



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# ADVANCING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

## THE WOMEN IN POWER PROJECT



Photo credit: Ayesha Warsi, National Democratic Institute

### BACKGROUND

Gender equality is a basic human right and a necessary condition for sustainable development. Women's ability to participate fully in the key decisions that affect their lives is essential for creating democratic societies and successful development outcomes.

However, around the world today, women face numerous obstacles to running for office, holding office, and even expressing their choices through the ballot box.

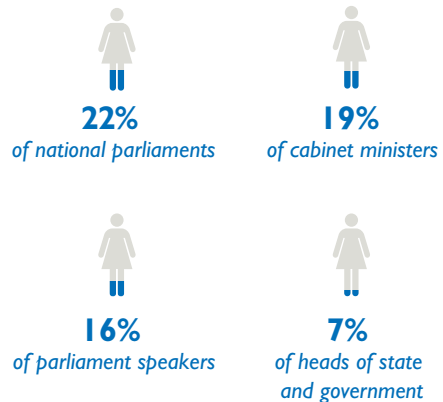
These barriers include "supply" side factors such as lack of access to education and financial resources, as well as "demand" side issues such as political parties' exclusionary practices and concerns about women's "electability." But these factors are also compounded by pervasive social attitudes which further limit women's political participation and leadership opportunities.

### USAID'S APPROACH

Advancing gender equality in politics and governance is integral to USAID's mission of ending extreme poverty and promoting resilient, democratic societies worldwide. In support of this goal, USAID developed an innovative learning activity - the Women in Power project - that brought together a top notch team of academics, USAID staff and gender experts to take a hard look at what the Agency is doing to advance women's leadership and political empowerment worldwide.

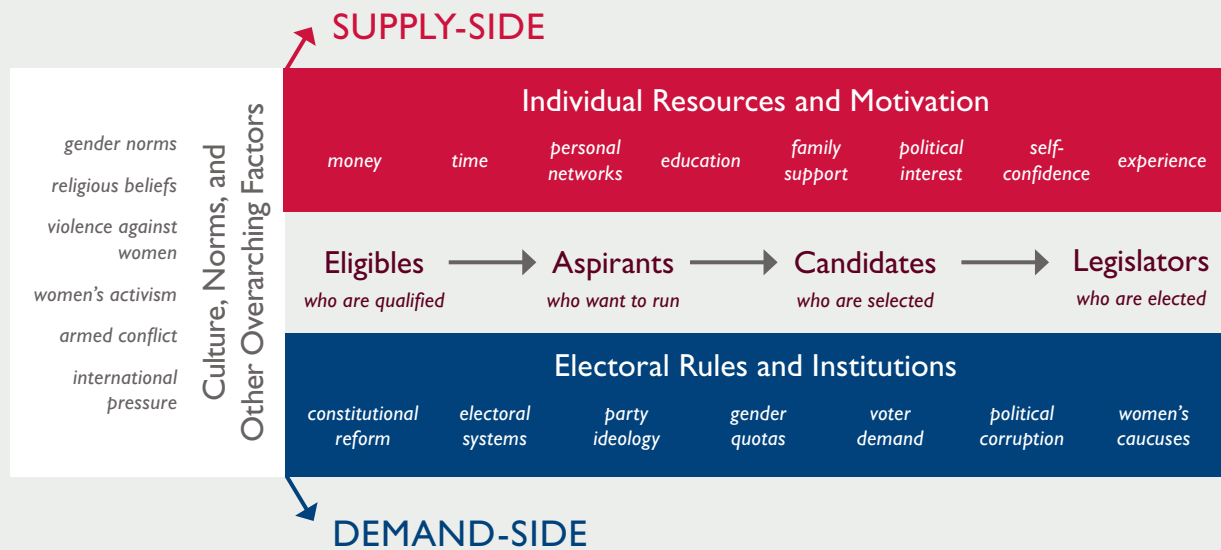
*While women's rates of participation in education and the labor force have increased significantly in recent decades, they lag behind in the political realm.*

#### IN JANUARY 2015, WOMEN CONSTITUTED



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015

**FIGURE 1 | THE INFLUENCE OF SUPPLY-SIDE AND DEMAND-SIDE FACTORS**



Sources: Adapted from Matland (2002); Paxton and Hughes (2016)

## THE WOMEN IN POWER PROJECT

Led by USAID’s Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance within the Bureau of Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance, this learning activity:

- Analyzed 98 USAID-funded activities that sought to increase the supply of women leaders, create greater demand for women leaders and change attitudes and cultural norms that restrict both supply and demand (see Figure 1).
- Developed and piloted the Diamond Leadership Model (see Figure 2), a new tool that helps to more accurately measure women’s leadership throughout government.
- Documented key findings and put forward policy and programmatic recommendations in a series of eight reports. <https://goo.gl/ktOHez>
- Brought together leading donors, practitioners and academics in 2014 to share these findings and identify areas for greater cooperation.

**FIGURE 2 | THE DIAMOND LEADERSHIP MODEL**

The Diamond Leadership Model measures the percentage of women in key positions across government

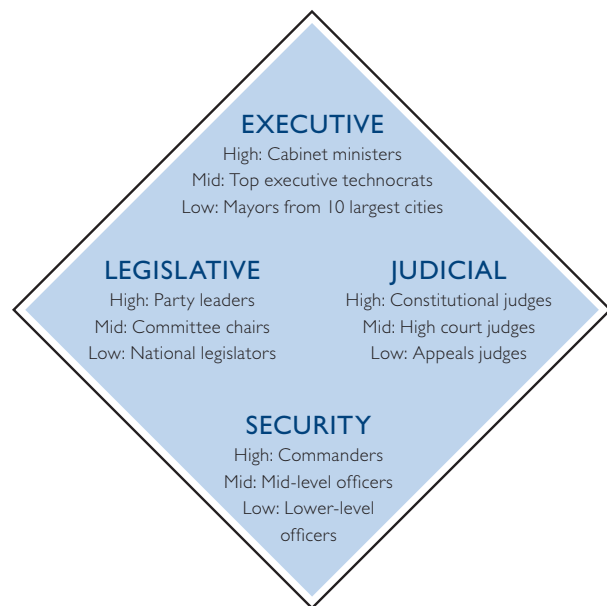




Photo credit: AFP

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote a common understanding of women's political empowerment.
- Commit to adequate funding to support women's political empowerment programming, including for multi-year activities and those that go beyond standard training programs for women to address more entrenched barriers.
- Expand the focus of programming and activities beyond national parliaments, to include women's leadership within the executive, judicial and security sectors; and focus on women's representation in regional and local offices as well.
- Improve access to and collection of more and better data, through the use of new tools like the Diamond Leadership Model.
- Improve coordination among donors, academics and implementers to develop, scale-up and evaluate innovative, evidence-based approaches.

## A Working Definition of Women's Political Empowerment

Just what is meant by women's political empowerment? The Women in Power project created a working definition. Women's political empowerment includes:

- The equal participation, representation and leadership of women within government institutions, political parties and civically engaged organizations;
- Women's free exercise of the authority inherent in those positions; and
- The regular creation, implementation and enforcement of laws and policies that address women's rights, positions and priorities.

**FOR MORE  
INFORMATION**

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