



COMMUNITY
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*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

Regional Organizations, Gender Equality and the Political Empowerment of Women





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Preface



International IDEA is committed to developing resources in support of sustainable democracy worldwide. Our aim is to inspire dialogue to reach consensus on the actions needed to tackle the main issues that affect democracy. We believe that increasing participation in politics and securing access to public life is of particular importance to the consolidation of democracy.

The pursuit of democracy is incomplete without policies, measures and practices that seek to reduce inequalities between men and women in all spheres of life. Democracy is expected to transform power relations between men and women by promoting the equal distribution of power and influence. We are committed to ensuring that gender equality is integrated into democracy building. Properly addressing issues related to gender equality and the political empowerment of women is key to the consolidation of strong democracies. This has become more evident with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly with the strong commitment that the global community has made on the advancement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, to ‘achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’.

Beyond this highly specific goal, gender has been recognized globally through agreements and legal instruments as a cross-cutting component that is crucial to creating an enabling environment for achieving sustainable development and strengthening democratic institutions at the global, regional, national and local levels. In this context, all actions aimed at achieving prosperity, security and political and economic stability, as well as fostering the protection of our valued natural and human resources are mainstreaming gender as a key element of success in these endeavours.

International and regional organizations have been given a renewed prominence both as supporters of their member states and as designers and implementers of key initiatives oriented towards facilitating the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Regional organizations have the ability to bring together the political will, expertise, advocacy skills and human capacity to inform decision-making processes at all levels around these crucial issues. This allows them to increase the impact and promote better actions to tackle, among other things, the following challenges:

- the lack of gender action plans at the local and national levels;
- increasing the quality of gender analysis and developing gender-disaggregated data;

- the implementation of quota systems or other mechanisms that promote gender equality;
- the need to design cost-effective joint efforts between international institutions and local stakeholders, such as civil society and national parliaments, to promote women in politics;
- the involvement and support of men in the advancement of women's political and economic empowerment; and
- increasing young people's awareness of and interest in the importance of gender equality and the political empowerment of women.

Some of these challenges were identified while consulting global actors on the main issues and obstacles to the advancement of gender equality. This report discusses these challenges from a regional perspective, based on stakeholders' experiences in the field. International IDEA, together with the Community of Democracies and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has been working to gather the views and perspectives of key stakeholders on the broader topic. The consultation process involved regional meetings with civil society and grassroots organizations, government officials, representatives of regional organizations, academics and experts in the field in Africa, the Americas, the Arab World, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe.

We hope that this report contributes, through its policy recommendations, to the ongoing discussion on the 2030 Agenda. We also hope that its references to the legal and policy instruments currently in place for the advancement of gender equality and the political empowerment of women make it a relevant instrument to inform further discussions with global and regional organizations, governments, civil society and citizens in general. Our expectation is that those stakeholders that greatly contributed to the report will return to it to cross-reference the actions set out at the regional level, and learn from successful practices, replicating those elements that can inform and strengthen actions in their own particular contexts.

This report was made possible by the support of the European Commission through its Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). Its contents are a result of collaboration brought about by the Inter-Regional Dialogue on Democracy (IRDD), a unique platform led by International IDEA that aims to engage and work together with global and regional organizations to exchange best practices and identify channels of cooperation on the strengthening and promotion of democracy. International IDEA, through the IRDD, is also highlighting the importance of bringing on board other key partners, such as civil society organizations, as instrumental allies in the advancement of the work of our institutions. We recognize the importance of joining forces with the main beneficiaries of the hard work deployed by our Member States for the well-being of our societies.

It is our hope that this report reaches a broad audience and that it will help inform and inspire policymakers and advocates interested in advancing gender equality as a key element of democratic sustainability in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Yves Leterme
Secretary-General
International IDEA

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We would also like to express our gratitude to the authors who contributed to this publication, as well as to the African Union, the Association of South East Asian Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the League of Arab States, the Organization of American States, the Pacific Islands Forum and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. These organizations recognize the value of being part of the IRDD, and have reaffirmed their commitment to the platform by working tirelessly with us in the production of this publication, including the development of chapters and policy recommendations on gender and the political empowerment of women, as well as their active participation in the Regional Consultations organized in the framework of this initiative.

The development of this publication also included a process of regional consultations that was possible thanks to the financial support of the Community of Democracies through a generous grant from the Government of the Republic of Korea. We would also like to extend our appreciation to all the experts, practitioners and representatives of civil society organizations and foundations that were part of this process, and that helped build the set of policy recommendations that are included at the end of each section of this report.

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