

Cyber dialogues summary three GENDER AND GOVERNANCE

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Theme: Gender and governance

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Quote for the day: *"Mainstreaming women in governance needs a concerted effort from both governments and a strong women's movement which understands the interaction between structural societal factors producing inequality and specific factors for gender inequality."* Gertrude Mongella

1. Over the last ten years what have been the most important gains for women in government?

- An important development has been the increase in the numbers of women that now have access to decision-making positions in parliaments. From 11.5% in 1995, the increase to 15.7 in 2005. This has been the quickest gain in the past 100 years.
- In Africa women have gained confidence to stand for election. Women's lobbying has changed the mind set of leaders who are more accepting of the principle of sharing power with women. One of the demonstrations of that spirit is the election of Gertrude Mongella to the important post as the president of the Pan African Parliament.
- In Uganda affirmative action has helped to create structures that involve women at all levels of leadership right from the grass root level to parliament and even having a Lady Vice President. Both the number and the nature of women's political/government positions has changed.
- In Mauritius there are only 5.7% women in Parliament and until recently there was only one woman Minister.
- Latin America has seen an increase in terms of the numbers of women over the past year years. The adoption of the law on quotas in Argentina prompted a 'quota' fever in the region with a further 10 countries adopting quotas for women in the 1990s. This has resulted in a 6% increase overall in the numbers of women. And two Latin American countries reaching the Beijing target - Argentina and Cost Rica.

2. Do women in government represent the interests of women?

- In Mauritius neither the Domestic violence Act nor the Sex Discrimination Act or the Child Protection Act would have been passed without the men as there was only one woman Minister in cabinet when these Acts were discussed.
- In India the women in power are not always interested in women's issues because, except for a couple of women, they are all in power by default, belonging to a political family or as a substitute until their children grow up.

- On the issue of do women represent women, we need to be careful to not have a double standard where women are judged in a different way to their male counterparts.
- Decision-making processes in party and government policy formulation need to be looked at closely at the avenues in which women are able to have a real effect on policy and thereby represent the interests of women.

3. Are quota systems a good way to ensure women's representation in government?

- The quota system is the most ideal way to guarantee women's opportunities in a situation where women have been marginalised for a long time. With the proper use of the quota system women with great potential can be highlighted and become role models.
- I started in a quota system in Tanzania and I am now a member of parliament representing a constituency. The women find it very difficult to get through parliament because of the long term discrimination. The quota system nurtured me before I could go to the constituency.
- In the administration the quota system will eliminate the invisibility of women. But we should consider this as a bridging strategy with the focus on one day making gender a non-issue.
- Some equality policies and laws have been launched from different governments due to women, even when discriminatory sexist values and practices are still alive, and male code of conducts still shape politics to exclude women.
- Some reforms of electoral systems for women to participate have been challenging the system itself.
- Key gender issues such as violence against women and sexual and reproductive rights appear in some governmental agenda, although they are constantly attacked by fundamentalist forces.
- The creation of national machineries has centered "a women agenda" in some countries, even when these institutions are marginalised in government structures and hampered with lack of sufficient resources, plus they have become spaces for political parties to fill their commitments with some people who contribute to their campaigns.
- Quota systems are the most effective way to increase the numbers of women in politics. They safeguard women's presence in parliament. The results in the past ten years have been extremely effective in some countries, but less so in other countries. The devil is in the detail and quotas need to be drafted with enforcement mechanisms.
- Another argument is the quota system undermines some basic rights of men and women. Let them face equal challenges. Why treat them differently?
- Quota systems are not the best way to ensure women's representation, but they do help in the initial stages to increase the number of women in power, and no one can ever underestimate the power of numbers.
- When it is just a few who have the speech, there are not able to defend the voice of all the women. There must be many to do that.
- In Latin America, many women who are in political posts due to the quota law do not have a feminist agenda... and yes, very few committed women have gained from it... at least here...

- The quota system is important for providing space for women we should not worry about the quality until we have the quantity to be able to influence the rules.
- In Somalia where the clan system is strong and only women who are deemed not powerful are selected by the clan leaders, we need to work with these women to ensure they take on board key issues of concern for women and even if they are not sensitive, they are more reachable than men , so I would recommend we continue to lobby for the quota system.
- We need to work on two prong strategy that includes quota, so long as we live in a world that is male biased and also to lobby for reform of laws and we have seen the effect of quotas work in countries such as Uganda.
- Having women in the political space is one way of changing perceptions and is an opportunity we should build on.
- Mobilisation is crucial as that will galvanise change at the top.

4. How do we ensure that women's rights are on the agenda when constitutions are being drafted in post conflict situations?

- Ensure that women's rights are on the agenda when constitutions are being drafted, women must be made aware of the process and know all the processes involved and what stages of the constitution making process are very critical.
- Women must be represented effectively as delegates and observers in the negotiations.
- Women's rights agenda must be specifically defined including draft texts for negotiating into the draft constitutions and these should be buttressed within the international instruments like CEDAW.
- The peace facilitator must have a positive commitment to women's issues
- A strong women's and human rights lobby or coalition is critical to sustain the advocacy.
- Monitoring the details in the various drafts is also essential because one can lose on the basis of detail. The experience of Somalia and Sudan is quite informative on these issues.
- We need to have more discussions so women in all spheres of life are heard - if we don't speak for ourselves, who will do it?

5. Challenges and strategies to move forward. Action points.

Education and awareness raising

- Very few women understand the word and meaning of gender so I don't know how you start talking about gender and governance before knowing gender.
- Women must be engaged in the issues which matter in the lives of people today, which include the gender and the globalisation process.
- We need women at local, national and international level.
- Women outside power need to do advocacy work with women politicians. We must provide them with the necessary information, and with moral and logistical support to promote women's issues on the political agenda.
- We now have to mobilise those women to pay particular attention to the education of the girls. We all have to do it together. I promise you that now that

Africa has taken a step towards parity as the principle, a decision which was taken by heads of states, we have an entry point.

- The greatest challenge to me as the President of PAP is to build a strong democratic parliament that really represents the voices of the people of Africa and does not exclude women.
- We have a parliamentary gender committee in the Pan African Parliament and I just wish that Gender Links comes down to SA to establish this type of talk so that we can capture your ideas for parliament. That's the way forward and that's how women can become powerful - by linking to each other and being able to exchange ideas in a very transparent manner.

Women in politics

- Mainstreaming women in governance needs a concerted effort from both governments and a strong women's movement which understands the interaction between structural societal factors producing inequality and specific factors for gender inequality.
- We need to discuss the context of politics and how to support women candidates. Work done by CHANGE has shown that women do get dented by negative and violent contexts of politics.
- Governments are most responsive to criticism from other countries. Such criticism may serve to mobilize a government which is not being attentive to gender issues.
- Resources and funding for women's effective mobilisation and participation in electoral process is critical. Women need access to political party financing and need to be included in decision-making regarding the use of funds.

6. Results of the poll questions

The majority of the people who responded to the question felt that quotas had given women a "foot in the door" which they have made good use. Many people also felt that quotas are the best way to increase women's representation in decision-making.

