



Women Count



IFES works to promote equal rights, justice and political participation for women around the world.

A society is only able to reach its full potential when women and men are fully engaged as equal partners in their families, workplaces and communities.

Around the world, women bravely embrace the rights agenda set by the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an international convention adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. Women understand they must lead efforts to ensure women's rights and gender equality are codified in their democratic institutions.

Despite institutional barriers and deep-seated social and cultural beliefs, women remain determined. Key to their success is their own power to lead democratic processes in decision-making roles. Equally important is meaningful engagement and support by all members of their communities, as well as the government institutions mandated to ensure equality.

Over the last 25 years, IFES has worked to ensure women and men participate equally in political processes as voters, candidates, election administrators and civil society leaders. IFES pursues gender equality by providing electoral assistance; conducting voter and political education campaigns; and encouraging civic involvement and advocacy. From Honduras to Libya, Guinea to Cambodia, and Pakistan to Côte d'Ivoire, IFES empowers women and men to lead communities together.

Based on international human rights standards and best practices, IFES promotes political participation, justice and equal rights for women and men around the world.



Research

Building on its successful Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) project, IFES continued to support women's empowerment and civil society's capacity to advocate for reform through collecting new quantitative and qualitative data on gender issues. In November and December 2012, IFES conducted a nationwide survey of the adult female population in Libya with a sub-sample of male respondents. Through this initiative, unique information was made available to women's advocates and activists in a country where there is a dearth of gender-disaggregated statistics and research capacity is weak.

The IFES survey found high interest in political engagement among women, with 71 percent indicating they would like to engage in political activities. However, when asked if they had engaged in political activities in the previous year, only 10 percent say they did, indicating a gap between interest and participation. Findings also identified a

gender gap in civic and political participation, with women's voter turnout in the most recent national elections 22 percent lower than men's. While data suggests a greater level of gender parity in higher education, with similar majorities of women and men completing secondary education or obtaining a university degree, the survey reveals an employment gap. Men are one and a half times more likely to have a job than women, even at the same level of education.

Despite these gaps, the promise of a robust women's empowerment movement is burgeoning. Nearly 80 percent of women polled agree the status of women in Libya is good or very good. This research is invaluable for promoting gender equality. The newly-available data supports building women's advocacy and leadership capacities. It equips women's groups with essential data on the status and experiences of women from different backgrounds and walks of life in Libya.

Advocacy

In Côte d'Ivoire, IFES has been working with women-led civil society organizations, improving the capacity of women to develop and convey policy priorities. Women have also connected with other stakeholders through the Women's Network, an entity founded in October 2012 through the Global Women's Leadership Fund facilitated by IFES.

The Women's Network has been building links with the Ivorian Independent Election Commission (CEI) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CDVR) to promote women's leadership and mainstreaming gender issues in decision-making. These bodies identified shared concerns about women's participation in political and electoral processes. As a result, the Women's Network developed a declaration that makes recommendations on access to information; mechanisms for meaningful participation of women; and gender parity and quotas.

IFES then conducted a training seminar on advocacy techniques for members of the Women's Network, CEI and CDVR. This training built skills in advocacy, negotiation and networking that will help these organizations implement the recommendations made in the declaration.

IFES believes the Women's Network is building the foundation of an enduring, inclusive platform that will make tangible progress in improving gender equality and women's empowerment in Côte d'Ivoire.

"By focusing on advocacy, IFES provided this great opportunity to reinforce our capacity so that we can help strengthen the voices of our sisters and ourselves to reject inequality in our communities."

— **Dosso Mafelina**

Member of the Women's Network, Côte d'Ivoire



Leadership

Representation of women in Cambodian election management bodies (EMBs) and in leadership positions is low. Although Cambodia is signatory to the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the constitution of Cambodia guarantees equal rights, women are still underrepresented in political and administrative functions due to various cultural, educational and financial considerations.

While women face few obstacles and are free to make their own choices at the ballot box, there is a gender imbalance in election administration. Since 2010, IFES has been implementing the Women's Progressive Leadership in Election Administration program, which provides training and professional development to increase the credentials of women as staff of election commissions at all levels.

In the 14 provinces already covered, program graduates have been given information on the importance of women's participation in the electoral process, the role of EMBs and practical negotiation

"I believe that if these trainees participate as electoral administrators in the future, there will be more transparency in every election."

— **Touch Setha**

Deputy Chairperson of Kandal Provincial Election Commission, Cambodia

and leadership skills. Participants have also been able to apply lessons from this program to their current careers and use connections to lobby and apply for new positions in the provincial electoral sector.

IFES has trained over 462 women across 14 provinces; 23 were women with disabilities and 51 were indigenous women. Of the 196 graduates who applied for election administration positions during the June 2012 commune council elections, 124 worked as electoral administrators and 108 have been accredited by the National Election Committee as local election observers, while 25 stood as commune council candidates, of whom six were elected.

Elections

Statistical data from the Philippine Election Commission (COMELEC) shows women outnumber men both as registered voters and in voter turnout. While women are more active at the polls, they have shied away from seeking leadership positions in election administration.

The constitution of the Philippines guarantees equality of women and men, and all government agencies are mandated to mainstream gender and development policies. IFES is currently assisting the COMELEC in institutionalizing its gender and development strategy. IFES is also facilitating the implementation of the Gender and Development Plan, which includes conducting a gender audit, developing trainings that use gender-fair language and promoting laws that protect women from abuse and harassment.

On the other side of the world, the United Nations Development Programme reports women in Haiti make up more than 52 percent of the population, and

approximately 44 percent of households are led by women. However, only 4 percent of parliamentarians are women.

IFES programs in Haiti promote the participation of women, not only as voters, but as active participants in the electoral process. To develop strategies that mainstream gender and empower women to be more active in the electoral process, IFES assists the Transitional College of the Permanent Electoral Council (CTCEP). IFES provided training and technical assistance to include more women as election workers, establish gender focal points within the Permanent Electoral Council and ensure senior management includes women in decision-making roles.

IFES is also coordinating with political parties to increase the number of women participating as poll workers; developing targeted messages in voter education campaigns; and encouraging more women to vote on Election Day.



About IFES

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) supports citizens' right to participate in free and fair elections. Our independent expertise strengthens electoral systems and builds local capacity to deliver sustainable solutions.

As the global leader in democracy promotion, we advance good governance and democratic rights by:

- Providing technical assistance to election officials
- Empowering the underrepresented to participate in the political process
- Applying field-based research to improve the electoral cycle

Since 1987, IFES has worked in over 135 countries – from developing democracies, to mature democracies.

For more information, visit www.IFES.org.

IFES promotes women's political participation in every region of the world.



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