "gender budgeting," worked with women's civil society organizations to train female candidates and to encourage women to vote, and participated in the Committee to Promote Women in Political Participation (CPWP).

With advocacy involving allies

Party lists: Political party commitments to add more women to electoral lists are in part responsible for recent advances.³ In 2002, 1,161 female candidates were in the top three places on party lists. That number leapt to 2,328 in 2007.⁴ The Cambodian People's Party nominated an unprecedented number of female candidates for office. When Secretary General Mu Sochua, the first female secretary general of a Cambodian political party, mandated more women in the top three positions on the Sam Rainsy Party lists, they saw a greater proportion of their candidates elected compared to the previous commune election.⁵ Political parties that increase the number of women on their lists likely will benefit from the positive image of women leaders among voters; research shows that Cambodian voters see women as more trustworthy than men⁶ and are more likely to vote for a woman candidate over an equally qualified male candidate.⁷

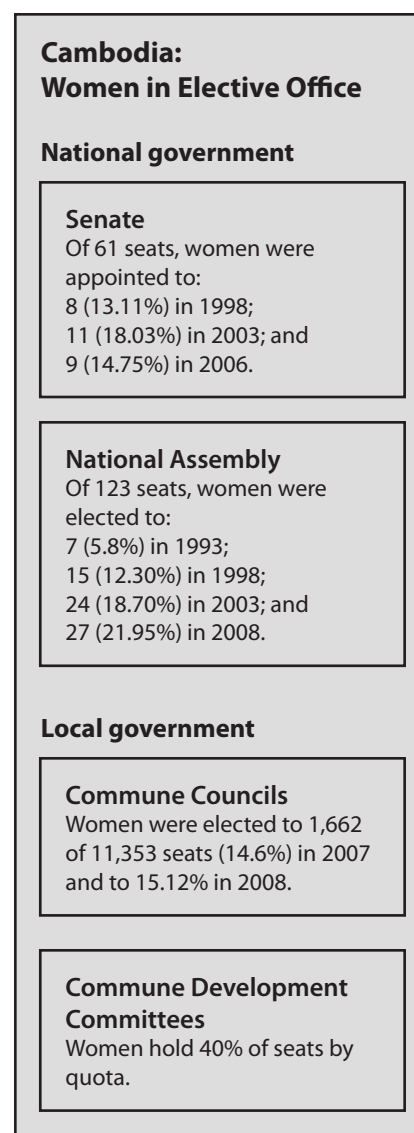


Figure 3.

Multi-sector collaboration: An innovative partnership between civil society organizations, political parties, and government ministries promoted women's candidacies for the April 2007 commune elections. Other non-governmental coalitions, like the Cambodian Committee for Women, the Gender and Development Network, and the NGO Committee on the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, work with MoWA on legislation to combat domestic violence, human trafficking, and labor violations.⁸

Using capacity building

Developed by NGOs and supported by international donors, capacity-building programs provide women with skills and support to thrive in a hostile political environment. Leading the effort is Women for Prosperity, an NGO established in 1994.⁹ Of women elected in the 2002 commune elections, 65 percent were trained by the WfP.¹⁰ The group also coordinates forums for elected female officials to discuss projects, coordinate agendas, and share lessons.¹¹ WfP director and founder Nanda Pok bridges cross-party divides through capacity-building for female candidates from all parties, including women formerly associated with the Khmer Rouge. Essential support for the WfP has come from the UN Children's Fund, which engages local communities in building childcare centers, enabling women to participate in political life.¹² "We want to promote a culture of peace, not revenge," says Pok.¹³

In 2002, UNIFEM sponsored a campaign that explained registration and voting processes and encouraged women to vote.¹⁴ UNIFEM, working with WfP and MoWa, also offered media training for women candidates and distributed bicycles to alleviate the transportation challenge faced by many female politicians.¹⁵ These efforts contributed to the election of nearly 1,000 women to communal office.

In 2006, the World Bank, the German government, UNIFEM, and UNDP supported the CPWP's pre-election training and public awareness campaign on women's political participation.¹⁶ The National Democratic Institute (NDI), funded by USAID, provided capacity-building to 36 members of the Cambodian Women's Leadership Caucus. The three dozen Caucus members, from the nation's three main political parties, went on to train female candidates within their parties.¹⁷ With additional USAID funding, NDI and the Khmer Institute for Democracy sponsored 11 national forums to raise the profile of female candidates.¹⁸

Benefits of women's participation

For women and women's rights

- **Improved public opinion of women's abilities.** Women are increasingly viewed as talented and trusted public leaders.¹⁹
- **Greater attention to domestic violence.** Female councilors are educating the public about domestic violence laws,²⁰ essential in post-conflict environments, where domestic abuse tends to worsen.
- **Party support of female candidates expanded.** The CPWP secured verbal commitments from political parties to include quotas for women on party lists.

An innovative partnership between civil society organizations, political parties, and government ministries promoted women's candidacies for the April 2007 commune elections.

For the nation as a whole

- **Cross-party communication advanced.** Participating in capacity-building programs and the Caucus helps forge cross-party alliances among female politicians.
- **Cooperation between government and civil society increased.** Through programs like WfP and partnerships like CPWP, women are fostering dialogue among sectors of society and bringing a grassroots perspective to policymaking.
- **Government more accountable.** Female commune leaders push for budget transparency and oversight,²¹ challenging traditional local patronage systems that breed corruption.
- **Policy priorities more closely aligned with community needs.** USAID cites a survey revealing that Cambodian women are more knowledgeable than male counterparts about community development priorities.²²

Opportunities for improvement

- **Promote women within political parties.** The other political parties could commit publicly to the promotion of women within party lists.
- **Fund and support women at the national level.** Women's gains in political leadership are being made largely at local levels. Programs could advocate for and support women politicians specifically at the national level.
- **Institute quotas.** Cambodian political parties are cultivating a talented supply of female candidates; a national quota system could encourage political parties to put this knowledge and expertise to work.
- **Ensure higher education for women.** Currently only 0.2 percent of women in the Cambodian labor force have a university degree and women are only 20 percent of university graduates. The gender gap in government service is related to the gender gap in education, as senior government positions demand higher levels of education.²³ Providing higher education programs to women could decrease the gender gap in government service.

Example Three: Afghanistan

Since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan's fledgling democracy has struggled. Despite a traditionally conservative society, women are striving to promote gender equality, religious and political moderation, and human rights education and reforms. International attention to women's status has expanded their rights and inclusion in government. Women now make up more than 25 percent of the lower house of parliament and were active in drafting the country's new constitution.

Mechanisms for promoting women's inclusion

Through government policies and programs

Constitution drafting: Afghan women were active participants in the main bodies responsible for developing the new constitution—the Constitutional

Loya Jirga (CLJ) (an assembly of national and tribal leaders) and the Constitutional Drafting and Review Commission. Composed of 20 percent women, the CDRC¹ conducted hundreds of public consultations with local NGOs during 2003.²

Constitutional provisions: Constitutional mandates significantly increase women’s representation in government, guaranteeing 25 percent in the lower house of parliament. Of the one-third of upper house seats appointed by the president, 50 percent are women. The results of the 2005 elections exceeded expectations, with women capturing 17 seats beyond the 68 allocated by quota.^{3,4} Without the quota six women still would have gained seats in parliament.

Media exposure: Female candidates in the 2005 elections benefited from the Media Commission’s offer of free television and radio advertising: 76 percent of female candidates used them compared to 55 percent of male candidates. Using radio and television ads compensated for the lack of security impeding women’s mobility.⁵ The Voice of Afghan Women radio station provided voter education for women; in provinces with access to broadcasts, voter registration and turn-out were higher.⁶ International organizations, notably the European Union, funded programs to promote women’s political participation, including media and civil servant trainings.⁷

Appointments: At the national level, President Karzai signed and supported declarations of women’s rights and in 2005 appointed the first female governor.⁸

With advocacy including allies

International encouragement: Leading up to the 2001 Bonn Conference, the UN pressed delegations to include women—and encouraged women’s organizations to ask for that inclusion directly.⁹ These efforts resulted in women making up 10 percent of all Afghans at the talks. During the negotiations, the UN broke a stalemate by working out a quota of two female representatives per province in lieu of women simply representing a percentage of all national representatives.¹⁰ Concurrent with the Bonn talks, the Belgian government co-sponsored a conference of 40 Afghan women to draft recommendations for donors to ensure a leading role for women in reconstruction.¹¹

Charlotte Ponticelli, former senior coordinator for international women’s issues at the US State Department, notes that leaders in the US and Afghan governments, particularly the US president, supported women’s empowerment.¹² Specifically, US officials pushed for equal rights language in the draft constitution.¹³

Domestic lobbying: Women’s groups in Afghanistan—including the Gender and Law Working Group (which convenes members of government, the judiciary, and civil society), the Afghan Women Judges’ Association, the Afghan Women Lawyers’ Council, the Afghan Women’s Network, and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission—urged President Karzai to ensure gender parity among the 50 percent of delegates he appointed to the December 2003 CLJ.¹⁴ Similarly, in September 2003, Women for Afghan Women convened



“Women and the Constitution,” a conference that produced the landmark Afghan Women’s Bill of Rights. The document was influential in President Karzai’s decision to appoint a gender-balanced delegation to the CLJ.¹⁵

Using capacity building

Candidates: Donors support women’s political empowerment through the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MOWA) and through civil society.¹⁶ NDI, supported by USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy, conducted capacity building for 2,000 female candidates prior to the 2005 elections.¹⁷

Parliamentarians: NDI also led technical training for female parliamentarians on budgeting, media, and legislative processes and facilitated the development of a network of female politicians.¹⁸ UNIFEM currently funds a resource center for female parliamentarians, including a library, conference rooms, and Internet terminals.¹⁹

Delegates: The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan led an induction course for female delegates to the Emergency Loya Jirga, the transitional authority, and held training sessions for women in the CLJ.²⁰

At the national level, President Karzai signed and supported declarations of women’s rights and in 2005 appointed the first female governor.

Benefits of women’s participation

For women and women’s rights

- **Expanded women’s rights.** The constitution recognizes gender equality. Women are pushing for improved family legislation, from efforts to require both parties’ consent in marriage to the successful 2005 campaign to ban marriages for women under the age of 18.²¹ With women in parliament and civil society, MOWA is drafting legislation that prevents and penalizes violence against women.²²
- **Ministry of Women’s Affairs created.** Despite MOWA’s many shortcomings, its creation had a strong symbolic value beyond the impact of its programs. Though ideologically divided, women parliamentarians have defeated several proposals to abolish the ministry.²³
- **Conditions for female prisoners improved.** Female parliamentarians demanded greater attention to female inmates’ rights. Although prison conditions are still appalling, female inmates are now allowed visits from their children and pregnant inmates are receiving better prenatal care.²⁴

For the nation as a whole

- **Security concerns acknowledged.** Women in government and civil society have led calls for improved security, urging disarmament of militias, and leveraging of mechanisms such as the Afghan Women’s Bill of Rights to strengthen the rule of law.²⁵ The Afghan Women’s Network has participated in North Atlantic Treaty Organization trainings on civil-military relations.
- **Human rights monitored.** Through their role in the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, women are leading investigations into abuses and educating government officials about human rights.²⁶
- **Participation in democratic government broadened.** Women were more than 40 percent of registered voters in the 2004 and 2005 elections.

Through broadened participation, women are helping democratize Afghanistan's nascent government.

- **Extremism challenged.** Women temper political and religious debates and have fought warlords' involvement in government.²⁷
- **Ethnic pluralism and minority rights promoted.** Female members of the CLJ supported Uzbek minority requests to gain official status for their language²⁸ and advocated for handicapped rights.²⁹ One female parliamentarian said, "I'll try to introduce legislation that will protect the rights of the oppressed people."³⁰

Opportunities for improvement

- **Ensure women's security.** The head of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Kandahar province was murdered in 2006. In June 2007, two female journalists were killed outside their homes. Female police have also increasingly been targeted; one of the most prominent, Lt. Colonel Malalai Kakar, was killed in Kandahar in September 2008. Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission last year documented over 1,500 cases of atrocities against women—threatened, kidnapped, and murdered for working outside the home.³¹ Although the government currently is aware of threats against six female MPs, most have received no extra security.³²
- **Institute official quotas for ministries.** Afghanistan's constitution mandates 25 percent women's representation in the National Assembly; Afghan women currently comprise 27 percent. The 25-minister cabinet, which has no quota, has only one female member.
- **Strengthen MOWA.** Although the creation of MOWA was a symbolic victory, it is largely ineffective. The ministry is marginalized within government, attacked by conservatives, and hampered by resource shortages.³³ In addition, frequent leadership turnover has undermined its institutional continuity.
- **Hold capacity-building and coalition-building programs accountable.** Several efforts by the international community have failed to produce a functional coalition of Afghan women parliamentarians. As a result, the number of women in government has yet to translate into proportional impact.³⁴
- **Protect constitutional rights.** Afghan women face a tremendous disconnect in their constitutional rights and the application of their protections. The justice system does not provide sufficient recourse. Nearly 80 percent of incarcerated women are charged with *zina* or sexual misconduct outside marriage; many of the incarcerated are victims of rape or sexual abuse. Enforcement of women's rights may require a push to consistently apply laws and adequate training of security officials, judicial actors, and religious and civic leaders.³⁵
- **Educate the public to cultivate local support.** Strong external pressure opened the door for women's participation in Afghanistan's government. It has not been matched effectively by domestic efforts to demonstrate the value of women's involvement. As a result, the door has been left open to insurgent attacks on women and some backlash to women's empowerment.

Afghanistan: Women in the National Assembly (2005)

Upper House (Meshrano Jirga)

Total members = 102

Women occupy 22.5% (23) of seats.

- Women were elected to 6 of 70 positions.
- President Karzai appointed 17 women among 32 members he named.

Lower House (Wolesi Jirga)

Total members = 249

Women were elected 27.69% of seats.

There are two more women in the lower house than the minimum 25% guaranteed by the constitutional quota.

Endnotes

Making the Case for Women in Government

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Authors: Tobie Whitman & Jessica Gomez
 Editors: Daniel de Torres & Michelle Page
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The Institute for Inclusive Security

1615 M Street NW, Suite 850
 Washington, DC 20036
 United States of America
 Tel: 202.403.2000
 Fax: 202.299.9520
 Web: www.InclusiveSecurity.org
 Email: Strategies@HuntAlternatives.org