

# Best Practices Used by Political Parties to Promote Women in Politics



International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics



## Introduction

Despite comprising more than 50 percent of the world's population, women continue to lack access to political leadership opportunities and resources at all levels of government. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy, but a necessary pre-condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Governance structures which do not result in the equal participation of men and women, or their equal enjoyment of benefits from state interventions are by definition neither inclusive nor democratic.

In 2007, recognizing that over the last century women's gains in the political arena have been slow and inadequate, five international organizations came together to make women's political participation their collective priority and devise a strategy that would scale-up each of the organization's efforts to foster gender equality in politics:

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)  
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)  
National Democratic Institute (NDI)  
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)  
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics ([www.iKNOWPolitics.org](http://www.iKNOWPolitics.org)) is an online network, jointly supported by the five partner organizations, that aims to increase the participation and effectiveness of women in political life by utilizing a technology-enabled forum to provide access to critical resources and expertise, stimulate dialogue, create knowledge, and share experiences among women in politics.

In just three years, iKNOW Politics has become the leading website on women's political participation. Building on a library of over 5300 resources, iKNOW Politics has captured the combined experience and knowledge of its 92 global experts and 10,000 members from over 150 countries. iKNOW Politics has documented and disseminated the lessons and best practices of women as voters, candidates and elected legislators.

The following is a printed version of one of the most frequently-cited iKNOW Politics knowledge products, based on the combined input from experts and members worldwide. Please visit the iKNOW Politics website to pose a question of your own, contribute to the online discussions, browse the resource library or read additional iKNOW Politics consolidated expert responses, E-discussion summaries, interviews with women leaders, or contact iKNOW Politics at [connect@iknowpolitics.org](mailto:connect@iknowpolitics.org) to get in touch with a staff member in your region of the world. iKNOW Politics is available in **English, French, Spanish and Arabic.**

## Consolidated Response on Best Practices used by Political Parties to Promote Women in Politics

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*This consolidated response is based on research conducted by iKNOW Politics staff and the contribution submitted by Dr. Lesley Clark, former Member of Parliament, Queensland, Australia; Josephine Anenih, Former Chairwoman of the Federation of Women Lawyers and the first National Woman Leader of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria; Gabriela Serrano Resident Country Director – Peru, International Republican Institute (IRI); Mona Lena Krook, Assistant Professor of Political Science and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Washington University in St. Louis; and Julie Ballington, Programme Specialist, Gender Partnership Programme, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).*

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### Question

*What are some practices and internal policies, besides the adoption of quotas, implemented by political parties that led to the increase of women's political participation or a policy change?*

### Introduction

As gatekeepers of elections, political parties play a key role in promoting women in political processes. Political parties nominate candidates to their party lists, provide campaign funding to its candidates, rally voters, and create national platforms. Julie Ballington, iKNOW Politics Expert and Programme Specialist at IPU, adds that:

*“Political parties also formulate policy and set governance priorities and are therefore strategically placed to address the concerns of women.” (Ballington, J. Expert Opinion. 2009)*

Given the important role of political parties, it is critical that parties promote women in their candidate lists, provide women candidates with appropriate training and support, and allocate campaign funds equally. In many countries, the adoption of party quotas, either voluntarily or due to a legislative requirement, has become very popular in the last few decades. The implementation of gender quotas, however, is not an only tool used by political parties to advance women in politics.

This consolidated response highlights strategies and policies that may be used in addition to gender quotas by political parties to increase the numbers of women in politics. The strategies described in this response include establishing women's sections in political parties, providing women candidates with training and financial assistance to hold effective campaigns, creating a forum for women to lobby and discuss policy, and offering political parties incentives for promoting women in politics.

### **Establishing Women's Wing and Committees within Political Parties**

Women's wings and committees of political parties are internal party sections that aim to strengthen women's representation within the party and in the political process in general. Creating women's wings of political parties is not a new phenomenon and has been promoted by parties and women activists since the last century. For instance, the Social Democratic Party of Sweden established its women's branch in 1920, and now includes over 300 local women's clubs throughout the country. (Consolidated Response on Establishing Women's Party Sections. iKNOW Politics. 2007)

Often, women's wings help promote women's interests in party policy platforms and strengthen the demand for increasing women's representation in party nomination lists and decision making processes. A good example is the Women's League of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. The advocacy efforts organized by the ANC Women's League against all forms of discrimination and gender imbalance led to the ANC resolution that one third of its representatives in Parliament must be women, which had a far reaching effect in transforming the newly-elected democratic Parliament of South Africa. (Lamakhosikazi, I.) Speaking about the role and importance of women's party branches, Dr. Lesley Clark, former Member of Parliament from Australia, mentions:

*"The establishment of a women's branch or a women's policy committee can be the vehicle for beginning the change in male attitudes and a first step in the campaign for affirmative action. Attracting women into the party to get the number of votes needed to have influence in party decision making or policy forums is also a vital step and a women's branch can be a more comfortable place for women entering politics for the first time. However it is crucial to integrate a women's branch into the structure of the Party and define its role, or it will run the risk of being marginalized and powerless. The rules of the Australian Labor Party (nationally and for each State branch) specify the role, composition and powers of the Labor Women's Organization (LWO)." (Clark, L. Expert Opinion. 2009)*

According to Teresa Sacchet, women's wings in political parties in Latin America play a dual role:

*“Many women’s departments perform a critical double role: on the outside they work in support of the party but on the inside, they work to transform unequal gender relations. Their main roles are to advise political parties on gender-related policies, to educate party members on gender issues, and to organize and train women politically.” (Sacchet, T. p. 6. 2005)*

A good example of such a role is Mexico's Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN, National Action Party), which transformed its women's wing from a women's social organization into an effective base for promoting women's entry into mainstream leadership positions. In elections between 1997 and 2003, the PAN's National Secretariat for the Political Promotion of Women lobbied local and national party leaders to include women as candidates. As a result of their efforts, by 2003 the PAN had more female candidates than the country's two other major parties, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party) and the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD, Party of the Democratic Revolution). (Htun, M. p.115.2003)

### **Allocating Funds for Training**

Research shows that providing skills-based training, specifically on campaign related topics, is beneficial for women candidates. Political parties provide training to women who are members of the party and, in some cases, to women candidates in the country. Mona Lena Krook, iKNOW Politics Expert and Professor of Political Science and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, points out that providing training to women is an especially popular strategy amongst parties that do not adopt quotas (especially conservative parties). As an example, Ms. Krook mentions the recent Women2Win campaign initiated by women in the British Conservative Party, which had the goal of providing women with the skills to wage effective political campaigns. (Krook, M. Expert Opinion. 2009) Another interesting example is the Australian Labor Party (ALP), which provides training for all women members, prospective women candidates, and the Equity Officer (when this position existed) through its women's branches. The ALP's training sessions are aimed at enhancing women's skills in campaigning, media management, public speaking, meeting procedures, fundraising, etc. (Clark. L. Expert Opinion. 2009)

There are also instances where political parties create special funds for women's training and consultations. For instance, In El Salvador, the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) sends money from the party budget to the National Ministry for Women, which uses it for national assemblies for party women, trainings, and consultations with women. The party also has a special fund to train its own female members. Some FMLN women work with the business sector on fundraising for women candidates. (Luchsinger Sidhu, G and Meena, R. p. 20. 2007) Another interesting case is the Panamanian Party in Panama that has a provision setting aside 30% of the total party training funds specifically for the training of women. The money is allocated to and disbursed through the National Secretariat for Women, which has a powerful structure within the party. (Young, G. Los partidos políticos panameños y las mujeres. E-Discussion Forum on Financing Women in Politics . 2008)

### **Rules of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) on Labor Women's Organization and Women's Conference**

#### **Labor Women's Organisation**

(19) The objects of LWO are:

- (a) to further the objects, methods and platform of the Party;
- (b) to promote the organisation of women in the Party;
- (c) to educate women politically and industrially;
- (d) to promote affirmative action programs in favour of women; and
- (e) to support the selection and election of women candidates for public office.

#### **Labor Women's Conference**

(20) A conference of women members of the Party shall be held first weekend in October at a venue determined by the Administrative Committee, including regional centres.

(21) All women who are members of the Party are members of the Labor Women's Organisation, and shall be entitled to attend the Labor Women's Conference and those women who have been registered members twelve months prior to the Conference shall be eligible to vote at the Conference.

(22) The agenda for the Labor Women's Conference shall be prepared by the executive of LWO. Items for inclusion in the agenda shall be called from all Branches and Unions, and from individual women members.

(23) Labor Women's Conference may submit items for inclusion in the agenda for State Conference.

#### ***Extract from the Rules of the Australian Labor Party (State of Queensland).***

<http://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/data/portal/00000005/content/31590001218521537593.pdf>

## Providing Financial Incentives and Aid to Women Candidates

Political parties can also adopt policies and special measures that provide women candidates financial assistance during campaigns and while they hold public office. For instance, the New Democratic Party (NDP) in Canada has a financial assistance program that allows women and minority candidates to be reimbursed up to C\$500 for child care expenses incurred in seeking a nomination, C\$500 for travel costs in geographically large ridings, and an additional C\$500 for costs incurred in seeking nomination in ridings where the NDP incumbent is retiring. (Young, L. p.137. 2005) Such assistance programs can help women candidates not only cover some of their campaign expenses, but also alleviate their concerns for the well being of their family members and colleagues.

Additionally, some political parties offer women candidates breaks on membership dues, registration forms, and other campaign expenses to increase women's participation in the political process. Speaking about the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria, Josephine Anenih, iKNOW Politics Expert and former National Woman Leader of PDP, points out:

*“When we noticed that women did not pick up nomination forms for party primary elections because of the high cost, we decided to encourage women by asking them to pick up nomination forms free of charge. Many women who could never have afforded to buy forms came forward and many of them won the primary elections.” (Anenih, J. Expert Opinion. 2009)*

Another important issue for women candidates is fundraising, which has become particularly important as the cost of political campaigns have increased. Political parties can play an instrumental role by providing women with equal access to public funds and creating special fundraising networks for women candidates. Julie Ballington, iKNOW Politics Expert and Programme Specialist at IPU, highlights the example of fundraising groups in the United States pointing out that:

*“Fundraising groups in the USA have been very influential in raising and mobilizing funds for women. These fundraising networks are particularly important where there is no public funding and candidates have to raise private funds to contest an election.” (Ballington, J. Expert Opinion. 2009)*

Considering the recent increase in campaign costs, it is critical that political parties adopt policies providing financial assistance and incentives to women candidates during campaigns. Such assistance can come in the form of breaks to membership dues and party

fees, reimbursement for travel and family care expenses, special designated party trust funds, and building fundraising networks for women candidates.

### **Providing Women a Forum for Policy Lobbying and Discussions**

Practical experiences and research data show that providing women a forum for discussion and the exchange of ideas may be critical in putting women's issues on political agendas and creating intra-party alliances to advance women in politics. Gabriela Serrano, iKNOW Politics Expert and the International Republican Institute's Country Director in Peru points out the following:

*“Another area where key alliances take place is among women leaders from different parties. It is important to create spaces where they can come together to share experiences, learn together, and seek solutions to common problems; results of discussions in these spaces usually translate in internal practices or policies.” (Serrano, G. Expert Opinion. 2009)*

Dr. Lesley Clark mentions that ALP's Labour Women's Organization (LWO) holds its own conference every year to give women an opportunity to discuss policy issues, to lobby on specific issues, and to network with each other. Dr. Clark mentions that the ALP also has a Women's Policy Committee that influences party policy. (Clark, L. Expert Opinion. 2009)

Josephine Anenih mentions that although the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria does not have a women's branch of the party, it has a women's standing committee that serves as a forum for women to meet and discuss relevant issues with the National Woman Leader. Ms. Anenih also mentions that at these meetings women can strategize on how to promote women and make their voices heard within PDP. (Anenih, J. Expert Opinion. 2009)

According to Anita Vandenberg, iKNOW Politics Project Manager, dialogue is not always enough. There need to be tangible policy documents and strategies that turn the dialogue into action. For example, in Canada the Liberal Party Women's Caucus published a separate electoral platform for the party specifically on women's policy issues, which they called the “Pink Book” (a play on words on the “Red Book” which was the Party's formal election platform). This put pressure on the party leadership to include a number of these policy promises into the official party platform. Another example was the establishment of an internal party Task Force specifically dedicated to women's engagement that held meetings and hearings with women across the country before publishing its recommendations. The chair of this Task Force used the results of the hearings to develop a set of questions about women's policy that were presented publicly to party leadership candidates. As a result, the

issues raised by women inside the party were forced onto the policy agenda at the highest levels of party leadership.

Providing forums for discussion and lobbying and developing strategies to put pressure on male party leaders empowers women party members by making their voices heard both within their parties and with the electorate. Additionally, discussion platforms allow women to create networks with other women leaders and their supporters, and provide women politicians with an opportunity to learn from their colleagues.

### **Parity in Party Activities**

The nomination of candidates to party lists or to elected positions within the party organization is only one aspect of party activities. Anita Vandenberg, IKNOW Politics Project Manager, argues that it is equally important that the party leadership commit to a policy of “parity” (no more than 60% of one gender) in all its activities and functions. For example, a party can ensure that at all of its conventions and events there are just as many women speakers as men. Some parties even ensure that all televised meetings are chaired jointly by a man and a woman, which can send a powerful visual message to voters. When selecting members of parliament to make interpellations or to ask questions, the party leadership can ensure that there is always a woman parliamentarian asking the first or second question.

Additionally, parties can ensure that women are appointed equally to key party committees, task forces and working groups. In some cases, the president of the women’s section of the party is made an ex-officio (automatic) member of other high-level party decision-making committees, including election preparedness committees that develop party platforms and select candidates. In addition to nominating more women candidates, party leaders who are committed to equality also have a number of other ways to make a party more inclusive. For instance, Australian Labour Party (ALP) in its Party Rules requires that three or more party positions are filled with not less than 40% of women and not less than 40% of men in all elections, provided that sufficient candidates of the relevant gender nominate. ALP also requires that a minimum of 40% of a Union’s delegation to party conferences and forums shall be women, and a minimum of 40% to be men. (Rules of the Australian Labor Party (State of Queensland). p.2. 2008.)

Ensuring gender parity in political party platforms and internal structures is key to securing party's commitment to the advancement of women in politics. Political parties have used a number of policies and regulations to promote parity in their internal structures, including requiring equal representation at party events and conferences, appointing women and men equally to party decision-making positions, and providing women members with a platform to voice their questions.

### **Creating Incentives for Political Parties to Promote Women**

Sometimes relying on political will is not enough. Research shows that providing financial and other incentives to political parties for better representation of excluded groups is an important motivator for political parties to place more women candidates on their nomination lists and in their party structures. Such incentives can be in the form of additional public funds provided to political parties ensuring gender balance in their nomination lists. For instance, in Ethiopia, international organizations jointly provided a basket fund with allocations of goods and services for parties and individual candidates in the 2005 elections. Parties fielding women candidates received an extra allocation. (Luchsinger Sidhu, G. and Meena, R. p.31. 2007)

Another interesting incentive is free-of-charge media time that is granted to political parties promoting women candidates. Julie Ballington, iKNOW Politics Expert and Programme Specialist at IPU, points out the following:

*“Access to the state and privately run media is an instrumental part of campaigning to establish a connection between the candidates and the community. Media time free of charge is a subsidy in kind, and was used in East Timor as one way to help women candidates: Those parties that had women placed in high positions on party lists received additional media time. In Bosnia, the OSCE worked to increase the visibility of women in the media by developing standards of content in the media, and trained women politicians on media strategies.” (Ballington, J. Expert Opinion. 2009)*

In some cases, financial sanctions imposed on political parties for under-representation of women are just as effective as financial incentives. For instance, the amendment adopted in 1999 to Article 3 of the Constitution of France states that 50% of candidates on election lists must be women, or political parties face financial sanctions. The reform is designed to ensure parity between men and women in access to political office in all list elections in France, including elections for the European Parliament, provincial and municipal assemblies as well as elections for the National Assembly. The reform will also apply to list

elections in the Territorial Assembly of French Polynesia and for Wallis and Futuna, and in elections for the Provincial Assembly and Congress of New Caledonia (communes with less than 3.500 inhabitants are exempt). (Ballington, J. 2003. p. 181.)

Using the combination of incentives and punitive measures to incentivize political parties to promote women in public office has become a popular tool exercised by governments around the world. Some of the incentives are included in country constitutions, while others are mandated through election laws and party regulations.

## Conclusion

Although the adoption of gender quotas has become popular in recent decades, it is not the only strategy used by political parties to promote women in the political process. Political parties around the world have established women's wings and committees within their structures, used financial incentives and assistance programs, allocated funds for training and skills-building, and created discussion and lobbying platforms for women to succeed in politics. Some parties have adopted a combination of such strategies, while others gave preference to one of the tools. Additionally, governments have created incentives for political parties to promote women candidates in their party lists and within their internal structures by giving the parties extra public funding and free media time. In some cases, governments have even adopted punitive measures against parties not abiding to mandatory representation of women within their structures required by a constitution or a legislative provision.

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