



#ParlAmericasGEN

THEMES: Gender equality, roles of CSOs, public participation, social transformation

DATE: September 9, 2022

LOCATION: Virtual

PARTICIPANTS: 94 representatives from civil society organisations from 16 countries and 2 overseas territories

ORGANIZING PARTNERS: ParlAmericas, UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean, and Equality Fund



This activity aligned with SDGs 5, 16 and 17.



Effective Engagement in Parliamentary Processes

This interactive training session was the first to be held as part of a series of virtual workshops for Caribbean women's organisations on effective engagement in parliamentary processes. Recognising the pivotal role women's organisations play in influencing legislative and policy change, this workshop focused on providing introductions to legislative and parliamentary processes inclusive of the branches of governments and their roles and functions, formal mechanisms for public participation in parliaments, and effective strategies for engagement with individual parliamentarians. The session also incorporated a presentation on ParlAmericas' [What We Heard](#) report, which details the key findings of a survey of Caribbean women's organisations on their engagement with parliaments. The results of this survey also informed the design of this workshop and the others still to come in the series.



AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

Opening remarks by:

- Ms. **Tonni Brodber**, Representative, UN Women Multi-Country Office - Caribbean
- Ms. **Tamara Huggins**, Director - Women's Voice and Leadership - Caribbean, Equality Fund

Session facilitator and presentation "**Why engage with parliaments?**":

- Ms. **Lisane Thirsk**, Deputy Director - Gender Equality & Communications, ParlAmericas International Secretariat

Presentation "**Overview of the legislative process and formal opportunities for participation**":

- Ms. **Chantal La Roche**, Senior Legal Officer, Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago

Feature address:

- Member of Parliament **Marsha K. Caddle**, Barbados



[FULL AGENDA](#)



[PRESS RELEASE](#)



KEY RESOURCES

The following are key resources on themes of citizen participation in legislative processes:

- [Roadmap Towards Legislative Openness 2.0](#) (ParlAmericas)
- [Toolkit: Citizen Participation in the Legislative Process](#) (ParlAmericas)
- [How Laws are Made](#) (National Assembly of Belize)
- [The Legislative Process and Advocacy](#) (Citizens for Public Justice)
- [A Toolkit for Gender Advocacy](#) (Joanna Richards)
- [Y Advocacy? An Intersectional Feminist Toolkit](#) (YMCA Australia)
- [How To Participate in Parliamentary Processes: An Advocacy Guide](#) (Australian Women Against Violence Alliance)
- [Legislative Tracker](#) (Jamaica Accountability Meter Portal)

The following are some of the key learning points and recommendations from the session:

On the importance of public participation

- Citizen participation in parliamentary processes is crucial as it can result in greater equality in policy outcomes, strengthened social cohesion, broader influence on parliament's agenda, the incorporation of gender and intersectional considerations in legislative discussions, and a more inclusive, accountable, transparent and representative parliament.
- The advancement of gender equality is a human right pursuit that requires a multi-sectoral and multi-level approach.

On avenues for parliamentary engagement

- When seeking to engage in parliamentary processes, it is important to first understand the legislative cycle in order to select the best engagement strategy. This may differ across the Caribbean region based on the parliamentary system and specific institutional procedures.
- The parliament acts as the legislative arm of government with the responsibility of law making whereas the executive arm of government holds the responsibility of policy-making. It is therefore imperative to understand the roles and functions of different branches of government to determine the advocacy entry point and most effective engagement strategy.
- Formal mechanisms for engagement in parliamentary processes include: participating in the parliamentary committee system, attending parliament sittings, analysing the parliament website and social media pages, submission of stakeholder comments, meeting with a member of parliament during their constituency clinics/ surgeries/office days, and writing petitions on a particular call or issue.
- Other methods for strategic advocacy can include communications with women's caucuses, opposition parliamentarians, constituency office staff, back benchers, and parliamentary staff such as a committee secretary. Marches and protests are also popular methods used to communicate urgency or garner attention on an issue

On advocating directly to parliamentarians and policy makers

- Advocacy messages should be evidence-based and data-driven.
- The ideal strategy for engaging a parliamentarian will be determined by the desired change to be effected. This will also influence where the change is likely to be enacted. In some instances, your ask will require legislative change, but in others, rather than influencing the parliamentary process, your goal will be to affect policy practice, policy guidance, or the way an institution or state may function.
- Shared action and shared responsibility can be a constructive strategy to present a proposed change on an issue of importance. To demonstrate shared responsibility, an organisation could both present its ask of the parliamentarian and outline the ways in which they are taking action themselves and mobilising resources so this can be a form of leverage for the decision maker to bring the idea forward in other spaces.
- Acknowledge the competing priorities and ideas in the government space in your research. This will aid parliamentarians and policy makers in similarly addressing those competing ideas in their own efforts.
- Build alliances with policy makers which can allow room for conversations and solutions to be explored collaboratively.
- Acknowledge that policy decisions will also be guided by the ideological base of a political party. Therefore, conversing, sharing research, or emailing the general secretary of a political party can be useful in influencing policy development.
- Host advocacy events in a public space to gain broader public commentary on areas of interest. This strategy allows politicians to observe and hear different perspectives.
- Present the advantages of the desired action or intervention for improving gender equality. When making national or policy decisions, it may appear to be more expensive to take an inclusive approach. When the financial costs and negative consequences of not making inclusive judgments are considered, the cost of inaction outweighs the cost of action.

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ParlAmericas is headquartered in **OTTAWA, CANADA**

International Secretariat of ParlAmericas

703-155 Queen Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 6L1 Canada

Telephone: +1 (613) 947-8999

Email: info@parlamericas.org

