

## BRIEFING: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, INTERSECTIONALITY AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CARIBBEAN

### SUMMARY

The need for a critical mass of women in political leadership has been clearly acknowledged in the global development agenda. Not only is women's political leadership in keeping with commitments to protecting and advancing the fundamental rights of women but evidence shows that having a critical mass of women policy makers results in greater allocation of resources to policies that benefit women, men, boys and girls; moreover as the number of women in political leadership increases so too does economic growth.

**Empowering women requires consideration of how intersecting social identities, rooted in gender, socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, (dis)ability and age, combine to either result in increased privilege or oppression for women, men, boys and girls.** The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an integrated development framework for policy design that recognises intersectionality; this framework calls on political leaders to apply an inter-sectional approach in the design and implementation of legislation, policies and programmes that promote women's political leadership.

This brief highlights how increased women's political leadership can promote sustainable development and presents examples of **Temporary Special Measures (TSMs)** for scaling up women's political participation. For sustainability, these efforts must form part of a comprehensive package of policies that protects women's rights including, *inter alia*, women's access to decent work and protection from violence.

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### The Imperative for Sustainable Development in the Caribbean

Caribbean small island developing states (SIDS) continue face a number of development challenges including citizen insecurity, the impacts of climate change and disasters, high public debt, high poverty, and unemployment. High levels of gender inequality also persist and perpetuate challenges of: domestic violence; gender-wage gaps; unequal burdens of care; higher representation of female-headed households among poor households; and relatively low representation of women in political leadership.<sup>i</sup>

A critical element in legislating for sustainable development is developing policies that promote substantive equality. Substantive equality involves achieving equitable (fair) outcomes as well as equal opportunity. It takes into account the effect of past discrimination, and unequal distribution of rights,

entitlements and opportunities. Substantive equality addresses all forms of inequality.

### Intersectionality: The Implications for Substantive Gender Equality and Sustainable Development

The pursuit of sustainable development requires legislation inscribing substantive equality and must build on the premise of intersectionality: people live multiple and intersecting identities – related to age; social/economic status; race ethnicity; (dis)abilities and/or sexual orientation - derived from social relations, history and operation of power structures.

### Sustainable Development in Action

In September 2015, Heads of Government of Caribbean countries, assembled through the United Nations General Assembly, adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)s, which identify gender equality as a pre-requisite for development.

Gender equality is also the focus of a stand-alone goal, with women's political empowerment being specifically addressed by Target 5.5 *to ensure women's full and effective participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.*

### **Women's Leadership, Sustainable Development, CEDAW and the Caribbean Commitment**

Substantive equality in women's leadership in the Caribbean requires equality in form (an increase in the number of women in leadership), and equality in substance (meaning that both men and women in leadership practise principles that are inclusive, transformational, and equitable).

Transformational leadership is critical to substantive equality in leadership. It must focus on achieving a critical mass of women leaders, and applying a gender responsive approach in decision-making that acknowledges intersectionality.

Women's equal opportunity and access to leadership are human rights reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The human rights approach to women's political empowerment posits that women should be in leadership because they represent half of the population, and that leaders should reflect the population that they represent. All CARICOM states have ratified CEDAW and are signatory to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). These international frameworks, as well as the SDGs, highlight the importance of women's leadership and encourage governments to take measures to increase women's political representation in parliament to a critical mass of at least 30%.

Despite broad commitments to gender equality, a long history of political engagement and high levels

of education - including women outnumbering men at the tertiary level by a ratio of 2:1 - Caribbean women's levels of participation in elected and appointed offices (Upper and Lower House combined) is comparatively low.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Economic case for Increasing Women's Political Leadership**

Increasing women's representation in legislatures is proven to benefit economic development. Research associates an average annual increase in per-capita economic growth of 0.16% with each percentage point in increases to parliamentary representation of women.<sup>ii</sup>

### **The Caribbean Public is ready for Increased Women's Leadership**

According to a 2015 UN Women/CADRES survey of four countries in the Caribbean, at least half of those surveyed felt that more women were needed in politics. This sentiment was particularly high among respondents aged between 18-30 years. Across all of those interviewed in the region, 72% (with a high of 98% in Jamaica) felt: that women have the same right to hold political office and become leaders; that women bring much needed qualities to politics; and that women and men should have equal representation.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Electoral Systems**

Most Caribbean countries use the plurality/majority electoral system – also known as first-past-the-post (FPTP). In this system, one candidate is elected per constituency, and the candidate with the highest

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage of women in parliament in the Caribbean (excluding Haiti and the Spanish-speaking countries) is 18.5%. This is lower than the global average of 22%. Caribbean states with the highest percentages of women in political leadership are Grenada with 33.3%, Guyana with 30.4% (Guyana has a party quota of 30% for party lists) and Trinidad and Tobago with 29.2% (Lower House 28.6 and Upper House 30%).

## BRIEFING: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, INTERSECTIONALITY AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CARIBBEAN

number of votes wins. This system is not considered particularly favourable to women candidates as only one candidate is selected per constituency – in

comparison to proportional representation, which allows for a broader slate of candidates to be put forward by political parties.<sup>iv</sup> Regardless of the electoral system in use, there are persistent socio-cultural and economic factors that also affect women's odds of election. To address this, many countries have implemented temporary special measures.

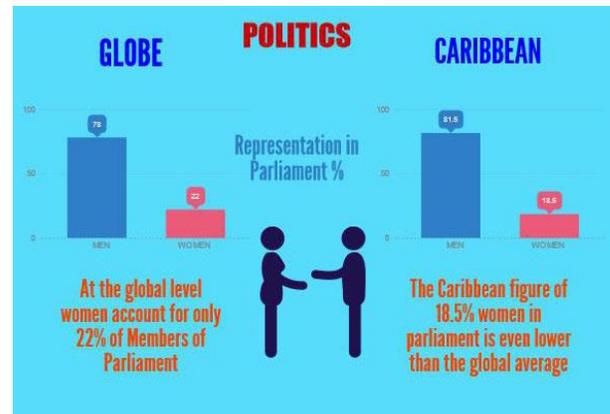


Figure 1: Global and Caribbean Political Leadership

### Strategies for achieving Sustainable Development by scaling up Women's Political Leadership: Temporary Special Measures (TSMs)

When considering different measures to increase women's political participation and representation, it is essential for policy makers to remain cognizant of *socio-cultural*, *political* and *economic* factors to ensure that proposed measures are relevant to the national context. Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) are best implemented following a 'rigorous assessment'<sup>v</sup> to understand the different types of possible measures and entry points to initiate them.

#### Quotas

The most commonly used and well-known TSMs are quotas. Quota mechanisms can be effective ways to increase women's representation, by ensuring that women and other historically underrepresented groups hold a minimum number of elected offices.

#### Initiators

Different actors could initiate the implementation of quotas depending on the country's legislation: Parliamentarians, through legislation; civil society groups through advocacy; the National Electoral Management Body through electoral regulation; the Government through a national strategy promoted by a ministry; or *political parties* through internal reforms - including the application of gender quotas to candidate lists.

# BRIEFING: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, INTERSECTIONALITY AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CARIBBEAN

### *Legal Framework*

Quotas could be introduced through legislation, constitutional reforms, ministerial resolutions, electoral laws and regulations or reforms of political party constitutions and/or regulations. Depending on the mechanism used, quotas can be *mandatory* (that is, enacted in legislation and accompanied by an enforcement regime) and aimed at reaching a certain numerical target, either in terms of *nominations* (known as candidate quotas) or in terms of *results*; or *voluntary* when quotas are implemented by political parties.

### *Timing*

Depending on the phase of the electoral cycle in which they are introduced, quotas could be applied to potential candidates, nominated candidates, or elected seats<sup>vi</sup>.

### *Voluntarily quotas on potential candidates*

Political parties may choose to include a minimum number of women as candidates and/or to increase women's representation in their internal decision-making structures, such as party governing boards or national executive committees.

### *Mandatory quotas on candidate nominations*

Mandatory quotas require each party to include a legislated minimum number of aspiring persons with particular profiles among its nominees.

### *Mandatory quotas on results«*

A target can be set for the *overall composition* of the elected body; the *results for each constituency* if there is more than one; or the *winning candidates* returned by each party in each constituency. This is not ideal for the FPTP electoral system.

### *Reserved seats*

A reserved seat is one that can only be contested by women candidates. Samoa recently implemented this measure to promote women's participation.

## **Advancing and sustaining meaningful and transformative change**

The adoption of measures like quotas has been used globally to increase women's political participation and representation. Such measures are most effective when part of a broader package of policies and programmes geared towards sustainable and equitable development.

# BRIEFING: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, INTERSECTIONALITY AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CARIBBEAN

## Recommendations

- Measures should be taken to ensure that women are equally represented in government policy and decision-making positions at all levels, by enacting special measures such as gender quotas;
- Political Parties, as a primary entry points to participate in political life, are crucial allies in efforts to increase women's full and transformative participation in decision-making processes. Global studies show that in all political contexts, political parties are the single greatest enabler to advancing women's leadership at the national and local level;
- Existing constitutional; legislative, political and regulatory frameworks should be reviewed to identify and remove provisions that limit women's equal participation;
- The localisation of the SDG Agenda should be approached from an intersectionality perspective thereby resulting in actions that are gender responsive and take other dimensions of discrimination into account. For each of the goals and targets therefore, the voices and leadership of women must be a part of the commitments and actions at all levels;
- The 2030 Agenda should be made a part of the parliamentary and political agenda, whereby p
- arliaments and political parties promote gender equality within their institutions and advocate for gender responsive policies.
- Studies show that more women in politics have resulted in a shift in policy prioritisation, with greater policy emphasis emerging around integrated responses to issues of health, education, employment rights, social protection, and the eradication of domestic violence; and;
- Caribbean countries need to increase efforts to generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated statistics that could guide integrated policy-making from a gender responsive perspective.

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<sup>i</sup> Wiltshire, Rosina. Towards a Caribbean Multi-Country Assessment: A Base Document for Stakeholder and Partner Consultations." United Nations, 2015. <http://sr.one.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CMCA-sr.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Jayasuriya, Dinuk and Paul Burke., Australia National University and Development Policy Centre, 2012.. [https://devpolicy.anu.edu.au/pdf/papers/DP\\_18\\_-\\_Female\\_parliamentarians\\_and\\_economic\\_growth.pdf](https://devpolicy.anu.edu.au/pdf/papers/DP_18_-_Female_parliamentarians_and_economic_growth.pdf).

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Un Women. Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation – Women in Parliaments.

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#sthash.O284b10w.dpuf>

<sup>v</sup> UN General Assembly/ UN Security Council. Resolution on Women's participation in peacebuilding- Report of the Secretary General. 2010. A/65/354-S/2010/466. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/docs/2010/9/women-in-peacebuilding-report-2010>

<sup>vi</sup> Dahlerup, Drude, et al. , *The implementation of Quotas: Latin America Experience*. Stockholm, Sweden, International IDEA, 2008( p.11).