



## Policy Brief: **Promoting Male-Female Collaboration in Legislatures**

*Written by Jessica Gomez with Carla Koppell*

***This policy brief is part of a series derived from a three-year field program on the role of women in Rwanda. More broadly, these briefs provide policymakers, donors, and program planners with strategies for the consolidation of democracy in post-conflict societies.***

Women are capturing an increasing share of seats in post-conflict legislatures around the world. Evidence indicates that they are vital to ensuring that countries make necessary social investments in children's and women's rights, health care, and education; however, these lawmakers are more likely to succeed when they collaborate with male counterparts and when issues are framed as concerns to both sexes. Thus, the international community can help consolidate democracies by fostering alliances among male and female legislators.

Women parliamentarians in Rwanda demonstrate the value of such collaboration. Rwanda is at the top of world rankings of women's political representation; today, 56 percent of its elected lower house of parliament is female. Female parliamentarians have consistently worked across ethnic and political lines. In 1996, they created a cross-party political caucus, the Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians (Forum des Femmes Rwandaises Parlementaires, or FFRP). Emboldened by their 2003 success and concerned for human rights, in 2005 the FFRP began developing legislation to address gender-based violence. In August 2006, FFRP leadership and four male co-sponsors introduced the "Draft Law on Prevention, Protection and Punishment of Any Gender Based Violence" in Parliament. This was the first substantive bill written and presented to parliament by Rwanda's legislators.

Strategy and principle led the FFRP to include male colleagues in all phases of the law's development—from grassroots consultations that generated data about the extent of the violence to the introduction of the bill in parliament. To build alliances with male parliamentarians, women carefully framed the issue in a non-threatening manner and engaged men as fellow advocates rather than potential perpetrators. Describing the need for legislation, they spoke about the ways in which gender-based violence victimizes men and women, boys and girls. Inviting men to co-sponsor the bill and vocalize their support during the debate allowed the women to promote understanding and gain widespread endorsement of the bill. The participatory nature of their policymaking created a foundation of popular and parliamentary support for eventual passage and implementation.

This lesson of Rwanda reaches far beyond East African society, to anywhere men's cooperation is essential for women's success—that is, everywhere. Those looking to strengthen post-conflict democracies should promote women's efforts to address social issues by fostering cooperation among men and women in politics.

## Findings and Recommendations

<b>Finding:</b> Legislatures gain legitimacy and credibility when they reflect the composition of society.	→	<b>Recommendation:</b> Support the implementation of electoral law and constitutional quotas and reserved seats for marginalized groups, particularly women.
	→	<b>Recommendation:</b> Support the implementation of electoral law and constitutional quotas and reserved seats for marginalized groups, particularly women.
<b>Finding:</b> International support is indispensable to the creation of a strong legislative branch and inclusive lawmaking in post-conflict settings.	→	<b>Recommendation:</b> Fund programs that build the capacity of members of parliament to produce and promote legislation. Such efforts may involve providing professional staff for members or committees, training on legislation drafting, and educating both parliamentarians and citizens on the roles of the legislative and executive branches.
<b>Finding:</b> Cross-party caucuses moderate the influence of parties' agendas and promote the cross-fertilization of ideas. For success, caucuses must allow any interested legislator to participate (i.e., they should not be limited to certain parties or to individuals named by political parties).	→	<b>Recommendation:</b> Support the creation of cross-party caucuses, emphasizing the value of inclusive governing structures.
<b>Finding:</b> Having public consultations on legislative topics builds the legitimacy of government, connects parliamentarians with constituents, generates useful data for drafting legislation, and sensitizes the public on policy issues.	→	<b>Recommendation:</b> Encourage consultative policymaking, especially on socially sensitive issues.
	→	<b>Recommendation:</b> Allocate funds to pay for consultations with constituents in connection with pending legislation.
<b>Finding:</b> Women's caucuses, and caucuses in general, are useful channels for programs and funds to strengthen legislatures.	→	<b>Recommendation:</b> Support cross-party women's caucuses financially and technically.
<b>Finding:</b> When parliamentarians purposefully engage across gender lines to pass legislation, the relevance of an issue is highlighted and collaborative policymaking is encouraged.	→	<b>Recommendation:</b> Ensure that all programming for legislators involves men and women.
	→	<b>Recommendation:</b> Ensure that training for members of parliament includes the value of and approaches to working with colleagues of the opposite sex.
<b>Finding:</b> Women can lead in promoting democratic governance.	→	<b>Recommendation:</b> Support programs to enable women to fulfill their potential as legislators. An emphasis on skills such as public speaking, law drafting, advocacy, coalition building, and proposal writing will pay particularly high dividends.