

# Effectiveness of donor support to women in formal political leadership

Pressures to increase the number of women in formal politics have started to bear fruit over the past 20 years. This has led to a greater presence of women in elected, appointed, and recruited positions in public bodies, and (to a lesser extent) to their rise to senior positions in these settings.

## Rapid review

This executive summary summarises a rapid review which synthesises key findings on the role of donors in supporting women in formal political leadership to be effective once appointed. It is based on evidence selected through a rapid, non-systematic literature review<sup>1</sup>. Findings and recommendations included in this report should therefore be understood in the context of these limitations. Further, **rigorous evidence is scarce and patchy** on the support that external aid actors have provided women leaders in low- and middle-income countries<sup>2</sup>. The evidence base offers no comparative rankings on which types of interventions, and which specific interventions, have been more effective.

Overall, evidence shows that **the most frequent aid interventions have had mixed effectiveness, although on balance outcomes and results seem to be positive**<sup>3</sup>.

## Interventions to support women in political leadership

There have been four major strands of intervention to support women in formal politics: combining multiple types of

interventions; directly supporting women leaders; mainstreaming gender and transforming political institutions; and focusing on political parties. Within each, **common types of interventions** have included:

- > **Creating and institutionalising networks** – among elected women (e.g. caucuses), between elected women and men, or between elected women and other stakeholders, such as women's rights groups. This is among the more successful interventions.
- > **Supporting relations between elected women and constituencies**, e.g. facilitating dialogue with individual constituents or organisations, so that representatives better understand and represent women's needs and priorities. This intervention has been effective, but has not been used much.
- > **Supporting parliaments to become gender-responsive and women-friendly**. This can address women and men. It includes, for example, gender audits and monitoring, setting up structural bodies for gender-responsive policies and budgets, and supporting legislation and

ÉMILIE COMBAZ  
OCTOBER 2018

<sup>1</sup>This is a summary of *Effectiveness of donor support to women in formal political leadership – narrative review* (Combaz, 2018b).

<sup>2</sup>In addition, some successful support involved no foreign aid, and resulted from domestic dynamics.

<sup>3</sup>There are variations by region and country in the interventions frequently used, and in which interventions were effective. Further, aid actors have under-used some effective interventions.

**CASE STUDY**

## Working through women MPs' networks

UN Women has been effective at supporting the establishment of women's parliamentary caucuses, and supporting the work of existing women MPs' networks (e.g. parliamentary committees or caucuses). It has also connected women MPs across countries, through regional networks or South-South exchanges. Support through collective structures such as women's caucuses has both reinforced individual MPs' effectiveness, and increased women MPs' influence through strength in numbers. Further, this has contributed to promoting women's rights, for example through links between support to women MPs, and capacity development in gender-responsive budgeting, e.g. in Malawi, Senegal, Serbia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe (UN Women, 2018, p. 45).

policy for gender equality. It can also be about encouraging the promotion of more women into leadership, as well as shifting parliamentary norms, infrastructure, and culture. Activities to do this can include media campaigns, engagement with men parliamentarians and citizens, better rearranging of sitting hours, entitling members to parental leave, providing breastfeeding rooms, and establishing childcare centres in parliament. Interventions in this area appear to have largely been effective.

- > **Building up capacity and influence through trainings or peer learning.** This can cover diverse topics, such as the formal functioning of institutions or parties, leadership skills, strategic practical knowledge on politics, or policy issues. Such interventions mostly address women. Effectiveness varies widely, but can be achieved when there is a

combination of high-quality programming and favourable conditions, such as politically savvy coalitions of men or women representatives in favour of gender equality.

- > **Conducting, supporting, or facilitating dialogue, advocacy, or influencing for gender equality** or women leaders' effectiveness. This can involve elites, organised groups (e.g. media, civil society organisations, marginalised groups), wider society, and both men or women. It can be about building coalitions, or bringing together opponents. Effectiveness has been mixed, though positive overall, and seems specific to context.
- > **Working to make political parties gender-responsive**, in their internal organisation and in their governance after elections. Effectiveness seems to be mixed.

**CASE STUDY**

## Communities making politics gender-responsive

With support from UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality, the GROOTS project in Kenya was highly effective in making formal politics more gender-responsive and women-friendly. First, it changed attitudes and norms in communities about women's political participation. To do so, it mobilised men champions, and engaged intensively with husbands and men leaders. This facilitated women's empowerment work, made gender equality understandable, and let messages get into men-dominated spaces. Second, the project supported communities in identifying their own needs, researching solutions, and advocating for them. An evaluation found that women representatives associated with GROOTS had performed well in their role (Barnes, Bishop, & Vaca, 2016, pp. 35–37, 42).

*Supporting parliaments to become gender-responsive and women-friendly appears to have largely been effective.*

> **Supporting women’s participation in negotiations about peace or political transitions, in peacebuilding, or in the writing of a constitution.** This is typically used in ‘fragile or conflict-affected states’. It usually takes the form of funding and advocacy by donors. Effectiveness has been mixed, with significant failures to even request, let alone obtain, women’s participation and influence.

### When does donor support help women in formal politics?

Many common interventions can be effective if designed, implemented, and combined well, and if enabled by favourable external variables (those are often specific to each context). The most effective strategies reflect the combination of factors that affect women’s individual and collective political agency (e.g. capacities, resources, and social norms), whilst also prioritising interventions based on the country context.

Specifically, effective strategies:

- > Bring together multiple interventions, sectors, and stakeholders, and work at multiple levels (e.g. local, national, and regional).
- > Address multiple inequalities (e.g. class, ethnicity, disability), not just gender.
- > Work with groups of women, not just individuals. In addition, effective donor strategies factor in the roles of families, communities, men and boys, as allies or resisters at elite and grassroots levels. They draw on local cultural understandings to reduce cultural resistance to gender equality.
- > Do not assume that all women will advance gender equality. Instead effective approaches connect with diverse women and men who are able and willing to advance gender equality, exploring how to collaborate and provide support.
- > Work politically, and look beyond the formal state. This requires a deep understanding of context – not just on gender, but also on formal and informal politics, economy, society, culture, and security, and how these interact with gender issues. Then effective donor strategies

tailor approaches accordingly, rather than copying ‘good practices’.

- > Build on local initiatives and locally defined needs. Donors partner with local actors (e.g. organisations, parties, or women leaders) as relevant.
- > Use peer-based, collective learning provided through established institutions.
- > Provide ongoing support over more than 1–2 years, cover the entire electoral cycle, and seize political opportunities.
- > For some donors, it is effective to position themselves as neutral enablers of exchanges and learning between and among diverse actors in state and society.

#### Aid actors’ own practices affect effectiveness.

They need to commit enough funding and staff, and apply good programming. They also need to promote women into leadership, stop relying on separate gender programmes and teams, and incentivise collaboration, not silos.

Lastly, **a number of external factors and conditions outside interventions matter**, but evidence is insufficient and too context-specific to identify the necessary or sufficient variables. One finding is that even otherwise effective programmes will fail when political, economic, social, or cultural factors and conditions are overwhelmingly negative, for example due to structural gender inequalities, or to patronage-based loyalty to party over gender justice. Conversely, positive external factors include, for example: a higher presence of women in formal politics; higher socio-economic development of the country; the presence of a strong autonomous women’s movement with links to government or bureaucracy; politically savvy coalitions of men and women committed to gender equality; and women leaders having been elected by a constituency rather than appointed.

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## For more on the information in this summary

Combaz, É. (2018a). *Effectiveness of donor support to women in formal political leadership – annotated bibliography* (K4D Helpdesk Report 426a). Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies. <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/123456789/14101>

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### KEY WEBSITES

- > Harvard – Kennedy School – Women and Public Policy Program – Political Empowerment: <https://wapp.hks.harvard.edu/politics>
- > iKNOW Politics – Library: <http://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/learn/library>
- > International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) – Gender & Democracy: <https://www.idea.int/our-work/what-we-do/gender-democracy>
- > Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) – Publications – Gender Equality: <https://ipu.org/resources/publications?theme=88&country=All>
- > National Democratic Institute (NDI) – News and Publications – Gender, Women and Democracy: <https://www.ndi.org/publications?topic=1026>
- > OECD – Gender Equality and Development: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/aidinsupportofgender-equalityandwomensempowerment.htm>
- > UN Women – Women's Leadership and Political Participation: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation>
- > UNDP – Research and Publications – Gender Equality: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/library.html?start=0&sort=date&view=cards&tag=topics:gender-equality>
- > Wilson Center – Women in Public Service Project – Resources: <http://www.50x50movement.org/resources-page>
- > Women Deliver – Strengthen Women's Political Participation and Decision-Making Power: <https://womendeliver.org/>

### CREDITS

This K4D executive summary was written by Émilie Combaz and edited by Poppy Bardwell.

### CONTACT

**Email**  
info@k4d.info

**Twitter**  
@K4D\_info

**Website**  
<https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/123456789/13022>

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