

ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT THE ADOPTION OF TEMPORARY SPECIAL MEASURES IN THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA



In Ethiopia, UNDP and UN Women collaborate closely to foster a conducive environment for women’s political participation and empowerment. From mid-2017 to 2022, they worked through the Governance and Democratic Participation Programme (GDPP). Additionally, the Supporting Election for Ethiopia’s Democratic Strengthening (SEEDS) project, which ran from June 2019 to December 2022, further bolstered their efforts. Together, these initiatives supported a campaign advocating for Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) in election processes, aiming to elevate women’s involvement in politics and their representation in elected roles.

Ethiopia’s 1995 constitution provides for the principle of equality before the law between all persons and prohibits any discrimination on the grounds of gender (Article 25). The Ethiopian constitution ensures the political participation and representation rights of its citizens in elected roles. Article 38 stipulates that every Ethiopian, without any discrimination—including on the basis of sex—has the right to participate in public affairs. This can be either directly or through representatives chosen without compulsion. Furthermore, citizens have the right to vote, be elected in periodic elections for any office across all levels of government, and, of their own volition, join a political organization.

The constitution recognizes “the historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia” and states that to remedy this legacy, women are entitled to affirmative measures which shall enable them to compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in political, social and economic life as well as in public and private institutions (article 35). Accordingly, the Government shall ensure the equal participation of women and men in all economic and social development endeavours (Article 89).

Despite these provisions, there are no legislated gender quotas guiding electoral processes and regulating political parties in Ethiopia. However, a voluntary gender quota of 30 percent on candidate lists was adopted by the ruling party, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front/EPRDF (who later became the Prosperity Party) for national and local elections. This was the result of strong political will and commitment from the ruling party’s leadership. As the ruling party won most of the seats in 2015¹ and 2021² general elections, women representation in the House of Peoples Representatives reached 38.8 percent³ and 41.31 percent⁴ members respectively. No other political parties have so far adopted similar gender quotas.

In 2018, Abiy Ahmed’s rise to power ushered in a series of reform measures that revitalized the political landscape. He facilitated the release of political prisoners and journalists, appointed Birtukan Midekssa—a former opposition party leader and political prisoner—as Chair of the Ethiopian National Election Board, and revised several restrictive laws. Among these changes was the reform of legislation that had previously constrained CSOs from advocating for human rights, including women’s rights. These transformations fostered a conducive environment for UNDP and UN Women to actively support governance reforms, emphasizing inclusive political participation.

The previous three decades were marked by limited political and civic spaces. The governance deficits were manifested among others by weak political parties and democratic institutions unfamiliar with their role and responsibility within a modern democracy. CSOs had also limited capacity to engage in influencing meaningful changes within the civic, political and electoral sectors. Besides, the country lacked an adequate pool of resource persons to both advocate for and promote women’s rights to participate in politics, to undertake various assignments required to generate evidence and generate adequate knowledge to help inform the design of the much-needed advocacy efforts and campaigns.

While Ethiopia’s Sixth General Elections were initially anticipated for May 2020, they were postponed until June 2021 as a direct result of the challenges of conducting the election during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

UNDP’s role in the adoption of TSMs

In the pre-electoral phase of the Sixth General Elections scheduled for 2020, UNDP and UN Women began their efforts with designing a capacity building programme for women members of political parties to among, build their capacities to compete successfully in electoral processes and to enhance their awareness on the importance of TSMs. The training programme was implemented in partnership with the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) and the Network of Ethiopian Women’s Association (NEWA) and were organised in two rounds from October to December 2019, targeting 80 women

1 The 5th general elections held on 24 May 2015 to elect officials to the House of Peoples' Representatives resulted in the victory for the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which won 500 of the 547 seats. Allies of the EPRDF won the remaining seats. Sadly, these elections were not deemed to be wholly free and fair.

2 The 6th general elections were to be organized in 2020. They were deferred to 2021 due to the COVID 19 pandemic. The 2021-elections resulted in the victory of the ruling party (prosperity party) who controls 454 seats out of 471 seats. These elections were judged to be free and fair and with a significant turnout of voters.

3 <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wip2015-e.pdf>

4 https://data.ipu.org/content/ethiopia?chamber_id=13389. As elections could not be held in all constituencies in June and September 2021 due to security reasons, data may change when elections are completed in the remaining constituencies.

members of political parties. This training programme was the first training since the restructuring of the Board and the opening of the political space in Ethiopia.

The capacity building programme fostered a sense of empowerment among women members of political parties who wanted greater control over their future political career development. To this end, they agreed to build a sisterhood coalition that transcended respective party lines. They consequently established, with the support of the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), a Consortium of Ethiopian Women Political Party Members. The Consortium is a cross-party entity with a mission to advance women's political participation on issues of particular concern for women party members and to promote women's leadership at all levels within political parties.

Other capacity building trainings were also organized during the electoral phase, between March and May 2021, in four rounds, in collaboration with the Network of Ethiopian Women's Association. The trainings reached women politicians from all registered political parties in Ethiopia. A total of 366 women members and leaders of political parties participated in the various training rounds. The trainings had multiple objectives. In the short-term, they aimed at preparing women candidates to run successful electoral campaigns. In the mid-term, they aimed at enhancing women members of political parties' awareness on TSMs and at empowering them to influence their respective parties regarding their involvement in the diverse political processes the country was going through. The trainings prepared also women members of political parties to proactively engage in the internal reforms their parties were likely to initiate. A specific focus was put on increasing women's leadership in decision-making positions through TSMs.

In the same vein, UNDP and UN Women jointly organized during the pre-election phase, a conference on women's political participation to promote women's participation as candidates in the 6th national elections. The conference was organized in collaboration with Addis Ababa University's Centre for Human Rights. It gathered academics, CSOs, women rights advocates, representatives from gender machineries both at federal and regional level, in addition to women members of political parties, women aspirant candidates as well as men political party leaders. The conference tackled various thematic issues including TSMs in the election law and voluntary party candidate quotas for women. The conference served to raise the awareness of political parties on the concept of TSMs and to demonstrate to political party leaders that there are enough women willing to compete in the 6th general elections, who will be trained and supported by electoral stakeholders and development partners to be able to campaign successfully. The ultimate aim of the conference was to promote equal participation of women in the 6th general elections and to influence political party leaders on their decisions related to the nomination of candidates.

UNDP and UN Women commissioned a gender audit of 70 political parties to assess their procedures, activities and culture from a gender perspective and to identify discriminatory practices that hinder women's inclusion in parties' decision making processes and reduce women's participation in political processes in Ethiopia. In collaboration with the National Election Board of Ethiopia and with the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, the findings of the gender audit were discussed among political parties through an inclusive platform. UNDP and UN Women also commissioned a gender analysis of the draft 'Ethiopian Election, Political Parties Registration, and Election Ethics' proclamation, which was prepared by the Democratic Institutions Working group established under the Federal Attorney General's office

Legal and Justice Affairs Advisory Council (LJAAC).⁵ The gender analysis was conducted in collaboration with the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE). Various working sessions were organized with EMB officials to identify legal gaps as well as gender gaps and specific challenges that hamper women's political participation in elections. The findings of the gender assessment were presented in a forum that brought together the Chairperson of the National Election Board of Ethiopia as well as members of the Democratic Institutions Working Group⁶ composed of notable Ethiopian politicians, academics, and practitioners who was tasked with drafting the proclamation. The recommendations of the audit of laws presented to the working group included suggestions to incorporate provisions on mandatory affirmative measures at the stage of nominating candidates by political parties as well as granting women candidates' additional time/space for campaigning by the media.

UNDP's support to policy campaign efforts

UNDP and UN Women's advocacy efforts, along with campaigns by national entities such as women's organizations, the EU, and other global organizations like the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), culminated in the inclusion of gender-targeted public funding for political parties in the final version of the election law. This was manifested in the Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration, and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation (Proclamation No. 1162/2019), which was ratified by the House of Peoples' Representatives.

Specifically, Article 100, Paragraph 2 (c) (d) of the election law states that the amount of financial aid for political parties should be influenced by several criteria. These include the number of female candidates they nominate, the count of women within the party, and the representation of women in leadership roles. However, it's notable that the recommendations advocating for legislated candidate quotas and special provisions for female candidates in media campaigning were not incorporated into the electoral law.

UNDP and UN Women also provided support in the pre-electoral phase, including with media campaigns in the form of radio talk shows to promote women's political participation. These media campaigns were organized by the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations. Five radio talk show programmes focusing among other issues on women's participation in political parties and the upcoming election were aired through Fana Radio which is among the highest listened radio station in Ethiopia.

Given the significant reform agenda before the House of Peoples' Representatives, both UNDP and UN Women saw the need to design and carry out varied, customized capacity-building activities for the parliament and its diverse committees. These initiatives aimed to equip parliamentarians with the skills needed to execute the representative, legislative, and oversight roles of the Parliament in a manner that's both gender-sensitive and responsive.

5 Shortly after Abiy's appointment in April 2018, a Legal and Justice Affairs Advisory Council (LJAAC) was established by directive. Its mandate was to advise the Attorney General on matters related to legal and justice system reform. The Council was composed of 13 experienced legal experts with a secretariat appointed by the Attorney General and working groups which comprise about 200 expert volunteers. Among the revisions made by the council that are of particular importance: Electoral laws, civil society law, terrorism law, and media law.

6 This working group was established by the Federal Attorney General's office under the Legal and Justice Affairs Advisory Council.

For example, 58 members of the Parliament, comprising 40 women and 18 men, underwent training to bolster their understanding and capabilities in gender equality, gender mainstreaming, and gender-responsive parliamentary oversight functions. The training created an opportunity for parliamentarians to discuss issues of gender equality, gender mainstreaming, gender responsive budgeting and auditing. Other workshops created an opportunity for parliamentarians to discuss issues of accountability, transparency, and participation for effective implementation of the international commitments including on gender equality and women's empowerment frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This was alongside technical support through other UNDP programmes to advance best practices in the policy and regulatory framework.

Ethiopia's electoral law leaves significant discretion to the National Election Board of Ethiopia in the conduct of elections. As the result, UNDP and UN Women supported advocacy efforts for the adoption by the National Election Board of Ethiopia of TSMs in the various directives it issues for the conduct of elections. The advocacy strategy was twofold: evidence based and internal influence through gender and election advisors, supported by promotion of key issues through dialogue with electoral stakeholders.

UN Women and UNDP supported the undertaking of a rapid assessment of eight draft directives by the National Election Board of Ethiopia to promote evidence-based advocacy on TSMs. The findings of the assessment were later used by women rights organizations such as the Network of Ethiopian Women Association to advocate for specific stipulations of TSMs during the various consultative workshops NEBE organized for CSO stakeholders. This was important given that the internal capacities of NEBE were largely weak given the new NEBE had started from limited institutional knowledge base.

Advocacy efforts resulted in the adoption of various TSMs in the National Election Board of Ethiopia directives including the directive jointly agreed on with the Broadcast Authority on the "use and allocation of mass media" which stipulates that "Based on the information obtained from the Board, twenty percent (20 percent) of the total airtime and newspaper column allocated to contesting political parties shall be allocated based on the number of women candidates nominated for federal and regional councils".

During the electoral phase, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, backed by UNDP and UN Women, launched a media campaign. This was synchronized with the candidate registration period and included TV programmes spotlighting women political party members. The campaign also engaged gender experts to elevate public awareness about women's active participation as electoral candidates.

During this electoral phase, on 19 April 2021, UN Women joined forces with the Embassy of Sweden and the Ethiopian Women Rights Advocates to host the inaugural inter-party debate on gender equality. This event saw participation from four national parties: the Prosperity Party, the Ethiopian Citizens for Justice Party, the National Movement of the Amhara Party, and the regional Afar Peoples Party. The debate was subsequently aired on TV and radio stations and also made available on a YouTube Channel. It served as a valuable platform to engage political parties on the topic of women's equitable participation in politics and decision-making. Furthermore, it facilitated discussions on potential reforms to combat gender exclusion, including the consideration of temporary special measures.

While advocacy efforts aimed at political parties didn't lead to the adoption of voluntary gender candidate quotas or gender quotas for their executive decision-making bodies, some parties did

adopt specific gender policies. Notably, the Ethiopian Citizens for Justice Party began collecting sex-disaggregated data across various thematic areas. This data highlighted gender disparities in the country's social, economic, and political domains, and the party proposed solutions to bridge these gender gaps.

For the Sixth General Elections, a total of 1,976 women registered as candidates by political parties and six registered as independents. While women constituted some 42 percent of the Prosperity Party (ruling party) candidates overall, most opposition parties struggled to include women candidates in their lists. Only 13 parties successfully reached the 20 percent threshold of registered women candidates to qualify for additional funding.⁷

The new 'Strengthening Ethiopia's Elections for Democratic Sustainability' project (SEEDS 2) (2023-2027) includes an important component on legal reforms and inclusion. UNDP and UN Women will continue working together to support the adoption of TSMs to increase women's representation in elected offices. For example, based on National Election Board of Ethiopia's request, UNDP and UN Women will support the latter to start a conversation on local elections and to ensure related directives are gender sensitive. Capacity building programs for women members of political parties will continue with the aim to prepare a pool of women credible prominent leaders able to influence their respective political parties.

Promoting gender equality within political parties, including through the adoption of Temporary Special Measures (TSMs), remains a pressing policy issue. While the groundwork for TSMs in the 2021 elections laid a solid foundation, there's still a significant journey ahead to fully weave gender considerations into every facet of the electoral process, extending beyond the elections themselves. This effort mirrors the broader initiative required to amplify the essential role women must assume in every component of Ethiopia's democratic framework.

⁷ *Ethiopia June 2021 National Elections Report*, International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI). www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/LEOME%20Report%20of%20the%20June%202021%20Elections.pdf



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United Nations Development Programme
One United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
USA