



iKNOW POLITICS

international Knowledge
Network of **Women** in Politics

Consolidated reply of the e-Discussion on

Engaging Male Champions to Support Women's Political Participation

Co-hosted with International Gender Champions

December 2017



LAUNCHING MESSAGE

Research and experience has documented that gender diversity yields better outcomes in political decision-making and that women's role in local and national political processes greatly improves democratic outcomes. Women's right to equal voice and participation in political life has a strong foundation of international commitments - from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to the Beijing Platform for Action and more recently the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet women continue to be under-represented across every area of political life – including in political parties, being part of inclusive constitution-making processes, as candidates, elected representatives, voters, etc. As of June 2017, women make up only 23.4% of national parliamentarians, 7.9% head of state, and 5.2% head of government, with unknown numbers in local government.

Gender balance in politics, however, can only be achieved if men work side by side with women to share the responsibility in breaking harmful cultural norms and practices, as well as the institutional, structural and legal barriers that hinder women's equal and influential political participation. Proactive work by male champions, in partnership with women, is necessary to establish an environment that empowers women's political participation at all levels of decision-making.

Men's partnership is required in addressing issues that hinder women's political engagement, including: structural barriers, discriminatory practices and violence that prevent women from exercising their right to vote; unequal access to education, networks and resources; discriminatory institutional practices and laws that prevent women from being recruited, nominated for standing for office, or getting elected; institutional discrimination against women in office resulting in their not being appointed to committees where they can have influence; violence, sexism and harassment against female candidates and female elected officials, and negative gender-based stereotypes perpetuated by the media.

Men can help lead the charge with women in enacting legislation that promotes women's rights, repealing laws and policies that discriminate against women and limit opportunities. They can also support the advancement of women in decision making bodies by advocating for temporary special measures. In political parties, men and women can work together to champion women's participation including nominating more women, having hard targets or quotas for women in leadership roles in the party, and ensuring women have the same professional development opportunities as men to enable their advancement within the party.

Beyond legal reform, quotas, and capacity building, gender balance in politics requires a reconfiguration of gender dynamics and power relations, breaking down social norms and stereotypes that limit women's participation in decision-making. It requires men to question and challenge the status quo, to change practices, and to lead other men in doing the same. It also requires a normative shift for women who may contribute to sustaining gender stereotypes and narrow gender identities regarding leadership roles for women as well as men.

Men can be powerful advocates in their community to promote women's role in political life, speaking out about the importance of women's role [in political life], advocating for women to run for office, supporting registration of female voters, or canvassing for female candidates. Male leaders can also utilize media appearances to make targeted statements advocating for change, raising awareness on the lack of

women's representation and leadership in their communities, or supporting the realization of women's right to participate in elections.

As fathers, men can help re-shape gender identities by emulating shared decision-making and leadership in the home, and speaking to their children about the importance of women in politics. Fathers also play a fundamental role in cultivating a culture of equality by sharing the duty of caregiving for children and by setting equal standards for boys and girls within the family, thus opening opportunities for women and girls to participate in public life.

Objective of the e-Discussion

This e-discussion is a platform to promote an active and fruitful dialogue on how men can be catalysts for enhancing women's participation in politics with the goal of drawing out best practices and lessons learned.

Structure of the e-Discussion

The e-discussion was co-convened by [iKNOW Politics](#) and the [International Gender Champions](#), a leadership network that brings together female and male decision-makers to break down gender barriers, from **06 September to 12 October 2017**. Public officials, political party leaders, civil society activists, government and international organizations representatives, academia and technical experts were invited to contribute with their experiences by answering to one or more of the below questions.

The e-discussion was supported halfway through with a [Facebook Live of a roundtable discussion](#) in Geneva on **2 October 2017** on the topic with male and female based in Geneva.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The e-Discussion on [Engaging Male Champions for Women's Political Participation](#) was co-convened in collaboration with International Gender Champions (ICG) from 6 September to 12 October 2017. Fourteen participants from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab region, Asia, the Americas and Europe engaged in the online debate and submitted contributions. The e-Discussion gathered 12 contributions in English, one in Arabic and one in Spanish. Four contributors are prominent International Gender Champions. As leaders, experts, members of civil society organizations, students and representatives of government institutions, the participants commonly stressed the urgent need for male leaders to play a more active role in supporting women's leadership and political participation. More details about the contributors are provided below:

1. [Noutcha Prudence](#), Program Coordinator at Network for Solidarity Empowerment and Transformation for All (NEWSETA) and Team leader at World Youth Movement for Democracy, **Cameroon**
2. [Dr. Ibrahim Okinda](#), PhD in Communication and Media Technology, Moi University, **Kenya**
3. [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), Mumbai, **India**
4. [Agripinner Nandhego](#), Programme Specialist Political Participation and Leadership, UN Women Uganda, **Uganda**
5. [Catherine Watuka](#), Executive Director of WUSETE and iKNOW Politics expert, **Kenya**

6. [Yury Fedotov](#), Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and International Gender Champion, **International**
7. [Sonket Sereyleak](#), Education and Gender Coordinator, Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia-COMFREL, **Cambodia**
8. [Cherith Sanger](#), Attorney and member of Sonke Gender Justice, **South Africa**
9. [Lisane Thirsk](#), Program Manager, Gender Equality at ParlAmericas, **Latin America**
10. [Saad Al Rawj](#), Electoral Adviser to political entities in Iraq, former Vice President of the Council of the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq, **Iraq** (in Arabic)
11. [iKNOW Politics user “Deygal”](#) (in Spanish)

The video contributions were submitted by:

1. [Doreen Bogdan-Martin](#), Chief of the International Telecommunication Union’s (ITU) Strategic Planning and Membership Department and most senior-ranked woman at ITU
2. [Michael Møller](#), Director-General of UN Geneva and founding member of International Gender Champions
3. [Dr Khalid Koser](#), Executive Director of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) and International Gender Champion

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

The iKNOW Politics and International Gender Champions teams would like to thank all their members and followers who took the time to answer the questions of this e-Discussion and share experiences, practices and recommendations. The contributions are summarized below.

1. **How do you explain the low representation of women in decision-making around the world, whether in village development committees, parliaments, governments, or intergovernmental organizations?**

Balanced participation of men and women in decision-making processes is a precondition for a healthy and functioning democracy. Even though women’s right to equal participation in political life has a strong foundation in international commitments - from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to the Beijing Platform for Actions and more recently the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - women continue to be underrepresented across every sphere of political life, including in political parties and constitution-making processes, as candidates, elected representatives, and voters. Sonket Sereyleak reports that as of June 2017, women make up only 23.4% of national parliamentarians, 7.9% head of state, and 5.2% head of government.

She argues that women’s political participation is still low because many signatory countries do not implement their international commitments into laws and policies. For instance, she reports that in **Cambodia** women make up only 19.51% of national parliamentarians and 16.76% of commune councilors at the local level. This is the result of the lack of temporary special measures (TSMs) to help achieve the goals set by the national development plans and failure to fulfill the national obligations in accord with the CEDAW, to which Cambodia has been a signatory since 1992.

Contributors from **Kenya, Uganda, Iraq, and India** argue that patriarchal structures and cultural perceptions and beliefs, shared by both men and women, play an important role in discouraging women

from entering politics and limiting their participation and influence when they do. They also attribute the low representation of women in politics to several factors, including:

- Political parties' lack of active solicitation of women candidates.
- Placing women candidates in constituencies where they are not expected to win.
- Poor access to campaign funds for women candidates.
- Inaccessibility to relevant political information.
- Derogatory media coverage of women, women politicians and gender issues that perpetuate stereotypes.
- Few women leaders acting as role models and mentors for young women.

Michael Møller points to bad habits, culture and male-dominated historical structures to explain the low representation of women in leadership positions. Specific to women's leadership in international organizations, he admits that bad habits and bureaucracies are difficult to change, but not impossible. Citing the initiatives of the new Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), António Guterres, as an example, he argues that leaders need to put in place gender policies and hold accountable those who do not follow of their actions to be able to spur behavior change.

To International Gender Champion Yury Fedotov, the unequal presence of women in leadership positions is a complex and systemic problem, and argues that the contributing factors are many. International Gender Champions Doreen Bogdan-Martin and Dr. Khalid Koser agree that there is generally a smaller pool of female applicants for leadership positions, which in turn lowers the possibility of a woman being promoted or appointed. Proposing solutions to address the root causes of this, Mr. Fedotov calls for the need to invest more in coaching and awareness-raising to support women to apply and succeed in assessment processes. Many leadership positions in international organizations involve hardship locations or extensive travel, so more needs to be done to support and enable the use of flexible working arrangements, and to provide opportunities for all staff to better balance private life and professional obligations.

2. How can men as leaders take meaningful action to foster an increase in women's representation in decision-making bodies? How can men as husbands/partners, fathers, sons, and other family members, support women's role in political life? Share concrete examples.

Contributors from **South Africa** and **Kenya** argue that men need to be critical of harmful patriarchal values and practices. Men, especially fathers, need to give the space for young women and girls to take on leadership roles within the family and the community. A contributor from **Uganda** asserts that in traditional African societies, men are very much listened to as they are the "gate keepers" to prominent roles in the community. That is why it is important that male leaders (e.g. tribe leaders, religious leaders, cultural leaders) take an active role in sensitizing their communities on women's political participation and leadership. For example, in Uganda many civil society organizations are training men as civic educators and role models. UN Women in Uganda has launched the [HeForShe](#) campaign in two cultural institutions (Buganda and Alur) which proved effective in showcasing cultural leaders who champion women's empowerment and who are leading by example. She also reports that the strategy of male champions has proved effective in Parliament, where women, who account for 32% of MPs, collaborate with their male colleagues to push for gender equality legislation. For instance, the Anti Female Genital Mutilation bill was tabled by a male MP and was successfully enacted into law.

A contribution from [ParlAmericas](#), a regional inter-parliamentary network in the Americas and Caribbean, argues that parliamentarians are essential actors in the fight for gender equality due to their lawmaking and budgetary review functions which shape policymaking. Their representative roles and broad public platforms can contribute to significant change in favor of women's rights. It is especially important that male legislators use their collective influence towards these pursuits, as they continue to outnumber women in most parliaments.

As an inter-parliamentary institution that promotes and mainstreams gender equality in national legislatures, ParlAmericas has compiled strategies that male parliamentarians can employ in different settings to be effective allies for women's equality and political empowerment. Parliamentarians from the Americas and Caribbean region have identified the following good practices, informed by their own experiences:

1) In political parties

- Demonstrating leadership for the recruitment of more women candidates for the next election by encouraging women they know to run for office and mentoring and supporting potential candidates
- Ensuring their party is proactive in seeking to run a gender-balanced ticket
- Promoting policies that favor equitable leadership by women in the party's top governance structures

2) In legislative and oversight functions

- Assessing legislation and budgets through an intersectional gender lens to consider the potential impacts on diverse groups
- Advocating for laws and initiatives that will positively impact women and help build the political will to pass them
- Consulting with women's groups to seek feedback on proposed legislative initiatives (not just those explicitly related to gender equality) and integrating the results into decision-making

3) In meetings (including committees, plenary, and in the constituency)

- Chairing meetings in a way that encourages equitable participation by all members (e.g. inviting those who have not spoken to contribute)
- Listening respectfully when each member of the group is speaking

4) In the media and online

- Leveraging social media as a tool to keep informed about the work of gender equality advocates and joining discussions on pertinent topics
- Challenging gender stereotypes and bias when they emerge on online platforms or through interview questions

5) In everyday life

- Learning about key gender equality issues and sharing knowledge with others
- Encouraging other men to become allies
- Using gender-sensitive language (i.e. communication that demonstrates respect for and does not render women invisible) and drawing attention to harmful uses of language in day-to-day conversations

To optimize outcomes, male allies' contributions should be guided by the experiential knowledge and needs of diverse women in their country. This approach will help ensure coordinated efforts with women-led organizations and movements that promote gender equality. Taking joint action will help transform norms and structures that disadvantage women collectively. The resulting cultural changes will also contribute to a more inclusive political environment.

ParlAmericas has produced a forthcoming toolkit for male parliamentarians in the Anglophone Caribbean region who wish to further their knowledge on advancing gender equality in partnership with women.

Specific to women's leadership in international organizations, Yury Fedotov says that men in leadership positions need to ensure that the organizational culture is conducive to the advancement of women. This could be approached in several ways, including by reviewing formal and informal "systems" and organizational cultures that have favored men when it comes to representation in decision-making bodies. For example, a Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan are being developed at the UN Office at Vienna and UNODC to make sure that senior management undertakes such reviews and follows commitment with action. A similar gender policy was established at the UN Office in Geneva, which includes a system of focal points throughout the organization and an accountability mechanism that sanctions employees who do not follow the policy. In addition, Michael Møller mentions that applying a gender perspective to all trainings and recruitment operations helps the workforce to be more gender conscious.

Sharing his own experience as a leader – and what he says every responsible male leader should do – Dr. Khalid Koser calls for giving more opportunities to women to test themselves, to rise and get promoted. He and Doreen Bogdan-Martin suggested this can be done by, for example, giving exposure to women on public panels as speakers or moderators and more prominent roles to women in missions and official delegations.

Michael Møller, Doreen Bogdan-Martin and Dr. Khalid Koser also mention the [International Gender Champions](#) initiative, of which they are members, as an example of how peer pressure can play a role in convincing leaders to take simple and concrete commitments, such as the [Panel Parity Pledge](#), which requires to strive towards gender-balanced panels at speaking events.

3. What strategies and approaches have been successful in engaging male champions in shifting the gender disparity of women in decision-making bodies?

Initiatives such as the International Gender Champions have been instrumental in mobilizing international organizations' leaders, diplomats and civil society to pledge to break down gender barriers. It is a successful tool because it provides easy guidelines to follow, such as the pledge to only speak at panels that include women.

Participants from South Africa and Cambodia call for establishing similar networks of male and female leaders across political institutions, civil society, academia and arts to support and strengthen existing advocacy for women's political participation. These leaders could use their position and influence to speak about the issue in public forums and in the media in order to raise awareness and encourage others to do the same. Participants also mention the role of the media is shifting popular attitudes towards women leaders by refraining from stereotypical coverage of women in politics and by exposing the issue of women's under-representation in politics.

4. What potential challenges do male champions face in being active and vocal supporters of women in politics (or in women's empowerment and gender equality)?

Yury Fedotov admits that an important challenge that must be addressed is a potential lack of understanding of what women's empowerment or gender mainstreaming means. Being a meaningful advocate for women's empowerment also requires building a better understanding of the challenges women face. That is why awareness raising is crucial. Collecting disaggregated data and gender statistics, which provide powerful evidence for gender inequality, is also essential to not only help male leaders have a better understanding of conditions, needs and contributions of women, but also to more effectively help address inequalities.

Dr. Khalid Koser mentions tokenism as another potential challenge that male champions might face and the risk that promoting women becomes more of a symbol than a deep change in behavior. Another challenge is that men risk being sidelined by other men in the community. They can be labeled 'pro women' and, in extreme cases, 'Anti African', a contributor from Uganda argues, because many believe patriarchy is a part of the culture that needs to be preserved.

5. What can be done to catalyze and encourage more male champions of women's political participation? Please share any initiatives or good practices that you are aware of.

Male champions can use their privileged positions and their voices to call for change, and to take and communicate clear steps to address gender inequality. Concrete and measurable commitments, such flexible working arrangements, the [Panel Parity Pledge](#), and equal representation on electoral lists, committees and official delegations, can help to show how simple steps can lead to great results. Demonstrating results helps attracting more male leaders to commit to become male champions.

There is a snowball effect powered by peer pressure, as the more high-level men leaders become male champions, the more other male leaders want to join the group. Research results unequivocally shows that diverse work forces are more effective than less-diverse ones, which makes a powerful business case for organizations to include more women at all levels of their workforce. Michael Møller points out that there are a number of clear strategies to eradicate gender inequality but that the key is to truly commit to implementing them by involving all parties and putting in place measures to hold those who do not follow accountable.