

Information Note

Women in decision-making processes: Political participation and leadership at international, national and local levels

The **Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)** reaffirmed that women's persistent exclusion from decision-making raised many concerns regarding the achievement of democratic transformations and women's empowerment. The presence of women in political decision-making for is a basis for democracy, highlighting that the right to vote and to be elected is to be equally applied to all citizens, whether female or male, and is a basis for achieving the goals of sustainable development such as the MDGs.

The BPfA emphasizes that "women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved".

It defines two strategic objectives in its critical area of concern on women in power and decision-making:

- Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making;
- Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

Women's engagement in decision-making, specifically in participation, representation and leadership, must be promoted in a variety of contexts, including in social movements, non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, political parties, trade unions and business organizations, elected public bodies, such as parliaments, state and local governments and global social and economic institutions, as well as the private sector.

Resolutions, Conventions, Mandates:

- Beijing Platform for Action
- Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women calls upon State parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country
- In Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the Security Council reaffirmed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, and stressed the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making
- In Millennium Development Goal 3, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments was established as one of the four indicators for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- During the 2005 World Summit held in September 2005, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the equal participation of women and men in decision-making, and resolved to promote the increased representation of women in Government decision-making bodies, including through ensuring their equal opportunity to participate fully in the political process.

Numbers and Figures:

Globally, in 1975, women accounted for 10.9 per cent of members of parliament worldwide. In 1995, the number of women in lower houses of parliament increased to 11.6 per cent and reached 13.4 in 2000.

Women comprise 16.2 per cent of the representatives in lower or single houses of parliament and 14.8 per cent in upper houses, or an average of 16.0 per cent across all parliaments, indicating that women's participation in parliaments is now the highest it has ever been. The past 10 years have seen the fastest growth in the number of women in parliament globally.

The number of post-conflict countries are listed among the top 30 countries with regard to women's participation in legislative bodies, averaging between 25 and 30 per cent of women legislators.

At higher levels, the figures are less encouraging: The number of elected women Heads of State and Government has actually decreased from 12 women in 1995 to 8 in 2005. Recent positive developments: women have been elected to high-level positions, one as President in **Liberia** another as Chancellor in **Germany**, and **Chile** has its first ever female head of state.

Within the UN, in 2005, of the 191 permanent representatives to the United Nations in New York, only 17 were women, although this is the highest number ever.

Increasing women's participation:

- It is crucial to work towards the elimination of discriminatory practices and introduction of positive action programmes such as quotas, which are defined as a mandatory percentage of women candidates for public elections, and have become the most widely used mechanism for facilitating the entry of women into representative politics.
- Three conditions that enhance women's effectiveness in decision-making processes and increase their impact on policymaking were identified by the United Nations:
 - (a) Identifying and working with critical actors and allies;
 - (b) Developing critical mechanisms/structures that strengthen women's political influence;
 - (c) Seizing critical junctures or moments where potential to influence the policymaking process is increased.