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Summary of the e-Discussion on
Women in Public Administration

May 2019



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LAUNCHING MESSAGE

“Increasing the proportion of women in public institutions makes them more representative, increases innovation, improves decision-making and benefits whole societies” - António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, [Message on International Women’s Day 2017](#)

Background

In 2015, governments unanimously endorsed the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and, through its Goal 16 on “promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies” and Goal 5 on “ensuring gender equality and women’s empowerment,” recognized the role of gender equality and inclusive public administration and institutions in achieving more peaceful, prosperous, equal and sustainable societies.

Public administration refers to the aggregate state-funded machinery, including agencies, policies and services, in charge of the management and implementation of laws, regulations and decisions of the government. It enables countries to implement national policies and programmes and is essential in driving sustainable development¹.

In many countries, public institutions continue to be male-dominated and patriarchal, perpetuating harmful, and sometimes violent, attitudes and practices. Although there is no global baseline on women’s participation in public administration, existing [research](#) from UNDP shows that women are under-represented, especially in leadership and decision-making roles. The available data suggests that women make up on average 45% of public administration, yet there is high variation of women’s participation across countries, ranging from 3% to 77%. The overall share of women in public administration is highest, on average, in OECD countries (55.1%), and lowest in the Arab States (35.9%). However, when looking at the share of women in decision-making positions in public administration, the highest average share is found in Latin America and the Caribbean (43.4%) and the lowest in Africa (25.1%). Moreover, just 20% of countries have reached parity (50%) in the share of women in decision-making positions of public administration².

Diversity, including equal access of women to leadership roles, is not only the right thing to do but also the most productive. A recent UNDP and McKinsey [study](#) found that female participation in public administration and in decision-making roles is positively correlated with economic development as well as gender equality in society. It also suggests that women’s equal participation and leadership creates conducive environment for a better and more effective government. These findings are reinforced by another recent [report](#) by the Wilson Center that concludes: “where there are more women in power, there is better governance, and where there is good governance, there are more women in power.”

Objective

This e-Discussion is a forum to promote a dialogue on the role of women in public administration and decision-making and exchange knowledge and good practices on ways to increase and strengthen women’s participation in public administration and decision-making and ensure public institutions are

¹ [Public Administration Reform: Practice Note](#). UNDP, 2004

² GEPA Initiative Database. UNDP and University of Pittsburgh, 2019.

safe and free of sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Women and men in politics and in public administration, national and local government representatives, civil society activists, experts, practitioners, and academia are invited to contribute with their experiences by answering to one or more of the below questions. The submissions will contribute to the elaboration of a Consolidated Reply that will augment the knowledge base available on the topic.

Questions

1. Data is essential in identifying trends and shape targeted and effective policy responses. What is the level of women's participation in public administration in your country? What about women in senior management positions in public institutions?
2. There are many barriers to women's full and equal participation in public administration and leadership. For example, women in public administration often face sexual harassment and gender-based violence³. Do women in public administration in your country face sexual harassment and/or gender-based violence? What are other barriers hindering women's equal participation in leadership and decision-making roles in your country?
3. What can be done to increase the equal and full participation of women, including young women, in public administration at all levels? What can be done to ensure public administration is free from sexual harassment and gender-based violence? Please share examples of good practices.
4. Have women in public administration in your country used their position to advance sustainable development and peace? Please share examples.

CONTRIBUTORS

The following participants joined the e-Discussion from 28 March to 19 April 2019:

1. abtagu@gmail
2. [Akua Dansua](#), Former Minister of Youth and Sports and former Ambassador of Ghana to Germany, Ghana
3. [Christopher Lee](#)
4. [Dr. Mrs. Chidi Ogbuta](#), former Governorship Candidate to IMO State, Nigeria
5. [Dr. Santosh Kumar Mishra](#), Technical Assistant, Population Education Resource Centre (PERC), Department of Continuing and Adult Education and Extension Work, S. N. D. T. Women's University (SNDTWU), India
6. [Evelyn Gracias](#), El Salvador
7. [Gabrielle Bardall](#), Gender Advisor at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), United States
8. [Houda Mansouri](#), Tunisia
9. [Kadidia Doumbia](#), Specialist in Gender and Education, United States/Côte d'Ivoire
10. [Kimberlyn Arevalo](#), Guatemala
11. [Laura Celia Arévalo](#)
12. [Leah Fleischer](#), Student at Montgomery College, United States

³ A recent [report](#) by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe revealed an alarming amount of sexual and psychological harassment/bullying targeting female staff of parliaments in Europe. 40.5% of those interviewed said that they had suffered acts of sexual harassment in their work and 50% had received comments of a sexual nature.

13. [Lilliam Arrieta](#), El Salvador
14. [Mbaisi Kihima](#), Kenya
15. [Meraj Hamayun Khan](#), Pakistan
16. [Nasheli Noriega](#)
17. [Puleng Letsie](#), Lesotho
18. [Rekha Shukla](#)
19. [Susana Campari](#), Co-founder and President of the Civil Association Woman and Government, Argentina
20. [Tomás Báscolo](#), Argentina

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

iKNOW Politics and its partners thank their followers for taking the time to participate in this e-Discussion and share experiences, practices and recommendations. The contributions are summarized below.

- 1. Data is essential in identifying trends and shape targeted and effective policy responses. What is the level of women’s participation in public administration in your country? What about women in senior management positions in public institutions?**

Public administration is the management and implementation of government policy, laws, regulations and decisions. Various public institutions altogether represent the “public administration” of a country, often the largest employer. Public administration is therefore essential for driving sustainable development.⁴ Unlike for women’s political participation and leadership, there is no global measurement mechanism to track women’s representation in public administration.⁵ Public and high-quality data on women in public administration is scarce, and when data exists, variations in definitions, monitoring and reporting mechanisms of governments make it difficult to have global data collection and monitoring methods.⁶

All participants agree that collecting and maintaining data on women in public administration, especially at senior levels, is challenging and requires significant resources. Many share examples of women’s representation in various national public administration institutions, consistent with [research](#) from UNDP that shows women are generally under-represented, especially in senior and decision-making roles.

[Liliam Arrieta](#) reports that although there are no legal barriers to the election of women in the Supreme Court of Justice of **El Salvador**, only 23.6% of elected Court members in the last three decades were women. Women’s representation is even lower in the country’s Constitutional Chamber: only two of the 19 elected members between 1994 and 2018 have been women. [Evelyn Gracias](#) estimates that women hold about 30% of management roles in El Salvador’s public administration, although does not provide a source for this figure.

[Susana Campari](#) shares that the executive branch of government in **Argentina** is male dominated with women representing 22% of ministers, 13% of secretaries and 27% of under-secretaries. However, citing

⁴ [Public Administration Reform: Practice Note](#). UNDP, 2004

⁵ A recently approved global SDG indicator 16.7.1b will request countries to specifically report on diversity within their public institutions. This will be an important entry-point to scale up data collection efforts and reporting. UNDP has been supporting the development of this indicator and is now the custodian agency for its reporting. UNDP will be supporting capacity development among NSO and Civil Service Commissions to track and report disaggregated data.

⁶ [Gender Inequality Research lab \(GIRL\) at the University of Pittsburg](#) (accessed on 9 May 2019).

an online source of gender data, [Tomás Báscolo](#) claims that women make up only 17.4% of ministers in Argentina. This discrepancy shows the complexity of accessing reliable data on women in top government positions.

[Kadidia Doumbia](#) shares that although there is “genuine willingness” from the government of **Côte d'Ivoire** to increase women’s participation in politics and public administration, the numbers remain low. She claims there are currently: seven women out of 41 Secretaries of State, 29 women out of 255 representatives, eight women out of 66 senators, 15 women out of 200 mayors and only one woman out of 31 presidents of regions/regional councils.

[Meraj Hamayun Khan](#) estimates that women are severely under-represented across public institutions and service providers in **Pakistan**, arguing that it is “extremely difficult for women to be appointed to decision-making positions.” However, there is no public data on women in public administration in Pakistan to back this assessment.⁷

Similarly, former candidate to Imo State Governorship [Dr. Chidi Ogbuta](#) shares that women’s participation in public administration is very low in **Nigeria**, especially in top leadership roles. She claims that there are only four women ministers, equaling about 15% of the current cabinet members, and that State Governors are mostly men.

[Leah Fleischer](#) says that although **Israel** was one of the first countries to elect a female Prime Minister in 1969, there were only six women ministers that served the Israeli government from 1948 to 1992. To her, women are under-represented in public administration, especially at the local level, because of the traditional and patriarchal culture that relies on women as primary caregivers.

[Gabrielle Bardall](#) mentions the [USAID’s Diamond Leadership Model](#) (DLM), a new framework for measuring women’s leadership that collects data on three leadership levels (high, mid, and low) for four government sectors (legislative, executive, judicial, and security), as a useful source for information on women in public administration. She also recommends the [Gender Inequality Research Lab](#) (GIRL) at the University of Pittsburg, which has been a partner of UNDP on its [Gender Equality in Public Administration](#) (GEPA) initiative since 2015, as reliable source of data.

The GEPA initiative supports women’s participation and leadership in public institutions and focuses on data collection, research and analysis. Based on its [Global Report](#) recommendations, it drives implementation through “advocacy, partnerships, capacity development, policy and programming at all levels and the development of a global tracking mechanism that will institutionalise the importance of monitoring the state of gender equality in the civil service.”⁸ To develop this tracking mechanism, UNDP is currently in the process of mapping national public service monitoring tools and assessing the availability of gender-disaggregated data across regions.

2. There are many barriers to women’s full and equal participation in public administration and leadership. For example, women in public administration often face sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Do women in public administration in your country face sexual

⁷ See the [Report on Gender Equality in Civil Service in Pakistan](#), UN Women and UNDP, 2018.

⁸ [Gender Equality Public Administration](#), UNDP (accessed on 9 May 2019).

harassment and/or gender-based violence? What are other barriers hindering women's equal participation in leadership and decision-making roles in your country?

Contributors agree that the barriers to women's full and equal participation and leadership in public institutions are many. Sexual harassment and gender-based violence are among the main obstacles hindering progress.

For example, in **Côte d'Ivoire**, [Kadidia Doumbia](#) says that many men refuse to allow their wives to work in public institutions fearing the abuse they may be exposed to. She shares that verbal harassment is widespread and that women, especially those who reach high positions, are often subject to psychological harassment and must continuously defend their positions. [Meraj Hamayun Khan](#) reinforces this point arguing that, in **Pakistan**, women who reach the highest positions often feel threatened and are pushed to prove their merit, recalling the case of a high-ranking woman who resigned because of the harassment imposed by her superior.

[Puleng Letsie](#) shares that in **Lesotho**, intimidation and smear campaigns are commonplace for women in public administration, especially those in leadership roles. Safety is an issue for many women in top positions. Although a law on gender-based violence has been in process for the past decade, gender-based violence "is at its highest in the country."

[Akua Dansua](#) points that although the official numbers may be low, women in **Ghana** widely face sexual harassment and gender-based violence in public institutions. She warns against the low reporting rates in Ghana and many other countries and the misleading image they might portray. Socio-cultural factors and the lack of awareness and education, she argues, are the main contributors to the lack of reporting rates. To her, movements such as [Me Too](#) are stimulating positive change with the normalization of naming and shaming powerful perpetrators in Western nations, but they need to spread beyond the contexts they originated in.⁹

Participants report that women in **Argentina**, **India**, and **Israel** working in public administration commonly face sexual harassment and gender-based violence and are subject to deeply rooted patriarchal cultures and public and political structures. Moreover, [Santosh Kumar Mishra](#) shares that Indian women are often given low-paid marginal jobs, excluded from decision-making roles, and "not acknowledged as contributors to the family and society as a whole." Sons are privileged over daughters, "who are often seen as an economic burden to families that fear high dowries and wedding costs."

[Dr. Chidi Ogbuta](#) argues that the levels of gender-based violence in **Nigeria** are "scary... and the security forces exacerbate it." Recalling her experience during the recent state governorship electoral campaign as the only woman candidate against 70 men, she argues that "the use of thugs to intimidate and harass and burn electoral materials scare women from participating."

To her, another important barrier slowing down women's equal access to public decision-making roles is the lack of transparency and corruption in nominations to top leadership roles.¹⁰ Men have often greater access to funds and supportive networks and are therefore more likely to provide bribes and win high-level nominations.

⁹ See the [summary of our previous e-Discussion on the topic](#) for more information on harassment and violence against women in politics.

¹⁰ See UNDP's survey on the "[Impact of corruption on women's career development opportunities in the Central Administration of the Republic of Moldova](#)" for more information.

[Meraj Hamayun Khan](#) argues that many women in **Pakistan** “are still unaware and refuse to accept the fact that injustice is being committed against them.” The lack of basic education and individual freedoms prevents many women from gaining awareness about their potential role in the society and reaching it.

3. What can be done to increase the equal and full participation of women, including young women, in public administration at all levels? What can be done to ensure public administration is free from sexual harassment and gender-based violence? Please share examples of good practices.

Breaking taboos and raising awareness about sexual harassment and gender-based violence along with establishing institutional accountability mechanisms and sanctions are essential to ensure public administration is safe for women, argues [Leah Fleischer](#). Public institutions must integrate units where women feel safe to freely report acts of harassment, abuse, and violence, participants suggest. Such units must ensure transparency and accountability, and that incidents are investigated, and perpetrators are questioned and sanctioned, regardless of seniority. Concrete and impactful procedures and sanctions would act as deterrents for perpetrators and perpetrators-to-be. This would lead women in public institutions to feel safer, and as result, more women would take on public administration jobs.

Many contributors argue that ultimately the most effective way to ensure public administration is free of sexual harassment and gender-based violence is to get more women in public administration and in high-level decision-making roles. As more women integrate public institutions, naming and shaming of perpetrators gradually becomes a norm. Additionally, when more women fill leadership positions, they contribute to putting in place more trainings and policies to combat sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

Furthermore, participants agree that education is key. They stress on the importance of including men in achieving gender equality in public administration and call for them to be educated about gender inequality issues, sexual harassment and gender-based violence, and toxic masculinity. Broader awareness on these issues would enable men to take an active role in building safe and inclusive public institutions. Participants also argue that educating women on sexual harassment and gender-based violence would contribute to greater reporting rates and as a result, more effective and targeted prevention and accountability policies and mechanisms.

[Dr. Chidi Ogbuta](#) blames the lack of women’s participation in politics and in public administration on the lack of education and training among women in **Nigeria**. She calls organizations such as UN Women to organize civic education and leadership trainings for Nigerian women at the local level in order to encourage them and equip them with the knowledge needed to participate in public decision-making processes.

Contributors agree on the importance of informing women on the opportunities in politics and public administration and encouraging them to take on a role in public service. Quality training is needed to enable women to apply and compete for jobs in public administration. For example, [Akua Dansua](#) shares that in **Ghana**, school curriculum enhancements and internship and mentoring programs have been put in place to promote women’s, especially young women’s, inclusion in public administration and decision-making.

Participants argue that affirmative action measures are usually the most efficient and fast-acting ways to ensure greater female representativity and participation in public institutions. For example, [Kadidia Doumbia](#) mentions a recent example from **Côte d'Ivoire** where the President signed a bill requiring all organizations to include 33% of women in their organizations.

More generally, participants argue that transparency is crucial at all levels of recruitment for public administration jobs and that anti-corruption and anti-fraud mechanisms are necessary to ensure the integrity of the recruitment process. If women are given equal chances at integrating and progressing in public service jobs, they will have greater chances of filling high-level positions, which will in turn contribute to a cultural change and to more gender-sensitive policies and procedures in public administration.

Moreover, [Houda Mansouri](#) calls for greater gender balance at home to enable women to progress professionally, in public service or otherwise. She recommends raising awareness of men on the shared responsibilities of taking care of the home and the family, as well as providing childcare support for parents in public administration. This would provide more opportunities for women to equally participate and progress in public institutions.

4. Have women in public administration in your country used their position to advance sustainable development and peace? Please share examples.

Participants agree that having more women in public administration reduces corruption and accelerates progress towards sustainable development and peace. For example, [Dr. Chidi Ogbuta](#) recalls the role that former Nigerian Minister of Finance Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala played in increasing transparency and reducing corruption in public institutions in **Nigeria**. Being the first woman to hold the post, she introduced the practice of publishing each state's monthly financial allocation from the Federal government in the newspapers and established the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System, which enabled to eliminate more than 62,000 ghost workers.¹¹ In **Ghana** too, women in public administration have made major contributions to reducing corruption, argues [Akua Dansua](#). To her, this is an indication that women in public administration have a deep and lasting impact on driving good governance and achieving sustainable development.

¹¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20160819105807/http://www.nitda.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/ICT4D-SAPI-Book.pdf>, page 17. (Accessed on 16 May 2019).