

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

“Fundamentally, we share an optimism about what can be done if people are given the opportunities to break through glass ceilings, to break the chains of history that sometimes hold them down...There must be no limits on human potential, and it is up to us to continue to make that a core value of who we are as Americans and what we hope for others around the world.”

-- Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton, November 2009

Women are joining government in growing numbers, holding almost 20 percent of seats in national assemblies worldwide, and serving as heads of government in over 20 countries, including Argentina, Bangladesh, Liberia, and Lithuania. From the Provincial Councils in Afghanistan to the Panchayats in India, women are participating in local governments and building foundations for peace and prosperity in their communities. Women’s political engagement not only increases visibility of women’s leadership abilities, but also leads to social and economic benefits for their communities and countries. For example, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has prioritized women’s empowerment, which has resulted in the inclusion of six women in her Cabinet and the enactment of initiatives focused on distribution of farming equipment to rural women, construction of domestic violence shelters, and credit for women entrepreneurs.



Despite this progress, women are still significantly outnumbered in the chambers of parliaments, in boardrooms, and at negotiating tables where conflicts are resolved. The U.S. Department of State recognizes that democracy cannot flourish without the full participation of all its citizens. Women must be engaged in governance and policymaking – not only because they have a right to be involved in the decisions that directly affect their lives and their communities, but also because their perspectives and experiences improve the outcomes of these deliberations.

Women’s Political Participation

Investments to advance women’s political participation and civic engagement will include:

- **Elections and Issue Advocacy:** Supporting emerging leaders through training and mentoring programs to equip them with the knowledge, access, and skills to run for political office, participate in elections, and lead community-based organizations.
- **Legal and Policy Framework:** Supporting NGOs working to advance anti-discrimination laws and policies that enable more women to participate in political and civic life, judicial training on gender equality, and the mainstreaming of women’s issues in government.
- **Peace Building:** Supporting women’s rights leaders, government, and NGOs efforts to promote women’s full and equal participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, particularly in peace negotiations, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction.

