



# The Role of Parliaments in Financing for Gender Equality



New York, 27 February 2008

A parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union  
and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women  
on the occasion of the 52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Conference Room 4 – UN Headquarters, New York

## Inaugural session

**Senator Mónica Xavier (Uruguay), President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians**, welcomed the participants, noting with pleasure that they represented more than 50 parliaments. She stressed how important it was that parliamentarians should participate in the processes of the Commission on the Status of Women. It was crucial that they should take part in the discussions, learn from one another and influence the decisions taken and resolutions adopted. Even more important was that they should return to their home countries determined to ensure that governments followed up on the resolutions adopted and commitments undertaken.

The presence of several female Speakers of Parliament was especially welcome. Their number was growing, and it was an initiative of the IPU that female Speakers in particular should take part in the meetings on gender issues, because for a woman to reach the highest office in a country's Parliament sent a message to girls and young women saying there was nothing to which females could not aspire.

She drew attention to the map produced by the IPU showing the situation of women in governments and parliaments on 1 January 2008. It was a dramatic presentation, and she urged the parliamentarians to distribute it widely to make the situation of women known. Comparing the present map to the former one, from 2005, she pointed out that while the percentage of women had increased in the organs of power, they were still far from a position of equality with men: only 17.7% of parliamentarians worldwide were women, and only 16.1% of government ministers. The inequality shown in those figures was closely linked to the paucity of resources dedicated to combating discrimination against women and achieving equality between men and women.

She urged the parliamentarians, too, to lead discussions in their countries, particularly in educational settings and with the media. The more people, particularly young people, were aware of the issue of gender equality, the sooner the desired changes would be achieved.

**Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women**, acknowledged the very important work of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. She was particularly pleased that the IPU had decided to focus these annual meetings on the priority themes under consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), providing a unique opportunity for parliamentarians to contribute to the Commission's work.

Expressing her appreciation for the different kinds of activities that the Division and the IPU had undertaken together, she welcomed in particular the new edition of the map showing women's participation in politics. It was a very useful tool, and indeed it would be desirable to have a similar map for each area of women's participation in decision-making: in the media, in academia, on corporate boards, and so on.

In carrying out preparatory research for the current session of the CSW on financing for gender equality and empowerment of women, the Division had discovered that very little attention had been given to the cost of inequality. What was inequality between men and women costing governments, countries, communities and individual people? No-one knew. It had also found that there was very little assessment of resource needs. While it was laudable that there were now so many policies on gender equality, so many strategies and action plans, very few of them were accompanied by a real assessment of what resources would be needed to ensure that they were fully implemented.

The work of the CSW was only as good as the degree to which it was implemented on the ground. While the Commission could come up with new recommendations on financing for gender equality and empowerment of women, there would be no impact on the lives of women and girls unless those recommendations were taken back to individual countries, disseminated and implemented. Parliaments and parliamentarians were critical in that process.

#### **Key note address:**

**Dr. Gertrude Ibengwe Mongella, President of the Pan-African Parliament**, made the following introductory remarks:

The IPU is to be congratulated on its role in the advancement of women in politics. Before the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, of which she had been Secretary-General, the IPU published the first map showing the situation of women in parliaments. But it was when she studied the map that she realized that political equality did not necessarily equate to economic equality. At that time, women accounted for 10% of the parliamentarians of her country, Tanzania, which was the same proportion as Canada. But the economic situation of women was vastly different between the two countries. Now, the new edition of the map shows Tanzania to be in the category of 25-30% of women parliamentarians, comparable to Germany, but again, the disparity in the economic empowerment of the women in those two countries is vast. The map shows vividly the need to move beyond the honeymoon phase of merely being women in parliament and get down to the business of advancing the empowerment of the women of the country.

Accountability is the key factor, but it is a complex one. On the one hand, governments have to be held accountable for fulfilling their commitments in the area of gender equality, and here parliaments have very specific mandates as to the supervision and oversight of the executive's work. But at the same time, parliamentarians themselves are accountable to the voters who have elected them. To what extent have parliamentarians met that duty of accountability, so as to ensure proper distribution of resources for gender equality and women's empowerment? Distribution of resources is controlled by certain laws, and if parliamentarians do not change those laws, the doors will never open for gender financing which empowers women.

*It is not enough just to open the door to the rooms of power - we have to get inside and rearrange the furniture!*

Giving an example from Tanzania, she pointed out that while huge amounts of money go to construction projects, the money initially came from the efforts of women growing cotton and coffee. How much money goes back to the women themselves? Or does taxation serve simply to siphon off resources from the poor women who were generating the resources in the first place?

Parliamentarians, particularly women, have to ask themselves whether their purpose in seeking election is truly in order that parliamentary decisions can make a difference in people's lives. If that is not the case, then women parliamentarians might just as well be co-opted members, doing the same as they had always done before Beijing.

## **Session One: Maximizing national wealth in favour of women and gender equality**

*Ways and means of making the best of national wealth and potential so as to support women and gender equality initiatives. Parliament's role in public finance management, with a particular focus on gender-sensitive budgets as a means to ensure better allocation of resources in favour of gender equality. Policies and mechanisms that can be developed or strengthened to maximize women's economic input and participation.*

### **Theme 1: National mechanisms to support women's economic input**

What national mechanisms? What types of partnerships? What is the role of parliaments and what initiatives can they take to make good use of their country's wealth to secure financing for gender equality policies?

Ms. Simel Esim, Senior Gender Specialist in the Arab States Region, International Labour Organization, offered the following ideas on the theme:

There is a need for increased allocation of resources to national machineries for women, and for support to the work of civil society and advocates working on gender equality, but it is difficult to see how such an allocation can be advanced under the new architecture for Financing for Development (FfD), that started at the Monterrey Conference in 2002 and was embodied in the Paris Declaration of 2005. The processes are becoming consolidated, better mainstreamed, better rationalized, but gender equality and women's rights concerns are missing from the governance, management and monitoring structure of FfD. It is difficult to see how there could be meaningful participation of women and gender advocates, and there is an absence of gender targets and performance indicators for monitoring quality implementation. The access rules and tools are too complicated for democratic participation of the women's movement, civil society or trade unions. Too high a degree of economic literacy is required to navigate around the new landscape, or for parliamentarians to explain to their constituents how to do so. In consequence, there is increasing disillusionment in advocates for gender equality and women's rights.

Who are the economic decision-makers? At the macroeconomic level they are the banks and the ministries of economy, finance and development. Economic power is becoming more concentrated. Do parliamentarians feel that they have economic decision-making powers? Some analyses seem to indicate that the role of parliamentarians is not as strong as it used to be, or as it could be. At the institutional level, the economic actors are senior people in companies, in government, in education, but at this level there are always fewer women than men.

Where women do have economic power is at the microeconomic level, as consumers. There is a need to think creatively and innovatively about what it means to have consumer power. Consumers as a collective can have an impact on prices, for example by boycotting products whose pricing is unreasonable, or conversely supporting those manufacturers who demonstrate corporate social responsibility. Parliamentarians have a responsibility to make deals with prosperous markets in those sectors – crafts, agriculture – where women predominate.

In looking at the impact of a country's budget on women, there is a need to differentiate what sort of women are involved: young, old, educated, uneducated, employed, unemployed? Women are not a homogenous group. Reflection is needed on how countries' constructions of masculinity and femininity are changing. Men as providers and women as caretakers: that static picture is what a lot of economic decisions are built on, which is why household work and care responsibilities are excluded from economic decision-making. Those perceptions need to change.

Gender budgeting does not mean earmarking a certain percentage of the budget to women, but there is room for innovative earmarking. For example, given the linkage between alcohol over-consumption on the one hand and violence against women on the other hand, governments could earmark alcohol taxes to finance measures to combat violence against

women. Another question is how to tap into women's savings: some countries have considerable amounts of women's wealth, sitting in banks, and the question is how to turn it into investing for strategic gender interventions.

## Theme 2: Parliaments and gender-sensitive budgeting

*What are gender-sensitive budgets? What is Parliament's role in this process? How can gender-sensitive budgeting provide an opportunity for an effective means of responding to the needs of women?*

Ms. Lydie Err, Member of the Chamber of Deputies, Luxembourg, Member of the PACE Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, put forward the following considerations:

The topic of gender-sensitive budgeting will entail training of women's political leaders, as well as guidance on how to communicate the idea to the world outside parliament, so as to make public opinion aware that the budget is an instrument of equality policy as much as an instrument of economic policy.

***Gender-sensitive budgeting is first and foremost a question of political will.***

Like any political innovation, gender-sensitive budgeting is first and foremost a question of political will, only secondarily one of financial resources. Gender-sensitive budgeting needs sex-disaggregated data. For example, to know whether a given electoral law favours the election of women or not, there is a need to learn for whom women vote, information that could be obtained by marking voting slips with the sex of the voters.

Gender-sensitive budgeting is only possible if budgetary procedures allow a qualitative approach, whereas they are normally purely quantitative accounting exercises. Governments always have other priorities, and therefore it is up to parliamentarians to set objectives and indicators to measure progress. Hence, the need for a budgetary procedure permitting analysis going beyond the figures. An evaluation of the present situation and of the one that it is desired to reach will require statistics that are currently not available.

It is sometimes claimed that gender-sensitive budgeting is in conflict with other cross-cutting factors such as sustainable development. On the contrary, they are complementary, and indeed have the same requirements: disaggregated statistics, objectives, indicators. Thus those calling for a budget based on sustainable development and those calling for a gender-sensitive budget should work together to achieve both goals.

Gender-sensitive budgeting can bring about genuine equality between men and women and at the same time improve the utilization of human resources, the decision-making process, and the functioning of democracy. If so many things can be achieved by gender-sensitive budgeting, why is it not already being universally practiced? Because while benevolent lip-service might be paid to gender equality in the abstract, as soon as it becomes an issue of money, it automatically becomes much more complex. That is one of the hidden reasons for the limited success in this area.

Much of the disparity in incomes between men and women results from the fact that a large proportion of women's time is spent on unremunerated work, and this inequity could be remedied by gender-sensitive budgeting. If parliamentarians refuse to approve gender-sensitive budgets, then governments will be obliged to change their approach.

Ms. Winnie Byanyima, Director of the Gender Team, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP, presented the following ideas:

Gender-sensitive budgeting is not a matter of women's needs or interests; it is a means of examining the budget and the policies behind it, to see who is being served, who is bearing what share of the tax burden. Men or women do not form a homogeneous group. One subgroup's problem might be unemployment, another's might be oppressive cultural norms, a third's might be disabilities resulting from conflict. Gender-sensitive budgeting helps parliamentarians to serve their constituencies better, giving them tools that enable them to

know how the budget which they pass is serving the different categories of people they represent.

The three main goals of gender-sensitive budgeting are firstly to raise awareness of the issues that affect men and women similarly and those that affect them differently; secondly, to improve policy by identifying gaps and raising them as policy questions during the budget debates; and thirdly to make governments accountable for delivery of suitable programmes to deal with the issues.

The first stage of implementing gender-sensitive budgeting is to study the situation of men and women in practice, in cooperation with civil society and specialists in the topic, looking at the difficulties they face as they try to play the roles that society has ascribed to them. The second is to look at the policy documents that come with the budget, and to ask whether the policy addresses the different needs, and the similar needs, that were identified in the first stage. This quickly leads the government to develop policies that are gender-specific rather than trying to be universal. The third stage is to ascertain whether the policy is addressed in the budget. Has it been addressed only rhetorically, or is there actual expenditure set aside for it?

One might start with simple data, such as school enrolment rates and retention rates, and then see how effectively the government is delivering the service of education and whether the price is fair for the service delivered. There is no need for this process to be complex.

It is critical that parliamentarians should examine not only the expenditure side but the revenue side as well. Because as a result of globalization, governments in developing countries no longer have the possibility to collect money from where they used to, namely levies on imports. Increasingly, they are relying on indirect taxation, but such taxes tend to penalize poor people disproportionately, and poor women in particular, because the greatest part of women's income is spent on basic household needs, including food. Also, taxation tends to lean heavily on those who cannot organize and do not have a strong voice. The tools of gender-sensitive budgeting will enable parliamentarians to identify such discrepancies and rectify them through parliamentary action.

#### *General discussion*

In the ensuing discussion, many delegates described the measures and strategies that their countries were adopting to mainstream gender issues, promote gender equality, and combat discrimination or violence against women. Some described the activities of various bodies under the government that had the specific mandates of addressing such gender-related issues. In some cases a major political event, such as independence from a colonial power or the end of a long-running internal conflict, had been the occasion to anchor women's rights firmly in the constitution. Others described publicity campaigns organized by governments and NGOs to increase public awareness of gender issues, or to achieve a more equal balance between work and home life, for men as well as women. Some delegates described changes in the law of their country intended to advance equality between men and women. Several of the participating parliamentarians welcomed the reminder they had received from some of the panelists of their duties of scrutiny, oversight and accountability.

The conclusions from the debate included the following:

- Today gender responsive budgeting is still relatively little known and performed.
- Producing a gender-responsive budget requires multi-level cooperation. It is fundamental that members of Parliament should be thoroughly informed and committed to achieving gender equality. Public opinion needs to be convinced that resources employed for the advancement of women also serve the advancement of society as a whole. Making the general public sensitive to the issue is a further responsibility for parliamentarians.

- Individual budgetary programmes for women's issues – health, violence, poverty and so on – are not sufficient on their own. There is a need to go one step further, and ensure that government policy as a whole considers indicators on its gender impact.
- A stronger presence of women in parliament and administration is a prerequisite for promotion of women's economic empowerment and input, although their increased presence does not automatically, in and of itself, ensure success.
- Some delegates have observed a tendency in women politicians, the longer they stay in the circles of government or parliament, to become more and more part of the establishment and less and less interested in advancing women's causes. It is time for women to undertake a commitment of solidarity to one another.
- The issue is not just the numbers of women in parliament, but their empowerment to speak out in favour of the women's agenda. To make their voices heard and advance their agenda, women parliamentarians need to learn to adapt to a rough, competitive political environment, something that some of them may not find easy or natural.
- Cross-party women's caucuses can play an important role in providing a comprehensive and coherent approach to gender mainstreaming, including in relation to financing for gender equality
- Women parliamentarians have passed through the door, but they need to ask themselves whether they have sufficiently rearranged the furniture in the room.

## **Session Two: Financing gender equality in politics**

*Gender equality in the political field and financial requirements to achieve that objective. Financial challenges faced by women in politics, whether as candidates or as members of parliament; the respective roles of various stakeholders in reallocating or enhancing financial support to women; political institutions and the question of how to fund an effective mainstreaming of gender.*

### **Theme 3: Financing women's political participation**

*What are the funding challenges faced by women running for election? What financial assistance could be provided, and by whom? What is the role of public funding? What is the role of political parties?*

Ms. Sharon Hay-Webster, Member of the House of Representatives, Jamaica, presented the following thoughts on the theme:

In Jamaica, women face many challenges in penetrating the proverbial glass ceiling. Despite the fact that over 70% of the graduates of tertiary institutions in the country are female, both Houses of Parliament, as well as local government, are largely male-dominated. This trend continued during the most recent general election in November 2007, in which very few female candidates were selected by either of the two major political parties. The People's National Party, for example, fielded only 10 female candidates as compared to 50 male ones.

Several realities contribute to the maintenance of the male-dominated status quo in political representation in Jamaica. Firstly, women in Jamaican society perform the bulk of unpaid household and voluntary or community work, which means that their contribution to the national wellbeing, although essential, is not measured by society in economic terms. Secondly, it is only in recent years that women in Jamaica have been attaining some visibility in the upper echelons of corporate power, which provides the opportunity for the social networking necessary to attract campaign funding from corporate sources.

Thirdly, by virtue of their household responsibilities, including the nurturing of children, women have much less leisure time for the kind of recreational activities that are amenable to the social networking necessary to attract private funding for political campaigns. Fourthly, the entrenched norms that govern the public conduct of females in Jamaican society make it impossible for them to utilize certain campaigning methods that are open to male political candidates, such as having a social drink with electors in bars and engaging them in political discussions in a relaxed atmosphere. In Jamaican society, it would certainly be counter-productive for any female candidate for political office to attempt to do the same. Fifthly, much of the political campaigning in Jamaica takes place in the late evenings - a reality which also poses a challenge to any female candidate, particularly those with family obligations.

The practical results of these limitations are that, generally speaking, female political candidates in Jamaica have much less access to the sources of private funding for their political campaigns than do their male counterparts. The end result is that comparatively few women in Jamaica offer themselves for selection as candidates for political office; and fewer still are actually selected by their party of choice to run for office. Women must use their collective wisdom across party lines to engage financial support, but they must also bond across political barriers on national issues, which will change some of the negative perception of politics amongst the younger women and bring about their buy-in to the political process. It might also reduce much of the strident ferocity of political campaigning.

Ms. Colette Tamko, Gender and Governance Program Coordinator, WEDO, presented the following ideas:

Women's political participation in decision-making in government and parliament is the only way to ensure that the issues of concern to women will be properly addressed. In most countries access to financial resources is a crucial factor, for both men and women, in the decision to run for office. The many challenges that women face in standing for election include a lesser access to financial resources than men.

Public funding is one of the ways that women in some countries finance their political campaigns. However, it has to be cautioned that in many cases public funding is given to the political parties, within which women tend to have a subordinate status, with the decisions being made by the men. The latter will sometimes provide financial resources to a female candidate, but usually only if the chances of her winning the campaign are almost certain. Additionally, most donor organizations are male-dominated.

With their lesser access to direct resources, in other words actual money, women rely heavily on indirect resources, notably unpaid volunteer work in support of their candidacy. Men, on the other hand, can call widely on both direct and indirect resources.

***Unless women are adequately represented in government and politics, the international community will not meet its commitment to eradicate poverty and to achieve gender equality by 2015.***

Colette Tamko

Additional challenges that women face include finding someone to take care of the home while they are out campaigning. Women will also be more reluctant than men to engage the financial resources of the family in a political campaign. Having to face returning to their workplace in the event that they do not win the election is also something that women are reluctant to envisage. All of these factors hold women back from running for public office.

One solution might be the establishment of limits on the amount of money to be spent in campaigning, together with establishment of equitable time limits on the campaign itself, in the light of women's additional commitment to home and family. Political parties should adopt statutes that are gender-sensitive, incorporating gender equality criteria into internal transparency and accountability mechanisms. A further positive factor would be the designation of a specific amount of resources to be reserved for women candidates.



#### Theme 4: Financial support for gender-sensitive institutional building

*How to effectively mainstream gender in public institutions, such as parliaments? How to provide support to women in parliament? How to finance gender mainstreaming mechanisms? What is needed? Is the budget of parliament analyzed from a gender perspective?*

Ms. Pregs Govender, former Member of Parliament, Chairperson of the Panel for the Independent Assessment of Parliament, South Africa, used extracts from her book, "Love and Courage, a Story of Insubordination," to illustrate how much insubordination, how much refusal to accept the old way of doing things, has to be brought to bear by women seeking to make their way in male-dominated parliamentary institutions.

Subordination and subservience are extremely important to patriarchy, as ways of keeping women from asserting their rights and changing their lives. When she entered the National Assembly for the first time in 1994, she quickly discovered that the new women members were going to have an uphill fight. There was not even a women's toilet in her part of the Assembly building, but she soon brought about an equitable redistribution of services.

**"WOMEN'S TOILET!"**

Sign placed by Pregs Govender on the door of one of the only two toilets – both men's – on her floor of the National Assembly

Over and above the lack of facilities, the all-male gymnasium, and the lack of provision for women's presence in general, there were also the long hours of work past midnight, and the style of working characterized by pugnacious debating and heckling. The 30% of women MPs – the quota demanded and secured by the ANC party, and one of the highest in the world in 1994, were appalled at finding themselves in what appeared to be a schoolboys' debating society of hot air and rhetoric. They were appalled, too, to discover that a significant portion of the work of the Assembly was performed for the benefit of white-male-owned businesses, and to find also that many of the male MPs would stroll into the Assembly in the afternoon after working at their farms or business in the mornings.

Gradually, however, things turned round, on all fronts. The males-only gymnasium was abolished, a crèche was introduced where MPs' children could be looked after, working hours were made more reasonable.

Slowly, there were improvements on the political front, too. Initially, her attempts to have the budget examined from a gender perspective were disparaged and ridiculed, and she was patronizingly told that the Finance Committee dealt with macroeconomic issues; questions on women's issues and poverty were the purview of units covering health and welfare. Gradually, however, with support from a few colleagues, she swung the Finance Committee round to examining the budget in terms of its impact on women and the poor.

Other innovations followed. The Government's statistical service came to see that women could no longer remain statistically invisible and that it needed to include their unpaid contribution to society, such as subsistence farming, in its economic calculations. By introducing the collection of gender-disaggregated data, the statistical unit became able to track the lives that were changing, and how they were changing.

She stressed that gender-sensitive budgeting does not entail creating a separate women's budget, but is a way of ensuring that the entire budget is examined for its impact on both men and women. Getting a commitment to gender-responsive budgeting could not just be the work of committees on gender or on women: it must be the task of every single parliamentary committee. In the case of South Africa, she and her colleagues tried to build capacity by developing questions which they gave to every committee to be asked of the relevant ministry. Having such lists of questions gave the committee members the confidence that they could actually start engaging with the budget. Where it was difficult to work with a whole committee, a small number of contacts in it, perhaps two, would be identified.

Analysis of the budget starts with analysis of policies, with asking what is the issue in women's lives that needs to be resolved. The next question is whether there is a policy to address that issue, and whether that policy is gender-sensitive? Are the resources that are necessary being provided to implement the policy?

In terms of resources, it is important to examine not just the expenditure side, but the income side as well. For example, if the government is obtaining its resources from user fees, for example for education or health, that will mean that poor people are going to be disadvantaged in terms of access to those essential services. Thus the policies adopted to collect money are as important as the choices being made on how to spend it.

Finally, once those resource choices have been made and those allocations made, the question becomes one of identifying what has changed in the situation. Has there been any improvement in the problem that was identified right at the start?

One negative development of the present time is that decision-making has shifted to unelected and unrepresentative institutions which protect the interests of capital above human rights. But at the same time, women have been elected into representative institutions such as parliaments in greater numbers than ever before. The challenge now is to find ways of using the power that those numbers bring, and to translate that into transforming the institution of parliament itself, so that it is effective at changing the lives of women for the better.

#### *General discussion*

In the ensuing discussion, many delegates gave information about their countries' plans and programmes to assist women to face the challenges of running for political office. Such plans and programmes provide varying kinds and levels of capacity-building for a successful political campaign. Other programmes give grants or loans to assist with the campaign costs. In some cases, a certain percentage of the central funds provided to political parties is earmarked for capacity-building, particularly for use by women. Other delegates described the changes being made by governments, under pressure from women parliamentarians, in areas such as family-friendly policies, working hours and facilities more attuned to the rhythms of politicians who are mothers, and various efforts both to open up opportunities in society and to make the political process more adaptable and more acceptable to women.

The conclusions from the debate included the following:

- Tasks such as housework or child-rearing are still obstacles to political life. However for women to advance, they will still need crèches for children, labour-saving devices to give them more time, and so on.
- Women start the political process at a disadvantage, through being neither founders of political parties nor positioned at the higher levels within them. Lacking decision-making power, they are assigned at the whim of the party leaders to electoral districts where their chance of succeeding is low.
- However, in some countries things are changing, slowly but surely. The male leaders are losing their traditional authority, the political parties are loosening their grip on the candidates as more and more independent candidacies are presented, and women themselves are creating political parties or leading existing ones.
- In some cases the changes needed to improve women's political chances have to come from government, in others from the political parties. It may be necessary for electoral law to be changed to allow, or compel, the parties to be more responsive to the political aspirations of women.
- Quotas can be useful tools to break the glass ceiling and facilitate women's access to decision-making positions. One danger of some types of quota systems, such as reserved seats, is that women may be regarded as second-class parliamentarians because they have

not secured their seat by competing in the rigours of an election. An alternative approach to advancing women's political careers is to have the government set aside financing specifically for female candidacies.

- Donor organizations and United Nations bodies can support women during elections, assisting them not only with money but also with logistics of running a campaign, as well as with voter education.
- As a matter of accountability to their electors, parliamentarians should reject the budget if they do not agree that it is gender-sensitive. If they are told that they have to toe the party line, they should form alliances with women parliamentarians from different parties. Women have common goals and aspirations, even if they oppose one another politically.

#### *Final conclusions*

Conclusions from the parliamentary event as a whole included the following:

- Achieving gender equality will require both economic resources and a display of political will and tenacity. It will also require training and capacity-building, of Parliament as an institution, of the parliamentarians themselves – both men and women – and of their technical and advisory staff.
- It will be necessary to develop knowledge in economic areas, to obtain disaggregated data and to establish indicators with which to measure progress. Indicators can also show that a policy is failing, demonstrating the need to change it.
- To ensure that the voice of women parliamentarians is heard, alliances must be created both within and across parties, as well as alliances outside parliament, which can bring about change through synergy and coordination.
- If a country does not have a gender-sensitive budget, its parliamentarians must ask why not. No budget is neutral. Parliamentarians have to use the leadership that the people have conferred upon them to pressure governments and question institutions. It is never time to accept the status quo.
- In addition to their legislative role, overseeing the actions of the executive is another important part of parliamentarians' mandate. They have a duty to monitor the effects of government programmes against firm objectives and indicators.
- The structure of the political parties is a key factor. Transparency is needed in order to guarantee the participation of women in the parties and to facilitate their reaching and retaining public office.
- In seeking a gender-sensitive budget, women parliamentarians must be prepared, initially, to be disparaged and patronized. But if they intend to make a difference to women's lives, they have to be able to affirm the political courage to act in the interests of the poorest and least powerful. It is a matter of accountability to those who have elected them.