



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE G

WOMEN IN POWER & DECISION MAKING

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES G

Objective G.1 Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.

Objective G.2 Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

(181)'The power relations that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning without which it is highly unlikely that a real integration of the equality dimension in government political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.'

(Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA))

OVERARCHING CONCERNs

While there has been a small increase in some areas of women in decision making institutions with an increase to 30.7%, they have not reached the stage where they can decisively influence the policies and priorities of the major political parties and our public institutions. Most progress to date has been in the public sector. Despite good government initiatives in this area, such as Leadership grants and EOWA research, there remain key gaps in women taking up positions of authority.

Data shows that while there is more than 30% female representation in the national government, less than 30 per cent of Local Government Councillors are women; only 20 per cent of senior management roles are filled by women; and only 7 per cent of Council Chief Executive Officers are women. Principal areas of concern for women Councillors are demands on their time and the ability to balance public and family life, exclusion from informal decision making outside meetings as well as harassment, bullying and sexist remarks.

For women on Boards, in a recent report by the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women, it was stated, "One of the key findings in EOWA's 2008 Australian Women in Leadership Census was that women hold 8.3% of Board Directorships in the ASX200 companies (125 seats out of 1,505), which compares with 8.7% (129 out of 1,487) reported in the 2006 Census and 8.2% (119 out of 1,456) reported in 2004.

Forty nine percent of ASX200 companies have at least one woman Board Director which is almost unchanged from 50% in 2006, 50.3% in 2004 and 51.5% in 2003.¹⁰ The Report unequivocally stated that the "overall trend is slightly downwards" and that the "number of seats held by women has not kept up with the increase in overall number of board seats."¹¹

While women are not yet equally represented in senior positions in society, they can and do positively influence important decisions, in government, the community sector and in business, and should have increased opportunity to do so. Female Directors lift the performance of corporate boards and are more likely to turn up to meetings. Research has found that closing the gap between female and male employment across all sectors would boost Australia's gross domestic product by 11%.

EOWA's Report, Pay, Power and Position: Beyond the 2008 EOWA Australian Census of Women in Leadership released in 2009 added further support to this finding reporting that "Between 2006 and 2008, the number of board seats in ASX200 companies increased from 1,487 to 1,505, while the number of seats held by women decreased from 129 to 125." It added that "while the number of individual women serving on ASX200 boards has increased since the first Census, the rate of change has been so slow that without significant improvement, women will remain substantially under-represented on company boards for decades." (Rodgers-Healey, D (2009) 'Women into Boards'; Australian Centre for Leadership for Women p10)

Key barriers to women in positions of authority are a lack of access to experiences that will provide the recognition of expertise, insufficient effective mentoring opportunities and restrictive criteria for board membership, sexual harassment and the culture of boards generally.

Furthermore there remains a lack of diversity among the women who are in positions of authority. Indigenous, lesbian, refugee, CALD, women with disability and young women are often excluded from decision making committees and other bodies. Such, groups' interests are often represented by male community members who neither consult with, nor represent, the position of women and girls. The lack of women in decision making produces and prolongs a climate which disadvantages women. Focussed and targeted mentoring and training programs are required to enhance the opportunities into leadership and decision making roles for women from diverse backgrounds.

GAINS

- Australia has affirmative action legislation and is working towards strengthening ways in which the processes of consensus building, strategic alliances, and dialogue can be used to encourage organisations to look more critically at their work practices, and introduce policies and procedures that provide as many opportunities for women as have been traditionally provided for men.
- Anti-discrimination laws in Australia exist at both federal and state levels of government. At the federal level, separate legislation is in place for race and gender discrimination (Racial Discrimination Act 1975; Sex Discrimination Act 1984).
- An active review of Women's Alliances and the role they will take in representation and decision-making, by the Office for Women will seek to ensure representation for both mainstream women's issues as well as groups representing specific target groups and issues.

- ✿ There are a number of registers for women wishing to gain board placement such as 'AppointWomen' that matches qualified and experienced candidates to vacancies on Australian Government decision-making bodies, and 'Women on Boards', is a national program to improve the gender balance on Australian company boards.
- ✿ Australia has its first female Deputy Prime Minister, The Hon Julia Gillard, in the national government and there are currently more women in Cabinet than ever before. The Australian government has provided almost half a million dollars for a range of projects to help improve the participation of women in the nation's Local Government councils and shires.
- ✿ EOWA has developed Pay Equity Resources including a Pay Equity Audit Tool to assist companies address issues of pay equity.
- ✿ On 5 September 2008, Quentin Bryce was sworn in as Australia's twenty-fifth Governor-General. As the first woman to take up the office, she remains a pioneer in contemporary Australian society, and one who brings more than forty years of experience in reform, community building and leadership to the role.
- ✿ Three from seven High Court Judges in Australia are women. Justice Susan Maree Crennan (VIC), Justice Susan Mary Kiefel (QLD) and Justice Virginia Margaret Bell (NSW).
- ✿ The Hon Tanya Plibersek, Minister for the Status of Women, has made 'Women in Power and Decision Making' one of her three priority areas.
- ✿ FaCHSIA Leadership funding through the Gender Equality Fund.

GAPS

- ✿ There continues to be a lack of available sex disaggregated data to measure and inform programs and policies for women in leadership and to the integration of women in the mainstream of civil and civic activities and processes.
- ✿ Approximately a third of organisations covered by the EOWA Act are not meeting their responsibilities by reporting to Government on what they are doing to improve equal opportunities for women at work.
- ✿ Workplace flexibility continues to be seen as 'solutions to the 'problem' of women's employment rather than a means of supporting women and men in managing their full range of carer responsibilities.
- ✿ The gender pay gap has a significant impact on women's lifetime earnings, with women two and half times more likely to live in poverty in their old age than men.

EMERGING ISSUES

None noted.

SUGGESTED UN LANGUAGE FOR KEY PRIORITY AREAS OF ACTION

- ✿ Urging all governments to examine party structures and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women.
- ✿ Calling on governments to develop initiatives that allow women to participate fully in all internal policy-making structures and appointive and electoral nominating processes.
- ✿ Urging governments to incorporate gender issues in their political agenda, taking measures to ensure that women can participate in the leadership of political parties on an equal basis with men.
- ✿ Calling on governments to commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, and in the judiciary, including, *inter alia*, setting specific targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action, in all governmental and public administration positions.
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- ✿ Urging governments to develop career advancement programmes for women of all ages that include career planning, tracking, mentoring, coaching, training and retraining.
- ✿ Urging governments to restructure recruitment and career-development programmes to ensure that all women, especially young women, have equal access to managerial, entrepreneurial, technical and leadership training, including on-the-job training.

UN REFERENCES

BPFA

Strategic Objective F.1 167 (a)

Strategic Objective F.3 177 (b)

Strategic Objective G.1 Action 190 (a) ; Action 191 (a) (b) (c) ; Action 192 (f) (g)

B+5 OD

B+5 IV Action 55, 58, 63, 66 (a) (b) (c)

CEDAW

Article 4, 7, 10, 11

MDGs

No reference found on these issues

Reference in other documents

E/ESCAP/BPA/2009/CRP.1 para. 15 (q) (r), 30, 39

GA Resolution 58/142

CSW Outcomes Documents 2005 – 2009

E/CN.6/2006/15 para. 7 (i)

E/CN.6/2007/9 para. 14.3 (b)