



Report

Women and power

Overcoming barriers to
leadership and influence

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Cover photo: SLFP Women's Wing Meet the President. Credit: Mahinda Rajapaksa

About the research

This case study is an output from the Women's Voice and Leadership in Decision-Making project. This two-year (2014-2016) evidence and learning project, funded by the UK Department for International Development, asks: (i) What enables women's substantive voice and influence in decision-making processes? (ii) Does women's presence and influence in decision-making improve outcomes for other women and advance gender equality? (iii) How can international actors better support women's leadership and decision-making? In answering these questions, the research has examined the relationship between women's political, social and economic power and resources, both individual and collective.

Project activities and outputs include:

- A global review of the evidence on women's voice and leadership, with thematic chapters on women's political participation, social activism and economic empowerment,
- A rapid review on women and girls' leadership programmes,
- A rapid review on women and girls' use of digital information and communication technologies,
- Five empirical case studies on women's leadership and decision-making power, in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Gaza, Kenya and Malawi,
- A synthesis report and policy briefings.

More information can be found at:
www.odi.org/women-and-power

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Acronyms

FEDO	Feminist Dalit Organisation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-government organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UN	SCR United Nations Security Council Resolution

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Summary

This policy paper synthesises findings from two years of research on women’s voice and leadership in decision-making in developing countries. Research activities included evidence reviews and five empirical case studies on Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Gaza, Kenya and Malawi.⁷ We set out to understand the factors that help and hinder women’s access to and substantive influence in decision-making processes in politics and society, and whether women’s leadership advances gender equality and the wellbeing of women more broadly.

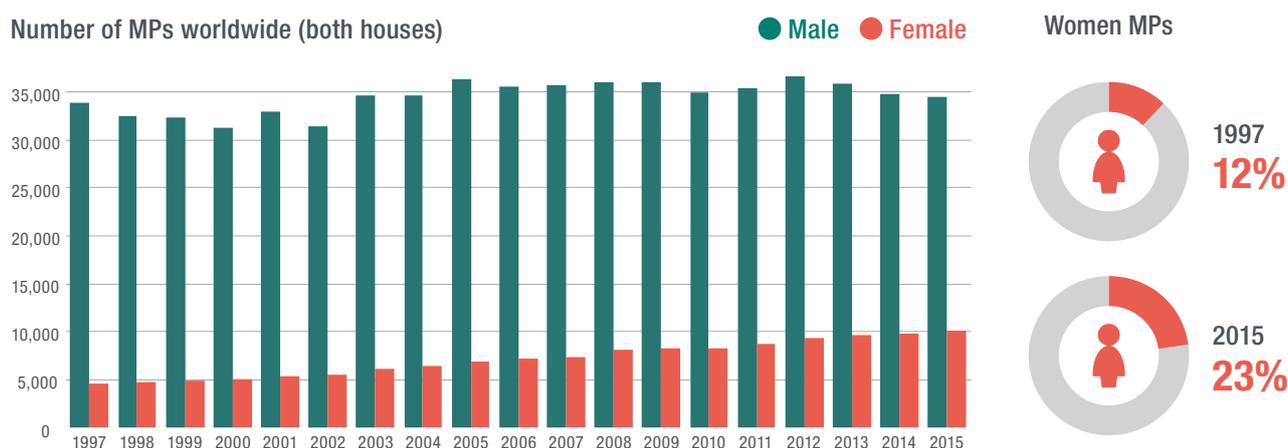
Women’s power to decide: An uneven story

Around the world, women now have more decision-making power and influence, over more aspects of social, political and economic life, than ever before (Figure 1). The first election of women to local government in Saudi Arabia in December 2015 shows that progress is being made even in the most conservative societies. Nevertheless, progress is uneven both across and within regions and countries, and resistance and backlash are common.

Having more women in power is not necessarily associated with economic growth and development. For example, there are more women in national legislatures in some low-income than high-income countries – Rwanda is the international leader with 63.8% (Figure 2 overleaf), while it is projected that the British parliament will not reach gender parity before 2055.

Increasing the number of women in political and public positions is important, but this does not mean they have real authority or autonomy. In part this is about how political systems work and who has power within them: there may be more women MPs in Rwanda than in most European countries, but parliament also has much less power over the executive in Rwanda. The gap between women’s formal and actual power is also about prejudice and sexism, often unconscious. Even in countries with liberal multi-party politics and progressive constitutions, common beliefs and expectations about what women and men can and should do block women’s political power and advancement.

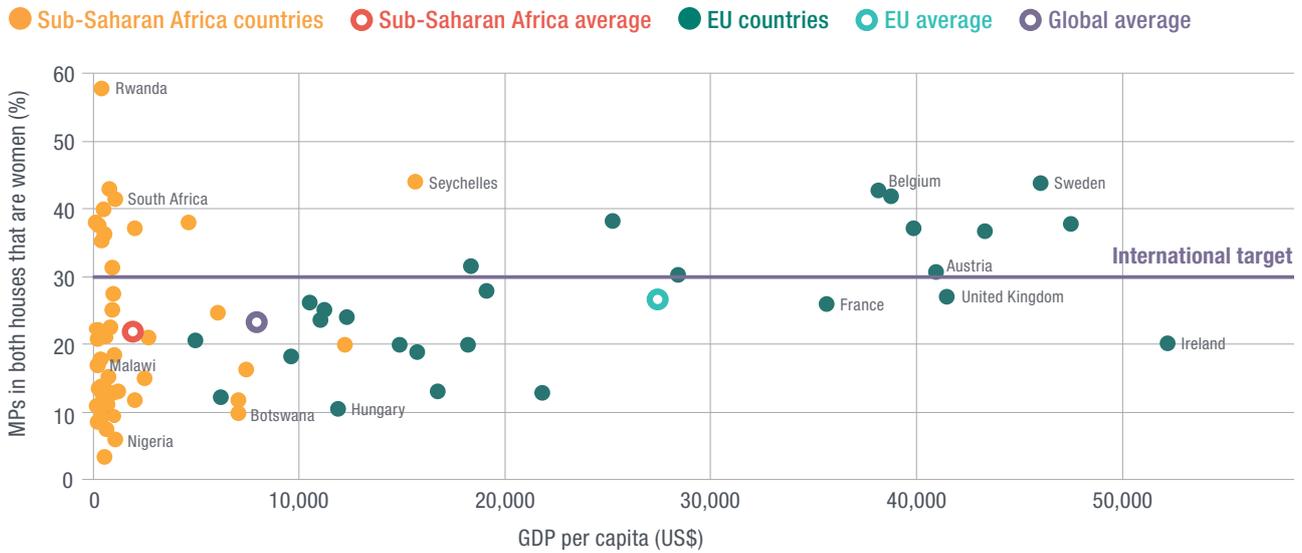
Figure 1: The number of women parliamentarians is rising but men still dominate



1 Project reports include: an evidence reviews of what enables women’s voice and leadership across politics, society and the economy in developing countries (Domingo et al., 2015a); a rapid review of women’s leadership programmes (O’Neil and Plank, 2015) and women and girls’ use of digital information and communication technologies (O’Neil and Cummings, 2015), a review of indicators of women’s leadership and decision-making (Wales, 2016), and five empirical studies of women’s leadership and decision-making power in Afghanistan (Larson, 2016), Bangladesh (Valters and Jahan, 2016), Gaza (Jones and Abu-Hamad, 2016), Kenya (Domingo, McCullough, Simbiri and Wanjala, 2016) and Malawi (O’Neil, Kanyongolo and Wales, 2016).

Figure 2: Economic development does not automatically lead to more women in power

Percentage of women MPs by GDP per capita



Note: data for the EU excludes Luxembourg, as it is a major outlier in terms of GDP per capita.

Discrimination is also evident in the adverse patterns of gender representation between sectors and levels of seniority. Even in countries in which gender parity is improving in the legislature, there are often still few women ministers (Figure 3). And, when they are present in cabinets, women tend to be given social sector portfolios (e.g. health, education, social welfare, gender and culture) while men dominate the most powerful sectors and positions, such as finance and defence (Krook and O’Brien, 2012).

Given the gap between women’s power on paper and in practice, there is a need to be realistic about the extent of changes that influential women can achieve on their own. A lot is often expected of women in public life. Women in politics are often subject to undue scrutiny and need to conform to widespread views of how women should behave to be accepted by voters and peers. These women are also from different classes, faiths, ethnicity, regions and ideological persuasions. They may have more in common with men ‘like them’ than with women from a different class or social group, and do not necessarily further other women’s interests.

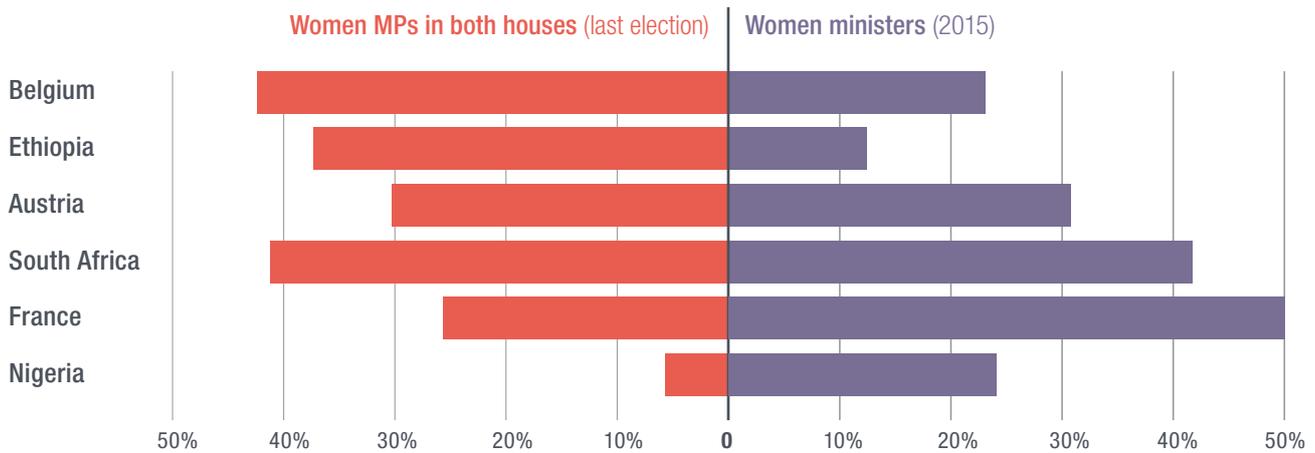
When and how do women have influence? Key findings

The research shows that women face a double hurdle to power, with formidable obstacles not only to obtaining access to decision-making positions and processes but also to having influence within them. Influential women overcome both hurdles.

When do women gain access and representation?

- **Legal rights and formal rules matter, but appropriate design is essential.** The spread of civil and political rights, the growth of women’s associations, and gender quotas have all increased women’s presence and representation in politics and civic life. Poorly designed laws, of which quotas are often a good example, are unlikely to empower women in practice. Well-designed laws are tailored to context and anticipate how new rules will work alongside existing laws (e.g. electoral rules), social norms and informal rules.
- **Unsurprisingly, elite women are most able to take advantage of new political opportunities.** Obtaining access to public positions and political decision-making often requires money and connections and, in some cases, higher education and technical expertise. In Bangladesh, women do not need legal qualifications to be a village court judge but they do need financial resources, effectively restricting the position to village elites, while both financial resources and a law degree are required to become a judge in the higher courts.
- **Family attitudes and environment** are key to women’s leadership, from childhood through to adolescence and adulthood. In many settings, women who are politically active and who take on responsibilities outside the home transgress ideas about what women should do. But so often do their parents and partner – whether this is a father who supports his daughter’s education or encourages her to speak up, or a husband who shares domestic responsibilities.

Figure 3: There is no clear relationship between women's representation in the legislature and executive



How do women gain substantive power?

- A woman's domestic decision-making power shapes her public power – can she choose to go out alone, attend public meetings or challenge community norms? Education and employment outside the home can increase women's power and status within the family and community.
- **Women need more than basic education and an income to influence high-level decision-making.** Their peers (and for elected officials, voters) need to view them as credible, which often means having higher education and technical knowledge, economic independence and, in some countries, wealth or access to patronage networks. For instance, women MPs in Malawi say that lack of resources is the biggest barrier to retaining their parliamentary seats. In Kenya women's technical expertise and professional experience in law and medicine have been crucial in crafting law and policy to advance women's rights and gender equality.
- Women need to work in politically and socially strategic ways to advance individual or group objectives. They have built on accepted institutions and ideas, framed issues to neutralise opposition, made deals and accepted second-best outcomes, and made alliances with others. For example, most women MPs in Afghanistan prefer to use 'quiet' voices to influence male colleagues because attracting public attention is risky and can be counterproductive.
- To do this, women often rely on political skills acquired through experiences outside of formal politics, such as growing up in a politically active family, or involvement in student politics, resistance movements, social mobilisation, faith-based organisations, voluntary activities or professional life. For example, hardly any of the current cohort of women MPs in Malawi were active in a political party before they stood for parliament, but nearly all were involved in a faith-based organisation.

- **The political and social environment shapes the opportunities women have to advance which issues.** Political transition, post-conflict peace processes and constitutional reform are critical moments when women can try to significantly renegotiate their access to rights and resources – as shown by women's mobilisation during Kenya's most recent constitutional reforms. More often, however, new openings arise from the mundane ebb and flow of political life, such as a change in government or the party system, a corruption scandal, legislative reform, an international agreement or new evidence.
- **Organisations, alliances and collective action matter** – precisely because they are marginalised politically, women's collective strength is critical to amplify their power. Public power and decision-making is, however, concentrated in mainstream organisations, such as political parties, government departments, judiciaries, universities, unions, armies and the UN Security Council. Women's political influence therefore also depends on their ability to make strategic alliances with the men who are often the leaders and gatekeepers and/or among themselves in order to achieve progress within these organisations.

Do influential women advance gender equality?

- **Women's leadership and authority has symbolic power.** It challenges widespread beliefs that men are leaders and women's place is in the home: 'When I first started, it was tough to talk. People are always asking why are women talking so much [...] now they support me. I had to prove my honesty and capability' (community mediator, Bangladesh).
- **Women can and do advance other women's interests** – in most countries, women politicians, bureaucrats and feminist activists have been able to secure legal and policy reforms that advance the rights and wellbeing of women and girls.

- Obviously, women and the political environments in which they operate are diverse – **not all women leaders advance other women’s interests**. If the concern is gender equality and improving wellbeing of ordinary women, what matters is *which* women hold power in their communities and the state and whether they are able to take advantage of political opportunities.

Policy recommendations: what should be done differently?

Policy-makers and practitioners need to capitalise on the high-level momentum regarding women’s rights and leadership, and ensure that good intentions do not get stuck at the level of commitments and conferences. Women’s rights and more equitable gender relations can be achieved only through the actions of the women and men concerned.

International development organisations can, however, play an important role in helping reformers in developing countries to ensure ‘women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life’ (SDG Target 5.5). Based on our evidence review and empirical case studies, we provide four sets of recommendations for what international agencies in particular could do differently to cultivate women’s substantive power and influence.

Invest in existing organisations, not those you wish existed

Donors need to support and work with organic, locally anchored organisations able to work with their members and the wider community or society to change exclusionary gender relations and advance women’s rights and wellbeing. The main objective should be to help women to organise around common interests and problems, and facilitating connections among different organisations (peer–peer, grassroots–elite), not to determine their agenda. This means:

- **Support existing feminist organisations** of different kinds and build relation between them (e.g. rights organisations, professional associations and grassroots groups).
- **Nurture diverse civic associations** by working through intermediaries to invest in long-term partnerships with women’s organisations of all types. Where civil society is more mature, work through national organisations and networks; where it is weak, work through specialist international women’s organisations.

Focus on groups, not individual women

Women need political skills to be influential, but project-based support that tries to quickly plug skills gaps of individual women is unlikely to be the most effective use of resources. Instead,

- **Invest in collective not individual leadership** by supporting organisations where adolescent girls and women can hone their political and leadership skills (e.g. student groups, trade unions, professional associations, faith-based organisations, political parties).
- **Work with families and communities, not only women**, to change the beliefs and expectations about gender roles and capabilities that are the main barrier to women’s empowerment and to gender equality.

Target all sectors, not just gender

Women’s political power is strongly associated with their economic power. Discrete gender programmes cannot increase women’s substantive power; sector programmes are also needed to build the capabilities and resources women need. This means:

- **Invest in women’s economic power** through reforms that increase their formal market participation, reform of laws that prevent women from inheriting/owning assets, and through livelihood/economic programmes that explicitly seek to shift gender norms that prevent women from controlling/owning assets rather than simply to raise household income.
- **Invest in women’s higher education** by working with universities and families to address barriers to women’s access, both economic (e.g. affordability) and social (e.g. early marriage, childcare responsibilities).
- **Invest in national knowledge production** by funding local think tanks and academic departments who have an interest in women’s rights and wellbeing.
- **Invest in women’s role in post-conflict and regime transition processes** through logistic support to women’s organisations and networks, and by using UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 and related resolutions to advocate for women’s inclusion in high-level peace negotiations and political reform processes.

Put your own house in order

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) apply to all countries, rich and poor. To be credible in their advocacy and assistance, development agencies must put their own houses in order. This means:

- **Lead from the front** by taking action to promote women’s leadership within their own organisations.
- **Get out of the gender ghetto**, which tries to overcome barriers to gender inequality and women’s power through discrete programmes and teams.
- To do this, ensure rules and systems **incentivise collaboration, learning and problem-driven approaches** within organisations and across programmes.

1. Introduction

This policy paper is about women’s decision-making power – and, in particular, their ability to influence decisions about the distribution of public authority, rights and resources. Policy and advocacy often focus on women’s legal rights and representation on the assumption that actual power follows, and that influential women represent the interests of other women. We delink women’s access, influence and agendas. We look at factors that help or hinder women’s *access* to decision-making and their representation, but also those that shape women’s substantive *influence* in public life. We also look at whether women leaders promote other women’s interests. We conclude with four sets of recommendations for what the international community could do differently to support women’s political empowerment and gender equality.

The paper synthesises key findings from a two-year research project on Women’s Voice and Leadership in Decision-Making. We draw on an evidence review of what enables women’s voice and leadership across politics, society and the economy in developing countries (Domingo et al., 2015), and on five empirical studies of women’s leadership and decision-making power.² These cases are: mobilisation around the Elimination of Violence Against Women law in Afghanistan (Larson, 2016), community mediators and judges in rural Bangladesh (Valters and

Jahan, 2016), civic and political leaders in Gaza (Jones and Abu-Hamad, 2016), mobilisation around constitutional reform in Kenya (Domingo and McCullough, 2016), and parliamentarians in Malawi (O’Neil, Kanyongolo and Wales, 2016).³ The potential sites of women’s influence and decision-making are wide ranging, including different countries, levels of society and governance, and areas of life. The paper therefore focuses on the recurrent findings about what is important for women’s power and leadership, as a guide to policy-makers. More detailed findings and recommendations are available in the project reports listed in the References.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a framework for understanding women’s decision-making power and changes to it. Section 3 summarises what is known to help and hinder women’s decision-making power. This includes institutions and institutional change, changes in women’s capabilities, and in beliefs and expectations about men and women’s roles, and political opportunities and women’s ability to act strategically with allies. Section 4 looks at whether and in what ways influential women promote gender equality. Section 5 concludes with recommendations for the international community on how to better support women’s leadership, decision-making power and gender equality.

2 The Malawi research used a new mixed methods survey instrument, and the other four case studies used in-depth interviews with women leaders and other key informants. Full details of research design are included in these reports.

3 The original source for any example or quotation related to these five countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Gaza, Kenya and Malawi – come from the individual case study reports (available at odi.org/women-and-power). Where we draw on other examples, or include new or specific data, the citation is also provided. Full sources for the primary material that informs overall findings are presented in the main evidence review (Domingo et al., 2015, available at: <http://www.odi.org/publications/9514-womens-voice-leadership-assessment-review-evidence>).

2. The political economy of women's decision-making

People constantly make decisions, both as individuals and as groups. Decisions are made in the private sphere, within the family or home. They are also made in the public sphere – in public institutions and processes about the distribution of public authority, rights and resources. Depending on the context and their capabilities, people have opportunities to influence these public decisions, directly or indirectly, through various processes and forums at different levels of society and state. This paper focuses on women's leadership and decision-making power in the public sphere, while recognising that gender and other power relations within the home and family shape the choices and power of girls and women outside it.

Decision-making power is the ability to influence these decisions. This power includes both *access* to decision-making and also the capabilities and actions required to *participate in* and, crucially, to *influence* decisions. Leadership is a related but separate concept, involving individual and collective capabilities to mobilise 'people and resources (economic, political and other) in pursuit of particular ends' (Lynne de Ver, 2009). Decision-making power and leadership may or may not coincide with formal positions of authority, but the ability to influence the ideas and behaviour of others is central to both.

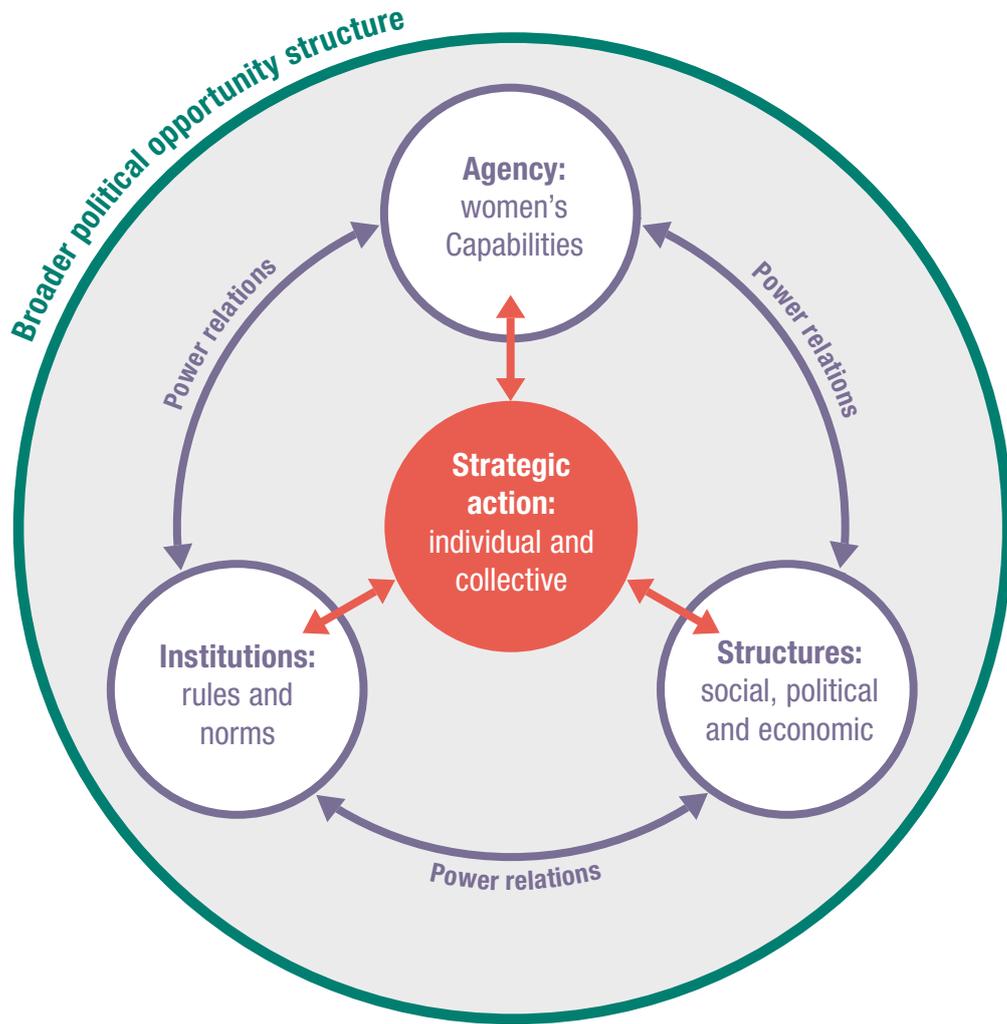
Figure 4 presents a framework to understand the political economy of women's decision-making power. This sets out the main factors that shape women's power, and how these change over time. The framework has three components. First, social **structures**, formal and informal

rules and norms, and people's **capabilities**, which interact to shape **power relations** between (different groups) of men and women. Second, the **broader political opportunity structure**, whereby shifts in the distribution of power and in ideas can create or close down the possibility for political and social action and change. Third, **women's actions** within concrete decision-making processes and institutional arenas to advance their objectives, feminist and otherwise.⁴

The three components depicted in Figure 4 are dynamic and connected to each other. Change in any one may increase or diminish women's decisions-making power. Changes may mean that women have more power to decide in one area of their life, but less in another. For example, women who transgress gender norms by taking on leadership roles may experience greater domestic violence. Women may gain more rights or access to resources but without women's active participation – for example, in Tunisia, male elites used secularisation of the state, including legal reform related to women's rights, to marginalise religious and sub-national elites after independence, and successive governments have sustained the commitment to policies to develop a skilled labour force, including by expanding women's access to education and employment (Chambers, 2014). But women's strategic action in and through different decision-making forums, as individuals and with others, is itself a critical factor in shifting rules and norms and increasing women's power and capabilities.

⁴ The framework draws explicitly on feminist institutionalist scholarship. This examines how the interaction of formal rules and informal norms (and in particular gender norms) shape gender relations and women's power in specific institutional domains, and the ability of women to effect positive change through them (see, for example, Krook and Makay, 2015).

Figure 4: The political economy of women's decision-making



Note: Thanks to Fiona Mackay at the University of Edinburgh for her suggestions for how to refine the framework.

3. When and how do women have influence in public life?

This section summarises what is known about factors that help or hinder women's *access to, presence or voice in* and *influence over* public decision-making.⁵ We look at key political processes and institutions to enable women's decision-making power in developing countries over the past 30 years (3.1). We then discuss deeper changes in social relations and women's capabilities that make women's access to power more meaningful (3.2) and the political opportunities and strategic actions that women have used in order to substantively influence public decision-making and effect change (3.3).

Women take part in decision-making in contingent ways in specific public arenas within particular political and economic conditions. Sets of factors and their interactions rather than single factors shape the outcomes. The role of contingency and conjuncture in women's empowerment helps to explain variations between and within countries in the power and influence of different groups of women. While there can be no single recipe for achieving women's political empowerment, it is possible to identify key ingredients for increasing women's power to decide. How these ingredients combine is important for the flavour and depth of women's influence.

3.1 Key political processes for rule change

The formal 'rules of the game' matter to women's decision-making power. Laws and regulations shape incentives and opportunities for everyone, particularly in countries where the state makes its presence felt at every level. The question is whether women have the opportunity to renegotiate these rules in their favour through political processes and institutional change or whether, in reality, the rules of the game undermine their influence.

In this section, we look at four processes and forums where national or community leaders make decisions about the distribution of power and resources, including between women and men.

Two relate to unique 'moments' that present one-off opportunities for renegotiation:

- **post-conflict peace processes** offer a rare opportunity to re-shape gender roles and relations,
- **constitutional reforms** signal the re-shaping of the formal rules that govern political, social and economic life and state-society relations – an opportunity for women to lobby for substantial new rights.

Two relate to permanent governance institutions that determine who gets what, when and how:

- **women's political representation** to ensure that women are included in legislative decisions and policy-making, including on decisions about how services are provided,
- **women's access to justice**, which, in turn, helps to determine whether laws are implemented, and how women and girls can exercise oversight, seek redress or protect their rights.

There are positive linkages between all of these different areas. Close linkages also mean, however, that failings in one area can weaken progress in others and opportunities to increase women's political power vary as a result. While several global trends – international rights conventions, political liberalisation and the rise of feminism – have helped to increase women's access to political life in most countries, their substantive influence in our four key areas of change remains elusive. Rights reform on paper is rarely backed by robust implementation, and institutional reform is often shallow unless accompanied by the deeper changes in elite bargains as well as in the wider attitudes, norms and capabilities that are essential if women are to operate on equal terms with men.

⁵ In analysing women's political effectiveness, Goetz (2003: 39) 'distinguishes between three types of engagement and control: access, presence and influence'.

Post-conflict peace processes

Conflict is known to increase gender-based violence and the other hardships women already face (UN, 2015), but it can also lead to changes in gender roles and relations. Conflict can propel women into new public, economic and military roles, increasing their autonomy and challenging stereotypes about their capabilities (Tripp, 2015). Whether this shift continues once peace is achieved is, however, uncertain. Conflict can also reinforce male dominance and reduce women's political participation and decision-making. After a conflict, elites may abandon commitments to gender equality and legal gains can be reversed, particularly when conservative forces form a new government (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, once won, legal protection and political representation can give women a platform to resist rights reversal. For example, in Tunisia, following the election of an Islamic party in 2011, the women's movement were able to successfully resist attempts to roll back women's rights in the 2014 constitution, and were able to gain 31% of parliamentary seats in the 2014 elections (Chambers, 2014). In Gaza women activists have successfully resisted attempts by Hamas to introduce conservative dress codes (e.g. for female lawyers) and to ban women from smoking in public.

The type of conflict and peace process, and the international environment, also determine whether changes in gender relations and attitudes continue once a settlement is reached, and whether new rights and decision-making power for women become entrenched or are discarded. In several African countries, for example, women played a key role in the liberation struggles against the colonial powers, but subsequent independence did little to advance their own freedoms (Geisler, 2004). Post-conflict transitions in sub-Saharan Africa since the mid-1980s (and particularly since the 2000s) have, however, had a major and independent influence on women's formal rights and levels of political representation (Hughes and Tripp, 2015).⁶ The differences between these two periods is in part explained by the end of the Cold War, international commitments to both democracy and women's rights⁷, transnational movements, and new women's organisations and activism across the global South (Tripp, 2015). However, in Africa, the type of conflict has also shaped women's opportunities to press for new rights, including whether conflict is protracted or short-lived, nationwide or localised, and whether it ends in a negotiated settlement (*ibid.*).

Whatever their experience of conflict – as active participants, leaders, victims or refugees – women are still mostly denied a place in formal peace negotiations: women comprised only 9% of negotiators and 2% chief mediators between 1992 and 2011 (UN Women, 2015). While

women have acted as observers to formal negotiations, taken part in consultations and mass action, and served on commissions to monitor and implement agreements, the parties to a conflict rarely see their inclusion at the negotiating table as a priority. Women are more likely to be included when there is a strong coalition of women's organisations to represent a cross-section of women's interests and mediators are interested in their participation (O'Reilly et al., 2015). Despite its limitations, national and transnational advocacy movements have used UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) to push for the greater visibility of women in peace processes (UN, 2015).

While women may not be part of official peace processes, they are often peace-builders in their communities. In Colombia, for instance, women's grassroots activism gave voice and agency to women who had survived violence during conflict and also contributed to national feminist action, leading to the inclusion of gender issues in legislation on transitional justice. Women activists have also had a presence in the peace talks that took place in Havana (Domingo et al., 2015). However, in countries as varied as Afghanistan, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sierra Leone, women who have come together to solve post-conflict problems in their communities have not been able to translate their local action into influence in national processes (Cardona et al., 2012).

Constitutional reform

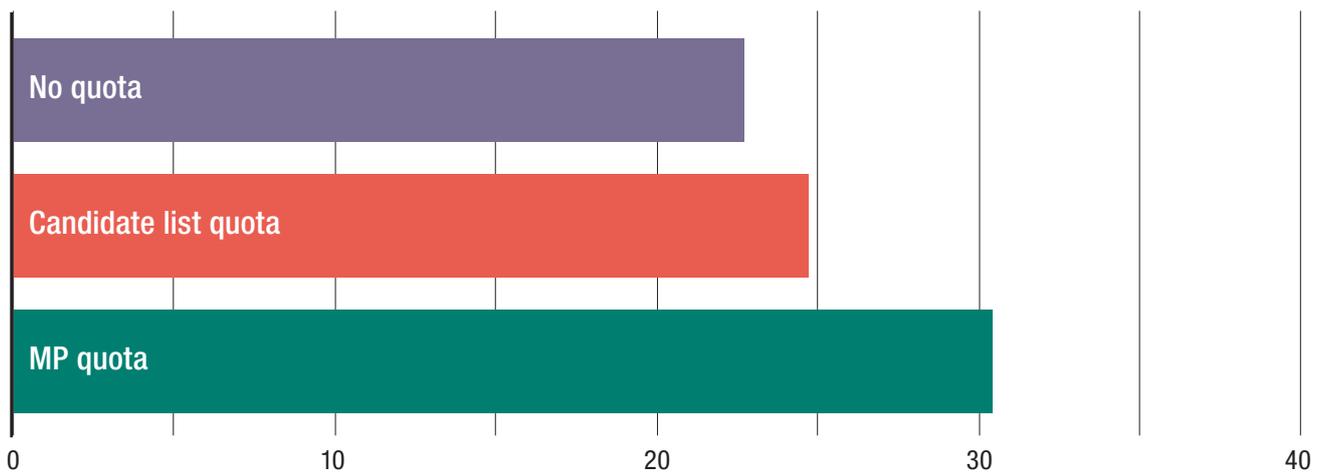
Conflict and regime change often trigger constitutional reform. These are critical moments for new political projects, involving momentous legal changes that renegotiate the formal rules of political, social and economic life and state–society relations. They provide unique opportunities for the expansion of rights, including new norms on women's rights and access to power (Waylen, 2008). Reflecting the global trend of greater commitments to rights, most current constitutions establish rights to gender equality and non-discrimination, including universal suffrage and equal access to public office.

Constitutional reform also gives women the chance to have a direct influence on political negotiations and to lobby for specific provisions that increase and protect their political presence. The constitutional ambitions of women activists include protection of any existing affirmative action, equal access to property, elimination of discrimination in marriage and inheritance, and reproductive health rights. In Kenya, women's movements helped to shape the women's rights content of the constitution and strengthened accountability, judicial review and implementation mechanisms, and women's

6 Based on statistical analysis of women's political representation and presence of major conflict across 48 African countries between 1985 and 2010, and controlling for quotas, proportional representation and democratisation (Hughes and Tripp, 2015).

7 In particular, Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the UN Beijing Platform for Action (1985) and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and related Resolutions.

Figure 5: Women’s political representation is higher in countries with gender quotas



Average % MPs who are women in both houses at the last election worldwide

movements in Tunisia secured major gains for women in the new 2014 constitution (Chambers, 2014).

The varied nature of political regimes and cultures shape women’s opportunities to obtain access to and influence within political decision-making during and after constitutional reform. Liberal democracies, for example take different forms – including parliamentary and presidential systems, and differences in checks and balances, electoral systems, the extent of decentralisation, legal pluralism, and religious or secular foundations. In addition, constitutions are often aspirational in their scope. Whether they shape political and social conduct in practice depends on whether they reflect both elite agreement and the distribution of power between influential groups, as well as commanding wider acceptance and consensus in society at large. In reality, many countries have hybrid regimes, whereby informal norms and practices such as personalism, patronage and patriarchy shape people’s conduct and formal rules are inconsistently applied and upheld (DFID, 2010).

Constitutional reform is also susceptible to passive resistance or even outright sabotage and retrenchment, particularly when it challenges elite interests, as tends to be the case with women’s rights and gender equality. Political liberalisation does, however, provide an opening for women to lobby against discriminatory laws and for laws that protect them and address their historical exclusion. In many countries, activists have successfully lobbied for statutory law to be brought in line with constitutional provisions, such as the introduction of gender equality laws and reproductive health rights, reform of women’s rights regarding marriage, inheritance and property, and the criminalisation of violence against women. By 2011, 125 countries had outlawed domestic violence, 117 sexual harassment and 115 had legislated on women’s equal property rights (UN Women, 2012).

Nevertheless, many developing countries have plural legal systems that include customary and religious legal and

dispute-resolution mechanisms. These govern personal status and the private sphere, by law or *de facto*, and often in ways that discriminate against women and entrench patriarchal gender norms. In Afghanistan, for example, the Shiite Personal Status Law, enforced through Shia courts, gives male family members legal authority over women. Progressive constitutions are, therefore, a necessary basis for women’s empowerment, but will not automatically give women the autonomy, education, economic independence and social capital they need in order to exercise political influence.

Political representation

Peace agreements and constitutional reform processes are rare opportunities to renegotiate more power and rights in favour of women. But in order to influence the ways in which rights and resources are distributed and accessed, women need to be part of legislative, policy and decisions on implementation and service-delivery processes. One key goal for activists has, therefore, been to secure representation for women and improve the gender balance in government and permanent state institutions.

Globally, the overall trend in women’s participation in political and civic life is positive (UNIFEM, 2009, UN Women, 2012). Nevertheless, men continue to dominate mainstream political organisations of all kinds, both inside and outside the state. Worldwide, the proportion of women national legislators almost doubled between from 12% in 1997 to 23% in 2015, but men still account for 77.4% of legislators and, in 30 countries, for 90% to 100% (IPU data). Women represent only 20% of local councillors globally (UCLG, 2015). Similarly, political parties are gateways to parliaments but most party leaders are men. It is critical, therefore, that male elites promote women’s representation and leadership, but their support can be hard to win given that they benefit from the status quo and may believe that women are less able to win elections than men (O’Neil et al., 2016).

Quotas can encourage party leaders to support and select female candidates and women's representation is higher in countries that use them. Women have the greatest representation in countries with mandatory reserved seats for women MPs and local councillors (Figure 5).⁸ Quotas take different forms and whether they empower women in practice depends on their design and their interaction with the electoral (first-past-the-post, proportional representation, etc.) system and party systems, and with informal norms (e.g. clientelism, sexism) (Larsrud and Taphorn, 2007; Krook, 2014).

Where gender quotas are badly designed, men can subvert them by putting women candidates at the bottom of the party list, or use them to extend their own control by selecting loyal or 'proxy' women (Krook, 2014). For example, in Egypt, reserved seats in the 2009 Quota Law was replaced in the 2011 constitution by the requirement that political parties include women on their list, but without any specification on positioning or sanctions for non-compliance. This led to a sharp decline in women's representation from 65 MPs (13%) in 2010 to just nine (2.2%) in 2011 (Tadros, 2014b). In Kenya, male candidates and party leaders have subverted the principle of affirmative action set out in the 2010 constitution by dissuading women from standing for election through quiet non-compliance with the quota to test enforcement, by ridiculing women candidates, and through violence and intimidation. Women nominated to the County Assembly through the quota are called 'Bonga Points' (i.e. top-up points) and not accorded the same respect in meetings as other members.

In countries that do not have quotas, electoral and party rules, and the way they interact with clientelism and gender norms, influence support for women candidates. In Malawi, for example, party leaders were reluctant to select women candidates in Malawi's closely fought 2014 election, particularly for seats their party had a good chance of winning (Box 1). Once selected, women candidates often faced prejudice and gender-based abuse

– some of it violent – during campaigning. They were also required to conform to expectations about 'good women' in their dress and behaviour in order to be accepted by voters but even so were often labelled as 'prostitutes'.

Women face a double hurdle in shaping the outcomes of parliamentary (and other types of political) bargaining. Once they overcome obstacles to access to parliament and are elected, they face barriers to their influence on parliamentary decisions. Not all of these are gendered: in many countries the executive dominates parliaments, both by law and because of informal norms and political culture and practice. Gender norms and expectations, however, put women MPs at an additional disadvantage and mean that they rarely have the same influence as their male counterparts.

Quota design can play a part here: women in reserved seats and/or who are nominated by their party to meet a quota can be seen as less deserving and able to represent only 'women's interests' – while at the same time being more dependent on party patronage than other MPs and less able to advocate for women's rights without support from party leaders. Even women elected women can find it difficult to advance their own career or group interests. Their minority status makes them more visible and subject to more scrutiny than male MPs. They can face sexism and ridicule, public and covert, in parliament and in their constituency (Domingo et al., 2016 O'Neil et al., 2016; Tamale, 1999). Moreover, they may not have a presence in male-dominated spaces or activities where the 'real' political negotiations take place – in Afghanistan, for example, political deals tend to be struck at private dinners that categorically exclude women.

Political parties are the gateway to political influence on policy and patronage within parliament, as well as to access to it. Where parties control appointments and the whip, MPs' standing in their party and relationship with its leader shapes their progression and achievements. Even when women gain elected office, they rarely attain the legislative and executive positions with the greatest

Box 1. The 'rules of the game' undermine women's representation in Malawi

Formal and informal rules and norms interact in Malawi to shape the decisions of party leaders and help to explain the drop in the proportion of women MPs from 21.7% in 2009 to 16.6% in 2014. Malawi has a majoritarian, single-member-constituency electoral system. Political parties can nominate only one candidate per constituency and have, historically, had ethno-regional bases. Malawi is also a socially conservative country, including in attitudes to women's leadership. In the 2009 election the ruling party won a landslide victory, returning a record number of women MPs. In contrast, the outcome of the 2014 election was uncertain and regional voting patterns re-emerged. As most party leaders selected women candidates for seats they had little chance of winning, it is no surprise that the number of women MPs fell.

Source: O'Neil et al. (2016).

⁸ In rich countries, as well as in much of Latin America, the use of voluntary quotas or commitments to gender parity by left-leaning parties is more usual than mandatory quotas (Chen, 2010).

decision-making power. Only 16 women are currently elected heads of state, and fewer than 5% of mayors are women. The number of women ministers worldwide increased from 9% in 1999 to 17% in 2010 (Hughes, 2014), but women are still more likely to lead portfolios associated with ‘women’s concerns’, such as education, health, family affairs, gender and culture, rather than finance or defence.

Access to justice

What matters after constitutional and legal change is whether laws are implemented and make a difference to the lives of women and girls. Government commitment, policy coherence, capacity and incentives for civil servants to implement law and policy are all vital for the success of policies that challenge powerful vested interests. Some of these factors are likely to be missing when it comes to the implementation of laws on women’s rights and so hamper implementation – as has been the case in implementing the 2010 Domestic Violence Act in Uganda, for instance (Ahikire and Mwiine, 2015). Where there is no commitment, judicial review, courts and other oversight and dispute-resolution forums are essential for the implementation of progressive laws to advance new rights and to protect women from abuse. The influence of individual women therefore needs to be placed in the context of how well the overall government and legislative system works – in general, are policies and laws implemented, or do they remain largely ‘on paper’?

While the case for recourse to courts should not be overstated, they can serve as parallel and connected areas of oversight and influence for the implementation of laws and policies regarding gender equality. For example, judicial action as ‘politics by other means’ can be used to good effect by feminist and other social activists. Therefore, the way in which women use the courts or other dispute-resolution mechanisms matters for mobilising momentum around new laws and to challenge discriminatory laws and practices.

At one end of the spectrum, women activists are increasingly using litigation and the courts to realise new rights. This works only in countries with adequate judicial review mechanisms, and court with the political autonomy to defend new progressive laws and to make rulings that will be enforced. In Colombia, for example, since 1991 women’s movements have frequently and successfully used a progressive Constitutional Court to protect women’s rights, most recently in relation to conflict-related violence and displacement (Domingo et al., 2015b).

Courts and alternative dispute-resolution forums are also places where judges, mediators and community leaders make daily decisions that affect women’s access to rights and resources. While they are officially neutral, social and political beliefs and interests often shape the way in which they interpret and apply the law. Women’s political power is, therefore, linked to their access to and influence in these forums. In plural legal systems, women activists and

claimants may use different norms and forums, statutory, customary and religious, sometimes simultaneously, to challenge gender norms (Domingo and O’Neil, 2014).

In Kenya, for example, feminist women lawyers (such as members of the Federation of Women Lawyers), use formal law and litigation structures to protect women’s rights *and* work with communities and religious authorities to encourage debate on gender norms. In Bangladesh, NGO-supported dispute-resolution approaches build on traditional mediation by community elders (*shalish*) to give grassroots women leaders their first opportunity to formally mediate community disputes and increase their participation in these historically all-male institutions.

3.2 Social structures and women’s capabilities

Formal changes – in law, organisations and processes – are necessary foundations for women to have decision-making power. They are often the most visible outcomes of gender struggles and changes in norms. If, however, they are not accompanied by more transformative shifts in gender relations and in the capabilities of women and girls, institutional change can be shallow, giving women access to decision-making but not to substantive influence. We look at six changes in *social structures and women’s capabilities* that make it more likely they will have genuine decision-making power: socio-economic status, personal economic power, education, gender norms, political skills and connections, and organisational strength.

Socio-economic status

Political liberalisation, increased mobility, the spread of primary education and a growing proportion of women working outside the home provide new opportunities for women of all backgrounds and income levels to have a public voice. Nevertheless, socio-economic class matters in relation to political power. Intersecting forms of discrimination mean that women from disadvantaged groups are less likely to have the capabilities and resources necessary for political influence – such as the money or connections to fund and win election campaigns or to pay for domestic help or childcare so that they can take on responsibilities outside the home.

Elite women therefore tend to fill political, public and professional positions. In countries with a small or nascent middle class, the proportion of women able to harness new opportunities is likely to be small (with the exception of countries with a proletarian or peasant-based government, such as Bolivia). In rural communities too, it is usually women from better-off families who take advantage of new openings in the civic and state spheres, and wealthier people often control or are able to secure more favourable outcomes in justice and governance forums.

Personal economic power

In addition to the family's economic position, women's *personal* economic power affects their influence over private and public decision-making, with important linkages between the two. A woman can be part of wealthy family and even earn an income, but not have a say in household finances. Structural changes that increase women's access to the labour market, and particularly formal employment, are important in order to shift discriminatory gender norms and relations – as shown by the social changes wrought by the migration of rural women to work in garment factories in Bangladesh. Women who are educated *and* economically independent are more likely to have decision-making power in the household and community, particularly when combined with new gender norms (e.g. regarding women's mobility).

For example, in Bangladesh women mediators in community dispute resolution often have some source of income, which provides them greater power in their household. This in turn can often translate into greater opportunities to participate in public decision-making. By contrast, Gazan women have high levels of literacy or education but, because of conservative gender norms and lack of economic opportunities, make up only 12% of the labour force – which effectively 'silences' them in a society when 'people listen to the person who controls resources' (activist, Gaza).

Women's personal economic power also matters in relation to public influence. Women have less political power and credibility in patronage-based polities because they are less likely to have the resources required of powerful patrons. Women are concentrated in low-paid jobs and own less property, are less likely to occupy the senior positions that give them access to patronage resources (e.g. appointments, decisions that can be traded), and are more likely to be excluded from male-dominated networks through which to obtain access to finance. For example, in Malawi's increasingly commercialised and competitive electoral competitions, with no controls on party finance and fewer economic resources than men, women candidates are at a distinct disadvantage. In Kenya, their more limited access to resources undermines women's opportunities to pursue successful political careers.

As in Thailand, some women get around this problem by 'borrowing' male patronage networks (Bjarnegård, 2015) and, if they obtain senior positions, can then build their own. For example, in Bangladesh all of the mediators who were involved in local politics said they needed considerable financial support in order to compete in elections, which in practice meant they needed strong support from a husband and a large family network to help secure votes. In general, however, women's relative lack of material and non-material resources reproduces their lack of political power at all levels of society. There is a positive correlation between male dominance of legislatures and the prevalence of clientelism, for example (ibid.).

Education

Access to education is clearly related to women's decision-making power at all levels. Leaders are commonly expected to be articulate and knowledgeable. Access to education is an important foundation for girls to have the confidence and skills to see themselves as a potential leader and to be seen as credible by others. As a male informant in Gaza observed: 'Women need to be highly skilful, professional. Especially when they are young. *Mukhatara* [tribal elder] men are stupid and accepted – no one questions their authority – when it comes to women, usually people ask, is she technically competent or not?'

Education can confer more bargaining power on women in the household and community. For more powerful decision-making positions and processes, however, *higher* education is critical. Supreme Court judges and Accountant Generals need the appropriate professional qualifications. While rarely a mandatory requirement, most politicians have also completed higher education (Tadros, 2014a) – for example, 74% of surveyed women MPs in Malawi had. Education is therefore a powerful tool to displace gender norms that diminish women's authority – hence Afghan women MP attend evening classes at private universities to further their education in order to offset their being 'quota' women.

More specific *technical* knowledge and experience is often important to women's access to and influence in political negotiations of different kinds – whether they have a seat at the table or are lobbying decision-makers. Legal expertise is particularly important for women's credibility and effectiveness in peace, constitutional and legal reform processes. Political battles, including resistance, take place through technical discussions, such as the wording of texts, and women must be able to compete on these terms in order to have influence. Access to good research and evidence is also critical to making the argument for new gender norms and to back up feminist mobilisation.

For example, Kenya has a critical mass of women academics and lawyers, including feminist activists. Kenyan academics in law, health and social sciences produce the evidence base for law and policy recommendations across a range of issues, ranging from women's political participation, reproductive health, access to education, women's exposure to violence, and access to land and property. Feminist lawyers were a key resource during the political processes of negotiating constitutional and legal texts, and pursuing litigation strategies to protect women's rights and gender equality gains. This has also been the case in Colombia, where feminist lawyers have both mobilised to draft texts on transitional justice and legislation on violence against women as well as to engage in strategic litigation at the Constitutional Court (Domingo et al., 2015b). More basic legal knowledge can also increase women's power in community governance. In alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms in Bangladesh, women's public legitimacy as mediators tends to be dependent on their 'ability to speak', and their ability

to make a logical argument: 'If I make an argument and establish logic, they will consider my opinion' (village panel judge, Bangladesh).

Political apprenticeship: skills and connections

Having a seat at or a say in decision-making processes is not enough. Women need political skills and judgement to have substantive influence, whether they are working from within or outside the state, to further their own personal interests or those of others. Political skills are language and inter-personal skills – negotiation, persuasion, compromise, intuition and public speaking – that are mostly learnt by watching others and through experience. Such skills are not easily taught in a classroom: 'There's no module for politics!' (woman MP, Malawi).

Often, women do not learn these skills through formal political organisations, such as political parties, where women are often still consigned to 'women's wings' and to supportive rather than decision-making roles. An activist in Gaza commented: 'Parties don't create leaders, they find good people and utilise them'. Women acquire political skills and resources in other ways, however. Families can provide adolescents and adults with a 'political apprenticeship' (Cornwall and Goetz, 2005): women whose parents or spouse are community leaders or politicians can watch how they deal with people and situations, and capitalise on their reputation and connections.

Student activism, professional associations and voluntary activities are also common ways that women learn political and leadership skills and build a profile and support base (Tadros, 2014a). Women often belong to faith-based organisations, but their role in encouraging or discouraging future women leaders is poorly understood. In Malawi, while some new women MPs are afraid to talk in parliamentary sessions, another told us: 'Public speaking in my case is not a problem. As a leader, and also I preach. I can preach in front of thousands in a church, so I'm not intimidated. That's an advantage.' Or as in Gaza, women's participation in nationalist or resistance movements can also be an important political training ground.

As shown by the grassroots work of organisations like Nagorik Uddyog in Bangladesh or Tostan in Senegal, long-term engagement by trusted external partners using innovative methods can help adult women to gain skills and knowledge that increases their private and public decision-making power. For example, Nagorik Uddyog has developed voluntary grassroots women's leadership networks that seek to build women's confidence, critical awareness and collective strength (Box 2).

Box 2: Women's grassroots leadership networks in rural Bangladesh

Nagorik Uddyog, meaning 'Citizens Initiative', began in 1995. There are many women's organisations in Bangladesh, but this is not one of them. It is headed by a man and emerged from socialist rather than feminist ideas. Over time, however, it has come to use Bangladesh's relatively progressive constitutional and legal framework to encourage and legitimise individual and collective activism at the local level. Its work has sought to raise women's awareness of their rights and their capacity to pursue them. Its strong organisational vision has led to it eschew donor-sponsored approaches and pursue its own model of women's empowerment. Its grassroots women's leadership networks provide training and regular meetings in which women are challenged to critically reflect on the patriarchal practices that have a negative impact on their lives and strategies for addressing them. The volunteer members of these networks often go on to use their knowledge and capabilities in the Nagorik Uddyog shalish.

Source: Valters and Jahan (2016)

Gender norms

Dominant gender norms worldwide assign women domestic and caring duties and in some cases can proscribe or discourage women from taking on public responsibilities and, in particular, leadership positions. This is especially the case in countries with widespread conservative religious and/or patriarchal customary practices. Regardless of legal reform, therefore, in some societies, women who are active in public life transgress norms and expectations about women's proper place and behaviour. Changes in family relations and in attitudes to women's roles and responsibilities are therefore important to women's ability to take on public responsibilities.

Influential women are commonly seen as exceptional, 'troublemakers',⁹ and not 'like other women'. Their behaviour and actions are more scrutinised, and judged more harshly, than their male counterparts'. Public perceptions of the capabilities of women in general can also be based on the performance and actions of individual women leaders: 'the mistakes of one woman affects all women' (activist, Gaza). The limited presence of women in public can, however, work to women's advantage. In Kenya, as the women's movement gained momentum it became notorious for its members' non-compliance with gender norms. This attracted media attention. As one

⁹ This is also a finding of the LSE's Above the Parapet Project, who researchers has interviewed 40 women leaders from politics, diplomacy, civil society, academic (Sen, 2015): <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/ipa/above-the-parapet-profiles>.

Box 3: Resistance to women's leadership in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, women who attempt to engage in community decision-making face considerable discrimination. Community authorities were rarely supportive at first, and women faced verbal abuse and rumours that undermined their legitimacy. Some women also implied that they faced domestic and community violence when they took on public roles. Importantly, most women made clear that discrimination tended to wane over time as they demonstrated their 'ability to speak' and to make a contribution to community life. Their ability to pursue this kind of work in spite of this opposition is commonly related to their political connections, family status, level of education and involvement in NGO networks.

Source: *Valters and Jahan (2016)*.

particularly controversial figure noted: 'If I opened my mouth, the country listened'.

Unfortunately, the attention is rarely without backlash. Politically active women often face abuse, sometimes violent, both from men and from other women. In Kenya, women politicians often wore trousers under their skirts in case male colleagues lifted them during parliamentary sessions. This is not dissimilar to women MPs' experiences of bullying in Westminster.¹⁰ A common finding therefore is that women leaders and activists have considerable self-belief, personal courage and resilience (Box 3). Women leaders in Gaza, across different generations and the political spectrum demonstrate these qualities. When asked what motivated her to sacrifice so much for women's empowerment, a Kenyan activist said simply, 'We wanted power!'

Perhaps less recognised is that behind or alongside women leaders and activists are often men and families also willing to act against widespread gender expectations and norms within their society. Family relations and life influence women's ability to take on responsibilities outside the home (Tadros, 2014a). The reasons vary by context and socio-economic status, but include women's primary responsibility for domestic work and childcare, restrictions on women's mobility or access to education and employment and their economic dependence on their husband. A supportive family can therefore be a critical

Box 4: How do you share domestic responsibilities with your partner?

In Malawi, we asked 22 of the 32 current women MPs how they divided domestic responsibilities with their husband – much to the amusement of some: 45% of the respondents who were married or divorced (n=21) said they shared domestic tasks equally and their husband helped them, or had done so in the past, with responsibilities such as childcare and cooking. Other MPs were clear that, 'in our culture', women are expected to be responsible for all domestic responsibilities, whatever her position, even if this primarily means managing domestic staff.

Source: *O'Neil et al. (2016)*

resource for women's leadership – whether this is a father who supports his daughter's education or encourages her to speak up, or a husband who is willing to share domestic responsibilities (Box 4).

Organisational strength

Organising around shared interests and taking collective action increases people's political power. Strong women's organisations, in particular strong feminist organisations that seek to advance gender equality, are known give women more influence over government decisions and policy. For example, the presence of a strong, autonomous feminist movement is associated with increased government action on violence against women (Htun and Weldon, 2012).¹¹ Collective action, both by women-only and mixed-sex groups, is also linked to progressive shifts in social norms and expectations (Evans and Nambiar, 2013).

Women coming together provides the opportunities for them to discuss and discover shared experiences, such as of gender-based violence or discrimination, build solidarity and, sometimes, the ability to question the natural or immutable nature of tradition and exclusionary norms. There is also courage and power in numbers. Collective action gives women more protection and influence than they would have as individuals, helping them to take action in the face of resistance and backlash.

Political liberalisation introduces rights – such as to association and freedom of expression – that enables the emergence of civil society, in the form of independent organisations. The strength and diversity of civic

¹⁰ <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2004/dec/07/uk.gender>

¹¹ Htun and Weldon (2012) construct an original global dataset to compare the strength of women's movements and government action to address violence against women (including, for example, law reform services for victims, prevention and public education programmes). Their raw data show that countries with strong feminist movements score, on average, three points higher on their violence against women policy scale (0–10) than those with weak feminist movements.

associations varies widely, and women's organisations mirror this. In some cases, such as Afghanistan and Malawi, the number of NGOs grew with the introduction of multi-party politics, but many rely heavily on a single 'founder member' and external finance. In other countries, like Bangladesh and Kenya, there are more organic and/or membership-based organisations with clear ideologies and agendas, increasing the support available to women from both women's organisations (e.g. women's professional associations) and other types (e.g. socialist organisations). These differences reflect structural factors that change slowly but affect the possibilities for women's collective action.¹²

Formal and informal rules and norms also shape collective action (Waylen, 2014). The design of the political system can deter or encourage cooperation, both feminist and mainstream. For example, in Afghanistan, executive authority and vote-buying, parliamentary electoral rules (single non-transferable vote) and politicians' localised support bases combine to discourage the formation of political parties, politicians' alignment with specific causes (e.g. a women's organisation or caucus) or the prioritisation of legislative business and provision of public goods. When it is perceived to favour particular, often elite, women's organisations, as in Gaza and Afghanistan, external funding can foster competition between women's and other organisations rather than encourage alliances or support nascent social movements

3.3 Strategic action and political opportunities

A combination of changes in the legal framework, social norms and women's capabilities therefore underpin women having more, and more meaningful, decision-making power. Whether they have influence, however, also depends on *political opportunities* and *what women do* to capitalise on them. Political opportunities occur from changes in the balance of power or the emergence of new ideas. These changes can arise because of unexpected, society-wide events, from natural disasters to revolutions. More often, however, new openings arise from mundane ebb and flow of political life, such as a change in government or the party system, a corruption scandal, legislative reform, an international agreement or new evidence.

To take advantage of political opportunities, women not only need rights and resources, they also need to use them to build strategic positions and relationships that enable them to work with and around political realities. Women politicians, bureaucrats and activists – even the most powerful – always have to negotiate gender norms and discrimination in trying to advance their objectives.

Political tactics are similar whether used by progressives or conservatives to further group objectives, or by individual women or men to further personal agendas. We look at four ways that women have worked in politically and socially strategic ways to advance individual or group objectives: building on accepted institutions and ideas; framing of issues and arguments; compromise, deals and second-best outcomes; and broad-based movements and strategic alliances.

Building on accepted institutions and ideas

Building on accepted institutions and ideas make it more likely that changes to gender norms will be accepted and sustained than if attempts are made to challenge a set of beliefs and vested interests wholesale (Bicchieri and Mercier, 2014). For example, the Bangladeshi NGO, Nagorik Uddyog, works with grassroots women's networks and male elites to establish alternative dispute-resolution forums based on traditional mediation institutions, the *shalish*. In rural areas, traditional *shalish* are male-only processes, even when women are party to a dispute. In *NGO-shalish*, women are encouraged to participate and speak, women leaders join men on the mediation panel, and decisions refer to statutory rights, such as legislation on domestic violence, as well as to custom and common sense.

Women may also use gender norms or ideas about the inherent character of women to their advantage. For example, women MPs in Malawi gain voters' acceptance by dressing according to dominant beliefs about what women should wear and by participating in 'feminine' tasks, such as cooking, during rallies (O'Neil et al., 2016); and women often harness common stereotypes about women and motherhood, such as women being inherently caring and peaceful, to gain legitimacy and influence during peace processes (Tripp, 2015).

Framing of issues and arguments

As well as harnessing existing ideas, women may be selective in how they frame an issue or argument in order to win over allies, both men and women, and minimise conservative opposition. Some women deliberately avoid the language of gender equality and appeal instead to accepted values, such as family, morality, religion or custom in order to make an argument. For example, Malawian women MPs successfully made the case for a new Divorce, Marriage and Family Relations Act (2015) by stressing the dangers of child marriage to the health and wellbeing of girls, appealing to their male counterparts as fathers, and by not drawing attention to more controversial provisions in the bill. Most Afghan women MPs prefer to use 'quiet' voices to influence male colleagues because attracting public attention risks criticism, damage to their

¹² Structural factors such as the presence of organised peasant, middle- or working-class movements, the presence of socialist or populist ideologies, and past experiences of conflict and political transitions.

reputation and alienating potential supporters, and is therefore perceived as counterproductive.

Rather than rejecting gender norms outright, therefore, women often use them strategically in order to advance political objectives. This can be a pragmatic approach; women leaders adapt messages, arguments and tactics according to what is most likely to work. These messages can also be closer to their own values and beliefs. At the same time, there is a risk that such tactics can reinforce the very norms that perpetuate gender inequality and women's subordination. Reformers need sound political judgement to mitigate the risk that they will win the argument but at the cost of longer-term changes in gender relations and women's continued subordination. In Afghanistan, for example, when provision for women's reserved seats in provincial councils was removed from the draft electoral law, women MPs are said to have cried and begged the committee head to have them reinstated.

Similarly, domains already viewed as 'women's issues' may provide an entry point for women to have new authority. For example, by law in Bangladesh, at least one judge should be a woman in village court cases involving women or minors. Where village courts are active, this has enabled elected women councillors to extend their status and authority into the judicial sphere. In the absence of structural changes, however, it is unlikely that this will be a stepping-stone to women acquiring decision-making power in areas seen as men's domains. Women do not adjudicate in land disputes because women rarely inherit land or own land and so are not party to these disputes and not seen as able to understand and rule on them: 'we have less experience with land [...] as a woman I do not own any land, so how do I resolve a land case?' (village court judge, Bangladesh).

Compromise, deals and second-best outcomes

Politicians and activists need to choose their battles and tactics according to what is feasible and will produce the best outcome in the circumstances. All negotiation requires parties to give up some demands to achieve others, and women politicians and activists negotiating or lobbying for legal reform and political agreements also accept partial victories. For example, the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act (2015) in Malawi does not outlaw polygamy or marital rape because it would not have got through cabinet and parliament if these provisions had been included.

Second-best outcomes can also extend to tactical use of procedure. For example, international outcry over the passing of the Shiite Personal Status Law in Afghanistan provided activists with an opportunity to lobby for the Eliminating Violence Against Women law also to be passed by presidential decree. This was a strategic decision, as it was highly unlikely that it would have passed had it gone through the parliamentary route, although a law by decree is more vulnerable to reversion than a parliamentary act and, arguably, has less legitimacy.

In Kenya, the women's movement initially supported proportional representation over a quota system. But the movement, which was dominated by urban educated women, failed to get support for this position from rural women. Women in rural areas, who tended to be less educated, were familiar with the concept of quotas and could more easily understand how they might benefit women. The movement decided to concede on this issue to preserve unity.

These trade-offs also indicate that it is harder to make progress on some issues than others. In Uganda, activists were able to secure a Domestic Violence Act, but have been unable to get the president's support on women's inheritance and land rights – an issue that perhaps more directly challenges men's economic advantage (Ahikire and Mwiine, 2015; Tripp, 2001). Where the gap between legal reform and gender norms becomes too wide, and particularly when government has little interest in implementation, the greater the risk that it will not be enforced. Again, however, sound political judgement is required, to ensure that second-best solutions go in the right direction and do not undermine the larger cause – albeit that this is difficult to predict and there can be no hard and fast rules.

While women are often excluded from male networks and private spaces where deals are struck, they can also use informal lobbying and negotiation to further their objectives. For example, activists mobilised women MPs in Kenya to invite up to three male colleagues to dinner at the Intercontinental Hotel in Nairobi to convince them of the need for a bill on implementing affirmative action.

Broad-based movements and strategic alliances

Ideological, religious and ethnic differences can make it difficult for women across political divides to come together around gender or other common interests. In Gaza, for example, women's activists on the right and left of the political spectrum both claim to act in women's interests. However, those affiliated to Hamas see this being about national liberation and livelihoods, whereas those affiliated with liberal organisations champion gender equality and women's civil and political rights.

Class also shapes women's interests and priorities. Unsurprisingly, therefore, women (like men) most often form associations with women from similar backgrounds and interests – such as women's professional associations or self-help community groups. There may be linkages between elite and grassroots women's organisations and broad-based movements, however, and some have been critical to women's substantive political influence in peace, constitutional reform, legal processes and in social change more broadly. For example, the deep inequalities and ethno-regional divisions that afflict wider society are mirrored in the Kenyan women's movement but it was still able to coalesce around core gender-equality goals, such as affirmative action, during the constitutional reform processes (Domingo et al., 2016). While rare, even in this

Box 5: Working across political divides in Gaza

'The Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) was founded in 1991, after the first Intifada, by five Gazan women who decided to put away their marked political differences and focus on their similarities. Believing in democratic thinking, women's leadership and a society in which children and women had an active role, these women grew their organisation from a small community-based affair providing a handful of school-aged children with health, education, legal aid and psychosocial services as well as educational and recreational opportunities into a large NGO that directly reaches over 20,000 Gazans a year.

CFTA's success is built on inclusivity. While its work is inspired by human rights, it avoids the divisive issue of gender inequality, even when providing women's health care. Furthermore, it is community- rather than donor-driven. By providing quality services in a participatory, holistic manner and avoiding political factionalism, CFTA has positioned itself as a 'fiercely independent' organisation that has proved to nay-sayers that women are effective leaders. Twenty-five years later, the five women who started CFTA are still running the organisation together.'

Source: Jones and Abu-Hamad (2016).

environment women can form alliances across political divides (Box 5).

Women's movements comprising women from different classes and social groups have greater legitimacy. Women speaking with 'one voice' is particularly effective in the face of divided male elites, as in Kenya's constitutional reform process, or Liberia's peace process (Tripp, 2015). The legitimacy of elite women's groups and their claim to represent women more broadly is increased when they have close connections with grassroots women's groups and their everyday life. In addition, through relationships with elite organisations, women's community groups can obtain access to technical assistance and to high-level decision-making processes. In Nepal, for example, the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) has provided technical expertise and networks that enabled Dalit women's groups to influence the constitutional reform process (Box 6). Connections with a professional NGO can also be an important and strategic social resource for poor women when they participate in community governance. For example, the backing of an NGO – and the threat of escalation of a case to the formal courts – can provide weight to the position of women in community mediation (Domingo and O'Neil, 2014).

Women's power is also strengthened through connections between women within and outside the state, and across different sectors (e.g. politicians, judges, academics, service providers, activists). Women's civic associations are an important, but in many countries under-used, resource for feminist politicians and bureaucrats. For example, they can provide support for women's election campaigns, legitimacy to their political causes, and access to robust research and evidence (Goetz and Cornwall, 2005; Tripp, 2001). For their part, feminist organisations place transformative ideas on the agenda, but they need to work with and through politicians and bureaucrats to realise these. For example, women activists in Colombia successfully worked with feminist lawyers and politicians to ensure that the transitional justice law and

measures took account of gendered experiences of violence (Domingo et al., 2015b).

Women need also to make alliances – whether based on principle or pragmatism and mutual gain – with men in positions of power. Mainstream organisations and institutions – cabinets, government departments, political parties, parliaments, parastatals, private firms, trade unions, universities, foreign agencies – are where decision-making power is concentrated. As men occupy most senior positions in these organisations, their support is critical.

Box 6: Dalit groups organise to influence the constitutional reform process in Nepal

The Feminist Dalit Organization is a social movement working in 56 districts in Nepal. During the constitutional reform process, FEDO acted as a link between women and Dalit groups at village and province level and high-level groups able to influence the negotiations. They convened 'collective action' groups to facilitate discussion between Dalit and non-Dalit stakeholders. They also worked with legal experts to make the technical language and process of constitutional reform accessible to women. While FEDO's initial focus was on pressing for quotas for women and Dalits, they rapidly extended their focus and tactics in 2014. Following the earthquake in Nepal, the political parties pushed forward with a draft charter that contained significant threats to women and citizenship rights. Despite brutal police repression, developed new strategies with other women's movement actors, engaging in hunger strikes to draw media attention to the rights issues – and with some success. The new constitution contains provisions on ending gender inequality and mentions the empowerment of Dalits of and women, but does not give women the same citizenship rights as men.

Source: Hunt (2015).

For example, each member of the Malawian Parliamentary Women's Caucus was asked to lobby five male MPs in support of the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act.

Male elites may share women leaders' interests, including feminist objectives, but may also support their aims because they gain from them in some way, such as bolstering their international reputation or marginalising religious or traditional elites. For example, as part of its strategy to position itself as a progressive party, the Democratic Party of Kenya, then in opposition, invited the women's movement to audit women's representation at different levels within the party. Where interest in gender equality is only pragmatic there is a high risk of rhetorical commitment, laws languishing on books, and women being given access but no actual authority.

Finally, international organisations can be an important ally for activists in developing countries. The transnational

movement is a critical resource for activists in countries without established feminist organisations or women's movements, for instance. In some countries, however, women need to distance themselves from foreign agencies or risk their agenda being discredited as being driven by external ideas and agents. This is particularly the case in countries where women's rights become a pawn in power struggles between domestic male elites. In Afghanistan, for instance, UN Women's support for the Eliminating Violence Against Women Act was critical but was deliberately discreet. This risk is currently most apparent in countries that have radical Islamic groupings, but was a feature of early post-independence African politics where traditional and urban elites 'both used their control over women not as the object but the subject of [their] struggle' (Geilser, 2004: 60).

4. Do influential women advance gender equality?

This section considers the effects of women's political power and leadership. We look at four ways that women's presence and influence in public decision-making processes can contribute to gender equality: symbolic effects, changes in gender norms, legal and policy change, and other women's wellbeing. Women and the political environments in which they operate are diverse. As a result, women can and do advance other women's interests; but not all influential women do and even then not under all circumstances.

4.1 Symbolic effects of influential women

Men are over-represented in public life in all countries, and in some cases women are completely excluded from decisions-making positions. Women's increased presence in positions of authority and in public life more generally, regardless of other outcomes, changes this status quo and is one marker of reduced gender inequality. Being viewed as leader through position, action or association (e.g. with an NGO) can improve a woman's status, particularly when it leads to benefits for her family, community or constituency. Even when women's leadership lacks substantive power and is contested by many men and women, it can still have important symbolic effects on discourse, and ideas, expectations and aspirations. For instance, male chairmen continue to dominate proceedings and decisions in community dispute resolution in Bangladesh, but simply having women sit on the panel is a profound break from the past when women were not even allowed to speak. Women in public positions can therefore normalise the idea of women with power – for example, women's ministers contribute to shifting attitudes towards women's leadership (Alexander and Jalalzai, 2014).

At the same time, backlash against women winning office can deter other women from standing for office, as was found in Indian states with high levels of gender inequality and discrimination (Bhalotra et al., 2016). Women leaders who are seen as tokenistic or as doing a bad job can also reinforce prejudice about women being less capable or suited to leadership than men. Double standards are rife in this respect, since women are often held to higher standards than men and any perceived failing regarded as representative of women in general rather than the individual. A Kenyan human rights activists commented: 'The political space is rough, so most women

have ended up playing the man's game to survive [...] The problem is that this behaviour is acceptable to Kenyans for men but not for women'. Despite not being the first Malawian president to be implicated in corruption, the exposure of large-scale embezzlement during Joyce Banda's presidency harmed public perceptions of women as leaders. The concentration of women leaders in departments or roles associated with 'women's traits' and 'women's issues', such as such as social welfare or human resources, may also reinforce gendered stereotypes.

4.2 Changes in gender norms and expectations

Women's leadership may be initially contested but gain legitimacy over time, even if not universally. For example, in Bangladesh women who mediate in community disputes or engage in local NGO networks often face considerable discrimination at first, which tends gradually to wane. Women's leadership has less effect on gender stereotypes and norms when powerful women are seen as exceptional and/or exhibiting masculine traits: 'they [male colleagues] say I have a man's mind in a woman's body' (women MP, Malawi). The number of women in public life may be important in changing gendered stereotypes and expectations.

For example, economic crisis has forced Zambian women into the labour market and into previously 'masculine' jobs in much greater numbers. This is 'disrupting' gender stereotypes about women's capabilities, including in relation to their political leadership abilities (Evans, forthcoming). In Bangladesh, women have increasingly been engaged in public work, such as working in paddy fields or managing livestock, although they rarely earn enough to be economically independent. Yet along with improvements in girls' education and greater networking opportunities provided through NGO and microfinance programmes, these economic changes have contributed to broader social shifts in ideas about women's private *and* public-decision making capabilities.

Women's empowerment is nearly always met with resistance and backlash, from men and other women, sometimes violent – precisely because it challenges vested interests and ideas. Whether they are elite or poor, women who transgress gender norms by becoming politically

active or taking on new leadership roles can face resistance from their families, and stigma or abuse from their community, colleagues or the state. For example, Egyptian women who protested in Tahir Square in 2011 against the Muslim Brotherhood's exclusionary policy and attempts to enforce socially conservative norms were subject to arrest and, for an 'unknown number', also sexual abuse (Tadros, 2014a). After being touched inappropriately by a male colleague in Kenya, one women MP challenged him by asking, 'Do you want me to undress for you?'

In the short to medium term, women's presence in decision-making forums does not appear to change the gendered culture of public institutions and behaviour of public officials. For instance, increasing the number of women MPs does not necessarily disrupt 'masculine' styles or ways of working that characterise many parliaments, such as adversarial debate, heckling and one-upmanship. Women's minority status may compel them to conform to the dominant male culture. It is possible that this might change as organisations move nearer gender parity, but 'critical mass' theory is unproven (Childs and Krook, 2008). Even when women challenge exclusionary norms in the workplace, they may continue to re-enact them in their family: 'this is what we tell our women, whenever you want to be in a top position yourself, we've got to take ourselves down to the ground when we are in our homes' (Woman MP, Malawi)

It is unrealistic to expect small numbers of individual women to substantially change gender norms. The evidence points to the importance of women's collective action to progressive norm change (e.g. Evans and Nambiar, 2013), and to the importance of work with whole communities, including men and boys, and particular male leaders at the international, national and sub-national levels (Alexander-Scott, 2015; Edstrom, 2015). Organisational leadership is key to changing a gendered culture – as recent research on why some UK government departments are doing better than others in reducing the gender gap in senior positions confirms (Ernst and Young, 2016).

4.3 Law and policy change

The most common, and perhaps visible, contribution of women's leadership to gender equality is the extension of women's legal rights and policy change. Recognising that it is foundational, legal reform is often the target of women activism and lobbying, leading to the progressive reform of discriminatory laws relating to violence against women, reproductive health rights, marriage, inheritance and property ownership, among others. Women's organisations in particular are instrumental to

these gains. There is a clear relationship between the strength of independent women's organisations and government actions to reduce violence against women, for instance (Htun and Weldon, 2012). There is also a strong correlation between women's activism and inclusion of electoral quotas in new constitutions (Anderson and Swiss, 2014).

Less is known about the relationship between women in formal positions and legal/policy outcomes. The evidence is mixed on whether increasing women's representation, even achieving a 'critical mass', produces more gender-friendly policy and outcomes (Franceschet, 2015). While there is a clear association between strong feminist movements and government action to reduce violence against women, for instance, this is not also true for the number women MPs (data from Htun and Weldon (2012) and IPU (2015)). Nevertheless, case studies show the importance of the strategic actions of women politicians, bureaucrats and judges to progressive law and policy change.¹³

Women's strategic actions have also secured constitutional and legal reforms that establish mechanisms for women's *future* participation and influence, such as quotas, and also mechanisms for oversight and redress (e.g. judicial review) that enable activists to push forward the agenda beyond legal reform. For example, in Kenya women activists during the constitutional reform process were not only vigilant in advancing women's rights, but also worked closely with other progressive forces to counter efforts to undermine the strengthening of oversight mechanisms, reform of the judiciary and to strengthen judicial review powers. Earlier gains can also be important in women's resistance to attempts to repeal women's rights when the political environment changes, such as when conservative Islamist governments took power in Gaza and Tunisia (Chambers, 2015).

4.4 Improving outcomes for other women

Women's political participation may contribute to improving social welfare, public goods and to improved development outcomes for women more broadly. For instance, in India, women's representation in local councils is positively associated with increased public spending (Beaman et al., 2006) and, at state level, with reduced neo-natal mortality (Bhalotra and Clots-Figures, 2011). A quantitative analysis of Brazilian municipalities found that those with a woman mayor are awarded more federal transfers and that less educated women have better health outcomes (fewer women without pre-natal visits, fewer premature births) than those led by a man (Brollo and Troiano, 2013).

13 See for example the extensive library on the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Programme website (<http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/>), or the growing body of work by feminist institutionalist scholars (<http://www.femfin.com/>).

There is also a positive association between women's *substantive* involvement and influence in peace processes and an agreement being reached and implemented (O'Reilly et al., 2015).¹⁴ When individual women participate in peace processes, as negotiators, witnesses and signatories, peace agreements last longer than when they do not – for example, peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2011 were 35% more likely to be sustained for 15 years with the involvement of women (ibid.).¹⁵ There is too little evidence to draw any firm conclusions on the broader effects of women's leadership, however, more comparative research in particular is needed on women's substantive decision-making power and development outcomes (beyond legal reform).

Legal reform can bring important changes in women's status, even when it is not implemented or only partially implemented by government, and can provide new avenues for redress for rights violations. For example, in Bangladesh and India women use domestic violence legislation as leverage in negotiations with husbands and extended family in informal justice forums and, in Kenya, women's groups are using the constitution to litigate on issues related to women's access to property (Domingo and O'Neil, 2014). An Afghan activist told us that until the introduction of the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law 'women were reluctant to report violence committed against them by their husband or family members, partly because they were not confident that this kind of violence constituted a crime'.

Legal reform is not the only or necessarily the most effective way to change harmful gender norms and practice, however. For example, an NGO in Senegal, Tostan, has been working in partnership with remote communities since 1997 through an informal education programme. This has proved remarkably successful in changing community attitudes *and* practices in relation to female genital mutilation/cutting – and more so than legal reform in conservative regions (Molloy, 2013; Shell-Duncan et al., 2013). What is clear is that in many countries, challenges to state capacity, policy implementation and service provision make it unwise to assume any leap from legal wins to outcomes.

4.5 Different women, different agendas, different political settlements

Framing and assessing the behaviour and achievements of women by whether they advance gender equality and the wellbeing of women *in general* risks reinforcing stereotypes of women and their interests. Clearly, women are diverse: women who hold power have a range of different values, beliefs, ideas and interests – as do the constituencies they represent.¹⁶ Women's organisations may claim to represent women's interests, but understand these differently even within the same society – as is the case in Gaza for women leaders affiliated with liberal organisations versus those affiliated to Hamas. Many women do not believe in gender equality and even those who do may not self-identify as feminist, as a recent survey in the UK shows (Fawcett Society, 2016). The evidence that women are more likely to represent other women's interests is also inconclusive, however these interests are defined (e.g. Child and Krook (2009) on women MPs).

This is not just about whether women are more likely than men to see women as a special interest group – there are plenty of examples of this – but whether conditions allow women to act on it. Understanding whether women in politics, business and society are more likely to act in the interests of other women therefore means separating out their attitudes, whether they are able to act on those preferences (e.g. to introduce women-friendly laws or policy), and the outcomes of any actions (e.g. whether law or policy is actually implemented) (Franceschet, 2015). Too much focus on individual women and their objectives or achievements, and not also the (formal and informal) rules of the game and social norms, risks misdiagnosing the problem as being about women's failings rather than institutional or ideological/ideational barriers (Goetz, 2003) (Box 7). It also reinforces the double standards in expectations that women *should* represent women and champion gender equality, when the same is not expected of men in power, and in placing responsibility for gender equality on women and not also men.

14 These findings come from the 'Broadening Participation Project' at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (<http://graduateinstitute.ch/home.html>), and are based on forty in-depth case studies of peace negotiations and political transitions.

15 Statistical analysis of women's participation in 182 peace talks/agreements between 1989 and 2011 finds it to have a significant and positive association with the duration of peace. However, this research does not look at the quality of women's participation and whether they have substantive influence (Stone, cited in O'Reilly et al., 2015).

16 Valters and Jahan (2016) use the phrase 'different women, different choices, different lives' to comment on how the particularities of women's histories, even in rural Bangladesh, lead them to make different choices and have different capabilities. This point can be extended to take in the variation that comes from the histories of different groups of women and different countries and political settlements.

Box 7: Michele Bachelet and gender policy in Chile

Michele Bachelet was President of Chile between 2006-2010, and was elected again in 2014 for centre-left coalition, Concertación (later Nueva Mayoría). Gender was a prominent part of Bachelet's platform during her 2006 campaign, including the pledge to promote gender parity. She has had limited success in changing entrenched informal rules and interests – such as the power of party bosses and the Catholic Church – but changes in the balance of power between parties has created new opportunities for gender-related change. For example, during her first term, President Bachelet was able to achieve gender parity in her first Cabinet but was unable to maintain this, and was able to make progress on some areas (e.g. budget allocations to women's issues, emergency contraception, pensions, child care), but not on more controversial issues (e.g. reform of the total ban on abortion, equal pay). Importantly, her coalition did not have a majority in congress and so, while she was able to work with male allies on some issues, such as pensions, she also had to rely on presidential powers to counter challenges from conservative and Catholic opposition (e.g. to her government's attempts to promote emergency contraception). By contrast, Nueva Mayoría does now hold the Congress and the right-wing opposition is divided, opening up the possibility for Bachelet to promote legislation even on more taboo subjects, such as civil partnership and the decriminalisation of abortion for three restricted cases (though this legislation not yet passed) as well as electoral that includes gender quotas.

Source: Staab and Waylen (2014); Waylen (2015).

4.6 Women's empowerment is intermittent and uneven

Political empowerment is never linear or even. It is a process of change and counter-change: gender equality gains are won but resisted and both feminists and conservatives regroup and find new fronts and tactics to advance and push back from. A sudden surge forward in formal women's rights or roles following conflict or transition is often followed by disappointment when established gender roles and relations are reasserted. Elite women may benefit from social change while poor women do not. Women may gain new political rights but not economic power. Women may gain a foothold in parliament and the judiciary, but not the executive or security sector. Women's mobilisation may win quotas, but women's organisations are then weakened when civic leaders become elected politicians. Women may challenge

gender discrimination in the workplace but conform to gender norms at home. Access to new technology may give girls access to new platforms for information and voice, and to acquire new capabilities, but make them vulnerable to gender-based violence, online and offline (Box 8). And so on.

We therefore see waves of progress within and across countries. These intermittent and uneven gains are connected, but the importance of individual gains may be clear only with the benefit of hindsight. For example, we may focus on the proximate reasons for women securing quotas in the 2010 Kenya constitution, such as the building of a coalition across class and ethnic groups, but this victory was built on two decades of changes: political liberalisation, the emergence of an educated middle class and an autonomous women's movement, and their mobilisation (sometimes failed) around previous legislative processes.

Box 8: Voice, influence and digital information and communication technologies (ICTs)

Access to digital ICTs can expand employment and education opportunities for girls and women, and can also be an important tool in women's collective action, and a practical or symbolic source of power, increasing a person's status in their home or community. At the same time, ICTs can also be used to reinforce gender stereotypes and women and girls' use of them can expose them to gender-based violence. Further, women's access to and use of digital ICTs is limited by existing discriminatory social, economic and political structures. This means that if the digital divide between men and women is not reduced, gender-based inequalities may actually widen (O'Neil and Cummings, 2015).

5. Cultivating women's decision-making power and gender equality

5.1 Conclusion

This policy paper synthesises findings from two years of research on women's voice and leadership in decision-making in developing countries. We set out to understand the factors that help and hinder women's access to and substantive influence in decision-making processes in politics and society, and whether women's leadership advances gender equality and the wellbeing of women more broadly.

Too often, policy-makers use formal rights and the presence of women in public life and positions as a marker of women's genuine power. We find that changes in formal rules and addressing gender imbalances in public institutions are important conditions for women to have decision-making power. But we also find that women face a double hurdle, with formidable obstacles not only to obtaining access to but also to having influence in decision-making processes. Taking actions to increase women's presence in public and political life is only half the battle, therefore, and tells us little about whether women are in fact able to advance personal or group interests.

Overcoming the second hurdle requires attention to whether laws are designed in ways that are likely to empower women and are being implemented, and whether they are accompanied by more transformative changes in women's capabilities and economic power, and in common beliefs and expectations about women and men. Women do not have more or less power because of one or two isolated personal or social changes, therefore. Their decision-making power comes from the interactions between social structures, norms and rules, women's capabilities and strategic actions, and political opportunities.

There are multiple pathways of political empowerment in different countries (Krook, 2010) and for different women (Pathways, 2011). The political economy of women's decision-making power means that there can be no set recipe for women's empowerment; it is peculiar to time and place. But research and experience do point to some key ingredients, including working with families and communities to change harmful gender norms, expanding

women's access to education, particularly higher education, and the formal labour market, increasing women's ownership of and control over assets and economic power, supporting women's political apprenticeship and collective strength, both in feminist and mainstream organisations, and enabling reformers and activists to set their own agenda and to decide how best to advance it.

Finally, policy-makers and practitioners sometimes work on the assumption that women leaders will act in the interests of women more generally. In contrast, we argue that policy-makers should approach increasing women's leadership, on the one hand, and increasing gender equality and women's wellbeing, on the other, as two related but distinct objectives. Women's presence in public life and positions is a precondition for their influence, but will not automatically change how gender shapes how political institutions work or lead to women-friendly policies. If the primary concern is to achieve more gender-sensitive policy and better outcomes for poor and marginalised women, it matters which women (and men) have political power. In this case, a more productive approach than focusing on women leaders is to look at 'critical [gender] actors', the women *and* men who have an interest in gender equality, the power to advance it, and how they do this in practice (Childs and Krook, 2008; 2009).

5.2 Recommendations for the international community

Feminists believe that women and men are equal and should have equal rights, opportunities and levels of wellbeing. Feminist organisations and bureaucrats and politicians of both sexes play a key role in shifting public debate and lobbying for change when the opportunity arises. Women's rights and more equitable gender relations emerge only through the actions of the women and men concerned; outsiders cannot make these changes happen.

At the same time, there is more high-level political momentum around the rights of women and girls and

women's leadership than there has been for some time, namely the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UN Security Council Resolutions on Women Peace and Security, the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict and the recently announced, UN High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, to name just a few international initiatives and commitments.

What can development organisations do to ensure that good intentions do not get stuck at the level of commitments and conferences and they support 'women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life' (SDG Target 5.5)? Based on our evidence review, empirical case studies and analysis, we offer four sets of recommendations for what international agencies could do differently to cultivate women's substantive power and influence.

1. Invest in existing organisations, not those you wish existed

Rather than working with organic, locally anchored organisations, development agencies often fund those that ostensibly share their values or meet pragmatic or bureaucratic requirements (speaking English and fluent in 'development speak', based in the capital city or secure areas, able to handle large grants, with proper accounting procedures) (Denney and Domingo, 2014). The risk with this strategy is that at best it is ineffective because donors are not funding organisations that are well placed to change gender relations in their communities and, at worst, that it undermines voluntarism and the development of a diverse and mature civil society (Bano, 2012).

Support feminist organisations where they exist: We know that feminist organisations and movements, and in more recent years Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) organisations, have been the vanguard of gender equality advocacy and reform. Where these exist, it makes sense to invest in them. Feminist organisations include rights organisations, but also professional bodies, such as women lawyers' associations or women's medical associations, and grassroots groups that seek to improve conditions for women. To improve their ability to select partners, donor country offices should build relations with women's organisations, and also help grassroots and elite groups to network.

Nurture diverse civic associations: Political pluralism and broad-based women's movements are also important. International agencies should invest in long-term support to women's organisations of all types, which may entail using intermediaries to disburse relatively small amounts to promising organisations, including those supporting marginalised or isolated women. Where civil society is weak, channelling funding through 'briefcase' NGOs is unlikely to encourage them to establish a clear membership

base and agenda. In this case, it is better to work through international/specialist women's organisations that can invest in building the capacity of emerging women's organisations. Where there is a more mature civil society, it makes sense to work through national organisations and networks that have long-term relationships with grassroots women's groups – including those that may not label themselves as women's rights organisations, as with Nagorik Uddyog in Bangladesh. The aim should be to help women to organise around common interests and problems, and facilitate connections among different organisations (peer-peer, grassroots–elite), not to determine what that agenda should be.

2. Focus on groups, not individual women

Women need political skills to be influential, and these are often built through associational or professional life. Long-term, well-targeted capacity-building or mentoring programmes can help, particularly when they create networks between women and explicitly seek to tackle barriers to their leadership. Projects that aim to quickly meet the skills gaps of individual women – such as training for women candidates immediately before an election – are unlikely to be an effective use of resources.

Invest in collective not individual leadership: Funding might be better invested in long-term support and engagement with organisations where adolescent girls and women (could) hone their political and leadership skills and that might nurture future women leaders might – such as student groups, trade unions and professional associations and faith-based organisations. Finding ways to convince political parties to regard women members as an asset is essential to women's political power. International actors can facilitate strategic dialogue, alliances and networks including with powerful men.

Work with families and communities, not only women: Gender norms that assign particular and unchanging roles to men and women are the principal barrier to women's empowerment and to gender equality. While women's organisations can foster women's critical consciousness and solidarity, changes in gender norms and practices do not come from changes in individual attitudes but from changes in shared expectations (Alexander-Scott et al., 2016; Marcus and Harper, 2015). Work with individual girls and women can only go so far, and there is a need also to engage with entire families and communities, including male leaders (Edstrom, et al., 2015). The aim should be to help groups critically to evaluate and change harmful gender norms and practices, and never to lecture, judge or try to dictate what they should do (which is likely to be counterproductive). Sensitivity to legal pluralism and customary norms is vital.

3. Target all sectors, not just gender

Women's political power is strongly associated with their economic power. Sector programmes are needed to build the capabilities and resources women need to have substantive political power; discrete gender and governance programmes cannot do this.

Invest in women's economic power: Women are concentrated in the informal economy, and reforms that help them to move to formal employment are a priority: place of work, regular wages and benefits all matter for women's decision-making power. Informal work and livelihood/economic programmes can raise the level of household income and assets (e.g. through credit or loans), but they will increase women's decision-making power only if they are explicitly designed to do so. This requires reform of laws that prevent women from owning or inheriting property and other assets as well as economic programmes that seek to shift gender norms that prevent women's ownership of and control over assets – such as programmes that encourage women to interact/organise and that engage male leaders and family members.

Invest in women's higher education: Higher education and professional expertise increases the credibility and confidence of women leaders and is mandatory for many high-level jobs. Expanding the pool of such women should be a priority but rarely features in women's empowerment and leadership programmes, or in education programmes. More research is needed on the best approaches, but principles applied in programmes to increase girls' access to secondary education might be extended to higher education, namely scholarships, mentoring and peer learning, alongside partnerships with university departments in development countries. Like livelihood/economic programmes, education programmes need to be multidimensional and explicitly address gendered barriers to women's education, such as early marriage or primary responsibility for childcare (Clifford et al., 2012).

Invest in national knowledge production: Applied research and analysis is best done by national organisations. Women need to be able to generate the evidence to lobby and make effective arguments for reform. They are best placed to identify problems and solutions. Fund local think tanks and academic departments that have an interest in women's rights and wellbeing.

Invest in women's role in post-conflict and regime transition processes: The technical is highly political. Women need to be present and effective in the high-level

negotiations that decide the text of laws, constitutions and peace agreements. When women are not included in negotiations, the international community should always use UN SCR 1325 and subsequent Resolutions to apply political pressure. Irrespective of whether women are part of the formal negotiations, providing logistical support to women's organisations is critical to enable them to lobby decision-makers and act as a link with community-based women's groups with an ongoing role in sub-national conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

4. Put your own house in order

The SDGs apply to all countries, rich and poor. The credibility of development agencies to support not only SDG 5.5 on women's leadership, but also the inter-linkages between the different SDGs, is in question if their own house is not in order.

Lead from the front: High-level organisational leadership, resources and actions are needed to change gendered norms, practices and outcomes within national and international organisations and bureaucracies; policy and speeches are not enough. The UN has made little progress on achieving gender equity at all levels of the Secretariat and throughout all UN bodies, as mandated by the General Assembly.¹⁷ Leadership, mentoring and flexible working have been key to getting more women into senior positions in the UK civil service (Ernst and Young, 2016).

Get out of the gender ghetto: Development requires interested parties coming together to work on problems of common interest, and this also applies to the bureaucracies that fund and manage development assistance. Precisely because gender bias is replicated in all bureaucracies (Eyben and Turquet, 2013), the gender ghetto – where gender advisers sit in separate teams and agencies seek to change gender relations primarily through working on discrete gender programmes – can be a lonely place to work from. Changing this is not about mandatory mainstreaming and checklists, which takes the needed politics out of gender equality and related programming (and organisational relationships!) (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall and Brock, 2005). This is about gender advisers and programme managers working closely with governance and sector colleagues, and vice versa, to spot opportunities for international assistance to advance both women's power and wellbeing, and wider sector objectives.

¹⁷ Since 1986 the General Assembly resolutions have repeatedly set gender targets for representation of women at different levels of the UN system, all of them missed. In 2008, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on current projections gender parity would not be reached in the highest grade until 2120 (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/fplegbasis.htm>).

Ensure systems incentivise collaboration and learning: Women's substantive power will only be cultivated with more joined-up working and problem-focused approaches – and this requires organisational rules and systems that support and encourage collaboration, risk and learning within organisations and programmes. Performance management systems and procurement rules are two key areas here (Denney and Domingo, 2014; ICAI, 2015).

Funding modalities and programme design also need to help reformers and activists in developing countries to identify problems and possible solutions, and work with and around political realities to achieve them – with a growing evidence base from different development sectors on how best to do this (Box 9).

Box 9: Principles of adaptive development and programming

Learning from across different sectors and programmes indicates that development programmes – and particularly those related to complex social and political change process – have more chance of success if they adopt the following principles.

1. Start with problems or issues, not ready-made solutions
2. Support change that reflects local realities and is led by local stakeholders
3. Work through local conveners, who can mobilise coalitions and facilitate collaboration around reform
4. Use politically smart tactics to achieve objectives
5. Use (and reward) experimentation, learning and adaptation

Sources: Booth and Unsworth (2014); Wild et al. (2015).

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