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INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

Equal participation of women and men in
decision-making processes at all levels

Written statement*

Submitted by

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

There has been an upwards trend in numbers of women in decision-making positions in public and private institutions have increased in recent years, although the present financial crisis is likely to slow this trend in the private sector. This presentation will review trends, it will consider the impact of women's participation in decision-making, identify some persistent problems and emerging threats to women's capacity to take up positions of authority, and it will also identify decision-making arenas in which numbers of women remain persistently and alarmingly low.

II. THE NUMBERS: PUBLIC OFFICE

The most visible arena in which women are appearing in greater numbers is national and local politics. In 24 countries women exceed 30% of representatives of national assemblies, with Rwanda taking the world lead with 56% of seats occupied by women. The rate of increase in numbers of women in politics recently has been promising, increasing from 11.6% of seats in 1995 to 18.4% now.

However, even at the accelerated rate of increase in numbers of women in public office, the 'parity zone' where neither sex holds more than 60 % of seats will not be reached by low-income countries until 2045 *at the present rate of increase*.

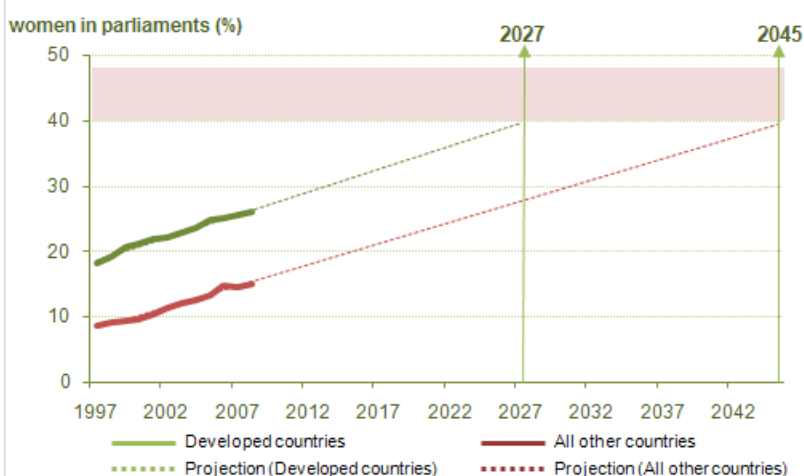
Quotas or other temporary positive action measures such as reserved seats have now become a standard means of supporting women's engagement in political competition, and are used in 48 countries.²

Most of the 24 countries that boast 30% or more women in national assemblies applied quotas in some form. Currently, a promising approach to quotas is to use a 60/40 formula, wherein neither one gender is able to take more than 60% of seats.

Political parties continue to be the most important institution shaping the numbers of women nominated as candidates for public office. In many contexts such as Western Europe, Southern Africa, and Latin America, women have succeeded in gaining internal party quotas for women in party decision-making positions and policy-making posts. However, there is no systematic data available on women in political

Parity Zone for Women in Parliaments is Generations Away

At the current rate of increase, it will take close to 20 years for developed countries and more than 40 years for developing countries to reach the 40% parity zone.



Notes: This calculation is based on women members in the lower or single house of parliament. Projections reflect a simple linear regression using available information from 1997 to 2008. The resulting equations are $y = 0.694x + 18.01$ for developed countries and $y = 0.649x + 7.543$ for all other countries. The linear extension of the current trend assumes that the rate of increase during the last decade remains unchanged.

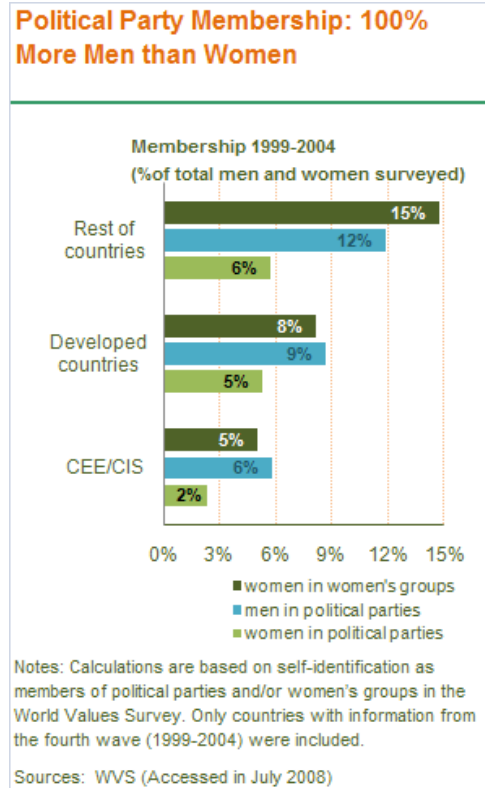
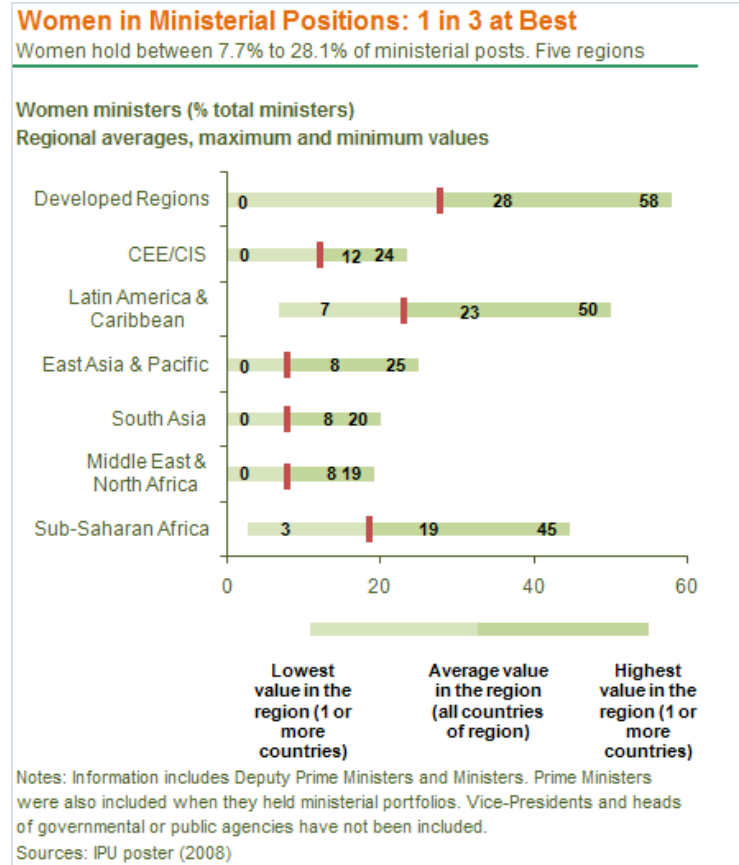
Sources: IPU (accessed July 2008)

¹ Anne Marie Goetz is the Thematic Advisor on Governance, Peace and Security for the UN Development Fund for Women. Much of the text of this presentation is drawn from UNIFEM's 2008/9 publication: 'Progress of the World's Women Gender and Accountability: Who Answers to Women?'. Graphs and tables created by Hanny Cueva. See: <http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/>

'Global Database of Quotas for Women: Data grouped by quota type', International IDEA and Stockholm University, 2006, <<http://quotaproject.org/system.cfm>>, accessed 1 July 2008; Mansbridge, Jane, Miki Caul Kittilson, and Mark P. Jones, 'Critical Perspectives on Gender and Politics: Gender Quotas I', *Politics & Gender*, 1(5), 2005, 621-652; Dahlerup, Drude and Lenita Freidenvall, 'Quotas as a "Fast Track" to Equal Representation for Women', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(1), March 2005, 26-48; Yoon (2001); and Reynolds (1999).

party decision-making. As a proxy we can use figures on numbers of women who are members of political parties, and as we can see from the chart below, twice as many men as women join political parties.

Parties still have much to do to advance women’s participation. According to the UK-based Fawcett Society, political parties fail adequately to respond to significant barriers to women standing for parliament, which they have identified as confidence, culture, childcare and cash.³ ‘Confidence’ problems refer in part to women’s relative late entry to politics – unlike many men they may not have had an extended apprenticeship in party politics. ‘Culture’ denotes the aggressive confrontational style of political competition, ‘childcare’ denotes the failure to find practical support for women’s domestic work, and ‘cash’ reflects upon political party under-investment in women’s campaigns.



Once in government, women in public office tend overwhelmingly to be clustered in “social” policy-making positions. Whether by choice or by force of unexamined assumptions about women’s contribution to public decision-making, this concentration in the social sectors can inhibit women’s potential contribution to other critical decision-making areas, notably security, the budget, and foreign policy.

A 2008 study of UK politics confirms that as the number of women in formal political institutions has increased since the 1997 election when women’s representation doubled to 18.2%, issues of particular concern to women have been increasingly mainstreamed into policy and political debate.⁴

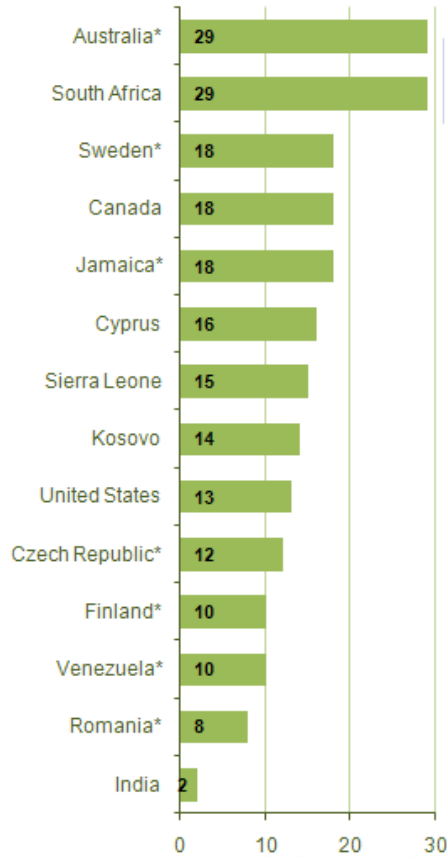
³ ‘Fawcett Briefing: The Four C’s’, The Fawcett Society, London, 1997, <[http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/The_four-Cs\(1\).pdf](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/The_four-Cs(1).pdf)>, accessed 26 June 2008.

⁴ Sarah Childs, Women and British party politics: descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation, Routledge, 2008.

National Police Forces are Male-Dominated

In a sample of 13 countries shown in this figure, only 2 have police forces with female participation greater than 25%. The rest have less than 20% participation of women in national police forces.

Percentage of Women in National Police Forces, Selected Countries 2001-2006



Notes: Information correspond to 2006 except for: Sweden, Jamaica and Czech Republic (2001), Venezuela and Australia (2002), Finland (2004) and Romania (2005).

Source: Denham (2008)

Women in public office have another very important effect in building accountability to women; they encourage greater political engagement by ordinary women. Research by the Electoral Commission in the UK has revealed that women voters turn in out slightly higher numbers than men (a gender gap of four percent) in seats with a woman candidate.⁵ Research on women's policy impact at the local level also suggests that local women decision-makers tend to have a positive impact on the delivery of services to women and children.⁶

One of the anticipated effects of women in public office is a decrease in corruption. Certainly corruption is a matter of concern to women around the world. The causal relationship between women in public office and a reduction in corruption, however, needs much more study – a perceived correlation between numbers of women in public office and lower levels of corruption can mostly be explained by the strong correlation between liberal democracy which is associated both with more open competition for and more accountability in public office.

One of the institutional arenas about which little information on gender balance is available are public bureaucracies that implement policy decisions. There is no doubt that more diversity in public administration supports more socially responsive administration. A survey of 1,000 members of the US government's Senior Executive Service (high-level civil servants) found evidence of a direct relationship between the number of women working in an agency and their willingness to support women's issues.

Other studies have found that when bureaucracies mirror the diversity in the publics they serve are more likely to be attuned and responsive to the specific needs of a variety of marginalized social groups.⁷ This is particularly important at the "front-line" of service delivery bureaucracies – the public health workers, the teachers, the police.

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⁵ Pippa Norris, Joni Lovenduski and Rosie Campbell, Gender and political participation, The Electoral Commission, 2004, p. 47. OK

⁶ Raghavendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo (2004) "Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India." *Econometrica* 72(5): 1409-1443. OK

⁷ Keiser, Lael, R., Vicky M. Wilkins, Kenneth J. Meir; and Catherine A. Holland. 2002. 'Lipstick and Logarithms: Gender, Institutional Context, and Representative Bureaucracy'. *American Political Science Review*. Vol. 96, no. 3, pp. 553-564.; Dolan, Julie, 'The Senior Executive Service: Gender, Attitudes, and Representative Bureaucracy', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 10(3), 2000, p. 522.

⁸ Keiser, Lael, R., Vicky M. Wilkins, Kenneth J. Meir; and Catherine A. Holland. 2002. 'Lipstick and Logarithms: Gender, Institutional Context, and Representative Bureaucracy'. *American Political Science Review*. Vol. 96, no. 3, pp. 553-564.; Dolan, Julie, 'The Senior Executive Service: Gender, Attitudes, and Representative Bureaucracy', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 10(3), 2000, p. 522.

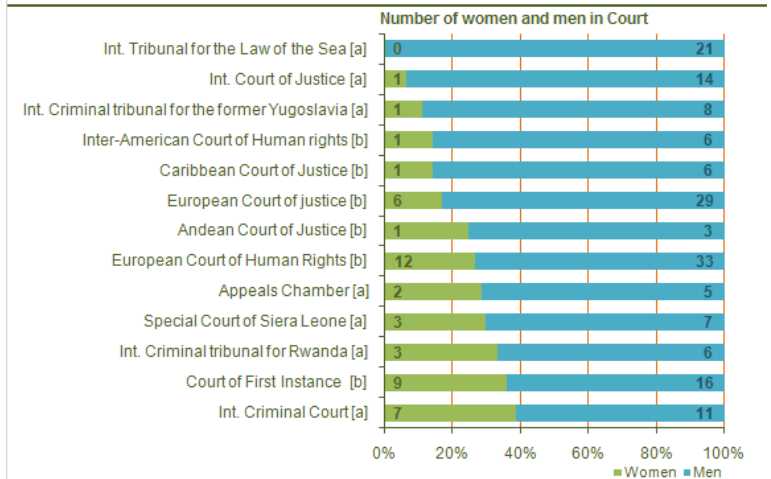
Two areas of public service are particularly sensitive to gender balance issues when it comes to promoting women's rights – justice and law enforcement. Both of these domains remain heavily male dominated. As the bar chart below shows, there are only two countries in the world where women make up 30% of the police – South Africa and Australia – and the norm is well below 10%.

The judiciary is also a highly male-dominated field, although numbers of women are going up on the benches of international courts, as shown in the figure below. Women's leadership in the judicial sector is of critical importance in advancing gender equality and equal rights as this is the sector that is the final arbiter of what is fair and just in public and private life. Without a doubt, women leaders in the judiciary around the world have pioneered judgements to advance gender justice.

Nowhere is this more evident than in international criminal courts, where prominent female prosecutors in the International criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda were responsible for the world's first indictments, trials and sentences of war criminals for sexual violence during warfare.

Women's Representation in International Courts

Women are under-represented in all international and regional courts, with only one third having percentages higher than 30%.



Notes: Figures for European court of justice includes both judges and advocates general. Court of First Instance is an independent court attached to the European court of justice. The number of women in courts are labeled at the base of the bars; the number of men in courts are labeled at the end of the bars. [a] denotes international courts and [b] represents regional courts.

Sources: Terris et al (2007); and, International Courts Official Website (accessed 2008)

III. THE NUMBERS: PRIVATE SECTOR:

Gender biases in labor markets have meant that women's productive potential is less effectively tapped than men's and that women have been more concentrated than men in informal, subsistence and vulnerable employment. In the last decade, more than 200 million women have joined the global labor force. In 2007, there were 1.2 billion women in paid work, compared to 1.8 billion men.⁹ An indicator of gender bias in formal employment is the gender wage gap, standing at a global average of about 17 % (for countries in which this data is available for formal sector employment), and which tends to be higher in private than in public sector employment. The lower cost of female labor has been one of the attractions for foreign capital in many countries. Export Processing Zones have proliferated and women represent more than 50% of workers in most of these Zones.

Numbers of women in market leadership positions have always been low. Norway recently addressed this problem by making it compulsory, on January 1 2008, for Norwegian companies to have at least 40% female membership on management boards. Today women make up 38% of board members, well above the average of 9% across Europe. As with quotas for women in political competition, the notion of quotas for women in private sector leadership responds to the perception that without temporary artificial pressure on leadership selection processes, gender biases will continue to produce overwhelmingly male-dominated leadership. Corporate board quotas temporarily unsettle this male dominance, and in the process, it is hoped, usher in a new ability to accept women's presence and decision-making roles.

⁹ International Labour Organization, 'Global Employment Trends for Women', March 2008, p. 2, <http://www.ilo.org/global/About the ILO/Media and public information/Press releases/lang-en/WCMS_091102/index.htm>, accessed 30 May 2008.

Data on numbers of women in executive posts around the world shows that positive action such as this is essential to breaking the 'glass ceiling' keeping women from senior enterprise management. The share of women in senior positions around the world remains low and is seemingly not correlated with numbers of women in full time jobs, although there is a positive relationship between female enterprise ownership and women in senior management. The share of women around the world in senior management ranges from 3% to 12%. This is not remotely in proportion to their share of formal employment ranging from 17% to 49%.

There has definitely been an upward trend in women's participation in the formal labor market and in senior management. However, the current financial crisis can be expected to constitute a very serious threat to women's market gains in the area of secure and formal employment. Informal economies are likely to expand, and are likely, as ever, to be dominated by women.

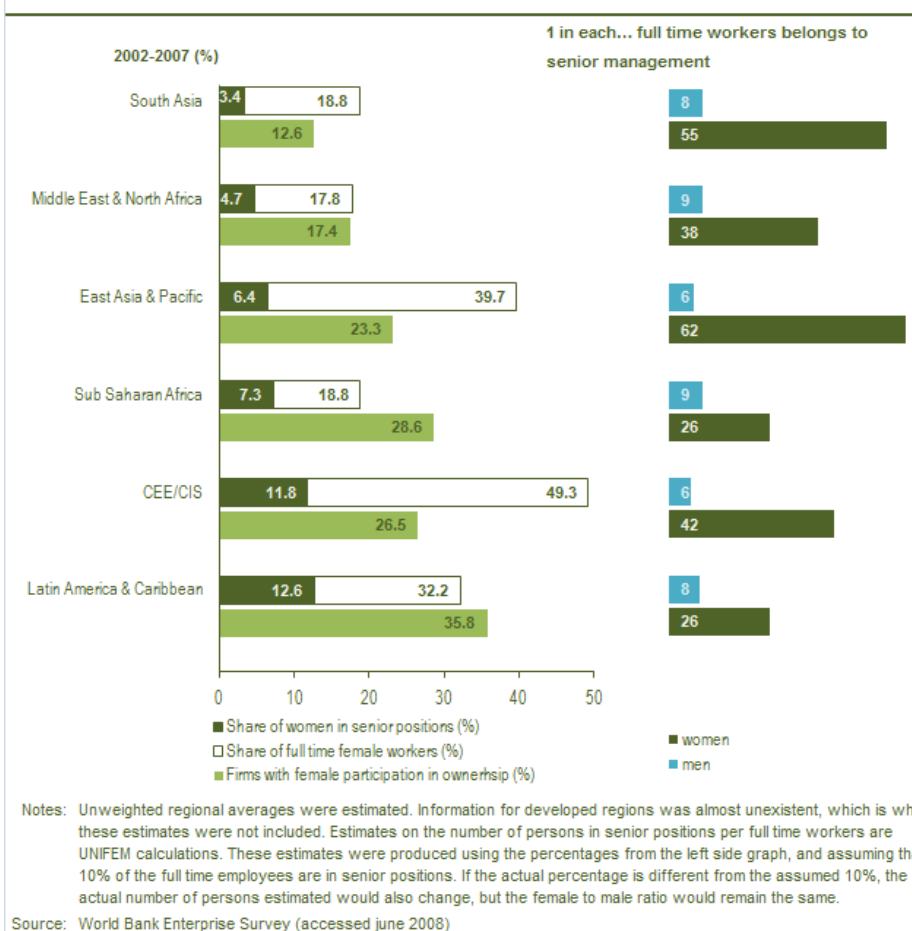
An important trend for the CSW to monitor over the next few years is women's relative security in formal employment, public and private sector.

Women's capacities to hold onto labor rights gains in the market are clearly linked to their relative engagement in collective action, notably in trade union activity. Trade union activity and membership has been threatened by economic globalization particularly where this comes with constraints on independent trade union activity in export processing zones. Around the world fewer than 40% on average of the employed population belongs to unions and of this population, fewer women than men are members. However, trade union activity is important for women, enabling them to reduce, for instance, gender-based pay gaps.

Women have responded to their own dominance of informal sector work with innovative informal trade union organizations to bring protections to members. For instance as of 2006 the federation of Homeworkers Worldwide is demanding equal treatment with workers in the formal sector. This is an

One woman per 9 men are in senior management positions

The percentage of women in senior positions ranges from 3 to 12 percent, despite the fact that the share of full time female employment ranges from 17 to 49 percent.



The low percentage of women in senior positions shows great disparity when analyzed together with the female share of full time employment. Firms with female participation in ownership vary across regions with South Asia and Middle East and North Africa lagging behind other regions. While the number of men in senior management positions per total share of full time employment is relatively stable (between 1 in 6 to 1 in 9), this rate is dramatically higher and unstable for women, ranging from 1 in 26 women in Sub Saharan Africa and in Latin America and Caribbean, to 1 in 62 women in East Asia and Pacific.

arena in which women have shown leadership – creating a new political and organizational space for women’s collective action.

IV: THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSTITUENCIES AND CONSUMERS

The focus on women and men in decision-making may over-stress the capacity of individual leaders to make changes. However, leaders are only as effective as the constituencies that support them and that can mobilise to support policies of leaders. To whom do political leaders feel accountable? To whom do corporate leaders feel accountable? To whom do traditional leaders in communities feel accountable? If they do not feel that they answer to women, or that they have to answer FOR gender equality, then when women join leadership ranks, they may also not necessarily feel this pressure.

Historical research shows that women working as a constituency *demanding* change are as important as gender equality advocates in government *supplying* change. A good example is the fact that public policy in democracies often changes when women get the vote, long before significant numbers of women get into office. In the US in the 1920s, in the states in which women had won the vote first, public spending on public health was 35% higher than in other states. This is because power holders assumed that women voters were interested in health, and they wanted to attract women’s votes. In Nordic countries where women won the vote very early, particularly in municipal and local government, public policies and local government spending began the shift to investment in social welfare institutions very early.

This effect is starting to be evident in the private sector as well, where women’s increasing consumer power has been at the forefront of efforts to promote ethical trade and responsible environmental and workplace practices in large international corporations.

Thus it is just as important to promote women’s capacities to work as effective constituencies of public policy and market performance as it is to promote gender balance numbers of women in all areas of decision-making.

V: GAPS:

While there are many areas of concern in terms of women’s continued absence from public decision-making, just three will be mentioned here: gender balance in peace talks, in traditional community decision-making and dispute-adjudication, and in financial sector management and regulation.

Peace talks: In spite of the requirement in SCR 1325 that women be engaged in peace processes, UNIFEM research shows that in the 8 and a half years since the resolution was passed, there have been no women chief mediators in major peace processes. Numbers of women on negotiating teams have not increased appreciably and are still below 10%. Numbers of women observers have gone up whenever there has been a gender equality expert working with the mediation team – as was the case in the Juba talks for Northern Uganda and the Abuja talks for Darfur.

What does women’s exclusion from peace talks mean? It means peace accords that do not necessarily reflect women’s suggestions and priorities for building peace – they may lack adequate security and justice provisions for women and may not make provision for women’s land rights and property security.

This exclusion sets the tone for future exclusions. Early recovery planning priorities and financial allocations may leave out women’s concerns if no provision is made in peace talks. UNIFEM’s analysis of seven Post Conflict Needs Assessments (essential post-conflict planning documents that become the basis for fund allocation) found that cost estimates for priority spending often leave out gender-specific spending. Indeed, while PCNA documents mention women’s needs, less than 8% of the actual budgets specifically mention women’s needs.

Traditional leadership: Crises in governance in many countries – where states have limited finances and capacity for ensuring full geographic reach in public services and administration – have revived reliance on traditional decision-making systems to compensate for limits in state capacity. For instance, in some contexts, where the justice system does not reach remote areas, or where regionally or ethnically distinct social groups demand a certain measure of autonomy, governments have recognized the authority of traditional leaders and customary dispute adjudication. This is most well-known in the case of transitional justice measures where the national judicial system cannot possibly cope with the vast case-load of war-related crimes and disputes, and assigns responsibility to traditional dispute-adjudication mechanisms to hear some of them. The Gacaca courts in Rwanda are a well-known instance. In that case and in some others, recognition of patriarchal leadership structures and the gender bias this brings has brought a revamping in order to ensure that more women are represented amongst the elders who hear local disputes. But in many of these systems, women are not seen as rightful dispensers of justice or of local governance.

In local government a similar pattern is evident, in contexts where traditional leaders are assigned a certain number of seats or decision-making authority over a certain amount of local spending. In these cases, if provisions are not made for women's representation amongst traditional authorities, there is a serious risk that gender-biased decision-making patterns will persist.

Financial sector management and regulation: Many of the chief executives whose management practices have fuelled the risk-taking behavior that caused the current serious financial crisis are men. The lack of regulation – or rather, the loopholes opened by overlapping or poly-regulation – of the financial sector may have facilitated the crisis, and gender-balance in decision-making may or may not have made any difference to what is in the end a set of political arrangements and decisions about regulation. However, gender-balance in financial sector personnel might have contained some risk-taking behavior. On February 8, New York Times columnist Nicolas Kristoff asked whether this crisis would have taken the same course if the investment bank, Lehman Brothers had been Lehman Sisters or, better yet, Lehman Brothers and Sisters. He cites research from an article in the Journal of Economic Theory that socially diverse groups perform better at problem solving than homogeneous groups. He cites other research from the Evolution and Human Behavior Journal that men are particularly likely to make risky decisions under financial pressure when surrounded by other males of similar status, whereas women's risk-taking is unaffected by this kind of peer pressure. For those who work on gender equality and women's rights, there is significant recognition that failure to achieve greater balance in decision-making can actually have very serious long-term consequences for economic stability, development, and peace.

VI: AREAS OF CONCERN:

In pursuing the challenge of building numbers of women in public and private decision-making, and in supporting gender equality in the outcomes of their decisions, I finish by listing some obstacles that are still far from overcome:

1. *Low perceived legitimacy.* Women still face the challenge of translating a formal entitlement such as political and civil rights and a quota into political legitimacy and credibility. In other words, their male colleagues whether in government or the private sector may view them as not deserving this public space and as lacking legitimacy to push their agendas. In the end, legitimacy stems from building constituencies of support and a track record in decision-making.
2. *High attrition rate:* women's challenges in juggling the massive demands of leadership positions with the still high demands of domestic obligations, combined with growing backlash from their own relatives, produces a high 'drop-out' rate. Data is not yet clear on this but it would be worth the CSW paying attention to the numbers of women who leave office after their first term. As ever, investment is needed in measures that enable women to balance domestic with work obligations, and that enable men to take on a bigger share of these obligations in the private sphere. In addition, women in some sectors legitimately fear for their safety and specific security

measures are needed to enable higher female recruitment – this is true for women in the military and the police for instance.

3. *Elite character of the women in office.* In some contexts, and depending on the means by which women come to office (quotas or through a long political apprenticeship), and also depending on the nature of the political system, many of the women who attain office are relatively elite. This is particularly the case where women who are relatives of male leaders have best access to public office. This can limit their capacity to engage with or respond to the needs of poorer women, or women from disadvantaged races, classes, or disabled women.
4. *Shunning gender issues.* In some context research shows that although women in government – especially local government – act as magnets for local women, making them feel there is someone in public office that they can approach, there are massive pressures on ambitious women leaders to stay away from gender equality or women’s rights issues. These are not seen as the means by which political careers are made, not least because women voters have yet to act decisively to back gender equality agendas in politics.
5. *Backlash and violence.* In several elections over the past two years high levels of violence were experienced by women running for office. In some recent elections numbers of women running for office have actually decreased because of this threat. This is a backlash phenomenon where male resentment is making itself felt as a serious deterrent to running for public office.

VII: CONCLUSION:

There is an upward trend of numbers of women in decision-making in public and private sector leadership roles. However, even though the rate of increase has accelerated over the past decade, it will still be decades until there is parity (no sex takes more than 60% of positions). Areas where there are particularly stark gender gaps are in security forces and the judicial sector, in conflict mediation, in traditional dispute adjudication, and in financial sector regulation and management. Issues to be addressed in building women’s numbers in decision-making and in building their influence include a the lack of provision to compensate for women’s domestic responsibilities and security needs, leading to a high attrition rate, the perceived lack of legitimacy of women decision-makers, the elite character of many women in high office, the low incentives to promote gender issues, and outright, violent backlash.

This paper argues that just as important as women exerting influence in public and private sector decision-making is women in civil society engaging with decision-makers, women or men, and engaging as active voters or consumers, making their preferences felt, and holding decision-makers to account.

As Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said, in a special contribution for UNIFEM’s report: **‘Progress of the World’s Women 2008/9, Gender and Accountability: Who Answers to Women?’**: “ ‘The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “the authority of government is grounded in the will of the people’. Half, even more than half, of ‘the people’ are women. Yet for far too long, women’s will, women’s voices, women’s interests, priorities, and needs have not been heard, have not determined who governs, have not guided how they govern, and to what ends. Since women are amongst the least powerful of citizens, with the fewest social and economic resources on which to build political power, special efforts are often needed to elicit and amplify their voice.”