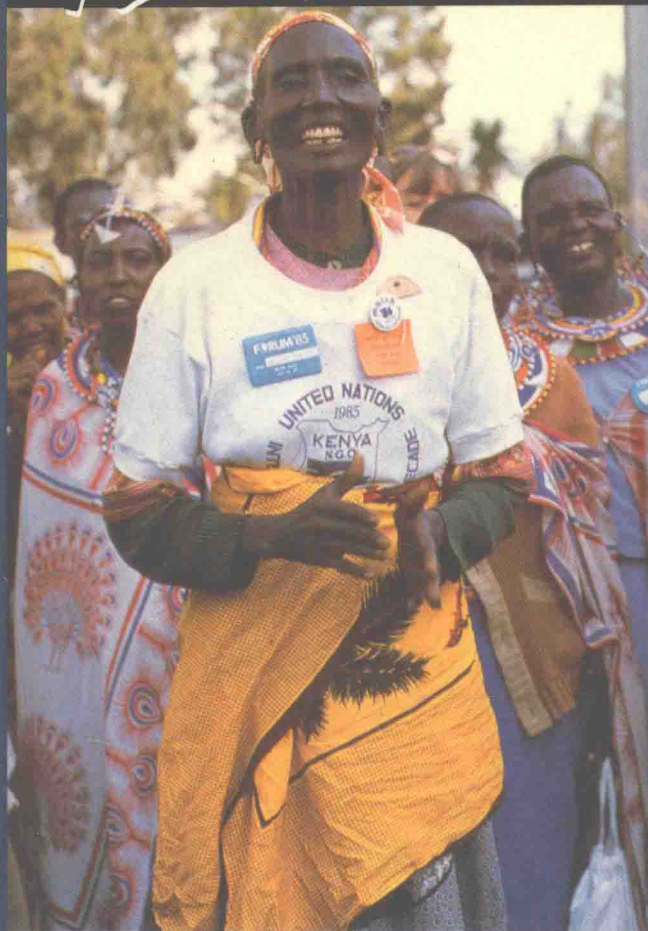


WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT

Participation and Decision Making



WOMEN
& WORLD
DEVELOPMENT
SERIES

*'A "must-read" for anyone with an
interest in the development of what is
truly a world women's movement'*

ANNE WALKER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S TRIBUNE CENTRE

PREPARED BY

MARILEE KARL

WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT

PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING

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INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK is the tenth and concluding title in the Women and World Development Series. The series, prepared by the UN-NGO Group on Women and Development, a project co-ordinated since 1989 by the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS), Geneva, is the outcome of an interactive, collaborative process of work of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Altogether over one hundred organizations from all five continents participated in the different stages of the production of the series. Their participation provided a basic element of the unique UN-NGO co-operation that is part of the global process of women's mobilization for empowerment.

Special appreciation is due to the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service and the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA) for providing two programme co-ordinators, Yvonne Backholm (1990-91) and Kirsti Floor (1992-94), for the production of the Women and World Development series. The titles in the series are listed at the beginning of this book.

This last book in the series focuses on how women are mobilizing around the world to participate in the life of their communities and in society. Participation is understood as part of a process of empow-

erment that leads to greater decision-making power and the transformation of society through the inclusion of women's priorities and perspectives.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the extensiveness of gender discrimination and the low status of women in society, and its consequences. It looks at factors affecting women's participation and at the concept of empowerment.

Chapters 2 and 3 review the history of women's participation and look at different strategies and achievements of non-governmental organizations and movements for the promotion of women.

Chapter 4 is concerned with women in electoral politics and public life as well as with mechanisms and strategies for increasing women's participation in this sphere.

Chapter 5 is devoted to women and development. It reviews the evolution in thinking on women's participation in development, and discusses interlinkages between women's empowerment and development.

Chapter 6 traces how international mechanisms can be used to increase women's participation and empowerment and the ways women are working in and around the United Nations to address their concerns and advance their status.

The annexes give further information on some of the mechanisms and strategies women use for their empowerment.

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1 OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

People's participation is becoming the central issue of our time... People today have an urge – an impatient urge – to participate in the events and processes that shape their lives.¹

WOMEN ARE A MAJOR FORCE behind people's participation in the life of society today: not only do they comprise the majority of those excluded from participation, but they play a leading role in the emergence of groups, organizations and movements worldwide, and are becoming increasingly active in their communities, governments and the international arena.

Why is women's participation so important? In the first place, there can be no true democracy, no true people's participation in governance and development without the equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life and levels of decision making. Second, the goals of development cannot be attained without women's full participation not only in the development process, but also in shaping its goals. And third, women's participation is changing the world in which we live by bringing new priorities and perspectives to the political process and the organization of society. In focusing attention on the most neglected portion of humanity today, women and girls, women's participation will make society more responsive to the needs of all people. In bringing new insights and contributions to all issues, it will enrich and shift the focus and content of discourse in politics and society to include a wider range of views. In raising the status of women and girl children, it will improve the economic and social development of countries. In changing the

unequal balance of decision-making power and control in the relations of men and women – in the household, in the workplace, in communities, in government and in the international arena – it will lead to women's empowerment.

Participation has two dimensions: quantitative and qualitative. The tendency in the past has been to focus mainly on the quantitative aspects of people's participation and to measure it principally in terms of numbers of people, irrespective of the quality of their participation or their involvement in decision-making processes. For instance, development agencies often considered people's participation mainly in terms of the numbers involved in development programmes and projects. In this sense, women's participation was measured by how many women were affected by a project even if they were simply passive recipients of development aid, without any voice in the design, implementation or monitoring and evaluation of the project. Similarly, in workers', political and social change organizations and movements, women often make up the majority of the rank and file, but comprise a minority of the leadership and decision makers. There is, of course, a relationship between the quantitative and qualitative aspects of participation: the larger the numbers of participants, the more possibilities exist to make a difference. It generally takes a critical mass of women to effect change. Other factors, however, such as universal gender discrimination, present obstacles not only to the number of women participants but also to their access to leadership and decision making.

Today the focus is changing from the quantitative to the qualitative aspects and participation is conceptualized in broader terms. According to the *Human Development Report 1993*, prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):



PHOTO: OLGA YOLANDA LOPEZ/ISIS INTERNATIONAL

Women are increasingly making their voices heard in the political arena

Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives. People may, in some cases, have complete and direct control over these processes – in other cases, the control may be partial or indirect. The important thing is that people have constant access to decision-making and power. Participation in this sense is an essential element of human development.²

FORMS OF PARTICIPATION ☐ The UNDP *Human Development Report* identifies four basic forms of participation:

- household participation
- economic participation
- social and cultural participation
- political participation.

These forms of participation are inter-

related and cannot be viewed in isolation. As the *Human Development Report 1993* states:

Since participation can take place in the economic, social and political arenas, each person necessarily participates in many ways, at many levels. In economic life as a producer or a consumer, an entrepreneur or an employee. In social life as a member of a family, or of a community organization or ethnic group. And in political life as a voter, or as a member of a political party or perhaps a pressure group. All these roles overlap and interact, forming patterns of participation that interconnect with — and often reinforce — each other.³

HOUSEHOLD PARTICIPATION The household is often the main — and

sometimes the only – place where women participate. Women are almost universally responsible for caring for children and other members of the household and for all the domestic work that their caring roles entail. They often have primary responsibility for their families' health and for the provision of food, water and fuel, and their work is not only unpaid, but largely unrecognized as well. Their major responsibilities for the household's well-being do not always mean decision-making power within the family. In many cases, women do not have equal control over the management and allocation of family income, especially if the income has been earned by the men in the family. This fact has only recently been recognized by development agencies, which in the past usually looked at the household as a unit in which an increase in men's income would benefit the whole household equally. Studies have shown, however, that men and women generally spend their incomes in different ways: women use their income to meet the basic needs of their families, such as food, education, health care and clothing, while men devote a greater percentage of their income to non-essential personal goods. Thus women's ability to participate in household decision making has an effect on the well-being of the entire family.

Women's status in the household also affects their ability to participate outside the home. While women can often assert influence over public life through the males of their household, women's secondary status in the family frequently prevents or limits them from taking a direct part in the outside world. Moreover, since women carry the major burden of child care and domestic work, they often face severe time constraints on their participation outside the home. Democratization and redressing the gender imbalance in the home are therefore crucial to women's wider participation and

entail not only increasing women's control in the household, but also a more equal partnership of men and women in sharing household responsibilities. Whilst democracy begins in the home, a frequent result of women's increasing involvement in society is their greater decision-making power in the home as well.

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION Women's economic participation has, on the whole, been increasing. Great inequalities remain, however, between men and women in employment opportunities and rights, remuneration, and recognition of women's economic participation. As the UNDP *Human Development Report 1993* says:

The nature of economic participation can vary widely, from forms of drudgery to creative, productive and independent economic activity. Societies also vary greatly in the value they place on forms of work, ranging from the association of manual work with servitude to a respect for manual labour in more egalitarian societies. And closely related to this range of social attitudes is the nature of the work environment itself, which can be more or less participatory.⁴

Overall, women have far fewer job opportunities than men and are disproportionately found in lower paid and less prestigious occupations. They earn far less even when performing the same work as men. Women hold only a small proportion of management positions and are seldom in the leadership of trade unions, which may explain, at least in part, women's weak position in regard to rights such as maternity leave and job security, and the provision of social services such as child care. Women who work outside the home are still responsible for the domestic work of the household and thus bear a double work burden, which is an obstacle both to better employment opportunities and to social and political participation.



PHOTO: ANNE MARIE GAUDRAS/UNICEF

Women's participation is greatest in community organizations

Women's unpaid household work is usually not valued or considered a contribution to the economy. Lack of income, or lower income, also reduces women's decision-making power in the household and their ability to participate in social and political activities. The inequalities women face in economic participation have an adverse effect on women's self-esteem and their status in society:

Participation in economic life also affords people a basis for self-respect and social dignity, attributes that are integral to participating in all dimensions of life.⁵

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PARTICIPATION Women participate in the life of society through community associations, religious groups, and a wide variety of other groups and organizations, in which

they often comprise the majority of members. A great many factors affect women's social participation, including their household and economic status and traditional customs and attitudes which may either promote or inhibit their activities. In societies with conservative attitudes towards women's participation outside the home or where strong discrimination against women exists, women's social roles may be limited. In many societies, women play a significant part in the cultural life of their communities as the members of the community who preserve the traditional culture in song, dance, storytelling, art and ritual.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION Women's political participation takes many forms: it includes not only voting and holding public office, but also collective action in associations and organizations. In the

sphere of electoral politics, women have made great strides forward in obtaining the vote and the right to be elected to political office in nearly every country, yet today they comprise only 10 per cent of the members of parliaments worldwide and hold only a fraction of other leadership positions nationally and internationally. In the national and international civil services, which are playing an increasingly powerful role in politics and public life today, women occupy only a small portion of the management positions, although many are to be found at the lower levels.

The major sphere of women's political participation is that of community groups, and of women's and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the local, national and international levels. This type of political participation is no less important than participation in government. As Arvonne Fraser, former director of the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP), states:

Non-governmental organizations are the conscience of the body politic, whether they are providing social welfare services or advocating for changes in public policies. Civil societies cannot exist long without them because NGOs are a check on the power of governments. Every government needs to be held accountable by its citizens, and citizens acting together in non-governmental associations are far more powerful than individuals acting separately. NGOs also have the freedom to generate, test out and promote the adoption of new ideas, policies and programs.⁶

Whilst women have a long history of participation in such organizations, their involvement has increased greatly over the past two decades and they have achieved notable successes in influencing the

political agenda through such organizations and through movements for social change. Women's participation in development agencies, projects and programmes has had an impact on development policies.

HOW FAR HAVE WOMEN COME? □

Contrasting views exist on the progress women have made in terms of their political participation. On the one hand, a study on women's political participation by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) presents an optimistic view:

Since the turn of the century, women have come a long way as regards political participation ... their increased visibility, acquisition of full citizenship and greater education make it impossible to conceive of building a long-term future without their participation.⁷

It is also true, however, that far fewer women than men participate politically, economically and socially, and women have far less decision-making power. As the *Human Development Report 1993* states:

Women are the world's largest excluded group. Even though they make up half the adult population, and often contribute more than their share to society, inside and outside the home, they are frequently excluded from positions of power.⁸

An examination of gender discrimination, that is, discrimination against women, reveals enormous gaps between men and women in all societies, and many of the obstacles that prevent women's equal social participation. Without statistics, however, it is difficult to obtain systematic information on the extent of gender discrimination, or for governments, intergovernmental agencies and other planning and policy-making bodies to assess the situation and respond to the

needs of women and their families in ways which improve gender equality. For instance, lack of accurate information on women's role in agricultural production has resulted in the failure of development programmes and projects because they did not address the needs of women farmers. On the other hand:

At the village or community level, an accurate reflection of the contribution of women farmers in statistics will further provide the justification for fundamental changes in policy, plans and the allocation of agricultural resources so that all farmers, both female and male, benefit. This would effectively remove many of the constraints women farmers face in increasing their productivity.⁹

Statistics also provide women's organizations with an important instrument with which to pressure and lobby national and international bodies, to influence policies and programmes, and to make the case for the need for further gathering of statistics.

Over the past few decades, women researchers, activists and organizations have called attention to the fact that economic and social advances and development do not necessarily benefit all people equally, and to the need to disaggregate statistics by sex. When statistics distinguish between men and women, they reveal that the position of women lags far behind that of men, and that in some countries gender disparity is even growing. As the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, says in introducing the book *The World's Women 1970-1990*:

It is clear from these data and indicators that, although there have been some improvements for women over the past 20 years, the majority still lag far behind men in power, wealth and opportunity. Data are needed to generate awareness of the present situation, to guide

policy, to mobilize action and to monitor progress towards improvements.¹⁰

The World's Women 1970-1990 is a collaborative effort by many United Nations bodies to present as clear and comprehensive a picture as possible of women's condition and how it has or has not changed over the two decades in the areas of: family and households; public life and leadership; education and training; health and child-bearing; housing, human settlements and the environment; women's work and the economy. On women's participation in public life and leadership, the report reaches the following conclusion:

Women are poorly represented in the ranks of power, policy and decision-making. Women make up less than 5 per cent of the world's heads of State, heads of major corporations and top positions in international organizations. Women are not just behind in political and managerial equity, they are a long way behind. This is in spite of the fact that women are found in large numbers in low-level positions of public administrations, political parties, trade unions and businesses.¹¹

Growing awareness of gender disparities has led to increased efforts by United Nations bodies, governments and non-governmental organizations to gather statistics on women and to pinpoint the male-female discrepancies. For instance, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) produces an annual report, *The Progress of Nations*, which ranks the nations of the world according to their achievements in health, nutrition, education, family planning and the progress of women in terms of literacy, maternal mortality and participation in politics. UNICEF is also collecting age and sex-disaggregated data, and some countries

TABLE 1.1
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HDI AND GENDER-DISPARITY-ADJUSTED HDI

COUNTRY	HDI VALUE	GENDER-DISPARITY- ADJUSTED HDI	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HDI AND GENDER- DISPARITY-ADJUSTED RANKS
SWEDEN	0.977	0.921	4
NORWAY	0.978	0.881	1
FRANCE	0.971	0.864	5
DENMARK	0.955	0.860	8
FINLAND	0.954	0.859	8
AUSTRALIA	0.972	0.852	1
NEW ZEALAND	0.947	0.844	9
NETHERLANDS	0.970	0.826	1
USA	0.976	0.824	-3
UNITED KINGDOM	0.964	0.818	0
CANADA	0.982	0.816	-9
BELGIUM	0.952	0.808	3
AUSTRIA	0.952	0.782	1
SWITZERLAND	0.978	0.768	-10
GERMANY	0.957	0.768	-4
ITALY	0.924	0.764	3
JAPAN	0.983	0.763	-16
CZECHOSLOVAKIA	0.892	0.754	4
IRELAND	0.925	0.720	-1
LUXEMBOURG	0.943	0.713	-3
GREECE	0.902	0.691	0
PORTUGAL	0.853	0.672	3
CYPRUS	0.890	0.656	0
COSTA RICA	0.852	0.632	2
HONG KONG	0.913	0.618	-5
SINGAPORE	0.849	0.585	1
KOREA, REP. OF	0.872	0.555	-3
PARAGUAY	0.641	0.546	1
SRI LANKA	0.663	0.499	-1
PHILIPPINES	0.603	0.451	0
SWAZILAND	0.458	0.344	0
MYANMAR	0.390	0.297	0
KENYA	0.369	0.241	0

A positive difference shows that the gender-disparity-adjusted HDI rank is higher than the unadjusted HDI rank, a negative the opposite.

Source: UNDP, Human Development Report 1993.

and organizations are disaggregating data by race and ethnic origin as well. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has been compiling statistics on the representation of women in parliaments and other political bodies (see Chapter 4).

Since 1990, the UNDP has been issuing an annual *Human Development Report* with extensive statistics, disaggregated by sex, in a number of areas: percentage of the population; life expectancy; literacy; mean years of schooling; enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels; and labour force participation. Statistics on maternal mortality, fertility rates and

contraceptive use are also presented. The reports are designed to give a comparative rating of the world's countries on the basis of a human development index (HDI). This measure is obtained by combining indicators such as real purchasing power, education and health, and is thus able to present a more comprehensive picture of a country's development than ratings based only on the gross national product (GNP). Each country is assigned an HDI value and the countries are ranked from highest to lowest. According to the *Human Development Report 1993*, Japan ranked first with a HDI value of 0.983, while Guinea was in

GENDER DISPARITY IN JAPAN

Japan, despite some of the world's highest levels of human development, still has marked inequalities in achievement between men and women. The *Human Development Report 1993* human development index puts Japan first in the world. But when the HDI is adjusted for gender disparity, Japan slips to number 17. Here's why.

In tertiary education, the enrolment for females is only two-thirds that of males. Similarly in employment, women are considerably worse off. Women's average earnings are only 51 per cent of those of men, and women are largely excluded from decision-making positions: they hold only 7 per cent of administrative and managerial jobs. Their representation is even lower in the political sphere. Women obtained the right to vote, and to be elected to parliament, only after the Second World War. Yet today, only 2 per cent of parliamentary seats are held by women, and at the ministerial level there are no women at all (compared with 9 per cent for industrialized countries as a whole and 13 per cent for the other countries

of Asia). Nevertheless, one or two women have achieved important political positions, and a number of women were among the founders of the Social Democratic Party.

In terms of legal rights in general, Japan's patrilineal society is only gradually changing to offer women greater recognition and independence. Only in 1980 was the inheritance right of a Japanese woman raised from one-third to one-half of her late husband's property (the rest goes to the children). In other aspects the law is still not gender-neutral. Thus, the legal minimum age of marriage is eighteen for men, but sixteen for women. And after divorce, a man can remarry immediately, but a woman has to wait six months.

Japan now has political and non-governmental organizations pressing for change. The League of Women Voters, for instance, is lobbying for a correction in the disparity of seat distribution in parliament, and for greater participation of women in policy making.

UNDP, *Human Development Report 1993*, New York, 1993, p. 26

last place with a HDI rank of 173 and an HDI value of 0.045.

For a number of countries the *Human Development Report 1993* presents a gender-sensitive HDI, measured on the basis of indicators for women (see Table 1.1). The changes in the countries' HDI value and rank are very revealing:

When the HDI is adjusted for gender disparity, no country improves its HDI value – The meaning: no country treats its women as well as it treats its men, a disappointing result after so many years of debate on gender equality, so many struggles by women and so many changes in national laws ... But some countries do better than others, so adjusting for gender disparity makes a big difference to the rankings: Japan falls from number 1 to 17, Canada from number 2 to 11 and Switzerland from number 4 to 14. By contrast, Sweden improves its rank from number 5 to 1, Denmark from number 16 to 7.¹²

The *Human Development Report 1993* indicates the gaps between men and women in life expectancy, population, literacy, mean years of schooling, primary, secondary and tertiary education enrolment, and labour force participation (see Table 1.2 at the end of this chapter). According to the report:

In industrial countries, gender discrimination (measured by the HDI) is mainly in employment and wages, with women often getting less than two-thirds of the employment opportunities and about half the earnings of men. In developing countries, the great disparities, besides those in the job market, are in health care, nutritional support and education. For instance, women make up two-thirds of the illiterate population. And South and

East Asia, defying the normal biological result that women live longer than men, have more men than women. The reasons: high maternal mortality and infanticide and nutritional neglect of the girl-child. According to one estimate, some 100 million women are 'missing'.¹³

Attempts to relate statistics and indicators of women's status to development goals show that the status of women rises hand in hand with economic and social development. For instance, as UNICEF reports:

Girls' education correlates positively with several important national and international goals, including universal primary education, economic productivity, social development, inter-generational education, social equity and sustainability of development efforts.¹⁴

GIRLS' EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT GOALS*

There is a positive correlation between primary education enrolment rates of girls and GNP per capita. In addition, there is definitely an overall impact of education on the economic well-being of women, their families and society, although the relationship is both multidimensional and complex ... Girls who complete primary school education participate more in the labour force and are employed in different types of occupations in that labour force. This leads to greater wage employment opportunities and more participation in self-employment and in the informal sector, which in turn leads to higher productivity, higher wage earnings, more access to credit and higher entrepreneurial earnings. For those women who do not join the formal or informal sector but

* UNICEF, *Strategies to Promote Girls' Education*, New York, 1992, pp. 12–19

remain in non-market and home production, primary education still leads to more efficient performance of domestic work, child care and production of goods for home consumption. On the other hand, larger gender disparities in education appear to reduce GNP, and the widest education gender gap exists in the lowest-income countries, where girls' enrolment in school lags behind boys' by an average of 20 per cent ... Educated mothers have healthier families. First, an inverse relationship exists between girls' education and infant mortality, and this relationship is particularly strong in low-income countries. Each added year of maternal education tends to translate into a reduction in child mortality rates. (The mortality-reducing effect of a father's education is smaller, especially in rural populations.) Further, a mother's education explains more of the variation in child mortality than many other variables, including family income, access to health care, cost of health care or total family income that can be allocated to health care. Since the mother carries the main burden of looking after the health of her children, how well she performs this task depends on the knowledge and confidence that she gains from getting an education

There is also a correlation between mean years of female schooling and family health. Higher levels of schooling for girls increase children's chances of getting immunized and therefore increase their chances of survival. The mothers' education appears to reduce the negative effects of poor community sanitation and water supply High female literacy rates correlate with lower fertility rates Educated women generally marry later, are more likely to practice family planning and have smaller families than their uneducated counterparts

Education empowers women. By

increasing women's ability to earn an independent income, education increases women's status in the community and leads to greater input into family and community decision-making. Perhaps more importantly, education provides girls with a basic knowledge of their rights as individuals and as citizens of their nation and the world. Having knowledge, income and decision-making power can place women on a more equal footing with their male counterparts Education also provides people with the knowledge and skills to contribute to and benefit from development efforts, especially in areas of health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and the environment. Efforts in these areas are more likely to be successful if women understand the new concepts and their potential benefits, possess the skills needed to implement new ideas, and are willing to test these concepts with their families and communities Girls' education is a necessary condition to ensure that development efforts will be sustained. ●

FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION □

Many interrelated factors affect women's ability to participate in politics and the life of society. A number of major factors have already been mentioned:

- household status
- employment and remuneration
- work-related rights (maternity leave, job security, provision of child care)
- double burden of work
- education and literacy
- health
- ability to control fertility.

In addition, there are a number of other significant factors:



Girls' education is essential for sustainable development

- access to financial resources
- legal rights
- tradition, cultural attitudes and religion
- socialization and self-confidence
- violence against women
- the mass media.

ACCESS TO FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Women face obstacles in accessing financial resources, such as credit and funding, to carry out political activities, whether in the field of electoral politics or in organizations.

LEGAL RIGHTS Women often face legal discrimination and restrictions that inhibit their participation in many spheres of life. Constitutional and legislative guarantees of women's rights are not always imple-

mented, and religious laws, customary laws or personal status laws that discriminate against women may be allowed to override such constitutional declarations and legislation. Moreover, women are not always aware of their rights under the law. As an expert meeting on legal literacy pointed out:

In situations where there is de jure recognition of women's rights, the need may arise to increase awareness of such rights. Where there is no such recognition, the need to raise awareness for the purpose of agitating for such rights becomes necessary.¹⁵

Legal guarantees and knowledge of one's rights are not sufficient, however, unless these rights are enforced. People also need the means to be able to claim their rights, and women are the least likely to have access to the justice system.