



Gender Network Newsletter: April – July 2005

Since its establishment in May 2003 as the Women's Working Group on Gender (WWGG), the network's membership has expanded to more than 200 members. The network's activities have continued to be guided by the six priorities identified by the WWGG:

- Advocacy on gender equality
- Regional workshops on topical issues
- Enhancing women's access to decision-making positions
- Strengthening women parliamentarians' capacity
- Addressing HIV/AIDS, especially mother to child transmission
- Taking advantage of ICT.

Although the network activities got off to a slow start, it is with great enthusiasm that we report on the momentum that has since been generated and is expected to continue. Just to refresh our memories, three regional workshops had been planned for execution between 2003 and early 2004, but the timeframe had to be extended to 2005. The West Africa regional workshop was held in Mali in March 2004 and the East Africa workshop was held in Rwanda in September 2004. Due to elections in most Southern Africa countries in 2004, the last of the regional workshops was postponed to May 2005 in Malawi.

One of the exciting activities addressing the issue of women's access to decision-making positions was the conference organized to facilitate a forum for Ugandan women to develop a strategy for retaining their current level of representation in Parliament, should the anticipated political transition from a movement to a multi-party political system materialize. The major outcome of the conference was the decision to draw up women's agenda for presentation to all the emerging political parties for incorporation in their election agenda. This strategy acknowledges the importance of women's presence in Parliament first, for promotion to decision-making positions within Parliament. We hope to follow developments with a keen interest and share with you the results, which we hope will be equally exciting.

Political developments in Niger in December 2004 made history by raising the level of women's representation in Parliament from one to fourteen. The Parliamentary Centre is honoured to have facilitated a workshop¹ on how women could campaign effectively, which contributed to this phenomenal increase in women's representation. We

¹ The workshop was held in October 2004

congratulate the women Parliamentarians in Niger and all the men who provided the much needed support to translate that dream into reality.

In order to assist aspiring women candidates in future campaigns, the Parliamentary Centre is in the process of developing a handbook on how to launch an effective election campaign as a woman political candidate. The handbook will have some examples of how women in Niger succeeded in raising their level of representation from one to 14 members. The handbook will also have a testimonial from the Niger veteran woman MP. As we develop this handbook, we would appreciate your individual stories on challenges you faced as women candidates and how you managed to overcome those obstacles.

April 2005 and Beyond

Parliamentary Centre and Pan Africa Parliament

The beginning of the new fiscal year for the Africa Program at the Parliamentary Centre was heralded by an event which will hopefully synthesize gender equality initiatives throughout Africa. The Africa program seized the opportunity created by the inauguration of the Pan Africa Parliament (PAP) to create a platform for a stronger and more effective articulation of gender issues on the continent. The gender network organized a workshop for the Committee on Gender, Children and People with Disabilities (Gender Committee) of the PAP in April 2005 to develop a strategy for its engagement on gender issues within the PAP.

The goal of the workshop was for the Gender Committee members to develop a strategy for mainstreaming gender within PAP and for establishing a gender mainstreaming linkage between PAP, the regional and national parliaments. The workshop was attended by all members of the Gender Committee, Chairs and Vice Chairs (or a representative) from all other Committees of PAP as well as representatives from Oxfam and Women's Rights Coalition in Africa. The workshop commenced with a gender sensitivity presentation which was designed to raise participants' awareness on gender equality issues. Having been equipped with the basic knowledge on gender equality issues, participants were exposed to the various international legal instruments dealing with gender issues. A preliminary strategic plan has been received, which will hopefully be circulated to members as soon as it is finalized. We would encourage all network members to regularly visit our website (www.parlcent.ca) since the final document may be posted on the website before you receive it.

The first follow-up activity to the April workshop will be another workshop scheduled for September 2005 in Libya. The Gender Committee strategic plan will be circulated as soon as it is made available to PC and hopefully, well in advance of the September workshop, whose proceedings should benefit from your comments on the plan. We are fortunate to have one of our network members, Honourable Loice Bwambale from Uganda as the Chairperson of the PAP Committee on Gender, Children and People with Disabilities. We have confidence in her capable leadership, which should strengthen the collaboration between our network and PAP, for some tangible results.

Virtual Gender Sensitivity Training of Trainers

We have embarked on an exciting mode of training which not only reduces costs and allows us the flexibility to achieve more with fewer resources, but enables us to train participants in more than one country, simultaneously. We conducted our first training of trainers session on 5 May 2005 by videoconferencing which connected Ottawa, Canada with Kampala, Uganda. The training had originally been designed to involve Uganda, Tanzania and Nigeria, but Tanzanian MPs could not join us due to pressure as the national election preparations gather momentum. As for Nigeria, the room which was to accommodate our session was not accessible at the time convenient to MPs in Uganda. Since the training was a follow up to the conference held in Uganda for the women parliamentarians to develop a strategy in collaboration with civil society for retaining their level of representation, a decision was made to proceed with only Ugandan participants.

Considering the time the VC was held, after working hours in Uganda, the participation by 14 of the original number of 15, was quite impressive and a strong indication that the Ugandan women parliamentarians attach to their representation in parliament. The training was delivered through a PowerPoint presentation which provided a definition of gender, but emphasizing the distinction between sex, which is a biological difference between men and women; and gender which, refers to roles assigned to different groups of people in society. The emphasis on the definition was essential for suggesting mechanisms for changing attitudes which form the basis of the social roles. I am sure we all concur that most people appreciate more benefits in any situation than costs, which is the approach suggested to participants for changing the electorate's attitudes towards women, if people are to give women candidates equal opportunity in Uganda's forthcoming elections. The objective of the training was to equip participants with the tools necessary for them to develop their own training program for community leaders working at the grassroots level. We shall be monitoring developments on this initiative and hope to bring you positive results. For a full report on the video conference, please refer to the Parliamentary Centre website under Gender Network.

Southern Africa Regional Workshop

This last of the three regional workshops as agreed to by the WWGG, was held in Blantyre, Malawi from 31 May to 2 April 2005. The workshop was attended by two men parliamentarians from South Africa, a man and a woman parliamentarian from Zambia, three women parliamentarians from Zimbabwe and a female member of Zimbabwe civil society, and fifteen participants (12 women and 3 men) from the host country. The workshop topic confirmed the concern about poverty reduction throughout Africa. Just like the two other regional workshops, the Malawi workshop was on, '**Micro Finance as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction**'. The workshop facilitated the sharing of information among parliamentarians on policies and approaches being taken to reduce poverty in their respective countries. The challenges facing use of micro finance as a strategy for reducing poverty among women range from the social roles expected of women to effective management of micro finance. As a strategy for emphasizing the importance of women's participation in the development process, a decision was taken to submit statements to the various legislative levels within the region and in Africa in general.

Statements will thus be presented to the Southern Africa Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF), Pan Africa Parliament (PAP) and to the African Union (AU). Honourable Callista Chimombo, who is the secretary for Malawi women's caucus was appointed coordinator of the regional efforts to submit the referred statements to the indicated bodies.

I am sure you share our enthusiasm and anticipation of the results of this initiative, which again we hope to share with you as they unfold. The full workshop report is also available on the PC website.

Professional Development

In today's fast-paced world, we are constantly reminded of the importance of continuous self-improvement and that we have to keep running in order to maintain one's position in the race. At the Parliamentary Centre we are attempting to maintain our position too through professional development; and to that extent, Annie Gingras (Program Officer) has just returned from participating in a conference on women's policy research – *When women gain so does the world* held in Washington, USA from June 19 to 21. Christine Ivory (Regional Program Coordinator based in Senegal) and Lillie Chitauro (Gender Equality Program Coordinator) participated in an international conference organized by Wilton Park in London, UK on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For the benefit of those who may not be familiar with the MDGs, these are 8 goals set by the United Nations as the global strategy for reducing poverty by half by the year 2015. The conference brought together participants from the academia, bureaucrats, aid donors, civil society and parliamentarians.

In addition to the two PC representatives, the Program Coordinator for the Poverty Reduction Network, Dr. Rasheed Draman also participated. Apart from logistical and administrative arrangements to ensure the comfort of the invited parliamentarians, Dr. Draman and Lillie Chitauro participated as resource people. For more information on Wilton Park conferences, you can visit their website, www.wiltonpark.org.uk. From the gender perspective, the presentation focused on the feasibility of the attainment of the MDGs in view of the extensive poverty among women which is a function of roles assigned to them by society. Among the conclusions, was the need for a change of attitudes in society, which is obviously long-term and hence the call for a concerted effort, if the goals are to be achieved.

We welcome inquiries from network members that may be interested in acquiring more information about the Millennium Development Goals and their relevancy to gender equality.

Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)

The Gender Network was represented by Annie Gingras at the Women's Network Annual Meeting as well as the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie's 31st Session held in Belgium from July 4 to 9, 2005. The significant development of the conference was the adoption of the Declaration from the Women's Network on the

Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

For the benefit of the network members who are not familiar with the APF, it is the French speaking countries' equivalent of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The Parliamentary Center's first association with the APF was through its representatives' attendance of the APF 30th Session held in Prince Edward Island, Canada in July 2004. The invitation to the Parliamentary Centre was facilitated by Honourable Viviane Compaoré in her capacity as President of the Women's Network and also as a very active member of the ACPSP² Gender Network. It was at that session the APF members agreed to adopt CEDAW as a central theme for the APF Women's Network. As a first step to operationalize the implementation of the declaration, a workshop was convened in Bamako, Mali in October 2004.

Despite Honourable Compaoré stepping down as President, our collaboration with the APF is expected to strengthen through her continued support of the ACPSP Gender Network. We hope to follow the progress on the implementation of the APF Declaration through the Women's Network chapters that have been charged with the responsibility for monitoring the implementation of CEDAW in the various APF member countries. As developments evolve in the implementation of the CEDAW in APF countries, we hope to share these with the rest of the gender network members.

² Africa-Canada Parliamentary Strengthening Program managed by the Parliamentary Centre and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency's Canada Fund for Africa.