

REGIONAL CASE STUDIES



The interviews that follow illustrate the different structures and experiences of three cross-party gender caucuses in the Americas and the Caribbean, demonstrating how diverse these groups can be based on the membership's priorities and the parliamentary context.

GRENADA: The Grenada Women's Parliamentary Caucus

COSTA RICA: Parliamentary Group of Women Members of the Legislative Assembly (*Grupo Parlamentario de Mujeres Diputadas*)

ECUADOR: Parliamentary Group for Women's Rights (*Grupo Parlamentario por los Derechos de las Mujeres*)

Costa Rica: Parliamentary Group of Women Members of the Legislative Assembly (*Grupo Parlamentario de Mujeres Diputadas*)

An interview with members of the Legislative Assembly

LIGIA FALLAS,
Vice-President (Central America) of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality (2017-present), and

EMILIA MOLINA,
coordinator of the Parliamentary Group of Women Members of the Legislative Assembly (2015-present)



WHAT MOTIVATED THE CREATION OF A CROSS-PARTY WOMEN'S CAUCUS IN THE ASSEMBLY?

We created the Parliamentary Group of Women Members of the Legislative Assembly (GPMD by its Spanish initials) in order to amplify women's voices in the legislature. There are 20 women in our legislature of 57 members, and this gave us a way to strengthen our work in promoting legislation that benefits women. Creating the GPMD as a mechanism to do this was also influenced by the IPU's *Plan of Action for Gender Sensitive Parliaments*, which our parliament adopted through our participation in the IPU.

HOW DID MEMBERS AIM FOR THE GPMD TO IMPACT THE PARLIAMENT AND LEGISLATIVE AGENDA?

Our first objective was to strengthen the parliamentary gender infrastructure, which also consists of a technical unit and a parliamentary committee, by institutionalizing the GPMD and ensuring that it would continue to function after our legislative term concludes.³

Apart from that, we wanted to further the implementation of the Legislative Assembly's Gender Equity and Equality Policy and work to advance a legislative gender agenda. The three main pieces of legislation we have proposed have been on parity in electoral lists, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and protection for minors against gender-based violence and abusive relationships.

³ In accordance with Article 107 of the Political Constitution of Costa Rica, parliamentarians can run for re-election in the Legislative Assembly only in non-consecutive terms.

HOW HAVE PARTNERSHIPS HELPED SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE GPMD?

The GPMD does not have an operating budget, but we receive technical support from the Legislative Assembly's Technical Unit on Gender Equity and Equality and have created an alliance with the Legislative Assembly's Special Committee on Women. Support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Costa Rica has also been critical for our work, allowing us to host events and discussions and to create the action plan we approved on International Women's Day 2017.

WHO FORMS THE GPMD'S MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP, AND HOW ARE ITS ACTIVITIES ORGANIZED?

The GPMD is comprised of all women parliamentarians regardless of party. It is coordinated by a parliamentarian who is elected by the group's membership. We meet regularly to conduct our work. We do not have a set recurring date or time at which we meet, but we announce in advance when meetings will take place based on what work is being undertaken by the group and the parliament.

WHAT WAS THE FORMAL PROCESS FOR THE GPMD'S CREATION?

The GPMD was formalized through a Constitutive Act during a meeting of the Special Committee on Women on June 24, 2015. However, this act does not permit the same permanence for the group as a law or reform of the regulations of the Legislative Assembly would. Therefore, the group will not

technically exist after the end of this legislature and the start of another in May 2018. This is why we are seeking to further institutionalize the group, and have proposed that in the next legislature it be comprised of both current and former parliamentarians in order to continue strengthening the group and build on the work we have started.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER THE GPMD'S GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR?

We continue to make important progress in the legislative agenda we have committed to advancing. We recently passed a law that comprised a suite of reforms to strengthen the legal protection of girl children and adolescents from situations of gender-based violence associated with abusive relationships, and we will soon be voting on the parity law, which we hope to have in place for 2018 elections at all levels. We also presented a bill on sexual and street harassment on March 8, 2017, and the creation of this broader initiative included the participation of three civil society organizations, the National Institute of Women of Costa Rica (INAMU by its Spanish initials), the Special Committee on Women, and the Technical Unit.

More broadly, through the GPMD we have created a space for women parliamentarians of different ideological tendencies to come together to discuss and agree upon common objectives. For example, we came to an agreement to request that the leaders of all parties support a decision to only discuss issues that differentially impact women in the legislative plenary on International Women's Day.

Ecuador: Parliamentary Group for Women's Rights (Grupo Parlamentario por los Derechos de las Mujeres)

An interview with **GINA GODOY**, President of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality (2015-2017) and coordinator of the Parliamentary Group for Women's Rights of the National Assembly of Ecuador (2013-2017)



WHY WAS A CAUCUS CHOSEN AS A MECHANISM FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY?

We formed the Parliamentary Group for Women's Rights in Ecuador (GPDM by its Spanish initials) because women's human rights are a priority issue, and it is parliamentary practice to form working groups on issues of importance. The GPDM is currently one of the longest functioning groups in the National Assembly.

WHAT DOES THE GPDM SEEK TO ACCOMPLISH THROUGH ITS WORK?

The objectives of the GPDM are to promote, contribute to, deepen and incorporate human rights with a focus on gender in legislation, to ensure compliance with the rights and principles of women's equality and non-discrimination, in both form and practice, which are enshrined in the Constitution and in international doctrine. Achieving equal participation of men and women and a life free of violence are the topics to which we have dedicated the greatest attention, work, and discussion.

"The GPDM is a space for increasing male parliamentarians' awareness of the need to strengthen recognition of women's rights, in their broadest spectrum, in legislation. It functions as a forum to expand political debate on laws from a gender perspective and as a platform for defending human rights. It further allows male legislators to become involved—without taking a leading role—in social agendas from the conviction and understanding of the need to work together to achieve set goals."



DIEGO VINTIMILLA, coordinator of the Parliamentary Group for Women's Rights of the National Assembly of Ecuador (2013-2017)

WHAT RESOURCES DOES THE GENDER CAUCUS HAVE ACCESS TO IN SUPPORTING ITS WORK?

The GPDM does not have an operating budget, but the commitment and political will of the former President of the National Assembly, Gabriela Rivadeneira, were of great benefit when beginning our work. We have also had the support of organizations like UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Ecuador, which allowed us to host forums and promote discussion with experts in the subject matter. UN Women, in particular, has become a permanent ally for us.

WHAT IS THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE GPDM? WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE?

During the previous parliamentary term, the GPDM was comprised of approximately 70 parliamentarians—women and men—from various political parties. We sought to create a space for all members of the National Assembly who believe that the law is an instrument for justice and achieving positive social transformations to come together, regardless of party, ideology, or any other characteristic.

The Group has had different forms of leadership since its creation, from a single individual serving as chair to a collective group coordinating the group. For most of the last parliamentary term, the coordinating group was composed of 6 legislators—again, men and women—who shared the organizing responsibilities of the GPDM's activities. We encountered certain challenges with this collective approach, but the challenges were greater when just one person was responsible for managing the group.

WHAT WAS THE PROCESS FOR ESTABLISHING THE GPDM, AND HOW IS WORK DISTRIBUTED AMONG THE COORDINATORS IN DAY-TO-DAY FUNCTIONING?

With the support of UN Women, we first hosted a working breakfast to discuss creating a group, and those that attended the meeting formed the GPDM's first membership. We then informed the President of the National Assembly, which led to the formal recognition of the group, as she and various UN agencies based in Ecuador signed a framework agreement to cooperate in advancing gender equality, which included the creation of the GPDM.

Each of the 6 coordinators had particular interests in different themes within the gender equality and human rights agenda. We assumed responsibilities within the group based on the legislative project that arose and how they aligned with our interests. This allowed us to have a seat at the table from the beginning and follow the process and discussion of the legislation more closely.

WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE GPDM'S MOST EFFECTIVE WORKING METHODS SO FAR?

I think some of our most impactful work was in reviewing and proposing legislation with a gender lens. We developed an effective process, in collaboration with UN Women, to inform our legislative work. Before bills were drafted, we gathered as much information as we could. In the case of legal reform related to the problem of psychological violence, for example, we brought together members of the legal and justice administration, as well as civil society organizations that work with

victims of violence. This yielded important insight on the topic, helped us create clearer recommendations, and involved a wider array of actors in the process.

In addition, we worked in a variety of ways to build citizen awareness on women's rights. Nationally, when incidents of sexist violence (*violencia machista*) occurred, including those perpetrated by individuals at high levels in the public service, we actively denounced the act and advocated for due judicial processes, and, above all, for reparations for those affected by

the violence. These acts draw the attention of the entire country and allow an opportunity for those unfamiliar with the justice system to learn more about their rights so they can take action if facing such an incident themselves.

Our advocacy also took the form of events, social media campaigns, and engagement with students. We promoted UN Women's HeForShe campaign and hosted special plenary sessions attended by all women parliamentarians on the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Grenada: The Grenada Women's Parliamentary Caucus

An interview with Senator the Honourable Minister **BRENDA HOOD**, chair of the Grenada Women's Parliamentary Caucus (2016-present), and **JOAN PURCELL**, chair of the Grenada Women's Parliamentary Caucus (2010-2013)



WHAT INSPIRED THE CREATION OF THE GRENADA WOMEN'S PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS (GWPC)?

The idea for the Grenada Women's Parliamentary Caucus (GWPC) was developed in 2009 while we were planning for the 50th anniversary of women's representation in parliament. This event inspired us to mobilize current and former parliamentarians and built momentum for the creation of a caucus. A core group began to coordinate the caucus' formal establishment before we held our first Annual General Meeting in 2010.

The GWPC was dormant for a short period, but we re-energized our efforts in 2016 because we felt the caucus still has an important role to play in the Grenadian parliament and in the region. Our busy schedules can make it challenging to maintain the engagement of a large group, but we have a dedicated core membership and the caucus prevails because of the importance of its work.

WHAT ARE THE GWPC'S OBJECTIVES? HAVE THESE CHANGED OVER TIME?

Our membership approved the following as the caucus' objectives during our first AGM:

- To provide a forum for discussion and a platform for action on matters affecting women in the country, regionally, and internationally across party lines
- To develop and establish norms and standards that promote the effective participation of women in Parliament
- To advocate for continued official recognition and acknowledgement of persons who have served in Parliament
- To network with other organizations and institutions concerned with issues pertaining to women and women's participation in political processes
- To promote and help sensitize all parliamentarians to the principles of gender equality in the country, as well as regionally and internationally
- To advocate for legislation and implementation of the National Gender Policy for gender mainstreaming

We have also always seen the GWPC as a means to mentor young politicians, particularly women. Through their participation in various activities, like meetings, training sessions, workshops and seminars, we are able to provide them with insight on the inner workings of the political arena and the preparation necessary to become parliamentarians. Mentorship continues to be an important focus for us, and

we are also working on legislation to address sexual harassment in the workplace.

WHAT RESOURCES HAVE BEEN MOST USEFUL TO THE GWPC IN CONDUCTING ITS WORK?

We have been fortunate to have the assistance of a member of parliamentary staff who was assigned as the recording secretary. We have also benefited from the support of other members of the house, even for the work we have done outside of the parliament. The broader community has been supportive in response to how we have worked to reduce the divisiveness of politics typically witnessed across party lines.

Our personal networks and connections have been vital to our past work, and to reconvening the GWPC in the last year. We were able to arrange the logistics for the meeting and mobilize 50 former and current parliamentarians as participants in our 2016 AGM by dividing up responsibilities and following up personally.

WHO FORMS THE MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP OF THE CAUCUS?

The GWPC members are current and former women parliamentarians in Grenada from all parties. Working across party lines helps build consensus on important issues, and we make efforts to have party balance at our events as well. We also value the involvement of former parliamentarians because we can draw on their expertise, and we wish to recognize the contributions of their years of service. We consider all women parliamentarians

visiting Grenada from other legislatures to be honorary GWPC members.

We have an executive committee that comprises the following positions: chairwoman, deputy chair, honorary secretary, assistant secretary, honorary treasurer, and floor members. All members are elected. Our chair must be a currently serving parliamentarian so that we maintain a close connection to the parliament. We aim to have the chair and the deputy chair from government and opposition respectively, if possible.

HOW WAS THE GWPC'S STRUCTURE DECIDED UPON AND FORMALIZED? HOW DOES IT OPERATE NOW?

We decided on our structure after conducting research on other gender caucuses from around the world and holding extensive discussions among the coordinating committee. We created a rules document to outline the group's name, membership, management, meetings, quorum, a membership fee, voting processes, objectives, the roles and duties of the different members, and procedures for any future alterations to these rules. This was approved at our first AGM. Our first executive positions were elected and installed then as well. We continue to hold an AGM every year, and a core group of members meet once a month.

WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE GWPC'S GREATEST SUCCESSES?

The GWPC has undertaken a number of fruitful activities to achieve our goals. We have published a [collection of profiles](#) of Grenadian

women parliamentarians in celebration of this history, hosted seminars and training sessions with civil society organizations on women's political leadership, and worked with secondary schools to engage youth in discussions and generate awareness on these topics. We have found hosting arts and cultural events in the community to be a particularly effective way to influence wider opinion on gender and politics. A final highlight was the formal celebration of 50 years of women in the Grenadian parliament that first motivated the creation of the GWPC. This event brought together distinguished women from Grenada's history and served as the formal launch for the caucus.