

# MULTI-PARTY CAUCUSES FOR GENDER EQUALITY

A Handbook for Parliamentarians in  
Latin America and the Caribbean





This publication was made possible with financial support from the Government of Canada.

*ParlAmericas is grateful to Dr. Sonia Palmieri for the extensive knowledge shared on this subject matter through the facilitation of inter-parliamentary working sessions held in Ottawa in October 2016, which informed much of the content of this handbook. We furthermore extend our thanks to the UN Women Multi-Country Office—Caribbean who likewise supported this activity.*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

About ParlAmericas.....	4
Introduction.....	6
<b>Key Considerations for Establishing a Gender Caucus.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Defining objectives.....	7
Securing resources.....	8
Enlisting members.....	10
Formalizing the structure.....	11
Monitoring progress.....	13
<b>Regional Case Studies.....</b>	<b>14</b>
Costa Rica: Parliamentary Group of Women Members of the Legislative Assembly ( <i>Grupo Parlamentario de     Mujeres Diputadas</i> ).....	15
Ecuador: Parliamentary Group for Women’s Rights ( <i>Grupo Parlamentario por los Derechos de las Mujeres</i> ) .....	17
Grenada: The Grenada Women’s Parliamentary Caucus .....	19
<b>Further Recommended Reading .....</b>	<b>22</b>

To accompany this guide, ParlAmericas has created a **Strategic Planning Tool for Initiating a Multi-Party Caucus for Gender Equality** which can be found [online](#) or at the back of printed copies of this publication. This tool was adapted from the questionnaire developed by Dr. Sonia Palmieri that is published in [A Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region](#).

# ABOUT PARLAMERICAS



*ParlAmericas is the institution that promotes **PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY** in the **INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM***



*ParlAmericas is composed of the **NATIONAL LEGISLATURES** of the member States of the OAS from North, Central and South America and the Caribbean*



*ParlAmericas facilitates the exchange of parliamentary **BEST PRACTICES** and promotes **COOPERATIVE POLITICAL DIALOGUE***



*ParlAmericas mainstreams **GENDER EQUALITY** by advocating for women's political empowerment and the application of a gender lens in legislative work*



*ParlAmericas promotes policies and legislative measures to mitigate and adapt to the effects of **CLIMATE CHANGE***



*ParlAmericas fosters **OPEN PARLIAMENTS** by advancing the principles of transparency, accountability, citizen participation, ethics and probity*



*ParlAmericas works towards strengthening democracy and governance by accompanying **ELECTORAL PROCESSES***



*ParlAmericas is headquartered in **OTTAWA, CANADA***

The ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality promotes women's political leadership and gender mainstreaming in the agendas and operations of the national legislatures of the Americas and the Caribbean.

Since its creation in 2003, the Gender Equality Network (formerly known as the Group of Women Parliamentarians) has carried out activities and initiatives that bring together legislators from across the hemisphere for the exchange of knowledge and good practices to advance women's rights and gender equality. Through its inter-parliamentary gatherings, the Gender Equality Network has addressed topics of shared importance such as women's

economic empowerment, ending gender-based political violence, electoral reforms to promote women's candidacies, gender-sensitive media and communications, and parliamentary caucuses for gender equality, among others. The outcomes of these activities also inform the development of specialized resources and online communities for parliamentarians.

The Gender Equality Network is committed to creating diverse and inclusive working spaces, encouraging the participation of male allies, and collaborating with women's organizations and social movements towards shared objectives.

# INTRODUCTION

**Parliamentary gender caucuses** bring together legislators committed to advancing women’s rights and gender equality to coordinate their efforts and accelerate progress. There is no set form for these groups; rather, they should be designed to accomplish the specific goals of the individuals seeking to form the caucus, taking into consideration the national socio-political context.

Recognizing the potential these groups hold for achieving positive change, parliamentarians from Canada and five Caribbean countries—Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Grenada, Guyana, and Jamaica—gathered in Ottawa, Canada, in October of 2016 to participate in a [two-day ParlAmericas meeting on creating multi-party parliamentary caucuses for gender equality](#). The meeting was facilitated by

international expert in gender-sensitive parliaments, Dr. Sonia Palmieri. This handbook was inspired by that meeting and has been created to assist other parliamentarians in efforts to establish or strengthen these caucuses.

The handbook has three sections. The first outlines five key considerations to address when designing a gender caucus. Accompanying these considerations are questions to prompt discussion with potential caucus members, as well as recommended strategies to help ensure success. The second section features three case studies of gender caucuses from across the hemisphere to showcase the different forms these groups can take. The final page suggests additional resources that can help support the creation of a gender caucus.

# KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ESTABLISHING A GENDER CAUCUS

## Defining objectives



**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** What gender equality topics are of interest to the potential membership of the caucus?

How do these interests connect to the priorities of civil society groups working towards gender equality? How can priority areas be adapted as targeted objectives for the caucus to pursue?

Most multi-party caucuses for gender equality surface because of the potential these groups hold to mobilize and streamline work in collaborative settings. The specific purposes the caucus is formed to achieve will vary based on identified needs in the parliament or society, and could include **building solidarity** among women members of the legislature, **promoting women's representation** in politics, **mainstreaming gender** in parliamentary institutions and procedures, **drafting and reforming laws** with a gender perspective, **facilitating dialogue** and **raising awareness** on gender issues in political parties and in communities, and/or providing **training, information, or other support** to members.

With an idea of their preliminary goals, it is important that parliamentarians interested in founding a gender caucus **engage a potential membership**. This could be done through an informal initial meeting to gauge if others have

a similar interest in the caucus' establishment. If shared interest exists, the group can then work together to articulate the agenda the caucus will advance. **Collective planning** at early stages is vital to building ownership of and commitment to the caucus by members, which in turn helps to ensure the group's sustainability.

Objectives can be defined based on issues of common interest among the potential membership, and could be informed by an exercise to evaluate the parliament's gender sensitivity. Such an audit could build general understanding of ways in which the parliament could better contribute to achieving gender equality and reveal further strategic causes for the caucus to champion.

The caucus' members should consider ranking objectives in order of precedence. This will further contribute to building the membership's shared vision, and can be useful for future planning processes and resource allocation.

**GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS** are defined by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) as institutions that remove barriers to women’s full political participation and respond to the needs and interests of both men and women in their structures, operations, methods, and work. The *Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments* highlights gender caucuses as mechanisms that assist in this process. IPU has also published a [toolkit](#) to evaluate the gender sensitivity of parliaments.



**STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS:** *Assess if the timing is right to establish a caucus.*

As factors both internal and external to parliament could facilitate or hinder the process, it is advisable to consider whether the timing is strategic for creating a caucus. Citizen demand for attention to gender equality topics or upcoming events like the anniversary of women’s suffrage, for example, could create momentum for the cause. Alternatively, upcoming elections will draw focus to campaigns and could detract from efforts to create a cross-party caucus.

Timing could be evaluated at the initial meeting to determine interest in the project. If the group feels that the time is inopportune but still wants to collaborate on gender equality topics, other options could include informal gatherings or occasional meetings in support of a particular issue, such as creating or advocating for a particular piece of legislation. This may lay the groundwork for a future caucus within the parliament.

## Securing resources



**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** What financial resources, political will, and other support can the caucus leverage within the parliament? Can partnerships be established with other actors to supplement anticipated shortfalls?

Financial resources, research and administrative assistance from the parliament, and support from non-member parliamentarians are all potentially necessary to sustain the work of a gender caucus.

**Financial resources:** Certain initiatives a gender caucus aims to pursue, such as offering training sessions or hosting events, may have associated expenses. If this is the case, members will need to consider how to secure the necessary funding. Options could include seeking a designated budget from parliament, charging a membership fee, or fundraising.



### **Support from the parliament:**

The use of parliamentary facilities and the assistance of parliamentary staff could be beneficial logistical supports for organizing and documenting meetings or other activities. Access to research capabilities, through the parliamentary library or gender bureau if either is available, could also lend specialized expertise when reviewing studies or bills ahead of meetings or debates.

**Support from non-member parliamentarians:** Securing the buy-in of non-member parliamentarians is essential if the caucus' establishment requires a resolution by parliament, and if the caucus intends to contribute to the creation of legislation. Broad support for the caucus will also help to ensure its general sustainability. Caucus members should consider if potential champions, particularly those in positions of power or influence in parliament, can be identified and engaged.

Taking inventory of which of these resources will be required based on the caucus' objectives, and which will likely be accessible, should be done early in planning. This exercise may affect which activities the caucus pursues, or the order in which they are undertaken.



**STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS:** *Create partnerships with actors outside of the parliament to reinforce the gender caucus' efforts and fill resource gaps.*

At the local level, **civil society groups, universities, and gender equality advocates** could all be potential partners to undertake joint initiatives and advance the work of the caucus. Equal Voice, a multi-partisan and not-for-profit organization that seeks to help elect more women to political office in Canada, outlines the following examples:

- Applying public pressure on shared goals or building solidarity around a specific topic
- Disseminating information through civil society channels, such as social media accounts, youth networks, and broader stakeholder groups
- Gauging support for ideas and positions through informal advising

ParlAmericas and other **international or regional organizations** can provide opportunities for a gender caucus to engage on areas of mutual interest with fellow parliamentarians in other countries. These organizations can facilitate technical expertise and the exchange of experiences to inspire new ideas, or help troubleshoot any difficulties the caucus may face.

Partners could also be sought to conduct research or provide access to data to inform legislation or campaigns; facilitate or help design capacity-building sessions; co-organize or sponsor events or initiatives; and/or make connections with other potential partners or support organizations.

# Enlisting members



**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Who will form the caucus' membership and be responsible for coordination? Will male colleagues, the Speaker/President, and/or former parliamentarians be involved? How can cross-party collaboration be sustained?

Interest in joining will be the starting point for determining membership, but the caucus could also encourage particular groups of individuals to become formal members, including men, representatives from all parties, former parliamentarians, and/or members of parliamentary leadership. Active, long-term involvement by each of these groups could strategically benefit the caucus and help achieve its objectives.

Engaging **male parliamentarians** who are allies for gender equality could help build a stronger support base for the caucus and its pursuits. This would be especially valuable if the caucus hopes to advance legislation, increase sensitivity on women's rights, or work to address identified barriers to equality within parliament.

There are similar benefits to seeking a balanced representation of **members from all parties**, as initiatives will likely be better received and more easily advanced through the legislature when there are voices advocating from across party lines. Partisanship can complicate the ability of legislators to come together in undertaking this work, but certain strategies can help prevent or overcome any tensions. Improved cooperation across party lines could positively influence parliamentary culture over time.

In order to **FACILITATE CROSS-PARTY COLLABORATION** within gender caucuses, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International IDEA publication *One Size Does Not Fit All* recommends employing the following strategies:

- Fostering personal relationships among the members of the caucus by encouraging interaction in informal and social venues in addition to in legislative settings
- Ensuring that everyone has access to the same information and an equal say in caucus functioning by establishing internal mechanisms and procedures to streamline decision-making, communication among members, and consensus-building
- Focusing on topics that are less likely to be divisive along party lines, such as the country's progress implementing an international agreement like [CEDAW](#), and encouraging discussion supported by research and data

Parliamentarians have also noted that the caucus' leadership can be used as a mechanism for balance: there could be a co-chair from each of the parties involved, or parties could rotate holding the chair position.

Members of **parliamentary leadership**, such as the Speaker or President of a chamber, can also be critical to promoting support for the group. Parliamentarians have stated that the participation of a woman presiding officer brings gravitas to the caucus, facilitates access to parliamentary and other resources (such as securing speakers for events), and helps to increase awareness for initiatives because of the extensive networks these members often have. Including **former parliamentarians** could have similar advantages; their history of political engagement also means that their involvement would be particularly beneficial for caucuses hoping to promote **mentorship** or conduct capacity-building exercises.



**STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS:** *Create a coordinating or executive group for the caucus.*

Forming an executive group and a mechanism for its selection helps promote the continuity of the gender caucus' work. Its rotation also ensures that members are rallying behind a cause rather than a particular individual. Members should discuss the roles of the different executive committee positions and the length of their terms. Making these decisions among the potential membership of the caucus is a further opportunity to establish collaborative work methods and find consensus.

## Formalizing the structure



**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** *What kind of structure will facilitate the achievement of the caucus' objectives? How formal should its relationship to the parliament be? How will these considerations affect meetings and decision-making processes?*

The caucus is most likely to be an effective tool for achieving the objectives members have outlined if its design is based on these goals and takes parliamentary context into consideration. The exercise of collectively outlining the objectives and the corresponding support available within and outside of parliament can therefore help to determine the caucus structure.

If the primary goals of the caucus relate to influencing policy and legislation or reforming parliamentary procedures or norms, there will be a greater need to engage with other political actors and access resources within the legislature. This will likely require the gender caucus to have a more **formal structure** with a clearly defined relationship to the parliament. In this case, it may be necessary for parliament to approve a resolution to establish the gender caucus. Members will also need to consider how the caucus will interact with other bodies that work on gender equality topics, such as those listed in the strategy box on the next page.



**STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS:** *Clarify the caucus' relationship to other parliamentary groups and bodies.*

There may be other bodies connected to the parliament—including committees, ministries, technical units, or bureaus—whose mandates relate to issues the gender caucus hopes to address. To ensure that efforts on these agendas are maximized, it is important that the gender caucus work in consultation with these bodies to define their relationship. This is also essential to ensuring resources are used as effectively as possible.

**INTERNAL DOCUMENTATION** can be useful to record the main components of the caucus' structure once these have been agreed upon.

A **rules document** can be drafted at the end of a collective planning process to ensure that everyone is in agreement and can provide a tool to resolve future questions about caucus operations. A template for this type of document is included in IPU's *Guidelines for Women's Caucuses* (pages 35-36) and can be adapted to the caucus' particular needs.

A **strategic plan** can clarify the long-term vision and goals of the caucus and how it will fulfill them. The plan should include the objectives and issues to be addressed, what activities will be undertaken, and anticipated timeframes. This document should be updated on a regular basis to guide the caucus' work.

Alternatively, if the main purpose for creating the caucus relates to strengthening trust or building solidarity among women parliamentarians, a formal structure approved by parliament may not be required. Members may decide to pursue a more **informal structure**, along the lines of an association or network.

Once the structure and its relationship to the parliament have been determined, members can address how frequently and where to meet, how to run meetings, and how decisions will be taken (for example, by consensus or by voting). Being a formal body within the parliament may have implications for member eligibility and procedural requirements which should also be assessed.

# Monitoring progress



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How often should the caucus evaluate its progress? What will be the reference point for these assessments? What alterations can be made to the group's structure or activities to overcome any challenges and further advance its objectives?

Periodic **evaluation** will help the caucus to continue to operate with success. Undertaking this exercise annually or at another pre-determined interval will allow caucus members to reflect regularly on how the activities and work undertaken are helping to achieve the caucus' objectives, what has been accomplished, and what challenges have emerged along the way.<sup>1</sup> Evaluation will be most effective with a guiding document like a **strategic plan** to provide a reference for discussions, as well as **metrics** that help measure incremental progress towards a long-term goal.

Adjustments can be made to objectives and working methods based on the information yielded from this exercise. Internal documents should also be amended to reflect any changes.



**STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS:** *Celebrate the caucus' achievements.*

The caucus should regularly share and celebrate its achievements, including through events (which could be held with civil society or international organization partners) and social media. This will help to maintain momentum and the commitment of the membership, and provides an opportunity to acquire additional support for the caucus' work from parliament and outside stakeholder groups.

Caucuses can build **STRONGER INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY** by maintaining records of their achievements and of the practical considerations that affect the group's functioning, according to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). This can be useful in convincing others to join or renew the gender caucus, minimizing disruption to its work between parliamentary sittings, and informing future decision-making.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for Women's Caucuses (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013); pg. 45

<sup>2</sup> A Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2013); pg. 69

# REGIONAL CASE STUDIES



The interviews that follow illustrate the different structures and experiences of three cross-party gender caucuses in the Americas and the Caribbean, demonstrating how diverse these groups can be based on the membership's priorities and the parliamentary context.

**GRENADA:** The Grenada Women's Parliamentary Caucus

**COSTA RICA:** Parliamentary Group of Women Members of the Legislative Assembly (*Grupo Parlamentario de Mujeres Diputadas*)

**ECUADOR:** Parliamentary Group for Women's Rights (*Grupo Parlamentario por los Derechos de las Mujeres*)

# Costa Rica: Parliamentary Group of Women Members of the Legislative Assembly (*Grupo Parlamentario de Mujeres Diputadas*)

An interview with members of the Legislative Assembly

**LIGIA FALLAS**,  
Vice-President (Central America) of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality (2017-present), and

**EMILIA MOLINA**,  
coordinator of the Parliamentary Group of Women Members of the Legislative Assembly (2015-present)



## WHAT MOTIVATED THE CREATION OF A CROSS-PARTY WOMEN'S CAUCUS IN THE ASSEMBLY?

We created the Parliamentary Group of Women Members of the Legislative Assembly (GPMD by its Spanish initials) in order to amplify women's voices in the legislature. There are 20 women in our legislature of 57 members, and this gave us a way to strengthen our work in promoting legislation that benefits women. Creating the GPMD as a mechanism to do this was also influenced by the IPU's *Plan of Action for Gender Sensitive Parliaments*, which our parliament adopted through our participation in the IPU.

## HOW DID MEMBERS AIM FOR THE GPMD TO IMPACT THE PARLIAMENT AND LEGISLATIVE AGENDA?

Our first objective was to strengthen the parliamentary gender infrastructure, which also consists of a technical unit and a parliamentary committee, by institutionalizing the GPMD and ensuring that it would continue to function after our legislative term concludes.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from that, we wanted to further the implementation of the Legislative Assembly's Gender Equity and Equality Policy and work to advance a legislative gender agenda. The three main pieces of legislation we have proposed have been on parity in electoral lists, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and protection for minors against gender-based violence and abusive relationships.

<sup>3</sup> In accordance with Article 107 of the Political Constitution of Costa Rica, parliamentarians can run for re-election in the Legislative Assembly only in non-consecutive terms.

## HOW HAVE PARTNERSHIPS HELPED SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE GPMD?

The GPMD does not have an operating budget, but we receive technical support from the Legislative Assembly's Technical Unit on Gender Equity and Equality and have created an alliance with the Legislative Assembly's Special Committee on Women. Support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Costa Rica has also been critical for our work, allowing us to host events and discussions and to create the action plan we approved on International Women's Day 2017.

## WHO FORMS THE GPMD'S MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP, AND HOW ARE ITS ACTIVITIES ORGANIZED?

The GPMD is comprised of all women parliamentarians regardless of party. It is coordinated by a parliamentarian who is elected by the group's membership. We meet regularly to conduct our work. We do not have a set recurring date or time at which we meet, but we announce in advance when meetings will take place based on what work is being undertaken by the group and the parliament.

## WHAT WAS THE FORMAL PROCESS FOR THE GPMD'S CREATION?

The GPMD was formalized through a Constitutive Act during a meeting of the Special Committee on Women on June 24, 2015. However, this act does not permit the same permanence for the group as a law or reform of the regulations of the Legislative Assembly would. Therefore, the group will not

technically exist after the end of this legislature and the start of another in May 2018. This is why we are seeking to further institutionalize the group, and have proposed that in the next legislature it be comprised of both current and former parliamentarians in order to continue strengthening the group and build on the work we have started.

## WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER THE GPMD'S GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR?

We continue to make important progress in the legislative agenda we have committed to advancing. We recently passed a law that comprised a suite of reforms to strengthen the legal protection of girl children and adolescents from situations of gender-based violence associated with abusive relationships, and we will soon be voting on the parity law, which we hope to have in place for 2018 elections at all levels. We also presented a bill on sexual and street harassment on March 8, 2017, and the creation of this broader initiative included the participation of three civil society organizations, the National Institute of Women of Costa Rica (INAMU by its Spanish initials), the Special Committee on Women, and the Technical Unit.

More broadly, through the GPMD we have created a space for women parliamentarians of different ideological tendencies to come together to discuss and agree upon common objectives. For example, we came to an agreement to request that the leaders of all parties support a decision to only discuss issues that differentially impact women in the legislative plenary on International Women's Day.



# Ecuador: Parliamentary Group for Women’s Rights (Grupo Parlamentario por los Derechos de las Mujeres)

An interview with **GINA GODOY**, President of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality (2015-2017) and coordinator of the Parliamentary Group for Women’s Rights of the National Assembly of Ecuador (2013-2017)



## WHY WAS A CAUCUS CHOSEN AS A MECHANISM FOR ADVANCING WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY?

We formed the Parliamentary Group for Women’s Rights in Ecuador (GPDM by its Spanish initials) because women’s human rights are a priority issue, and it is parliamentary practice to form working groups on issues of importance. The GPDM is currently one of the longest functioning groups in the National Assembly.

## WHAT DOES THE GPDM SEEK TO ACCOMPLISH THROUGH ITS WORK?

The objectives of the GPDM are to promote, contribute to, deepen and incorporate human rights with a focus on gender in legislation, to ensure compliance with the rights and principles of women’s equality and non-discrimination, in both form and practice, which are enshrined in the Constitution and in international doctrine. Achieving equal participation of men and women and a life free of violence are the topics to which we have dedicated the greatest attention, work, and discussion.

*“The GPDM is a space for increasing male parliamentarians’ awareness of the need to strengthen recognition of women’s rights, in their broadest spectrum, in legislation. It functions as a forum to expand political debate on laws from a gender perspective and as a platform for defending human rights. It further allows male legislators to become involved—without taking a leading role—in social agendas from the conviction and understanding of the need to work together to achieve set goals.”*



**DIEGO VINTIMILLA**, coordinator of the Parliamentary Group for Women’s Rights of the National Assembly of Ecuador (2013-2017)

## WHAT RESOURCES DOES THE GENDER CAUCUS HAVE ACCESS TO IN SUPPORTING ITS WORK?

The GPDM does not have an operating budget, but the commitment and political will of the former President of the National Assembly, Gabriela Rivadeneira, were of great benefit when beginning our work. We have also had the support of organizations like UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Ecuador, which allowed us to host forums and promote discussion with experts in the subject matter. UN Women, in particular, has become a permanent ally for us.

## WHAT IS THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE GPDM? WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE?

During the previous parliamentary term, the GPDM was comprised of approximately 70 parliamentarians—women and men—from various political parties. We sought to create a space for all members of the National Assembly who believe that the law is an instrument for justice and achieving positive social transformations to come together, regardless of party, ideology, or any other characteristic.

The Group has had different forms of leadership since its creation, from a single individual serving as chair to a collective group coordinating the group. For most of the last parliamentary term, the coordinating group was composed of 6 legislators—again, men and women—who shared the organizing responsibilities of the GPDM's activities. We encountered certain challenges with this collective approach, but the challenges were greater when just one person was responsible for managing the group.

## WHAT WAS THE PROCESS FOR ESTABLISHING THE GPDM, AND HOW IS WORK DISTRIBUTED AMONG THE COORDINATORS IN DAY-TO-DAY FUNCTIONING?

With the support of UN Women, we first hosted a working breakfast to discuss creating a group, and those that attended the meeting formed the GPDM's first membership. We then informed the President of the National Assembly, which led to the formal recognition of the group, as she and various UN agencies based in Ecuador signed a framework agreement to cooperate in advancing gender equality, which included the creation of the GPDM.

Each of the 6 coordinators had particular interests in different themes within the gender equality and human rights agenda. We assumed responsibilities within the group based on the legislative project that arose and how they aligned with our interests. This allowed us to have a seat at the table from the beginning and follow the process and discussion of the legislation more closely.

## WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE GPDM'S MOST EFFECTIVE WORKING METHODS SO FAR?

I think some of our most impactful work was in reviewing and proposing legislation with a gender lens. We developed an effective process, in collaboration with UN Women, to inform our legislative work. Before bills were drafted, we gathered as much information as we could. In the case of legal reform related to the problem of psychological violence, for example, we brought together members of the legal and justice administration, as well as civil society organizations that work with

victims of violence. This yielded important insight on the topic, helped us create clearer recommendations, and involved a wider array of actors in the process.

In addition, we worked in a variety of ways to build citizen awareness on women's rights. Nationally, when incidents of sexist violence (*violencia machista*) occurred, including those perpetrated by individuals at high levels in the public service, we actively denounced the act and advocated for due judicial processes, and, above all, for reparations for those affected by

the violence. These acts draw the attention of the entire country and allow an opportunity for those unfamiliar with the justice system to learn more about their rights so they can take action if facing such an incident themselves.

Our advocacy also took the form of events, social media campaigns, and engagement with students. We promoted UN Women's HeForShe campaign and hosted special plenary sessions attended by all women parliamentarians on the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

## Grenada: The Grenada Women's Parliamentary Caucus

An interview with Senator the Honourable Minister **BRENDA HOOD**, chair of the Grenada Women's Parliamentary Caucus (2016-present), and **JOAN PURCELL**, chair of the Grenada Women's Parliamentary Caucus (2010-2013)



### WHAT INSPIRED THE CREATION OF THE GRENADA WOMEN'S PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS (GWPC)?

The idea for the Grenada Women's Parliamentary Caucus (GWPC) was developed in 2009 while we were planning for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's representation in parliament. This event inspired us to mobilize current and former parliamentarians and built momentum for the creation of a caucus. A core group began to coordinate the caucus' formal establishment before we held our first Annual General Meeting in 2010.

The GWPC was dormant for a short period, but we re-energized our efforts in 2016 because we felt the caucus still has an important role to play in the Grenadian parliament and in the region. Our busy schedules can make it challenging to maintain the engagement of a large group, but we have a dedicated core membership and the caucus prevails because of the importance of its work.

## **WHAT ARE THE GWPC'S OBJECTIVES? HAVE THESE CHANGED OVER TIME?**

Our membership approved the following as the caucus' objectives during our first AGM:

- To provide a forum for discussion and a platform for action on matters affecting women in the country, regionally, and internationally across party lines
- To develop and establish norms and standards that promote the effective participation of women in Parliament
- To advocate for continued official recognition and acknowledgement of persons who have served in Parliament
- To network with other organizations and institutions concerned with issues pertaining to women and women's participation in political processes
- To promote and help sensitize all parliamentarians to the principles of gender equality in the country, as well as regionally and internationally
- To advocate for legislation and implementation of the National Gender Policy for gender mainstreaming

We have also always seen the GWPC as a means to mentor young politicians, particularly women. Through their participation in various activities, like meetings, training sessions, workshops and seminars, we are able to provide them with insight on the inner workings of the political arena and the preparation necessary to become parliamentarians. Mentorship continues to be an important focus for us, and

we are also working on legislation to address sexual harassment in the workplace.

## **WHAT RESOURCES HAVE BEEN MOST USEFUL TO THE GWPC IN CONDUCTING ITS WORK?**

We have been fortunate to have the assistance of a member of parliamentary staff who was assigned as the recording secretary. We have also benefited from the support of other members of the house, even for the work we have done outside of the parliament. The broader community has been supportive in response to how we have worked to reduce the divisiveness of politics typically witnessed across party lines.

Our personal networks and connections have been vital to our past work, and to reconvening the GWPC in the last year. We were able to arrange the logistics for the meeting and mobilize 50 former and current parliamentarians as participants in our 2016 AGM by dividing up responsibilities and following up personally.

## **WHO FORMS THE MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP OF THE CAUCUS?**

The GWPC members are current and former women parliamentarians in Grenada from all parties. Working across party lines helps build consensus on important issues, and we make efforts to have party balance at our events as well. We also value the involvement of former parliamentarians because we can draw on their expertise, and we wish to recognize the contributions of their years of service. We consider all women parliamentarians

visiting Grenada from other legislatures to be honorary GWPC members.

We have an executive committee that comprises the following positions: chairwoman, deputy chair, honorary secretary, assistant secretary, honorary treasurer, and floor members. All members are elected. Our chair must be a currently serving parliamentarian so that we maintain a close connection to the parliament. We aim to have the chair and the deputy chair from government and opposition respectively, if possible.

### **HOW WAS THE GWPC'S STRUCTURE DECIDED UPON AND FORMALIZED? HOW DOES IT OPERATE NOW?**

We decided on our structure after conducting research on other gender caucuses from around the world and holding extensive discussions among the coordinating committee. We created a rules document to outline the group's name, membership, management, meetings, quorum, a membership fee, voting processes, objectives, the roles and duties of the different members, and procedures for any future alterations to these rules. This was approved at our first AGM. Our first executive positions were elected and installed then as well. We continue to hold an AGM every year, and a core group of members meet once a month.

### **WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE GWPC'S GREATEST SUCCESSES?**

The GWPC has undertaken a number of fruitful activities to achieve our goals. We have published a [collection of profiles](#) of Grenadian

women parliamentarians in celebration of this history, hosted seminars and training sessions with civil society organizations on women's political leadership, and worked with secondary schools to engage youth in discussions and generate awareness on these topics. We have found hosting arts and cultural events in the community to be a particularly effective way to influence wider opinion on gender and politics. A final highlight was the formal celebration of 50 years of women in the Grenadian parliament that first motivated the creation of the GWPC. This event brought together distinguished women from Grenada's history and served as the formal launch for the caucus.

# FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

The following are suggested resources to consult for further information on multi-party caucuses for gender equality and processes for their establishment.

## Publications

**A Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region** (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2013)

**Guidelines for Women’s Caucuses** (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013)

**Legislative Change Agents: Multi-Partisan Caucuses** (International Republican Institute, 2014)

**One Size Does Not Fit All: Lessons Learned from Legislative Gender Commissions and Caucuses** (National Democratic Institute and International IDEA, 2010)

## Online resources

**Multi-party Caucuses for Gender Equality** (presentation prepared by Dr. Sonia Palmieri)

**PARLINE database: Specialized Parliamentary Bodies** (Inter-Parliamentary Union)



International Secretariat of ParlAmericas  
710 - 150 Wellington St., Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 5A4 Canada

Telephone: + 1 (613) 594-5222 | Fax: + 1 (613) 594-4766

[www.parlamericas.org](http://www.parlamericas.org) | [info@parlamericas.org](mailto:info@parlamericas.org)

