



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

BACKGROUND

Enhancing gender equality and women's empowerment is a core pillar of USAID's approach to advancing democracy around the globe, and women's political participation and leadership is a key part of that. Currently, women do not have equal access to safely and meaningfully participate in politics, nor are they able to fully exercise their own agency once in political leadership positions. To promote women's meaningful participation, USAID developed the [Women's Participation in Politics and Public Life Assessment Framework](#), which 1) maps the current environment for women's political and civic participation, 2) identifies barriers to and opportunities for women's participation and leadership, and 3) develops country-specific recommendations to break down barriers, take advantage of opportunities, and advance women's involvement and power in political and civic spaces. Stakeholders can use this assessment to evaluate a more complete picture of women's political and civic participation in a country in order to design and implement gender-inclusive democracy and government programming.

PARTICIPATION

ACCESS:

Are women politically engaged as citizens, in any of a wide range of possible political roles?

POWER:

Do women exercise political agency and influence as citizens?

LEADERSHIP

ACCESS:

Do women serve as political leaders, whether in elected or non-elected roles?

POWER:

Do women exercise political agency and influence as political leaders?

OVERVIEW

In 2023, USAID conducted eight WPPL assessments in Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Honduras, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, and Tanzania. These assessments examined both women's political participation – activities women can engage in as citizens – and political leadership – activities women can engage in as elected and non-elected political representatives. These two components were analyzed through the lens of women's access, i.e., their ability to take part in the political process, and women's power, i.e., their voice and agency as political actors.

243
INTERVIEWED

Including politicians, candidates, political party leaders, journalists, and civil society leaders

26

LOCATIONS WITHIN THE SIX COUNTRIES

92

FOCUS GROUPS

Conducted with stakeholders such as voters, elected officials, and local leaders

The assessments explored three factors that shape opportunities and barriers for women to participate substantively in political life:



SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

such as gender stereotypes, prevailing views on gender roles, and cultural ideas about gender equality



INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

including the electoral system, political parties, and the broader political and legal context



INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

including women's levels of political capacity and resources and support for their political engagement

KEY GLOBAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Restrictive gender norms and a ubiquitous patriarchal culture represent one of the most significant socio-cultural barriers to women's political participation and leadership. It is crucial to invest in programs that focus on men as agents of change—particularly male family members, male party leadership, and male traditional and community leaders—to combat these negative gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles that often pigeonhole women into domestic and caregiving duties in the home.

Violence against women in politics both on and offline is a pervasive global issue that keeps women from not only getting involved in politics but also staying involved in politics. Programs must focus on strengthening existing laws to address this type of violence, working with key electoral stakeholders and party leaders on strategies to curb this violence, and supporting women to bring perpetrators to justice and seek the physical or psychological support they need. Programs must reflect reports from women that perpetrators of violence can come from both political opponents and their own party leaders and members.

Political parties are key institutions that can provide important opportunities for women's participation and leadership but can also be the main sites of exclusion. Political party leaders, who are usually men, often control party funding, candidate selection, and party platforms. These male leaders make decision-making behind closed doors, often excluding women from real political opportunity and power. It is therefore critical to work with political parties—both women and men party members and leaders—to ensure a gender-inclusive environment that values and promotes women's leadership.

A lack of confidence, capacity, and connections to power and resources can deter women from participating in politics. There is a continued need to connect women with power and resources as well as build women's individual skills on a range of political topics, such as fundraising, policy development, and conflict mitigation. Such an increase in capacity fosters confidence, which is essential for women who want to engage in politics. Particularly important is prioritizing engagement with those most likely to experience low levels of confidence, capacity, and connections such as women outside the capital and those belonging to other marginalized groups, such as Indigenous women, women with disabilities, and young women.



“It is more difficult for women to enter and be in politics. Expectations [from] others [of] her are higher, and her expectations of herself are high, too while men do not have [the same] high expectations of themselves.”

—Woman Government official, Kyrgyzstan



“It was ‘one of the most difficult decisions of my life’ to stay in politics.”

—Woman political leader, Quito, Ecuador



“There are women who fight ... Women who started from nothing, who had only a primary school education, but who became members of parliament, beating doctors and academics.”

—Woman in civil society, Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire