

SUMMARY  
OF THE E-DISCUSSION ON

# WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

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## LAUNCHING MESSAGE

### Background

Women's right to equal opportunities and participation in public life is guaranteed by international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals. Women are active in both the formal and informal public spaces, including in social and political movements as civil society activists, political candidates and leaders, and peace negotiators.

Over time, women activists and feminist movements have led efforts globally and nationally to advance the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda in all spheres of life. For instance, in politics they were instrumental in achieving women's suffrage, as well as the introduction of gender-sensitive laws and electoral gender quotas in many countries. Albeit still far from parity, women's participation and representation in formal political institutions has increased in recent decades as a result of those reforms. For instance, women's representation in national parliaments has nearly doubled in the last twenty years, rising from [13.4%](#) in 2000 to [24.9%](#) in 2020.

With the rise and renewed uses of the internet, women are using both formal and informal spaces to drive change for a more democratic and sustainable world free from discrimination. Social media tools enable digital activism and grassroots movements with unprecedented speed, reach, and often impact, transforming institutional and traditional activism and civic spaces.

### Objective

This e-Discussion explored and raised awareness on the different ways and forms women participate in public life outside of formal political institutions, such as in feminist movements, civic demonstrations and initiatives and online activism. Activists in civic and political movements, civil society groups, political parties, social media campaigns, as well as practitioners and researchers on issues related to political and public engagement were invited to join this e-Discussion from 24 August to 14 September 2020. Submissions contributed to the elaboration of the below Consolidated Reply, augmenting the knowledge base available on the topic.

### Questions

1. How have women outside of formal roles advanced the gender equality agenda and influenced other public debates and decisions? Please share concrete examples.
2. In organizing and pushing for change, many women activists develop valuable leadership skills. Can you share examples of women in politics who entered the formal political sphere after engaging in informal spaces?
3. What is the role of youth, especially young women, in driving public and civil society movements and influencing decision-making? Is the public engagement of today's youth different from previous generations'?

## CONTRIBUTORS

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 following participants joined the e-Discussion:

1. [Akua Sena Dansua](#), Former Ambassador of Ghana to Germany, Former Minister of Tourism, Former Minister of Youth and Sports, Former Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, Former Member of Parliament (MP), **Ghana** (English)
2. [Doumbia Kadidia](#), Specialist in Gender and Education, DC Human Rights Liaison, **Côte d'Ivoire** (English)
3. [Hana Hammoud Abbas](#), **Iraq** (Arabic)
4. [María Espinoza Pajilla](#), Presidenta of Instituto Violeta Correa de Belaúnde, **Peru** (Spanish)
5. [Samira Massoudi](#), **Libya** (Arabic)
6. [Siti Fuadilla Alchumaira](#), Co-Founder of Empowomen, **Indonesia** (English)
7. [Susana Campari](#), Co-founder and President of the Asociación Civil Mujer y Gobierno, **Argentina** (Spanish)

## SUMMARY

1. **How have women outside of formal roles advanced the gender equality agenda and influenced other public debates and decisions? Please share concrete examples.**

Women's emancipation through legal reforms on issues such as suffrage, labor, marriage, maternity, and gender-based violence, is linked to efforts and movements led by women striving for equality and a better life for women and girls everywhere. Although women have gained many rights, liberties, and opportunities in the past century, full gender equality is still far from reach in most countries. Globally, over 2.5 billion women and girls around the world are affected by discriminatory laws and the lack of legal protections, often in multiple ways.<sup>1</sup>

Participants agree that women activists and civil society actors have played a crucial role in pushing for change in many countries. In **Ghana**, for example, [Akua Sena Dansua](#) argues that women are increasingly active, visible, and successful in influencing national debates, both in formal and informal public spaces.

[Siti Fuadilla Alchumaira](#) reports that many social movements were initiated and driven by women-led organizations in **Indonesia**, especially those on gender equality. In Lampung, where awareness on gender issues is low, women NGOs collaborated to raise awareness on inequalities between women and men within the community and to local and national government actors through advocacy and capacity-building activities.

In **Iraq**, women activists were instrumental in promoting the gender equality agenda, especially in the law, according to [Hana Hammoud Abbas](#). She argues that their activism was crucial in ensuring the Constitution includes a quota of 25% for women in Parliament. Furthermore, in 2014, Iraqi women activists succeeded in stopping a personal status law based on sectarianism that discriminated against a group of Iraqi women from passing. In addition to protesting the bill, they flagged it to the CEDAW Committee, which pressured the Iraqi government to reconsider.

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<sup>1</sup> [Equality in law for women and girls by 2030: A multistakeholder strategy for accelerated action](#), UN Women, 2019.

Samira Massoudi shares that in **Libya** women civil society actors had a major role in ensuring representation among legislative election candidates after the 2012 revolution. About 580 women candidates received support from women activists through a campaign entitled *My Vote/Voice to Her (صوتي لها)*. Thirty women made it to the legislature, making up 16% of all parliamentarians. Libyan women activists led another campaign called *Where are you in the Constitution* (اين انت من الدستور), pushing for a gender quota in the committee tasked with drafting the Constitution. According to Samira Massoudi, the campaign drew significant public attention and succeeded in urging decision-makers to introduce a 20% quota for the committee.

**2. In organizing and pushing for change, many women activists develop valuable leadership skills. Can you share examples of women in politics who entered the formal political sphere after engaging in informal spaces?**

Participants unanimously recognize that women activists develop and demonstrate unique organizing and leadership skills and that many of them pursue successful political careers as a result. In **Peru**, the Institute of Violeta Correa de Belaunde, which María Espinoza Pajilla presides, offers targeted training to support further development of leadership skills for local women and youth civil society leaders in order to compete in national politics.

In **Iraq**, many women in politics started their public engagement as women's rights activists in civil society spaces. Examples of such women include Members of Parliament Ala Talabani, Anaam Alkhizae, and Sarwa Abdulwahid, in addition to the Minister of Immigration Evan Faeq, according to Hana Hammoud Abbas.

Similarly, Siti Fuadilla Alchumaira shares the example of former Minister of Fisheries of **Indonesia** Susi Pudjiastuti, a renowned activist and self-made entrepreneur, who redefined the image of a successful politician with her brave reforms and unique leadership style during her time as a government minister.

Doumbia Kadidia recalls the contribution of Namizata Sangare, President of the National Commission of Human Rights in **Côte d'Ivoire**, who was previously known as a fervent women's rights defender in civil society as the Head of the Organization of Active Women of Côte d'Ivoire.

Akua Sena Dansua shares the example of her own experience, reflecting on her debut as a young active and assertive journalist interested in gender inequality issues who started her activism with the 31<sup>st</sup> December Women Movement of **Ghana**, at the invitation of the movement's leader and former First Lady Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings. She says that her experience in civil society empowered her to continue her career in politics, filling the posts of District Chief Executive, Member of Parliament, Minister of State, and Ambassador.

Akua Sena Dansua argues that mentorship is crucial in women's empowerment and their engagement in public affairs. As she benefitted from mentorship as a young activist, she now identifies and mentors young women to pass on her experience to the next generation. Dansua argues that efforts should focus on identifying and mentoring women in schools, churches, markets and other spaces where women are present as that results in an increase in women's overall interest, engagement, and participation in public life.

**3. What is the role of youth, especially young women, in driving public and civil society movements and influencing decision-making? Is the public engagement of today's youth different from previous generations?**

All participants agree that young people, especially young women, have historically played important catalyst and leading roles in driving change and advancing minority empowerment and freedoms. They argue that while the commitment of today's youth might be the same as those that came before, opportunities are greater, thanks to the unprecedented technological advances and mobilization tools. Namely, young people have powerful technology at their fingertips allowing them to get direct access to information and tools to organize and be heard on a global scale with no intermediaries or filters, which can lead to lasting change.

A recent example of such influencing and decision-making power is the role young people, including young women, played in the **Iraq** October 2019 revolution, as reported by [Hana Hammoud Abbas](#). Iraqi youth ignited and drove a nation-wide movement against corruption calling for social justice, which led to the formation of a new government and the announcement of early parliamentary elections. Young women played an important role in this movement despite the threats, acts of intimidation, kidnappings, and online violence. To [Hana Hammoud Abbas](#), every generation brings waves of change to their time, but today's youth in Iraq showed unprecedented determination and success in reaching its goals.