

Consolidated Response

How to Promote Gender Equality Within A Political Party

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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) 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 close to 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 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 How to Promote Gender Equality Within a Political Party

Question

I am interested in making a proposal for a gender equality policy to my party (PINU-Social Demócrata). I would like information about experiences and expert opinions in this area. Ana Ortega, Honduras.

We have prepared the following consolidated response based on the responses received from our experts and complementary research by the iKNOW Politics team:
Introduction

Gender equality policy

A gender equality policy means more than including references to the subject in official party documents or increasing the proportion of women who participate in the party as active members or leaders. As noted in the “Strategic Plan for the Implementation of Gender Equality Policies” in the Partido Democrático Somos Perú, a policy of this sort implies *keeping in mind the particular situation faced by men and women in different spheres of life — social, political, economic and cultural — to guide their efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination and exclusion. It means making equality a work area for the entire Party and a goal of all of its activities*, in the words of the Partido Socialista Español, PSOE (PSOE, 2002, p.1).

This means preparing a plan of diverse, complementary, interrelated strategies over a period of time, which are reflected in actions that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based.

Developing a policy

1. Assessment

The first step in preparing a gender policy is an investigation of the status of gender equality within a political party. This may include examining existing documents and rules governing the functioning of the party, its policies and manifesto commitments, and examining the

situation of women within the party. It is important to assess the composition of office holders within the party.

For this assessment, which should be as participatory as possible, questions may focus on certain areas, as suggested by María Emma Wills (Colombia) and Beatriz Llanos (see accompanying box).

There is a great deal of literature about gender analysis, and it probably will not be difficult to find people inside or outside the party who are familiar with it and can help develop a simple guide for doing a rapid assessment in this area. Aspects that seem insignificant, such as the time of day

Questions for a gender assessment

Dear Ana:

I applaud your interest in developing a gender-equity proposal for your organization. To develop such a proposal, however, it is crucial that you first do a brief assessment of the party's openness to the inclusion of women. Only when you know the starting point will you have a clear idea of the type of measures that must be implemented in your party and the strategies you will need to use to win their adoption and implementation.

Along this line, I think a concept developed by the Colombian researcher María Emma Wills is very useful. She measured the degree of Colombian parties' "friendliness or indifference" to the inclusion of women. To determine whether a party is friendly (committed to, receptive to or inclined to promote inclusion), she suggests observing/analyzing five aspects of the party's activity:

- Doctrinal positions: Has your party included provisions in its by-laws or government plans that expressly recognize the need to adopt measures to promote gender equity?
- Internal structures: Does your party have quotas for women in leadership positions or a women's section or equality section?
 - Policies adopted by parties: Are there specific actions for recruiting women, training activities targeting women, or funds allocated for promoting women's participation?
- Electoral practices: Have quotas for the inclusion of women on candidate lists been adopted, and are they met? What percentage of candidates put forward by your party for election are women?
 - Public policies: Are elected officials and authorities from your party committed to promoting gender equity and incorporating this concept into the government actions that they promote or implement?

I think that if you apply these questions to your organization, you will get an initial idea of how committed your party currently is to promoting gender equity.

With regard to the measures you could propose, I would like to note that in May, International IDEA will publish, "From word to deed: Good practices for women's participation in Latin American political parties," a manual in which you will find a total of 95 experiences from parties in 18 Latin American countries, and which also includes national studies of the situation of women's political participation in these countries, including Honduras (you will also be able to read the analysis by María Emma Wills, which I mentioned above, about parties' friendliness or hostility).

These good practices involve 11 "institutional areas" into which we have grouped party activities:

- o By-laws and declarations of principles
- o Internal organization
- o Recruitment
- o Elections and leadership promotion
- o Training
- o Electoral system reforms
- o Financing
- o Government plans
- o Inter-party consensus building
- o Relations with civil society
- o The media

Excerpts from the *Expert Opinion* submitted by Beatriz Llanos, 2008.

For the complete text, see: <http://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/node/5555>

when party activities are held, are extremely important in promoting or discouraging women's participation.

2. Building a critical mass for change

Along with the assessment, it is crucial to develop a *critical mass* for promoting the desired change. Obviously, the main source of recruitment for this is from among women who are already in the party. That, however, is insufficient.

Jorge Valladares (*Expert Opinion*, 2008) reminds us that *a party is an organization with central leadership, whose leaders tend to reduce internal competition and whose essence is to compete in elections for positions of power. It is therefore indispensable to involve those who make up the elite (at any level), because otherwise they could become irrelevant. It is true that the elite are usually male, which is even more reason: a very common error is to exclude men from projects that seek to promote women.*

The Scandinavian social democrat parties were the first to establish women's sections and make equity proposals (Norway in 1912, Sweden in 1920). It could be useful to establish relationships with parties in the Latin American region and the world to exchange valuable information from them about the ways in which they have promoted gender equity. To identify possible interlocutors in the region, it is advisable to consult the manual, "From word to deed: Good practices for women's participation in Latin American political parties."

While gender equity is a value in itself, to reinforce the argument within the party it is important to include strategic considerations: What will the party gain by implementing and promoting it? This means analyzing both the socio-political situation in Honduras and the political system itself. With regard to the former, the analysis must identify the pending equity agenda in Honduran society, as well as the as-yet-undeveloped potential for mobilizing women that could be unleashed by a party that puts this issue on its agenda. With regard to the second point, the conclusion of one recent study (Martínez in Various authors, 2008, p. 24) notes: *In Honduras, progress has been made in electoral regulation in general and women's participation in particular. But this progress is inadequate if there is no effective enforcement or force capable of demanding implementation of the law. A party that takes gender equity seriously has an enormous opportunity in this context: to spearhead the effort to bring about historic change in the Honduran political system.*

A good example of the strategic effect of progress in gender equity is offered by the Concertación parties in Chile and the Alternativa por una República de Iguales (ARI) in Argentina. In the case of the former, it is not an accident that women (Michelle Bachelet and

Soledad Alvear) have been the leaders of renovation processes within their parties, giving them new impetus for electoral victory after several terms in office. As various analysts have noted, one of the main factors in Bachelet's victory was the inclusion of key elements of the gender agenda in her platform (Gerber, 2008). In the case of ARI, there has been a notable advance in election results, not only because of the presidential candidacy of Elisa Carrió (2003), but also because of increased gender parity within the party, to the point that today about 60 percent of party leaders are women. This and other good practices make ARI stand out in the study of Argentina in the manual mentioned above (Marx and Borner, in Various authors, 2008, p. 18).

Concrete Steps

The next sections elaborate on steps that should be taken to make progress in this area.

1. A working group

A first step is to form a working group to promote the policy and draft a correlative plan. This does not necessarily mean creating a "women's commission" or "equity commission," which could reinforce the attitude that this is a "women's" issue or raise suspicions among other party members. Instead, opportunities should be offered for open discussion of the issue, drawing in people who, although they may not be active party members, could help with reflection and gender analysis. Although we do not want to offer a "recipe," it is important to include leaders from various levels of the party, as well as young members.

As noted above, an initial task for this working group should be to analyze the party's content (ideology, program, by-laws) and practices from a gender standpoint, identifying not only where the critical points for equity lie, but also where there are embryonic alternatives and forces for change.

While doing the assessment, the promotional group must strengthen its own vision of gender and equity within the framework of party principles. One of the measures that the Partido Socialista Español, PSOE, includes in its *Equality Plan* is the *development of arguments in favour of parity, for dissemination and internal debate* (PSOE, 2002, p. 3). Active members and leaders from various areas of the party should be included in this effort.

2. Training

Another step must be to promote an intensive internal training process on gender equity. In her *Expert Opinion*, Diana Ávila stresses that the plans should include a gender audit and

expert guidance in the preparation of manuals, as well as gender formation at all levels and in all areas of the party, as indicated in the analysis of Objectives 2 and 3 in the PSOE Equality Plan.

In many cases, parties have adopted resolutions on gender equity and parity in their events (Congresses) and top decision-making bodies. But these resolutions, like the electoral legislation that exists in nearly every country in the region, mean little if they are not accompanied by change in the vision and practices of leaders and citizens. It is therefore crucial to make an ongoing effort to promote debate and formation. In this regard, learning from other parties' experiences can be useful especially on the implementation of policies and statutes. In Latin America, outstanding experiences include the *Hannah Arendt Institute for Cultural and Political Formation*, promoted by ARI in Argentina (for more information, see: www.institutoarendt.com.ar).

A gender equity training plan must involve interconnected actions targeting the entire party; it may be useful, as the PSOE proposes (PSOE, 2002, p. 5), to have an "equality module" that is used by the entire party, with specific actions for building women's skills so that they can reach and act effectively at various levels of party responsibility.

3. Institutionalizing change

As arguments become more solid and circulate more widely, the next step is to begin to institutionalize equity policies within the party. This means making concrete changes in aspects of party life where the main obstacles have been identified. It is important to establish concrete targets and commitments for reaching them, specific affirmative action measures for women, etc.

There has been much discussion about whether it is necessary to have specific secretariats on this issue. On the one hand, this can ensure that the issue receives specific attention. On the other, it is important to avoid the belief that the issue can be resolved by forming an ad-hoc commission. In this area, it is important to consult and consider various models. The PSOE, for example, has an *Equality Secretariat* (with no other modifier) whose primary objective is to *consolidate "party democracy" within the PSOE, guaranteeing a balance of men and women in decision-making positions and greater participation by and affiliation of women*. Other parties have bodies with more traditional titles (Women's Secretariat), but have redefined their agendas. That is the case of the historical Partido Socialista Argentino (founded in 1896), which has taken a clear gender approach (on this, see: Marx and Borner,

in Various authors, 2008, pp. 35 and subsequent). A proposal along the same line has emerged within the *Partido Democrático Somos Perú*.

The process of institutionalizing the proposal can reach its peak at a top-level party event (Congress or Conference) at which the most important party documents are reviewed and modified and specific decisions are made that make the changes visible to society (parity-based entities, for example).

Conclusion

A party exists in and for society, and its changes are real if they have an impact on society. A gender-equity plan should therefore have public components. One could be an intensive recruitment campaign that targets women by presenting the party as an organization deeply committed to women's issues, as reflected not only in the party's platform, but also in the makeup of its leadership. Another could be a national political campaign focusing on some of the most relevant issues for women in Honduras. This connects internal changes with changes that are needed in the country and gives them greater legitimacy.

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