

**Submission to the House of Commons
International Development Committee Inquiry**

PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTHENING

Written evidence by Womankind Worldwide

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SUMMARY - Womankind Worldwide recommends that:

Women's meaningful participation as a prerequisite for strong, democratic parliaments

- *Parliamentary strengthening should be based on a core principle of ensuring the gender-sensitivity of parliaments, recognising that where women's equal and meaningful participation is constrained overall institutional legitimacy suffers and breaches of women's rights occur.*

Accountability and representation

- *DFID should take an integrated approach to parliamentary strengthening, which recognises and reinforces the roles of multiple stakeholders in fostering representative governance and accountability, to create a climate in which the priorities and interests of women are fully articulated and acted upon within political and legislative fora.*

The role of women's rights organisations in parliamentary strengthening

- *DFID should increase the accessibility of funding for governance and democratic development, including parliamentary strengthening, to women's rights organisations, recognising their excellent value for money to donors as a result of their multi-faceted role in supporting women's democratic engagement.*

DFID's Strategic Vision for Girls and Women

- *DFID priority country governance and political economy analyses should include a rigorous gender-focused component to ascertain the situation of women in political systems and behaviour.*
- *In line with DFID's Strategic Vision for Girls and Women, its refreshed Operational Plans should outline how support for women's political participation will be increased.*

Coherence and cross-Government coordination

- *Robust procedures are embedded to ensure value for money and coherence between FCO and DFID strategic aims to support women's meaningful participation in political structures and processes, including reporting on coordination between DFID Country Offices and FCO Posts.*

The UK National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace & Security

- *Institutional strengthening, including parliamentary strengthening, should be included in the activities proposed to increase women's political participation in the six Country Focus sections of the NAP's Implementation Plan.*

Pathways of women's political participation – from the local to the national level

- *DFID must scale-up support to women's democratic engagement and political participation at all levels, recognising both that local-level participation is an important end in itself, and that pathways to national-level participation can and must be forged from the grassroots.*

What DFID can learn from other donors

- *DFID develops a dedicated and fully-funded workstream aimed at increasing women's participation and leadership, taking best practice from the Dutch FLOW fund.*

Womankind Worldwide

1. Womankind Worldwide (Womankind) is the UK's leading international women's rights and international development organisation working with 31 women's rights organisations across 13 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Many of our partners are based in fragile and conflict-affected countries, and work to increase women's participation in public and political decision-making at all levels and to eliminate violence against women.

Introduction

2. Womankind welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the work of the International Development Committee (IDC) in its assessment of the work UK taxpayers fund in strengthening parliaments in developing countries. This submission addresses questions asked by the IDC on how best to engage in parliamentary strengthening, the prioritisation of parliamentary strengthening over other work to promote democracy, cost-effective delivery, and what DFID can learn from other donors.

3. We have based much of our submission on a recent consultation with our partners – Afghan Women's Resource Centre (Afghanistan); Liberian Women Media Action Committee (Liberia); Feminist Dalit Organisation (Nepal); SAATHI (Nepal); Women's Peace and Justice Project (Sierra Leone); WAVES (Sierra Leone); and Isis-WICCE (Uganda). This consultation focused on UK government work on Women, Peace and Security.

Women's meaningful participation as a prerequisite for strong, democratic parliaments

4. Women's equal participation and influence at every level and in every political institution is fundamental to both representative, inclusive democracy and the fulfilment of women's rights. Yet, there is often a discrepancy between the way institutions refer to democracy and the way democratic principles are applied or practiced.ⁱ

5. Globally, the percentage of women in national legislatures has increased, but is still far from reflecting the overall ratio of women in society. Only 21.8 per cent of national parliamentarians were female as of 1 July 2014, a slow increase from 11.3 per cent in 1995.ⁱⁱ

6. As the CEDAW committee noted in 1997, temporary special measures such as gender quotas are an essential prerequisite to women's equality in political life.ⁱⁱⁱ The establishment of gender quotas is an important means of addressing the underrepresentation of women at all levels of decision-making. In addition, enabling women to access training, networks, information and support is crucial to ensure their full and meaningful participation in political activities, both as candidates and after having attained political office.

7. There is, however, general consensus that even where women's entry into parliaments is facilitated through quotas, the efficacy of their participation can be severely limited. For representation to be meaningful, women must be actively involved in and able to influence decision-making processes. Yet, entrenched structural barriers including traditional social norms, attitudes and beliefs about women's role in public life, constraints on women's time and mobility, and violence against them hinder women's ability to participate meaningfully in decision-making fora.^{iv}

8. Furthermore, in-depth research carried out by the Inter-Parliamentary Union demonstrates that in parliaments specifically, barriers to women's full and meaningful participation in decision-making

can include exclusion from Committee membership and key leadership positions (eg. Speaker); challenges understanding and navigating complex rules and norms at the heart of parliamentary norms and culture – including ‘unwritten rules’; inaccessible or exclusionary parliament building infrastructure; and caring responsibilities which hinder ability to fulfil requirements such as evening voting.^v Developing the gender-sensitivity of parliamentary structures and procedures as a core objective of parliamentary strengthening processes can redress these barriers and ensure women’s meaningful participation in democratic parliamentary life.

9. Womankind recommends that any parliamentary strengthening effort should be based on a core principle of ensuring the gender-sensitivity and inclusiveness of parliaments, recognising that where the full, equal and meaningful participation of women is constrained overall institutional legitimacy suffers and breaches of women’s rights occur.

10. Womankind recommends that the IDC asks DFID whether building gender-sensitive parliaments will be prioritised in the ‘How to’ note on parliamentary strengthening currently under development.

11. It is also recommended that the IDC ask what measures will be proposed within the ‘how to’ note to ensure DFID parliamentary strengthening work makes a significant and tangible contribution to increasing the gender-sensitivity of parliaments.

Accountability and representation

12. Parliaments do not exist in a vacuum; they provide a public forum to articulate citizens’ concerns to those that govern and as such are vital to the process of representative democratic governance and accountability.^{vi} Therefore, increasing parliamentarians’ responsiveness to women constituents is a fundamental element of parliamentary strengthening work, as is reinforcing women constituents’ ability to communicate their concerns and priorities to parliamentary candidates and elected representatives. Political parties are central to this, as parliamentarians’ willingness and/or ability to act on women constituents’ concerns is inextricably tied to their party allegiance, and in turn to the receptivity of that party to women’s rights and interests in their political and legislative agenda.

13. Womankind urges DFID to take an integrated approach to parliamentary strengthening, which recognises and reinforces the roles of political parties, parliamentarians, constituents and women’s rights organisations in fostering representative governance and accountability, creating climate in which the priorities and interests of women are fully articulated and acted upon within political and legislative fora.

The role of women’s rights organisations in parliamentary strengthening

14. In-country women’s rights organisations play a multiple role in enhancing women’s participation in all aspects of democracy, and as such are ideal partners for gender-sensitive parliamentary strengthening. The OECD confirms that supporting women’s rights organisations to improve women constituents’ capacity to actively monitor governments is a particularly effective strategy for ensuring accountability for gender equality commitments.^{vii}

15. Women’s rights organisations deliver ongoing support to aspiring and elected women leaders at all levels, through leadership capacity-building programmes and mentoring initiatives. With technical and legal expertise, some provide advisory on electoral reform including the development of legislated and voluntary gender quotas. Their autonomy also allows them to work with and across

political parties to increase gender-sensitivity, as well as allowing them to take on social norm change work which political parties and other stakeholders may find too politically sensitive to engage in directly and overtly.^{viii} More broadly, evidence shows that women-led organisations offer added-value to donors as a result of their relevance and connectedness to women's and girls' lives, as well as the innovative approaches they take to achieving their objectives.^{ix}

16. Womankind recommends DFID recognises the multi-faceted role of women's rights organisations in supporting women's democratic engagement, and the excellent value for money to donors as a result of this. As a result DFID should increase the accessibility of funding for governance and democratic development, including parliamentary strengthening, to women's rights organisations by implementing OECD-DAC Network on Gender Equality guidance.^x

17. Womankind recommends that the IDC asks DFID what percentage of funds spent on governance and democracy promotion has gone directly to women's rights organisations, and if specific steps have been taken to ensure funding is accessible to grassroots women's rights organisations.

DFID's Strategic Vision for Girls and Women

18. In November 2013 DFID updated its 'Strategic Vision for Girls and Women'.^{xi} Womankind welcomes DFID's recognition that achieving women's empowerment requires an 'enabling environment' of strong, open and inclusive economies, societies and political institutions, for which promoting women as political leaders and active citizens and addressing social norms is essential.^{xii} However, whilst DFID's aim to increase women's political participation as part of an 'enabling environment' is commendable, its implementation appears narrow in scope and inconsistent across DFID's country-level operations.

19. As outlined in DFID's Strategic Vision, the 'enabling environment' does not address specific contexts which impact on a country and on women's lives and opportunities. For example, the increasing conflict and fragility in some states, and new and ongoing democratisation processes in others, require a current and nuanced understanding of women's individual and collective political participation. At the same time, shifting social and political contexts offer new opportunities for women to enter leadership roles.^{xiii}

20. DFID's governance and political economy analyses in priority countries and regions provide an important opportunity to gain insight into context-specific political and economic processes, and should inform DFID's Country Operational Plans (OP).^{xiv} Many of DFID's OP's are currently being refreshed, with new versions due to be launched in 2015, offering an important opportunity to draw on a renewed context-analysis and to ensure country-level integration of DFID's commitments to strengthen political institutions and promote women as political leaders, as outlined in the Strategic Vision.

21. Womankind recommends that the IDC asks DFID whether and how its priority country governance and political economy analyses include a rigorous gender-focused component to ascertain the situation of women in political systems and practice.

22. Womankind also recommends that the IDC asks DFID whether its refreshed Operational Plans will outline how women's political participation will be increased, and whether, in line with its Strategic Vision for Girls and Women, implementation will also focus on achieving and measuring changes in social norms around women's leadership.

Coherence and cross-Government coordination

23. Initiatives to support and increase women's political participation as a prerequisite for gender equality and democracy are also implemented through other Government Departments, notably the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) as part of its Human Rights and Democracy Programme. The Human Rights and Democracy Report 2013 indicates FCO support for women's political participation in several countries, for example through its Embassy in Manila, Philippines, and in Afghanistan where DFID has committed a total £7 million to support training and skills development for female provincial and parliamentary candidates and elected leaders in 2014 and 2015.^{xv xvi} Coherence of strategic aims and coordination of implementation initiatives developed in-country by DFID and FCO is crucial to ensure maximum impact of project work and therefore the best value for UK taxpayer money.

24. Womankind recommends that the IDC asks DFID what procedures are in place to ensure coherence between FCO and DFID strategic aims to promote and support women's meaningful participation in political structures and processes.

25. Womankind recommends the IDC asks DFID what requirements it has of its Country Offices to report on how it has coordinated its in-country support for women's political participation with that delivered through FCO Embassies and overseas posts.

The UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security

26. In 2006 the UK became one of the first countries to launch a National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security (NAP), which outlines how it will implement United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and associated Resolutions.^{xvii} Womankind welcomes the UK's commitment to putting women's participation in decision-making at the heart of its latest NAP, launched in June 2014. Notably, a specific commitment is made to encourage female voter participation and promoting and strengthen women's participation in elections.^{xviii}

27. However, it is important the new NAP seizes the post-conflict 'window of opportunity' to strengthen the institutional structures which define women's participation, including parliaments. These structures also include the electoral system and legal special measures such as gender quotas.^{xix} However, it is not clear within the NAP whether the UK will contribute to strengthening institutions as an essential component of its work to enable women's meaningful political participation in conflict-affected countries, as no specific commitment to this effect is made.

28. An Implementation Plan outlining how the UK will operationalise its NAP will be launched 'before the end of the year'.^{xx} It is important that this Plan is both coherent with other DFID Operational Plans, and also defines institutional strengthening activities to be carried out in the NAP's bilateral focus countries.^{xxi}

29. Womankind recommends that the IDC asks DFID how it will ensure coherence between the UK NAP's forthcoming Implementation Plan and the revised DFID Operational Plans of the NAP's bilateral focus countries, to be launched in 2015.

30. Womankind recommends that the IDC asks DFID whether institutional strengthening, including parliamentary strengthening, will be included in the activities proposed to increase women's political participation in the six Country Focus sections of the NAP's Implementation Plan.

Pathways of women's political participation – from the local to the national level

31. Previously, the UK NAP focused on supporting women's participation in formal, national-level political processes.^{xxii} However, many of the decisions that affect women's lives are made locally, meaning that women's political and public participation at the local level is an important aim and end in itself.^{xxiii}

32. Womankind strongly welcomes proposals in the new UK NAP to support the active and meaningful participation of women in decision-making, including at the grassroots level. This signifies an important development in the Government's understanding of and support to women's participation in decision-making. Given this progress, we caution against DFID increasing focus on national-level parliamentary processes at the expense of locally-focused democratic strengthening.

33. Nonetheless, Womankind's experience shows that in some cases a pathway to women's participation in national-level processes can be forged from the local level; as such 'bottom-up' approaches which build on women's roles in local decision-making are crucial. For example, a Womankind partner working in Afghanistan supported a number of women to be involved in Community Development Councils, two of whom became committee leaders at district level. Following this they ran for election in parliament and are now both MPs.^{xxiv}

34. DFID can play a key role by supporting women's community-level decision-making, recognising that local leadership enables women to develop the skills required for nomination and election to district and provincial positions. Supporting such pathways also increases opportunities for marginalised and geographically isolated women to gain the skills and experience necessary for entry into formal political structures.

35. Womankind recommends that DFID supports women's democratic engagement and political participation at all levels, recognising both that local-level participation is an important end in itself, and that pathways to women's national-level participation can and must be forged from the grassroots.

What DFID can learn from other donors

36. The Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women (FLOW) fund, set up in 2012 by the the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, is a good example of a dedicated donor government fund aimed at increasing the participation and representation of women in politics and public administration.^{xxv} The successor to the MDG3 Fund, FLOW has a budget of €80.5 million which is divided over 34 projects in four years. As a recipient of FLOW funding, Womankind is currently implementing a four-year programme with partners in Afghanistan, Ghana, Kenya and Nepal, focusing on a range of decision-making structures at local and national levels to increase women's capacity to assume leadership positions. The programme also enhances their role in ensuring the rights and needs of female constituents are addressed.

37. FLOW is unique as a resource focused specifically on increasing women's participation and leadership, in a context where many funds require support for women's participation to be integrated as an 'add-on' component to programmes with a wider focus (eg. 'governance', or 'women's economic empowerment'). FLOW also recognises the expertise and added-value of in-country women's rights organisations, allowing grantees to draw on their locally-relevant knowledge to identify effective strategies to support women's participation in their operational context. By adopting this open approach FLOW avoids being prescriptive about how change happens and allows

flexibility to test assumptions, whilst offering grantees opportunities to gather and share learning and evidence on ‘what works’ to support women’s full and effective participation – including through supporting opportunities for South-to-South learning between grantees.^{xxvi}

38. *Womankind recommends that DFID draws on best practice from the FLOW fund to establish a dedicated and fully-funded workstream aimed at increasing women’s participation and leadership, with an embedded commitment to actively supporting women’s rights organisations to identify and implement locally-relevant strategies for change as well as to develop ‘what works’ learning and evidence.*

39. *Womankind recommends that the IDC asks DFID how it works with donor government counterparts to identify best practice in (1) encouraging cost-effective innovation and (2) increasing the accessibility of funding to women’s rights organisations, particularly funds targeted at human rights and civil society organisations.*

ⁱ Brody, A. 2009. ‘Gender and Governance Overview Report’, BRIDGE (p.14).

ⁱⁱ Inter-Parliamentary Union, ‘Women in Politics: 2014. Available online at: http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wmnmmap14_en.pdf [accessed 5/10/14].

ⁱⁱⁱ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 23 (16th session, 1997).

^{iv} Hoare, J. & Gell, F. (Eds.). 2009. ‘Women’s leadership and participation: Case studies on learning for action’. Rugby: Practical Action Publishing.

^v Dr. Sonia Palmieri, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011, ‘Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice’, Reports and Document No. 65-2011.

^{vi} Inter-Parliamentary Union & United Nations Development Programme. 2012. ‘Global Parliamentary Report: The changing nature of parliamentary representation’. United Nations Publications.

^{vii} Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2014. ‘Financing the unfinished business of gender equality and women’s rights: priorities for the post-2015 framework’. Available online: http://www.cipaf.org.do/pdf/Financing%20the%20unfinished%20business%20of%20gender%20equality_Long%20version.pdf [accessed 5/10/14].

^{viii} World Bank. 2014. ‘Voice and Agency: Empowering women and girls for shared prosperity’. Available online: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/19036> [accessed 5/10/14].

^{ix} Comic Relief. 2012. ‘What added value do organizations that are led and managed by women and girls bring to the work addressing the rights, needs and priorities of women and girls’. Available online: <http://www.gadnetwork.org/storage/Comic%20Relief%20Review%20of%20Value%20Add%20of%20Women-led%20Organisations.pdf> [accessed 5/10/14].

^{x x} DAC Network for Gender Equality (2008) *Issues Brief 3: Innovative Funding for Women’s Organisations* Recommendations included: applications should not be expected to be written in perfect English; applications can be in an language; application forms are kept simple and short; evaluations are timed to suit women’s rights organisations and are participatory and meaningful; and extensive evaluations are not imposed.

^{xi} See ‘Stepping-up a gear for Girls and Women: Updates to DFID’s Strategic Vision for Girls and Women, to 2020 and beyond. A Revised Framework and Narrative’. November 2013. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/298253/Strategic_Vision_for_Girls_and_Women_Narrative_-_November_2013-4.pdf [accessed 5/10/14].

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} Gender and Development Network. 2012. ‘DFID’s Strategic Vision for Girls and Women: A move in the right direction?’. Available online: <http://www.gadnetwork.org/storage/GADN%20Briefing%20%20-%20DFID's%20strategic%20vision%20for%20girls%20and%20women.pdf> [accessed 5/10/14].

^{xiv} For more information see DFID’s ‘Political Economy Analysis How To Note’. 2009. Available online: <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/PO58.pdf> [accessed 5/10/14].

^{xv} Foreign and Commonwealth Office. 2014. ‘Human Rights and Democracy Report 2013, Countries of Concern: Afghanistan’. Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy->

report-2013/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2013#section-xi-human-rights-in-countries-of-concern
[accessed 5/10/14].

^{xvi} For more information about the two projects concerned see: <http://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-204484/> and <http://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-203501/>.

^{xvii} For more information see: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/women/wps.shtml>

^{xviii} UK National Action Plan On Women, Peace & Security 2014-2017. Available online:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security>
[accessed 5/10/2014].

^{xix} Markham, S. 2013. 'Women as agents of change: Having voice in society and influencing policy'. World Bank, Women's Voice, Agency, & Participation Research Series 2013 No. 5.

^{xx} Oral evidence provided by The Rt Hon Baroness Warsi on the Foreign Affairs Committees Inquiry into The FCO's human rights work in 2013. Available online:

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/foreign-affairs-committee/the-fcos-human-rights-work-in-2013/oral/11255.html> [accessed 5/10/2014].

^{xxi} The six focus countries are Afghanistan, Burma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Somalia and Syria,

^{xxii} See Foreign & Commonwealth Office. UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security, Final Annual Review, October 2013.

^{xxiii} Womankind Worldwide. 2013. 'Why women's leadership matters – Key learning from Womankind Worldwide'.

^{xxiv} Hunt, A. 2014. 'Moving forward-recommendations for the UK National Action Plan on women, peace and security'. Womankind Worldwide. Available online: <http://www.womankind.org.uk/download/16569/>
[accessed 5/10/14].

^{xxv} For further information see: <http://www.flowprogramme.nl/Public/AboutFlowPage.aspx>

^{xxvi} For example Womankind has organised two learning events on women's participation and leadership, financially supported by the FLOW programme, bringing together women's rights organisations from Afghanistan, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal and Zimbabwe.