

Promoting women's leadership in local government:

Local government associations help women meet the challenge



This case study highlights some of the good practices emerging among FCM and its partner local government associations in improving women's political leadership and decision-making in local government. It is one in a series of thematic case studies that support FCM's local government association capacity building activities.

Section 1: Overview

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) is the national voice of municipal government in Canada. With more than 1,750 members, FCM represents the interests of municipalities on policy and program matters that fall within federal jurisdiction. Members include Canada's largest cities, small urban and rural communities, and 18 provincial and territorial municipal associations.

FCM draws on the strength of its municipal network to implement municipal capacity building programs in over 20 countries in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. With financial support mainly from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), FCM's international programs help local governments around the world develop their capacity to deliver basic services, promote economic growth and encourage the participation of their citizens.

The activities of local government affect both men and women in ways that are fundamental to satisfying basic needs and quality of life. Women and men do not, however, enjoy equal access to or control over the basic services provided by local government, because women continue to be under-represented in both the political leadership and administration at the local level. Yet local government, as the order of government closest to citizens, is in the best position to involve women and men in decisions concerning their lives.

Given this reality, FCM and its partner local government associations (LGAs) are working to strengthen the ability of their own organizations to support increased women's participation in local government as a critical strategy for change. This case study highlights some of the good practices emerging from FCM and its partner LGAs. The establishment of permanent standing committees or caucuses on women's participation in local government is one successful model for change. Within these structures, FCM and its partners have advocated for legislation that aims to address discrimination against women in the political sphere, developed programs and tools to support women at election time, enabled local governments to assess the gender-responsiveness of their administrations, provided gender training in local government and supported knowledge sharing and networking nationally, regionally and internationally.

Local government associations are key institutions responsible for serving and representing the interests of their members – advocating on their behalf with higher orders of government, in some cases building their administrative and management capacity, and acting as a hub of knowledge on local governance. They also have an important role in strengthening national and sub-national policies, institutional and legal frameworks that support democratic local governance.



Ana Maria Encina, president of the Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia (ACOBOL), has been instrumental in developing national electoral legislation to end discrimination against women and citizens groups involved in politics.

Section 2: Introduction

Why is Women's Equality in Local Government an Issue of Concern?

Although women comprise over 50 per cent of the world's population, they continue to be under-represented as voters, leaders and as elected officials, including at the local level. As a result, women do not have equal influence over the policy decisions that affect their lives. The participation of women in local government can have a particular influence on local and national development, global affairs and/or social issues that affect their families' daily lives such as healthcare, education and infrastructure.

Factors that limit or facilitate women's participation in political processes – as voters, advocates, activists, and decision-makers — vary according to social or cultural circumstances, economic situation, geography, and political context and systems. The factors commonly identified as barriers to women's participation include gender stereotypes and outright discrimination, personal obstacles such as lack of confidence, culturally prescribed domestic roles, low voter education, women's relative lack of financial and socio-economic capital, "winner take all" electoral systems, and political institutions that are not conducive to balancing family and public life.

Although internationally a strong rights-based framework exists, which calls for the equal participation of women and men in political decision-making, including at the global level, progress has been uneven and slow. Despite various commitments made by the international community to empower women through increased women's political participation (Beijing Platform for Action, ECOSOC, the Millennium Development Goals – see box), the world average proportion of women members of national-level legislatures stands at just over

The United Nations and Women's Political Participation

The United Nations has been a strong supporter of greater participation for women in political decision-making and has set a number of targets, including:

A **UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Resolution** in 1990 that recommended targets for increasing the proportion of women in leadership positions: 30% by 1995 and 50% by 2000.

The 1995 **Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing** reported that little progress had been made in achieving the ECOSOC targets and adopted as a strategic objective to: Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. Specific actions to be taken by government include: commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, and in the judiciary, including, inter alia, setting specific targets

and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action, in all governmental and public administration positions.

The **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** adopted by the United Nations in 2000 are eight time-bound targets to end extreme poverty by 2015. While all of the MDGs are directly related to women's rights, MDG3 specifically requires nations to support gender equality and women's empowerment. While the target is to eliminate gender disparity in educational attainment, indicators for this goal include not only the ratio of boys to girls being educated, but also the share of women employed in the non-agricultural sector and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. This last indicator recognizes the critical need for women to participate in decision-making at the political level before change towards this goal can be fully realized.

17 per cent. Rwanda and the Nordic countries have come close to parity, although women's national political representation remains low in other regions, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. Most encouraging is the consistent progress in Latin America and the Caribbean, where women hold 20 per cent of parliamentary seats. In Canada, women comprise less than 22.1 per cent of parliamentarians in the House of Commons. In local government, women make up 23 per cent of municipal councils, according to the most recent municipal election results collected by FCM.

It has often been argued that a "critical mass" of over 30 per cent women is needed before major changes in legislative institutions, behaviour and policy occur. While the UN continues to argue for parity, there is an urgent need to meet, at minimum, the 30 percent milestone in order for progress to be made. Local government in particular offers an important entry point for women seeking to represent their local community at the political level.



While women's numeric representation in political institutions may be critical, it does not guarantee that women have more influence over policy decisions or that women's rights and gender equality are addressed in government policies and programs. Initiatives aimed at increasing women's political participation and representation must take into account the need to go beyond numbers and ensure more positive outcomes for women. These outcomes include enabling

Women's Voices Need to be Heard to Ensure More Positive Outcomes for Women

While observing a local government council meeting about budget priorities in Sri Lanka, City of Toronto councillor Pam McConnell, who was in Sri Lanka supporting FCM's work, listened as male councillors checked off a list of items required by councillors, ranging from computers to cars. The sole woman councillor was silent until McConnell urged her to speak out. "We could use some running water in the mother's room," the Sri Lankan councillor said. When women remain invisible in municipal government, their access even to simple services is restricted.



Toronto Councillor Pam McConnell (second from left), while on a monitoring mission in Sri Lanka for the Sri Lanka/Canada Municipal Cooperation Program (2005-2009).

women's voices and perspectives to be heard in decision-making, and ensuring that services address women's needs and interests as well as those of men. In Bolivia, for example, it has meant making sure women-headed households are reached in programs to address child malnutrition. In Canada, it has meant addressing safety issues for women in public transport through night stops or access to emergency phones at transit stops.

Increasing women's access to municipal services and programs

Women and men can best fulfil their personal, family and community responsibilities when they have equal access to local government services and programs. It is important for local governments to understand gender roles and responsibilities, to recognize factors that affect gender relations, and to play a role in promoting gender equality through their policies and programs.

Equitable access to programs and services at the local level begins with measures to ensure equitable participation by women and men in consultative processes and local government decision-making. Women and men should be able to participate fully, allowing them to influence the outcome of decision-making processes and to play a substantive role in deciding on local government priorities and the allocation of public funds in order to reflect the needs and aspirations of both women and men.

Section 3: The Role of Local Government Associations (LGAs) in Promoting Gender Equality in Local Government

LGAs, such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, have a critical role to play in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. LGAs act as a voice and advocate for local government at the national and international level. In fulfilling their role, LGAs work with and on behalf of their members to deliver a shared vision of local government, where local priorities drive public policy decisions, all the way up to the national level. LGAs can also help to shape the public debate on a variety of issues of importance to local governments, influence policy and practice in public services, support innovation to help local governments meet future challenges, support democratic accountability and effective leadership, and champion best practices in the sector.

FCM and its partner LGAs recognize that gender equality forms an integral part of the long term commitment to improving local government performance. They are therefore developing a permanent and ongoing capacity within their own associations to ensure a greater voice for women and to promote women's equality in local government, using a variety of tools, including:

- Establishing and supporting women's caucuses or standing committees in LGAs with a mandate to provide leadership to increase women's political involvement and improve gender equality outcomes in local government. These structures can provide women with opportunities to compare experiences, learn from each other's efforts, and plan joint actions. These caucuses or standing committees are a permanent, ongoing feature of the LGA's governance structure, endorsed by the association, ideally with core budget support from the LGA to support the implementation of action plans;
- Developing election toolkits and training for women to provide information relevant to women candidates. These toolkits are aimed at increasing women's confidence and chances of success – and to encourage their continuing involvement in local government. The toolkits and training cover issues such as campaigning, legal requirements, fundraising and campaign organization;
- Raising awareness of gender issues in local governments (e.g. local government assessment). FCM and its partners in Canada and internationally have adopted a range of strategies to build support and capacity for local government that responds to the needs of women. Strategies have included consultations, special advisory groups, encouragement of equal employment opportunities, and the provision of women-friendly services;
- Creating champions programs where prominent women encourage, mentor and advocate for women's involvement in local government;
- Supporting capacity building and gender-based training on a number of issues in local governments. These programs help to build skills to create women-friendly services and working environments. In future, more technical dimensions like gender-responsive local government budgeting (see box on page 9) and the use of gender-disaggregated data may be included;
- Networking and knowledge sharing among women in or interested in becoming involved in politics (see sidebar – FCM's capacity building role); and
- Supporting advocacy on gender equality issues, such as legislation to prevent harassment and discrimination of women, quota systems or municipal codes that promote gender equality, and so on.

This consistent and programmatic approach in FCM and its partner LGAs is showing results. The number of women elected and appointed at the local level is increasing slowly but surely. In many countries there is growing pressure to legislate women's candidacy, in a number of innovative ways, including requirements for parties to present men and women candidates. This is helped by the growing movement toward decentralization of power in many countries. Women municipal leaders are gaining confidence and skills, in part because they have opportunities created through the FCM strategy to work together to reinforce their efforts. As might be expected, women constituents see women local officials as an important enabler and support: the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) reports that women feel more comfortable talking to women representatives. What is less expected is that organizations wishing to

FCM's capacity building role

FCM not only works to promote women's equality in local government at home in Canadian municipalities, but incorporates gender equality as a cross-cutting theme in all of its international programs as well. This means that FCM's programs, which help strengthen local governance around the world, strive to address the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities and benefits among women and men, including marginalized groups. By integrating the theme of gender equality, projects take steps to build good governance policies and practice. FCM International's Statement on Gender Equality (2002, see next page) guides all its programming.

In addition to ensuring that gender equality is considered in all its program decisions, FCM also undertakes targeted gender programming, which aims specifically to build capacity of its partner LGAs to increase women's political participation in the governance and administration of their respective local governments. FCM has supported a range of capacity building activities, including:

- Supporting the establishment and operations of permanent women's caucuses in its partner LGAs, which are embedded in the governance of the associations;
- Facilitating knowledge sharing by bringing women to Canada (or together from several countries) to exchange information and ideas on the same issues and challenges;
- Providing funds to help bring female elected leaders (mayors and councillors) together to work on national issues of importance, which has led to advocacy efforts and policy change;
- Developing publications and resources that promote gender equality and women's leadership in local government (see list at end of case study);
- Facilitating the development and piloting of gender mainstreaming tools specifically targeted at local governments, such as *Looking through the Gender Lens: Five Steps to Building Local Government Competencies and Capacities to Promote Gender Equality*;
- Providing funds and technical assistance support to selected LGAs to assist them in launching new initiatives to increase women's participation in local government. Funds have been used to support the development of national action plans, election campaign training for women, and toolkit development; and

- Creating enabling forums and networks, nationally, regionally and globally. FCM's African Local Governance Program and Municipal Partnership Program have together supported numerous knowledge sharing and networking activities, including four regional workshops in Africa in 2005-2006, which spawned a number of initiatives such as the launch of the African Women in Local Government Network (see below) and the Ghana Women and Leadership Forum (2008), which brought together female elected leaders and association staff from different countries, including some from Canada, Latin America and Asia, to work on similar issues.

Through its various activities, FCM ensures that women have opportunities to participate actively and to share the podium. By building these opportunities into existing professional associations and gatherings, FCM gives greater visibility to gender equality issues and supports the professional development of women involved in local government.

The African Women in Local Government Network was launched at UN-Habitat's World Urban Forum 3 in Vancouver under the auspices of FCM's African Local Governance Program. The network initially linked women mayors and councillors in Ghana, Mali, Mozambique and Tanzania and eventually expanded to include women from Burkina Faso, whose national local government association hosted the first meeting of the network following the launch. The network also shares knowledge with and provides technical support to women from other African countries actively involved in local governance.



Participants of the first meeting of the African Women in Local Governance Network in Burkina Faso in December 2006.

FCM International Statement on Gender Equality (2002)

The activities of municipal governments affect both men and women in ways that are fundamental to satisfying basic needs and quality of life. However, women and men do not enjoy equal access to or control over these basic services. FCM International will support specific actions aimed at addressing four dimensions of gender equality:

- 1. Equitable Access to Municipal Leadership & Resources:**
FCM International will actively support specific and concrete actions aimed at increasing the number of women serving as both elected officials and senior managers.
- 2. Equitable Access to Municipal Services and Programs:**
FCM International will actively support women's participation in the design and delivery of programs and services in order to ensure distinct gender roles and responsibilities

are reflected in the formulation of municipal priorities and the design and delivery of municipal services.

- 3. Gender-Sensitive Organizational Culture in Municipal Operations:** FCM International will actively support local administrations to ensure greater gender awareness in their service orientation, personnel issues and policies and design and implementation of local government policies.
- 4. Policy Dialogue and Influencing Policy:** FCM International will be actively involved in policy discussions and support activities that promote the integration of gender dimensions into policy at the local, national and global levels.

FCM International will build on existing efforts in order to continue to effectively and fully integrate gender equality practices into international programming.

work with women also see local women elected officials as a way to effectively reach women, as the Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia (ACOBOL) is experiencing (see case study on page 8). FCM's emphasis on including women in delegations and on platforms has provided a positive boost and a significant learning opportunity for women.

Section 4: Case Studies

GHANA – the Women's Caucus of the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG)

Women municipal leaders in Ghana took advantage of new opportunities to work together and formally organize themselves through FCM's African Local Governance Program (ALGP). In 2005, FCM and its African partners agreed to focus on gender equality and increasing the participation of women in local government, in the context of working to achieve the Millennium Development Goals related to women (see box on page 3). Women leaders from Ghana were part of four ALGP-supported regional workshops (2005-2006), which enabled more than 150 male and female municipal leaders and practitioners from fourteen African countries to network and share knowledge on gender equality and other issues, as well as to work together to develop a tool to support gender mainstreaming in local governments, which was then piloted, evaluated and refined.

Through the ALGP, Ghanaian women leaders were also invited to FCM's annual conference in 2005, where they met members of FCM's Standing Committee on Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Government, as well as local women's groups and municipal leaders,

The African Local Governance Program (ALGP, 2002-2007) was a program funded by the Canadian government, through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), that supported local governance and the decentralization process in Africa in four key areas:

- national policy development on local governance and decentralization;
- local municipal capacity to facilitate service delivery in such areas as water, sanitation, health, and local economic development;
- public participation and access to government; and,
- strengthened African networks and institutions working on local governance so they are better able to serve the needs of their constituencies.

ALGP implementing partners included national associations of local authorities/ municipalities in four countries in Africa (Ghana, Mali, Tanzania and Mozambique), as well as two regional technical assistance organizations and the continental body representing local authorities in Africa. The national LGAs in these four countries continue to be core international program partners of FCM.

and representatives responsible for Canadian government programs for women.

During their meetings in Canada, the Ghanaian delegation reported that only 5% of local government officials were women, and that mayors are appointed by the President, rather than elected. The national level women's caucus in Ghana had advocated for an increased proportion of women appointees, reporting that the screening of potential candidates by all-male interview panels meant women were not given fair consideration. While their advocacy was not successful in the short term, they were encouraged by a positive media response around their goal of increasing women's representation in local government.

The learning opportunities and exposure provided through ALGP helped the Ghanaian women develop ideas for actions that could be taken in their own country to increase women's participation in local government. Backed by financial and technical support through FCM's international programming, they established a formal women's caucus as part of NALAG. The caucus gained the formal endorsement of the association, and a place in its offices. In advance of the local elections in 2006, the caucus organized training sessions for women aspiring to enter local office, encouraged women to run and successfully fundraised for financial support for women candidates. As a result of these efforts, over 4,000 women candidates were inspired to run for office. Those elections more than doubled the number of women elected to local office to 10.7 per cent of the total, and gave a great deal of encouragement and publicity to women in local government.

Clean drinking water, safety, and support for income generation through provision of markets and loans were key demands made by Ghanaian women of their local government candidates during the 2006 campaign. The greater representation of women in local office has resulted in NALAG advocating for the provision of these demands in local budgets.

Sharing Knowledge – Rwanda Report Shows Why Women's Political Leadership Matters

As part of the ALGP-supported workshops, participants from Rwanda tabled a report that found that women find it easier to approach women local officials, and women officials tend to attract more women to their community meetings. In addition, when women officials have responsibilities that include issues like youth, sports, health, or culture, they are able to broaden their skills – and increase their community visibility through their work with a wide range of citizens, elected officials, and civil servants.



NALAG hosted the Ghana Women and Leadership Forum (2008), which brought together female elected leaders from Africa and other countries, including some from Canada, Latin America and Asia. From left Cllr. Guylaine Lejeune (Sept-Îles, Que.), and Jane Edna Nyame, president of NALAG's Woman's Caucus, at the closing ceremonies.

Within NALAG itself, the 2007 elections to the Board more than doubled the number of women represented, and a woman was elected vice-president. NALAG also changed its constitution to ensure gender parity among its senior officers, so that if a man is elected president, a woman will be vice-president and vice versa. The number of women assigned as delegates on official missions has greatly increased, as NALAG now aims to balance the number of women and men on such delegations, and on the podium.

During the 2008/09 Ghanaian national elections, the NALAG women's caucus and other Ghanaian women's groups successfully pressed candidates from all parties to include women's advancement in their manifestos. As a result, the newly elected President promised that 40% of his local government appointees would be women.

The NALAG women's caucus continues to host meetings of women elected officials and participates actively in the African Women in Local Government Network. NALAG has inspired the set up of a formal caucus in Mali (see below) and its leadership paved the way for the formation of those in other FCM partner countries in Africa, including Tanzania and Burkina Faso. The caucus feels there is growing interest by women in local government, and is looking forward to even greater success with the new members of the women's caucus and the next round of local elections.

MALI – The Association des municipalités du Mali (AMM)

Gender equality has been a priority of the Association des municipalités du Mali (AMM) since 2004, but until 2006 activities to promote women's equality in local government were relatively unstructured. Things changed following the launch of the African Women in Local Government Network in 2006 at UN-Habitat's World Urban Forum 3 in Vancouver, under the auspices of FCM's African Local Governance Program (see sidebar on page 6). The Malian women participating were inspired by their Ghanaian counterparts, which catalyzed the creation of AMM's own women's caucus.

In December 2006, with financial support from FCM, 600 of the 720 women municipal officials from all regions of Mali came together to found AMM's women's caucus. The caucus established a structure (President, Secretary-General, and focal points in each of the country's eight regions and one for the capital, Bamako) and a secretariat to support its work. With a formal structure to guide its contribution to gender equality, AMM's women's caucus has been working with the central government on the municipal dimensions of gender equality issues, particularly the fight against poverty and the right of women to own property.

The existence of the caucus also allows women municipal representatives to participate more prominently in regional and global fora through which they learn from the experience of women in other countries and parts of the world. Caucus members used the most recent meeting of the African Women in Local Government Network,



Madame Konté Doumbia Fatoumata, speaking at UN-Habitat's World Urban Forum 3 in June 2006. She was then Secretary-General of AMM and Mayor – commune I. Following the launch of AWLGN, AMM created its own permanent women's caucus.

held in Ghana in September 2008, to communicate and strengthen their own work. This meeting also included some of FCM's LGA partners from Latin America and Asia, broadening the knowledge sharing opportunities.

In the first quarter of 2009 the caucus organized training workshops for hopeful women candidates running in the April 2009 municipal elections. The caucus adapted FCM's *Election Toolkit for Women* to the context in Mali to support the training, which covered essential elements of campaigning, including presentation, networking and fundraising skills. The caucus is also advocating for legislation that would guarantee 30% of municipal positions to women, and a draft law is currently being considered by Mali's legislature.

Caucus members say the proof of their effectiveness will come in the 2009 municipal elections, the first round since the caucus was formed. If more women contest and more are elected, they will rejoice in their success and redouble their efforts on behalf of their constituents.

BOLIVIA – The Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia (ACOBOL)

The Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia was established to develop, support and promote women leaders. Women were largely absent from Bolivia's municipal government structure. Research conducted by ACOBOL found that:

- Bolivians believe there is gender discrimination and that this is a serious problem;
- Men are twice as likely as women to participate in municipal meetings;
- There is a significant gender gap in terms of the presentation of requests to the municipality, which is an even more important variable than participation in municipal meetings.

To tackle this set of issues, ACOBOL has followed a number of different strategies over the years, and has been supported consistently by FCM since 2002. ACOBOL was instrumental in developing 'affirmative action' electoral legislation, The Law of Citizen Groups and Indigenous Peoples, which promotes the participation of citizen groups and of indigenous peoples as well as women. The Law requires 30 percent of each political party's candidates to be women. The proportion of elected women councillors has increased from about 18% in 1991 to 46% by 2004, due to the implementation of the electoral law. However, this law does not apply to mayoral candidates, and only about 4 per cent of Bolivia's mayors are women.

The number of women in office is not the only measure of success for ACOBOL. The association aims to improve the participation of women in municipal affairs and ensure that local government benefits both women and men. To ensure success, ACOBOL led training programs for all municipal councillors between 2000 and 2004, aimed at



Members of ACOBOL shown participating in FCM's annual conference in Quebec City in 2008, an exchange that enabled the two associations to share knowledge about their respective efforts to increase women's political participation in local government.

producing operational plans through participatory municipal management. Gender equality was an integral dimension of the training through:

- Supporting a political culture and citizenry that recognizes equality as a value;
- Promoting more participation and greater empowerment of women and the exercise of responsible citizenship;
- Developing the capacity of elected men and women to understand and address the strategic needs of women, and integrate this learning in their decision-making; and,
- Working towards municipal management practices that combat gender inequality and social exclusion in order to ensure greater sustainable development.

In order to decrease gender discrimination in the operations of municipal government, ACOBOL embarked on a gender responsive budgeting program that sought to identify resources allocated to benefit women, and to increase gender equality. Even with a clear process for ensuring that budgets contributed to women's and men's participation, and to gender equality, ACOBOL found that additional initiatives were necessary.

ACOBOL members successfully worked with the National Ministry of Finance in 2005 to ensure the financing of municipal budgets for gender equality activities. Subsequently, ACOBOL encouraged women to request funding for relevant services, held consultations in the preparation of such requests, and compiled and publicized a selection of the resulting proposals. It felt that encouraging municipalities to compare their performance and to learn from best practices would strengthen gender budgeting. ACOBOL decided to measure and publicize the

extent to which the budgets were benefiting women as well as men, using indicators like the per cent of resources directed to gender projects, activities and programs out of the total municipal budget, and the existence of a municipal resolution on investment and gender equity, among others.

ACOBOL members are committed to improving municipal governance for all citizens – women and men. This process has proved risky. Women councillors are threatened, intimidated and harassed to such an extent, especially in rural areas, that ACOBOL has been pressing for a federal law to limit violence and harassment of municipal officials.

“They locked me in a room, hit me and ordered me at gunpoint to sign a letter of resignation.”

–Testimony collected by ACOBOL

A draft law prepared by ACOBOL to address harassment and gender violence in politics makes Bolivia a leader among Latin American countries, where complaints are frequent but no penalties are provided for by law. The draft legislation is currently before the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies and Senate undergoing detailed review and has obtained broad approval. To get this far, ACOBOL documented the problem, held workshops and seminars to publicize and validate its findings and developed the draft legislation. ACOBOL members also worked closely with legislators and the Social Political Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, as well as with the media to promote the legislation's adoption.

What is a Gender Responsive Budget?

“Gender responsive budgeting (GRB) is about ensuring that government budgets and the policies and programs that underlie them address the needs and interests of individuals that belong to different social groups. Thus, GRB looks at biases that can arise because a person is male or female, but at the same time considers disadvantage suffered as a result of ethnicity, caste, class or poverty status, location and age. GRB is not about separate budgets for women or men nor about budgets divided equally. It is about determining where the needs of men and women are the same, and where they differ. Where the needs are different, allocations should be different.”

Debbie Budlender 2006 from UNIFEM
<http://www.gender-budgets.org/>

While ACOBOL members feel their work is not done, they are proud of their accomplishments, and of their contribution to improved democratic local government for women and men of Bolivia's municipalities.

CANADA – The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)

Like the other countries described in this case study, Canada also has a small percentage of women elected local government officials – 23 per cent according to the most recent results from municipal elections held nationwide. The ability of municipalities to include women in their consultation processes and consider women's interests and perspectives varies a great deal among municipalities, and even among departments in a given municipality.

FCM began to take a leadership role in improving gender equality in local government in 2002, when it created the FCM Task Force on Issues for Canadian Women in Municipal Government. That same year, the Task Force oversaw and participated in FCM's International Knowledge Sharing Workshop on Gender Equality and Local Governance, which concluded: "...the problems women face are the same in Canada as they are in developing countries."

One of the outcomes of the workshop was a Status of Women Canada-funded research project on women's participation in municipal decision-making to see how women's voice in municipal affairs could be strengthened, implemented in two phases. The first phase of the project surveyed Canadian municipalities on a number of dimensions related to municipal practice in including women. It also selected six research sites (Cowichan Valley BC, Saskatoon Sask., Thunder Bay Ont., Montreal Que., Halifax NS, and Iqualuit, Nun.) to speak with over 600 women on their municipal priorities, and how they might become more actively involved. Their research found that women are under-represented in most municipal processes, and Canada was losing ground in this area compared to other countries. The study, released in June of 2004, identified significant barriers to women's participation, especially for marginalized women, and found that few municipalities partnered with women's organizations – an 'untapped

resource' the study concluded. Their complete findings and recommendations were published, along with a resource kit, called *Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Strategies for More Inclusive Canadian Communities*. FCM has also produced and widely shared related materials, like *A City Tailored to Women* (developed jointly with the City of Montreal).

The second phase of the project had several goals, including: to highlight the need for action to get more women elected to local government; and also to lay the groundwork for local groups to take up the issue, foster local understanding, and bring about change in each community. There were two main components to this phase: a mobilization tour and a series of 10 workshops. The goal of the tour was to build support for increasing women's political participation by using the news media to raise awareness and by building local networks for change.

The workshops were held in rural and urban communities across Canada and asked participants – more than 400 women and men from a broad range of community groups – to consider the barriers to women's participation and to brainstorm and come up with ways to overcome these barriers. Their ideas were compiled in the 2006 FCM report, *Getting to 30% by 2026*, which is a community mobilization plan that provides tips and strategies for municipal councils that want to encourage women to become involved in local government.

The results of the Status of Women Canada-funded research yielded a greater understanding of the continued disparity between women's and men's participation in local government, and paved the way for the formal establishment of FCM's Standing Committee on Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Government in 2005. Since then, the committee has actively taken on a number of activities to increase women's leadership and voice in local government.



FCM representatives and project stakeholders at launch of the Status of Women Canada-funded project on increasing women's participation in municipal decision-making.

Status of Women Canada (SWC) is a federal government organization that promotes the full participation of women in the economic, social and democratic life of Canada. SWC works to advance equality for women and to remove the barriers to women's participation in society, putting particular emphasis on increasing women's economic security and eliminating violence against women. See <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca> for more information.

For example, the committee prepared a resource tool to encourage women to run for municipal office, the *Election Toolkit for Women: The Candidate's Guide to Municipal Elections*, which was released at FCM's 2008 annual conference in Quebec City. The goal is to increase the percentage of women in local office to 30 per cent of the total number on municipal councils by 2026. "It's not just about being on council", noted Councillor Pam McConnell (Toronto, Ont.). "It's also about being confident that we can make a contribution, and that we have the support to voice our concerns about budgeting. It's interesting that economics is always seen as a man's world. In most of our lives, it's the women who make dollars in their homes to go from paying the rent to feeding the children."

The toolkit covers factors to consider in making the decision to run for office, the legal context, and the main elements of a campaign. "The first steps to getting involved in politics can be daunting," according to Councillor Suzanne Anton (Vancouver, BC). Councillor Pam McConnell agrees. "We heard a common refrain from women," she said. "I really want to run for election, but I don't have the tools, money or connections that the boys have." The guide helps demystify the process of election campaigning. The kit is being well received by FCM's counterparts in Mali as well, where it is being adapted to the local context.

The committee also launched its Regional Champions Campaign in June 2008, continuing its efforts to reach the 30 per cent target of women elected to municipal councils in Canada by 2026. This campaign consists of building a national network of regional champions who will work within their respective communities and beyond to recruit, encourage, support and mentor women who are interested in entering local politics. FCM supports this initiative by providing resource materials; promoting the campaign through local and national media outlets; and coordinating the exchange of information between regional champions' groups on the FCM website.

CONCLUSION

By encouraging more women to run for local office, FCM and its local government association partners are building a foundation for improving women's equitable access to local services. Once elected, women need skills – in listening, speaking, negotiating, collaborating and realizing the potential of their position to benefit all of their constituents. Women (particularly younger women) often feel a lack of respect as compared to their male colleagues, and they often face barriers in being assigned to high profile positions, committees, and so on.

FCM's cross-cutting gender equality strategy enables women – from Kamloops to Kathmandu – to build their collective momentum for better municipal outcomes. The process of building women's capacity to exercise leadership takes time, as evidenced by the progress in the associations described above. The knowledge sharing and skills building supported by participation in national, regional and global conferences and meetings plays an important role in developing

women's leadership skills and confidence. By undertaking and supporting the work of formal, permanent women's caucuses that are central features of the governance of national local government associations, FCM is increasing the prospects for sustained and effective women's participation in local government that will lead to more inclusive policies, programs and services.

RESOURCES

FCM resources available through its website (www.fcm.ca) include:

A City Tailored to Women: The Role of Municipal Governments in Achieving Gender Equality, FCM and Femmes et ville, Montreal, 2004.

The Election Toolkit for Women: The Candidate's Guide to Municipal Elections, FCM, June 2008.

Gender Equality & Local Governance: Canadian Municipal Government Initiatives, FCM, September 2002.

Getting to 30% by 2026. FCM, June 2006.

I'm A Regional Champion: Now What? FCM, June 2008.

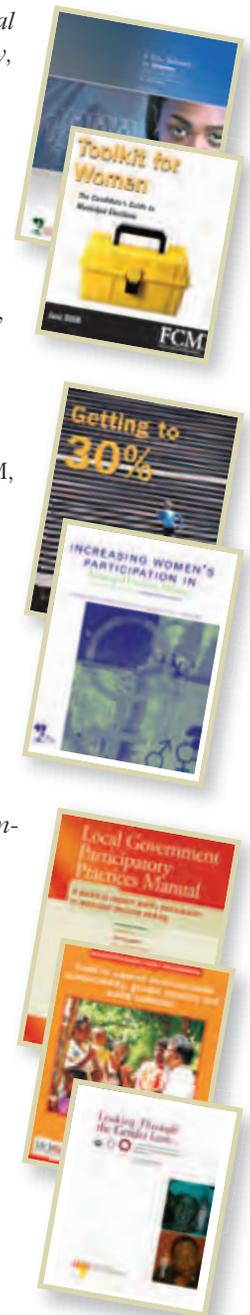
Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Strategies for More Inclusive Canadian Communities, Resource Kit, FCM, September 2004.

FCM-INTERNATIONAL Statement on Gender Equality and Local Governance, FCM, 2004.

Local Government Participatory Practices Manual, FCM, 2007.

Tools to Support Environmental Sustainability, Gender Equality and Social Cohesion, FCM, 2008.

Looking through the Gender Lens: Five Steps to Building Local Government Competencies and Capacities to Promote Gender Equality, FCM, 2006.



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