

Strategies for Chairing Gender-Inclusive Meetings

To yield the best outcomes and build a positive, productive environment, it is important that parliamentary meetings are inclusive, allowing for all participants' contributions to be heard and valued.

When meetings are male-dominated, women participants may be at a disadvantage as a result of internalized negative biases and stereotypes that are a product of our socialisation. For example, women are traditionally viewed as relationship-oriented, nurturing, expressive, and warm, while men are traditionally seen as dominant, self-oriented, assertive, ambitious, and the public voice on issues. These ideas can manifest in harmful ways in work environments and minimize women's voices.

Male parliamentarians who are allies for gender equality can identify and proactively prevent and correct these problems. Below are some practical strategies for conducting meetings that promote equitable participation.

Why is this important?

Studies show that women are...

- More likely to be **interrupted** by both men and women.
- More likely to be asked to **take on tasks** that can interfere with their participation in meetings (coordinating refreshments, recording minutes); they are seen as **selfish** if they decline to do so, whereas men who decline are seen as busy.
- Thought to **speak more** than men in conversations even when they do not.
- Perceived to be **less competent and less helpful** if they speak more often than their peers; whereas men who speak more often are seen as more competent and more helpful.
- Less likely to have their contributions seen as **valuable**.
- Perceived as forming a **larger part** of groups than they do



Scheduling and logistics

- Hold meetings at times that are less likely to interfere with caregiving and family responsibilities and take decisions there, rather than in informal settings or outside of regular work hours.
- When organizing community meetings (e.g. with constituents) request a safe and accessible location and time and advertise relevant services (e.g. what disabilities can be accommodated, if childcare is available, etc.).
- Fairly divide administrative tasks necessary for meeting preparation and proceedings – such as note-taking or preparing refreshments – among participants or the coordinating group. Where appropriate, encourage everyone to be responsible for their own notes or refreshments.



Agenda preparation

- Invite participants to contribute to developing the agenda so that everyone is more likely to feel ownership and take part in the discussions.
- Alternate who chairs the meeting, or assign different participants to lead the discussion during various moments on the agenda to guarantee wider participation.



Shared meeting space

- Consider gender balance and diversity when inviting speakers to present or witnesses to testify before a committee in order to bring a variety of perspectives to discussions.
- Ensure that everyone has physical space in the room, is visible to the chairperson, and can see audio-visual supports and/or resource materials.



Respectful and participatory conversations

- Model gender-sensitive language and communication free of gender stereotypes.
- Establish collective guidelines for meetings, which could include a stipulation to prohibit interruptions.
- Interject if an interruption occurs to invite the first speaker to finish their point, and speak privately to individuals who frequently interrupt to bring the issue to their attention.
- Pay attention to individuals with a pattern of speaking less and invite them to offer their thoughts.
- If agenda items generate particular interest, ask each participant for their thoughts or implement a time limit on contributions to provide equal speaking opportunities.



Highlighting women's contributions

- Repeat good ideas and attribute them to their original owner, and acknowledge who inspired your thinking when building on previously shared points.
- If an idea is repeated without credit being given, say something like "It sounds like you agree with what Ms. Green said a few minutes ago."



Wrapping up

- Consider taking decisions by consensus if women are out-numbered in the room as this gives more weight to individual voices that may be otherwise marginalized.
- Distribute responsibility for "action items" in a way that does not resort to traditional stereotypes.
- Send a follow-up note after the meeting to circulate minutes, inviting corrections or additions before the final document is shared; welcome additional feedback on the meeting and its outcomes via email or in person.

References

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