

Lessons from UN Women evaluations in the Americas and the Caribbean

EVALUATION META-SYNTHESIS: LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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Why is work in women’s leadership and political participation important?

Despite regional and global progress in the recognition of women’s political rights, significant challenges remain for the effective, equal and non-violent participation of women in the public sphere. Areas that continue to constrain women’s ability to participate meaningfully include: patriarchal political cultures; gender stereotypes; the burden of unpaid domestic care; unequal economic resources and media coverage; and gender-based harassment and violence. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated such forms of violence through social networks and online media.

In the COVID-19 pandemic context, underrepresentation of women in public policies risks translating into responses that do not consider half of the population. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, women comprise 30.9% of parliamentarians (IPU, 2020), 28.5% of ministers, 15.5% of mayors and 32.1% of ministers in national supreme courts (ECLAC, 2018). These gaps are even larger in some countries when considering the low participation of women of African and/or indigenous descent, women with disabilities, young women, and women of different sexual orientations, among others.

This dynamic is equally reflected in the private sector and academia.

In order to eliminate barriers to equal participation, UN Women promotes the adoption of legislative and public policies that guarantee the effective exercise of women’s political rights as voters, candidates, activists, as well as elected and public officials at all levels of government. In addition, it works in coordination with United Nations agencies at the regional and country level, national and regional public institutions, women’s political networks, and civil society to promote women’s political participation. This includes its work to produce knowledge through the Political Participation Index in collaboration with UNDP and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Other key strategies include strengthening capacities of women in politics and decision-making as well as promoting effective, plural and democratic participation of women in decision-making spaces. UN Women also supports women in politics and interinstitutional dialogues to promote the adoption of new laws for the eradication of violence against women in political spheres.

UN WOMEN STRATEGIC RESULTS AREAS IN LEADERSHIP POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



More women of all ages fully participate, lead and engage in political institutions and processes



More national and local plans, strategies, policies and budgets are gender-responsive



More and better quality and disaggregated data and statistics are available to promote and track progress on gender equality and women’s empowerment, including vulnerable groups



More judicial institutions are accessible to and deliver for women and girls in all contexts

Source: [Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#)

Which approaches have proven effective for increasing women's leadership and political participation?

UN Women's contribution in the area of women's leadership and political participation is recognized by evaluations across several areas, including in terms of: **technical assistance provided to women's political groups and public entities**; research, advocacy and follow-up on violence against women in politics; the **promotion of spaces for dialogue** with various actors; the production and dissemination of knowledge products; and the identification of exclusionary factors for women in decision-making processes, with special focus on work with indigenous women.

In terms of **training** public actors, UN Women has worked on the creation of **national roundtables with indigenous authorities**, supporting discussions on legal pluralism and cross-cultural diversity. This type of intervention in Guatemala contributed to access to justice for indigenous women and to the construction of greater trust between indigenous peoples and State agencies.

Similarly, UN Women's work supporting **political dialogue** contributed to **improving the conditions for women's political participation in decision-making spaces**, generating interest on the part of women. In El Salvador, Bolivia and Guatemala, UN Women has had an effect in such spaces through advice and close support of government institutions.

UN Women has contributed to the **production of data** and the strengthening of statistical capacities and disaggregated analytical information, as has been the case in Colombia, Bolivia and Guatemala, helping to ensure that policies and programmes are both context sensitive and gender responsive.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TIMES OF COVID-19



UN Women has supported gender mainstreaming into the COVID-19 response across the region. In the context of leadership and political participation, some of UN Women's main areas of work have included training and facilitation with political actors.

- Reaching agreements with actors at a political level encourages the participation of other key actors, including from the private sector, donors and civil society organizations.
- The commitment of several strategic actors enables the creation and institutionalization of spaces for dialogue where measures aimed at gender parity and women's political participation can be followed up and monitored much more closely.
- Building strategic alliances with women in decision-making positions and civil society organizations, from a capacity-building perspective, facilitates broader work on gender equality and women's political leadership.
- Identifying partners for training of trainers can support the creation of networks, reaching out to vulnerable groups, and formation of representative leaders who express their perspectives and advocate for the needs of their community.

How can UN Women in the Americas and Caribbean region improve its work in women's leadership and political participation?

Political violence against women leaders is a deterrent to their participation in the public sphere. Consequently, a major challenge faced by UN Women is the promotion of participation of such female political leaders through the creation of spaces for respect and equality.

Building on UN Women's efforts to eradicate this type of violence, **strategies and greater resources are needed** for consolidating women's right to meaningful political participation free from violence. Such strategies can address issues including: dissemination of regulatory frameworks; work with electoral entities; establishment of observatories of women's political participation; trainings for gender role transformation, not only in political spheres, but more widely at a social level.

To strengthen capacities and promote political will for gender equality, UN Women can consolidate support to develop **spaces for dialogue** with political parties and women's groups as well as technical support and capacity building for electoral bodies. Such efforts would contribute to **raising awareness** among key actors beyond electoral processes, including through forging partnerships and political networks with both women allies and men who are willing to act as gender equality advocates.

As such, UN Women could bolster capacities of political parties and institutions to innovate and actualize a transformative gender agenda. This would also allow UN Women to guide parity democracies, mainstream the gender perspective into public administration, and train allies with transformative public and political agendas to contribute to an equal, fair and democratic present and future.

EVALUATION REPORTS CONSULTED:

- 2020, Country Portfolio Evaluation, [Colombia](#)
- 2020, Country Portfolio Evaluation, [El Salvador](#)
- 2020, Country Portfolio Evaluation, [Mexico](#)
- 2019, Country Portfolio Evaluation, [Guatemala](#)
- 2019, [Strategic Partnership Alliances](#), Bolivia
- 2018, [Women and Municipal Policies](#), El Salvador
- 2018, [Overcoming violence](#), Colombia
- 2015, Country Portfolio Evaluation, [El Salvador](#)
- 2015, [Political participation](#), Regional Office

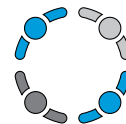
All evaluations available at <https://gate.unwomen.org/>



Create spaces of respect and equality aimed at eradicating political violence against women



Develop spaces for dialogue with political parties and women's groups to raise awareness on gender equality



Strengthen capacities of allies in political circles to promote equality work and the gender agenda