European Commission
United Nations Development Programme
International IDEA

In collaboration with

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Canadian International Development Agency
Organization of American States

Joint Training on Effective Electoral Assistance

Accra, 29 June - 3 July 2009
Promoting the Participation of Women in Political Life in the Arab and West African Region: the Case of Mauritania

Part 1: Situation in the Arab and West African region
- Facts and figures
- Legal framework

Part 2: The case of Mauritania
- The 20% quota law
- Lessons learned
- Recommendations

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PART 1
Participation of Women in Africa

- Africa: continent where women have the most difficulty accessing electoral posts and securing appointments to high level positions, with some exceptions:
  - **Liberia** (January 2006): Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf becomes the first female president on the continent
  - **Rwanda** (September 2008): the Rwandan Parliament becomes the first one in the world with a majority of women (56,25%). A woman is speaker of Parliament.

- Arab region: lowest rate of women participation in decision-making
Some Facts and Figures  
(Source: IPU)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>West Africa</th>
<th>Arab Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women Heads of State</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women Heads of Governments</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women at Ministerial Level</td>
<td>18.83%</td>
<td>7.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Presidents of Parliaments</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Parliament (Lower or Single House)</td>
<td>11.91%</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Women in Arab and West African Parliaments (source: IPU)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Percentage of women in Lower or single house 1998</th>
<th>Percentage of women in Lower or single house 2009</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nordic Countries</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe (without Nordic Countries)</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pacifique</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>West Africa</strong></td>
<td><strong>6%</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.01%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arab States</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>9.6%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Global average 2009: 18.4%
The Legal Framework

1. QUOTA LAWS:
   - West Africa: Mauritania, Burkina Faso (30% quota law)
   - Arab region: Iraq, Egypt (quota on 64 seats in Parliament)

2. GENTLEMEN’S AGREEMENTS between political parties:
   - Morocco, Mali, Ghana

3. VOLONTARY QUOTA:
   - West Africa: Niger, Côte d’Ivoire
   - Arab region: Algeria, Tunisia

➢ PARLIAMENTS: women parliamentary caucuses (Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso)
permanent gender committees (Ghana)
# The Representation of Women and Electoral Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>West African Countries</strong></th>
<th><strong>Arab countries</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>Women in Parliament (2009)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
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<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
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<td>Mali</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
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<td>Guinea Bissau</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gambia</td>
<td>9.43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>8.44%</td>
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<td>Ghana</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nigéria</td>
<td>7%</td>
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Challenges and Opportunities for the representation of women in West Africa and the Arab region

CHALLENGES:

1. **No access to leadership in the political parties**
   Only 6 parties led by women in the two regions

2. **Poor access and representation in the political sphere**
   Rigidity of the legal frameworks and gender stereotypes

3. **Empowerment issues**
   Little opportunity for capacity building and higher turnover

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. **Reform of electoral frameworks** and recent trends to adopt pro-women electoral systems

2. **Parliaments:** entry points for institutionalizing *gender sensitive reforms* in electoral frameworks
PART 2
THE CASE OF MAURITANIA

• The 20% quota law
• Lessons learned
• Recommendations
The Representation of Women in Decision-Making 2005

Elected:

3 women / 80 Deputies at the National Assembly
3 women / 56 Senators
3 women / 216 Mayors

Appointed:

3 women / 24 Ministers
1 woman / 35 Heads of Political Parties

Public Service:

- No woman represented at the high levels of the Public Service (Ambassador, judge...)
- Women represent 80% of the low-level administrative employees in the civil service
The Political Context

• 2005: Democratic transition, new beginning

• Upcoming parliamentary, municipal and presidential elections (2006-2007)

• Exceptional engagement and mobilisation of CSO and women to promote their rights

• UN joint project to support the participation of women in the elections
Why the need for quota laws?

- The fulfillment of International conventions and frameworks:
  - art. 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration of HR;
  - the MDG 3;
  - Beijing agenda (minimal participation of 30%)

- Electoral process:
  quota laws facilitate a rapid change in social and cultural barriers

- Post electoral stage:
  quota laws can be used as a powerful precedent to support long term gender sensitive legislative reforms
The 20% Quota Law
20% quota on electoral lists, not on seats

Municipal:
- women candidates must be placed in specific positions on the electoral list (proportional to the district size)

Legislative:
- National Assembly - Allocation of 1 position to a woman in each electoral district that has 2 seats.
  - In districts with 3 seats, at least one candidate out of the top 2 on the list should be a woman.
- Senate -
  - 1 woman head of the list only in Nouakchott, no quotas in the rest of the country

➢ Mixed Voting System (Proportional Representation in districts with 3 seats or more, and Simple Majority in 1 and 2-seat districts)
Electoral Results
2007

Municipal:
> 30% of women counsellors (1120)
but only 4/216 mayors

Legislative:
Women in Parliament:
17.22% (26/151)

National Assembly:
18% women (17/95)

Senate:
16% women (9/56)

In 2009, following some readjustments
18.54% (28/151) women MPs
Strengths and weaknesses of the 20% quota mechanism

Strengths:
- Electoral lists are only valid if they include 20% of women candidates
- Financial incentive for parties to exceed the 20% quota

Weaknesses:
- **Municipal:** no quota for Mayors
- **Legislative:** mechanism neither allows the 20% representation nor that the best-qualified candidates have access to the seats
Problems Encountered

Structural:
• Lack of legal framework and supporting structures for women participation
• Weakness of political parties and of women’s political leadership

Social and economic:
• Widespread illiteracy of women candidates
• Lack of financial means for women candidates

Cultural:
• Low engagement of women in politics
• Mentalities: quota law perceived as unconstitutional and discriminatory
• Tribal system works against women participation

Financial:
Lack of funds to strengthen the capacities of newly elected women
Lessons Learned

• **Quality of women candidates**: reserving 20% quota on the national list would have ensured better quality

• Need for **continued support** in terms of capacity-building to the newly elected women

• Need to create **permanent structures** to build the capacity of women candidates

• **Timing** too short for sustainable and thorough changes

• Advocate for **quota systems** in all public service positions
Recommendations

• Enshrine the principle of equal representation in the Constitution and/or legislation

• Use Parliaments as entry points to promote gender-friendly electoral legislation

• Long term perspective: start advocacy process at the beginning of a legislature

• Improve the participation of women and their leadership within political parties
Aim for Equal Representation!

Thank you