



# ***European Commission United Nations Development Programme International IDEA***

*In collaboration with*

**International Organization for Migration  
Canadian International Development Agency  
Organization of American States**

## ***Joint Training on Effective Electoral Assistance***

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# Promoting the Participation of Women in Political Life in the Arab and West African Region: the Case of Mauritania

## Part 1: Situation in the Arab and West African region

- Facts and figures
- Legal framework

## Part 2: The case of Mauritania

- The 20% quota law
- Lessons learned
- Recommendations

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# PART 1

## Participation of Women in Africa

- **Africa: continent where women have the most difficulty accessing electoral posts and securing appointments to high level positions, with some exceptions:**
  - **Liberia** (January 2006): Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf becomes the first female president on the continent
  - **Rwanda** (September 2008): the Rwandan Parliament becomes the first one in the world with a majority of women (**56,25%**). A woman is speaker of Parliament.
- **Arab region: lowest rate of women participation in decision-making**



# Some Facts and Figures

(Source: IPU)

	West Africa	Arab Region
Women Heads of State	1	0
Women Heads of Governments	0	0
Women at Ministerial Level	18.83%	7.88%
Women Presidents of Parliaments	2	0
Women in Parliament (Lower or Single House)	11.91%	9.60%

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# Women in Arab and West African Parliaments (source: IPU)

Regions	Percentage of women in Lower or single house	Percentage of women in Lower or single house
	1998	2009
Nordic Countries	36.4%	42%
Americas	12.9%	21.5%
Europe (without Nordic Countries)	13.8%	19.3%
Asia	13.4%	18.4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	10.1%	18.2%
Pacifique	9.8%	13%
<b>West Africa</b>	6%	12.01%
<b>Arab States</b>	3.3%	9.6%

**Global average 2009**



# The Legal Framework

## 1. QUOTA LAWS:

*West Africa:* Mauritania, **Burkina Faso (30% quota law)**

*Arab region:* Iraq, **Egypt (quota on 64 seats in Parliament)**

## 2. GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENTS between political parties:

Morocco, Mali, Ghana

## 3. VOLUNTARY QUOTA:

*West Africa:* Niger, Côte d'Ivoire

*Arab region:* Algeria, Tunisia

- **PARLIAMENTS:** **women parliamentary caucuses** (Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso)  
**permanent gender committees** (Ghana)



# The Representation of Women and Electoral Systems

West African Countries			Arab countries		
Countries	Women in Parliament (2009)	Voting system	Countries	Women in Parliament (2009)	Voting system
Senegal	22%	Mixed	Iraq	25.5%	Mixed
Mauritanie	20%	Mixed	Tunisia	22.9%	Mixed
Guinea	19,3%	Mixed	UAE	22.5%	X
Cape Verde	18,1%	Proportional	Sudan	18.1%	X
Burkina Faso	15,3%	Proportional	Djibouti	13.9%	Majority
Sierra Leone	13,2%	Majority	oPt	12.9%	Mixed
Liberia	12,5%	Majority	Syria	12.4%	Majority
Niger	11,1%	Mixed	Morocco	10.5%	Proportional
Togo	11,1%	Proportional	Algeria	7.7%	Proportional
Benin	10,8%	Proportional	Kuwait	7.7%	Majority
Mali	10,2%	Majority	Libya	7.7%	X
Guinea Bissau	10%	Proportional	Jordan	6.4%	Majority
Gambia	9,43%	Majority	Somalia	5.9%	X
Côte d'Ivoire	8,44%	Majority	Lebanon	3.1%	Majority
Ghana	7,9%	Majority	Comoros	3%	Majority
Nigéria	7%	Majority	Bahrein	2.5%	Majority
			Egypt	1.8%	Majority
			Yemen	0.3%	Majority
			Oman	0%	Proportional
			Qatar	0%	X
			Saudi Arabia	0%	X



# Challenges and Opportunities for the representation of women in West Africa and the Arab region

## CHALLENGES:

- 1. No access to leadership in the political parties**  
Only 6 parties led by women in the two regions
- 2. Poor access and representation in the political sphere**  
Rigidity of the legal frameworks and gender stereotypes
- 3. Empowerment issues**  
Little opportunity for capacity building and higher turnover

## OPPORTUNITIES:

- 1. Reform of electoral frameworks** and recent trends to adopt pro-women electoral systems
- 2. Parliaments:** entry points for institutionalizing *gender sensitive reforms* in electoral frameworks



# **PART 2**

## **THE CASE OF MAURITANIA**

- The 20% quota law
- Lessons learned
- Recommendations



# The Representation of Women in Decision-Making 2005

## Elected:

- 3** women / **80** Deputies at the National Assembly
- 3** women / **56** Senators
- 3** women / **216** Mayors

## Appointed:

- 3** women / **24** Ministers
- 1** woman / **35** Heads of Political Parties

## Public Service:

- No woman represented at the high levels of the Public Service (Ambassador, judge...)
- Women represent **80 %** of the low-level administrative employees in the civil service



# The Political Context

- **2005: Democratic transition, new beginning**
- **Upcoming parliamentary, municipal and presidential elections (2006-2007)**
- **Exceptional engagement and mobilisation of CSO and women to promote their rights**
- **UN joint project to support the participation of women in the elections**



# Why the need for quota laws?

- **The fulfillment of International conventions and frameworks:**
  - art. 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration of HR;
  - the MDG 3;
  - Beijing agenda (minimal participation of 30%)
- **Electoral process:**

quota laws facilitate a rapid change in social and cultural barriers
- **Post electoral stage:**

quota laws can be used as a powerful precedent to support long term *gender sensitive legislative reforms*



# The 20% Quota Law

20% quota on electoral lists, not on seats

## Municipal:

women candidates must be placed in specific positions on the electoral list (proportional to the district size)

## Legislative :

### *National Assembly-*

Allocation of 1 position to a woman in each electoral district that has 2 seats.

In districts with 3 seats, at least one candidate out of the top 2 on the list should be a woman.

### *Senate-*

1 woman head of the list only in Nouakchott,  
no quotas in the rest of the country

- **Mixed Voting System** (Proportional Representation in districts with 3 seats or more, and Simple Majority in 1 and 2-seat districts)



# Electoral Results 2007

## Municipal:

> **30%** of women counsellors (1120)  
but only **4/216** mayors

## Legislative:

Women in Parliament:  
**17.22%** (26/151)

**National Assembly:**  
**18%** women (17/95)

**Senate:**  
**16%** women (9/56)

In 2009, following some readjustments  
**18,54%** (28/151) women MPs



# Strengths and weaknesses of the 20% quota mechanism

## Strengths :

- Electoral lists are only valid if they include 20% of women candidates
- Financial incentive for parties to exceed the 20% quota

## Weaknesses :

- *Municipal:*  
no quota for Mayors
- *Legislative:*  
mechanism neither allows the 20% representation nor that the best-qualified candidates have access to the seats



# Problems Encountered

## Structural:

- Lack of **legal framework** and **supporting structures** for women participation
- Weakness of **political parties** and of women's political leadership

## Social and economic:

- Widespread **illiteracy** of women candidates
- Lack of **financial means** for women candidates

## Cultural:

- **Low engagement** of women in politics
- **Mentalities:** quota law perceived as unconstitutional and discriminatory
- **Tribal system** works against women participation

## Financial:

Lack of funds to strengthen the capacities of newly elected women



# Lessons Learned

- **Quality of women candidates:** reserving 20% quota on the national list would have ensured better quality
- Need for **continued support** in terms of capacity-building to the newly elected women
- Need to create **permanent structures** to build the capacity of women candidates
- **Timing** too short for sustainable and thorough changes
- Advocate for **quota systems** in all public service positions



# Recommendations

- Enshrine the principle of **equal representation** in the Constitution and/or legislation
- Use **Parliaments as entry points** to promote gender-friendly electoral legislation
- **Long term perspective:** start advocacy process at the beginning of a legislature
- Improve the **participation of women** and their leadership within political parties



# Aim for Equal Representation!

## Thank you