

## WOMEN AND POWER

### *The Big Picture*

#### In Canada

- Women's empowerment has many dimensions and women can be involved in decision-making in many ways — as parents and family members, community activists, consumers, employees, union members, business owners and members of government, non-government and private sector organizations.
- Most women in Canada now participate in the labour force and have access to their own income, which enhances their influence in the household and in public life. They still spend more time caring for children and household however, which increases their time pressure.
- Canada has a well established and influential women's movement but because women have less time and income than men, and because Canada is such a large and diverse country, organizing to have voice in public policy is difficult.
- Women are continuing to make progress in attaining high-level positions in the public and private sectors, although it is not even or rapid.
- Canada has a wealth of data and a growing body of research on gender equality to inform decision-making but some gaps exist, especially regarding advances made by visible minority, Aboriginal or disabled women.

#### Around the World

- Women's under representation in positions of power and decision-making is linked to women's overall unequal status in society and to structural barriers within political, economic, cultural and social systems in society.

- Many gender biases emanate from inequalities at the household level and in social norms (*World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, 1999)
- In many developing countries and economies in transition, the harsh socio-economic or political realities limit women's ability to participate in political activity. In some countries, "everyday life is so harsh and mere survival in a precarious economic situation or a situation of armed conflict is such a challenge that the questions on participation in politics hardly arises". (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1999)
- Women still place a great deal of emphasis on involvement in non-governmental and community-based organizations as a means to power and influences, especially where barriers to traditional routes to political leadership are strong.
- Participation in local and provincial level bodies is more feasible for women as it has less impact on family life than participation in national bodies that can be great distances from home.

### *Facts and Figures*

#### In Canada

- Finding time for public life is still a challenge for women. In 52% of families in which both partners had full-time employment, women were responsible for all daily housework and in only 10% of families was there equal sharing. And women still perform the vast majority of child-related work in all family types.
- As of June 1999, women made up 19.9% of the Members of the House of Commons and 29.5% of Members of the Senate. Of Canada's Cabinet Minister, nearly 1/4 are women. In provincial and territorial



legislatures, women represent 20.11% of the Members. Within the federal public service, 1 in 4 Deputy Ministers is a woman. (*Women and Men in Canada: A Statistical Glance*, 1999)

- Among federally appointed judges, 20.7% are now women, up from 15% in 1991. Women also increased their representation among lawyers and notaries 27% in 1991 to 31% in 1996. In 1999, Canada appointed the first woman Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.
- Women are also gaining in positions of influence in the business world. From 1994 to 1999, women's representation in senior management positions increased from 19.8% to 26.8%. Their representation in all managerial categories remained the same at 35.1%. In the professional category, women's overall representation has dropped slightly from 52.2% to 51.8% in areas such as nursing and teaching. There were increases in other categories such as medicine, dentistry, natural science, engineering and mathematics and business and finance.
- Women hold 12% of officer positions in Canadian corporations (690/5,746); approximately 25% of Canadian corporations have no female corporate representation and out of 560 of the largest corporations, 12 are female-led. (Catalyst Census of Women Corporate Officers in Canada)

### Around the World

- Representation of women in top-level political decision-making is roughly equal to 1995 levels in national governments, but women's share of these positions in the UN secretariat and in the diplomatic corps has increased.
- At lower levels, women are participating in politics and public life in increasing numbers, due in part to the introduction of quotas, targets and affirmative action policies by governments and political parties, but mainly due to the efforts of women's organizations and networks, which have grown immensely.
- As of March 2000, women were 50% of the electors and 13.4% of the members of legislatures worldwide. Women hold an average of 7% of cabinet posts, double that of 1987. (InterParliamentary Union, March 2000).
- In Eastern Europe, women's representation dropped from 29% in 1989 to just 7% in 1998 (IPU, *op. cit.*)

## Towards Equality

### In Canada

- Each of Canada's major political parties has established programs to encourage and support women federal candidates. Measures include earmarking campaign funds for women, including grants for child care, household help, lost wages and campaign costs and mechanisms to achieve greater gender parity on executives, governing bodies and committees.
- The new *Employment Equity Act* that came into force in 1996 continues to apply to private sector employers under federal jurisdiction and now also includes almost all employees in the federal public sector. It strengthens efforts to ensure that women have access to the full range of occupations and opportunities for promotion.
- The 1995 *Federal Plan for Gender Equality* includes a commitment to a gender-based approach. This policy directs that future legislation, policies and programs will include analyses of the differential impacts on women and men. Efforts to support capacity-building for this activity across government include training, best practice models and pilot projects.
- *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* recognizes that Aboriginal women need to be involved in decisions regarding the future of their communities. The Canadian government provides support to Aboriginal women's groups both on and off the reserve, to promote networking, coalition-building, leadership training and participation in decision-making at the community, provincial, regional territorial and national levels. Priority is given to projects that facilitate greater participation in the policy and strategic development of Aboriginal governments and organizations on self-government.
- Since 1995, Canada's major funding program on gender equality issues has supported over 1,500 initiatives developed by equality-seeking organizations, involving thousands of women and relating to a wide range of issues from violence against women and girls and human rights, to poverty, education and training, and unpaid work.

- Canada recognizes women's diversity by developing relationships and providing financial support to immigrant and visible minority women's groups.

### Around the World

- Seventy-five action plans to implement the Beijing Platform for Action (87%) from all regions refer to women in power and decision-making with actions focused on specific mechanisms to increase women's voice and representation in power structures. They include mainstreaming, institutional arrangements, enabling environment, training, public information campaigns, and monitoring and statistics. (UN Review and Appraisal)
  - Canada has been a strong advocate of efforts to increase the number of women in decision-making positions and to achieve the Beijing Platform for Action target of having women hold 50% of managerial and decision-making positions in the UN Secretariat by the year 2000. Canada promotes these objectives in a number of international fora, including the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
  - Through CIDA, Canada supports leadership training for women political candidates and organizations fostering greater participation of women in democratic politics. For example:
    - in Colombia, 28% of the candidates who received training were elected in the most recent elections, and even those who lost gained valuable experience;
    - in India, a comprehensive development project provides training and counselling for women newly elected to village councils in addition to assistance in health, income generation and microcredit. The project also provides leadership training for women's clubs, girls' groups and grassroots workers in 200 rural villages;
    - in Haiti, an education and training project has facilitated the formation of 8 groups with a regional management committee, as well as their participation in a Women's Federation, a coordinating body that has just received national recognition.
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