



TOWARDS INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACIES
INCREASING GENDER EQUALITY
IN POLITICAL PARTIES

Netherlands Institute for
Multiparty Democracy

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INTRODUCTION

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) is a democracy assistance organization that promotes the deepening of democracy through interparty dialogue and capacity strengthening of political parties. Based in the Netherlands, NIMD works with over 200 political parties in more than 20 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and South Caucasus. Together with the political parties and our local implementing partners, we contribute to inclusive and stable political systems in these countries.

In order to build inclusive democracies, both women and men need to be meaningfully involved in political parties, regardless of their age, gender, religion,

sexual orientation or ethnic background. However, many political parties across the globe structurally exclude marginalized groups. As a result, the political representation, participation and leadership of women, young people, and members of indigenous and other groups remain low.

That is why gender and diversity are important focal points in NIMD's work. Through our programmes we aim to contribute to the active participation of all groups in society and the equal distribution of power and influence between women and men.

This brochure describes our work on gender equality in political parties and party systems.

**THERE CAN BE NO DEEP DEMOCRACY
WITHOUT THE INCLUSION AND EQUAL
PARTICIPATION OF ALL MEN AND WOMEN**

DIVERSITY: THE KEY TO INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACIES

Diversity is the key to building inclusive democracies, and is inextricably linked to gender equality. This is why NIMD has adopted diversity as one of the five principles to guide its work. We include a gender and diversity perspective in the design, monitoring and evaluation of each of our country programmes.

In our experience, it is not enough to promote a seat at the table for women. In order to really achieve inclusiveness, it is also important to work on national legislation, to work with political parties on their internal party regulations and, last but not least, foster an open political culture. This means ensuring that unwritten rules and practices that exclude women and other groups from participating in the political arena are addressed.



Gender refers to the socially-constructed (rather than biologically-determined) roles assigned to women and men, and the relationships between men and women in society.



Gender equality implies that women and men enjoy the same status, have equal opportunities to contribute to national, political, social, cultural and economic development, and benefit from the results.



Diversity refers to a state in which all people are accepted and respected, regardless of their age, gender, health status, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

NIMD'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Impartiality

Our approach is non-partisan. We are not affiliated with any political denomination and work with all parties across the political spectrum.

Inclusiveness

We provide a platform for discussion for both ruling and opposition parties. All parties take part in the dialogue with an equal voice.

Diversity

We encourage the equal participation and representation of marginalized groups and empower representatives of these groups to take part in the policy-making process.

Local ownership

Our programmes are locally set and owned and reflect local demands. We work with our partners on an equal basis.

Long-term commitment

Political transformation, building trust and strengthening political parties takes time. Therefore, we invest in long-lasting relationships with our local partners and political parties.

GENDER AND DIVERSITY IN POLITICAL PARTY ASSISTANCE

In any democracy, political parties make decisions that affect people's lives. In a well-functioning democracy, political parties represent the interests of their electorates and transform people's needs and aspirations into policy action.

In an inclusive democracy, political parties actively nurture a political culture in which all citizens are free to speak, where no individual or group is excluded from policy conversations, and where a wide range of interests and needs are respected and accommodated.

However, political parties often struggle to fulfil their roles in making inclusive democracies work. Their internal structures and financing may be less than transparent, or their party cultures may be based on elite, masculine or discriminatory modes of politics.

The global gender gap in politics

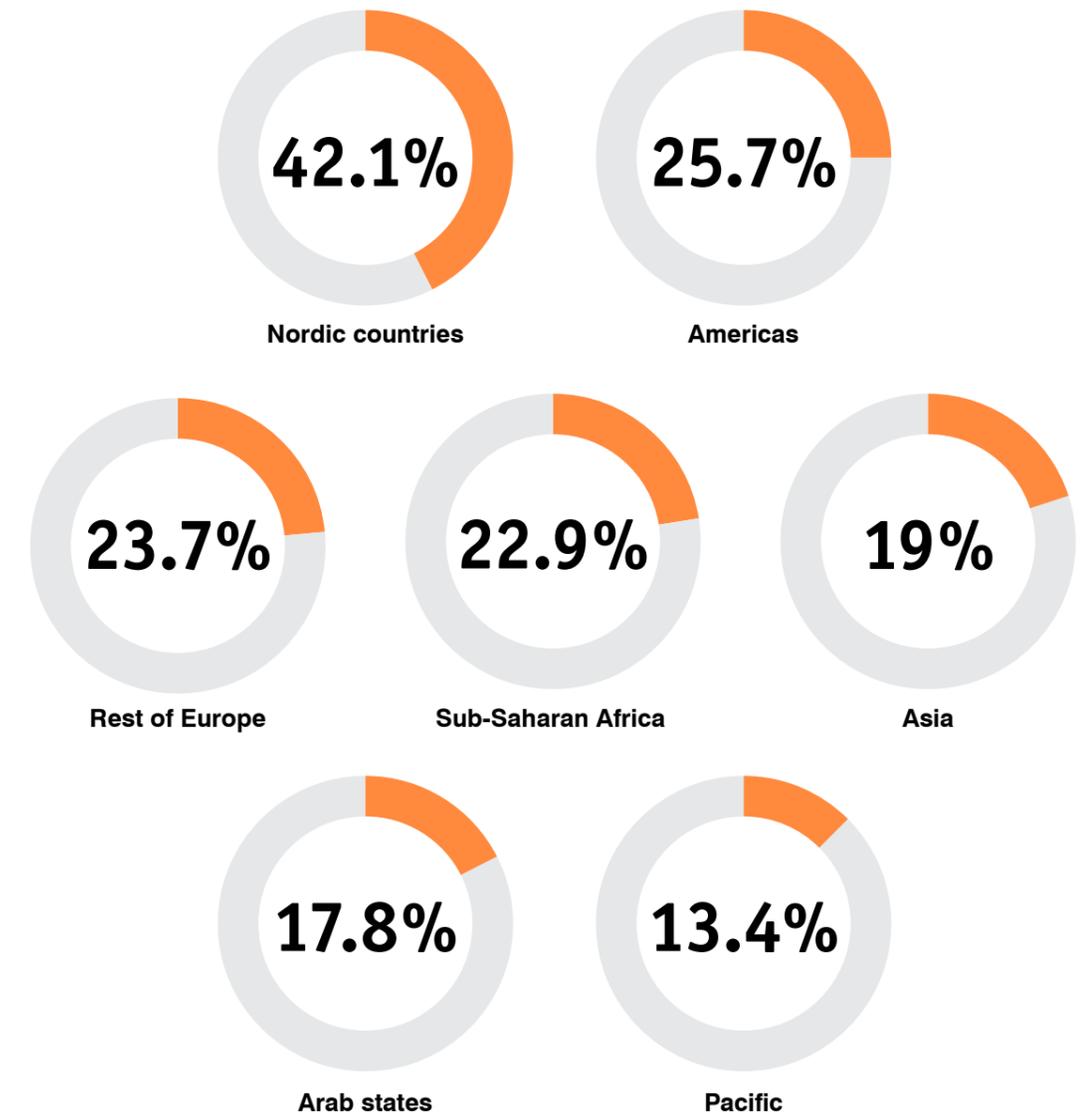
Despite the existence of international conventions and legal frameworks that guarantee women's political rights, the number of women active in politics remains low.

In fact, while affirmative action initiatives have achieved remarkable results, and while some political party reforms have been undertaken, on average just 22 percent of all members of parliament around the world today are women. In many countries, this figure is even lower.

The status of women in politics is a reflection of the level of gender equality in society. If no direct action is taken to improve gender equality, it will take decades to close the global gender gap in politics.

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

Source: Inter Parliamentary Union, May 2014



WHAT CAUSES INEQUALITIES IN THE POLITICAL ARENA?

Inequalities between men and women are caused by deeply-rooted and normative gender beliefs, which are then embedded in economic, political and cultural structures. These structures discourage

women and members of marginalized groups from entering politics, and from seeking leadership positions within political parties.

POLITICAL PARTIES' INTERNAL DEMOCRACY AND CULTURE

Because political parties formulate their own rules and procedures for the recruitment and selection of candidates for elections, parties' decision-making bodies are not only highly influential in the electoral process, but also define the political agenda and its priorities. Women continue to be under-represented and excluded from these higher levels of power.

GENDER-BLIND POLITICAL AGENDAS AND POLICY MAKING

Political parties do not have the capacity or political interest to include the needs of marginalized groups. And outside the formal structure of parliament (which is often polarized and dominated by the ruling party) there is little space for open dialogue on issues of diversity, gender equality or women's political empowerment.

LACK OF FINANCE FOR WOMEN AS CANDIDATES

Although a growing number of countries are now in the process of adopting legislation that specifically addresses funding issues and promotes women's political presence, women candidates often do not receive equitable financial support from their parties. They are also not as well-positioned as their male colleagues to raise money for campaigns.

POLITICAL EXPERIENCE AND WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Due to gendered work divisions and a lack of access to affordable care services, women can experience challenges in complying with their responsibilities in the professional and private spheres. For example, party meetings and other events often run until late in the evening, therefore discouraging women with young children from participating. In addition, in many countries women have been underexposed to public debate and the practices of opposition and deal making. This is often used as an excuse not to select or promote women for political leadership positions.

GENDER STEREOTYPING

When women are considered purely as 'caregivers', it also implies that politics is something that only men can handle. Even when nominated or elected to political posts, women are often confined to administrative and operational roles, or assigned 'feminine' topics such as health and education.

VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

Cases of gender-based political violence and harassment against politicians, candidates and civil society organizations are common. While all women are exposed to gender discrimination, other characteristics such as race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion can also play a role in determining access to political resources and rights.

GENDER STEREOTYPES ARE NOT TRUE, BUT CONSTRUCTS OF POWER THAT CAN BE BROKEN DOWN

HOW DO WE WORK?

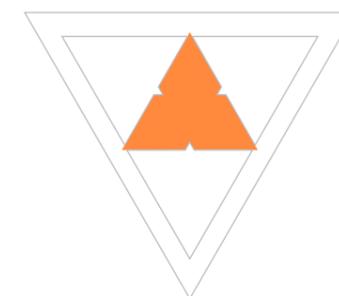
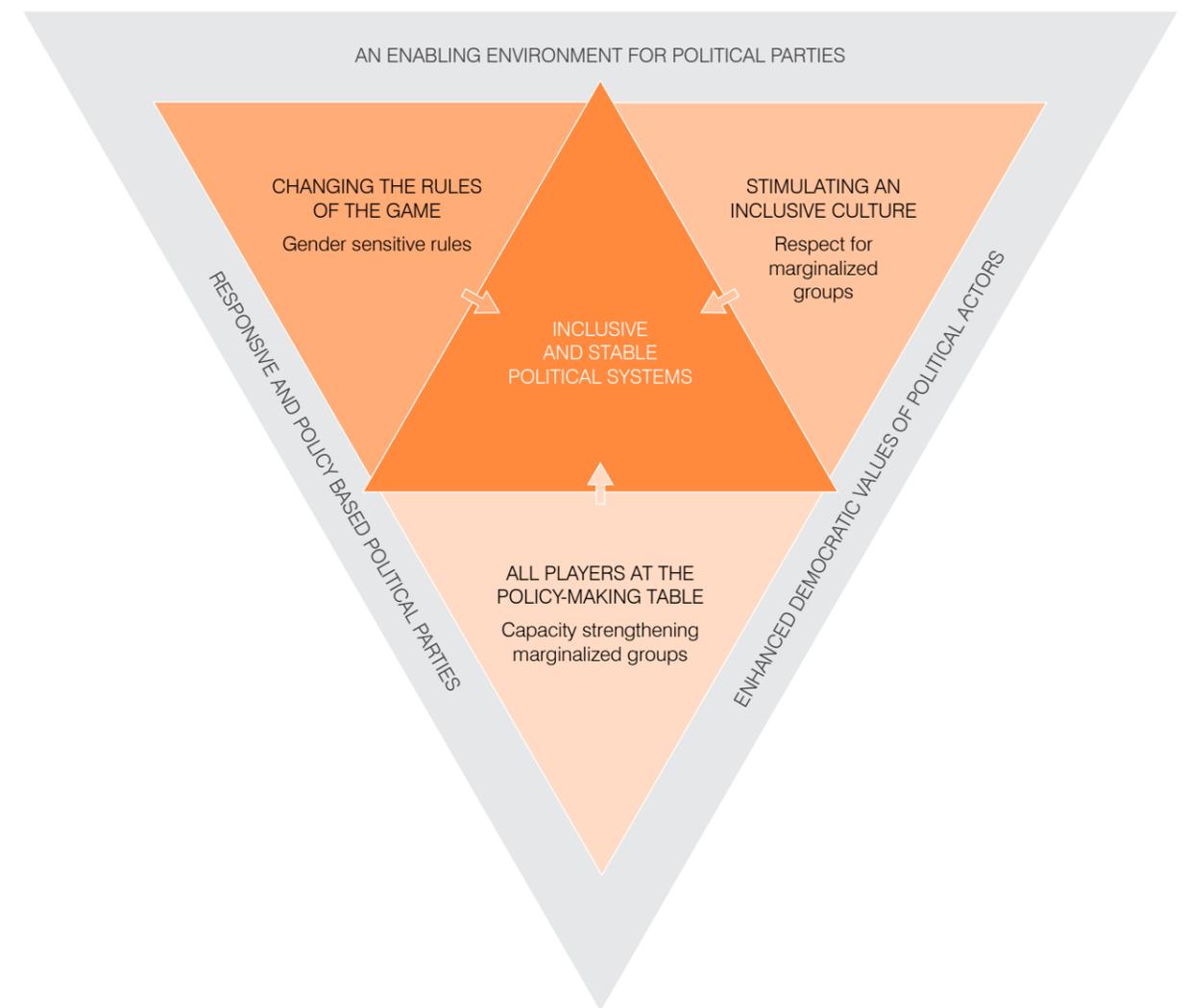
Political parties can only take up their role if the political system and environment allow them to do so. If the rules of the game are not clear or the system is not open to all parties, the democracy will remain weak. So there need to be gender sensitive rules and regulations.

At the same time, inclusive democratic systems cannot function without political parties and democratic individuals. In other words, there need to be political actors with democratic skills and values who show respect for marginalized groups and their rights. And political parties have to know how they can formulate policies around gender and diversity.

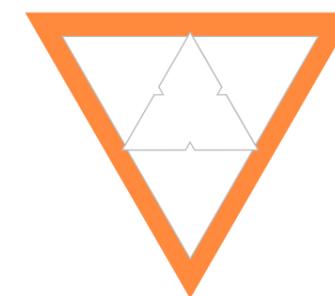
Therefore, NIMD works simultaneously with political systems, cultures and actors. Our activities are centred around three strategies:

- Changing the rules of the game (system-level)
- All players at the policy-making table (actor-level)
- Stimulating an inclusive culture (culture-level)

All the levels and strategies are linked with each other (Figure 1). This multi-level approach is unique and makes it possible for NIMD to really make a difference in political party assistance and gender equality.



NIMD's overall objective



NIMD's key objectives. These objectives are within NIMD's sphere of influence and directly influence the overall objective



NIMD's key intervention strategies on gender and diversity

SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO MAKE AN EXTRA EFFORT TO MAKE SURE THAT WOMEN ARE AND STAY INCLUDED

Regional exchanges and peer-to-peer learning

Every country has a unique and complex history, culture and political heritage when it comes to gender and diversity issues. Therefore a detailed understanding of local contexts is the basis on which we design our programmes.

But there are also similarities and lessons learned that can be very useful for peers in other countries. NIMD regularly organizes peer-learning events and exchange visits across and within regions. By bringing politicians, government officials, civil society representatives and women's rights activists together, we inspire them and stimulate learning and action.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: THE DUTCH NATIONAL ACTION PLAN 1325

By signing The Dutch National Action Plan – an initiative of three Dutch government ministries, four research institutions, the Dutch Gender Platform WO=MEN and over 30 civil society organizations and women's groups to implement United Nation Security

Council Resolution 1325 – NIMD has made a commitment to respecting women's rights, contributing to the equal participation of men and women in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction, and supporting local women and their organizations.

CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GAME

It is important that politicians understand and challenge the mechanisms, practices and stereotypes that perpetuate inequalities between men and women in the political arena. In our experience, interparty dialogue can contribute to this. Therefore, NIMD facilitates dialogue processes between parties and encourages them to cooperate on gender and diversity issues. The dialogue platform can be either formal or informal, but the main goal is to provide a safe environment where the political parties can get to know each other, build trust, and formulate viable policy alternatives to ensure the political participation of women and other marginalized groups.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN PRACTICE IN KENYA

In 2003, NIMD set up the Centre for Multiparty Democracy in Kenya (CMD Kenya) to implement its programme. CMD Kenya is a political party dialogue platform. Its activities range from advocacy to facilitating dialogue and offering direct support to the political parties who are a member.

One of the key themes within the platform is the role of women in Kenyan politics. The CMD platform has initiated several proposals to reduce formal barriers for women. The most notable process was the development of the new Constitution in 2010, where the NIMD programme lobbied for the inclusion of an affirmative action provision for women.

The lobby was successful: Kenya's new Constitution includes a strong Bill of Rights, ensures the participation of ethnic minorities, and stipulates that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies can be of the same gender.

The new Constitution was a major victory for the women of Kenya, especially for those aspiring to take up a political role.

STRENGTHENING WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES IN COLOMBIA

In Colombia, violence against women has increased considerably in recent years. According to the newspaper El Tiempo, every six hours a Colombian woman is abused due to the armed conflict in the country, and a daily average of 245 women are victims of some type of violence. While there has been very little documentation of the violence used to impede women's participation in politics in Colombia, violence against female leaders of social movements is common.

Since 2011 UNDP, NIMD and International IDEA have worked with women and political parties in Colombia via the Democratic Strengthening programme. At the individual level, this work has included supporting the nomination of candidates, the promotion of women in legislative benches and commissions, and the creation of meeting spaces for elected women and social organizations. More than 1500 women took part in these activities.

The political parties received technical support to assess and reform their internal rules and regulations.

ALL PLAYERS AT THE POLICY-MAKING TABLE

The second strategy in NIMD's approach is empowering representatives of marginalized groups to become active participants at the policy-making table. In Latin America, Africa and the South Caucasus Region, for example, we empower female candidates during elections and provide training in political skills, media engagement, networking and political campaigning. We do that in close collaboration with women's wings and electoral committees. The result is an increase in the number of women, young people and ethnic representatives on electoral lists, and more diverse legislatures.

In Honduras we have set up an NIMD Political Academy that provides career development for female politicians. We have also set up a monitoring system to track their contributions to gender-sensitive policies and legislation.

In Kenya, Colombia and Tunisia, NIMD provides technical support to political parties to assess and reform their internal rules and regulations. In particular, we encourage male leaders to reform discriminatory internal party rules and regulations.

STIMULATING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

All our activities contribute to a more democratic culture where the rights of marginalized groups are protected. The dialogue platforms lead to new laws and legislation, but they also make the political parties aware of their own rules and barriers. On actor level, NIMD builds parties' capacity to analyze citizens' interests and needs. Parties can then bring these analysis to the policy-making table to change the rules of the game and the political culture in their country.

In addition to the activities described above, NIMD also sets up and facilitates democracy schools. In Egypt, Georgia, Tunisia, Guatemala, El Salvador and Indonesia, diversity and gender sensitivity are explicitly included in the curriculum. This is reflected in the topics that are discussed and in the mixed composition of the teachers.

RAISING GENDER ISSUES ON THE NATIONAL AGENDA IN GUATEMALA

The conservative 'macho' culture in Guatemala does not allow much space for women's political participation. NIMD's programme in Guatemala supports the Forum of Political Parties (FPP), a multiparty dialogue platform. Specifically, we have made resources available for the activities of the Commission on Full Citizenship for Women, or Women's Commission, which aims to advance women in politics and leadership, independent of partisan ideologies.

Women's civil society organizations in Guatemala have long been pushing for a special law to punish the killing of women, or femicide. Guatemala has the highest femicide rate in Latin America: between 2000 and 2012 over 5000 women were murdered. With the support of NIMD's political analysis and technical support, the Women's Commission worked with civil society and women's groups in the drafting of a law against femicide. After a long and intense dialogue process, the law was approved in 2008. It contributed to sensitizing Guatemala's political culture to this important gender issue.

SHARING OUR APPROACH AND EXPERIENCES

Diversity is the key to building inclusive democracies, and is inextricably linked to gender equality. We have adopted gender and diversity as the thematic focus of our knowledge and innovation agenda for the coming years. This means that it is a priority topic in our monitoring and evaluation activities. It also means investing in diversity within our own organization and further sensitizing the staff on this issue.

With this pragmatic 'learning-by-doing' attitude, we are committed to further expand our knowledge and innovate our strategies to translate the complex issues of gender-equality and diversity into political party assistance in order to support our local partners in their political quest for more inclusive and stable democracies.

NIMD is always open to new partnerships, linkages and political networks. Please contact us if you too would like to discuss and share experiences or explore possible future collaborations.

