



TOPIC 3

Political accountability & space

- how to make it work for gender equality & women's rights?

Introduction

To articulate interests, to organise and mobilise around these interests, to represent or to seek representation, to have influence within institutions, and to hold the elected representatives accountable (through elections, audit or other mechanisms) are elements of participation in politics.

Women's participation, be it in national parliaments, political parties, in local government structures or in community based committees, is an end in itself and therefore important to achieve. Quota systems are increasingly being used where a certain number of seats are reserved for women. Moreover these quota systems can be accompanied by capacity building and empowerment efforts that are meant to ensure actual and effective participation by the elected women. However, are quotas the answer? What other measures are needed?

The presence of women in governance institutions at different levels of society is not a guarantee though for positive gender equality outcomes. The governance systems and their actors should acknowledge gender equality issues as valid issues of concern and they should be held accountable to their constituency for these issues. Institutions often replicate prevailing norms on gender that limit women's influence, impact and at times women's own attitudes within these institutions.

The conference will explore women's participation in politics and governance institutions and the practices around promoting this participation through quotas and other means at different levels of society. The conference will look into ways of supporting civil society to promote women's political participation and influence; to better secure gender equality and women's rights outcomes; and to strengthen gender accountability mechanisms.

Questions

- How can women increase their political space? How can one develop increased political space on gender equality issues?
- What are the experiences of the ever more increasing practice of applying quota systems around the world? What are the local reactions to for example quota systems and other changes in the area of governance?
- How to achieve women's representation: through fixed criteria (quota legislation or minimum requirements in development driven committees), through empowerment and promotion of social movements, through sensitisation and communication strategies, through self-help groups etc?
- How to ensure the quality of participation of women? How to facilitate that the most disadvantaged women actually participate?
- What is the role of economic empowerment activities in the political empowerment of women? How can these activities be strengthened to further women's political participation?
- How to create an environment conducive to women's "real" participation? How to involve men?
- How to create change and how to share the responsibility for this change to happen?
- How to transform women politicians into mainstream politicians, elected as persons and not as women? How to transform male politicians into gender equality advocates?
- How to work with and overcome the many myths related to women's participation (Women as cleaner politicians, women as the representatives of change etc).