# DEMOCRACY
# With Women, For Women

Seven grants that helped change the face of governance
*The UNDEF-UNIFEM partnership: first-round results and lessons*

**United Nations Development Fund for Women**
**UNIFEM**

**UNDEF** The United Nations Democracy Fund

## Grants Profiled in This Publication

*UNDEF Round I, 2006-2008*

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Raising Women's Media Visibility in Elections

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Changing Attitudes About Who Makes Decisions

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# AN OVERVIEW
# Results and Lessons

This publication presents an overview and brief analysis of the first round of grants issued by the UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF) in partnership with the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Both organizations are engaged in advancing gender equality and democratic governance around the world. The following pages probe, in a concise fashion, what was achieved through seven grants to improve women's political participation in a diverse set of countries and regions.

A series of project profiles, drawn from reports and independent evaluations, summarizes objectives and activities, results, challenges, lessons and ideas for future work. Collectively and individually, the profiles shed light on effective strategies in implementing gender and governance programmes. This information may be useful for people carrying out or funding similar initiatives, or for gender advocates, governance specialists and researchers interested in a concise overview of recent experiences illustrating advancements in women's political participation.

Since 2006, UNDEF has provided grants to strengthen democratic governance in over 100 countries. UNIFEM works with about 10 percent of UNDEF projects to inject its long-standing expertise in gender equality and governance. While all UNDEF projects contribute to realizing gender equality goals, UNIFEM puts deliberate emphasis on ensuring that women have an equal voice in all aspects of governance, peace and security and public decision-making. Globally, progress towards a gender balance in politics is being made, but the pace of change is slow, and the number of women in political offices remains low.

In 2006, the first round of UNDEF proposals awarded $36 million to 125 projects. Grant awards ranged from $50,000 to $500,000. UNIFEM assisted 10 projects in Argentina, Cambodia, Ecuador, Haiti, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Tanzania participated in a Great Lakes regional project, while Inter Press Service International implemented an Africa regional project in Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Swaziland.

Round 1 grants assisted government agencies, civil society groups, and regional and global organizations. They were implemented in 2007 and 2008, with many linked to elections or political reform processes. Most initiatives pursued a combination of strategies on the premise that altering political systems to achieve gender equality will require efforts on many fronts. These typically involved developing skills among women candidates, advocating for steps such as quotas to bolster women's participation, assisting with the formation of women's networks, engaging political parties to bring gender into their platforms and conducting media campaigns. The project in the Occupied Palestinian Territories focused on youth, while the Africa regional project trained journalists to bring gender perspectives into political reporting.

In reviewing the seven projects highlighted in this publication, some common points and indications for future directions emerge. One immediate impression is how much dedicated gender ad-

vocates can achieve even in relatively fragile and unstable political systems. In some cases, strong partnerships with UNIFEM were particularly effective in connecting women's priorities with political processes, since UNIFEM, as part of the UN system, had access to a variety of political and governmental actors. It was also able to help forge the diverse partnerships required to push forward increases in women's political participation, drawing on sometimes longstanding connections with women's groups, women politicians and national gender machineries.

Some of the most effective projects had multiple partners working on different issues, but these efforts were also sufficiently connected and orchestrated to produce significant impacts. Timing was critical. Successful projects were closely aligned with electoral processes, and built on opportunities provided through decentralization reforms, changes in laws, gender-responsive policies, and constitutional revisions. Another factor enhancing project outreach was the willingness to work across the political spectrum, presenting gender equality as an objective consistent with multiple political ideologies.



Women exercise their political voice in many ways. Josefa Kai-bete does so as a voter and a candidate in Timor-Leste's Second National Village Council (sucos) elections in 2009 (UN Photo/Martine Perret).

Much work on women's political participation has focused on legal and policy initiatives, such as reservations for seats or equality provisions in the law. These provide an important framework for progress on women's participation and can rapidly escalate progress. But several project assessments stressed the need to connect these strategic interventions to concrete results and benefits that the majority of people can see and will find convincing. The case for gender-responsive government needs to include arguments for women's rights, but to inspire wider buy-in, it also should clarify the benefits for political institutions and societies at large. These have not always been obvious just from having more women in office or more gender commitments in political discourse.

In some projects, political empowerment was perceived as delinked from economic empowerment. Several evaluations underscored that, especially in poorer countries, this perception lessened interest in project goals. Political participation needs to be presented for what it can achieve across all aspects of gender equality, not as an end in itself. Greater emphasis on connecting political and economic empowerment in particular would include the recognition that access to resources is often a precondition for women's political involvement, especially as elections globally become more competitive and expensive.

Many projects combined initiatives to increase the number of women in politics with those to improve the quality of women's participation. This combination is important, given experiences with women in office who are not effective, either in operating as politicians or in advocating a gender equality agenda. From the perspective of the United

Nations and multiple international agreements, quality implies the transformative politics inherent in gender equality. What this means in individual nations and for the democratic expression of diverse points of view might deserve more thought and debate.

In future projects, more attention may need to go to the quality of political institutions. Globally, there is growing disenchantment with political systems that are unresponsive, marred by rampant clientelism and distorted by massive infusions of resources. Women themselves have expressed concerns about the meaning of participation in these kinds of environments, but for the most part, questions about the nature of institutions were overshadowed in the projects by a preoccupation with women's position within them. Even so, several projects came up against these issues. One found that women can do much in working for gender equality from within political parties, but in the end are bound by party positions that may or may not support gender equality. Projects that engaged with parties to make party platforms more gender responsive encountered problems with parties actually supporting new commitments. Very little was said in project reports about widespread scepticism of current political systems based on poor performance, except in one case where women trained as potential candidates acknowledged at the end that they would take a wait-and-see approach to deciding to run for elections.

Capacity development initiatives were common to most projects, but those that combined professional and psychological skills (such as those to build self-confidence) were very well received. Political competency requires both; women who have both may be more willing to venture into politics and be more effective once there. Greater understanding of how gender discrimination operates and the mental qualities needed to overcome it may be particularly relevant for women in politics because many gender stereotypes overtly

**Among the more remarkable achievements of the grants were:**

• Sweeping provisions for gender equality in Ecuador's new Constitution.

• Women comprising 33 percent of the representatives in Nepal's Constituent Assembly, a historic number for Nepal and the South Asia region.

• Significant increases in women in local and national political positions in Cambodia, with political party leaders acting on commitments to place women candidates higher on party lists.

• The insertion of gender perspectives in Morocco's reconciliation process, highlighting for the first time the toll taken on women by political violence.

• New national actions in the Great Lakes region to implement the Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence.

work against women as leaders, people with self-confidence, people who deserve a public voice, and so on. Projects in conflict countries may need to account as well for the psychological barriers, including feelings of powerlessness and isolation, that can stem from experiences with violence and trauma, including those forms linked to gender.

Despite the risks inherent in working in the political arena, especially during elections and more so in countries with any recent history of instability, none of the projects appeared to have carried out a detailed risk assessment. All had to manage these risks and seemed to cope well, including by adjusting activities and objectives, and building strong relationships within political systems. But a clearer understanding of risks at the beginning might have improved project design and

implementation by mapping out the most efficient and effective responses to emerging issues. Similar considerations might apply to organizational capacity assessments. Two grantees recognized, not long into their projects, that capacity development measures were needed. These were taken, and improved the project work and outputs. In two cases, tensions among different groups working on projects seemed to fester without being fully resolved, suggesting that more should have been done in developing capacities for collaboration and conflict resolution.



Women candidates need skills to run for office, such as those related to constituency outreach. Here a woman candidate for the 2009 provincial council elections in Afghanistan makes her case to other women (Kabul Film & Photo House for UNIFEM)

On the operational end, several project reports and evaluations noted that the timeframes and resources for grants, while generous, were insufficient given the scope of issues involved in advancing women's political participation. There were also challenges with multiple initiatives that duplicate each other within a given country. The complex issues at stake underscore the importance of linking and coordinating political participation initiatives. Political momentum for gender equality and women's participation is subject to many variables, from changes in government to shifts in electoral laws. Maintaining it requires multiple, interconnected efforts and a longer time frame.

Finally, project evaluations varied widely in quality, suggesting that there should be clearer standards and guidelines for evaluation, as well as the necessary funds to carry these out. Some common problems included statements without evidence, data without analysis, and limited exploration of why certain strategies are or are not effective. Ideally, evaluations could serve not just as assessments of whether or not the project complied with its objectives, but also as learning tools. They could be an accessible source of practical knowledge—what works best, why and how—that could be used by organizations implementing other UNDEF grants and groups embarking on similar initiatives.

As the following pages show, there is much to be learned from what women politicians and gender equality advocates have been able to achieve so far under the UNIFEM-assisted UNDEF grants. They have paved a way that, with the right investments, could be further extended and sustained towards the goals of women's equal role in politics and society at large.

# AFRICA
# Raising Women's Media Visibility In Elections

## Quick Facts

Coverage of women politicians by the media is often limited or biased. To correct these imbalances, the Inter-Press Service (IPS) worked with journalists to improve the quality and quantity of their reporting on women in politics through over 100 new published stories. It reached out to women politicians to cultivate their abilities to engage the press.

## Aims and Achievements

In 2007, the project selected 11 out of the 19 African countries undergoing electoral processes, as these provide openings for expanded political coverage. Over 50 journalists from IPS and national media were chosen to begin producing stories on women in the elections, guided by a reporter's checklist for integrating gender into their coverage. A thematic editor provided mentoring in the drafting of stories.

Over 100 stories were produced by the reporters and appeared in media in 26 countries. They included a greater number of profiles of women politicians, and featured analyses of women's election participation in Kenya, reports on protests by women's organizations in Zimbabwe and an investigation of the reduction in female Cabinet members in Benin. Stories highlighted women's perspectives and explored the impacts women have on political processes. After publication, they were circulated on the IPS newswire, uploaded to an interactive section of the IPS website and reworked into a "rip and read" format for use by radio stations across Africa. By the end of the project in 2008, the website, called "From Polls to Polls," had attracted over 400,000 pageviews. Aside from the stories, visitors could access an elections calendar map, and resources for reporters on gender and elections.

In late 2007, reporters from seven countries and women politicians from four countries participated in a joint workshop on gender, politics and the media in South Africa. The training sought to make reporters aware of gender biases in media coverage, to equip women politicians with skills to engage the press, and to cultivate links between the two

### What's the Difference?

Coverage of women politicians and women's political participation increased, with over 100 stories appearing in the media in 26 countries.

Journalists gained new skills to cover women in politics.

Women politicians acquired new abilities to engage the media.

Easily available resources specific to African countries are available to support better coverage of gender and politics.

groups. A workshop survey found that participating reporters planned to increase their coverage of gender and politics, and were using new knowledge to mentor their peers. Based on their interactions at the workshop, several reporters wrote profiles of women politicians. Women politicians reported that they came away from the session with greater confidence in dealing with the media.

An electronic handbook for journalists and women politicians was created. Entitled "Women in the News: Strengthening the Voice and Visibility of Women in the African Media's Coverage of Elections, Politics and Governance," it was later provided to trainers and more than 40 media organizations, such as the Media Institute of Southern Africa. Media leaders endorsed the handbook as a resource, with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) uploading it on its Intranet. IPS Regional Director Paula Fray profiled it on two current affairs shows on SABC. Women politicians have used the handbook as a media training resource.

## Challenges

• IPS intended to hold training sessions for women politicians in four additional countries, but was unable to do so for reasons that included slow response times by potential national partners and the need for additional funding.

• A heavy reliance on electronic media to disseminate stories and information did not sufficiently reflect the communications challenges faced in much of Africa. Many people surveyed for the project evaluation reported problems with accessing project materials on the web.

• Nuances in different countries could not be reflected in the reporting and evaluation of the project, as these took a regional approach. Further, the project collected no initial baseline information to inform the eventual evaluation.

• Weaknesses in administrative processes as a whole underlined the need for a qualified project

## What's Next in Africa?

Future projects of this type should have a more realistic budget and well-formulated mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

• More workshops should be held, including at the grass-roots level. They should be adapted to different skill levels and languages. Formal partnerships with national and regional organizations could help disseminate tools and training designed by IPS. New training modules should have the capacity to "cascade" down to different countries and groups within them.