Meeting summary and related resources
Working Meeting of Women Presiding Officers of Caribbean Parliaments
May 17, 2021

Background and objective
Presiding officers have a unique ability to affect change in legislative institutions, particularly as it relates to adopting a gender perspective in the legislature’s work and promoting women’s participation. Given the increased number of women holding these offices in legislatures in the Caribbean, a virtual meeting was convened to create space for dialogue among these leaders on priority legislative issues, specifically in relation to women’s rights and gender equality, and to facilitate collaboration on these themes. This document shares a summary of the main topics addressed in discussions, as well as a selection of resources that can support further learning and action on these issues.

Priority themes raised in discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power and women’s political participation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main points raised on the issue</strong></td>
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<td>• It is necessary to support women leaders both when they are running in elections and when they are in the legislature, as well as in other formal political spaces.</td>
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<td>• Women’s representation in the legislature is necessary to ensure that the issues that uniquely affect women arise in legislative discussions.</td>
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<td>• Though there is much work to do, it is important to recognize the contributions of women leaders – including women parliamentarians and activists – for the progress that has been achieved thus far.</td>
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<td><strong>Areas of recent progress</strong></td>
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<td>• There has been discussion at the municipal level in Belize about establishing parity in the candidate slates that are put forward by parties.</td>
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<td>• Positive progress was also noted in Belize as women’s representation among government CEOs is now just under 50%; this was made a specific government priority.</td>
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<td>• The recent election in Jamaica brought an increased number of women into the legislature. Other countries in the region have also seen increases in the number of women elected and appointed to legislative seats.</td>
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<td><strong>Areas for further attention</strong></td>
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<td>• Political parties are an important avenue for advancing women’s leadership. Action within these spaces can include implementing a quota for candidacies, mentoring, and finding ways to bring others into leadership roles.</td>
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<td>• In addition to increasing the numbers of women within the legislatures, the nuance of their participation in this space must be considered. What roles do women hold in the parliament? What committees do they chair?</td>
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<td>• There is a need to examine standing orders and parliamentary practices for examples of inequality and discrimination that can affect women’s participation.</td>
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**Related resources**

- [Promoting Women’s Candidacies](ParlAmericas)
- [Women’s Political Leadership in the Caribbean](UN Women)
- [Women and Political Parties in Five Small States of the Commonwealth Caribbean](Commonwealth Secretariat)
- [Where are the Women? A Study of Women, Parliaments, Politics and Equality in CARICOM Countries](UNDP)
- [Evaluating the Gender Sensitivity of Parliaments: A Self-assessment Toolkit](IPU)
### Gender-based violence

#### Main points raised on the issue
- Domestic violence was raised as a particular area of concern, as its incidence is noted to have increased globally in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the stay-at-home orders introduced to as a containment measure.
- In many countries around the region, legislation on domestic violence and other elements of gender-based violence may not exist or may require strengthening, but there has been recent progress in this regard.

#### Areas of recent progress
- Montserrat passed the [Domestic Violence Act](#) this year.
- Antigua and Barbuda passed a [Domestic Violence Act](#) in 2015.
- A domestic violence bill is currently before the Attorney General in St. Lucia.
- Jamaica has opened a shelter for gender-based violence survivors and has secured two further properties to be converted into additional shelters.
- Sexual harassment legislation and other laws to address violence against women are also being debated in Jamaica.

#### Areas for further attention
- The strength of protections in existing or new legislation should be assessed (e.g. consideration of whether protections extend to common-law couples), including in consultation with domestic violence survivors.
- Where new legislation or processes to revise existing laws have stalled, these must be guided forward.
- Access to reliable data on instances of gender-based violence is a critical tool to understand the full scope of the issue and inform action.
- There remain harmful misconceptions about legislation to address gender-based violence that must be confronted. For example, laws are seen as being developed to punish men rather than as a means of protecting all members of the public.
- Laws on these issues must be fully implemented after their passage in order to positively impact the population; they cannot be seen or treated as a formality or rhetoric.
- Legislation must be complemented by the provision of effective services and protective mechanisms (for example, shelters, medical support, counselling, transportation, reporting mechanisms, etc.).

#### Related resources
- [Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Legislation](#) (UN Women)
- [Caribbean Women Count: Ending Violence against Women and Girls Data Hub](#) (UN Women, CARICOM, CDB)
- [COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls](#) (UN Women)

### Training on gender-responsive budgeting and legislation

#### Main points raised on the issue
- Parliamentarians – as well as the general public – must be sensitized on the importance and meaning of gender equality and parity, with specific attention paid to addressing misconceptions regarding the meaning of these terms and what the concepts look like in practice.
- All legislation, and all allocations made through the national budget, will have a differential impact on all members of the public, whatever the topic. For this reason, it is necessary for parliamentarians to examine all proposals presented before the legislature from a gender perspective.
- Existing legislation that focuses specifically on advancing gender equality and women’s rights also needs to be reviewed to consider how this can be strengthened to best meet public needs.
- Partnerships an important avenue for ensuring success in these pursuits, and particularly to create public pressure to advance such efforts. Collaborations can be explored with gender bureaus and women’s commissions, NGOs, businesses, churches, schools, and other community-level and governmental actors.

### Areas of recent progress

- A draft Gender Equality Policy Statement and Strategy is currently before the Minister for Gender Relations in St. Lucia.
- Trinidad and Tobago and St. Lucia have both hosted sensitization sessions on gender-responsive budgeting; in St. Lucia this has focused ministry staff thus far through a train the trainers program; Trinidad and Tobago has held sessions for parliamentarians and government staff.

### Areas for further attention

- Participation in training sessions on developing and reviewing gender-responsive budgets and legislation should be expanded to include all parliamentarians so that these objectives are taken up across the legislature.
- Parliamentarians require access to disaggregated data and other necessary information to facilitate the review of laws and budgets from a gender perspective. One possible mechanism for receiving such information could be to request it be included in presentations on bills and budgets.

### Related resources

- [Making the Case for Gender Equality](ParlAmericas)
- [Debunking Gender Equality Myths](ParlAmericas)
- [Intersectionality Tool](ParlAmericas)
- [Gender Responsive Budgeting: A Tool for Enhancing Parliamentary Oversight and Accountability](UN Women)
- [Making Laws Work for Women and Men: A Practical Guide to Gender-Sensitive Legislation](OSCE)
- [Gender Mainstreaming Resources](European Institute for Gender Equality)

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### Creation of multi-party women’s caucuses

#### Main points raised on the issue

- Multi-party women’s caucuses can be important vehicles for building solidarity among the women that are in the legislature, which will in turn help to amplify the voices and perspectives of women parliamentarians.
- The structure of these bodies can be suited to each parliament, but all provide a space for focused and collaborative work on gender equality and women’s rights.

#### Areas of recent progress

- Antigua and Barbuda formally established the Antigua and Barbuda Network of Women Parliamentarians, a bi-cameral and multi-party group, in 2020 through their incorporation as a standing committee of the Senate in the revised standing orders.
- It was also noted that Grenada has a women’s parliamentary caucus.
- Discussions have been held in the parliaments of Belize, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago to varying degrees regarding the creation of women’s caucuses.

#### Related resources

- [Interactive Toolkit on Multi-Party Caucuses for Gender Equality](ParlGenderTools)
- [Multi-Party Caucuses for Gender Equality: A Handbook for Parliamentarians in Latin America and the Caribbean](ParlAmericas)
- [Guidelines for Women’s Caucuses](IPU)
- [One Size Does Not Fit All: Lessons Learned from Legislative Gender Commissions and Caucuses](NDI and International IDEA)
**Mentorship and coaching of young women**

**Main points raised on the issue**
- Encouraging young women’s interest in parliament and leadership is viewed as an important strategy for increasing future cadres of women wanting and prepared to take part in public leadership.
- Working with youth of all genders is also an avenue for furthering education on the importance of women’s leadership and gender equality and achieving the necessary paradigm shift in this regard.
- Direct engagement with the parliament and parliamentarians’ involvement in training and support to young leaders can help to facilitate the above.

**Areas of recent progress**
- President Williams Grant conducts a mentorship program in Antigua and Barbuda, called “The President’s 10,” for young women in their third year of secondary school.
- The Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda partnered with ParlAmericas and CIWiL in 2020 to host interactive training programs for young women leaders between the ages of 18-25 that provided practical knowledge on gender equality and transformational leadership, as well as experience in the parliamentary space.

**Related resources**
- Designing Inclusive Futures in Partnership with Youth (ParlAmericas)
- Reports on Young Women in Leadership initiatives Trinidad and Tobago and Antigua and Barbuda
- Youth Parliament Tool: Gender Sensitivity in Legislation (ParlAmericas and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago)
- Generation Equality Action Coalitions: A Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality (UN Women)

**Men as allies**

**Main points / areas for attention raised on the issue**
- Achieving gender equality also requires the active participation of men, who continue to hold the majority of positions of power.
- In parliament, there have been a number of instances where legislation to advance women’s rights or strengthen protections against manifestations of inequality is viewed as combative or harmful to men.
- There also remain general misunderstandings about the fact that all individuals have gender; this is not just a women’s cause, nor is gender equality solely beneficial to women.

**Areas of recent progress**
- Jamaica has established mentorship programs for men and training services for new fathers.
- Gender bureaus are expanding outreach to and programming with men to advocate their role in addressing harmful gender stereotypes and inequality.

**Related resources**
- Male Allies for Gender Equality (ParlAmericas)

**Next Steps**
- It was agreed that ongoing collaboration among the presiding officers was a valuable tool and was recommended to continue to occur.
- ParlAmericas will support the reconvening of the group of presiding officers in approximately three months after the initial meeting to further conversations on progress and challenges.
  - As a prevailing theme identified during the call was the provision of gender equality training to all parliamentarians, ParlAmericas proposes that the next dialogue focus on strategies and necessary tools to achieve this objective.