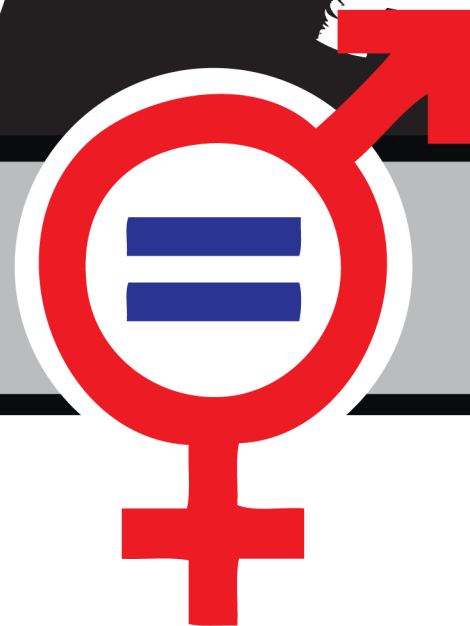# TOWARD **EQUALITY** OF OPPORTUNITY FOR **EQUALITY** OF RESULTS

A SITUATION ANALYSIS OF GENDER AND POLITICS IN BELIZE

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A SITUATION ANALYSIS OF GENDER AND POLITICS IN BELIZE
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A Situation Analysis of Gender and Politics in Belize

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1. Introduction

In 2012, Belize has only one elected woman in the National Assembly, placing this country near the bottom of the list outlining progress on women's political representation world-wide. It is perhaps a surprising situation, given that women have made significant strides accessing higher education as well as advancing in the public service and civil society organizations. Belizeans also might see their society as more accommodating to women's aspirations than some other countries who have achieved a greater proportion of women in their parliaments. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the doors of our governing bodies remain stubbornly difficult for women to open, especially at the national level.

It is not as if a concern about the low level of women's political representation hasn't been noted before. In 2001, the National Women's Commission released the report *Women in Politics: Seeking Opportunities for Leadership in Belize*, including a series of recommendations for improving women's participation in political decision-making. The United Nations Committee to monitor progress on the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has expressed its concerns about the continued underrepresentation of women in Belizean politics and Belize will not meet its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals to achieve 30 percent women elected at the national level by 2015.

Recognizing the lack of progress in achieving gender balance in Belize's decision making bodies led the United Nations Development Program (UNDP-Belize) and the National Women's Commission to launch a collaborative initiative to update and expand the analysis of gender and politics in Belize and develop a renewed advocacy strategy informed by this analysis. This report documents the first stage in that process.

The overall purpose of this analysis is to identify ways to jump start the process of identifying and implementing concrete, enforceable actions that will increase the representation of women in electoral politics and achieve Belize's commitments to greater women's representation as quickly as possible. While all levels of government have been included, particular attention has been paid to strategies necessary to open the doors for women at the national level of electoral politics.

Objectives for the situation analysis included providing data and analysis on the participation rate of women in both elected office and appointed positions since 1998, as well as an analysis of the current political and policy context and structural barriers affecting women in the political process. In addition, the study was to assess performance on the recommendations in the *Women in Politics* report and commitments made by political parties. By identifying best practices elsewhere and analyzing the current situation in Belize, the analysis was to inform the development of an advocacy strategy and stimulate a public dialogue on women in politics in Belize[1].

As mentioned previously, the situation analysis was intended to focus particular attention on women's representation at the national level. At the same time, it was important to include a review and analysis

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[1] A complete list of the objectives of the situation analysis is found in Appendix B.

of women in politics in cities, towns and villages as well. While the situation at the national level demonstrates the most extreme example of **women being left out,** women are also significantly underrepresented at all levels of leadership and it is important to recognize this in the analysis. Furthermore, politicians at the national level frequently gain experience and exposure through involvement at the municipal or village level.   Therefore, if women are not adequately represented at this level, it is likely that this will affect their presence on the national stage.

It was also important that the study reflect the experiences of women in politics country-wide. Belize is a diverse country with different social and cultural contexts that may affect the political process. As will be shown later in this report, there are also some significant differences in the level of women's participation in politics in different parts of the country. In particular, the representation of women at the village council level varies by district. For all these reasons, it was important that the situation analysis be inclusive of experiences country wide.

1.1. Methodology and Organization of the Report

The situation analysis depends on three types of input. A review of the literature brought together the global experience on women's representation in politics and contributed experience on the strategies that have been most effective in increasing the proportion of women in governing bodies. Data on the gender composition of Belize's governing bodies was collected (primarily through the National Archives) and analyzed[2]. The experiences and perspectives of various players on the political stage were collected through interviews and focus groups.

The bulk of the research for the situation analysis was carried out in mid- to late-2011, with report being finalized in December of that year. Before the report could be published, **however, early double elections were called for March 7, 2012.** Because of this, it was decided to update the report in 2012 to account for the results of that election and other relevant events since the initial report was completed.

To identify the interview subjects, a list was developed by the consultant and representatives of UNDP and the National Women's Commission. Two main criteria were used in identifying individuals to interview. First, women who had been candidates for election at the national, city and town levels were included. This brought in women who had been successful and achieved political office (including all four women who have been Members of the National Assembly in the last two decades), and others who had not been successful. Second, selected party officials were added to the list in recognition of the importance of political parties in the electoral process. These included Party Leaders (because they are in the best position to address their parties' commitments in this regard), Secretary Generals and the heads of the women's arm. In addition, the Minister of Human Development and Social Transformation was also included on the list because both the National Women's Commission and Women's Department fall under his portfolio. In addition to these main categories, a few individuals were included on the list because they brought a particular perspective or expertise. In particular, a

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[2] Appreciation goes to UNDP Intern Michael Ashworth for his assistance in accessing information from the National Archives, and to Phil Westman for his assistance in organizing the data and finding additional data required.

representative of one of the smaller political parties and an individual with background in the regulation of political parties were included.

Some of those on the interview list did "double duty" as they were both candidates and party officials. In addition, two cross-cutting criteria were used in the selection of individuals for the list. First, selection was made in recognition of the need to have as much geographical diversity as possible. Also, experience in the period since 2000 was given priority.

In addition to the interviews, five focus groups were conducted to achieve a broader range of input into the analysis. These focus groups brought together those with a particular vantage point through which to view the issue of women's representation in politics, including: participants in the Women in Politics training programme; women elected at the municipal and village council level; women who have been advocates on women's issues through civil society organizations; women appointed as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) to government ministries; and male and female voters[3]. Participants included individuals from all districts of the country and included those from both urban and rural areas. For the voters' focus group, participants were solicited through an appearance on a popular radio talk show, announcements on television's *Community Billboard*, and notices sent out to various organizations and tertiary level educational institutions.

Both the interviews and focus groups were organized by the Secretariat of the Women's Commission. In some cases, it was a challenging process. While most women candidates readily made themselves available to be interviewed[4], in some cases it was more difficult or impossible to get agreement from **party officials.**

 The focus groups provided an opportunity to obtain a wider range of input to the situation analysis. With the exception of the CEOs group (whose size was determined by the number of women in that position), eight was the target number for the groups. However, it was difficult to identify women for the advocates group so six women were invited to that session. Most of the groups had a good turn-out, with the exception of the group for municipal and village council representatives where only three women attended. Overall, a total of twenty-eight people participated in the focus groups[5].

Both interviewees and focus group participants were given assurances that they would not be identified in the situation analysis. In a few cases where it was relevant to cite the origin of a particular quote, permission was obtained from the informant to do so.

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[3] The original plan was to have separate focus groups for male and female voters. However, despite efforts to reach interested participants, there were not enough male volunteers to form a separate group. Nevertheless, the voters' focus group (four men and four women) produced a very good discussion of the issues from the perspective of both men and women.
[4] One woman candidate declined to be interviewed, apparently because her negative experience as a political candidate had led her to withdraw from the political arena and she did not wish to discuss her experiences.
[5] Specific attendance at the groups was as follows: WIP participants – 8; Male and female voters – 8; CEOs – 5; Women's Advocates – 4; Municipal and village elected women – 3.

The analysis of the information, data and perspectives gathered through the situation analysis is presented in the following chapters. Chapters 2 through 4 are based on the literature review. Chapter 5 looks at the current state of women's political representation in Belize and presents data on all levels of government, political appointments and political parties. Chapter 6 uses the perspectives gained from the informants through interviews and focus groups to provide the context of women's representation, identify barriers to women, and consider the potential for change in the existing situation. Chapters 7 through 9 provide direction for future actions to increase the proportion of women in our governing bodies.

A few words are in order concerning the terminology used in the situation analysis. *Informant* is used to refer to any individual who participated in either the interviews or focus groups. At times, the text will specify whether the individual was an interviewee or focus group participant. *Candidate* refers to women who have run for political office at any level, including those who went on to be elected and those who did not. *Elected woman* refers to those women who were elected at any level. Where relevant, the text may refer to the level at which the elected woman or candidate participated. *Party leader* refers to the individual currently holding that position within his party. *Party leadership* refers to the upper tier of those who have power and authority within the party, including those in the top decision making bodies and others who may hold significant influence.

The situation analysis has shown that there is no level playing field for women in politics. It is hoped that the investigation presented here can provide a foundation for ongoing work to break down barriers to women and achieve greater gender balance in the governance of our nation.

2. Women's Political Representation

The history of the 20th century was marked by the struggle of women to claim their place in the political process through the right to vote and hold political office. Yet despite the fact that women won these rights, by the latter part of the century it was clear that this achievement had not translated into equal participation in governance. Critical decisions that shape the life of nations – and their citizens – continue to be made primarily by men and informed by men's experience of the world.

In analyzing why women have been marginalized in governance, the term "participation" is often used broadly to describe the entire process of making the decision-making process more responsive to women's needs and perspectives, and more specifically to refer to women taking their place on governing bodies. This can lead to considerable confusion. In addition, it can also lead to a lack of understanding of how women's representation relates to broader issues of women's participation. This may contribute to an approach which sees increasing women's numbers in governing bodies as an end in itself, rather than a part of a process of ensuring that women's experiences and perspectives are fully integrated into decision-making and governance.

This document uses the following definitions to make the distinction between "participation" and "representation":

Political participation allows for political agendas to take shape through a variety of ways of "taking part in politics" – discussion and debate, lobbying and demonstrating in formal and informal ways[6]. In this sense, women participate in politics not only through the electoral process, but also through a process of defining their interests and engagement with all parts of the decision-making process from outside as well as from within.

Political representation is a process by which the articulation of these political agendas is represented in institutions of decision-making in democratic societies through political parties and elected chambers of policy making such as parliaments. Women's representation, then, includes both the presence of women in governing bodies and the promotion of women's perspectives as a result.

The focus of this report is on promoting women's political representation – that is, increasing the numbers of women in governing bodies as critical to the inclusion of women's experience and perspectives in decision-making. At the same time, representation does not occur in isolation from broader issues of participation, and both the analysis of the issues and strategies for change must account for this connection.

2.1. Why does representation matter?

No one can deny that women are underrepresented in governing bodies – as we will see, the numbers speak for themselves. But why does it matter?

2.1.1. The right of representation

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was passed by the United Nations. Section 21 recognizes the right to take part in government as a key manifestation of human rights. Since that time, other international conventions and declarations have reinforced this principle.

It is important to remember that international agreements do not materialize out of thin air, but are the manifestation of people's struggles to achieve their rights. While the "first wave" of the modern women's movement in the first part of the 20th century focused on women's right to vote, the "second wave" that developed in the 1960s and 1970s turned its attention to achieving the right of representation in the political process. As a result, specific international conventions and agreements have focused on ***women's political participation and representation as essential to ensuring women's human rights.***

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) recognizes the need to end discrimination against women in political life. The Convention was passed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and was ratified by Belize in 1990. Article 7 of CEDAW says:

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[6] Definitions in italics are taken from Rai, *Background Paper*, Expert Group Meeting on equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership, p 4

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right,

   a) *To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;*
   b) *To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;*
   c) *To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country*

Unlike some other international declarations, CEDAW is intended to legally bind state parties to take action to implement the Convention. To this end, the Convention requires state parties to submit reports on the measures they have taken to implement the convention and, after a process of consultation, makes recommendations to strengthen compliance[7].

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, governments from around the world (including Belize) endorsed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Article 13 of the Declaration states,

Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.

The Platform for Action included greater detail on how to achieve the principles outlined in the Declaration, including specific objectives and strategies.

The Millennium Development Goals also recognize women's right to representation and that the achievement of this right has positive implications for the overall development of nations. Millennium Development Goal 3 is "Promote gender equality and empower women". One of the three indicators for this goal is "The proportion of seats held by women in the National Parliament".

These are just some of the major international instruments that recognize women's right to political representation. Other international and regional bodies (such as the Commonwealth and CARICOM) have similarly recognized this right. Unfortunately, there continues to be a significant gap between recognizing and achieving women's rights to representation.

2.1.2. Democracy and representation

Democracy is not just about casting a vote every few years. At its best, democracy should ensure the equal participation of all citizens in the process of governance. This not only guarantees the rights of

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[7] Subsequent to Belize's combined third and fourth periodic report in 2007, the CEDAW committee raised specific concerns concerning Belize's inaction in ensuring the right of women to political representation.

all, but also that the promise of democracy is achieved because it draws on the contributions of all. Put simply, ***democracy cannot afford to be gender-blind***.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has said that "Success without democracy is improbable; democracy without women is impossible." She argues,

> *In the modern world, women's empowerment is not merely a goal, but a cornerstone of democratic growth. This is because women raise issues that others overlook, devote energy to projects that others ignore, reach out to constituencies that others neglect, and help societies to move forward together. Women's empowerment leads to governments that are more representative, responsive, and accountable and better able to reach across ethnic, racial and religious lines.*[8]

So on the one hand, upholding democratic ideals supports women's claim to political representation because one of the fundamental principles of democracy is that women and men should have equal rights. On the other hand, democracy itself benefits when the perspectives of both women and men are included in decision-making and a wider range of voices informs the legislative and policy process.

2.1.3. Equality of opportunity vs. equality of result

A governing system based on gender equality should deliver on women's right to be represented as well as integrate the contributions of both women and men in decision-making. Yet despite the fact that very few countries in the world still prohibit women from voting or holding political office, it is clear that most countries of the world fall short of these goals.   While the removal of laws preventing women's participation in politics can be seen as providing ***equality of opportunity***, it is clear that it ***has not led to equality of results***.

The reason for this is that laws are just one manifestation of societies based on gender inequality and women's subordination. Consequently, when laws are reformed other economic, social and cultural factors continue to support inequality. This is no less true when we consider women's participation and representation in politics. As will be discussed later, women winning the right to vote and hold office did not eliminate the other barriers that prevent women from achieving fair representation in governing bodies.

2.1.4. Critical mass

Women's representation in legislatures is important as the realization of women's right to speak and be heard. It is also important, however, to ensure that women's concerns are effectively integrated into the policy agenda. While there is no guarantee that any individual woman politician will promote women's issues, there is considerable evidence that increasing the number of women in office has a positive impact. It's clear that ***having a sufficient number of women in legislatures who are motivated***

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[8] National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, *Democracy and the Challenge of Change: A Guide to Increasing Women's Political Participation*, p 12

to represent women's concerns makes a difference. This has often been referred to as critical gender mass, which one group has defined in this way,

> *The necessary percentage of women representatives in a legislature for transforming the legislative context from one in which gender-sensitive policy is unlikely, to one in which opportunities for implementing gender-sensitive policy are increased.*[9]

Most discussions identify a level of 30 percent women as the minimum necessary to achieve critical mass. More recently, however, some have argued that the goal should be the achievement of 50 percent or gender balance in legislatures.

Studies of women Members of Parliament in Scandinavia have confirmed that having a critical mass of women has a significant effect. These studies found that women politicians worked to recruit other women, and developed new legislation and institutions that would benefit women. As their numbers grew, it became easier to be a woman in politics and attitudes toward women politicians changed.[10] Other studies have also demonstrated a link between the proportion of women in legislatures and the extent to which gender issues are addressed.

2.2. What keeps women out?

Since it is clear that the formal right to vote and hold office does not lead to equality in practice, it is critical to analyze the reasons why women continue to be underrepresented in the political realm.

2.2.1. Political barriers

Political systems world-wide continue to be characterized by ***a masculine model of politics*** that sets the rules for how the game of politics is played. Male values dictate how political life is organized and how it is portrayed to the wider society. As one observer has noted,

> *Politics is often based on the idea of 'winners and losers', competition and confrontation, rather than systematic collaboration and consensus, especially across party lines. It may often result in women either rejecting politics altogether, or rejecting male-style politics. Thus, when women do participate in politics, they tend to do so in small numbers.*[11]

The institutionalized masculinity of the political world is generally presented as the best, or even the only, way of carrying out the business of running the country. If women see this system as unfriendly, or even hostile, then it is women who are seen as lacking. This avoids the issue of whether a political system based primarily on competition and confrontation always achieves the best result.

The masculine model of politics not only acts as a disincentive to women to run for office, it also sustains itself through the institutions of government and as a result can block women's entry or advancement.

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[9] Pedwell, *Just Politics: Women Transforming Political Spaces,* p 25
[10] Studies by Drude Dahlerud, cited on the International IDEA website.
[11] Ballington and Karam, *Beyond Numbers: Women in Parliament*, p 35-6

In a review of issues related to gender and governance, one observer has noted that "inequalities are perpetuated through institutions because those who are in power usually fail to challenge them, continuing to favour others like themselves for positions of authority,"[12] She also points out that, even when women do enter into government, there continue to be many barriers to women's full participation in governmental life and decision-making processes. Some of these barriers include:

> *Discrimination:* Women continue to face discrimination as women. Some of this discrimination is passive and, as a result, often difficult to pin down. For example, women and women's ideas may be ignored in meetings or women may not be included in the informal meetings where political decision-making often occurs. Discrimination can also be direct and even abusive. Women may be verbally attacked in ways that are often sexualized, "reflecting the ambivalent attitudes of some men towards women who may be…defying traditional expectations in order to participate in government"[13]

> *Lack of the connections needed to "get on" in politics:* Success in politics often stems from the connections made through male networks. These networks often provide the means to maintain political power in the hands of an established male elite. Lack of political leverage that comes from participation in those networks puts women at a disadvantage both before and after election to office.

> *The double burden:* The organization of the political world assumes that women who are elected to government office are required to work long, inflexible hours, including evenings and weekends. Men, of course, are expected to do the same. Unlike men, however, women are usually expected to do the unpaid care work in the home and as a result, are faced with a double burden. This burden can limit women's advancement in politics and in some cases lead women to leave politics altogether.

All of these barriers contribute to a situation where women are effectively kept at the margins of political life. A few women may be able to overcome these obstacles and successfully enter politics. This does not, however, challenge the system of institutionalized masculinity that maintains political power primarily in male hands.

Some of the same factors that make it more difficult for women to engage in politics also contribute to **the failure of political parties to promote equal representation of women**. Political parties are the gatekeepers to the electoral process – very few individuals can be successful in politics without the endorsement of a political party, particularly at the national level. Yet parties have been reluctant to put in place effective measures to ensure that women are fairly represented either in their own internal decision-making processes or as candidates. Political parties continue to be primarily "old boys' clubs" where power remains in the hands of men.

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[12] Brody, *Gender and Governance: Overview Report*, p 24

[13] *Ibid*, p. 32 with reference to Tambiah (2003)

A study of women's political representation in Latin America over the past 30 years demonstrates the persistent inability (or unwillingness) of parties to address this issue. While research has found that few political parties in Latin America have sex disaggregated data on their memberships, many parties insist that about 40 to 50 percent of their memberships are female[14]. Yet despite the fact that parties are aware of considerable "female capital" in their organizations, it is common to hear party leaders complain that there are no suitable females or that women refuse to run, particularly in situations where quota systems require a minimum number of female candidates. The authors, however, make it clear that the responsibility for this situation rests squarely with the parties themselves, saying:

> *This discourse reveals the parties' limited effectiveness in turning their members into leaders who are willing and able to face electoral competition….It also says little of their ability to attract women from other spheres, such as the social arena, where they have long played a leadership role. It is likely that the problem, then, lies not in the lack of women, but in "unfriendly" party structures that discourage women's participation.[15]*

Political parties, however, have been slow to see how their structures and practices continue to create a barrier for women.

There is also considerable evidence that **the type of electoral system** can create specific barriers to women's participation. While there are variations within categories, almost all electoral systems can be classified into these main types[16]:

> *Plurality/majority* systems most often use single member districts to elect representatives from a defined geographical area. The number of seats a party wins in the legislature may be substantially more (or less) than its share of the vote. The *First Past the Post (FPTP)* system used in Belize and most other former British colonies is the most common example of a plurality/majority system.

> *Proportional representation (PR)* systems translate a party's share of the votes into a corresponding share of the seats in the legislature. PR requires the use of electoral districts with more than one member – clearly it is not possible to divide a single seat proportionally. In some places, the entire country forms one multi-member electoral district. In others, electoral districts are based on provinces or on districts designed for the purpose of elections. PR systems are dominant in Latin America, Africa and Europe. The *List PR System*, which involves each party presenting a list of candidates in each multi-member electoral district, is the most common PR system in use.

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[14] Available data from Paraguay, Panama, Peru and Mexico support this, with percentages of women ranging from 45 to 52 percent. Only Guatemala is lower at about 30 percent.

[15] Llanos and Sample, *30 Years of Democracy: Riding the Wave? Women's Political Representation in Latin America, p 35*

[16] A full description of these categories, their subcategories, and the advantages and disadvantages of the various systems can be found in Andrew Reynolds *et al, Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook.*

Mixed systems combine plurality/majority and proportional representation methods by using each of the two systems to elect part of the legislature. The votes are cast by the same voters and contribute to the election of representatives under both systems. Mixed systems have been widely adopted by many new democracies in Africa and the former Soviet Union.

Looking at the results world-wide, it has been shown that single member plurality/majority systems produce consistently worse results for women than multi-member PR or mixed systems. One analysis of statistics from 24 countries since 1945 showed that the gap between these systems prior to 1970 was small, but increased dramatically after that. The growth of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s led to pressure for equal rights on a range of issues, including greater political representation. In PR or mixed member systems, women were able to translate this pressure into greater representation. In plurality/majority systems, however, "the same demands were made, but they were largely unsuccessful or only very modestly successful"[17].

Other observers have also recognized the greater challenges faced by women in plurality/majority and, in particular, First Past The Post systems. In one study of women's representation in Pacific Parliaments, the author notes that the Westminster-style, FPTP systems inherited by many Pacific Island countries tend to be unfavourable for women candidates. Overall, representation has been very low. In particular he cites the case of Papua New Guinea, saying,

> *PNG's experience provides a striking example of the low levels of women's representation associated with a first-past-the-post system. Only a handful of women have ever been elected to the 109-member assembly. Analysts regularly point out that in PNG women have considerable political influence that cannot by assessed only by formal representation. Nevertheless, only eight times since 1972 have women been elected to the national parliament, despite growing numbers contesting elections[18].*

Other observers have similarly noted that "SMD (single member districts) remain a high hurdle for women to clear in order to improve their share of legislators"[19]

What leads to these greater barriers for women in single-member plurality/majority systems? Because these systems nominate only a single candidate, women aspiring to political office must compete directly against all men. Arguments for gender balance are cast aside as irrelevant when balance cannot (obviously) be achieved in a single candidate. Social and cultural assumptions about women often play a strong role. Furthermore, by nominating a woman, a party must often deny the ambitions of the most powerful male politician in that district – something that male dominated political parties are most often reluctant to do.

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[17] Ballington and Karam, *op cit*, p 100. In 1950, for example, the difference between Plurality/majority, single member districts and PR/mixed, multi member districts was only 2.6 percentage points (2.1% compared to 4.73%). By 1980, however, this gap had increased to 8.52% (3.37% compared to 11.89%) and by 2004, to 9.25% (18.24% compared to 27.49%).

[18] Frankel, "The Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Pacific Parliaments, p 66

[19] McAllister and Studiar, "Women's Representation in Anglo-American Systems" p 4

Clearly, the choice of electoral system plays a significant role in the barriers to political representation faced by women. It has been said,

> There are several reasons why scholars of politics and women activists emphasize the effect electoral systems have on women's representation. First, the impact of electoral systems is dramatic….Second, and just as important, electoral systems can be, and regularly are, changed. Compared to the cultural status of women in society, or a country's development level (the two other factors known to affect women's representation), electoral rules are far more malleable. Changing the electoral system often represents a far more realistic goal to work towards than dramatically changing the culture's view of women.[20]

An additional potential barrier to women's representation is **the lack of an effective women's political constituency** as a foundation for promoting legislation and policies that will facilitate women's increased entry into politics, support women candidates, and hold both female and male politicians accountable for addressing women's concerns at all levels. This is one area where women's *representation* intersects with women's broader *participation* in politics. A 2007 North-South dialogue on women transforming political spaces stressed the importance of an "inside-outside" approach, concluding,

> Mobilization on the part of civil society, women's and feminist organizations and activist groups can provide an important source of pressure on States to address democratic deficits which function to exclude women from political representation and participation[21].

When women are not seen as a critical political constituency, male dominated institutions have little motivation to take action to promote women's concerns and interests, including the implementation of measures to increase representation. Commitments may be made in speeches, political agendas or policy documents, but action is often lacking. A case study of Burkina Faso considered reasons why women have not been successful in significantly increasing their representation in governing bodies, despite the use of a proportional representation system and promises from political parties to include women on their lists. The study concluded that "without a solid network of women's groups there can be little influence on the nomination and selection criteria and the political parties' procedures to press for increased female representation and participation"[22]. Closer to home, it has been observed that,

> Women have not emerged in the Caribbean as a single and distinctive electoral bloc that has to be courted, appeased and won by the dominant political parties. Thus, political parties are not compelled to dramatically adjust their political strategies to appeal to the female voter.[23]

The relationship between the strength of women's participation and the extent of women's representation should not be underestimated. The success of proposals to address other barriers to women in politics is likely to depend on the power of women as a political constituency.

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[20] Ballington and Karam, *op cit*, p 99-100
[21] Pedwell, *op cit,* p 23
[22] Case study – Burkina Faso: Recruiting Women for Legislative Elections, Ballington and Karam, *op cit*, p 136
[23] Barrow-Giles, "Political Party Financing and Women's Political Participation in the Caribbean" p 55

2.2.2. Socioeconomic barriers

Socioeconomic barriers to women's representation begin from the persistent reality that women have *less access to financial resources* than men. Women continue to earn less, are more likely to be unemployed, and have fewer assets than men. Furthermore, because men control greater financial assets than women, they are more likely to contribute to political campaigns where they most often give their support to other men.

In addition to having less access to financial resources, women also face additional social and economic costs to seeking office. In the previous section, it was noted that the organization of political institutions and political life does not recognize the double burden women face through their *responsibility for unpaid care work in the home*. This can also lead to an additional financial burden for women, as described by Guilliam Guifarro, elected as a deputy to the Honduras legislature. She confirms,

> Women not only consider the costs of preparing a campaign in the public sphere, they also consider the money they will have to invest in the domestic sphere to cover their absence. Such costs as child care, dependant adults, home care and domestic duties, in general, will have to be covered by women all the way through the different phases of their campaigns.[24]

The double burden and additional costs faced by women because of their responsibilities in the home often have the effect of eliminating women from politics during the years when they are raising children – the very years when men are likely to be entering the political arena. Monique Essed-Fernandes, a former presidential candidate in Suriname, has noted that,

> Women who run for public office are either single, have no children, have grown children or have a support network for child care. Child care is an issue that starts before nomination because in practice those who have a problem with childcare are either excluded or exclude themselves from the system.[25]

This observation is confirmed though experience elsewhere. During the 2003-2005 electoral period, only 17% of male legislators in Argentina were single, divorced, widowed or separated compared to 40% of women legislators who belonged to those same categories[26]. A British study demonstrated that 85% of women politicians left government for non-electoral reasons, and 63% because of difficulties in balancing home and work life[27]. This evidence suggests that for many women, their responsibilities in the home are a deterrent to seeking political office.

Socioeconomic barriers also interact with political barriers. A review of campaign financing internationally confirmed that, not only do women have less access to money, they also have *less access*

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[24] Tovar and WEDO, "Women Candidates and Campaign Finance", p 4
[25] *Ibid*, p r
[26] Study by Marx *et al,* cited in Llanos and Sample, *From Words to Action: Best Practices for Women's Participation in Latin American Political Parties,* p 17
[27] Study by Van Donk 1997, cited in Brody, *op cit,* p 32

to powerful and moneyed networks that fuel political campaigns[28]. Based on interviews with experts in the field, women's organizations, women candidates and party members in the Americas, Europe and Africa, this study noted that:

> Men are more likely to be financial donors to campaigns. Income levels are the key determinant of who gives and how much is given to political campaigns. As a result, more men contribute than women and they contribute larger amounts.
>
> The majority of large donors to political campaigns are men.
>
> The average size of individual donations to female candidates is less than for male candidates.
>
> Female candidates require more money to meet the thresholds of both campaign viability and electoral success, because of other barriers to participation in the electoral process.

It is clear that a lack of access to campaign financing is a critical barrier for women. This is even more true because the cost of conducting political campaigns has risen dramatically in recent years through increasingly expensive campaign methods (increased use of paid political advertising, for example). In addition, where vote buying or political handouts have become entrenched within the system, costs increase dramatically. If women cannot access the funds necessary to compete, they are effectively kept out of the game.

The actions of political parties in election campaigns often contribute to this. Decisions on allocations of campaign funds within political parties are most often in the hands of the "political party elites" that continues to control party priorities. Lack of transparency and accountability in campaign financing means that it is difficult or impossible to access these resources to promote the interests of female candidates.

UNIFEM has also noted that the greater difficulty women face in accessing campaign funds has a direct effect on their ability to compete in the electoral process, noting that "Where controls on campaign financing are weakly enforced, women are at a disadvantage because they often begin their races with less access to money than men."[29] This is, of course, even more true when controls are inadequate or non-existent and where party hierarchies continue to treat their financial affairs as a purely private concern.

The barriers described above mean that there is no "level playing field" for women and men in politics. Women's lower economic status means that they enter politics in a disadvantaged position. Because women have the double burden of work inside and outside the home, they face greater costs in both time and money if they decide to run for office. Lack of access to campaign financing can prevent women from competing effectively.   For many women, these realities mean that the race is over before it starts.

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[28] Tovar and WEDO, *op cit*, p 8
[29] UNIFEM, *Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*, p 26

2.2.3. Ideological and psychological barriers

Despite advances made by women in recent decades, ***traditional assumptions about the role of women*** continue to play a role in women's participation in politics. Women continue to be seen as primarily responsible for the home while men have greater responsibility for public life. While there is little evidence to suggest that these attitudes strongly influence voter behavior, they do influence the degree of support women may get when deciding whether or not to run as well as the attitude of political parties toward their candidacies. As one observer has noted,

> *These norms, of course, are rooted in the public-private divide, which plays a major role in socializing women and men into prescribed gender roles, calling into question the legitimacy of women's political engagement and conferring private sphere responsibilities on women that prevent them from pursuing public office. These effects endure long after shifts in women's social and economic status by negatively influencing women's decision to run as well as elites' evaluations of potential female candidates.[30]*

There is considerable evidence that demonstrates the resilience of assumptions about gender roles. A study on women's political representation in Latin America cites research on attitudes about gender roles in 18 Latin American Countries[31]. Respondents were asked "Do you strongly agree, agree or disagree?" with these statements:

> *It is better for women to concentrate on the home and men on work.* In 11 of 18 countries, 40 percent or more of respondents said that they strongly agreed or agreed. In Central American countries such as Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador, 50 per cent or more expressed this opinion.

> *If the woman earns more than the man, it is almost certain that there will be problems.* This statement revealed even stronger reactions that the previous one. In 17 of 18 countries, 45 percent or more of respondents agreed with this opinion.

As the authors point out, responses to these questions reveal the resistance that persists in Latin America toward equal rights and opportunities for women. They note, "Changes in Latin American political culture, notably influenced by patriarchal attitudes, are occurring more slowly than had been hoped."[32] Similar attitudes persist in other parts of the world. At a recent world conference of women parliamentarians, Kenyan Member of Parliament Linah Kilimo described how patriarchal beliefs in her country continue to undermine women in political life[33]. These beliefs are manifested at every level, including lack of support from spouses, intimidation by male candidates, destruction of property and

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[30] Jalalzai and Krook, "Beyond Hillary and Benazir: Women's Political Leadership Worldwide", p 12
[31] Llanos and Sample, *30 Years of Democracy,* p 43-44
[32] *Ibid,* p 44
[33] Kilimo, "The Challenges Faced by Women Running for Election", in Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Is Parliament Open to Women? An Appraisal*, p 14

violence against female candidates. Caribbean societies, which have been described as "resiliently patriarchal"[34], also tend to have lower than average rates of women's political representation.

Traditional assumptions about women may also lead women to believe that in order to succeed in the political realm, they must adopt masculine traits to succeed. This not only sustains the notion of politics as a "man's world", it can also come at considerable cost to the woman herself. As one observer says,

> *In fact, the more authoritative and 'manly' a woman is, the more she corresponds to the undeclared male rules of the game. That is why some women politicians in general have to overcome the difficulty of feeling uncomfortable in the political field, as though they are somewhere where they do not belong, behaving in ways that are not natural to them. Often women internalize many of these ideas and end up frustrated when they cannot match this almost impossible image.[35]*

Women in politics, then, must either apologize for being women or pretend that being a woman has nothing to do with her role as a politician. This is not only a difficult position for the woman involved. It also means that the very strengths and experiences that women can bring to the political process must often be suppressed in the course of getting elected.

Lack of confidence is also often cited as a reason for women's under-representation in political institutions, and it is certainly true that women may question their potential in this regard. It is important to remember, however, that this lack of confidence is built on some of the other barriers women face. If women are not expected to play a prominent role outside of the home – and in fact may be actively discouraged from doing so – it is hardly surprising that they come to believe that participating in political life is not for them. Men gain much of their political knowledge, experience and contacts through informal networks that are often closed to women, and it is of course difficult to make a confident entry into the political world without that background. If the image of the successful politician embodies only masculine traits, women may well feel that they are inadequate to meet that image.

Another barrier to women's representation is their *perception of politics as a "dirty" game.* This perception, unfortunately, often reflects reality in many countries where corruption has become an integral and often accepted part of the political system. There is also evidence that women are less tolerant of corruption than men. Data from Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer shows that women report that they perceive higher levels of corruption than men do[36]. As a result, women may come to believe that it is impossible to affect change through involvement in electoral politics.

Once again, it is important to remember that gender differences in the *perception* of politics likely reflect gender differences in the *experience* of corruption. A recent review on gender issues related to

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[34] Barriteau, "Requiem for the Male Marginalization Thesis in the Caribbean: Death of a Non-Theory" p 327
[35] Ballington and Karam, *op cit*, p 45
[36] Cited in UNIFEM, *op cit*, p 8

corruption and accountability[37] found that corruption generally affects women and men differently, with poor women in particular suffering disproportionately from corrupt practices. Despite limited research on the specific effects of corruption on women in politics, there is some evidence to indicate that corruption acts as a deterrent to women. Some of these effects include,

> Women may lack access to the important networks that facilitate entry into politics.

> Candidates are often selected on the basis of their ability to mobilize patron-client networks and to collect the resources needed to finance an election campaign.

> Women attempting to enter politics may also face demands for sex from male party members – a sexualized form of corruption that women are more likely to encounter than men.

The connection between the perception and reality of politics means that strategies to address this barrier for women cannot take place in isolation from a commitment to address broader issues of transparency and accountability in government and political parties.

It is important to consider **the role of the media** in creating an environment which is – or is not – conducive to women's participation in political life. The media often reinforces stereotypes about women. Women are frequently portrayed by the media as sexual objects, reinforcing the idea that a woman's physical attributes are more important than her intellectual accomplishments. In 2010, the Global Media Monitoring project found that 46% of news stories in the media reinforced gender stereotypes, while only 6% challenged those stereotypes[38]. The Caribbean report to the project noted that:

> *Results from monitoring the news showed that women are under-represented in the news and that gender stereotypes abound, affecting both women and men. Three out of four persons who appeared in the news were men. Women's voices were heard far less than men's in the topics that dominate the news agenda such as politics and government, economics and business, giving a distorted impression of women's real-life participation in these areas. Imbalanced representation of women and men in the media perpetuate stereotypes that form the basis of gender basis discrimination in everyday situations.[39]*

Another observer has noted that the media can also be used to promote a particular political agenda that holds women responsible for society's ills, saying,

> *The media can be used to cultivate gender biases and promote a stereotype about 'a woman's place', helping conservative governments and societies to put the blame on women for the*

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[37] Hossain, Musembi and Hughes, *Corruption, Accountability and Gender: Understanding the Connections,* UNDP and UNIFEM (now part of UN Women) 2010

[38] Global Media Monitoring Project, *Who Makes the News? Summary,* p 3

[39] Global Media Monitoring Project, *Who Makes the News? Caribbean Report,* p 2

failure in family policy and to reinforce the idea that women are responsible for social problems such as divorce and the growth of minor crime.[40]

The media, then, can play a significant role in sustaining a context that keeps women at the margin of political life.

There is also evidence to show that media outlets may actively discriminate in their coverage of women candidates. One study monitored media coverage during elections in Peru[41]. The study found that gender issues were virtually invisible in the media's coverage of the campaign. Furthermore, coverage of candidates clearly discriminated against women. Women represented 39 percent of candidates on party lists. Yet they obtained only 18.59 percent of the coverage in print media, 22.22 percent on television, and 26.19 percent on the radio. All forms of media consistently gave less coverage to women than their presence on candidate lists warranted. Another study in Uruguay found similar results. Furthermore, this study revealed that 81.3 percent of appearances by women candidates on radio or television were silent – they were merely mentioned or their image was shown without words. In contrast over half (51. 1 percent) of appearances by men consisted of statements or interviews.[42]

Understanding the role the media plays during election campaigns and in general leads to the conclusion that promoting women's participation and representation in politics must include strategies to encourage greater responsibility from media houses in challenging gender stereotypes and providing equitable coverage to women who run for office.

3. The Global Picture

Although women world-wide have been calling for greater political representation and governments have committed themselves to take action through mechanisms such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform of Action and the MDGs, progress has been inconsistent at best. To find strategies to accelerate the process of change, it is important to understand what progress has been made and what factors have led some countries to perform better than others. It is also important to understand the particular conditions in the Anglophone Caribbean that have led most countries in the sub-region to lag behind regional and international trends.

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[40] Ballington and Karan, *op cit*, p 47
[41] Cited in Llanos and Sample*, 30 Years of Democracy*, p 40
[42] *Ibid,* p 41

3.1. World-wide progress in women's representation

Globally, *women have made slow but steady progress* in the proportion of seats held in parliaments/legislatures. Figure 3-1 shows the increase in percentages of women in lower or single house worldwide since 1945.

Figure 3-1: Women in parliaments worldwide.							
	1945	1975	1985	1995	2000	2005	2010
Number of parliaments	26	115	136	176	177	184	187
% of women in lower or single houses	3.0	10.9	12.0	11.3	13.4	15.7	19.0
Source: Ballington (2010), data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)							

We can see that the proportion of women representatives has increased six-fold in this period, when the Inter-Parliamentary Union began keeping statistics. While early progress moved very slowly, there was some acceleration after 1995, when the Beijing process motivated many governments to address this issue including through the implementation of gender quotas. Globally, the increase in the proportion of women in these governing bodies has now reached approximately 1 percent per year*. In 2012, the proportion of women elected worldwide has reached 20.3%.*[43]

Figure 3-2: % Women in Parliaments by Region

Source: Ballington (2010), IPU data
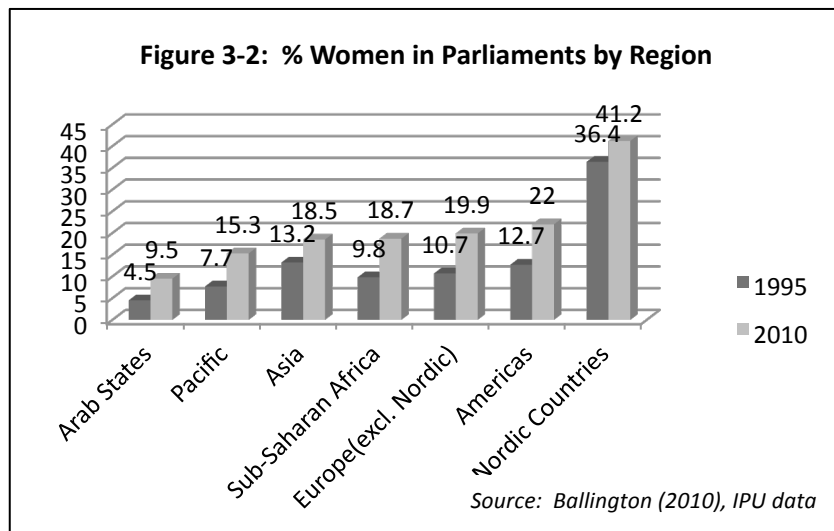
There are considerable *differences between regions, as well as between countries within regions*. Figure 3-2 shows the regional variation in women's representation and changes between 1995 and 2010. Regional averages, however, mask some significant differences among countries. For example, figures for the Pacific region are inflated by the inclusion of Australia and New Zealand. When these two countries are removed, Pacific Island states have the lowest rate of women's representation in the world at 3% and this figure has not increased in recent years. And as we shall see later, the average for the Anglophone Caribbean sub-region lags significantly behind the Americas region as a whole.

Only 32 countries world-wide currently surpass the target of 30% participation in parliaments[44]. A review of these countries reveals the following:

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[43] Inter-Parliamentary Union website, October 2012
[44] *ibid*, October 2012

While as a region, the Nordic countries continue to have the highest proportion of women legislators, the African nation of Rwanda now has the highest representation of women at 56.3%.

Of the top 32 countries, more than half (18) are from the developing world, including 8 from Africa (Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Mozambique, , Tanzania, Uganda, Algeria and Burundi) and 6 from Latin America (Cuba, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Argentina, Mexico, and Ecuador). This demonstrates that developing countries have as much potential for addressing issues of women's participation as developed ones.

At 31.3%, Guyana is the only country from the Anglophone Caribbean that has reached the target.

Of the 32 countries, 28 have adopted some form of quota system to increase women's representation[45].

It is clear that most countries in the world will not achieve the MDG target of 30% representation of women by 2015. What sets successful countries apart from the rest? Understanding the answer to this question can help to inform strategies where progress has so far been limited.

3.2. What makes a difference?

In the context of the push for greater women's representation in governing bodies, increases in the proportion of women in parliaments, and the introduction of quota systems in many countries, there has been a great deal written in the last decade about what makes a difference for women. There is a strong consensus concerning the factors that lead to greater representation. The existence of quota systems has been shown to play the most significant role in promoting women's representation in politics.

3.2.1. Quotas

Over half of the countries in the world now use some form of quota system. As mentioned previously, 28 of the 32 countries that have met the target of 30% women in their parliaments use quotas.

Quota systems are of primarily two types. ***Candidate quotas*** require that a certain percentage of candidates be women and apply to political parties' lists of candidates for election. *Legal candidate quotas* are established through the constitution, in electoral laws, or in legislation covering political parties. *Voluntary party quotas* are adopted voluntarily by political parties. Candidate quotas are generally only applicable to proportional representation systems, since they require the use of multi-candidate constituencies and candidate lists. The prevalence of proportional representation systems in Latin America, for example, has enabled many countries to adopt candidate quotas.

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[45] Most of these countries (18) have mandatory, legislated quotas. The remainder (10) use other methods, mainly voluntary quotas within the political parties. Most of the countries in the developing world have mandatory quotas.

Reserved seats is another form of electoral quota which sets aside a certain number of seats for women, as specified either in the constitution or in legislation. Reserved seats can be used in plurality/majority, proportional representation, or mixed systems. In Uganda, one seat in each of 56 electoral districts is reserved for women. In Rwanda, 30 percent of seats are allocated to women and elected through a special procedure outlined in the constitution. In Tanzania, 20 percent of the seats are reserved for women and allocated through political parties in proportion to the number of parliamentary seats won in an election. A criticism of some reserved seat systems is that women are not elected directly, as in Rwanda, but appointed by political parties on the basis of general election results.

The effect of quotas on results for women is dramatic. In 2009, elections were held in about 45 countries. Countries where quotas were used elected 27 percent women, compared to 13.8 percent in countries without quotas. In other words, the proportion of women elected through quota systems was almost double that of situations where quotas were absent. Similar results were seen in the 2008 elections (24% vs. 17%)[46]. One study found that institutional factors, including the use of a quota system, are the best predictor of women's electoral status, saying, "Quotas emerge as a most consistently predominant explanatory factor for female legislative representation."[47]

Further review of quota systems, however, reveals that **not just any quota system will do**. Experience in the implementation of quotas in Latin America, for example, reveals a wide disparity in their effectiveness. For example, quotas in Costa Rica and Argentina have led to significant increases in women's representation (in 2011, 38.6% and 38.5% respectively) whereas in Brazil the quota system has had virtually no impact, stagnating at 8.6%.

The reasons for the wide disparity between countries with quotas can be explained both by the structure of the quota itself and the presence (or absence) of sanctions for non compliance. In Brazil, for example, there is no requirement for women to be placed in electable positions nor is there a specific sanction for not respecting the quota. As a result, the percentage of Brazilian women elected to Congress is among the lowest in Latin America, despite the existence of a quota on paper. In Argentina, on the other hand, the quota system has been revised through the years to require that women be included in candidate lists "in proportions with a chance of being elected". Since 2000, the system gives the courts the authority to re-arrange candidate lists in line with the law if the political party does not do so.[48]

Costa Rica provides another example of the importance of strong enforcement measures for the implementation of quotas. Although Costa Rica passed legislation on gender quotas in 1996, the initial legislation did not include the requirement to put women in electable positions nor did it provide for strong sanctions if parties did not meet the quota. As a result, improvements for women were modest. Subsequent amendments to the law required parties to put women in electable positions and candidate

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[46] Ballington, Julie, Bridge Project (presentation), slide 22
[47] Tripp, and Kang, "The Global Impact of Quotas: On the Fast Track to Increased Female Legislative Representation." P 357
[48] Llanos and Sample, *Riding the Wave*, p 31

lists are not accepted if they do not abide by the law. In 2011, women make up almost 40 percent of the Costa Rican legislature.

The prevalence of quota systems in Latin America is in part a reflection of the greater use of quotas in proportional representation systems. Over 70 percent of PR systems now include some kind of quotas, compared to less than 30% of plurality/majority systems.

A recent report reviewed possible measures that could be used to promote women's representation in Pacific Island states[49], many of whom have the similar First Past The Post systems as Belize. The report acknowledges the challenge of implementing gender quotas in these systems and that there is no "one size fits all" approach that will suit each country's situation. The report outlines some options for implementing quotas in FPTP countries:

> Add a set number of new women-only reserved seats.
> Convert a number of existing seats to women-only reserved seats.
> Create new multi-member constituencies incorporating reserved seats for women.
> Mandatory or voluntary party quotas, where parties would nominate and support an agreed percentage of women candidates in winnable seats.

The report also outlines different methods for filling reserved seats, including direct election; distribution to the political parties in proportion to their share of the popular vote or number of seats won; indirect election by parliament; or appointment by the Governor General following an open and participatory selection process.[50] The report also acknowledges that until parties believe that there is a demonstrated advantage to nominating women, mandatory quotas are likely to be more effective than voluntary ones[51].   Party quotas would require that the political parties develop specific strategies, such as all women short lists, to ensure that they meet the quota target.

While quotas have been shown to have dramatic impact on women's representation, there is currently considerable debate on whether the 30 percent target is sufficient. While 30 percent has been identified as the level at which "critical mass" is reached, others argue that this level does not reflect women's proportion of the population[52]. Furthermore, political parties often treat quotas as a maximum rather than a starting point to equality in representation.

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[49] Clark and Rodrigues, *Utilizing Temporary Special measures to Promote Gender Balance in Pacific Legislatures"*
[50] *Ibid,* p 51
[51] *Ibid,* p 52
[52] While some countries have quotas that are less (and sometimes considerably less) than 30%, others have quotas that exceed that level – for example, Costa Rica (40%) and South Africa (50%).

There has recently been considerable discussion that the goal should in fact be the achievement of gender balance in political representation, so that legislatures would more closely mirror the population. From this point of view, quotas would not only specify a minimum number of women, but would state minimum-maximum representation for both sexes – for instance, no more than 60 and no less that 40 percent for each sex. The Australian Labour (ALP) Party currently uses a voluntary quota which requires that 35 percent of candidates in held and winnable seats must be women. In 2012, the ALP will implement a 40% gender neutral quota. This new system is based on a "40:40:20" model, where 40 percent of candidates must be women, 40 percent must be men, and 20 percent can be either women or men.

Special Measures by Political Parties

Plurality/majority, First Past The Post systems make quotas more difficult to apply. Political parties in some countries have developed other special measures for increasing women's representation. Parties in both the UK and Canada have used **all women shortlists** as a tool to ensure that women are nominated as candidates, including in winnable seats. All women short lists require designated constituencies to consider only women in their nominating process. In Britain, the Labour Party introduced all women shortlists in 1997. Following a legal challenge, the Women's Representation Bill was passed in 2001 which allows the use of all women shortlists through 2015. To date, only the Labour Party has used this mechanism.

In the Canadian province of British Columbia, the New Democratic Party's (NDP) Equity Mandate Programme required that all seats where an incumbent NDP member was not seeking re-election and 30 percent of all other seats be designated for women candidates[1]. The 2009 election saw a significant increase in the percentage of NDP Members of the Legislative Assembly who are women (21 to 34 percent). At the national level in Canada, the Liberal Party has adopted a range of strategies to promote women candidates, including measures to ensure that at least 33% of Liberal candidates countrywide are women. This goal was successfully reached in the 2008 elections.**

It is important to note that in these examples, the political parties involved had highly organized and motivated women's wings that pushed for special measures. Women's movements in these countries also tend to be stronger than in some other parts of the world and politicians have greater respect for women as a political constituency. Both of these factors undoubtedly set the stage for the party leadership to develop the political will to implement these measures.

* Information from McAssister and Studlier, "Women's Representation in Anglo-American Systems"
** Information from an in process publication of the United Nations Development Programme and the National Democratic Institute, Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties

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The role that quotas play in addressing barriers to women's representation cannot be denied. At the same time, quotas should not be viewed in isolation from other actions. Because of the range of political, socioeconomic and ideological barriers to women, a range of strategies will be necessary to promote women's participation and representation in politics.

3.2.2. Electoral systems

Even without quotas, there is evidence that some types of electoral systems provide more opportunity for increasing women's participation than others. Earlier in this document, we noted that plurality/majority systems – and in particular First Past The Post systems such as our own – create a barrier to women. Conversely, proportional representation systems are more open to increasing women's participation, even in the absence of a quota system. Because PR systems have multi-member constituencies where seats are assigned according to the percentage of votes won by the parties, more women can compete and win. A handbook on electoral system design notes,

> PR electoral systems are almost always more friendly to the election of women than plurality/majority systems. In essence, parties are able to use the lists to promote the advancement of women politicians and allow voters the space to elect women candidates while still basing their choice on other policy concerns than gender…In single-member districts most parties are encouraged to put up a 'most broadly acceptable' candidate and that candidate is seldom a woman. In all regions of the world, PR systems do better than FPTP systems in the number of women elected.[53]

Analysis presented in UNIFEM's 2008/9 Progress of the World's Women report showed that the type of electoral system works in conjunction with quotas. Based on 2008 data, the report reveals that, on average, women represent the highest percentage in parliaments under proportional representation systems with quotas. Proportional representation systems without quotas and quotas in non-PR systems occupy middle territory. Women in non-PR systems without quotas (like Belize) fare the worst, with average representation just over 10 percent[54].

In countries where no substantial reform to the electoral system has taken place, there is often the assumption that the existing system is the best, or even the only possible, way of electing representatives. However, many countries have changed their systems in recent years. One review found that 27 countries substantially changed their systems in the period from 1993 to 2004 alone[55]. In selecting a new system, no countries moved from proportional representation to plurality/majority, leading the author to observe,

> The trend is rather clear. Most countries that have changed electoral systems have done so in the direction of more proportionality, either by adding a PR element to a plurality system…or by completely replacing their old system with List PR. The most common switch has been from a plurality/majority system to a mixed system, and there is not one example of a change in the opposite direction.[56]

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[53] Reynolds *et al*, *Electoral System Design: the New International IDEA Handbook*, p 61
[54] UNIFEM, *op cit*, p 22
[55] This was in addition to the many other countries that made minor changes that did not fundamentally change the electoral model.
[56] Andrews, et al, *op cit*, p 23

This trend in part reflects the recognition that plurality/majority systems (including First Past the Post) have significant shortcomings in promoting equitable representation, not only for women but also for the population as a whole. In recent years, the development of greater expertise in the area of electoral system design should make it more possible for states to take a critical look at their own systems and determine whether change is needed.

3.2.3. Campaign financing

As previously discussed, there is no level playing field for women and men in campaign financing. Consequently, measures that address the funding gap can have a significant effect on women's ability to compete. In addition, tighter controls on the maximum amounts that can be spent on campaigns make it more possible for all candidates, including women, to run for office. The Inter-Parliamentary Union's 2009 meeting of women parliamentarians from around the world identified four specific strategies that help address the gender gap in campaign financing[57]:

> ***Provide "early money" for nomination campaigns.*** Women candidates in many countries have indicated that the greatest challenge in accessing funds comes early in the process, at the stage of running for the nomination. This is especially true in plurality/majority systems with single member districts. EMILY's list[58] in the United States was an early example of a women's campaign fund providing financing to women candidates at the nomination stage. Other countries, such as Australia, Cambodia and the UK have since developed similar networks for funding women's campaigns[59].

> ***Consider the provision of public funding for election campaigns.*** In some countries, the state provides a level of funding to political parties for election campaigns. Women candidates agree the public funding helps their candidacies. However, this is only true if there are enforceable accountability mechanisms to ensure that women and men have equal access to these funds. In most cases, state campaign financing does not specify how it must be used. One exception is Mexico, where Article 78 of the Electoral Code requires that at least 2 percent of the public funding of political parties be used for programmes to build women's capacity as candidates and politicians.[60] In other cases, parties themselves must implement guidelines to ensure that women have fair access to public funds.

> ***Implement limits on campaign expenditures.*** Limiting the amount spent on political campaigns can have a significant effect on leveling the playing field for all candidates, including women. The Centre for Legislative Development in the Philippines and the UNDP Asia Pacific Equality Network suggest that economic limits should be applied to every national and local election campaign, as well as to donations used for "party building", voter registration, membership

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[57] Inter-Parliamentary Union, *op cit,* pp 35-6
[58] The name EMILY is taken from the phrase "Early Money Is Like Yeast – it makes the dough rise" – in this case, dough being campaign funds.
[59] UNDP and NDI, *Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties,* publication in process
[60] UNDP and NDI, *op cit*

campaigns and payments to party-related "think tanks". In Mexico, for example, the law limits the amount of contributions from non-governmental organizations and prohibits funding from foreign citizens, religious officials and private businesses. Sanctions include economic penalties and fines, suspension of public funding or the revocation of a party's registration[61].

Provide incentives for political parties to include more women. These incentives could include free or subsidized media time for parties that reach and sustain a high level of female participation and representation.

Campaign financing is a critical issue for women's political representation. It also has serious implications for the quality of democracy as a whole, particularly in situations where patronage and corruption have cast a shadow over the electoral process. Campaign finance reform, therefore, can have a positive effect on addressing barriers to women as well as building citizen confidence in the political system.

3.2.4. Solidarity among women across party lines

There are many examples of women politicians and party activists working across party lines to advance issues of particular concern to women. Specifically, ***coordinated actions have advanced measures to increase women's political representation***. A 2007 north-south dialogue on women's political participation concluded,

> *Through intra- and cross-party networking, women elected to local and national political office have mobilized to increase women's participation and to make political processes more attentive to gender-oriented issues and concerns.[62]*

Women politicians who are committed to creating space for other women have made a significant impact. In Argentina, it was a group of women legislators from different political parties who introduced the 1990 legislation to amend the National Electoral Code to require at least 30% women on the electoral lists of political parties. When the law did not lead to results,

> *Considerable solidarity was mustered around the Quota Law among the women of different political forces, especially in cases in which the legal minimum of 30 percent was not being respected. Solidarity among women was more important than party allegiance.[63]*

There appears to be increasing recognition among women politicians that there is much to gain from working together. Today, non-partisan caucuses of women parliamentarians exist in every region of the world. In addition to working on a broad range of issues, many have also been involved in specific actions to strengthen women's participation.   This not only includes work to incorporate special measures in constitutions or electoral laws. In many cases these groups are also involved in activities

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[61] Cited in Tovar Restrapo, *op cit*, p 39
[62] Pedwell, *op cit*, p 29
[63] Case Study – Argentina: A New Look at the Challenges of Women's Participation in the Legislature, Ballington and Karan, *op cit*, p 170

such as capacity building for women legislators and lobbying for greater representation of women in non-elected positions. For example, the Uganda Women's Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) worked to ensure that quotas for women were included in the constitution at both the national and local government levels. In addition, the organization organized workshops in leadership skills for women parliamentarians and members of local councils and successfully lobbied for increasing numbers of women on various commissions and in the judiciary[64].

In many Latin American countries, cross-party cooperation among women politicians has similarly been institutionalized. In Panama, for example, the National Forum of Party Women (FONAMUPP in Spanish) is a national forum for women politicians to achieve joint goals. Representation and compromise are the organization's guiding principles, and decisions are made by consensus. In 1997, FONAMUPP successfully lobbied political parties and legislators to support a 30 percent quota and to institute provisions within political parties to ensure women's participation in both internal leadership and candidacies for elected positions. Its current priorities include training party women to reduce disparities in the political field and improving compliance with the quota law in electoral processes and internally within parties[65].

Politics is often characterized by competition and, sometimes, by the virtual demonizing of those in opposing camps. In many countries, however, women politicians have shown that the spirit of cooperation and commitment to common concerns can lead to concrete gains for women.

3.2.5. Action by political parties

Because political parties are the gatekeepers for political representation, they can play a significant role in advancing the representation of women. As has been noted previously, however, too often political parties continue to be "old boys' clubs" where men continue to hold both formal and informal decision-making power. This affects the candidate selection process, the level of resources available to women, and the willingness to challenge the ideological barriers to women's increased involvement in the electoral process.

There is often a significant gap between parties' verbal commitment to greater equality and their own practices, particularly with respect to decision-making within the party itself. A review of the situation in Latin America concluded,

> *Women's participation in decision-making spheres generally depends on the interest that party leaders might have in promoting "inclusive" structures. Unfortunately, examples of genuine commitment to gender equality represent the exception rather than the norm. Most parties continue to follow traditionally masculine behavior patterns. Many of the parties that have made a move to promote equity through the adoption of voluntary quotas tend to regard these*

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[64] Uganda Women's Parliamentary Association, "UWOPA envisages the best in capacity building for women in leadership"

[65] Llanos and Sample, *From Words to Action*, p 51

measures as sufficient in themselves. Additionally, there are a number of cases where gender quotas have been incorporated within by-laws but not put into practice.[66]

Despite this general trend, however, the review notes two examples of how ***quotas within political parties have been used to make a significant impact on the levels of women in party leadership***. In Costa Rica, Article 60 of the Electoral Code requires parties to include in their by-laws the mechanisms necessary to ensure that women hold at least 40 percent of the positions in party leadership, as well as on candidate lists and in district, canon and provincial assemblies. As a result, 43.9% of positions in party decision-making bodies are held by women[67].

Another noteworthy example comes from the Partido Socialista in Uruguay. That party has established a "mirror quota" system.   This quota rule states that the percentage of women in party decision-making bodies must reflect the percentage of women in active membership. As a result, 39 percent of the members of the National Executive Committee and 43 percent of the Central Committee are women. Prior to this measure, there were no women on the National Executive, and women were only 12 percent of the Central Committee.

These examples make it clear that quotas can also work to promote women's leadership within political parties – whether the quotas are legislated or developed and implemented by the parties themselves. These quotas are becoming more commonplace, with countries as diverse as South Africa, India, Mexico, Morocco, Cambodia and Australia all implementing such measures in recent years.[68]

There are, of course, other factors which make political parties more or less responsive to women and women's representation. A review of the role of parties in promoting the equal participation of women and men in political decision-making[69] suggested the following factors are more likely to lead to good outcomes for women:

> Parties that have ***transparent structures*** and are governed by clearly defined sets of rules make it easier for their members – including women – to demand accountability.

> Parties with an ***internal organization of women*** that is able to mobilize resources tend to respond better to women's demands.

> Parties' willingness to respond to demands for internal change is ***connected to strength of the political clout of women*** in the broader society.

On the first factor, it has been shown that a system of clear and transparent rules for the nomination process makes it more possible for women to compete. In Norway, for example, women successfully

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[66] Llanos and Sample, *Riding the Wave*, p 36
[67] As of 2007.
[68] UNDP and NDI, *op cit*
[69] Sacchet, Teresa, "Political Parties: When do they work for women?" p 9-12. The author also suggests that parties of the centre and left are more likely to initiate action on gender concerns, including those related to women's representation.

mobilized around the nominating process to increase their representation on candidate lists, even before the introduction of quotas.[70]   This requires that candidate selection processes be explicit, standardized and effectively implemented, and not open to subjective interpretation by party officials. As one study reports,

> *Generally, women will benefit if parties have clear bureaucratic procedures for selecting candidates rather than a system based on loyalty to those in power. When the rules of the game are clear, it is possible for women to develop strategies to improve representation. When the process is dominated by patronage, rules can be unclear and decisions are often made by a limited number of persons, who are almost certainly predominantly male.[71]*

Parties, then, have the responsibility to ensure that their internal structures are clear and well-enforced. This includes safeguards that do not allow formal rules to be undermined by "behind the scenes" manipulation of the process.

Women's sections in political parties can obviously play a role in pushing their parties to be more accountable to women and to implement strategies to increase the number of women candidates the parties put forward. In identifying the importance of this factor, the review cited above noted that, "The parties most likely to respond to gender-related demands are those in which women tend to be well organized and are able to carry out concerted and resourceful collective actions, and in which they have links to other supportive organizations and to civil society which afford them higher political clout."[72]

This means, of course, that women's sections must function as a forum for advancing women's interests within the party, and not just as "women's auxiliaries" whose primary purpose is to provide uncritical support for party policies and activities. The leadership of political parties has the responsibility to provide an enabling environment to support the development of effective women's sections. Just as important, however, is the commitment of women within parties to organize themselves to promote gender issues and the development of women's leadership, and to challenge their own parties to act on these concerns.

As recognized above, actions of political parties occur in the context of the broader society. The importance of civil society organizations in the overall process of promoting women's political representation will be addressed in the next section.

In addition to the above factors, political parties also have an important role to play in identifying and promoting women within their internal party decision-making processes and as candidates. It has been shown that when parties invest in the development of women, women do step forward to take on leadership responsibilities. An assessment of women's political party programmes in Morocco,

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[70] Ballington and Karan, *op cit*, p 96
[71] *Ibid*, p 106
[72] Sacchet, *op cit*, p 11

Indonesia, Serbia and Nepal revealed the following "best practices" for political parties in improving women's representation[73]:

> *Consistent communication training* to develop their strengths as women leaders.
> *Building leadership skills*, including skills in public speaking, advocacy and campaigning.
> *Uniting women across political parties*.
> *Working with parties on internal reform* to challenge male dominance, patriarchal attitudes and political party elitism.
> *Training women to train other women* so that future trainees have role models within their own parties*.
> *Developing the capacity and preparedness of elected women* to continue the process of capacity building.
> *Exchanging information internationally,* to allow women political leaders to learn from the experience of others and build an international network of women leaders.
> *Engaging youth to help change socio-political attitudes and behavior*, to sow the seeds of gender equality among future political leaders from the earliest stages of their political campaigns.

The assessment observes that the consistency of these best practices across four very different countries makes it possible to apply them across countries and continents, providing a roadmap for political parties in the development of effective programmes to promote women's political participation and leadership.

3.2.6. Strength of the women's movement and civil society

The role of the women's movement and civil society organizations has been critical in advancing women's political participation and representation. A strong women's movement can ensure that gender issues in general and the specific issue of women's representation are taken seriously by political parties, elected politicians and the electorate as a whole. As noted earlier, male-dominated institutions are unlikely to be motivated to take action on these issues unless they are convinced that there is broader support. Women's organizations also have an important role to play in holding politicians and governments accountable if they fail to act.

The women's movement also has an important role to play to ensure that increasing women's representation is connected to broader issues of women's participation. More women are needed in legislatures not only because they have a right to be there, but also because they are more likely to reflect women's particular experience of the world and bring this expertise to the development of policy and legislation. This means that the women's movement must support women to get into political decision-making bodies as well as help them to develop the skills and strategies to ensure that issues raised by women become integral to the debate and decision-making process. A further part of this

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[73] Kozma, Alyson, "Women's Political Party Programmes: Best Practices and Recommendations", in IPU, *Is Parliament Open to Women?"* pp 47-49

process is holding women legislators (as well as men) accountable once they are there. This broader undertaking has been described in this way:

> *The main mission of the women's movement is to inculcate the right type of confidence and assertiveness among [women legislators]. It needs leaders who can express proper ideological messages and inspire confidence. New ways of thinking and acting, educational activities, research about women's status, and means of communication among women's organizations are needed. The challenge for women is to build a society according to a paradigm that reflects their values, strengths and aspirations, and thereby reinforce their interest and participation in the political process.[74]*

There are many examples of how women's organizations have played a decisive role in both getting more women elected and ensuring that women's concerns are addressed once they are there. In Rwanda, the umbrella NGO ProFemme played a critical role in the development of the new 2003 Constitution[75]. They engaged in consultations with their members and with grassroots women to solicit input into the process. They then worked with representatives of the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development and the Forum of Women Parliamentarians to integrate this input into specific actions to make the constitution gender-sensitive and increase the proportion of women in government (including 24 reserved seats for women in the 80 member parliament). Once the draft constitution adequately reflected women's interests, ProFemme worked countrywide to encourage women to support the document in a countrywide referendum. In the first elections under the new constitution (October 2003), women won almost half of the seats (48.8 percent). This included the 24 reserved seats and an additional 15 women elected in openly contested districts. In the 2008 elections, women's representation increased to 56.3%.

Elsewhere, civil society organizations have been important in promoting women's representation and participation as a base for action on gender concerns. The Tanzania Gender Networking Programme's Activism, Lobbying and Advocacy programme challenges gender-insensitive laws and policies through policy analysis, coalition development, campaign activities, and engaging in electoral processes and voter education[76]. In El Salvador, the Colectiva Feminista provides training in leadership skills and supports women in gaining political office and in maintaining a women's rights focus in their work once elected. The group also works for gender equity in local development at the municipal and national levels.[77] These are just two examples of how strong and effective women's organizations are critical – not only for increasing women's representation but also for ensuring gender concerns become central to the process of decision-making within government.

3.2.7. Gender-friendly parliaments

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[74] Balllington and Karam, *op cit*, p 39

[75] The process of developing Rwanda's new constitution took place during the 9 year transitional period following the 1994 genocide in that country. Women in a number of post-conflict situations have successfully taken that opportunity to push for greater representation of women in new governing structures.

[76] Pedwell, *op cit*, p 29

[77] *Ibid,* p 20

As mentioned previously, in general the organization of the work of parliaments has not recognized the double burden faced by women because of their responsibility for unpaid care work in the home. In addition, attitudes toward women within legislatures can be dismissive and sometimes even hostile. Instituting regulations to *promote gender-friendly parliaments* can play a significant role in improving conditions for women politicians. This will also have an effect on women's willingness to run for office.

A questionnaire developed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union[78] asks parliamentary authorities to report on measures they have implemented to make the institutions themselves more responsive to gender concerns. The questionnaire asks the following questions:

> Does the parliament have a *gender equality policy*?
>
> Which policy determines the *maternity/paternity leave or parental leave* conditions of parliamentarians?
>
> Does the parliament have a *policy on sexual harassment and/or violence*?
>
> Does the parliament have a *policy on equal access to resources*, such as financial benefits, allowances, office space and computers?
>
> Does the parliament have a *policy or complaints procedure that deals with gender equality related matters or harassment*?
>
> How much *time is devoted to [parliamentary activities]* (including sitting times, committee work, plenary, constituency time, vacation time/recess)?
>
> Do parliamentary sitting times *accommodate the needs of parliamentarians with family (or caring) responsibilities*? (including the discontinuation of night sittings and aligning sittings with the school calendar)
>
> Have any measures been implemented to *support the needs of parliamentarians in fulfilling their parental roles*? (including childcare facilities provided in parliament and financial assistance for childcare)
>
> Do parliamentary rules and practices *ensure non-discrimination* (for example, in language and behavior, dress codes, etc.)

Clearly, many of these gender-friendly policies would also benefit men, particularly those who play a greater role in the life of their families. For women, however, they are critical because women now play the greater role in care giving. Some countries are taking specific actions to promote these practices. In South Africa, for example, the parliamentary calendar has been reorganized to match the school calendar so that parliamentarians are either in recess or have constituency time when students are on vacation, debates finish earlier in the evening, and childcare facilities have been put in place.[79] Actions such as these can only enhance the ability of women to enter political life.

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[78] Intra-Parliamentary Union, "Mechanisms and Measures for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments", questionnaire
[79] /BKKUBRIBM Hykkuwm "/Gender Sinsitive Parliaments" in Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Is Parliament Open to Women?* p 82-3

3.3. The Caribbean and Belize

As in other parts of the world, women in the Caribbean have made some progress in political representation over the past decades. At the same time, this progress has been limited. In fact, the Anglophone Caribbean lags behind other parts of the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region and behind the world average in the percentage of women elected to national parliaments. While the percentage of women has reached about 20% globally and over 21% in LAC[80], **the average rate in the Anglophone Caribbean remains under 15%**[81].

Figure 3-3	
Women elected to Caribbean legislatures	
Country	**% women**
Guyana	31.3
Trinidad and Tobago	28.6
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	17.4
St Lucia	16.7
Grenada	13.3
Bahamas	13.2
Jamaica	12.7
Dominica	12.5
Suriname	11.8
Antigua and Barbuda	10.5
Barbados	10.0
St. Kitts and Nevis	6.7
Belize	3.1

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 2012

Figure 3-3 shows the percentage of women currently elected to legislatures in Caribbean countries. Guyana, holding first place with 31.3 percent, has both a proportional representation system and quotas. All other countries (except Suriname) continue to use the Westminster Model system inherited from the British with single-member, First Past The Post (FPTP) constituencies. As shown in the chart, the percentage of women elected range from a high of 28.6 percent in Trinidad and Tobago to a low of 3.1% in Belize.

It should be acknowledged that in Caribbean countries which have an upper house or Senate, the average representation of women is higher than in lower houses. In 2010, women, on average, made up 30 percent of appointed Senates, more than double their presence in elected lower houses[82]. This may reflect a willingness on the part of governments to make parliaments more responsive to women. At the same time, political power in government continues to rest in the elected legislature and cabinet. A more cynical explanation of the appointment of women may be that it provides the appearance of movement on gender concerns without fundamentally changing the system. The appointment of women to Senates and other public bodies is, of course, a positive development and essential to the overall goal of achieving gender balance in governance. It cannot, however, be a replacement for addressing barriers to women in electoral politics.

As discussed previously, **the FPTP system used in the Caribbean creates particular barriers** to women's ability to successfully enter electoral politics. It is also more challenging to develop and implement

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[80] 2010 figures
[81] Htun and Piscopo, "Presence without Empowerment? Women in Politics in Latin America and the Caribbean" p 18
[82] *Ibid,* p 18

gender quotas in these systems. This reality undoubtedly contributes to the failure of the Caribbean to keep pace with regional and global trends.

It has also been observed that **the atmosphere of Caribbean political culture is "non-woman friendly"**, explained in this way:

> *Commentators have already referred to the aggressive and confrontational type of masculine politics; the 'dirty' and dishonest aspects of corruption and patronage which seem to be endemic to our system and the personal abuse and sexual and morality-based attacks to which women are often open. Indeed, it can be argued that there are some women who can become very adept at this kind of politics and many of the women who do succeed become better at this kind of politics than some men. But this has always been and continues to be a minority.*[83]

Although a few women may overcome the barrier created by a male-dominated political world, others have confirmed that women are generally expected to conform to rather than challenge the masculine model. Even Trinidad and Tobago's first female Prime Minister, Kamla Persaad-Bissessar (who must certainly be counted among the region's most successful women politicians) has said,

> *It seems that [a woman political leader] is required to be genderless in her speech and manners, perhaps even to curb her feminine nature. The desire to make women politicians feel as though they are somewhere they do not belong, or to want to see them behave in ways that are not natural to them, is a difficulty that women politicians must overcome.*[84]

This resistance – and sometimes open hostility – to women in politics leads to a difficult "catch-22" situation.   Many of the most effective means to increase women's participation rely on decisions of governments and political parties to develop and implement strategies to promote women (including, but not limited to, quotas). However, those controlling decisions on whether those strategies will occur are often the same male politicians who benefit from the current system and whose perspectives are shaped by this non-woman friendly political culture.

The financing of electoral campaigns in the Caribbean is almost entirely private and largely without regulation. This once again leads to particular challenges for women. **It is generally more difficult for women to get financial support from either political parties or private donations.** One study found that the domination of party financing by private sources in Jamaica contributed to women being unable to successfully compete[85]. While some female candidates have indicated that it is easier to raise financial contributions from private sources than political parties, others say that it is still difficult to get private donations because of the reluctance of the private sector to invest in female candidates[86].

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[83] Reddock, "Address to the Graduation Ceremony of the Women in Politics Programme (Cohort II) of the National Women's Commission, Belize.
[84] La Rose, "Kamla: Things still tough for women politicians"
[85] Study by Munroe (2003), cited in Barrow-Giles, *op cit*, p 68
[86] Barrow-Giles, *op cit*, p 68

Political parties have not generally given priority to addressing gender disparities in campaign financing, leading to the conclusion:

> *Equity considerations, not withstanding protestations to the contrary, seem not to be given high priority by the political parties in their determination of the needs of the candidates who have been selected to contest general elections on behalf of the parties. Inequality, that is imbalances between parties and among candidates in terms of the distribution of the party's resources whether in cash or kind, is therefore rife.[87]*

While some individual female candidates report that their parties have been more supportive in providing campaign finances, lack of access to political money in the Caribbean continues to be an obstacle to women seeking political office.

Of course, Caribbean women, like women elsewhere, also face additional costs in campaigning due to their responsibility for work in the home. Given the high numbers of women in the Caribbean who are also the sole support of their families, this can be a significant deterrent to women. Political parties seldom, if ever, take this into account in the distribution of campaign funds.

A 2007 report by ECLAC reviewed women's political participation and representation in the Caribbean at all levels[88]. The observations of the report reflected many of the global and sub-regional issues outlined above and included:

> There is a **lag in both political will and results** in the areas of programmes to increase support for female politicians in the areas of campaign financing and other kinds of support; quota legislation and enforcement; and integration of accountability into national machineries.

> Governments **have not translated international commitments into national laws** with effective implementation.

> Party politics, the emergence of the concept of "male marginalization" and the shift from women and development to gender and development has **weakened the women's agenda**, making it difficult to highlight and address inequities.

> Caribbean countries are **too dependent on political will and non-legal measures** for the attainment of gender parity.

> Most women who become politically active **lack the expertise to conduct a gendered analysis of policies**.

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[87] *Ibid*, p 69
[88] Bart-Alexander, "Women's Political Participation and Gender Parity in Decision-making at all Levels in the Caribbean"

The report also notes that the 30% figure often used in quota systems is inadequate, saying that it is time to move past this "paltry figure"[89] to reflect true gender balance and give women a say in decision-making that reflects both their numbers and their contribution to society.

Despite rhetoric to the contrary, it is clear that governments and political parties in the Caribbean have not taken substantive measures to address barriers to women and achieve balance in representation. For the most part, *programmes to support women in politics have come primarily from civil society women's groups*. For example, since 1994, the Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women has included the Women's Political Forum. In its own words, the Network has been engaged "in a process of reshaping approaches to women's leadership using gender-based analysis of political systems and working toward the development of transformative politics".[90] The network has been involved in training potential women candidates from all parties, documenting information on women's contributions to local government, lobbying activities, and sharing their experience and expertise through training women for political office in Grenada, Guyana, Antigua and St. Kitts. While there has been no analysis of why the proportion of women in the legislature is significantly higher in Trinidad and Tobago than in other First Past the Post systems in the Caribbean, it is not unreasonable to assume that the sustained work of the Network has made a significant contribution to advances in women's representation.

At the same time, experience elsewhere shows that training and other support to potential women candidates will not necessarily lead to more women in the legislature. Since 1992, the Jamaica Women's Political Caucus, a non-partisan, non-governmental organization has been involved in a range of programmes, including: public education to promote women in politics; training for aspirants to political office through its Institute for Public Leadership; financial contributions for female candidates through its Candidates' Fund; and active campaigning for gender issues to be accorded high priority in government plans and programmes. Despite this work, the 2006 NGO shadow report to CEDAW reported that "statistics over the past decade, however, reveal a vastly increased number of women candidates running in elections but limited numbers actually gaining elected positions"[91] Female candidates between the 1993 and 2002 general elections doubled (from 14 to 28), while the percentage of women elected actually decreased slightly (from 12% to 10%)[92]. There has been little improvement since that time, with the current level of women's representation at 13.3 percent.

The experience of civil society organizations demonstrates that women will respond to training and support programmes and offer themselves for political office. However, actions to promote gender balance must move beyond individual women and women's groups and into political parties and government institutions that sustain many of the barriers to women's representation.

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[89] *Ibid,* p 18
[90] Network of NGOs of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women, *Put a Woman in the House of Parliament*, brochure
[91] AWOJA, *Jamaica and CEDAW: The NGO Perspective*, p 15
[92] Similar results were seen at the local government level, where the number of female candidates increased from 48 in 1009 to 114 in 2003 but the percentage of women elected remained stagnant (13% and 12%).

The same challenges that are faced by women in other parts of the Caribbean are also seen here in Belize. Belize's standing at the bottom of lists recording women's political representation in the Caribbean and worldwide suggests that the barriers for women here are even more entrenched than in other parts of the sub-region. This means, of course, that there is an urgent need to develop strategies that will ensure that women can take their rightful place in making the decisions that affect us all.

4. The Belizean Context

4.1. Gender and the status of women in Belize

While women certainly have made some advances in recent years, almost every indicator shows that women as a group continue to occupy a subordinate position in Belizean society. Certainly, Belize's dismal showing in terms of women's representation in elected bodies at all levels reflects deeply rooted gender inequality. Other manifestations of this include:

Women continue to face a disadvantaged position in employment. Despite a lower participation rate in the labour force (44.7% for women compared to 80.9% for men[93]), female unemployment rates are double those of men (33.3%/16.7%). Women's increased participation in higher education does not consistently translate into greater economic opportunities.

Women continue to bear the responsibility for the unpaid work of caring for children and men. This not only includes the day to day responsibilities of domestic work, but also the added labour needed during illness or crisis.   Women are expected to carry out these responsibilities whether or not they also work for pay.

The belief that men should be dominant and women should be submissive continues to shape relationships between women and men. Studies in Belize have shown that women are still expected to obey their husbands or partners[94]. The idea that men should "be the boss and keep women in their place" continues to be part of Belizean culture.[95]

Violence against women continues to be systematic and widespread. This includes domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, sexual abuse and exploitation of young women and girls, and sexual harassment. Sexual violence against adult women and older girls has become accepted as "no big deal" and men are seldom held accountable for violent and abusive sexual behavior.[96]

The above examples demonstrate that men continue to hold occupy a privileged position in Belize – in households, communities and society as a whole. Gender analysis does, of course, identify some ways in which men and boys experience particular vulnerabilities. For example, in many parts of Belize, boys

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[93] 2010 Population and Housing Census.
[94] Several studies demonstrating this are cited in Catzim-Sanchez, *Situation Analysis of Gender Issues in Belize,* p 59
[95] Lewis, Debra J., *Walking in the Darkness, Walking in the Light: A National Assessment of Actions on Ending Violence against Women",* p 32
[96] *Ibid*, p 33

have a lower rate of participation in secondary school and are more likely to drop out of school. This situation is not unique to Belize, and some people around the Caribbean have turned to the idea of "male marginalization" to explain this phenomenon. This trend has continued, despite the fact that the theory of male marginalization has been discredited by both male and female gender analysts across the region[97]. Recognizing that men and boys experience particular problems does not mean that the system of gender inequality has suddenly been turned on its head and that men are no longer dominant in that system. In fact, gender analysis reveals that many of the problems experienced by men and boys result from a gender identity based on relations of dominance and how that translates into expectations about what it means to "be a man".

As the ECLAC study observed, however, uncritical acceptance of the concept of male marginalization has made it more difficult to maintain a focus on addressing women's concerns. This is no less true in Belize. Indeed, some observers in Belize have expressed concern about a dangerous backlash against women and girls as a result of this approach. Work to promote gender equality and women's empowerment – in politics and in society as a whole – must guard against this trend.

4.2. Belize's political system

As mentioned previously, Belize's political system is based on the Westminster model inherited by British colonies. As part of the legacy of British colonialism, the Head of State continues to be the Governor-General as representative of the Queen. The Governor General is officially appointed by the Queen on the recommendation of the government in power at the time. The role of the Governor General is primarily ceremonial, although there are some important constitutional functions performed by whoever holds that office.

Within this context, Belize is governed through a parliamentary system including the legislative and executive branches of government.[98] Legislative functions are carried out through the National Assembly and executive functions through the Cabinet.

Although there have been some minor modifications in the years since independence, the basic principles and structure of the system remain intact.

4.2.1. The electoral model

Belize has a bicameral National Assembly composed of two chambers, ***an elected House of Representatives and an appointed Senate***.

There are currently 31 Area Representatives in the House of Representatives. Area Representatives are elected in general elections through ***single-member districts in a First Past The Post system***. The party that wins the greatest number of seats in the election forms the government, with the Leader of that

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[97] See Barriteau, "Requiem for the Male Marginalization Thesis in the Caribbean", among others.
[98] The third branch of government is the judiciary.

party becoming Prime Minister. Elections are usually held every five years, although the party in power can choose to call an election before the five year period is up.

There are 12 members in the Senate, appointed by the Governor-General with the following advice: six members are appointed with the advice of the Prime Minister, three with the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, one member with the advice of the Belize Council of Churches and the Evangelical Association of Churches, one member with the advice of the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Belize Business Bureau and one member with the advice of the National Trade Union Congress. Legislation to add a thirteenth Senator to represent non-governmental organizations was passed and signed into law, but has not yet been implemented by the government.

Although there are two chambers of the National Assembly, in theory, **primary authority rests with the House of Representatives** which has the power to pass new legislation, administrative policies and the budget. However, the Prime Minister and Cabinet wield virtually complete power in this process. The Senate has the power to delay legislation, but no authority to block or amend it.

At the local level, **cities, towns and villages have a different system for electing their councils**. Mayors (in cities and towns) and Chairpersons (in villages) are elected directly. The other members of council (10 in Belize City and 6 in Belmopan, district towns and villages) are elected through open elections where a list of candidates is presented and voters have an equal number of votes to the number of councilors to be elected. The appropriate number of candidates who receive the most votes on the list are elected. In practice, political parties nominate slates for city and town elections. In the villages, elections in recent years have also been characterized by a high level of partisan politics.

Despite the critical role of political parties in the electoral process at all levels, there is **no regulation of political parties** in Belize. Parties tend to guard their right to operate as private concerns beyond public scrutiny. Indeed, there is some indication that individuals sometimes exert considerable ownership and control over the parties, as demonstrated in 2009 when it was revealed that a few leading members in one of the parties claimed a considerable proportion of what had been assumed to be party assets, including its headquarters, newspaper and radio station.

There are **no campaign finance regulations** in Belize. As in the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean, the state also does not provide funds for political campaigns.

4.2.2. The Political Reform Commission

The most comprehensive review of Belize's political system since independence was through the Political Reform Commission. The Commission was appointed in January 1999 and was composed of 14 members (10 men and 4 women), including representatives of political parties, the public and private sector and various civil society organizations and the media. The work of the Commission included an extensive public consultation process. The final report, including recommendations, was completed in January 2000.

While a complete analysis of the views and recommendations of the Commission is beyond the scope of this review, the report discusses several areas relevant to women's participation and representation. In particular, it focused on gender issues in a chapter on Gender and Governance[99]. In the introduction to this chapter, the Commission acknowledges that women are "grossly under-represented" in areas of political and public sector leadership. It says,

> *The Commission is cognizant of the historical disadvantages and discrimination that women face and recognizes that these contribute to their under-representation in leadership positions in government and political parties. It is also aware that while some gains have been made by women in these areas there is a long way to go to have women's representation reflect their proportion of the population.[100]*

Unfortunately, however, the recommendations of the Commission did not include measures to address this reality. The Commission considered a proposal for a legal requirement that a minimum of 1/3 of all new appointments to public bodies be women, but ultimately rejected that idea. The report **makes no reference to consideration of special measures or quotas for elections**, despite their contention that…

> *…the majority of the Commission is supportive of the general principle that women should be equally represented on public bodies and urges that political parties contesting elections commit themselves to a permanent policy of making more of all their appointments to public bodies be women and increasing their efforts at getting more women in positions of leadership in the parties.[101]*

Although a few more women have been appointed to public bodies in the decade since the Commission's report, women's representation in electoral politics has stagnated, especially at the national level. The gross under-representation noted in the report continues to exist, and neither political parties nor governments have implanted strategies to address this. The experience since the report of the Commission demonstrates that "urging" male-dominated political parties, in particular, to adopt practices to promote gender balance is simply not enough. Strong and enforceable measures are called for.

In addition to the section on Gender and Governance, the report discusses several other issues that have been shown to have a significant impact on women's political representation: the regulation of political parties, campaign finance reform and proportional representation.

The majority of the Commission **opposed legislation to register political parties or regulate their activities**, despite the fact that most other organizations in Belize – including companies, trade unions and cooperatives – must be registered. The main rationale for not regulating parties was that there is

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[99] This chapter also addresses other issues in addition to the section on the Appointment of Women to Government Bodies, including the language of the constitution, child care, gender awareness education, international conventions, and guidelines for institutions accepting public funds.
[100] Political Reform Commission, *Final Report*, p 129
[101] *Ibid,* p 131

no need to do so unless they are receiving public resources. Some also pointed out that election related activities are somewhat regulated by election laws and that parties have made their constitutions and leaderships public information. Other Commissioners disagreed, with one contributing a strong dissenting view to the report, saying,

> *Political parties in Belize have evolved to play an extremely dominating role as mediator in Belize's societal relations. They are powerful organizations that affect and infiltrate almost every aspect of national and local life. They have been a part of what is wrong with democracy in Belize. They seek the most important job in the entire nation: to democratically administer the state of Belize[102].*

This Commissioner argued that political parties, as organizations who seek our authority to govern, should be required to follow regulations to help ensure democratic control, give enforceable rights to members, and promote financial and institutional transparency and disclosure.

As this Commissioner also noted, regulation of political parties is also related to the need for campaign finance regulation. On this issue, the Commission took a stronger stand and **supported campaign finance reform.** While the Commission noted that developing a specific package of regulations was not possible given the time available, Recommendation 79 states,

> *The Commission recommends that campaign finance regulation be developed as a matter of urgent priority for implementation before the next national elections. In this regard, the Commission recommends that government, without delay, commission an independent body of the public sector, the private sector and civil society with the mandate to:*
>
> a) *develop campaign finance regulation legislation for Belize;*
> b) *consult relevant interest groups on the matter;*
> c) *examine the approaches used by other nations with similar political systems;*
> d) *give special attention to the approaches of limiting of spending by political parties and candidates and of limiting of the time in which campaigning is allowed.[103]*

Unfortunately, this recommendation was not acted on by the government of the day, and no government since has made a serious attempt to address this issue.

The report of the Commission notes that it received a number of appeals to consider incorporating aspects of proportional representation for Belize. There is no indication in the report, however, that the Commission considered moving to a proportional representation system for the election of the House of Representatives.   The report did recommend a **change from an appointed to an elected Senate, with proportional representation** to be used in the election of Senators. Recommendation 43 states that, "The Commission recommends that Chapter VI of the Constitution be amended to allow for the

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[102] Dissenting view of Commissioner Dylan Vernon, Political Reform Commission, *op cit*, p 159
[103] Political Reform Commission, *op cit*, p 116

proportional election of the Senate."[104] The report also includes details on how this proportional representation system should be implemented.

Once again, this recommendation has not been implemented either by the government of the day or by successive governments.

4.2.3. The ascent of "handout politics"

A critical development in Belize's political culture since Independence is **the institutionalization of political clientelism or "handout politics"**, which can be defined in this way:

> *Political clientelism is an informal and voluntary political exchange between clients who provide or promise political support, and patrons, who provide or promise a variety of public and/or private resources and favours.*[105]

Handout politics manifests itself in many ways. Direct vote buying, such as "blue notes"[106] for votes, is certainly part of it. But it involves much more than that. Politicians (both incumbents and those entering the political arena) provide resources – money, land, jobs or access to public services and programmes – on the basis of political support. Government resources, which should be allocated on the basis of public policy priorities and objective criteria for eligibility, are increasingly channeled through politicians and their brokers. Elections become less and less about policy and programmes, and more and more about whether candidates can deliver the handouts people have been trained to expect. The relationship between politician, political party and the electorate is reflected in the comment of one voter during the 2008 election,

> *I came for a cheque they promised me from one month time and haven't gotten anything…they have to bring that cheque to my house for me to go and vote.*[107]

Political clientelism is a complex subject and in depth analysis is beyond the scope of this document. However, recent research in Belize suggests that **the system of handout politics has significant gender dimensions**[108]. Most politicians report that more women come for handouts than men. They say that this is because women have more responsibilities in taking care of children and households, so they have more reason to come for help.   This suggests that women are more dependent than men for handouts – and hence more dependent on the male politicians and political parties that control those handouts.

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[104] *Ibid*, p 78

[105] Definition provided by Dylan Vernon, currently undertaking Ph.D. research on political clientelism in Belize through the Institute for the Study of the Americas at the University of London. Informal communications with him have been useful in developing a perspective on the development of "handout politics".

[106] A "blue note" is a Belizean $100 bill.

[107] 7News Belize, February 6, 2008

[108] These observations come from communications with Mr. Vernon on the basis of his research to date.

Most politicians also indicate that they prefer to deal with women because they are less aggressive and often come for smaller things – food for that week, paying small bills, etc. Although they may occasionally ask for a larger item such as a piece of land or housing repairs, women are generally more modest in their requests. Men, on the other hand, ask for more "big ticket" items and items that are less based on need (land, a grant or loan for a car, even money for the casino). They are also likely to adopt a more demanding or threatening tone. Women, then, are seen as more malleable and easier to accommodate.

In addition, there is clear evidence that handout politics leads to abuse of women. In some quarters, it is openly acknowledged that women are expected to "pass a li bit" [of sex] to get a handout. Because many women have come to accept this kind of abuse as a fact of life, it probably happens more often than we know. The result is that women must sometimes provide sex to male brokers or campaign workers to get a "favour" that should be their right. A political culture that allows this sexual extortion to continue unchecked is highly unlikely to treat women as equals in other respects.

The exponential growth of handout politics has meant that the cost of being in politics has skyrocketed. Both incumbent politicians and standard bearers spend thousands of dollars each month providing handouts – not only at election time, but during the years leading up to each election as well. Costs of providing handouts spike several times a year – at Christmas, graduation time and Mothers Day, for example. And during election time, of course, the cost goes through the roof. Even intra-party conventions to choose candidates are becoming more and more expensive, sometimes costing in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. After including funds spent on political handouts during the entire period leading up to an election, costs spent on conventional campaign expenses (media time, signs, and flyers, for example) now represent only a small part of the real cost of getting elected.

A political system based on handouts, of course, has many negative repercussions for Belizean society. For women, it also makes it even more difficult to compete. As has been noted earlier, women have fewer financial resources, less access to political donations, and less access to the powerful (and sometimes corrupt) networks that fuel political campaigns. Furthermore, there is some evidence that women have a greater distaste for feeding the system of handouts and patronage, while men more often see it as just part of the reality of political life. For all of these reasons, the ascent of a system of handout politics in Belize is one more barrier to women's political representation.

4.3. The Women in Politics report

In 1998, the National Women's Commission (NWC) with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank sponsored research on women in politics in Belize. The results of this research were published in 2001 as *Women in Politics: Seeking Opportunities for Leadership in Belize.* The purpose of the assessment was to provide the NWC with an effective tool to lobby for and recommend changes in the electoral system that would result in increased numbers of female aspirants for political office and hence, more female representatives within the system. The study had the following overall objectives:

To determine the level and nature of women's leadership in Belize – particularly their role as leaders in politics.

To understand the reasons behind women's level and style of leadership.

To recommend the most viable alternatives for increasing women's political leadership at all levels.[109]

Methods used in the study included a literature review, resource interviews with individuals familiar with the political process in Belize, focus groups and a countrywide random survey of 2013 women defined as "active" in politics, non-governmental organizations or churches. The survey documented a profile of a female political leader in Belize as well as attitudes toward women in politics and recommendations for getting more political leaders.

A review of the study's findings reveals that ***there is a filtering effect through the various stages of political engagement that leads to a very low rate of women's political representation***. Figure 4-1 shows the number of women surveyed who answered "yes" to each of 5 questions:

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[109] Rosberg and Catzim, *Women in Politics*, p 13

Are you willing to be a leader?
Are you willing to join a political party?
Are you a member of a political party?
Have you ever run for office at any level?
Have you ever held office at any level?

Figure 4-1
Women in Politics: The Filtering Effect
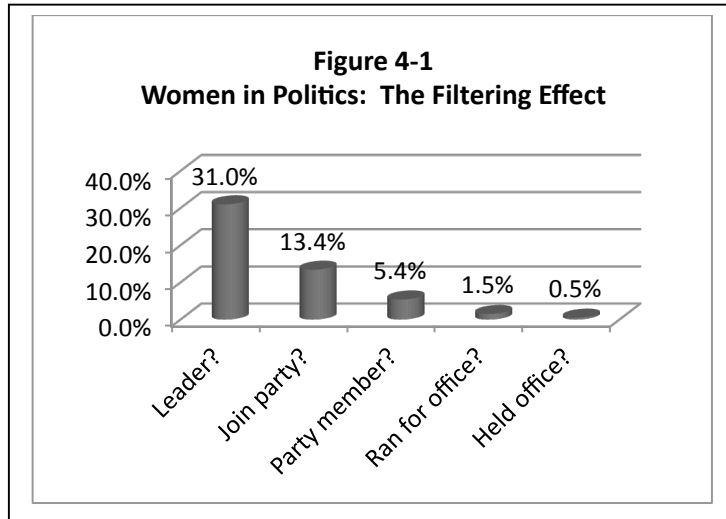
As the chart shows, there is a considerable drop off between the percentage of women who are willing to be leaders and those who are willing to join a political party. There is another, significant drop off between those who say they might be willing to join a party and those who actually do. This suggests that political parties themselves are a significant "bottle neck" for women who see themselves as leaders but do not become actively involved in political parties or in running for office.

Some of the other significant findings of the study included:

> ***There is no evidence that women will not vote for women who run for office.*** Most respondents to the survey said that the main reason they do not vote for women is that there are no women to vote for.

> ***Once in office, women are often marginalized by a male-dominated system.*** Women politicians said that the most significant obstacle they faced is that decisions are made without them.

> ***Most respondents continued to place the onus of responsibility to solve the problem of women's underrepresentation on individual women.*** "Moral support for women" and "Education for women candidates" were the most often cited strategies for getting more women elected.

The study proposed a long list of recommendations designed to increase women's access to political leadership. ***The recommendations, however, suffered from a number of critical limitations***:

> By their own admission, the report's authors avoided any recommendations that were deemed to be controversial or which did not already have a base of support. Given that women's lack of political representation is the result of deeply rooted gender inequality, strategies to effectively address the problem are likely to be controversial, at least at first. In addition, since the same

system of gender inequality supports attitudes that may be unsympathetic to women, building support for new ways of thinking will be an essential part of the process of change.

The recommendations lacked clear lines of responsibility and accountability for implementation.

There was no clear time line for implementation. Recommendations were labeled as "short", "medium" or "long" term, without definition of what this should mean in real time. This is particularly problematic given the importance of election cycles when dealing with issues related to political representation.

No consideration was given to the resources needed to implement the recommendations and where those resources might come from.

No monitoring mechanism was given to guide the implementation process.

As a result, the report had little impact in terms of action on its recommendations. Only one recommendation has now been implemented. Recommendation 3, "Train female (potential) political candidates" has now been taken up by the National Women's Commission through its Women in Politics training programme. It was almost a decade after the publication of the report, however, that this recommendation became reality. Other recommendations have not been acted on by political parties, civil society organizations or government. Some of these recommendations included the organization of a non-partisan Women Voters League; the use of proactive strategies such as the development of a non-partisan women's agenda for elections; and the election of male and female co-chairs within political parties.

Two critical areas were not addressed in the report's recommendations. ***No consideration was given to including temporary special measures*** as a strategy to promote women. This may have been the result of avoiding controversial issues in formulating the recommendations. In addition, the recommendations ***paid scant attention to the obligation of political parties*** in advancing women's leadership, beyond the recommendation for male-female co-chairs for the parties.

The Women in Politics report was a significant step in focusing attention on the need for greater women's political representation in Belize. The task now is to deepen the analysis of the barriers that continue to marginalize women in the political process. Part of this analysis must include a consideration of how temporary special measures can play a role in bringing greater gender balance to politics in Belize. Furthermore, greater attention should be paid to the role of political parties as gatekeepers to the electoral process and, in particular, how to make parties more accountable to the aspirations of women. Effective strategies for change will require action at all levels – by government, by political parties, by civil society organizations and, of course, by women themselves.

5. Women's Political Representation: How far have we come?

There have been some improvements in the status of women in Belize over the past few decades. For example, more women are accessing higher education, women are playing a stronger role in the public service, and some women have entered non-traditional fields. At the same time, however, the proportion of women in elected positions country-wide has remained largely stagnant. The following is a review of how far women have come. In fact, it is perhaps more accurate to say that the numbers show how far women have **not** come in recent years.

5.1. The National Assembly

As mentioned previously, **Belize currently has only one woman elected to the House of Representatives** of the National Assembly, and no elected female members on the government side. In addition, considering all elections since independence, only a handful of women have been successful in running for Area Representative. Women have also been poorly represented as candidates for the political parties.

Figure 5-1: Percentage of Women Candidates in Belizean National Elections				
	UDP	PUP	Other	Total
1984	0	7.1	0	3.8
1989	3.6	3.6	0	3.5
1993	6.9	6.9	0	6.8
1998	10.3	6.9	21.7	12.3
2003	10.9	6.3	0	6.8
2008	0	6.9	7.0	5.0
2012	0	9.7	0	4.1

Table 5-1 shows that the percentage of women running as candidates at the national level has leveled off at about 4-7% since the 1993 election. The exception was in 1998, which was the only election in which women represented more than 10% of the candidates. However, this was primarily due to the fact that there were four parties in addition to the two major parties running in this election. These parties did not run full slates of candidates, although they generally included proportionately more women. The election results demonstrated that candidates from these parties had little chance of success. In the most recent election, this severe underrepresentation of women as candidates continued, with the UDP running no women candidates and the PUP three.

The situation is even more dismal when looking at the proportion of women elected to the National Assembly. Since Independence, only 5 women have been elected – Jane Usher (1984-1989), Faith Babb (1993-1998), Dolores Balderamos Garcia (1998-2003 and 2012-), Ana Patricia (Patty) Arceo (1998-2003) and Sylvia Flores (2003-2008)[110]. Figure 5.2 dramatizes the severe imbalance in the House of Representatives. This includes the 2008 to 2012 term where all seats in the House were held by men.

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[110] Prior to Independence, Gwendolyn (Gwen) Lizarraga was the only woman elected after the implementation of the Ministerial system in Belize and the achievement of self-government. She won three elections (1961, 1965 and 1969) and served as Minister of Education and Housing throughout her three terms (Minister of Education, Social Services and Housing, 1961-1965)

Considering all national elections since Independence, men have made up 94.4% of the total number of candidates and women 5.6%. Men have represented 97.1% of elected representatives and women 2.9%. Despite rhetoric from the political parties, there has been

Figure 5-2: Percentage Males/Females Elected in Belize National Elections
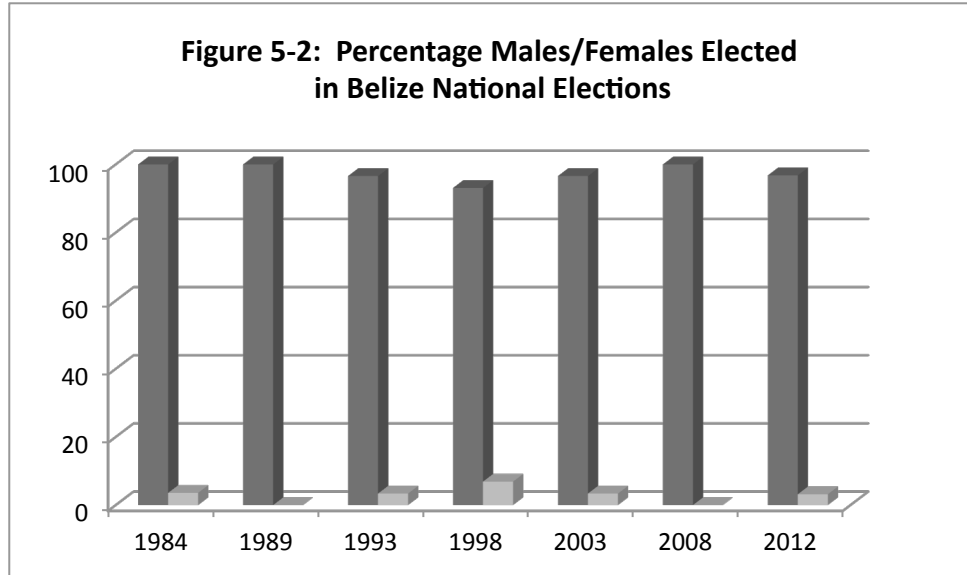
virtually no improvement over the years. The face of national politics in Belize remains persistently male.

5.2. The Cabinet

Along with the Governor-General, the Cabinet represents the executive branch of government in Belize. Most Cabinet Ministers are appointed from the House of Representatives, although the Prime Minister can and sometimes does appoint Cabinet Ministers from the Senate. Historically, women's representation in the Cabinet reflects their presence (or lack thereof) in the House. Since there are currently no women elected to the government side of the House, *the two women currently in Cabinet were drawn from appointed Senators.*

Two of the five women elected to the House – Dolores Balderamos Garcia[111] and Sylvia Flores – were appointed to full positions in the Cabinet during the term of their governments. It is noteworthy, however, that both women were appointed to the Ministry of Human Development (although Sylvia Flores was also Minister of Defense and National Emergency Management for a short period in 2003-4).

Two other elected women were appointed Minister of State during their time as Area Representatives – Faith Babb in the Ministry of Human Development and Patty Arceo in the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment. Jane Usher was Deputy Minister of Health in the period just before and after Independence (1979-1989).

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[111] Although two women were elected to the government side during Ms. Balderamos Garcia's first term in office, the government did not appoint both women as full Ministers. Since this was the first time that two women had been elected to the House at the same election, it was suggested by one informant that this was a lost opportunity to promote women's representation at the Cabinet level.

Prior to the 2012 elections, only one woman had been appointed to the Cabinet through the Senate. In 2007, Senator Lisa Shoman was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs until the end of the government's term in 2008.   Following the 2012 elections, the Prime Minister appointed two women Cabinet Ministers via the Senate. Senator Lisel Alamilla was appointed Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development and Senator Joy Grant was appointed Minister of Energy, Science and Technology and Public Utilities. This was the first time that women Ministers were appointed via the Senate immediately following the elections and the first time that two women have held full positions as Ministers at the same time.   While this is clearly somewhat of an improvement (in the last government, there were no women represented in Cabinet), women still only occupy two of fifteen full Ministerial positions (13.3%). There are also an additional six Ministers of State who are all male.

5.3. Local Government

The situation with respect to women's representation is only slightly better at the municipal level. Until 1999, Belize City Council had nine elected members. The Mayor was not elected directly by the voters, but came from the group of nine councilors who were successful at the polls. Most elections during this period saw women winning one of these nine seats (11.1%). The exceptions were in 1983 when there were no women, and 1996 when two women were elected (22.2%).

Effective in the 1999 election, Belize City Council increased to eleven members – a directly elected Mayor and ten councilors. Figure 5-3 shows the numbers and percentage of women on Belize City Council since that time.

As the figures show, the numbers of women on council increased in the 1999 and 2003 elections, with women representing more than half of the council in 2003.

Figure 5-3: Women on Belize City Council*		
Year	# women	% women
1999	4	36.4
2003	6	54.6
2006	4	36.4
2009	3	27.3
2012	1	9.1
* 11 member council (including Mayor)		

The numbers have dropped off significantly since that time, however. The 2012 election saw this slide continue. Very few women were included on party slates – the UDP included one woman, the PUP two (including the mayoral candidate) and the third party VIP one woman. As a result, the representation of women on the Belize City Council (9.1%) is lower than it has been since 1983.

Although the proportion of women on the Belize City Council has actually declined in recent years, 2006 saw the election of the city's first woman Mayor. Zenaida Moya served two terms as Mayor, but did not run again in 2012.

Overall, it is apparent that, despite the achievement of Mayor Moya, the level of women's representation at the Belize City Council is stagnating. This is particularly disheartening since in 2003, women actually made up more than half of the council, but this achievement could not be sustained.

Figure 5-4 shows women's representation on the Belmopan City Council since its first election in 2000. During this period, there have been two or three women on each successive council, although there has never been a woman Mayor or Mayoral candidate.

In recent years, women have made some limited gains in the proportion of women represented at the town board level.   Prior to 2000, women generally represented about 12-16% of candidates and about 10-16% of those elected. (An exception was seen in 1981, when just over 20 percent of elected town board members were female.)   Since then, however, women have represented about 18-24% of candidates and 20-26% of elected town board members. Figure 5-5 shows the percentage of male and female candidates and elected members since Independence and demonstrates this increase in recent years. However, it also shows that the percentages decreased somewhat in the last two elections. In 2012, the percentage of women elected to town boards (18.4%) dipped below 20% for the first time since 2000. Most town boards elected only one or two women members, with the exception of Corozal (where three were elected) and Benque Viejo del Carmen (where no women were elected).

Figure 5-4: Women on Belmopan Council*		
Year	# women	% women
2000	2	28.6
2003	3	42.9
2006	2	28.6
2009	3	42.9
2012	2	28.6
* 7 member council (including Mayor)		

Figure 5-5: Percentage Male/Female Candidates in Town Board Elections					
Candidates			Elected		
Year	Percentage Male	Percentage Female	Year	Percentage Male	Percentage Female
1981	84.4	15.6	1981	78.6	21.4
1985	88.3	11.7	1985	87.8	12.2
1988	86.6	13.4	1988	89.8	10.2
1991	83.5	16.5	1991	83.7	16.3
1994	87.2	12.7	1994	83.7	16.3
1997	87.9	12.1	1997	89.8	10.2
2000	81.4	18.6	2000	79.6	20.4
2003	76.0	24.0	2003	73.5	26.5
2006	75.7	24.3	2006	77.6	22.4
2009	82.1	17.9	2009	78.4	21.6
2012	78.3	21.7	2012	81.6	18.4

Even though women have achieved some gains, they have been slow to come and town boards are still far from gender-balanced. Furthermore, although women may represent about 20% of town board members in recent years, since direct elections for Mayor began in 2000, there has been only one woman elected to that post. From 2003 to 2012, Elsa Paz was Mayor of San Pedro. She has held that position for three terms but did not run for re-election in 2012. In 2012, only one woman ran for Mayor in town board elections, also in San Pedro. Maria "Conchita" Flota was the unsuccessful candidate for

Mayor on the PUP slate. Once again, experience shows that the highest level of leadership is heavily dominated by men.

At the village level, women's progress varies in different parts of the country. In some districts, such as Belize District, women play a more significant role on Village Councils, although once again a more significant role does not mean that the councils are gender-balanced. In other parts of the country, there are fewer women involved, and in a significant number of villages there are no women at all on the village council.

Figure 5-6: Women on Village Councils by District (2010 elections)				
District	# of villages	# of village council seats*	# of women elected*	average # of women/council*
Toledo	48	336	50	1.04
Orange Walk	24	168	44	1.83
Belize	34	238	93	2.74
Stann Creek	23	161	36	1.57
Corozal	28	192	46	1.64
Cayo	34	238	41	1.21
Totals	191	1,333	310	1.62
*includes Chairman and Village Councilors				

Figure 5.6 provides information on the number of women involved in village councils and the average number of women on the councils by district. On average and countrywide, there are 1.62 women on a 7 member council, with a low of 1.04 in Toledo and a high of 2.74 in Belize District.

Figure 5-7: Women Chairs of Village Councils by District			
District	# of villages	# of women chairs	% of villages
Toledo	48	2	4.17
Orange Walk	24	3	12.50
Belize	34	12	35.29
Stann Creek	23	3	13.04
Corozal	28	2	7.14
Cayo	34	2	5.88
Totals	191	24	12.57

Figure 5-7 provides additional information on women's presence at the village council level by looking at the number of women who chair the councils and the percentage of villages that have a woman as village Chair. Once again, the numbers vary considerably by district. Countrywide, only about one in eight villages are chaired by a woman, and

Figure 5.8: Village Councils with No Women's Representation			
District	# of villages	# of village councils with no women	% of village councils with no women
Toledo	48	25	52.08
Orange Walk	24	1	4.17
Belize	34	0	0.00
Stann Creek	23	7	30.43
Corozal	28	6	21.43
Cayo	34	12	35.29
Totals	191	51	26.70

that figure is much lower in Toledo, Cayo and Corozal Districts.

Furthermore, Figure 5-8 shows that, in a significant number of villages, there are no women represented on the village council at all. More than one in four villages in Belize has no women on its council. More than half of the councils in Toledo have no women, and only Belize District and Orange Walk have at least one woman on all or almost all of the councils.

Clearly, while women have made inroads in some areas, there is still a long way to go before women are adequately represented at the village level.

5.4. Political Appointments

While the main focus of this analysis is on women's representation in electoral politics, it is also telling to look at the number of women appointed by government to various positions. In addition to the Senate, government makes appointments to high level positions in the public service and the diplomatic corps, as well as to various boards, commissions and committees.

There has been a trend by the government and opposition in recent years to appoint somewhat more women to the Senate. Since 2003, the senate has been composed of twelve members – six appointed by the government, three by the opposition and one each by the churches, the business community and the trade unions[112]. In addition, there is a President of the Senate, who can be elected from among the members or nominated from outside. Prior to 2003, the Senate was composed of nine members, including the President. During the period following independence and until the 2003 change, there were generally two or three women appointed to the nine member body, representing 22.2% to 33.3% of the members.

Figures 5-9, 5-10 and 5-11 show the composition of the Senate[113] since its expansion to twelve members (plus President). These figures show, both in government and opposition, the PUP's appointments to the Senate in recent years have generally been gender-balanced. Although the UDP appointed no women to the Senate when in opposition following the 2003 election, they did appoint more women after taking power in 2008, with two women members and a female President of the Senate. They

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[112] Legislation has been passed to allow for the appointment of one additional senator from non-governmental organizations, but this has not yet been implemented.
[113] The charts are based on the first set of Senate appointments made immediately after the elections in these years. Senate appointments can, and frequently do, change during the term of the government.

improved this record following the 2012 elections, appointing three women and three men. Four of these Senate appointments (two women and two men) were also appointed to Cabinet.

Figure 5-9: 2003 Senate Appointments*		
	Men	**Women**
Government (PUP)	3	3
Opposition (UDP)	3	0
Other	3	0
Total	9	3
% women		25.0
* excluding President		

Figure 5-10: 2008 Senate Appointments*		
	Men	**Women**
Government (UDP)	4	2
Opposition (PUP)	1	2
Other	3	0
Total	8	4
% women		33.3
* excluding President		

It should be pointed out that the appointments made by churches, the business community and trade unions actually drag down the percentage of women represented in the Senate. Since they began making appointments in 2003, none of these groups have appointed a woman to represent them at this level[114].

Figure 5-11: 2012 Senate Appointments*		
	Men	**Women**
Government (UDP)	3	3
Opposition (PUP)	1	2
Other	3	0
Total	7	5
% women		41.7
* excluding President		

Women currently represent eight of the twenty-one Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in government Ministries (38.1%)[115]. CEOs are a combination of career public servants who have served in this capacity in governments headed by both political parties, and others who are brought in specifically by the current government in power. The significant number of women at this level would appear to reflect women's overall level of success in the public service. There are also eighteen women who serve as Heads of Departments in the various Ministries[116], making a total of twenty-six women serving in senior management positions in the public service.   Governments also make appointments to the diplomatic service***. Of eighteen diplomatic missions listed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, twelve (85.7%) are headed by men and only two (14.3%) by women (four are listed as vacant)***[117]***.***

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[114] The candidate selected by non-governmental organizations to represent them in the event that the legislation is applied in that regard is also male.

[115] Information from the Ministry of the Public Service, October 2012. The list of CEOs provided by the Ministry includes the positions of Cabinet Secretary, Financial Secretary and Solicitor General.

[116] Information from the Ministry of the Public Service, October 2012. This number does not include the Director of the Women's Department who had recently tendered her resignation.

[117] Ministry of Foreign Affairs website

Figure 5-12: Composition of Selected Appointed Boards

Board	Total Members	Men	Women	% Women	Female Chair?
Social Security Board	9	6	3	33.3	No
Development Finance Corporation (DFC)	9	6	3	33.3	No
Central Bank	8	6	2	25.0	No
Public Utilities Commission (PUC)	7	6	1	14.3	No
Belize Telecommunications Limited (BTL)	9	8	1	11.1	No
Belize Electricity Limited (BEL)	10	10	0	0.0	No
TOTAL	52	42	10	19.2	0 of 6

The government also makes appointments to various boards, commissions and committees. While it is not possible to consider every appointment made by government, Figure 5-12 shows the composition of six of the most significant and influential boards where all or most of the appointments are made by government[118] and where the Chairs are also appointed by government.[119] Because some appointments are made by other entities, government cannot be held completely responsible for the level of women's representation. Nevertheless, they have the greatest influence in this regard.

The figures show that *the numbers of women appointed to public Boards reflect the overall trend that women are more represented in appointed rather than elected positions, especially at the national level*. At the same time, *appointed bodies are still not gender-balanced*. Furthermore, from 2011 to 2012[120], the proportion of women appointed on these boards had actually declined from 28.9 percent to 19.2% percent and the number of female chairs of these bodies had similarly declined from two to none.

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[118] As of October/November 2012

[119] In some cases, these appointments are made by the Governor General on the advice of government. In the case of BEL and BTL, appointments are made because government is the majority shareholder. The number of members currently appointed by government in each case is: Social Security: 5 of 9; DFC: 9 of 9 (although 5/9 are recommended by other groups); Central Bank: 4 plus 2 of 3 ex-officio members (1 additional member serves by invitation); PUC: 7 of 7; BTL: 5 of 9; BEL : 8 of 10

[120] In the period from the initial research for this report and the updated version

5.5. Political Parties

As we mentioned above, the face of national politics in Belize is male, and this is also reflected in the decision making bodies of political parties. Men continue to dominate the national councils of the major parties. At the constituency level, almost all chairs of committees are men, despite the fact that it is generally recognized that women do a great deal of the work during political campaigns.

The National Executive of the PUP/Peoples' United Party currently[121] has twenty-eight members. Of these, five are female, including two of five Deputy Party Leaders and the Chair of the United Women's Group. This represents 17.9 per cent of the executive, despite the stipulation in the PUP constitution that all party bodies must include 30 percent women. Only two of thirty-one constituency chairs are women. The numbers are similar for the UDP/United Democratic Party. Of the thirty-one members of their Central Executive, six (19.4% per cent) are female, including the position of Director of Women[122]. In terms of the smaller parties, an informant from VIP/Vision Inspired by the People said that four of their seven person Executive are women (57.1%), although no requirements for gender balance are included in their constitution[123]. The PNP/People's National Party did not provide information on their party bodies, but the respondent indicated that three of the party leader's closest advisors are women.

The major parties have also paid scant attention to the underrepresentation of women in their election manifestos. When they have included some reference to enhancing women's position, it is phrased in general terms that make it impossible for women to hold the party accountable for its actions once in government. When discussing gender equality, manifestos may refer to increasing the participation of women in decision-making but do not provide concrete commitments in this regard.

5.6. Observations on Women's Representation

The low level of women's representation in electoral politics in Belize has not gone unnoticed. ***Both international and national bodies have called on Belize to take concrete action to improve the level of women's representation.***

In 2007, the *Concluding Comments* to Belize of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee) expressed their concern about the low rate of representation of women in public life and in elected bodies. They also expressed concern that the State party (Belize) does not support the use of quotas or targets to accelerate the realization of de facto equality between women and men in all areas of the convention. It urges Belize to use temporary special measures and to

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[121] Information from the PUP website, October 2012

[122] Information from UDP Secretariat, October 2012. Information on the number of female chairs of constituency committees was not available because elections were in progress. However, previous experience indicates that few of these positions are likely to be held by women.

[123] As included on VIP website

recognize that *"the application of temporary special measures is part of a necessary strategy toward accelerated achievement of substantive equality for women."*[124]

It is certain that Belize will not reach the Millennium Development Goals target of thirty percent women in national parliaments by 2015. Recognizing this, in 2010 the UNDP Belize Office Representative observed,

> *While there are many women holding CEO, heads of departments and senior public servants positions, the prevailing under-representation of women at the highest levels of decision-making in Belize represents a fundamental democratic deficit; strong political commitment is critical in addressing this challenge through empowered gender mechanisms and gender sensitive policies.*[125]

Belize's position at the bottom of global lists analyzing women's rates of representation in national legislatures will undoubtedly continue to attract the attention of organizations supporting work in the area of development, democratic governance, and women's rights.

At home, the situation analysis carried out in Belize to support the development of the new National Gender Policy also identified the low levels of women's representation as a problem. The report also reveals that this concern is not only felt by international bodies or women's rights groups at home. Women and men in the community also see the need for action to ensure that women take their fair place in Belizean politics. The report observes,

> *In nationwide consultations with young women and men, there was an overwhelming support for increasing women's political participation at the highest levels of government. Young women in one district were particularly adamant about women's access to decision-making positions as a prerequisite for achieving gender equality and equity. In another district, young men advocated strongly for young women to become leaders in all spheres of life, including politics. Among adult men and women, there was a general consensus of the need to completely re-structure Belize's governance system if any type of equity is ever to be achieved.*[126]

Based on the situation analysis, the new Revised National Gender Policy (2010) includes the development of a national strategy for increasing women's political participation, including their participation as candidates in national and municipal elections and appointment to leadership positions within public and private institutions. The Policy also calls for temporary special measures to meet specific targets in this regard.

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[124] *Concluding Comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: Belize*, Section 17-18.
[125] Roquette, Dr. Francisco, UNDP Belize Office Assistant Representative, *Press Release, September 15, 2010.*
[126] Catzim-Sanchez, Adele, *Situation Analysis of Gender Issues in Belize*, p 68

From the woman and man on the street in Belize to international organizations, ***there exists a wide recognition that action is necessary to address the low level of women's representation in our governing bodies.***

6. The Process of Politics and Women's Representation in Belize

The following sections incorporate the observations of informants into a description and analysis of the intersection of gender and politics in Belize. Both the interviews and focus groups revealed a high degree of consensus on both the issues women face in their struggle to be represented and what needs to be done to jump start the process of change.

6.1. The Impact of Women's Absence

The majority of informants agreed that ***the lack of women at the national level and the underrepresentation of women at all levels is a serious problem in Belize***, with some adding that it is a *"very serious"* or *"major, major"* problem. Others said that it was a "concern" or qualified their answers to indicate that they recognized that the issue was important, even if not a "serious problem". Only one informant believed that it was not an issue at all.

Some informants pointed out that a ***political system that does not provide for women's representation is not truly democratic*** and that women have a right to be represented at all levels. One elected politician called the situation "unacceptable" and said that there is no excuse for allowing the situation to continue. At the voters' focus group, one male participant said that the failure to empower women in the political process is "anti-democratic". He continued,

> *In Belize, women are in the majority but have no political say. That's a frightening thing. How can you talk about national policy without 51% of the population? It's a kind of apartheid.*

Another informant stressed that the national leadership should reflect the make-up of the country. All of these observations demonstrate the recognition that when women are not represented, our democracy is flawed and women fall short of achieving their full human rights.

In addition, many informants said that women bring different values and priorities to the table and that ***the underrepresentation of women has significant effects on the decisions that affect the lives of both women and men in Belize.*** Many informants agreed that men and women have different perspectives and that when decisions are made without hearing the perspectives of women, issues of particular concern to them are trivialized and marginalized. One elected woman said, "*We're talking about protecting the young ones, about women's rights. Those guys don't want to hear about that.*" In the advocates' focus group, participants related that, regardless of how much information is provided to politicians beforehand, it often makes little difference when women are not there when decisions are made. One woman said,

Politicians have one perspective on issues. There's no opportunity to hear the perspective of women in the decision-making forum, when they're actually making decisions. They forget, or choose to forget, what they've been told.

The CEOs' focus group also acknowledged that the lack of women "in the room" when decisions happen can make a difference. They pointed out that the increased number of women senior public officers has made a difference in the extent to which gender concerns are a part of the policy process, but "*those things may not make it in when the actual decision is made by all men. There are some things that men just don't see as an issue.*" This general recognition that women's concerns will not be given priority when women are not there contributes to one informant's comment that "*we need women there to show that women's interests are being taken care of.*"

It is not, however, only issues of particular concern to women that lose out when women are not represented. A number of informants pointed out that there are differences in how women and men approach issues in general. Some pointed out that men tend to think short term, whereas women often take a longer term view of issues and how they should be addressed. Some observed that men tend to focus more on physical infrastructure whereas women think more about social infrastructure. In the view of some informants, men often see physical infrastructure projects as an end in themselves, without considering what else is needed to make those projects have the desired results. From this perspective, having more women in the decision-making process could well lead to more effective decisions with greater impact.

There was considerable agreement among almost all informants that women and men bring different strengths to the political decision-making process. One candidate pointed out that Belize is a small country and resources are scarce, concluding, "*We can't afford to leave out 51% of the population. Leaving out women has half the impact [we should have].*" The Leader of the Opposition said that he believes it is very important to have much greater participation of women in Belizean politics and continued,

I've been fortunate to serve with women in Cabinet. It was clear to me that they bring an important perspective to government that has been missing.

These insights reflect the predominant view among informants that greater representation of women in our governing bodies would lead to a more balanced approach and better results. As another informant pointed out, "*we will never know the true potential of the nation without women*".

Some informants also pointed out that **the absence of women not only affects the decisions that are made by government, but also how those decisions are made**. Several informants commented that women and men appear to have different motivations for becoming involved in politics, and that these different motivations make for different ways of operating once in office. While most informants indicated that both men and women brought strengths to political decision making, there was often a sense that the lack of balance created when governing bodies are composed of all (or almost all) men is a real concern.

Some informants suggested that men seem to be more "*externally driven*" and policy decisions are often made to "*massage someone's ego*"[127] – an approach that sometimes wastes resources that might be better used elsewhere. One elected politician said that men see politics as a business, whereas women bring a different set of values to the process that is based in part on concern for the future of the nation's young people. From a more cynical perspective, a participant in the advocates' focus group observed that, "*women enter into politics for service, men to get rich*". A significant number of informants (including elected women, unsuccessful candidates and others) indicated that they believe that women generally have a greater problem with corruption whereas men more often see questionable or corrupt practices as a necessary (although perhaps regrettable) part of political life.

It is important to note that a significant number of informants pointed out that ***most male politicians do not accept the view that something is lacking when women are not represented***. Some women said that male politicians are comfortable with the current situation where they have the upper hand. Another pointed out that, even today, cultural influences lead some men to believe that women should stay at home. One informant said,

> *They don't understand the need [for women to be represented]. It's not important to them. They don't see the need for more diversity. They think they can do it, they can represent all of the people. It comes from the view that this is a man's domain, a man's world. And the reality is, the way they behave and the way they act excludes women.*

If it is indeed true that most male politicians believe that women and women's perspectives are not really needed in our governing bodies, it is not surprising that Belize has seen so little progress in this regard. A few informants maintained that younger men seem to be more open to accepting the need for women to be a part of political decision-making. However, in the absence of targeted strategies to ensure that women are present when the decisions are made, Belize will continue to suffer the effects of the absence of women in the room for a long time to come.

6.2. Politics in Belize

Women's political representation cannot be analyzed in isolation from its social and political context. While addressing some of the larger concerns at this stage of Belize's political development may be beyond the scope of this report, it is important to recognize that these issues have both direct and indirect implications for women's representation.

There was a significant sense coming from virtually all informants that ***there are flaws in the political process in Belize***. Some see these flaws as very serious and reflective of a crisis in confidence in the system. Others saw these concerns as problematic but also felt that they can be addressed as Belize develops greater political maturity. There was some tendency that, the closer informants were to power within the political parties, the more optimistic they were that these issues could be successfully

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[127] One informant cited research conducted several years ago by Katalyst which concluded that the policies that are implemented and implemented quickly in Belize tend to be those that are income generating or that will massage someone's – usually a Cabinet Minister's – ego.

addressed, particularly by political parties and the governments they lead. Some women who have been successful within the political sphere, however, report that they are disillusioned with the system and some women have withdrawn from political involvement because of their experience as elected politicians or candidates.

While informants varied in their views about how readily the flaws in Belize's political system can be resolved, there was considerable agreement about the need for greater action on these issues. Clearly, actions to enhance the level of women's representation will be most effective when the overall health of our democracy is assured.

6.2.1.   Issues of Political Process

Experience elsewhere has shown that a country's form of electoral system has a significant impact on the level of women's representation. Women consistently do better under proportional representation systems than under plurality/majority systems, including such First Past The Post systems as our Westminster Model. Most of those interviewed agreed that **it is time to look at whether our electoral system is accomplishing what we want it to do**. One informant said that, thirty years after Independence, it is time to review whether our system is accomplishing what we want it to, saying, "*The British system hasn't failed totally, but it has failed.*"   In addition to concerns about women's representation, informants raised other areas where our current system of national elections is problematic. In particular, several informants raised the issue of the lack of equality in the value of each vote due to huge differences among the sizes of constituencies.   Other informants stressed that reconsidering our electoral system should be a thoughtful process based on education and debate and that it should include an assessment of all areas of political reform, including the possibility of moving to a proportional representation or mixed system.

As mentioned previously, systems with clear regulations for the operation of political parties are beneficial for women, and indeed they play a role in insuring the effectiveness of democracy. A significant majority of those interviewed agreed that **the lack of registration and regulation of political parties is a problem in Belize.** Regulation would promote greater transparency and accountability within parties. One informant observed that, "*If parties are unwilling to follow rules and regulations as a party, what should people expect [when they are] in government?*" and another concluded, "*Political parties need to start acting like institutions and not a back yard party.*"   Some of the areas that informants thought should be regulated included financial disclosure, procedures for the selection or nomination of candidates, temporary special measures for women and ethical concerns, including being held accountable for statements made through advertising or other means. Some informants also mentioned that there need to be clear avenues of recourse when parties do not abide by the regulations. When asked why parties have resisted the idea of regulation, most informants said that it is because those who currently control the parties don't want to be scrutinized. They maintained that "*they feel that they are a law unto themselves*" and that "*they want to be able to do whatever they want, in their own personal interest.*" As a result, in the absence of strong public pressure, it is unlikely that governments formed by the major political parties will take action in this regard.

When asked about political party regulation, many of those interviewed focused particularly on the need for financial regulation. Indeed, an even stronger majority thought that **the lack of regulation of campaign financing is a problem in Belize**. They pointed out that where money comes from has a significant effect on decisions taken by governments once they are in power. When people give money, particularly substantial amounts of money, they want something in return so that politicians owe a debt to their donors. People need to know where the money is coming from to ensure that the interests of the donors do not overwhelm the interests of the electorate in political decision-making.

Informants also raised other reasons why campaign finance reform is needed. One observed that in the current situation, the party in government is able to manipulate how financing comes, sometimes through corruption and kickbacks. Another said that it was important to regulate financing to prevent a huge gap in funds available in order to level the playing field among candidates. This latter point is often particularly relevant to women.

There was a general concern that the interests of the Belizean people often take a back seat to the interests of political donors. As one candidate said,

> *I could tell you where I got my financing, but I'm not sure about my opponent. We need [regulation] to insure we're not selling out our country for campaign finance.*

Informants indicated that politicians in leadership generally don't want campaign finance reform for the same reason that they don't want regulation of parties – that is, they want to continue to do things in their own interests. A few informants also expressed concern that, although regulation might be needed, it would be very difficult to accomplish. However, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out,

> *The Belizean people are demanding [reform]. People want to know that parties represent their interests. People need to have some idea of where political parties are getting their money and how this may influence them when decisions are made.*

It seems clear that effectively addressing the problems arising from the lack of regulation of campaign financing has the potential to enhance our democracy and women's role within it.

Belize has seen a major growth of political clientelism or "hand out politics" in recent years. All of those asked about this trend thought that **hand out politics is a huge problem**, although a significant number expressed that they were *"at a loss"* to know what to do about it. Handout politics has made political campaigns more and more expensive, perhaps prohibitively so for many women (and men) who might wish to become involved. Furthermore, democracy is not well served when voters respond more to handouts of cash or goods than to political positions and proposed policies. Several informants observed that people have come to demand or expect this. On the other hand, one informant noted that *"it's the most demeaning practice that a politician can do to people"* and another pointed out that,

> *The electorate has latched on to the idea [of handouts] because they feel that once the politician is in power, they don't get listened to, there's no accountability.*

Informants in the advocates' focus group pointed out that having to line up for clinics feeds the politicians ego, *"like begging to a surrogate father"*. One participant continued,

> *It might appear that people are OK with this, but they're not. People feel humiliated. Politicians are more likely to go to a man's house [to give him the handout], whereas women need to come to them.*

This is consistent with the findings of research cited earlier in this report that demonstrates that the system of handout politics affects women and men differently.

Many of the women interviewed said that they found the system of handouts the most distasteful part of being a candidate or elected politician. Some women said that, while they don't condone or support it, they recognized that they sometimes need to provide handouts to be successful. Some also said that it was difficult not to provide handouts when people are so obviously suffering. A number of unsuccessful candidates said that they refused to do it, but that this may have been a significant reason why they lost the nomination or election.

Almost all informants agreed that handout politics has, at minimum, gotten out of hand in Belize and that something needs to be done – even if it is difficult to imagine what that "something" might be. Because the current Prime Minister did not make himself available for an interview, it was not possible to address this issue directly with him. However, several informants raised concerns about a recent statement by the Prime Minister that the party *"who wins gets the spoils"*[128]. This statement seems to legitimize the current system of handouts and patronage. One informant from his own party was concerned about this, saying that it needs to be remembered that *"government is formed to serve the people, not maintain the people"*. The Leader of the Opposition, on the other hand, conceded that,

> *[Handout politics] has been a growing problem. Parties have a responsibility to be a part of a national dialogue on this. There has to be enlightenment on both sides. We have to understand what's at stake.*

While there is currently no consensus on what needs to be done to address the hold that the handout system has on Belizean politics, it seems clear that the time has come for a national debate on its impact and possible strategies to deal with it.

6.2.2. Masculine Politics and the Old Boys' Club

Almost all of those interviewed agreed that ***there is a masculine model of politics in Belize***. They pointed out that politics is dominated and shaped by men, and that there is often an assumption that only men can rule. Some explained that our politics continues to reflect a patriarchal system. There is an assumption that politicians have to be *"macho"* and men in politics often equate feminine qualities

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[128] The Prime Minister made this statement at the first Prime Ministers' Forum held at the Bliss Centre for the Performing Arts, Belize City on September 14, 2011.

with weakness. For the most part, informants do not believe that there is a commitment to breaking men's hold on the political world.

Informants gave several practical ways in which masculine politics operates. One candidate said that *"race trumps gender"*, explaining that gender is more of a hurdle than race in politics, particularly in the Caribbean. Another said that the idea of the "maximum leader" – the style of leadership where people hesitate to challenge the man on top – comes out of male dominated politics. One elected woman pointed out that even when women are successful in politics, they are not fully part of decision-making. She said that women are informed, not asked or consulted, and continued,

> *Even when they appear to be consulting you, behind closed doors people have already called each other, the decision has been made. Fighting them, you never win, you become the "b----"*

Other informants echoed the belief when a man displays behaviour that is seen is aggressive, it's fine, but that a woman exhibiting the same behaviour is seen as a "b----".

As the above example shows, it's clear that ***the masculine model also leads to a double standard in the treatment of women candidates and elected politicians***. Some informants pointed out that when women are seen as "messing up" politically, it's taken as an indictment of all women. People will say, *"See what happens when you put a woman there?"* This doesn't happen for men. Informants also noted that some men think that women can't handle the job, so that women have to prove themselves in ways that men do not.

Nowhere is the double standard clearer than in the treatment of women and men on personal or "morality" issues. Informants pointed out that when women do something "wrong", it's used against them. For men, it's swept under the rug. As one informant pointed out, *"Men can openly build houses for their sweethearts. Women have to be squeaky clean."* Another said that we expect our male politicians to be *"virile"*, but women are often portrayed as *"sluts and politically incompetent"*. This informant also maintained that women who are considered "attractive" are persistently attacked on the basis of their sexuality. Another candidate noted that a lot of women say politics is dirty, and for a woman it is. She continued,

> *The things that men do and say, they can get away with it. Women can't. Even if we're not doing [anything wrong], the mud is slung.*

Discussion in the focus groups reinforced women's greater vulnerability to personal innuendo and attack. One elected politician in the municipal focus group said that "Seeing a man in a bar is OK, but if a woman takes a drink, all eyes are on her." Participants in the voters' focus group agreed that a woman's personal life is an issue in politics, and that sometimes accusations about women are invented without basis in fact. On the other hand, people do not hold up men's behaviour to the same scrutiny. One participant said,

> *For men, having several families and outside children is OK. Men can do what they want and get elected over and over again. Whatever men do is accepted. But for women, it's different.*

Informants generally agreed that women are much more vulnerable than men to attacks based on "morality". Both male politicians and the public seem able to compartmentalize the lives of male politicians into public and private worlds, even when men's "private" behaviour displays an acceptance of patriarchal attitudes that will inevitably affect their decisions in areas of public policy. Women, however, have little or no protection from the attitude that sees attacks on women's real or imagined personal behaviour as fair game.

The extension of a masculine model of politics is **the "old boys' club" that effectively controls politics in Belize.** Almost all women candidates and elected politicians acknowledged that the old boys club[129] continues to be in charge and that it creates a barrier to women's attempts to be an effective part of decision-making in the political world. Some acknowledged that this creates a hostile environment for women. Many informants indicated that men continue to be satisfied with this situation and that their behaviour reinforces rather than challenges the legitimacy of the club. One elected woman said, *"I think [the men] still want it to be that way. Neither of the parties are throwing their arms open to women."* Another successful woman politician observed that many men continue to believe that they are the only ones who can be leaders, and that this attitude contributes to behaviour that attempts to marginalize women.

As mentioned previously, men often make political decisions without involving women. One candidate described being part of a caucus of nine constituencies, but that by the time she is called to get a "block" decision, the decision has usually already been made – it's a process of being informed rather than consulted.

Many informants pointed out that decisions are often made in situations where men congregate outside of the official meetings. Frequently, decisions are made and deals are struck in the bar or other places where women are generally not present. One informant observed, *"Men can hang out together and make deals about what kind of support they will get."* Women, on the other hand, may go home to their children or other responsibilities. They may not want to "hang out" in the same way as men do, and men may not encourage them to do so even if they want to. As one informant pointed out,

> *Let's understand how they fraternize. If I'm hanging out with six men, three are married and cheating. They don't want a woman around….They don't want us around and we don't want to be around. But that's where deals are made.*

Another informant remarked that not being a part of men's social activities has a direct impact on her ability to be politically effective. She said,

> *I don't socialize enough. I have good relationships with the leadership, but they're formal. It's difficult to access information if I don't hang out.*

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[129] One informant observed that in recent years the "old boys' club" has really become the "rich boys' club".

This isolation from much of political discussion and deal making makes it more difficult for women to solidify a political base. This same informant continued, *"They go to the bar, drink two beers and get the support of all the men there. Where do we go?"*

The old boys' club also shows itself in men's reactions to differences of opinion with men and with women. Whereas politics should be a place for open debate as part of the decision-making process, some men are not comfortable with women who assertively promote a different view to theirs. One elected woman noted,

> *Men to men are very forgiving. Men to women, not so. [The attitude is], "You offended me, my ego." They will do anything to get back at you. They'll be vindictive. If you stand up to prove your point, those things are not welcome.*

Such reactions do not create an environment that is conducive to women's full and active participation in decision-making. Furthermore, when women are present in very small numbers, it is extremely difficult to challenge an environment where women may be punished for actively disagreeing with men.

A few informants pointed out that male politicians sometimes use women against each other to reinforce the status quo. One woman noted,

> *What they continue to do is pick women from their constituencies and give them everything their hearts desire. They use those women to support them…It becomes a barrier to keep other women out and foster the old boys' club.*

The message given by these male politicians is clear: If you support us uncritically and allow us to maintain control, we will treat you well. If you challenge our authority, you will pay a price.

It is clear that the old boys' club continues to create barriers for women's full participation in the political process. One informant also made the observation that the club operates across party lines, which may come as a surprise to those watching from outside. She said,

> *Once I thought the men on both sides were going to beat each other up. Then they all went for lunch…They said, "You know we have to talk that way because people expect it." It's really one big old boys' club.*

It should not be assumed, however, that women passively accept being marginalized by the club. Within political parties, as candidates and as elected politicians, women find ways to make their voices heard. At the same time, almost all women informants agreed that they had to work harder, speak louder and be more determined than men in the same positions. Furthermore, only a few women are able to succeed given the reality of masculine politics and the old boys' club, and it continues to be an uphill battle to have women's concerns taken seriously in decision-making. This demonstrates that something is fundamentally wrong with this approach to politics.

6.3. Selection Points and Barriers to Political Representation

There are three stages in becoming an elected politician: the decision to enter the race; achieving the political party's nomination; and success on election day. It is important to consider whether there is a level playing field for women and men in each of these stages. Input from informants confirms the observation from the 2001 Women in Politics report that political parties present a significant "bottle neck" for women interested in entering the political arena. In addition, gender-based barriers mean that many women who might otherwise be motivated to run decide not to do so. As a result, they are out of the race before it begins. As the following discussion shows, most women do not get past the stages of self-selection and selection by political parties. However, this is not a sign of disinterest or lack of ambition on the part of women, as some male politicians reportedly believe. Instead, it is the consequence of ***systematic inequities in the political system that create greater barriers for women than for men***.

6.3.1. Self-selection

To understand more about the process through which women decide to enter the political arena, candidates were asked questions about their own decisions. When asked why they decided to run, many women said that their motivation came from concerns that the political system was not delivering what it should. Some women reported that they ran because of their conviction that they could make a difference in this regard. One woman said, *"I had concerns that nothing was being done for the people."* and another that, *"People needed a champion."* Another candidate expressed her concern that "*People are losing faith in democracy."* and that this was a strong influence in her decision to run. The response of these and other candidates is consistent with the view expressed by informants in some of the focus groups who believed that women see political involvement as a form of service, where men may be more motivated by the prospect of personal gain or ego gratification.

A significant number of women candidates also cited their family history as a strong factor in their decision to become involved in electoral politics. Some women acknowledged that coming from a well-known political family was important in gaining access to the political arena.

Finally, several women talked about their belief that it was time for women to become more involved in politics as an important part of their decision. As one informant said,

> I had worked almost 20 years politically. [I felt that] I've got to make a statement that after working for so many years …we're going to accept women…I felt that was the only way I could make a difference…Somebody had to come to the forefront…It's time for women's faces to be seen.

Another candidate said that, *"It was important to me to break the tradition and say that we as women can be involved."* For these women, entry into electoral politics comes not only from the desire to serve the needs of the people, but also from their commitment to breaking new ground for women.

Even when motivated to run, most informants said that there were factors that have a greater impact on female candidates than male candidates. In some cases, these factors impacted on informants' candidacies directly. In others, women said that they had not been directly affected, but that they knew that other women had been. The most common points raised as barriers to women clustered around three main issues: cost of campaigns, family responsibilities and concern about personal attacks.

Political campaigns in Belize are becoming increasingly expensive. This is clearly an issue for all candidates, both male and female. However, most of those interviewed agreed that **the cost of campaigns is a greater barrier to women than it is for men.** As one informant observed, *"Finance is the main thing that propels politics and it's not there for female candidates."* A few women candidates said that financing had not been a problem for them and that it depends more on the individual. However, the majority said that financing was indeed a problem and that big donors don't generally give to women. One informant remarked, *"If people see you as a newcomer in a man's world, they don't think you can win so they won't give you money."*

A significant number of candidates also said that women weren't prepared to do things that men were willing to do to get funds for their campaigns. Informants said that women are less willing to be obligated to donors, less likely to do "back door deals" and less likely to engage in questionable business practices to get funds. When asked if campaign financing is a bigger problem for women, one candidate said,

> *Yes, and again it's simply because men get around and do things differently…I could have gotten a lot of money for my campaign [through involvement in something I believe is wrong], but to do that would have been treason to my people. But other [male] politicians don't see it that way. [They think], "It's business and we need money for our campaign." Men will use resources differently and for different reasons.*

It may be that male politicians see women's greater reluctance to engage in questionable practices as lack of motivation or a sign of weakness. There was a sense from many women candidates, however, that there is a need to question the "anything goes" approach to campaign financing – not only to ensure a level playing field for women and men, but also to prevent the pressure to generate funds from compromising the long term interests of the country.   Since political campaigns are increasing expensive, this is likely to become an even more pressing concern in the future.

Almost all candidates agreed that **family responsibilities are a major issue for women considering political office**. They pointed out that, while women are responsible for taking care of their households and families, male politicians generally have wives to take care of this for them. Many women candidates admitted that they had been able to run because they were in a different situation than most other women: they had unusually supportive husbands; they had a lot of family support; they were single, childless, or their children had grown. As one candidate said, *"Thank God I don't have a husband."* since that would restrict the time she could spend in the community. Another acknowledged,

> *I had support – from my husband, from my parents, from my whole family. If I hadn't, I wouldn't have been able to do it. My husband stepped in with the children [and that made it possible].*

This elected woman acknowledged, however, that even with this support, it was still challenging to balance political and home life. The fact that many women candidates have fewer home responsibilities tends to support the idea that women who do have more responsibilities often self-select themselves out of the running.

For women who do have young children, there's more conflict. One informant said that it's very hard and that despite her efforts, *"Sometimes I feel like I have to put my son on the back burner."*   Women politicians who have younger children often face a no-win situation. If they dedicate their time to their political work, they may be seen as being "bad mothers", but if they make a greater effort to balance their attention to politics and family, they may be accused of not being sufficiently committed to their political role. Once again, there is double standard at work, since men seldom have to make this choice.

As mentioned previously, ***women are more vulnerable to personal attacks that are a deterrent to political involvement.*** One informant described politics as *"dirty, nasty and brutish"*. Another observed,

> *Politics has become a rough sport, it's the new contact sport. Women see that you can't come out of it with your name and your reputation intact.*

Women are aware that, by becoming a political figure, they are exposing themselves to scrutiny and ridicule in a way that men are not. While men's personal behaviour is off limits, women are often attacked in personal and highly sexualized ways.   When these attacks happen with impunity, they become a warning to other women who might want to become involved. One candidate also observed that this is an additional disincentive for women because they are also concerned about the effects of this type of attack on their children. Another candidate noted that she had to change her cable company to prevent her children from seeing the kind of attack that was being made on her.

Some women who decided to run acknowledged that having a "good reputation" is critical for women in ways that do not apply to men. One elected woman said,

> *You need a good reputation. I was "clean" but women have it harder. Men can philander and it doesn't matter. I could say, "Not only am I capable of representing you, but you can put me to the test."*

In general, almost all women who decided to run for political office were well aware that they would face more public scrutiny and personal attacks than men do. However, even women who were prepared said they didn't understand the magnitude of scrutiny they would face. One woman with a long history of service to her party and government called it *"an eye opener"* when she decided to become a candidate for elected office. She added, *"I've always known how rough it could be, but knowing and experiencing are two different things."* One elected woman said that *"some women come out of the experience broken up. They're really, really mean to women."*

Women who have been successful in the political arena have made a decision to grapple with these conditions. A few women felt they could play a role in *"cleaning up"* politics in Belize. Others talked about "*thickening their skin*" or the challenge of trying to maintain their personal integrity in the face of political reality. Clearly, women who choose to become candidates deserve recognition for stepping up under these conditions.

At the same time, it's also clear that many women will not come forward as long as the system remains as it is. Participants in the advocates' focus group were asked if they would consider running for political office, since as women already involved in organizations promoting various issues, it is reasonable to assume they might be attracted by the possibilities of being part of government. However, none of the participants said that they would run because, in their words, *"it's not worth it."* The women in this group said that they don't believe that it's safe for women to run and that *"the level of corruption is so high you either have to roll with it or shut up".*

The issues that stand in the way of women putting themselves forward for public office are not just personal ones. It must be recognized that the issues discussed here are examples of systemic gender inequality that discourage women's entry into electoral politics. Strategies to increase women's political participation must understand this, and find ways to support women's choice to become political leaders and candidates.

6.3.2. Selection by Political Parties

Almost all informants agreed that **the male leadership of political parties is not serious about promoting women as candidates**, despite the rhetoric and policies on paper that call for a minimum percentage of women. Furthermore, some informants also said that the parties do not really care about retaining women who have been successful at the polls. As one elected politician who had been successful but later decided not to run again said, "If you're a woman, you're free to go."

Some women did report that the party was supportive of their particular candidacies, but this seems to be a question of selecting particular women to promote, rather than reflecting a commitment to greater gender balance. In addition, a significant number of women who have been supported by their party acknowledged that it was easier to gain a position as a candidate and bargain for what they wanted when their party was "down". In periods when parties have lost popular support, they appear to be more motivated to seek out women in part because men are less interested in pursuing what they may see as a losing cause.

As one candidate said, *"The party has to want you. If so, they'll do anything to get you elected. I don't know how you crack that."* Given the old boys' club that continues to dominate politics and political parties in Belize, it should come as no surprise that the vast majority of the candidates who the party "wants" are male.

Informants indentified a number of specific barriers women face in trying to get their party's support and nomination. Candidates reported that, **not only is there a lack of support for women, but also that**

there are also frequent attempts to undermine or push women aside. These attempts are seldom public or official, but operate beneath the surface to set women up to fail. Some women reported being repeatedly asked, *"Are you sure you're ready?"* in an apparent attempt to undermine their confidence. A few women said that support from the party leader did not translate into broader support from men in the party and that this had a direct effect on their campaign. One elected woman said,

> *[The party leader] was supportive, but others weren't. They thought, "If she can do it, a man can." I had worked for three years in my division, but two men came out of the woods to run against me at the convention…Nobody thought I could win this division. They didn't want to give me anything.*

Like a significant number of other women candidates, this woman was pressured to step down and give the nomination to a man. She continued,

> *They said, "Why don't you step down and give it to [him] and wait until they appoint you senator or something?"*

Some other informants also confirmed that they had also been asked to stand aside in favour of male candidates, even when they had done considerable work to establish their candidacies.

Male domination of party leadership and their incumbent politicians means that women often do not get practical support in their fight for the nomination. In the words of one informant, *"Women are left to sink, not swim."* Another woman said that she was not discouraged from running, but that she got no information or advice that would assist her in the campaign, and it was clear on nomination day that the leadership was out in force for her opponent. Women are sometimes encouraged to run, but later find that encouragement in words does not translate into backing in the nomination process. Informants cited several examples of women who had been persuaded to run and expected some degree of assistance that had not been forthcoming. As one elected woman said, *"If we really wanted more women, where was the party when the nomination happened?"*

On the other hand, male politicians and their political machineries seem ready and willing to line up behind other men. At the national level, politicians travel from district to district to support other, almost always male candidates. While in theory women might also be able to get this type of support, in practice, male politicians almost always support other men. Furthermore, when women attempt to "test the water" to see if there is support for their candidacy, they may not be dealt with honestly. One candidate said that she had been promised the support of the party leader, who later reneged. Another woman reported having discussed her desire to run with the party leadership. She said,

> *No one had the courage to say we will not support you. There was a grin, and they said, "Yes, go ahead."*

When the nomination happened, however, the leadership came out in force to support her [male] opponent. Some male politicians might contend that these concerns demonstrate that women just

aren't sufficiently motivated to take on the rough and tumble world of politics. It is clear, however, that the "rough and tumble" is much easier to take when you have the backing of those already in power.

Personal attacks (whether or not they are based in fact) are part of political campaigns in Belize. However, as previously noted, women are more vulnerable to these attacks and attacks are often sexualized in ways that they are not for men. Consequently, **the parties' tolerance of personal attacks on women creates an additional barrier for them.** Parties do very little, if anything, to stop these attacks, even when they are based on lies. One candidate said that she had been persistently lied about by her opponent and his supporters, and attacked specifically on her sexuality and religious beliefs. In this case, the party did call in her opponent, but this was more of a formality since they did not take a strong stand against the attacks and did not subject her opponent to any scrutiny or sanctions that would stop him from continuing. She said,

> *The response was, "Why don't you rough him up too?" There's an attitude that if you don't engage in that personal, petty politics, you don't belong here. Women generally don't want to engage in this.*

Women's lack of inclination to play "gutter politics" may be seen by some men in the political world as a sign of weakness. However, there is a strong case to be made that the problem lies in a system that frequently allows politics to be conducted on the basis of vicious attacks and lies. Furthermore, even if women candidates decided there is no choice but to climb into the gutter and go on the attack themselves, this strategy simply would not work in the same way as it does for men. The double standard which measures women and men very differently on questions of sexuality and personal behaviour means that women will always come out more tarnished and more brutalized by such tactics.

As discussed previously, "hand-outs" have become a central characteristic of the political system in Belize. Hand-outs are a prominent feature of nomination campaigns and, of course, both male and female candidates must deal with the current expectation[130] that these must be delivered. However, **the system of hand-out politics has a greater impact on women** since they are less likely to have access to major political donors and less likely to be well connected to the "old boys' club" that controls access to public resources. Furthermore, according to informants women have a greater resistance to providing handouts and engaging in questionable or corrupt practices to access funds.

A significant number of informants reported that hand-outs had a considerable effect on their campaign for the nomination. One woman said that she knew two weeks before the convention that she had lost because she saw the extent of hand-outs that were being passed out. Another informant said she thought she was doing very well based on feedback she had gotten as she went from house to house. She continued,

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[130] Many politicians attempt to lay the blame for the system of hand-out politics at the feet of voters who now demand hand-outs to vote or otherwise give their support to individual politicians and parties. It is important to remember, however, that Belizeans have essentially been trained to expect handouts as a normal part of politics because of the behaviour of generations of Belizean politicians.

> *I didn't realize until the day of the nomination that the commitment wasn't there. Two hours into the convention I knew that I wasn't successful. I got a different impression going door to door. People said we need a female representative and we can't accept bribery…[But at the convention] members of the party publicly displayed their support for the other candidate. They were passing out money, alcohol. People who told you, "Yes, miss, we really need a female," can't look you in the eye. Later, they'll tell you, "I really needed the money."*

An informant from the WIP focus group reported that she had gone to a convention for a female candidate and saw busloads of people being paid to vote for her opponent. It is difficult to argue that nomination conventions are a level playing field when so many votes appear to be bought and paid for rather than earned by the candidates.

A related issue raised by one informant addresses the use of public resources as hand-outs in nomination campaigns.[131] Vehicles, government employees and other resources paid for with public funds are clearly used for political purposes in Belize. While this reflects a general problem for how our democracy operates, it also has a gender dimension. When all (or almost all) incumbent politicians are male, they have access and control over those public resources. This puts any newcomer at a disadvantage. Since women are more likely to be entering the political arena for the first time, this will necessarily create a greater barrier for women.

The effects of political hand-outs – and the threat of withdrawing public resources – appear to be growing at the village level. In recent years, there has been a trend to greater partisan politicization in village councils. According to some informants, this has meant that village issues often take a back seat to the interests of national politicians and that there is increasing interference at the local level by Ministers and others from outside the village. One informant said,

> *I tried to run in the village. The Minister took two weeks and went house to house, giving people money. He said, "Don't vote for her, vote for the man. I personally will help him." He told people [if they didn't], he would take away their land, and he wouldn't give them the housing grant.*

Another informant said that it was "a disgrace" how politicians come into a small village and pay people to vote. Once again, this is likely to have a greater impact on women, since male politicians have shown that they are more likely to back other men. One informant said that it's now difficult for women at the village level because politicians from the national level *"stick their nose in, and if they don't want you, they'll destroy you."*

Representatives of political parties say that they want more women to run and that there is nothing about their parties that prevents women from doing so. Indeed, there are no formal rules that prohibit women's nomination. What is clear, however, is that a great deal goes on "unofficially" that undermines women's attempts to compete. Parties' unwillingness to address this *is* a critical barrier to

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[131] This, of course, also applies to election campaigns.

women. This makes it more difficult to be successful when they do run and contributes to the reluctance of women to become candidates – almost all informants were well aware of the gap between their party's rhetoric and the realities faced by women who want to run. As long as political parties pretend that there is a "level playing field" for men and women in their nomination processes, the chances for women's success remain slim.

6.3.3.   Selection by the Electorate

Few informants said that the sex of the candidate was a critical factor in how Belizeans cast their votes. This confirms the findings of the Women in Politics report where female voters reported that the main reason that women don't vote for women is that there are simply no women to vote for. The voters' focus group also agreed that *a candidate being male or female doesn't generally affect how people vote*, since political party affiliation is the most important criteria for most of the electorate. This would suggest that *the most significant hurdle for women is achieving the nomination*.

This does not mean, however, that there are no differences in the experience of male and female candidates and that elections are completely free from gender bias. One informant from a largely rural constituency said that some voters were not yet ready for a female candidate and that there is a need for education of the population that women can lead. Others pointed out that the double standard continues to plague female politicians even after they are nominated and that women's personal life is an issue, even if it is invented.   Clearly, many of the issues that confront women in the process of self-selection and selection by the party continue after she is nominated. *Campaign costs, the pressure of family responsibilities and vulnerability to personal attack continue to be greater burdens for women candidates.*

As mentioned previously, women who try to run on the issues are confronted by voter expectations of hand-outs. Once again, this is true for both male and female candidates, but as one informant said, *"men seem to have an easier time with political clientelism".* Contrary to what male politicians often claim, demands for hand-outs do not only come from individuals made desperate due to severe poverty. One candidate described her experience during the election campaign,

> [As I was campaigning], some men would say, "Buy me a case of beer." I'd tell them I wasn't buying any beer. They'd say, "Then we can go to [the other candidate]" I'd say, OK, I still wasn't buying beer.

A significant number of candidates reported that many voters would tell them that they were supportive of their candidacies and the issues they were talking about, but when it came to election day, *"the voter was with the candidate who would give them what they want."*

Many informants also pointed out that *the media treats women and men differently, both as candidates and elected politicians.* While the media plays less of a role in elections in the villages and smaller towns, in larger urban areas and nationally it is more significant.   Several informants indicated that men get more air time and for different reasons. Men get attention for their accomplishments,

while women get included when something goes wrong or something controversial happens. One informant described television coverage in one constituency, where the story showed the victorious female candidate cleaning up after the election night celebration, but the losing male candidate was shown actively engaged in a community project. Even in victory, the woman was portrayed in a traditional, domestic role instead of showing her working as a viable politician.

Informants also said there continues to be more scrutiny for women. One elected woman observed, *"you could almost hear the doubt from the interviewer's mouth [when talking to me]."* Women are scrutinized on their appearance, their clothes and their hair. Another elected woman remarked *"physical attributes are often an issue. They try to portray you as a little nitwit."* One woman interviewed observed that one influential radio announcer *"is always going on about feminine pulchritude. What's that got to do with [a woman's achievements]?"* Furthermore, informants noted that the media reinforces the double standard for women and men. They will readily report on a woman's personal life, where there is a virtual code of silence for men. As part of this focus on personal life, media also promotes the sexualized attacks that are often made on women. One informant talked about *"the mean and spiteful cartooning…[that] almost always goes to your sexuality, as if that's the tender spot."*

It seems clear that, once a candidate has been nominated, most voters do not mark their ballot because that candidate is a man or woman. At the same time, the conditions that women face as candidates may undermine their ability to successfully compete. Achieving the promise of democracy means insuring that all candidates – female and male – are on a level playing field when taking their cause to the electorate.

6.4. Women's Experience as Elected Politicians

While women's experience as elected politicians may not directly influence the selection process, it does have a significant impact on the proportion of women in our governing bodies. First, if other women see that the environment in our legislature, councils and boards is unfriendly to women, they are likely to decide that involvement at that level is not worth the cost. Furthermore, women's experience once elected affects whether they will continue to run. While a few women said that being a woman had little effect on their role as an elected politician, most said that they faced ongoing challenges.

A significant number of elected women agreed that **our governing bodies present a hostile environment for women**. One woman said that it starts from men making flippant comments about a woman now being in the room. She described a meeting early in her term between several politicians and a major developer who said,

> *"Now we have someone who can make us coffee,"…You really have to nip in the bud, make it clear…"No, make your own coffee."*

Other women said that the conditions were much harsher. One woman revealed that she was regularly confronted with vulgar jokes as well as being undermined and discounted *"every day, on every major decision"*. Sometimes women politicians face overt sexual harassment. One woman said,

> *One time, I didn't stay drinking with the men. I got lambasted later. They think you as a woman will mingle with them – because they are Ministers, demi-gods they can have you at their disposal. They think you will play around. There are some who think they are entitled to all of us.*

It's clear that facing this kind of hostile environment takes a toll on women politicians.   One elected woman said,

> *If I could have removed a portion of my heart, I could have survived better. [To survive] I needed to become this iron woman.*

Another elected woman agreed that the environment is very, very difficult for women and that, while she was determined to deal with it, many women are not willing to put up with what she experienced. She remarked,

> *I had my pride. And my pride said, "You are not going to cry." Cry at home, scream at home, then get up the next day and go back. Even if they give you a canoe with no paddle, paddle with your hands. But that's why women say they will serve through the community instead of in government. Not everybody has the stomach for what happens in government.*

According to some informants, many male politicians attribute women's sensitivity to the conditions they face in office as a sign that women are not strong enough for the political world. This attitude, however, simply goes to guard their own positions of power in the "old boys' club" and to mask their own responsibility for keeping women out. However, it is clear that many male politicians engage in behaviour that is intended to keep women at the margins of political power and influence, and then blame women when they say that this is unacceptable. Even when such behaviour appears to be unintentional, it is a part of deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes that fail to accept the legitimacy of women's presence and authority in our governing bodies.

This attitude that women don't really belong often also means that **it is more difficult for women to make their voices heard once in office**. One woman said that *"it was clear that [the men] wished you weren't there"* and that she always had to be sure she had prepared well so that she wouldn't be passed over. Other elected women echoed this, with one informant saying that she *"needed to be very assertive, more than men"*. Another said,

> *[As a woman], you have to work doubly hard to prove yourself. The expectations on a woman delivering are more than double, more than triple.*

And still another remarked, *"I did ten times the work [as the men] and got ten times the criticism."*

Not only did most of the elected women report that they needed to be stronger than the men to put forward their position, many also said that they were actively undercut in their work. When one informant was asked if she believed that there were attempts to undermine her work, she replied, "Hell yes." Some men openly question whether they can deal with women in positions of authority. Other women reported acts of sabotage or deception from their male colleagues. One woman said that she had identified a project in her area and was told by the male leadership to go ahead and put in the necessary work to make it happen. She later found out that these same leaders had already earmarked the land she had identified for the project for another use. Not only had they withheld this information from her, they had given the go ahead for her to proceed with her project. She said, "I felt stupid." for relying on the word of her colleagues in this regard.

In addition to having a more difficult time being taken seriously by their male colleagues, **women also report that decisions are often made without them**. As previously noted, many decisions in the political world are made outside official forums, often in male gatherings that are off-limits to women. After being elected, women continue to face being marginalized in decision-making in this way. One woman said,

> *The decisions made at town board didn't really work. The men would sit down on Friday night with beer and whiskey, make all the decisions and implement them by Monday morning.*

At the national level, women also report being isolated in decision-making. As one woman said, "I was in the government, but not the kitchen cabinet." Women also observe that they may be more readily allowed into some decisions (such those relating to social issues) than others (such as those relating to finance and budget priorities). An informant noted, there is an attitude of *"Let her deal with women, gender, children, poor people, people on the street,"* while the men address the parts of government that are more important (from their point of view). It's important to note, however, that the division between "social" and "economic" issues is generally an artificial one, and it is not possible to be responsible for progress on social concerns without a say over how money is spent and resources are generated and used.

Once again, **women politicians should not be seen as passively accepting this process**. Elected women put a good deal of energy into determining the most effective strategies to use in negotiating the old boys' club. Some report concentrating their attentions on the work of their portfolios. For example, one woman said that she focused on her Ministerial work because she believed that was where she could be most effective. At the same time, she had been successful in getting acceptance from government on several policy issues. It seems that she chose her issues and strategies carefully to maximize her chances for success while not wasting energy on battles she could not win. Women who successfully negotiate the current realities should be recognized for doing so under very challenging circumstances.

At the same time, virtually all these **women politicians recognize that their work would be less difficult and much more effective if there were more women there**. One woman with many years experience on a town board observed that,

Because I'm a woman, [the men] would try to take advantage of me if I didn't take a stand. They'll get together as a group to be against me. If they see you as a weak woman, they'll try to manipulate you. [The hostile environment for women] is acceptable because the women aren't there to change it. If there were 3 women [on the board] it would be different.

Having so few women also means that it is easier to target women who are seen as causing problems politically. One elected woman noted that women get ostracized within political parties for speaking out. She said that this pushes women to be individualistic and not think of other women in order to survive – a result that only serves to maintain the power of the old boys' club. Another informant, observed that women might be supported when they are seen as "winnable", but that,

…when [a woman] was seen as "messing up", people threw her under the bus. She was torn down because she was a woman. People are more critical of women when they are seen as making mistakes.

Whether they see it or not, all women politicians face this risk, a risk that male politicians do not face since no one holds them responsible as a representative of all men. This will continue to be the case as long as women are seen as the exception rather than the rule in politics.

Some female politicians continue to take on the risks and challenge the barriers faced by women. Others leave elected office because they are no longer willing to accept the hostile environment they encounter or accept that they must compromise their personal integrity to survive. One informant said that she had withdrawn from politics because *"I could do more and get more results from outside because I didn't have to deal with what I found inside."* Another said she made the decision not to run again because, *"I'm disgusted with how politics is run. I have to go against my will when I have to make decisions."* Contradicting the view reportedly expressed by some male politicians, these women withdraw from politics not because of weakness, but because of the strength of their convictions.

Other women see what the political world offers, and simply say, "No, thanks." It seems clear that it is critical to address the conditions faced by women in our political institutions as part of the overall strategy to increase women's political representation.

6.5. The Potential for change

Given that women face significant barriers to political representation, it is clear that targeted actions are necessary if Belize is to achieve greater gender balance in our governing bodies. Informants said, however, that the male political leadership does not, in general, accept this view. Frequently, their stated belief is that "women can run if they want to" and sometimes that "women are not hungry enough" for political success. However, as one informant pointed out, it is hard to be hungry for something *"when you put vinegar on it"*.

The denial by the male political leadership of barriers to women creates a particularly difficult environment for change. These are the people who are in a position to implement change, whether at the legislative and policy level or within political parties. However, if they don't accept that there is a

problem, they are unlikely to make meaningful efforts for change, especially since the existing situation works well for them. Strategies for change must have a strong organizing and advocacy component to overcome this major hurdle.

6.5.1. Developing Women as a Political Block

Almost all informants agreed **that politicians do not regard women as a political block to which they have to respond**. This has significant effects, not only in advancing the cause of women's political representation, but also for other issues of particular concern to women. In the words of one informant, *"Politicians realize they have to talk to the private sector or trade unionists, but haven't even thought of women as a block they have to talk to."*

Developing women as a block who will advocate in their own interests is key for progress on women's representation, or any other issue of particular concern to women. The current political context, based on a masculine model of politics and the continued dominance of the old boys' club, maintains power in the hands of men. As one informant said,

> It's a patriarchal system…Men aren't going to give up [the power] just like that. No power structure does just because it's morally right…you have to pry the power out of their hands.

This informant and others also acknowledged that, instead of strengthening, **women's presence as a voice to be reckoned with has actually become weaker in recent years**. A number of key organizations that served as a focus for advocacy on women's issues have disappeared. Some informants pointed out that the remaining NGOs that should be providing leadership in this area haven't been up to the task. In particular, several women pointed out that the Women's Issues Network (WIN-Belize), which should be playing a strong role in organizing and advocating for women, is weak and ineffectual, and that *"you don't really see them"* in any meaningful way. Younger women sometimes appear to have taken on the attitude that there is no longer a need for activism on women's rights. Even when young women do see the need, they may not know how to make it happen or where they fit. One young woman advocate said,

> I'm not sure how to define "women's movement". There seem to be different people with different ideas – what's the common ground? I don't understand what the women's movement is and what my role should be.

Participants in the voters' focus group agreed that, "*Nobody gives you power easily…women have to take action, but where do you go?*" They were concerned about the current lack of leadership. On the other hand, they believed that if women come together, change is possible. As one participant said, *"if we have an organization of 300 women in front of the Prime Minister's office every day, it will make a difference."*

Almost all informants agreed that **there is a need to rejuvenate the women's movement in Belize**. They stressed the need for rights-oriented women's groups in every district as the basis for this movement.

Informants also emphasized that it is important to understand that building a movement requires long term commitment and a willingness to step up and be counted.

The advocates' focus group also recognized the need for this rejuvenation, but also identified some obstacles that will need to be addressed in the process. Specifically, they raised these issues:

> Educated women with more privilege often don't see that they have the same issues as other women. This needs to be addressed in order to develop a united front on issues and to prevent women from being played off against each other.

> Many women in Belize (such as those in south side Belize City) are dealing with depression, grief and loss. This affects their hope for the future which in turn affects their willingness to be a part of change-oriented groups.

> There's a fear about getting excited about anything, because people have seen too many failures.

> Building a movement can't be based on the availability of funds. Women have to take this on as a personal responsibility.

Developing a wide ranging approach to rebuilding the women's movement in Belize is not the goal of this analysis. However, it is clear that strategies for increasing women's political representation must contribute to this process and establish women as a block that politicians will ignore at their peril.

6.5.2. Temporary Special Measures/Quotas

Experience in every region of the world has shown that introducing temporary special measures/quotas is the single most effective strategy for increasing women's representation in governing bodies. Only two of those interviewed opposed the introduction of quotas in Belize. A few interviewees were open to the idea, but expressed some concern or ambivalence. A ***significant majority of those interviewed, however, expressed strong support for quotas*** as necessary to break through the continued barriers faced by women in the political realm.

Many of those who supported quotas did so because they recognized that ***this is the only way to bring in enough women to shift the nature of our governing bodies***. They recognize that the potential of individual female politicians will always be limited so long as their numbers are so severely constrained. As one elected woman said, *"We need quotas to change political institutions. Those of us who have been there have to demand it."* Informants believed that greater gender balance in our governing bodies will not only ensure women's right to representation, but also lead to overall positive changes in how we are governed. Another woman elected at the national level said,

> *If there were more women in the party and in government, there would be a revolution in our country. One woman in a sea of so many men can't do it.*

This woman said that her experience had led her to change her view about quotas. She added,

> *I used to be opposed [to quotas] because I felt it was symbolic. I'm changing my view because it's important for how young women see things. I hope they would take the challenge [that quotas would provide].*

Another elected woman also said that her experience as a female politician had led to a more positive position on the use of quotas. She said she had mixed feelings and that she had initially opposed quotas, but that she was now in favour, *"for the good of women and the good of the country…because men won't let women in."* It is telling that most women who had experienced the realities of elected politics in Belize came out clearly in favour of quotas. Although these women had been successful as individuals, they well understand the challenges faced by women both individually and as a group and have come to see that strong measures are necessary.

In the focus groups, the majority of participants also supported quotas[132]. Some participants, however, did raise concerns. A few, particularly in the WIP participants' focus group, felt that they didn't want women to just be accommodated through the use of quotas. Most concerns, however, came not from opposition to the use of quotas, but rather from the thought that quotas would not be effective. Some women in the advocates and WIP participants' focus groups' were concerned that the women who would be nominated through quotas would not be those committed to real change for women. One participant in the advocates' group said, *"It might be the only way, but I'm cynical enough to think [the men] will pick who they can control."* This was consistent with the view of one woman candidate, who said,

> *I want to agree [with quotas], but knowing the reality, a quota would mean nothing to [men in the political leadership]. Our women would have to be more organized.*

Informants who expressed these views generally agreed that quotas could be a useful strategy, but only if women step up to ensure that they are truly effective. This reflects the experience elsewhere that quotas work best when they have "teeth" and when women both inside and outside political parties are well organized to ensure that the quotas work.

The other concern raised about quotas is that they might represent a limit rather than a starting point to increasing women's representation. A few participants in the WIP participants' group said that they were concerned that a 30% quota for women, for example, would be used as an excuse to have up to that many women, but no more. Essentially, they worried that the quota would represent a ceiling rather than a floor for women's representation. These participants agreed that using a gender-balance quota would address this concern. This type of quota, for example, might stipulate that both women and men would have at least 40% and no more than 60% representation in each governing body. Participants in the voters' focus group also liked the idea of a gender-balance quota.

Some informants expressed strong support for quotas but also observed that achieving and implementing them will be "an uphill battle". One woman interviewed said,

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[132] The exception was the CEOs focus group, where participants indicated that they did not support quotas, at least at this time.

Men in the party say outright that they don't support affirmative action, so they're not likely to implement special measures at this time…Women could be put in seats where there's no incumbent, but those seats aren't winnable. Men aren't going to step down on winnable seats.

Other informants talked about the importance of structuring the quotas so they do what we want them to do. One elected woman said,

Quotas need to be legislated and in party regulations as well. Quotas also need to be applied in Cabinet, since that's where decisions are made and you have to have something to trade and negotiate.

Despite these concerns, however, most informants agreed that the issue is not whether quotas are needed, but how to ensure that they achieve the results that we want them to. As one informant said,

I'm all for [quotas]. Let's put it in, but look at it carefully. It's needed for women to get a jump start. Affirmative action is needed. We can look at best practices and what we can learn from them.

As mentioned previously, quotas are more difficult to structure and apply in First Past The Post systems such as our Westminster model. It is not, however, an impossible task. One expert in the field of gender and governance warns that **there is a danger in getting bogged down in the details of the quota mechanism before getting commitment on the general principle of using quotas**.[133] She indicated that once there is agreement that a quota system is needed, there are experts in the area of electoral system design and the development of quota mechanisms that can be called on to develop appropriate options for the particular situation in a specific country.

While developing an appropriate quota mechanism at the national level is a challenging undertaking, this problem does not exist at the municipal and village level. **Since councils and boards are elected on the basis of slates, it is a more straightforward matter to require that those slates be gender balanced**. Slates would not be registered or accepted unless they met the criteria for numbers of women and men.

Outside of the two main parties, Vision Inspired by the People (VIP) is the only political party in Belize who has applied the principle of gender quotas in Belizean elections. According to an informant from that party, VIP slates at the municipal and village level must be gender balanced and this requirement has been applied in their slates in past elections. While to date VIP has not seen success at the polls, their experience does provide evidence that it is possible to implement a requirement for gender-balanced slates in cities, towns and villages without delay. [134]

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[133] Telephone discussion (June 7, 2011) between the consultant and Julie Ballington, Gender Advisor, Democratic Governance Group, United Nations Development Programme, New York
[134] Unfortunately, VIP did not continue this policy of gender balance in the 2012 municipal elections. In both Belize City and Belmopan, VIP ran seven candidates (including the mayoral candidates), and each case only one was female.

According to informants, the greatest barrier to adopting and implementing quotas at all levels is opposition from the male political leadership. For the most part, the men do not believe that affirmative action strategies are needed. They will also use the excuse that there are too few women available to fill seats provided by quotas. It must be stressed, however, that experience elsewhere has shown that when quotas provide an opportunity, women do step up. Furthermore, informants pointed out that if a quota system requires parties to nominate women, this will motivate them to identify and groom women for the positions since, as one woman pointed out, *"No political party is so stupid to put up a weak candidate just to have women."* Another informant observed,

> *We have to institutionalize things to say that women must be part of the governing system. If government says this has to happen, maybe as a party we have to do something [to get our women prepared].*

It is not possible to have the official view of the Prime Minister on quotas since he did not make himself available for an interview. However, informants from that party do not believe that he or other members of the party leadership will support quotas in the current circumstances. While informants from the other major party also believe that men do not support quotas, the Leader of the Opposition seems at least open to debate on the matter. He said, *"I personally would support quotas if the consensus [in the party] was that this is the best way to go."* While it might be said that it is easy to make this claim since men in the party may well block the possibility of achieving that agreement, it at least provides women members with an opportunity for building that consensus and holding the leader to his commitment.

The minority of informants who were opposed to quotas were asked what alternative measure they would take to meet our obligation to having at least 30% women represented at the national level. Of the two persons interviewed who directly opposed quotas, one said mass education was the answer and the other that she really hadn't thought about it. Education, however, while an essential part of the process is unlikely to produce the kind of rapid change needed in the next few elections. One focus group participant said that she believed that with effort we can ensure *"at least five women on the ballot and three elected for each party in the next election"* – that is, the election that will come in 2017 or 2018. Of course, even if this comes to pass, the numbers will still fall considerably short of 30%[135]. It seems clear that, without quotas, Belize will not achieve gender-balance in representation at the national level for decades.

6.5.3. Political Parties as Gatekeepers

It is clear that political parties are effectively the gatekeepers to representation and that **it will be difficult if not impossible for women to make significant advances in representation without a change in the culture and practice of the parties**. As mentioned previously, this will be an enormous challenge, since almost all informants agreed that the male leadership of the two main political parties does not

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[135] Five women on the ballot and three elected for each of the two major parties would mean that women would represent about 16% of candidates and 19% of elected representatives.

currently believe that women face particular barriers in politics. Just as it is critical to develop women's voice outside of the political parties, so too will the strengthening of the women's arm of the parties be essential to ensuring that they take responsibility for promoting women from within their ranks.

None of the candidates interviewed believed that the male leadership was serious about or committed to making concrete changes in how the party operates in order to promote women. Party officials also acknowledged that to date parties have done nothing in this regard, despite passing polities that in theory require them to have 30% women in leadership. Part III, Article 10, Subsection 3 of the People's United Party's (PUP) constitution says, *"All units[136] of the party shall include among its members a minimum of 30% women."*   However, as several informants pointed out, there is no concrete strategy for reaching this target, nor has the party specified a timeline within which this goal must be met.

In the case of the United Democratic Party, motions passed at their 2010 convention committed the party to:

> immediately put in place a task force comprised of women and men to consider strategies for effectively increasing women's candidacy in the party's slate for the next general elections to at least 30%;
> endeavour to ensure that at least 40% of the municipal election slates are women in the next municipal elections;
> consider electing co-chairs (male/female) to important party positions; and
> put in place a permanent mechanism to discuss/debate, plan for achieving gender equality/equity within the party and monitor the party's progress on this issue.

Despite these lofty goals, however, no action has been taken to make these commitments a reality. As has already been noted, the UDP has no female candidates in the upcoming national elections and only one female candidate for Belize City Council. Similarly, no progress has been made in the other areas included in this resolution.

As experience elsewhere has shown, commitments, targets or quotas that exist on paper without strong implementation and enforcement mechanisms are unlikely to have much effect.

When asked if male politicians are willing to look critically at the changes needed for a better response to women in politics, one elected woman said,

> *It's double talk. They talk one way – but you don't have to listen to their talk, their actions speak for themselves. Thirty years after independence, the parties should be overflowing with women…[but] they won't do anything.*

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[136] Units of the party include governing units and standing units. Governing units include the National Convention, the National Party Council, the National Executive, the Regional Caucuses and the Constituency Branches. Standing units include the Order of Distinguished Service, the Belize Youth Movement, the Marshalls Service Corps, the United Women's Group, the National Campaign Committee, the National Communications Committee, and the Policy and Reform Committee.

Other informants said that most men don't believe women can take leadership or that they *"don't want women to be leaders; they don't want women to be above them".* Another said that *"when there's a strong woman in the Caribbean, she's real strong. Men see that as a threat."* Still others pointed out that if the men were serious about promoting women's representation, they already have ways to demonstrate this by putting more women into party decision-making structures. In addition, parties in government could use available mechanisms to bring more women into Cabinet through the Senate. Neither party has done this, with the single exception of the PUP's appointment of Lisa Shoman as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2007-8.

As one informant pointed out, parties' resistance to women's attempts to play a greater role not only takes a toll on those women, it also deprives the parties of the talents that those women could contribute. She observed,

> *It's a system that is very wasteful of the women who try to get into it. People need to grow into the party hierarchy, but women get discouraged at the outset so you never reach that stage of gaining a certain amount of power and influence because you've been able to hold on and contribute.*

It seems, however, that the male leadership of the parties has not yet recognized that challenging the barriers faced by women is in their own best interest. Furthermore, there is a widespread belief that the leadership often shows little respect for women and women's concerns. As one informant said, *"Now, when you bring up women's issues, all the guys laugh. It's patronizing."* While a few informants felt that younger men were more open to greater representation of women, as a group the male leadership has a long way to go to demonstrate their real commitment to the women of their party.

There was a great deal of consensus among informants that **it will take concerted action by women within the parties and the strengthening of the women's arms** to make this happen. Several of those interviewed pointed out that women have put very little pressure on the leadership in this regard. One elected woman said,

> *You have to want to do it and force them to comply…you need a chorus of women. You have to bring pressure to bear on the male domination of the party or they will just pass you by. They hear you, but they don't listen to you.*

This informant stressed that it was critical that women approach this task together since it is easy for those in power to "pick off" individual women they see as challenging the status quo. Other informants spoke about the need for building a power base among women in the party as necessary both as a support for individual female candidates and as a springboard for promoting women and women's issues at all levels. One elected woman said,

> *If women as a group were able to express their power to the male leadership, they could make a difference in the life of the party…As voters and campaigners, we have to say, "This is what we*

want, this is what we're prepared to do [to get it]"…Women can make a difference if we have the numbers.

Another informant echoed this, saying,

[Women in the party] have to organize for ourselves, we can't sit around waiting. It has to be organic. You have to tap into women at the grassroots level.

While informants agreed that party women need to organize in their own interests, they also acknowledged that **the women's arms have been weak and not up to the task**. A significant number of informants said that the leadership of the women's sections has been problematic and that the individuals who had been given the mandate to work with women hadn't done the job. There was a concern that the individuals were chosen because of their connection to the party leadership and, as a result, they are not accountable to the women of the party. One informant observed that in current circumstances, a woman leading the women's arm is *"judged not on what you do [for women] but on how loyal you are and who you support".* Other informants said that women get comfortable in the position, with one maintaining that they are more concerned with *"the limelight and privileges while doing diddly for women."*

The person responsible for work among women in one party admitted that she had not come through, especially in recent years. She said that she had tried when she first took up the post, but that she got little support or assistance from standard bearers to identify women who might be interested. (Another informant confirmed that the political leadership in her district is resistant to the idea of a women's group there.)   This head of the women's arm acknowledged the need for a renewal of efforts, and that it is her responsibility to go to the party leadership and say that if they want to organize women, they have to provide the resources and support to do so.

While many informants laid responsibility for the current situation at the feet of the leader of the women's arm, others pointed out that other women in the party who have reached some level of influence are also accountable. One elected woman said, *"We all bear equal blame,"* and another woman candidate who has risen to prominence in her party said, *"I've neglected finding ways to bring women in the party together."* Others pointed out that the parties have provided no resources for work with women. One woman observed,

They only facilitate women when they need votes for something. If the party was serious about organizing women, they would provide the resources.

Several informants expressed the view that women in the parties *"have to come together and say, 'This isn't working, we have a better plan.'"* This will mean that women within the parties make it a priority to fight for this. One woman observed,

I have not fought [for the promotion of women in the party]. I'm not taking the men to task for it, because of the lack of work we need to do to have a critical women's voice in the party. We're not organized that way. We need to be, but we are not.

A number of informants stressed that a plan to change this situation must include organizing women in every district and in every constituency. The leader of the women's arm must be willing and able to take on this work, and the party must provide the resources to make it possible.

Several informants noted that in this process there will also be the need to challenge the view that the women's arm is an "auxiliary" to the party, doing traditional support functions but not empowering women to take their place in the party as a whole. One candidate said,

> Women who are entering the foray as candidates are professional women with their own thoughts and concerns, so they may not be reliant on what the other women in the party are thinking. Women used to come out of the women's group, but not so much now. There is a perception that the women's group deals with domestic issues and modern women are not confined to that. This has to change. We need to be more modern, more forward thinking.

This change may well require not only changing how the party as a whole views its women's arm but also building bridges among women themselves.

There was also some concern expressed that younger women in the parties haven't taken up the task. One informant attributed this to the fact that, *"Women's issues, I fear, have gone out of vogue. They're not 'sexy' any more. They're not seen as a path to power."* She observed, however, that this is a short sighted view, since if a woman gets the women of the party to organize, she has a power base on which to build. One elected woman said that having a base of women within the party had been critical to her success.

One informant talked about a successful effort within the UDP in the late 1980s/early 1990s to develop a rights-oriented women's section within that party. Called the UDP National Organization of Women (UDP NOW), its purpose was to develop a base for party women. This informant said,

> I didn't see the changes within the party to make me comfortable that my contribution would have an effect. So I realized we'd have to increase our numbers and establish a base.

Under the acronym AIM (Act, Involve, Motivate), the group sought to organize chapters in all divisions, to provide political training for women, and to develop a manifesto that focused on women's concerns. They sent their members to become involved in other organizations to find out what issues were important to them. While the group had some success, in the mid-nineties a change in the group's leadership weakened the section. A few years later, the new party leader *"brought in his own people"* and UDP NOW faded away. Over the past decade and more, neither of the major parties has developed a strong women's arm to advocate for women within the party.

Recognizing the need to strengthen the women's arms of the parties, however, does not take away the responsibility of the leadership to take more proactive measures to promote women's representation both within their own decision-making bodies and as candidates. Parties have made commitments to representation, and they should be held to account on this. They need a strategy and a timetable to make this happen, or else the target is meaningless and perpetuates the idea that even

official policies in support of women do not have to be taken seriously. Furthermore, parties cannot claim to have women's best interests at heart when they tolerate a lack of respect for women and women's issues within their ranks on a day to day basis. The leadership has a responsibility to bring the debate on the role of women into the mainstream of the party. As one informant stressed, *"There **has** to be a discussion in the party on the role of women in the party and in the country as a whole."* Parties also need to back up their stated commitments to women with the resources needed to organize effectively. Until the party leadership starts to deliver in all of these areas, women will be justified in viewing their claims to support women with skepticism.

Beyond the Major Parties

Looking at the smaller political parties, Vision Inspired by the People (VIP) does have some policies to promote women. As mentioned previously, they require slates of candidates at the city, town and village level to be gender balanced*, although they have no such requirement for national elections. In addition, they require party decision-making bodies to have both sexes represented as Chair and Co-chair (that is, if one position is male, the other must be female and vice versa). Although they do not have overall rules for gender-balance within the party, an informant from VIP said that in general the culture of the VIP has led to a mix of women and men in decision-making. He continued,

> *Bringing males and females together in decision-making is a beautiful process…I wish the other parties could experience that…You get the best decision [when you bring men and women together].*

Communications with another smaller party, the People's National Party (PNP) revealed that, although the party actively seeks women as candidates, they have no affirmative action policy (which the party representative described as *"positive discrimination"*). Although the representative said that three of the party leader's closest advisors are women, the party does not have requirements in this regard. It would appear that, within the smaller parties, there is somewhat greater openness to women's involvement although for the most part this has not been institutionalized and neither of these two parties have a women's arm. In addition, it must be acknowledged that because the stakes may seem to be less in parties that have not yet been successful at the poles, there may be less inclination for men to seek positions in the party machineries.

 * This requirement was discussed with the informant from the VIP, but was not implemented during the 2012 municipal elections in either Belize City or Belmopan..

6.5.4. Empowering Women to Run

Strengthening women as a political block both outside and inside political parties is critical to advancing women's representation. Temporary special measures/quotas are also key to ensuring that governing bodies achieve a critical mass of women and gender balance. At the same time, there continues to be a need for support for individual women to run for office. Given that men have dominated politics for so

long and that women continue to be shut out of their political networks, ***it is important to develop the spaces that will enhance women's skills and confidence to become candidates and elected politicians***.

Currently, the main avenue for this is the Women in Politics (WiP) training programme. Established by the National Women's Commission in 2009, by early 2012, almost 100 women will have gone through the programme[137]. The programme was started by the Commission in response to the recommendation coming from CEDAW that Belize needed to take action on the issue of the underrepresentation of women in our governing bodies. UNIFEM (now part of UN Women) provided initial funding for the programme.

According to the Executive Director of the National Women's Commission,

> *The WiP programme was less to train women than to socialize them, to strengthen their confidence. It was also to give women more visibility. And the community is taking notice. You hear more now about women in politics.*

She went on to describe her experience with the first cohort this way,

> *When they came In, a lot of them were iffy. But they gained so much confidence, it was amazing. A lot of the information was new and really opened their eyes; it was things they can use [if they decide to run].*

While many of the women gained a great deal of knowledge and confidence through the programme, this informant also expressed concern that some women came into the programme lacking the understanding of what would be expected of them if they wanted to run. She continued,

> *Some women in the second cohort were not prepared to pay their way, they wanted things for free. We give them invitations to events to make them more visible, but they don't come. They don't seem to feel like they have an obligation to meet you halfway.*

She stressed that some participants don't realize how much they will need to promote themselves and that this attitude will need to change if the women are going to be successful.

Overall, however, the Commission believes that the programme has been very successful in providing support for women with an interest in running for election. A few participants have been successful. From the first cohort, five women ran for election to village councils within a few months of graduation. Three of these women won, including one Chairlady and two council members. In 2012, two WiP graduates ran unsuccessfully for national level nominations and two others ran for town boards (one successfully).The challenge will be to continue the process of capacity building once women have completed the training programme. According to the Executive Director, women who have graduated need to be kept engaged and be supported to develop a sense of direction and increase their visibility as actors on the political stage. She expects that the third cohort may be the last one, and that efforts are

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[137] The first cohort included 53 women, many more than originally expected. The second cohort included 25 women and the third cohort, 20.

being made through civil society to move to a different level by supporting women to develop their presence in the communities where they may ultimately run.

In general, informants supported the WIP programme and agreed that it should be continued. Women in the WiP participants' focus group said that they *"learned from every session"* and that having the opportunity to learn from veterans was extremely useful. They also appreciated the chance to learn about marketing themselves and using the media.

A few questioned how successful the programme has been. On informant said that the programme could benefit from a wider selection of resource people and the inclusion of an internship. One elected woman said that the programme should have put more emphasis on reaching out to the political parties to identify women to take part in the training. Several informants, however, put more responsibility on the parties for not using the opportunity presented by the WIP programme to take the initiative and encourage a block of their own women to participate.

Participants in the WiP focus group echoed the belief that ***women interested in running for elected office need ongoing support after the training is over***. They said that women who had participated in WiP and decided to run felt that they were on their own. They added that there is a need for follow-up in terms of ongoing training and mentorship, but also recognized that women themselves need to take greater responsibility for building the supportive networks that break down their isolation.

In addition to providing training and ongoing capacity building for women candidates, and in recognition of the greater challenges faced by women in accessing campaign financing, ***most candidates supported the idea of special Women's Funds*** to provide additional support to women running for election. While a majority of candidates supported such funds either inside or outside the political parties, a few felt that it would be difficult to implement these within the party, particularly if applied in the nomination phase.

Experience elsewhere has shown that women working together across party lines has been shown to be effective both in capacity building for political women and in promoting strategies to increase women's representation. ***All candidates favoured the idea of a women's political caucus that would bring together political women to work on issues of common concern***. One elected woman said, *"It will happen, it has to happen. I just don't know when."* She continued,

> I support this. [Political parties] don't have to be afraid if you train your people in house. Then you can send out your ambassadors [to work with others].

A significant number of informants, however, acknowledged that this will be very difficult in the current political climate. One elected woman pointed out that the "we and they mentality" that currently exists within the parties is not conducive to women stepping out to work together with other women. Another informant talked about the "tribalism" that leads to the kind of "incivility" we see in politics in Belize. She continued, *"This incivility has to stop, but I don't see a movement of women saying it has to*

stop." Another candidate maintained that even acknowledging a woman from another political party is seen as a sign of disloyalty. She remarked,

> *I was on the radio and mentioned [a woman from the other party's] name. I was called out on this. They asked me, "Why did you endorse her?" I said, "I didn't endorse her. I just recognized her." [She] doesn't need me to endorse her.*

This informant also said,

> *It's a male dominated, masculine model. You're a woman in the party, and this is a party headed by men. They don't see the value of [women] working together.*

Because of political polarization and concern that women will be ostracized by their parties if they work across party lines, several informants doubted that it would be possible for women to come together. Almost all informants believed, however, that doing so would be a positive move and a sign of Belize developing greater political maturity. While recognizing that it will be an uphill battle, one informant said, *"If you see the party as an instrument of change for what you want to achieve, [you'd be open to this]."* Another elected woman went further to say,

> *We have to form a group for women [outside the political parties]…get women together, blue or red…For some of us, if you're red, you're red, red, red. If you're blue, you're blue, blue, blue. I'm still blue, but I need to look farther than just blue…I think we have to get all the women together and find a way out [of the current situation].*

In addition to finding ways of working together, several informants noted that even in the absence of non-partisan political forum for women, they could still take steps to challenge the attitude that "anything goes" when trying to destroy a political opponent. One elected woman said, *"Even if it's not possible [to have a group of women from both parties], we shouldn't be tearing each other apart."* Another reinforced this notion, observing,

> *Just because you don't agree with some woman, you don't have to get nasty to bring her down. We should use the high road, and talk about issues and policies.*

Clearly, **most political women believe that there is something to be gained by working together with other women, regardless of their party affiliation**. Given the current climate, ways of doing this will have to be developed carefully, perhaps by focusing on specific issues where there is a clear path to consensus among women of different political colours. It will also be important to ensure that the collaboration is truly non-partisan and not dominated or taken over by one "side". Women will also need to be willing to stand up to the leadership of their own parties who will likely exert pressure to discourage this kind of initiative. Nevertheless, the possibility of developing links among women across party lines holds promise for promoting greater representation of women and greater priority for issues of particular concern to them.

6.5.5. Changing the Culture of Political Institutions

Almost all of those interviewed, including women who have been elected to the National Assembly, City Council and Town Boards, agreed that there is a need for change in our political institutions. Although most informants were not very familiar with initiatives for Gender-Friendly Parliaments, they believed that Belize very much needs to focus attention in this area. One elected woman said that this is *"desperately needed"*. Another stressed that it would be important to *"put this in the manifesto for all thirty-one standard bearers. Otherwise they'll just laugh at it."* The fact that most male politicians continue to ridicule actions to address the difficult and sometimes hostile environment women face in our governing bodies is in itself a strong argument for a Gender-Friendly Parliaments programme.

Gender-Friendly Parliaments programmes work to ensure that attitudes and behaviours displayed in our governing bodies are not discriminatory, that family-friendly policies and procedures address women's additional workload in the home, and that sexual harassment is not tolerated among members of governing bodies and their staffs. In describing their experience as female politicians, informants provided concrete examples[138] of how the situation in Belize calls for the development and effective implementation of guidelines to promote a gender-friendly legislature. This also applies, of course, to city councils, town boards and village councils. Political parties, too, would do well to examine their own practices and develop guidelines to govern the practices within their own institution and membership.

6.5.6. Building for the Future

As one informant pointed out, making change in the interest of any disenfranchised group requires both affirmative action and education. Temporary special measures/quotas and targeted programmes to support and empower women candidates are affirmative action strategies that recognize the long history of barriers to women in electoral politics. At the same time, many informants also emphasized the need for education to change a culture which sees political leadership as primarily male territory. The public needs to be sold on the idea that we need more women elected and that women and men should complement each other in political decision-making.

Some informants also stressed the need to reach our children and young people through more civics education from the primary level up, including attention to the need for gender balance in our political leadership. Providing children with role models of women leaders is important to break the equation of political leadership with male leaders. Those role models send a message to girls that leadership is something they can aspire to and to boys that a woman leader is both capable and legitimate. One informant suggested that we should identify girls in schools and churches and develop a reward system where they are given positive reinforcement for developing leadership skills from an early age. Other informants echoed the idea that we need to pay more attention to civic education and developing leadership skills in our young people.

It is the powerful combination of education with practical strategies to directly address the barriers faced by women in politics that will lead to real change.   Affirmative action strategies without education are likely to encounter resistance that will doom them to failure. But education without other, concrete

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[138] Many of which are documented in earlier parts of this report.

actions will mean that women are unlikely to achieve fair representation in our governing bodies for a very long time, if at all. The combination of education and action has the potential to achieve fair representation of both women and men in our governing bodies within years rather than decades.

7. A Framework for Action

It cannot be denied that the low level of women's representation is the result of systemic barriers in our system of politics. These barriers operate at all levels – from the decision to become a candidate, to the selection by a political party, to the election campaign itself. Furthermore, the barriers continue after the election for those few women who are able to fight their way through to be successful at the polls. In order to see a substantive change, it is necessary to develop a strategy that recognizes these barriers and jump starts the move toward gender-balance in our governing bodies.

7.1. Guiding Principles

Developing a strategy for change requires agreement on a set of guiding principles that will provide a foundation and keep the strategy focused. Guiding principles provide context for the strategy and ensure that its advocates are "on the same page". The analysis set forth in this document demonstrates that women are effectively marginalized in Belizean electoral politics and leads to this set of guiding principles for change:

Principle 1   The lack of women's representation in electoral politics is a fundamental problem for democracy and a symptom of continued gender inequality in Belize.

Principle 2   There is no level playing field for women and men in Belizean politics. The low level of women's representation is caused by systemic barriers to women.

Principle 3   Because of their role as gatekeepers in the electoral process, political parties have a particular obligation to promote women's representation.

Principle 4   In recognition of the lack of a level playing field, the male political leadership should support initiatives to address the specific barriers to women in politics.

Principle 5   Any strategy for promoting women's representation will only be successful if women as a group develop a stronger voice both inside and outside the political parties.

Principle 6   Temporary special measures/quotas must be a key component of any plan to increase women's political representation. Quotas systems for governing bodies and within political parties must include a specific plan for implementation and a timeline for reaching the target. Sanctions must be used to ensure effective application of any quota system.

Principle 7 Strategies for increasing women's political representation, including temporary special measures/quotas, should strive for gender-balance in governing bodies – that is, both women and men should have at least 40% and no more than 60% of available seats.

Principle 8 Governments in Belize, at all levels, have the responsibility to ensure an enabling environment for the equal participation of women and men in our governing bodies.

These guiding principles provide the basic direction for the development and implementation of specific initiatives for change.

7.2. Election Cycles and Critical Timing

Developing a strategy for increasing women's representation in governing bodies brings a particular challenge. Elections do not occur on a continuing basis, but years apart. In Belize, national elections usually occur every five years, municipal and village elections every three years. At the same time, preparations for elections begin long before. When work on this situation analysis began[139], for example, it was already too late for any strategy to have an effect on the representation of women in the national election expected in 2013 but actually called in early 2012. Standard bearers are often chosen long before the election and work toward securing a nomination must begin even before that. Furthermore, strategies that will lead to significant increases in women's representation must be in place with sufficient time to allow political parties, candidates and the electorate time to adjust to the new situation.

This means that any strategy for change must be conscious of election cycles and ensure that all initiatives are planned to have impact at the next possible election. At the national level, this will mean targeting the 2017 election as the next opportunity to make a significant change. If that opening is missed, the next chance will be in 2022 or 2023, meaning that it will be more than a decade, or longer, before we see any real movement in the level of women's representation.

It is critical that the work begin now to lead up to that election. It may seem that it is a long time away, but developing and implementing the initiatives that will lead to success in that election will need every bit of that time. Women inside and outside of political parties need to develop an effective voice to advocate for the changes that are necessary within the parties and at the legislative level. Political parties begin the process of selecting standard bearers years before the election, and any requirements for temporary special measures/quotas will need to be in place before that process begins. Throughout this time, there is a need to engage the public in a dialogue about why gender-balance in our governing bodies is important for the women and men of Belize. Finally, the development of a system of temporary special measures/quotas that is appropriate for Belize will take technical assistance and time, as well as efforts to bring the existing political leadership on board.

At the municipal and village level, election cycles are shorter, so the opportunity to see movement comes somewhat more often. Fortunately, the method of elections used in the municipalities and

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[139] In 2011

villages makes the application of temporary special measures/quotas a much easier project at that level. As a result, it is feasible to look to the municipal elections in 2015 and village elections scheduled for 2016[140] as the target for the introduction of those measures as well as other initiatives at that level.

8. The Way Forward: Enhancing Women's Representation

It is clearly time to take action on the issue of women's political representation. The responsibility to do so, however, does not rest with any one actor in the political process. Government, political parties, civil society and women themselves all have a responsibility to do their part.

As mentioned earlier in this report, there was considerable consensus among informants that Belize's electoral system is flawed and that it is time to take action to reform the system. Specifically, a significant majority of informants supported a review of and possible changes to the Westminster electoral model and the implementation of a system of registration and regulation of political parties. Even more informants believed that campaign finance reform is needed. Finally, most informants recognized that "hand-out politics" is creating serious problems for our democracy and that there is a need for action to address this, even if some of the informants were at a loss to suggest how to tackle this issue.

Although all of these issues have both direct and indirect effects on women's political representation, it is beyond the scope of this study to make comprehensive recommendations on political reform. For the most part, the recommendations outlined below speak directly to addressing specific gender-related initiatives. At the same time, however, a few more general recommendations are made where they will directly contribute to reducing gender barriers, where they will make a significant contribution to strengthening overall democratic goals, and where the direction needed is clear.

Specific gender-related reforms could, of course, be undertaken in the context of an overall process of political transformation, and indeed it seems to be an important period in Belize's political development to undertake that wider endeavor. However, it is vital that targeted actions to address gender-based barriers in the political system not be delayed or avoided in the course of debate and decision-making over what broader changes are needed. As outlined in the previous section, timing is critical to achieve meaningful increases in women's political representation. The time to start is now.

8.1. The Responsibility of Government

The first duty of government with respect to women's representation is to acknowledge that there are concrete barriers that make it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve greater gender balance in our governing bodies. Based on that recognition, government must accept the need for temporary special

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[140] Village council elections will also take place earlier, in 2013. However, it is unlikely that it would be possible to put temporary special measures in place before those elections.

measures/quotas as an essential part of the strategy for change and begin the process of developing and implementing these measures.

> *Recommendation 1-1: Government should **adopt in principle the need for temporary special measures/quotas for the national level**, to begin with the elections scheduled for 2017. Agreement in principle should be achieved no later than December 31, 2013.*

> *Recommendation 1-2: Government should **appoint a technical working group to recommend changes to Belize's electoral system to accommodate quotas**, and provide resources to engage appropriate experts in the field of electoral system reform and gender quotas. This committee should be appointed by December 31, 2013 and report by December 31, 2014. Appropriate legislation should be passed by December 31, 2015 to allow political parties and potential candidates time to prepare for the change.*

While gender quotas cannot be implemented until the 2017 national elections, that does not mean that more immediate actions are not possible and necessary to demonstrate government's commitment to greater inclusion of women in the governing process. In particular, it is possible to use Senate appointments to ensure a minimum level of representation for women in Cabinet, regardless of the number of women in the House of Representatives. The present government has used this mechanism to appoint two women to Cabinet, but this provision should be strengthened and become automatic until there are sufficient women in the National Assembly to make this unnecessary.

> *Recommendation 1-3: As an interim measure, **government should ensure that at least three women are appointed to Cabinet, using existing mechanisms (Senate appointments) where needed to accomplish this**. This commitment should begin at the first new government appointments to the Senate after January 1, 2013, and continue until the National Assembly has reached gender balance.*

At the municipal and village level, the design of temporary special measures/quotas to achieve gender balance is a more straightforward process, because cities, towns and villages are not broken up into single-member areas for electoral purposes. A quota can readily be applied to slates of candidates, by requiring that all slates must adhere to the requirements for gender-balance – that is, both women and men will be nominated for at least 40% and no less than 60% of the positions on the slate. For slates of seven candidates (in villages, towns and Belmopan City), this would mean that three positions must be female, three male, and the final position can be either male or female[141]. For slates of eleven candidates (Belize City), this would mean that five positions must be female, five positions male, and the eleventh position can be male or female. Parties or groups[142] who choose to run only partial slates

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[141] All of these calculations are for all nominations on the slate, that is city/village councilors or town board members, plus the mayor or village council chair.

[142] There are examples of situations where a group of independents has run a slate of candidates at the village level, without formal organization as a party.

would have the quota applied to the number of candidates they run[143]. No slate would be accepted for the election that does not adhere to the quota provision.

>   **Recommendation 1-4:** Government **should pass and implement legislation to require slates for city, town and village level elections to be gender-balanced** *starting in the 2015 municipal and 2016 village council elections. This legislative change should take place no later than March 31, 2014 to allow political parties and potential candidates time to prepare for the change.*

Once temporary special measures/quotas are in place, periodic reviews should take place to determine their effectiveness, made any amendments necessary to improve their performance, and eventually determine when these measures are no longer necessary because gender balance has been achieved.

>   **Recommendation 1-5:** *Government should conduct* **a review of the system of temporary special measures/quotas after each election cycle and implement measures to improve their effectiveness**. *Temporary special measures/quotas can be discontinued only when barriers to women's representation have been substantially eliminated and gender balance has been achieved*.

The use of temporary special measures/quotas is a new concept for Belize.   While many women and men understand the need for greater representation of women in politics, it is important to ensure that there is a general understanding of why gender-balance is important and why affirmative action strategies are essential to achieving that goal. To accomplish this, government has the responsibility to promote initiatives that will develop that understanding.

>   **Recommendation 1-6:** *Government should* **support a public education campaign and national dialogue on the need for gender balance in political decision-making** *as part of the implementation plan for gender quotas. This campaign should be coordinated by the National Women's Commission beginning in 2013 with adequate resources for its development and implementation. The campaign should continue until temporary special measures/quotas are implemented at all levels.*

The use of public resources in political campaigns is clearly an abuse of those resources. Resources that should be equitably distributed on the basis of public policy priorities are essentially hijacked by politicians to further their own ambitions.   In addition, this gives incumbent politicians an unfair advantage in campaigns, which clearly works against women.

>   **Recommendation 1-7:** *Government should pass and enforce legislation to prohibit the use of public resources (including funds, personnel, vehicles or any other item or service paid for through public funds) for political campaigns, including both nomination campaigns and election campaigns. Breach of this legislation must be subject to clear sanctions. Legislation should be*

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[143] For example, the quota would require a slate of five candidates to include two women, two men and either a woman or a man in the fifth position.

passed by June 30, 2014, with implementation beginning with the 2015 municipal, 2016 village council and 2017 national elections.

While the Women in Politics programme has reached many women, there is a need for continued training for women. Furthermore, a significant number of informants from the districts stressed that training and capacity building must be decentralized to build a solid base of women with the skills and confidence to participate in politics. District level training can also be used to promote ongoing networks of support among the women in that area.

> ***Recommendation 1-8:*** *Government, through the National Women's Commission, should continue the Women in Politics training programme through the implementation of training in each district, beginning with those districts showing the lowest rates of women's representation at the village level (Toledo and Cayo, followed by Stann Creek and Corozal). This training should begin no later than September 2013.*

Finally, government has a clear responsibility to ensure that our governing bodies are enabling environments for the participation of both women and men.   Governing bodies that are often described as hostile to women can simply not be tolerated by governments who claim that political office is equally open to both sexes. Furthermore, the possibility of being elected to political office should not be restricted to men, or to those women without children or whose children have grown. Family-friendly institutions will not only help break down barriers to women, they will also benefit men who want to play a greater and more responsible role in the lives of their families.

> ***Recommendation 1-9:*** *Government should develop, pass and implement guidelines for gender-sensitive legislatures. This framework should also be used as a starting point for developing guidelines for city councils, town boards and village councils. Guidelines for the National Assembly should be completed by December 31, 2014 and for cities, towns and villages by December 31, 2015.*

8.2. The Responsibility of Political Parties

Experience elsewhere and in Belize has demonstrated that political parties are the gatekeepers to political representation. As such, they play a key role in maintaining the barriers faced by women. Conversely, parties have an equally important role to play in dismantling those barriers and advancing the cause of women's representation from among their own members.

It is a matter of great concern that, according to informants, most men in the leadership of the two major political parties do not believe that women face barriers in politics or that any special measures are needed to promote women. There is a need for a process of consciousness raising within the party membership and, in particular, in the party leadership. Political parties will not take effective measures to promote women (regardless of their rhetoric or policies on paper) if the leadership does not believe that such measures are necessary.

*Recommendation 2-1: Political parties should **develop and implement a process of gender-sensitization for the party leadership,** including the top levels of leadership. This sensitization process should take place over a one-year period, beginning no later than April 1, 2013.*

Both political parties currently have policies calling for greater participation of women in party decision-making bodies. In the cases of the PUP, the constitution calls for a minimum of 30% women in all party bodies. In the case of the UDP, no target is specifically defined, but their 2010 resolution calls for gender equality/equity within the party. However, as informants pointed out, neither party has done anything to reach those commitments. There is a lack of concrete plans and deadlines for implementation, and there is no mechanism though which the parties can be held accountable to their commitments. Without these conditions in place, targets and commitments made on paper are likely to remain there and women in the parties can expect to see little if any real progress.

*Recommendation 2-2: Political parties should **develop a strategy, identify necessary actions, and set deadlines to implement existing party policies on women's representation**. In the case of the two major parties, this means achieving their stated commitment to women's representation in internal party bodies within a specified period of time. Where specific targets have not yet been established, this should be done as part of this process. A timeline should be established in consultation with the women's arm, but in any case the strategy should be in place no later than June 30, 2013.*

Political parties are unlikely to make a substantial commitment to increasing women's representation both within party structures and as candidates in the absence of a strong women's voice within the party. Women need to be in a position to articulate their interests as a group and to put pressure on the male dominated leadership to take their concerns seriously. Strengthening the women's arms of the parties will be critical to the process of making other recommendations in this section happen and, indeed, in pushing the parties to take effective action when they are in government. Furthermore, stronger women's arms will provide a political base for women candidates and a place for training and capacity building that will help them be more effective as candidates and elected politicians.

*Recommendation 2-3: Political parties should **provide resources for an annual convention of the women's arm of the party,** including the election of the women's arm's representative on the party's executive. These events should begin in 2013.*

*Recommendation 2-4: Political parties should **provide resources for the ongoing organization of the women's arm of the party,** based on a strategy developed by the women's arm and submitted to the party's executive. This strategy should recognize that strong chapters of the women's arm are needed in every constituency. This should begin in 2013.*

Previous recommendations have called on government to develop and implement temporary special measures/quotas for implementation in the next possible election cycle. Political parties will need to develop a strategy to develop their own women candidates and, in fact, should be moving to voluntary quotas whether or not legislated quotas exist.

*Recommendation 2-5: Political parties should **develop and implement a strategy for identifying, developing and supporting women candidates and for achieving gender-balanced slates for city and town elections by 2015 and village council elections by 2016; and gender-balance in candidates at the national level by 2017.** This strategy should be in place no later than December 31, 2013.*

While political parties often claim that their nomination processes are open to women and provide a level playing field for both female and male candidates, it is clear that a great deal happens to undermine and marginalize women's candidacies unofficially and below the surface. These things happen to male candidates too, of course, but because of the old boys club that continues to dominate politics and the double standards that persist, the impact on female candidates is greater. Holding candidates accountable for their behaviour during nomination campaigns will be an important part of addressing barriers to women as well as promoting the health of democracy within the parties.

*Recommendation 2-6: Political parties should **develop a Code of Ethics for candidates during the party's nomination campaigns,** including prohibiting personal, unsubstantiated attacks on rival candidates and vote buying during the period of the campaign and at the convention. The Code of Ethics must include sanctions for violating the Code, including possible disqualification of the candidate. This Code of Ethics should be in place prior to nominations for municipal elections in 2015 and all subsequent elections, and in any case no later than March 31, 2014.*

8.3. The Responsibility of Civil Society

While government and political parties have their roles to play in promoting women's representation, it is absolutely clear that the development of women as a political block and the strengthening of the women's movement in Belize are necessary to create a base for women and to advocate in women's interests to both government and political parties. Furthermore, civil society organizations have a responsibility to play a role in developing an understanding in the wider population (both women and men) of the importance of achieving greater gender-balance in our governing bodies.

It is equally clear that there is currently no civil society organization in Belize with both the mandate and the capacity to provide leadership in this process. Informants supported the idea of a non-partisan women's political organization that would not only work to eliminate barriers to women's representation, but also bring women together across party lines to advocate on issues of common concern.

*Recommendation 3-1: A **Voice of Women organization should be established, with chapters in each district.** This organization should play the role of both **a league of women voters and a non-partisan women's political caucus.** Its role should be to organize focused political campaigns on issues of concern to women, to provide capacity building and a support network for women aspiring to political office, and to be a meeting point for political women to come together on issues of common concern.*

Recommendation 3-2: *The Voice of Women should **develop a long term strategy to establish women as a political block and achieve successful strategies for women's political representation.***

Given the current situation in Belize, there is a need to jump start the process of organizing women to have greater capacity to advocate on women's representation and other issues. Giving women access to successful experiences from other countries can provide both motivation and ideas for advancing the cause in Belize. It is essential that this event have the participation of women from both major parties as well as those from smaller parties and unaffiliated women to ward off accusations of partisanship. In addition, the need to decentralize efforts to organize women in Belize should be taken into account in organizing the event.

Recommendation 3-3: *To motivate the establishment of the Voice of Women, **donors should be approached to provide sponsorship for a women's political symposium**, including representatives from countries who have been successful in advancing the political representation of women (for example, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, etc.). Activities surrounding the symposium should also be held in the districts to maximize the impact and recognize the need for decentralization. The organization of the symposium should be carried out by a steering committee including political women from both major parties, women from smaller parties, and unaffiliated women. This symposium should take place no later than June 30, 2013.*

This new organization can provide a foundation for advancing women's concerns only if it develops clearly articulated policies that can be the focus of concerted advocacy between elections and during election campaigns. Issues that are put forth in vague terms are easily co-opted or sidestepped by politicians. It's also difficult to get broad and effective support for issues when the demands are not clear. Furthermore, the process of achieving agreement on the issues by women across party lines and non-aligned women may promote a sense of trust that will be critical to the success of this organization.

Recommendation 3-4: *Through this organization, **develop a specific Voice of Women Agenda as the basis of ongoing advocacy through to the 2017 national elections**. This agenda should include only a few, very specific and concrete proposals and focus on the issue of temporary special measures/quotas and other initiatives to increase women's political representation. The Agenda should be accompanied by the development of a plan to engage women countrywide in promoting the Agenda and the issue of women's representation.*

Another role the Voice of Women organization could play is in the development of a Women's Fund to support women who agree with their goals with campaign contributions, particularly in the nomination phase where women often have particular difficulty in accessing funds. Clear criteria would need to be developed for the distribution of funds, to guard against accusations of political partisanship and to ensure that those receiving funds clearly demonstrate their support for the goals of the Voice of Women.

Recommendation 3-5: The ***Voice of Women should consider the development of a special Women's Fund to support women candidates (from any party)*** who are in agreement with and willing to advance the policies of the organization.

9. Conclusion

At the end of each interview, informants were asked if there was anything they wanted to add. Some talked about the need to overcome the challenges that confront Belize's democracy, including patronage and hand-outs. One elected women spoke of the need for women to be a part of building "*a politics of hope*" where parties can come together and work for the people. Others mentioned the importance of supporting women who enter the political fray, with one woman saying, *"We need people who are brave…if we want women in politics, we need to be there with them."* Others emphasized again the need to develop the women's arms in both parties and that a legislated policy framework will be key to making real change happen.

Some women talked about their hopes for the future, when women would fully take their place in leading the country. One woman said, *"I desperately want to be at the forefront of a movement of women in Belize, to set them ablaze."* One woman said that if efforts to promote women in politics are successful, *"We will see women emerging. We will see women blossom."* Another looked forward to the day when she would see more women climbing the steps to the National Assembly.   If government, political parties and civil society organizations fulfill their responsibilities, attaining that vision is within our reach.

Appendix A: Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations for Government

Recommendation	Responsible	Timeline	Resources
1-1: Government should adopt in principle the need for temporary special measures/ quotas for the national level, to begin with the elections scheduled for 2017.	Cabinet and National Assembly	December 31, 2013	
1-2: Government should appoint a technical working group to recommend changes to Belize's electoral system to accommodate quotas, and provide resources to engage appropriate experts in the field of electoral system reform and gender quotas.	Cabinet and National Assembly	Appointed by December 31, 2013 Report by December 31, 2014	Expert consultants in the field of electoral systems reform and gender quotas.
1-3: As an interim measure, government should ensure that at least three women are appointed to Cabinet, using existing mechanisms (Senate appointments) where needed to accomplish this.	Prime Minister	At the first new government appointments to the Senate after January 1, 2013 and continuing until the National Assembly has reached gender balance.	
1-4: Government should pass and implement legislation to require slates for city, town and village level elections to be gender-balanced starting in the 2015 municipal and 2016 village council elections.	Cabinet and National Assembly	Legislation passed no later than March 31, 2014.	Expert in the area of drafting legislation in this area.

Recommendation	Responsible	Timeline	Resources
1-5: Government should conduct a review of the system of temporary special measures/quotas after each election cycle and implement measures to improve their effectiveness.	The Cabinet and National Assembly	After each election cycle. Temporary special measures/ quotas can only be discontinued when barriers have been eliminated and balance achieved.	Experts to assess the effectiveness of temporary special measures/quotas.
1-6: Government should support a public education campaign and national dialogue on the need for gender balance in political decision-making as part of the implementation plan for gender quotas.	The National Women's Commission with resources identified or allocated by government	Beginning 2013 and continuing until temporary special measures/quotas are implemented at all levels.	Costs of public education campaign.
1-7: Government should pass and enforce legislation to prohibit the use of public resources (including funds, personnel, vehicles or any other item or service paid for through public funds) for political campaigns, including both nomination campaigns and election campaigns. Breach of this legislation must be subject to clear sanctions.	The Cabinet and National Assembly Complaints mechanism to be established	Legislation passed by June 30, 2014. Implementation beginning with 2015 municipal, 2016 village council and 2017 national elections.	Expert in drafting legislation in this area. Costs of complaints mechanism.
1-8: Government, through the National Women's Commission, should continue the Women in Politics training programme through the implementation of training in each district.	The National Women's Commission with resources identified or allocated by government	Two cohorts per year starting September 2013. Year 1 – Toledo and Cayo; Year 2 – Stann Creek and Corozal; Year 3 – Orange Walk and Belize District.	Costs of conducting training.

Recommendation	Responsible	Timeline	Resources
1-9: Government should develop, pass and implement guidelines for gender-sensitive legislatures. This framework should also be used as a starting point for developing guidelines for city councils, town boards and village councils.	Cabinet and National Assembly City Councils, Town Boards, National Association of Village Councils	Guidelines for National Assembly completed by June 30, 2014. Guidelines for cities, towns and villages completed by December 31, 2015.	Gender expert to facilitate development of guidelines.

Recommendations for Political Parties

Recommendation	Responsible	Timeline	Resources
2-1: Political parties should develop and implement a process of gender-sensitization for the party leadership, including the top levels of leadership.	Party Leaders, Party Executives	For a one-year period to commence no later than April 1, 2013.	Costs of sensitization sessions.
2-2: Political parties should develop a strategy, identify necessary actions, and set deadlines to implement existing party policies on women's representation. In the case of the two major parties, this means achieving their stated commitment to women's representation in internal party bodies within a specified period of time. Where specific targets have not yet been set, this should be done as part of this process.	Party Leader, Party Executive in consultation with the women's arm of the party.	To be determined in consultation with the women's arm, but the strategy should be adopted by the party no later than June 30, 2013.	

Recommendation	Responsible	Timeline	Resources
2-3: Political parties should provide resources for an annual convention of the women's arm of the party, including the election of the women's arm's representative on the party's executive.	Party Executive in consultation with the women's arm of the party.	Annually, beginning in 2013.	Costs of annual convention of the women's arm.
2-4: Political parties should provide resources for the ongoing organization of the women's arm of the party, based on a strategy developed by the women's arm and submitted to the party's executive. This strategy should recognize that strong chapters of the women's arm are needed in every constituency.	Party Executive in consultation with the women's arm of the party.	Annually, beginning in 2013.	Costs of organizing activities as negotiated between the women's arm and the party Executive.
Recommendation 2-5: Political parties should develop and implement a strategy for identifying, developing and supporting women candidates and for achieving gender-balanced slates for city and town elections by 2015 and village council elections by 2016, and gender-balance in candidates at the national level by 2017.	Party Executive	Strategy in place no later than December 31, 2013.	Dependant on strategy developed.
Recommendation 2-6: Political parties should develop a Code of Ethics for candidates during the party's nomination campaigns, including prohibiting personal, unsubstantiated attacks on rival candidates and vote buying during the period of the campaign and at the convention. The Code of Ethics must include sanctions for violating the Code, including possible disqualification of the candidate.	Party Executive	In place prior to nominations for municipal elections in 2015 and all subsequent elections, and in any case no later than March 31, 2014.	

Recommendations for Civil Society

Recommendation	Responsible	Timeline	Resources
3-1: A Voice of Women organization should be established, with chapters in each district. This organization should play the role of both a league of women voters and a non-partisan women's political caucus. Its role should be to organize focused political campaigns on issues of concern to women, to provide capacity building and a support network for women aspiring to political office, and to be a meeting point for political women to come together on issues of common concern.	Women from all political parties and unaffiliated women	Following Recommendation 3-3	Dependent on activities
3-2: The Voice of Women should develop a long term strategy to establish women as a political block and achieve successful strategies for women's political representation.	Voice of Women	Within 6 months of the founding of the organization	
3-3: To motivate the establishment of the Voice of Women, donors and government should be approached to provide sponsorship for a women's political symposium, including representatives from countries who have been successful in advancing the political representation of women (for example, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, etc.). Activities surrounding the symposium should also be held in the districts to maximize the impact and recognize the need for decentralization.	Steering Committee of women from political parties and unaffiliated women	By June 30, 2013	Costs of symposium

Recommendation	Responsible	Timeline	Resources
3-4: Through this organization, develop a specific Voice of Women Agenda as the basis for ongoing advocacy through to the 2017 national elections. This agenda should include only a few, very specific and concrete proposals, and focus on the issue of temporary special measures/quotas and other initiatives to increase women's political representation. The Agenda should be accompanied by the development of a plan to engage women countrywide in promoting the Agenda and the issue of women's representation.	Voice of Women	As soon as possible after founding of organization, at least within two months.	Costs of producing and publicizing Women's Agenda. Costs of implementing plan.
3-5: The Voice of Women should consider the development of a special Women's Fund to support women candidates (from any party) who are in agreement with and winning to advance the policies of the organization.	Voice of Women	As determined by the organization.	Costs of soliciting donations, etc.

Appendix B: Objectives

Objectives of the Situation Analysis of Gender and Politics in Belize – 2011[144]

1. To provide an updated information-base and analysis of the political and policy context of Belize with special emphasis on developments and issues related to gender since 1998 (using *Women In Politics: Seeking Opportunities for Leadership in Belize* as one of the core base-line documents);

2. To provide updated comparative data for the 1998-2011 period on the participation rate of women in the House of Representatives, the Senate, the Cabinet, senior public service posts (CEOs and Heads of Department), appointed statutory bodies, municipal government, village councils, and senior posts in political parties;

3. To objectively assess and report on the performance on the recommendations in *Women In Politics: Seeking Opportunities for Leadership in Belize*, and on manifesto promises of political parties in relation to women in politics;

4. To update and expand the analysis of the structural and other barriers that preclude or discourage women from the political process;

5. To identify best practices of enhancing women's participation in other countries with similar contexts and issues, that may be of relevance for Belize;

6. To propose concrete and measurable interventions aimed at further breaking down barriers and supporting the increase in the number women in the highest levels of political leadership and decision-making;

7. To further stimulate and inform both public information and the on-going dialogue of women in politics in Belize and;

8. To inform the preparation of a collaborative advocacy strategy to mobilize actions around selected recommendations of the G&P-SitAn, with a focus on increasing the percentage of women in the National Assembly and the Cabinet.

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[144] The original project was scheduled to be carried out in 2011 and was completed in December of that year. However, before publication was possible, national elections were called earlier than anticipated. As a result, the Situation Analysis was updated in 2012 to take the elections into account in the final report.

Appendix C: Bibliography

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