



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

# WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?

A Study of Women, Politics,  
Parliaments and Equality  
in the CARICOM Countries

**SURINAME Case Study**



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# UNITED NATION DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2013-2014, a study was undertaken by UNDP to explore the presence of women in decision-making positions in the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)<sup>1</sup>, as well as the link between their presence in politics and institutions and the national advances on gender equality; i.e. the link between descriptive and substantive representation. The initial hypothesis for the study was that there is a relationship between women's political presence and the positive effect it might have through the inclusion of gender and other related inequality issues into the legislative and executive agenda –thereby establishing women as important agents of change for development. A similar study was in process in Latin America, but limited to the legislative agenda.

This study was conducted as a desk review, during which available information and data on women, parliaments, and gender equality were collected and analysed from existing reports, documents, and other resources. While the aim of the research was to analyse the data on women's political participation at the local and national levels for the period between 2000 and 2013, data for the period before were incorporated whenever it was available. This was done in order to paint as complete a picture of women's political participation possible and thereby capture key historic milestones and precedents that continues to have significant impact. As with many desk reviews that cover a wide range of countries and styles of government, the consistency and quality of data was often a challenge. Data quality and depth is constantly evolving and improving, and as a result not all countries were able to provide records with gender-disaggregated data for the time period studied. However, some countries, namely Suriname, Jamaica and Guyana, possessed data and other information sources that allowed for more in-depth analysis and allowed for the creation of three case studies that shed extra light on the regional study.

The structure of this document, the Suriname case study, is divided into three sections. The first provides an overview of the political and electoral system of the country, and provides the context that influence women's political participation. The second part lays out women's participation to date, and covers the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, as well as national and subnational political spheres. Because Suriname contains indigenous and afro-descendent populations that have some autonomy from the national government, women's political participation in this area is also reviewed. The final part reviews women's power in influencing, promoting, and contributing to gender equality and the empowerment of women. It includes women's participation in political parties and parliaments, in particular on their participation in parliamentary committees and the legislation that has been passed. It also examines the role and influence of women's political caucuses, women's organisations, and gender bureaus.

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1 Antigua and Barbuda; The Bahamas; Barbados; Belize; Dominica; Grenada; Guyana; Haiti; Jamaica; Saint Lucia; St. Kitts and Nevis; St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname; and Trinidad and Tobago — only Montserrat was not included.

# 1. General Overview, Political System and Electoral System of Suriname

Suriname is one of South America's smallest and least densely populated countries, and has a very ethnically diverse population. It shares borders with Brazil, French Guiana, and Guyana, and is located on the Atlantic coast. About 90% of the country is covered by sparsely inhabited forest, with the majority of the population living on the coastal strip. The inhabitants in the interior are indigenous Amerindian peoples and six Maroon<sup>2</sup> tribes who have settled along the larger rivers.

While the country had a relatively high standard of living during the past decade, it endures ongoing political, social, economic, and environmental challenges that hamper the equitable distribution of wealth and development. As a former colony of the Netherlands, it is the only Dutch-speaking country in Latin America, and has political and educational systems that are entirely different from the rest of Latin America and the English-speaking Caribbean.

Suriname is divided into ten administrative districts: the urban district of Paramaribo, Nickerie, Coronie, Saramacca, Commewijne, Para, Wanica, Brokopondo, Marowijne, and Sipaliwini. According to the 2012 census, the total population is 541,638, of which 66.3% lives in Paramaribo and the neighbouring district of Wanica<sup>3</sup>. The remaining 23.7% of the population is spread over the other eight districts.

Suriname ranks 100th in the 2014 Human Development Report, among the high-developed countries. Between 2005 and 2013, Suriname's HDI value increased 4.9 percent, from 0.672 to 0.705. However, this value remains below the average of 0.740 for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Within the region, countries similar to Suriname in terms of population size have HDI rankings of 121 (Guyana) and 84 (Belize)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Maroons are descendants of African slaves who escaped the plantations in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, and settled in small communities in the interior of the country.

<sup>3</sup> Human Development Atlas Suriname, UNDP 2013

<sup>4</sup> Human Development Report 2014: Surinam country note. [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/SUR.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/SUR.pdf)



**Table 1: Suriname human development data**

HDI value (2013)	0.705
Gender Equality Index (2013)	0.463
HIV prevalence (15-24 yrs)	0.7% (women); 0.4% (men)
Infant mortality (per 1000 live births)	19
Mortality rate (per 1000 adults)	111 (women) 194 (male)
Literacy rate	94.7%
Gross enrolment rate % (2003-2012)	114.0 (primary) 85.0 (secondary) NA (tertiary)

Source: 2014 Human Development Report

A *Human Development Atlas for Suriname* was developed in collaboration with UNDP and published in 2010. Data of the General Bureau of Statistics of Suriname show that the Gender Inequality Index<sup>5</sup> for 2009/2010 by district ranges from 0.407 in the capital Paramaribo to 0.771 in the district of Sipaliwini. The most populated districts show little or no change since 2004/2005. Two other districts even show a substantial worsening of the gender inequality index, while their GNI per capita improved during the same period. Table 2 gives an overview of the gender inequality index and the GNI per capita per district.

**Table 2: Gender Inequality Index and GNI per capita for each district in Suriname 2004-2010**

Districts	GII 2004/2005	GII 2009/2010	GNI per Capita 2004 (US\$)	GNI per Capita 2009 (US\$)
Brokopondo	0.508	0.459	6,564	7,500
Commewijne	0.726	0.429	5,651	6,948
Coronie	0.675	0.666	4,340	5,626
Marowijne	0.423	0.713	4,781	5,962
Nickerie	0.422	0.716	5,363	6,456
Para	0.743	0.721	5,272	6,273
Paramaribo	0.397	0.407	6,590	8,133
Saramacca	0.739	0.726	5,353	6,300
Sipaliwini	0.505	0.771	4,563	5,558
Wanica	0.431	0.466	5,656	6,908

Source: *Human Development Atlas Suriname*, UNDP 2013

<sup>5</sup> Women's disadvantage is measured in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market. The index shows loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in these dimensions. It ranges from 0, which indicates that women and men fare equally to 1, which indicates that women fare as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions.

Women in Suriname have a high literacy rate (94% in 2010), but women's unemployment is 25 percentage points higher than that of men, compared with a 9 percentage point difference in Guyana and a 7 point difference in Jamaica. Consistently, this also affects the number of women participating in businesses ownership, which for Suriname is also the lowest of the three countries at 18% (compared to Guyana's 58% and Jamaica's 24%). Internet usage in Suriname is extremely high for both women and men at 95% and 92% respectively.

## Political System

The Republic of Suriname gained independence from the Netherlands in 1975, and became a full member of CARICOM in 1995. Contrary to the Westminster model used in the English-speaking Caribbean countries, Suriname follows the *trias politica* principle, which separates the powers of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches and is intended to prevent the powers of one branch to conflict with the powers associated with the other branches. In this system, a parliamentarian who accepts a post of minister must immediately resign as a parliamentarian.

Approval by the National Assembly is required for all treaties and conventions to which the country accedes, constitutional amendments, acts of war, and demarcation and changes in state and district borders. Draft legislation is first reviewed by the State Advisory Council (*Staatsraad*) chaired by the president before it is submitted to the national assembly for further debate. The *Staatsraad* officially had 15 seats (11 allotted by proportional representation of all political parties in the national assembly, 2 appointed by labour unions, and 2 appointed by employers' organizations). However in 2010, an additional seat was added to expand the number of political party representatives. Three of the 16 seats of the *Staatsraad* are currently held by women.

Suriname has multiple political parties that participate in its elections. Many are historically ethnic-based, which reflects their alignment with the country's diverse population. In 2005, there were 25 parties registered to participate in elections, of which only three were registered as individual parties. Over the last three elections, the trend has been for individual parties to join forces into political combinations to enter general elections. These combinations bring together anywhere between two and seven parties of varying size. In theory, this strategy allows parties a wider scope of vote-gaining candidates across the different ethnic groups and representational districts.

## Electoral System

Suriname has a complex, decentralized system for organizing and administering elections. The country is divided into ten electoral districts that correspond to its administrative districts, each of which is divided into a number of constituencies. Suriname has no mayors; instead there are district commissioners who are appointed by the president. He/she is the highest government official in each district and is also responsible for the administration of elections in the district. The district commissioner heads the main polling station of the district.

The Centraal Hoofdstembureau (CHS)<sup>6</sup> is responsible for the implementation and administration of the general elections, while all elections and electoral procedures are overseen by the Onafhankelijke Kiesbureau (OKB)<sup>7</sup>, whose decisions can be appealed with the President of the Republic. The current chair OKB is a woman.

The voting age is 18 years. There is no separate system for voter registration. The Ministry of Home Affairs, which is responsible for the budget and the administrative procedures in preparation for general elections, extracts the names of eligible voters from the general population registers and prepares the voter lists. These are open for public scrutiny and voters have the right to check if their name is on the lists, and to have the lists amended if they are not.

Elections are held every five years according to the electoral law of 23 October 1987, which came into existence when the democratic voting process was re-established after seven years of military rule. Since then, elections have been held in 1987, 1991 (after another military takeover in 1990 and an interim government), 1995, and every five years afterwards. The most recent elections were held in 2010, and the next are scheduled for 2015.

Voting is based on a semi-open proportional party-list system. Candidates can only be nominated by their party if they are at least 21 years of age, have been a resident in the constituency where they are running for at least two years preceding the day of their nomination, are on the voters' list, and are a member of the party nominating them. Elections take place by proportional representation on a largest average formula basis with preferential votes. In each constituency, the first seat is awarded to the political party having obtained the highest number of votes. The remaining seats

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6 Transl.: Central Polling Authority

7 Transl.: Independent Electoral Council

## WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?

are awarded to the party with the highest average number of votes. In each party list, the candidate(s) having obtained most preferential votes are declared elected. Vacancies arising between general elections are filled by substitutes, according to the order of names on each party list. Voting is not compulsory.

Elections for members of sub-national government take place every five years, simultaneously with the general elections for the national assembly. A total of 893 district and local council members are elected in ten districts, including the capital.

## 2. Women's Access to Legislative, Executive and Judiciary Branches

Women's representation in Suriname's Parliament is the lowest of the three case studies, at 11.1% (Table 3). However, representation in the judiciary is notable, where over half of appointed judges are women, as is women's participation in Local Councils.

**Table 3: Women in executive, legislative and judiciary powers and in sub-national governance structures (between 1987 and Dec 2014)**

	1987	1991	1996	2000	2005	2010	Dec 2014 <sup>8</sup>
Cabinet Ministers	6%	0%	10%	15% *	11.1%	16.7%*	11.1%*
Parliament (DNA)	8%	6%	15.7%	17.6%	23.5%	9.8%	13.7%
District Councils	13%	13%	7%	18%	24.5%	29.6% **	NA
Local Councils	13%	17%	20%	24.7%	30.6%	35.7%***	35.7%
Judiciary <sup>9</sup>	NA	NA	NA	9.8%	9.1%	52.6%	62.5%

Sources: Presentation Henna Guicherit at joint meeting of Parliament, UNDP and Projekta Foundation

(28 June 2012); ECLAC gender observatory; Ministry of Regional Development

\*Includes one state minister (officially not a member of the Council of Ministers)

\*\*Percentage based on information provided by website Ministry of Regional Development

\*\*\* Percentage from ECLAC gender observatory

### Women and Legislative Power

After a period of military rule (1980-1987), a new constitution was approved, through which *De Nationale Assemblée (DNA)*<sup>10</sup> was created, as well as the sub-national district and local councils. In accordance with Articles 71-74 of this Constitution, the unicameral national assembly has 51 elected members, who serve a term of five years. The Constitution of Suriname has given the National Assembly quite a powerful role;

<sup>8</sup> Information as of December 2013 has been included, when available.

<sup>9</sup> Refers to appointed judges

<sup>10</sup> Transl.: National Assembly

it has both legislative and executive powers, in addition to an oversight function. The full range of its authority is formalized in Articles 71-74 of the Constitution.<sup>11</sup> It shares its powers with the executive branch (who proposes and signs off on laws), while parliament has the responsibility for electing the president and the vice-president, and for giving its approval to the government's socio-economic and political policy and its annual budget. The President, Vice-President and cabinet ministers must respond to any written enquiries of members of parliament.

The speaker and deputy speaker of parliament are elected by its members during the first session following elections. Parliamentary work is supported by a parliamentary secretariat headed by a secretary general and a deputy secretary general.

Women acquired the right to stand for elections in 1936, when Suriname was still part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the first woman was elected to *De Staten van Suriname* (the then 15-member parliament) in 1938. However, as general suffrage was only granted in 1948, it would be another decade before they were allowed to vote. It was not until 1963 that the next woman parliamentarian was elected to the 36-member parliament. When Suriname became independent in 1975, the parliament comprised 39 members — one of whom was a woman.

Suriname's parliamentary leadership has shown considerable evolution, moving from an all-male leadership in 1987 to all-female leadership in 2010. The first woman speaker of the national assembly, Marijke Indradebie Djwalapersad, was elected in 1996, and the current speaker (Jennifer Geerlings-Simons) entered active politics in 1996, when she was elected to the national assembly. Her influence in parliament grew when she became the leader of the parliamentary faction of her political party from 2000-2005. She was recently elected vice-president of the *ParlAmericas Group of Women's Parliamentarians* (for the period 2012-2014), and is also a member of the board of COPA (the *Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas*). The current deputy speaker (Ruth Wijdenbosch) was elected as the first woman deputy speaker in the history of Suriname after the elections of 2000, and was re-elected to the post again in 2005 and 2010. She is a board member of *Parliamentarians for Action*.

2010 marks the first time that both the speaker and deputy speaker posts were held by women (Table 4). It is also notable that they were also from opposing parties.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.dna.sr>, accessed on 10 Jan 2013

**Table 4: Parliamentarians and parliamentary leadership 2000-2013**

Year	# M	# W	% W	Parliamentary leadership	
				Sp	Dep Sp
2000	42	9	21.4	M	W
2005	38	13	25.5	M	W
2010	46	5	9.8	W	W
2013	44	7	13.7	W	W

Source: National Assembly of Suriname

Unfortunately, this unique combination has not yet produced any inter-party working structure, despite both the speaker and the deputy speaker having publicly spoken in favour of a legislated quota system to increase women's participation in parliament. However despite a lack of legislation, one political party currently has a quota system: the political party DOE has laid down in its by-laws that its board will be composed of 50% women and it will strive for equal numbers of men and women in all positions.

While women's representation in the Suriname parliament peaked in 2005 at 25.49% (Table 5), women's leadership has grown. As of 2013, women hold the positions of Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Clerk, and Deputy Clerk. The substantial increase of women's representation in 1996 is closely related with the Beijing Conference, which brought about a number of pre- and post-conference activities in the country, and saw women from parliament, political parties, and civil society joining together to discuss the women's agenda<sup>12</sup>. The delegation to Beijing was headed by First Lady Liesbeth Venetiaan, who was a supporter of the women's movement in Suriname.

**Table 5: Women parliamentarians and parliamentary leadership in Suriname (1987-2010)**

Election year	Women in Parliament		Women in Parliamentary Leadership			
			Speaker	Deputy Speaker	Clerk	Deputy Clerk
1987	4	7.84%	No	No	No	No
1991	3	5.88%	No	No	No	No
1996	8	15.68%	Yes	No	No	Yes
2000	9	21.42%	No	Yes	No	Yes
2005	13	25.49%	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
2010	5	9.80%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dec 2013	7	13.7%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Sources: IPU, General Bureau of Statistics.

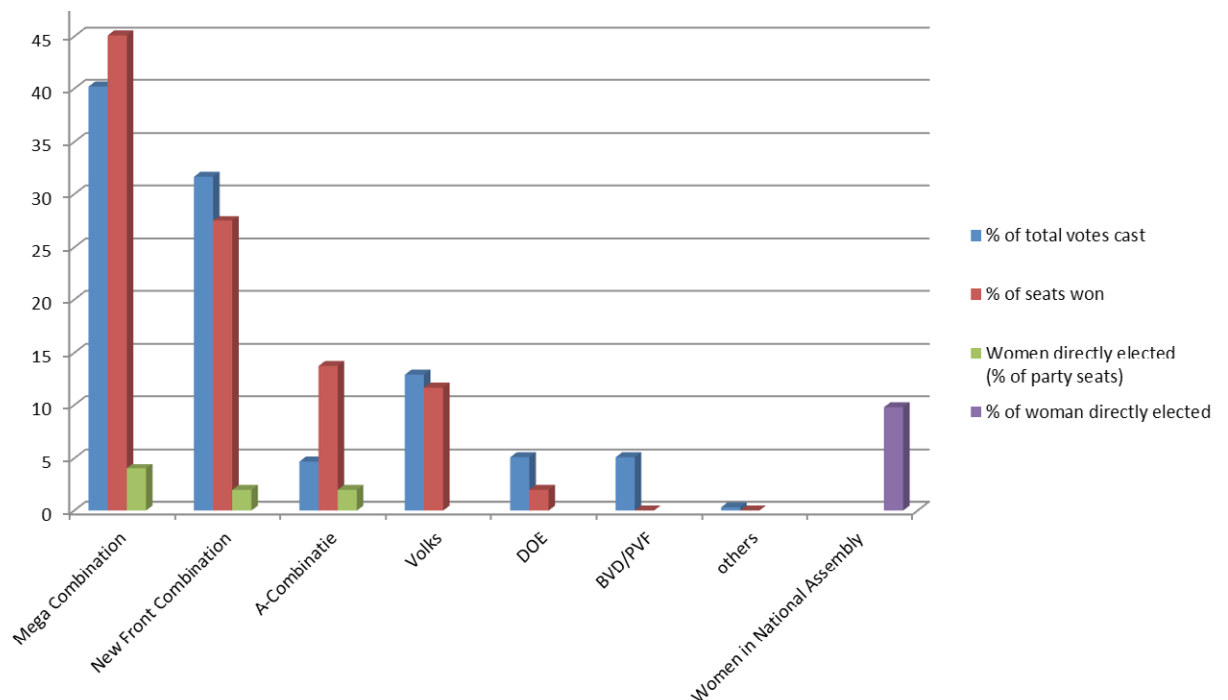
12. The Women's Parliament Forum was created in 1994 out of a meeting in which parliamentarians, politicians and civil society participated

In regards to the drastic decline in the number of directly elected women parliamentarians from 23.5% in 2005 to 9.8% in 2010, two possible factors may have contributed: the formation of large political combinations, and the ranking of women on candidates' lists.

In the last two elections, individual political parties joined forces in large combinations to register for general elections. Theoretically, this strategy would provide political parties with a wider scope of vote-gaining candidates across different ethnic groups and the ten electoral districts. However, in practice it has created a system that is open to bartering for seats and creates barriers to increased women's participation and election. Further, the way in which women were positioned on the candidates' lists in 2010 reflects an inequality in opportunities for women and men to be elected.

The 2010 general elections were marked by an incredibly low number of women candidates being fielded and elected by party combinations (Figure 1). This may be attributed to the fact that the leadership of all parties is dominated by men, whose individual needs must all be accommodated on the same candidate lists. In practice, this vastly diminishes equal opportunities for women to be nominated as candidates in 'winnable' places, as political patronage takes precedence over gender equality.

**Figure 1: Political party combinations participating in the latest elections and election results (2010)**



Sources: IPU Parline Database; De Nationale Assemblée; Centraal Hoofdstembureau



In 2010, only 5 women were directly elected (9.8%). Martha Djopawiro moved up to become a member of parliament for the district of Wanica when the elected male parliamentarian became a minister, bringing the number of women in parliament to 6 (11.8%). In 2013, Joan Dogogo moved up to take the place in Paramaribo of the male parliamentarian who was appointed minister after a second cabinet reshuffling, thus bringing the current number of women in parliament to 7 (13.7%).

A comparison of the women elected to parliament and their ranking on the candidates' lists of their respective parties in 2005 and 2010 reveals that women's ranking on candidate lists directly contributed to fewer women being elected (Table 7). In 2005, four of the ten electoral districts had no women parliamentarians. In Paramaribo, which delivers 17 seats, the five women who won seats were placed between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> position on the candidates' lists of their respective parties. In the remaining electoral districts where women won seats, they were placed in 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> position on the candidates' lists. However in 2010, seven of the ten electoral districts had no women elected to parliament, and Paramaribo delivered only three women parliamentarians (of the 17 seats available). No women were positioned in 1<sup>st</sup> place of their party's candidate lists in any of the electoral districts, and only one woman (district of Brokopondo) was positioned in 2<sup>nd</sup> place and elected in her district. Only two women parliamentarians were re-elected in 2010, both in the electoral district of Paramaribo – the speaker and deputy speaker. Women continue to find themselves in a disadvantaged position in relation to the men positioned above them on the candidates' list, and therefore must work much harder than the male candidates to be elected.

## Women and Executive Power

The executive branch consists of the President, the Vice-President, and the Cabinet of Ministers. The President is head of state, head of government, chairman of the council of state, and head of the Security Council. The Vice-President is charged with chairing the council of ministers and the day-to-day activities and decisions of the cabinet.

The President of Suriname is not elected directly by popular vote. Rather, candidates for president and vice-president are nominated in the national assembly after its first official session. If no presidential or vice presidential candidate receives a two-thirds majority in the national assembly after two rounds of voting, the *Verenigde Volksvergadering* (People's Assembly) is called, which is a session of all 893 representatives from the national assembly, and district and local councils.

A simple majority is required in the people's assembly to elect the president and vice-president, who serve the same 5-year term as the legislative bodies that elected them.

There has never been a woman president or vice-president in Suriname. The first woman minister was appointed in 1969 (Minister of Home Affairs). Cabinet members are appointed by the President, and the cabinet is usually made up of a constellation of representatives from the different political parties who make up the political spectrum. Therefore, the attainment of a cabinet post is highly political, and subject to negotiations — in which women are largely absent, due to the lack of women in powerful positions in their respective political parties. The cabinet has had relatively few women ministers throughout the period 1987-2010, varying between 6% and 11% (with a notable exception of 15% in 2000).

When the cabinet was inaugurated after the 2010 elections, two of the eighteen ministries were held by women (Finance and Social Affairs), while there was a woman state minister within the Ministry of Public Works. Despite this low representation of women, it was the first time in Suriname's history that a woman held the powerful post of a finance minister. Unfortunately, the Minister of Finance resigned within 18 months and was replaced by another woman, who also resigned in the cabinet reshuffling in 2013, and was replaced by a man. An earlier reshuffling in 2011 brought in a woman to hold the post of Minister of Education — a first in Suriname's history. For a short time, there were three women cabinet ministers and a woman state minister (22.2% of the total cabinet). However, the Minister of Education was asked to resign in 2013 and was replaced by a man. Further, the Minister of Social Affairs and Housing, who has been in cabinet since the beginning, has seen her power erode when the responsibility for housing was moved to other institutions designated by the President. As of December 2013, she remains the sole woman in cabinet, as the state minister in public works was moved to the ministry of agriculture.

Thus, the percentage of women in the current cabinet decreased to 5.8% — although this percentage climbs to 11.1% if the state minister is included. In public service, the number of women in official positions is better. There are currently six women permanent secretaries, and sixteen women deputy directors appointed in the eighteen ministries.

## Women and the Judiciary

Suriname has a civil law system strongly influenced by Dutch civil law. The judiciary branch consists of three *kantongerechten* (circuit courts) and an appeals court called the *Hof van Justitie* (High Court of Justice), which consists of the court president, vice president, and four judges. Suriname has recognized the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), but only in its original jurisdiction, that is, for the interpretation and application of the revised treaty of Chaguaramas, which established the Caribbean Community. It does not recognize the CCJ's appellate jurisdiction, as its constitution gives this role to the High Court of Justice. Judges are appointed for life by President of the Republic after consultation with the High Court.

There are separate procedures for civil processes, but owing to the lack of human resources, the same pool of judges is responsible for presiding over both civil and criminal cases. The law provides for an independent judiciary, but judges are appointed by the government and they take their oath before the president of the republic. The prosecutor general and the president of the high court are appointed for life. Concerns have been voiced that the independence of the judiciary is being hampered by its financial and administrative dependence on the Ministry of Justice and Police.

In November 2013, the need for institutional strengthening and capacity building of the judiciary in Suriname was pointed out in parliament. There are currently nineteen full-fledged judges, and the bar association says there is a need for at least forty. As a consequence, legal procedures (particularly civil cases, which are often delayed) take very long. Acknowledging the need for more judges, the Ministry of Justice and Police initiated an active system of training for new judges in 2005.

Men and women have the same rights according to the Constitution. However societal pressures and customs, especially in rural areas, sometimes prevent women from fully exercising their rights. In particular, marriage and inheritance rights are sometimes overruled, which has resulted in the direct passage of all property a woman would have inherited from her parents to her husband and parents-in-law, without legal action being taken, or with a court order passed in favour of the man. The Ministry of Justice and Police has instituted a special office, the Bureau for Women and Children, to ensure the legal rights of women and children, and to support victims.

Currently, over 50% of the appointed judges and deputy judges of the circuit courts are women (Table 6), and 2013 marked incredible growth of women’s judiciary representation over the past decade.

**Table 6: Percentages of women judges in Suriname 2000-2013**

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
9.1%	8.3%	8.3%	8.3%	7.7%	9.1%	9.1%	9.1%	33.3%	33.3%	52.6%	55.6%	55.6%	62.5%

Source: ECLAC Gender Observatory

With the appointment of eight women as public prosecutors in early 2013, the public prosecutor’s office is now staffed predominantly by women, although the prosecutor general and advocate general are still men. The steady growth in the number of woman judges and public prosecutors being appointed is also a result of the increased number of women graduating from the Anton de Kom University of Suriname with a law degree. It is expected that future appointments will continue to see even more women judges and prosecutors being appointed, while the bar association has also noted the number of women lawyers showing an increase.

In general, it is believed that the increased presence of women lawyers, judges, and prosecutors in combination with the support of civil society organizations, such as the Women’s Rights Centre, is influencing the way in which domestic violence legislation is implemented and has made the organization of training workshops for the judiciary and police members more easily accepted. However, further research will be required if to understand the relationship between the increase in women in the judiciary and the manner in which of domestic violence, and marriage and inheritance cases are dealt with.

## Women at the Sub-national Level

Local government is formalized in the Constitution and the *Wet Regionale Organen* 1989 no 44 (Regional Institutions Act, 1089, #44). There are two tiers of the sub-national government: *Districtsraden* (District Councils) and *Ressortraden* (Local Councils). There are a total of ten district councils: one for each of the nine districts, and one for the capital Paramaribo. District councils have between 7 and 21 seats; Paramaribo and Wanica have the largest district councils with 21 seats. There are a total of 62 local councils, each containing between 7 and 17 members<sup>13</sup>. Members of

<sup>13</sup> The number of seats for each council is spelled out in the electoral laws.

local councils are elected directly, while district council seats are elected indirectly, being allocated on the basis of the results of local council elections, with members being appointed from the officially registered party lists for the constituency concerned. Each district has a district administration that is headed by a district commissioner appointed by the President.

**Table 7: Sub-national governance system in Suriname**

Local government system	Legal basis	Number of representatives	Elections	Women's representation
3-tier government: 10 administrative districts each with a District Council  Each administrative divided into Local Councils  10 appointed district commissioners	Constitution of 1987 enshrines local government  Electoral Law 1987	115 district councillors  778 local councillors	Every 5 years concurrent with national elections  <u>Last elections 2010</u> Voter turnout 75.38%  <u>Next elections 2015</u>	<u>Membership (2010)</u> Local councils 35.7% District councils 29.6%  <u>Leadership:</u> 26.7% District commissioners 30.6% Local council chairs

There is a widespread perception that local government structures are ineffective and highly dependent on the central government, since all financial and technical support comes through the Ministry of Regional Development.

Due to Suriname's centralized decision-making and budgetary processes, national government and parliament have much more power than local governments. However, the decentralization process set in motion in the early eighties with multi-year support from the Inter-American Development Bank has achieved some success in putting in place decentralized planning procedures and budget exercises. However, the district and local council members who should in practice lead decentralized decision-making are rarely politically empowered. As a result, these council positions are more often than not used as political payoffs for party workers.

Contrary to women's representation at the national level, there has been a steady increase of the number of women in local councils from 13% in 1987 to 35.7% in 2010 (Table 3 above), thus in fact surpassing the 'critical mass' goal aspired after in the Beijing Platform for Action — although 20-25 years was needed to reach this goal. At the district council level, where councillors are appointed proportionally on the basis of the results of the local council elections, there was also an increase in

women from 13% in 1987 to 29.6% in 2010<sup>14</sup>. In addition, four of the fifteen District Commissioners (26.7%) who chair the district councils are women.

With the district councils themselves, women's representation varies greatly (Table 8) among the ten districts. For example, the district of Nickerie has no women in the district council, while Paramaribo' council is 52.4% women. Also, despite having no women in the district council, two of the five local councils of the district of Nickerie (40%) are chaired by women. The opposite can be seen in the district of Coronie, which has 42.9% women in the district council, while none of its three local councils is chaired by a woman.

**Table 8: women's representation in district councils and women chairs of local councils after last elections (2010)**

Electoral district	# Women district councillors/ total elected	% Women district councillors elected	# Women chairs/ total local councils	% Women chairs of local councils
Paramaribo	11/21	52.4%	7/12	58.3%
Wanica	5/21	23.8%	2/7	28.6%
Nickerie	0/11	0%	2/5	40.0%
Coronie	3/7	42.9%	0/3	0%
Saramacca	3/8	37.5%	1/6	16.7%
Commewijne	1/9	11.1%	1/6	16.7%
Marowijne	4/9	44.4%	0/6	0%
Para	1/9	11.1%	3/5	60%
Brokopondo	1/9	11.1%	2/6	33.3%
Sipaliwini	5/11	45.5%	1/6	16.7%
Total	34/115	29.6%	19/62	30.6%

Source: Ministry of Regional Development Suriname

<sup>14</sup> There was a decline to 7% in 1996, which cannot be explained. The elected local councils show a consistent increase of women. One possibility is that in that particular year, the candidates' lists for the district councils had predominantly men in the top positions. Another possibility is that there is a miscalculation or a typing error. The raw data of that particular year, available in the archives of the central polling station (CHS) would have to be checked.

## Women and Tribal Governance Structures

The Amerindian people are the indigenous people in Suriname. Their villages are found both in the interior and in the coastal area. The *Vereniging van Inheemse Dorpshoofden in Suriname (VIDS)*<sup>15</sup> was set up in 1992 to ensure the interests of the indigenous peoples through awareness of their rights and strengthening the capacity of Amerindian leadership. It has an office in the capital that focuses much of its work on the judicial aspects of acquiring collective land rights. Village leaders are elected by their communities, and the VIDS plays a part in helping to determine the results of village elections, which are usually not implemented through voting by ballot. Amerindian interests are also represented in the national parliament as well through increased political participation. In the 2010 elections, two Indigenous village leaders (both men) were elected members of the National Assembly.

The office of the VIDS in Paramaribo is managed by a number of Indigenous women, most of whom are university graduates, and there appears to be an increase of the number of women in Indigenous village leadership positions, with female captains now being elected or standing for election in several villages over the past years. However, no studies have been undertaken on the role these women may traditionally have played in the governance of their communities, nor on what their impact may be on decision-making and women's power in communities with increasing female leadership.

The Maroon<sup>16</sup> peoples generally reside along the upper courses of the larger rivers in Suriname, and are governed by a tribal system of clans and families. There is no umbrella organization of Maroon leadership. Currently, the *Vereniging van Saamaka Gezagsdragers (VSG)*<sup>17</sup> is the most prominent representation of the Saamaka tribal community. The VSG submitted and won a case against the state before the Interamerican Court of Justice, which ruled that the lands on which the Saamaka tribal communities have been living for centuries should be recognized and mapped.

After hostilities between the military and the Maroon peoples during military government in the 1980s, many Maroon peoples fled to neighbouring French Guiana

<sup>15</sup> *Transl.*: Association of Indigenous Village Leaders

<sup>16</sup> Maroons are descendants of slaves who were brought to Suriname from Africa in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. They fled the plantations and settled themselves in tribal groups in the interior of Suriname.

<sup>17</sup> *Transl.*: Association of Saamaka Authorities

and the urban area around Paramaribo, where they have now settled and form part of the coastal population. According to the last census (2012), the Maroon population is currently the second largest and fastest growing ethnic group in Suriname (21.7%). Since the 2005 elections, Maroon political parties have been part of the ruling coalition, and have been represented as cabinet ministers.

**Table 9: Brief overview of indigenous and tribal governance in Suriname**

<p><b>Indigenous: Amerindian</b></p>	<p><u>Amerindian:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Vereniging van Inheemse Dorpshoofden in Suriname</i> (VIDS), is the association of Amerindian village leaders set up in 1992</li> <li>• Village councils and leader chosen by village in own elections, overseen by VIDS</li> <li>• Amerindian women village leadership is said to be increasing</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tribal: Maroon</b></p>	<p><u>Maroon: 6 tribes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional clan and family system. Village councils and leadership chosen for life according to family lines</li> </ul> <p>Each tribe has a <i>granman</i> (tribal chief), <i>ede-cabitan</i> and <i>cabitan</i>, and <i>basya</i></p> <p>Maroon women now also appointed as <i>cabiten</i> (village head) <i>Marron Vrouwen netwerk</i> is part of the national platform of women's organisations and also has a gender equality agenda</p> <p>Increasing numbers of young, well-educated Maroon women in government middle management and in Maroon political party structures and members of parliament</p> <p>The current Minister of Social Affairs (the only woman minister in cabinet) is a Maroon woman</p>

The Amerindian and Maroon peoples have their own governance structures, which allow them to retain their own leadership, culture, customs, and traditional celebrations and practices. These structures are acknowledged by government, which officially appoints the leaders after they are elected by their respective communities, and which provides stipends or salaries for the tribal leaders through the Ministry of Regional Affairs. The constitution in Suriname does not acknowledge collective rights, and thus the collective land rights of Amerindian and Maroon peoples have been a bone of contention for many years.



It is only in the past decade that the first women Maroon captains were appointed, and no official data are available to determine whether the numbers of women being appointed in these traditional tribal governance structures is increasing. Appointment to Maroon governance structures is for life.

Over the past ten years, young indigenous and Maroon women have improved their level of education and are now being employed in lower and middle management positions in the urban areas of Suriname. Maroon women are increasingly also found in higher management and political positions in government. At present, the Minister of Social Affairs, Suriname's ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, and two of the seven women parliamentarians are Maroon women, as are the current permanent secretary of the ministry of Regional Affairs and many persons in the higher management positions of this ministry. With increasing numbers of young Maroon women completing university education and taking more prominent leadership roles, it will be interesting to witness the changing role and function of Maroon women, their decision-making power, and the impact of education on gender equality in Maroon society.

### 3. Women, Power and Influence to Promote Gender Equality

The original objective of the desk review was to seek out the causal link between women's political participation and its effect through the inclusion of gender and other related inequality issues into the legislative and executive agenda — thereby establishing the essential nature of women as important agents of change for development. As part of this objective, the case study seeks to analyze the extent of women's participation influence to promote positive changes in several fields of power.

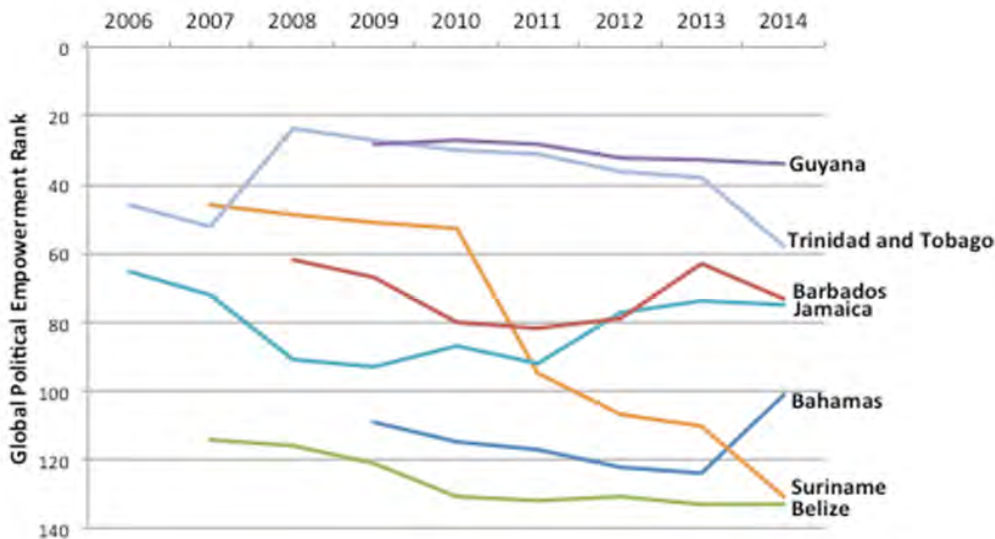
#### There are Relatively Few Women in Decision-Making

According to the 2014 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, Suriname shows high gender gaps in both political empowerment and overall gender equality.<sup>18</sup> The country's overall 2014 index ranking of 109 out of 142 countries makes it the lowest performing CARICOM country of the seven included in the regional desk review. In terms of political empowerment, Suriname dropped in rank from 46 (out of 128) in 2007 to 131 (out of 140) in 2014 — a fall of 54 places in five years (Figure 2). The biggest drop during this period is evident after the 2010 election, when women's representation in parliament was halved.

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<sup>18</sup> Global Gender Gap Report 2012, World Economic Forum

**Figure 2: Global political empowerment rank for selected Caribbean countries (2006-2014)**



Source: WEF Global Gender Gap 2014

Women’s advancement in political participation and decision-making is taking too long, despite international commitments and conventions that supersede national legislation. Civil society has been the more constant advocate through various, mostly women’s organizations. While some successes have been achieved, the gender equality agenda continues to retain an ad-hoc character in approach and real implementation.

### **Reasons Women are Underrepresented**

Women’s participation in political decision-making has been difficult to achieve in Suriname. While no studies have been conducted to examine the reasons within the country’s unique context, the structural and social barriers identified in analyses in other countries are undoubtedly important factors preventing women’s political participation and representation in Suriname as well.

Yet, although women are seriously underrepresented in Suriname’s politics, several women have achieved powerful positions in the political arena, such as the current speaker of the National Assembly. Jennifer Geerlings-Simons has held a high position within her party’s structure and has a popular following. The same is the case for deputy speaker Ruth Wijdenbosch, who was elected into the position from the

opposition. Both have publicly spoken out for more women in politics and leadership positions, and have given women opportunities in their place of work. However, it is not directly visible how their positions have helped to open spaces for other women in their respective political parties.

## Institutional Impediments Within Political Parties

In Suriname, one woman made her mark in history when she, in a strange twist of logic, was able to be elected to the then 15 member all male parliament in 1938 — even though she herself did not have the right to vote in elections until universal adult suffrage was granted ten years later. Like other Caribbean countries, women's involvement in politics in Suriname has traditionally been more focused on support or active campaigning for male candidates. However in 1991, a woman politician, who was placed quite low on her party's candidates' list, campaigned enthusiastically and received sufficient preferential, personal votes to gain a seat in parliament. She later went on to become the first woman speaker of the national assembly in Suriname (1996-2000).

Unlike Guyana, the first political parties set up in Suriname did not have any women frontrunners — nor was there an active feminist lobby as in Jamaica. It was only during the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and in the post-conference activities that women's organisations became actively involved in advocating for more women in decision-making positions. The first political party to be founded by women was DOE in 1999, which is also the only party which has a quota system laid down in its by-laws: 50% of its board and party structures must consist of women.

In Suriname, politics tend to be party-driven rather than voter-driven. The parties in fact determine the way people vote, and hardly ever adjust their programmes, images, ideologies, and policies to capture votes. Moreover, political parties were initially established more on the basis of racial lines than political orientation. Like its neighbour Guyana, a racial pattern of voting emerged<sup>19</sup> that continues to be an important factor in determining voting behaviour, and has become intertwined with many political and public issues.

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<sup>19</sup> Greene, 1974.

## ***Low presence of women in leadership positions in political parties***

A recent study by CIWIL and UN Women<sup>20</sup> notes that the structures and operations of political parties in the Caribbean were fashioned, and have continued to be influenced, by strong patriarchal norms. Although the study was not carried out in Suriname, these findings appear to apply to political parties here. Moreover, as the study also states, political parties are responsible for recruiting, selecting and promoting candidates for elections. Thus, they are the main gatekeepers of women's struggle for parity in political decision-making.

In the last elections (2010) there were 26 registered political parties contending nationally. The electoral system allows each party to enter elections individually or as a political combination. The criteria for either are laid down in the electoral laws. Each party or political combination submits party candidates' lists in ten electoral districts for both national and subnational elections at the same time. As in past elections, mammoth political combinations were formed as a vote gaining strategy. These political combinations not normally based on political or developmental vision. Rather, they are formed merely to contend in elections. This has caused problems in the past, with individual parliamentarians or smaller groups within the large political combinations either crossing over, or forming their own parliamentary factions. According to its official website<sup>21</sup>, the national assembly of Suriname currently has six political combinations registered in parliament.

The formation of political combinations is a specific challenge to nominating women as candidates in Suriname (Table 10). In 2010, all individual political parties were chaired by men. When political combinations are formed for elections, the chairs of the individual parties are nominated first on the candidates' lists; leaving few places open for women, even if they hold a strong position in their own party, or have a personal following within their constituency. Therefore the only viable option for women to win a parliamentary seat is to campaign for preferential votes from the electorate.

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<sup>20</sup> CIWIL and UN Women study

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.dna.sr/>

**Table 10: Political parties with seats in the National Assembly, and number of women per party (May 2010)**

Political combination	Seats	Number of elected women	% elected women
Mega Combination (NDP, PALU, NS, KTPI)	23	3	13%
NF Combination (NPS, VHP, SPA, DA91)	14	1	7.14%
A Combination (ABOP, SEEKA, BEP)	5	1	14.28%
VA Combination (Pertjajah Luhur, Pendawalima, D21, Middenblok, NPLO, PPP, PPRS, Trefpunt 2000)	6	0	0
DOE	1	0	0
BEP	2	0	0
Total	51	5	9.8%

Sources: IPU Parline Database; Political Database of the Americas; De Nationale Assemblée

Almost all political parties in Suriname have a women’s arm with the stated goal of including more women. However, the study by CIWiL and UN women has called into question the effectiveness of women’s arms to actually advance a gender equality agenda for some Caribbean countries, since very little is known regarding how and if they play role in empowering women politicians in their own party. It appears that their activities have generally been focused more on mobilising support for male contenders, as fundraisers, and as community development workers.<sup>22</sup>

## Prioritization of Gender Issues in the National Assembly

Once elected, parliamentarians are generally expected to observe party discipline when they vote in the National Assembly. The more experienced party members, or the party leaders who are parliamentarians, are generally the ones who speak on important issues; the younger and less powerful party members are expected to concur.

In Suriname, a time limit exists for all parliamentarians who speak in parliament on important issues. The government coalition parties and the opposition parties are assigned maximum time allotments that are agreed upon by the respective parties and the parliamentary leadership. Coalition and opposition parties then assign one

<sup>22</sup> CIWiL and UN Women study, p.7

or two persons each to speak on certain issues in the debates. This restricts the participation of parliamentarians in open debate — especially if they are new or less experienced.

Inexperienced parliamentarians who enter parliament after general elections (newly elected women parliamentarians usually fall in this category) do not have the power to bring change, or lobby for bills and legislative amendments that may be controversial or difficult to pass — like most bills that deal with gender equality. The only way in which inter-party alliances or working structures can be built is with the assistance or initiative of more powerful parliamentarians.

### ***Women in parliamentary committees***

The multi-party representation in the National Assembly forces the committee structure to bring all parties in parliament together to work on substantial issues and promote fundamental debate on legislation, although there are no formal intra-party working structures or formal parliamentary caucuses. The national assembly has 17 standing committees, 2 rapporteur committees and 4 ad hoc committees. Parliamentarians can sit in several committees without limitation, although committee membership is discussed by the parliamentarians in consultation with their respective political party. The standing committees are set up to monitor the work of the ministries, and have the same names as the ministries they oversee.

Seven of the standing committees have no women members (Table 11). One of these is the Standing Committee for Home Affairs — even though the Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for gender policy. Because of the relatively small size of the committees (5-7 members), the percentage of women members is high even when there is only one woman in a committee. It can be assumed that, due to the limited number of women parliamentarians, 10 of the 27 existing committees have no women members, but there is no clear explanation why only one committee is chaired by a woman (the speaker). Of particular note in regards to the committees in Suriname is the presence of women in the committees for Defence; Finance; foreign Affairs; Transport, Communication and tourism, and Trade and Industry, which are not necessarily considered the 'soft sectors' where more women are usually found.

**Table 11: Representation of women and men in committees of the National Assembly and in committee leadership**

Standing Committees	# Men	# Women	% Women	Chair (M/F)
Labour, Technology and Environment	5	1	20%	M
Home Affairs	6	0	0%	M
Foreign Affairs	4	2	50%	M
Defence	5	1	20%	M
Finance	5	1	20%	M
Trade and Industry	5	1	20%	M
Justice and Police	6	0	0%	M
Agriculture	6	0	0%	M
Natural Resources	NA	NA	-	-
Education	NA	NA	-	-
Public Works	6	0	0%	M
Regional Development	6	0	0%	M
Spatial planning, Land and Forest Management	6	0	0%	M
Social Affairs and Housing	5	1	20%	M
Sport and Youth Affairs	4	2	50%	M
Transport, Communication and Tourism	5	1	20%	M
Health	5	1	0%	M
<b>Rapporteur committees</b>				
Anti-corruption legislation	7	0	0%	M
Draft laws	6	1	16.7%	M
Law on homes and shelters	7	0	0%	M
<b>Ad-hoc committees</b>				
Renovation DNA	7	2	28.6%	F
Human Rights	5	2	40%	M
Internal DNA committees (4)	17	2	11.8%	M
Naturalization requests committee	7	0	0%	M

Source: Official website of The National Assembly of Suriname, [www.dna.sr](http://www.dna.sr)

It is also important to review the type of committees in which women are mainly represented to see whether there is a traditional division of labour in parliament. The Skard and Haavio-Mannila method distinguishes three types of committees: reproduction, production and preservation of system.<sup>23</sup> Using this method to categorize the committees of the National Assembly, it appears that women’s representation in the “production category” which includes many of the more prestigious or substantial national issues is lower than in the other two categories (Table 12).

<sup>23</sup> Reproduction: social policy, family, health, education, housing, environmental, culture, etc. Production: economic and fiscal policy, labor, industry and energy, etc. Preservation of the system: political and administrative reform, foreign and defense policy, support to interest groups and minorities, etc.



**Table 12: Parliamentary committees in Suriname's National Assembly, according to Skard and Haavio-Mannila categories**

Skard and Haavio-Mannila categories	Number of Committees	Total number of members	Number of women members
Reproduction	8	45	7
Production	6	33	4
Preservation of system	10	71	7

There is no specific gender committee in the National Assembly. A committee dealing with issues regarding women's and children's rights whose mandate included advising the government on these issues was established as a specialized permanent committee of the National Assembly during the previous administration in February, 2006.<sup>24</sup> Its priority was to propose a quota system to bring more women into higher positions of government and parliament, and to help strengthen a healthy family life. It was composed of nine members for the duration of the parliamentary term: three men and six women. The committee started with hearings of nongovernmental and governmental organizations responsible for women's and child issues. While the hearings were not public, information was disseminated through the website of the National Assembly. The idea was to establish subcommittees as needed to deal with specific issues. After the current parliament was inaugurated in 2010, all parliamentary committees were reviewed, and this committee no longer exists.

The ad hoc Human Rights committee (5 men, 2 women) was established to advise parliament on human rights issues and to supervise compliance with national and international standards. This committee has so far debated on conditions in prisons (especially for women and youth), corruption of government officials in relation to building permits that infringe on the rights of citizens, and on human rights education in schools. While this committee could be lobbied to play a more active role in women's rights and gender equality, training for the relevant parliamentarians will probably be needed in order to foster a better understanding of gender issues.

24 IPU Parline Database: Suriname, <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports>

### *Building capacity for promoting gender equality*

The *Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)* has developed a Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments<sup>25</sup> that provides a broad range of strategies in seven action areas:

- Increasing the number of women in parliament and achieve equality in participation
- Strengthening gender equality legislation and policy
- Mainstreaming gender equality throughout all parliamentary work
- Instituting or improving gender-sensitive infrastructure and parliamentary culture
- Ensuring that responsibility for gender equality is shared by all parliamentarians – men and women alike
- Encouraging political parties to be champions of gender equality
- Enhancing the gender sensitivity of, and gender equality among, parliamentary staff

According to the IPU, “a gender-sensitive parliament responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and work”<sup>26</sup>. It called upon the Parliaments to implement the Plan of Action at the national level by setting concrete objectives, actions, and deadlines suited to their national context, and to regularly monitor and evaluate their progress towards the goal of gender sensitivity. The National Assembly has not yet discussed or mentioned the IPU’s resolution to develop a gender plan for their institution. Nor have actions been taken so far towards building a gender-sensitive institution.

The Democracy Unit of the Anton de Kom University of Suriname, in collaboration with the National Assembly, organized a training workshop and other activities for parliamentarians and other persons nominated on the candidates’ lists of 2010. It has monitored the elections of 2005 and 2010, but has not undertaken any gender-specific activities.

In February 2012, a first round table on gender and politics was organized by the speaker of the national assembly (in collaboration with UNDP) as part of a capacity-building and institutional strengthening programme for the assembly and parliamentarians. Its objective was to get commitment from political parties represented in parliament to substantially increase the percentage of women in political and public positions and in decision-making bodies for the next elections and

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<sup>25</sup> The Plan of Action is adopted by the 127th IPU Assembly in Quebec, Canada, in October 2012. It is designed to support parliaments to become more gender-sensitive.

<sup>26</sup> IPU Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments, p.10

to develop an effective work plan for implementation. A follow-up round table took place in June 2012, with a focus on learning from the experiences with quota systems in Caribbean and Latin American countries. In a second session of this round table, the political parties were invited to present their views on gender equality and what actions they intend to take to encourage increased political participation of women. Most of the participants were in favour of introducing some kind of quota system, but could not agree on whether it should be a legislated system like Guyana. The speakers presenting for the national assembly were also invited to present at a public debate organized by the Projekta Foundation.

In May 2013, the annual meeting of the group of women parliamentarians of ParlAmericas was held in Paramaribo. Presentations and discussions focused on three themes: women presidents of national legislatures, leadership and political participation of women of African descent, and the effects of women's participation in politics. The speaker of the national assembly, who was elected chair of this group in August 2013, used the event to advocate nationally for more women in parliament and to once again discuss in a number of interviews and speeches held at the time, the introduction of a quota system in Suriname.

The Speaker also initiated an activity that brought together women politicians from different political parties in an informal setting to meet and talk with one another. There has not yet been a follow-up activity or workshop, although both the speaker and the deputy speaker have said they support further action in this regard. The women politicians in those sessions requested that more of such activities where they can meet and learn to know one another be undertaken.

## **Gender Responsive Budgeting**

Another way to hold parliaments and government accountable for gender equality is through gender responsive budgeting. According to UN Women<sup>27</sup>, gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is “government planning, programming and budgeting that contributes to the advancement of gender equality and the fulfilment of women's rights. It entails identifying and reflecting needed interventions to address gender gaps in sector and local government policies, plans and budgets. GRB also aims to analyse the gender-differentiated impact of revenue-raising policies and the allocation of domestic resources and Official Development Assistance.”

Although gender-responsive budgeting leads to greater public transparency and to economic policies with more benefits for the community, none of the CARICOM

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.gender-budgets.org/>, accessed on 20 January 2014

countries has introduced it into policy, in spite of the advocacy in the Caribbean by UN Women and other UN agencies to demonstrate its relevance to the Millennium Development Goals, aid effectiveness, public sector reform, and financing for development.

In 2002, a workshop on gender responsive budgeting was organized as an awareness raising activity by the Women's Parliamentary Forum. During this workshop different possibilities for gender-responsive budgeting were presented and discussed, as were different ways to analyse the national budget. Recommendations were then given on how gender budgeting could be introduced. Participants, which included parliamentarians, were enthusiastic about introducing or piloting gender-responsive budgeting. In identifying possibilities for gender responsive budgeting, a mapping study was conducted in 2008 in the framework of the EC/UN Partnership on Gender Equality for Development and Peace<sup>28</sup>. This study noted that:

*“Suriname uses a line budgeting format for its National Budget. Both Government officials and non-Government persons claim that the system allows for gender responsive budgeting, but they pointed out that the lack of awareness and a good understanding of what gender responsive budgeting really means and what it entails, are hampering its introduction.” (p.45)*

## Accountability for Gender Equality

The public needs to monitor the actions of officials in order to promote transparency, encourage performance, ensure that processes and institutions produce results that are promised, and resources are efficiently used. Meaningful citizen involvement and media attention are the most effective ways to monitor the actions of public servants. This is particularly the case in an area such as gender, where lip service is often paid to the issue without any real commitment to change.

*Stichting Projekta*<sup>29</sup> has organised the Democracy Month in November every year since 2009, which focuses on a wider context of participation and democracy, but always includes gender. During this time, an annual newsletter ‘The State of our Democracy’ is published electronically, and parliamentarians are invited for face-to-face interaction with the general public during public forums such as presentations, workshops, and panels. The speaker of parliament was invited to hold a presentation in November 2010, which was shortly after her election to the post and in the midst of the first budget debates led by her. She used it as an opportunity to present her

<sup>28</sup> Tjon Sie Fat; 2008

<sup>29</sup> [Transl.:](#) Projekta Foundation

vision and plans to build the capacity of the national assembly and make it more accessible to the general public by the active use of broadcasting and internet. After this interaction with the speaker, presentations were organized in parliament on the political participation of women, which led to a commitment from the ministry of Home Affairs to work on legislation for gender equality in political and executive processes, possibly through a quota system.

The Projekta Foundation has also organized an annual 'March of Women' activity since 2011. The same format is used as that of the successful Democracy Month, and gender equality issues are discussed with the general public in the form of presentations, debates, workshops, and media attention. Parliamentarians, including the speaker and deputy speaker, are invited to all events, and there are always one or two interested parliamentarians in every room, who engage actively with the public.

After the 1995 Beijing Conference, much attention was given both by women's organisations and the national gender policy bureau to provide gender awareness training for the media. While TV, radio and newspaper reporters are always invited and present at activities organized by parliament, the gender policy bureau, and women's organizations, the media continues to lack investigative journalism or opinion columns that deal specifically with gender equality issues, or programs that the media itself develops without specific encouragement from women's organisations.

The use of the Internet and social media is new for most parliamentarians. However, the national assembly has succeeded in making its website more user-friendly, and broadcasts all public sessions, either live-streaming or through radio. With the addition of the email addresses and telephone numbers of all members of parliament, the clerk, and the secretariat of the national assembly, it has become much easier for the general public to interact directly with parliament. Requests for appointments, attendance of public sessions of parliament, and official texts of parliamentary proceedings are all handled efficiently. Many parliamentarians, including the speaker and deputy speaker, are enthusiastic Facebook users and have acquired large followings.

As a result of this new connectivity, specific issues, including women's rights and gender equality issues, can now easily be brought to the attention of individual parliamentarians. However, with the exception of the Projekta Foundation, which uses Facebook and blogging to discuss gender equality issues as part of their democratization and participation program, civil society organisations in Suriname have not yet started to use social media, even though the Internet itself is quite intensively used by individuals.

## Gender Equality Advances on Legislation: A Review of Topics

The Government of Suriname has signed or ratified the following conventions, agreements, and action plans:

- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1992 (Optional Protocol not yet signed)
- Nairobi World Conference on the Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985)
- Beijing Platform for Action (1995)
- Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000-2015)
- Ten Year Review of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing+ 10)
- CARICOM Plan of Action (2005)
- Belem do Para Convention (2005)

In general, the passing and interpretation of laws tend to be rooted in custom, tradition, religion, ideology, and beliefs about the roles of men and women in society. It is recognized world-wide that a minimal critical mass of 30% women in parliament is needed to bring about reforms and amendments in relation to women's rights and gender equality. Given the low representation of women in the national legislative body, the record for preparing and passing legislation on women's rights and equality in Suriname has been scattered. Legislative reforms and societal change will probably continue to be slow.

In virtue of Article 27 of the Constitution, CEDAW entered into force in Suriname on 31 March 1993. In the discussions on Suriname's third periodic report in 2007<sup>30</sup>, the CEDAW Committee emphasized the need for increased sensitization of Government officials, parliamentarians, and the general public on the importance of legal reform that needs to be undertaken without delay, and requested the government to take temporary special measures, in accordance with Article 4, Paragraph I, of the Convention to enhance women's equality. For many women and women's organizations in Suriname, one of the biggest milestones towards achieving gender equality was the 1981 Act, which repealed the incapacity of married women to act independently.

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<sup>30</sup> The 2007 Country Report is the last report submitted by Suriname

An Intra-ministerial Gender Legislation Committee, under coordination of the Ministry of Home Affairs, was set up in 2000 specifically to ensure that legislation is in line with CEDAW. This Committee identifies discriminatory laws, and prepares amendments that are passed on to the national assembly for further discussion. Between 2001 and 2010, nine pieces of legislation that were directly or indirectly related to women's rights or women's equality, were passed by parliament. Two international conventions were ratified, namely the Belem do Para convention and the UN Convention against organized crime, which included the Protocols against trafficking of women and children and smuggling of migrants. In 2003, the divorce laws were amended to make the divorce process for women and men easier.

University lecturer Dr Monique Veira<sup>31</sup>, in writing for the newsletter published by the Projekta Foundation, stated that priority should now be given to legislation that will provide for equal pay for equal work, equality in parental responsibility, and quota for women in leadership positions.

Suriname's legislative body has also passed or amended several legislative products that address gender equality themes (Table 13) since 2001.

**Table 13: Legislative products that enhanced women's equality approved in 2001-2010**

Conventions ratified, and legislation passed or amended	Short description/ remarks	Year of approval
Accession to the Inter-American Convention on the prevention, punishment and eradication of violence against women (Convention of Belem do Para)	Ratification of international conventions supersedes national legislation	2001
Act to amend holiday allowance	Adaptation to meet changed economic and social circumstances	2001
Act to amend the 1974 law on identity	Use of own name by married women; own nationality, not dependent on nationality of husband	2002
Act to amend the marriage laws	New rules on the conclusion of marriages	2002
Act regulating parents' and children's rights to maintain contact	Regulates rights after separation or divorce	2002
Resolution to enforce amendment of marriage act	Amendment of age of consent, and attune the general marriage act with the Hindu and Moslem marriage acts	2003
Resolution for passport instructions of the Republic of Suriname	Married women to maintain own name	2004
Accession to UN Convention against organized crime, the Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and the Protocol against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea and air	Ratification of international conventions supersedes national legislation	2007
Act to amend domestic violence	Instituting clear rules and regulations to conform with Convention Belem do Para	2009
Act to amend the electoral legislation	Indication of candidates' gender on candidate lists	2010

Source: CEDAW country reports, Ministry of Home Affairs

31. St. Projekta, Nieuwsbrief 2011, p.5

Of 30 ILO Conventions ratified by Suriname, 29 are in force, and one has been denounced; none have been ratified in the past 12 months. Suriname has not ratified the following conventions, which are particularly relevant to women:

- Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183)
- Night Work Convention (No. 171)
- Underground Work (Women) Convention (No. 45)
- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156)
- Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111)
- Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169)

Ratification of an international or regional convention or treaty, followed by approval by the National Assembly and publication of the relevant text, automatically makes it applicable in Suriname, although existing legislation that does not conform should be amended. In spite of an existing listing of laws that need to be amended, the process through which this is undertaken is slow.

Below is a list of issues that affect women in Suriname, along with any legislative action that has been taken to date in their regard:

- **Maternity Leave:** Suriname is the only CARICOM country that does not have a national Maternity Leave legislation. The current law only applies to the public sector which allows for 12 weeks of fully-paid leave. Women employed in the private sector are left negotiate with trade unions and employers for maternity leave benefits.
- **Human Trafficking:** Suriname does not have a specific law on human trafficking. In its 2013 Trafficking in Persons (TIP)<sup>32</sup> report, the US Department of State placed Suriname on its Tier 2 Watch List. This classification means that the number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is significantly increasing, and governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards in their respective Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA).
- **LGBT rights:** Same sex sexual activity is not illegal, but there are no anti-discrimination laws with respect to sexual orientation. Same sex unions, marriages, and adoption by same sex couples is not legally recognized.
- **Sexual reproductive rights<sup>33</sup>:** The legal age of consent to sex is 16, but the legal age of majority is 21. Below the age of majority, the law requires parental consent for medical treatment, which effectively restricts access to contraception and other aspects of SRH care. Abortion is illegal in Suriname.

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32 <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2013/index.htm>

33 Allen, Caroline, Situation Analysis of Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV in the Caribbean, PAHO, 2013



- **Gender-based violence:** Domestic violence, sexual violence, and sexual harassment are covered by Wet bestrijding huiselijk geweld (Domestic Violence Act) of 2009, and in the Wetboek van strafrecht (Criminal Code) Title XIV, Offences against morality, articles 292 – 313.

## Public Policies on Gender Equality and the Role of the Gender Bureaus

The *Nationaal Bureau Genderbeleid (NBG)*<sup>34</sup> was established in 1998 as a department in the Ministry of Home Affairs, and replaced the Women's Bureau (it is one of seven departments within the ministry). The bureau has no direct access or a direct link to national parliament, since ministers are not parliamentarians. The NBG's responsibilities have been formulated as advising the Government on women's rights and gender issues, and monitoring the implementation of activities. Two Integral Gender Action Plans (IGAPs) have been developed since the NBG was established: the first for 2000-2005; the second for 2006-2010. They were both structured on the basis of the Beijing Platform for Action, and were formulated with participation of civil society organisations, primarily women's organisations. Implementation was poor, mainly due to a lack of coordination and a lack of human and financial resources.

The NBG initiated the establishment of a gender management system within government that consisted of gender focal points in the different Ministries to help with the implementation and monitoring of the Integral Gender Action Plan, and networking with other partners. However, the staff of the NBG and the gender focal points are generally junior officials with little or no power to influence or network with parliament or civil society organisations. This limits the organization's effectiveness as an agent of change.

In 2001, a committee was established by the minister of home affairs to make an inventory of legislation that needs to be brought in line with CEDAW and other international and regional conventions and treaties. This committee also prepared the necessary bills and amendments, which were submitted in the national assembly by a parliamentarian belonging to the ruling coalition or a member of the minister's party, and usually after lobby by women's organisations.

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<sup>34</sup> *Transl.*: National Bureau for Gender Policy

It is important to note that the National Development Plan presented by the current Government for 2011-2016 does not mention gender as neither a crosscutting issue, nor as a national priority. In response, a gender work plan was developed in 2012 by the NGB in close collaboration with a steering group and civil society organisations at the initiative of the Projekta Foundation. This work plan identifies five priority areas (violence against women, health, education, economic empowerment, and decision-making) that require action, as well as a monitoring system that has not yet been implemented. However, despite delays in implementation, there is evidence that the plan has garnered attention: in the last multi-stakeholder workshop to discuss the final draft document, the speaker and the chair of the standing committee for the Ministry of Home Affairs participated.

Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs has stated that it will develop, coordinate, and implement a national gender policy to achieve equitable development, i.e. equal opportunities for men and women<sup>35</sup>, and its 2014 draft budget shows an allocation of SRD 995,000 (US\$ 306,154) toward gender affairs (Table 14). The ministry also noted that it would continue to develop policy to optimize gender equality and gender equity with the aid and participation of relevant stakeholders. In the multi-stakeholder meetings organised so far, stakeholders have included civil society organizations, religious organisations, trade unions, and members of national and sub-national legislative bodies. It is assumed that the ministry will continue with this process.

**Table 14: Gender Budget 2012-2016 (in SRD)<sup>36</sup>**

Policy area/ objective: Executive and legislative realisation	Realization 2012	Expected realization 2013	Projection 2014	Projection 2015	Projection 2016
Emancipation: Gender					
Gender Affairs	359,000	897,000	995,000	945,000	995,000
Budget in US\$	110,462	276,000	306,154	290,769	306,154

Source: Draft Budget 2014 of Ministry of Home Affairs  
(1 USD =SRD 3.30)

<sup>35</sup> Draft Budget 2014 Ministry of Home Affairs.

<sup>36</sup> Information on financial allocations and tracking of expenditures and revenues are generally not easily available in Suriname, let alone accessible to the public. There is no right to information act with regard to budget transparency, but the national budget is presented publicly in the national assembly, and copies can be requested and purchased by interested parties.

The Ministry of Home Affairs' total programme budget in 2012 was SRD 61.4 million (US\$ 18.6 million). However, the allocation for "gender emancipation" was a mere 0.58% of the ministry's total realized budget. The projected gender policy programme budget for 2014 is 0.82% of the ministry's total policy programme budget, and for the projected following years it is consistently below 1% of the ministry's total budget. The amount which the Ministry of Home Affairs has budgeted each year for the National Gender Policy Bureau, and thus for the implementation of the gender equality program, has always been low. The current amount allocated is even below what was budgeted for 2007 and 2008 (Table 15).

**Table 15: Budget of the National Bureau for Gender Policy, 2001-2008 (in US\$)**

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>Total annual budget</b>	23,713	205,056	272,727	272,727	36,364	36,364	369,818	344,727

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs Presentation for High-level Policymakers, Oct. 2007

Note: Original amounts were in the local currency SRD and converted to USD using exchange rate at the time, namely: 1 USD/ 2.75 SRD<sup>37</sup>

## Women as Agents of Change for Gender Equality

Increasing numbers of women are being appointed to government positions, and development plans usually include paragraphs or entire chapters on how gender equality could be attained. However, these plans have not always resulted in changes in attitude or more just political systems. Women are also increasingly visible in the private sector, but data and information on their participation are not readily available from the chamber of commerce or the relevant private sector umbrella organizations. They are, however, most visible in nongovernmental organizations and have indeed always been the mainstay of civil society through their active work within these organisations.

### *Political women and the promotion of women's issues*

In Suriname, it is not clear whether or how influential women in politics advocate for women and women's issues. Sometimes, they are prevented from collaborating across party lines on gender equality issues

<sup>37</sup> Tjon Sie Fat, 2008, p. 47.

because of party discipline, or even fear of being perceived as feminists or women rights advocates. In other cases, they may have obtained their influence and power position for advocating for other relevant issues (indigenous rights, for green development, or economic change), and therefore have another agenda that takes priority over the women's agenda. Also, one should bear in mind that being women does not necessarily indicate gender sensitivity.

### **Women's movements**

Women in Suriname have been very active in religious and social organizations, as these were considered safe spaces where women could freely participate outside of the home without having to justify what they were doing. The first women's organizations were therefore, also organized along religious and social themes. Gradually, they were established to advocate and work for women's health, women's empowerment, and push gender equality issues forward. Some women's organisations, like the Projekta Foundation, broadened the scope of their work or specialized themselves to deal with new issues like democratization and civil action, or policy monitoring, or are offering specific capacity building training.

Women's organisations began to play an indispensable role after the Beijing Women's Conference (1995) in lobbying for gender policies and plans of action, and supporting the government in setting up the national gender bureau. They have also played an important role in raising awareness through involving the media in all their activities, or providing training for parliamentarians, members of the judiciary, and the police force. However, they never specifically targeted the political parties in their advocacy and capacity building to increase women's political participation.

## **Networks and Caucuses: Women Working Together**

The National Assembly does not have a formal or informal women's caucus or an institutionalized mechanism to address gender inequality and women's rights. While women's organizations and individual women have had formal and informal interactions with parliament throughout the years to bring a women's agenda to the table, the success of such interactions seems to have been isolated and sporadic, with no clear evidence on which strategies have been effective.

In regards to extra-parliamentary caucuses, the *Vrouwenparlement Forum* (VPF)<sup>38</sup> was founded on the initiative of the Projekta Foundation in 1993. At its launch, the forum stated that it would focus on equal access of men and women in politics, explore the possibility of introducing a quota system, introduce the concept of gender budgeting, lobby for amendments in legislation that are discriminatory to women, and push for policies and legislation to stop violence against women. Although it has no formal relationship with the national assembly, all women parliamentarians actively courted to join as special members. Within a year after its inception, it began to act much like a shadow parliament, holding meetings and hearings that provided women with a platform to voice their opinions on national issues, and creating an opportunity for interactions with women parliamentarians. Unfortunately, there was no follow-up to develop any specific institutional relationship. In addition to its activity as a shadow parliament, the Forum has also held seminars on issues that concerned women, conducted gender policy studies, and offered training to women who were interested in becoming involved in politics.

For the 1996 elections, the VPF organized a campaign to promote the use of preferential voting for women as an election strategy to address the issue that most women candidates were positioned low on the candidates' lists by their political parties, and therefore had slim chances of being elected.

The Forum was also quite active in 2000 general elections, running a voter education campaign targeting women voters, training women candidates from all contending parties, and publicly debating issues that were before the national assembly — thus bringing general attention to parliamentary work while emphasizing the need to set priorities that benefit women. The Forum provided training for locally elected authorities as well on issues of community development and on including a gender perspective in development policies.

It also voiced criticism on the sharp decrease of women parliamentarians after the 2010 elections. However, its visibility in the last two general elections (2005 and 2010) decreased enormously, apparently owing to a lack of funding. There have been no studies and analyses regarding the Forum's effectiveness. However, it can only be assumed that the increases in the percentage of women parliamentarians in 1996, 2000, and 2005 (when the Forum was most active) may be attributable to the its efforts, while the plummeting of the number of women parliamentarians in the 2010 elections could be the result of the lack of lobbying and awareness on the role of women in politics (one of the issues constantly raised by the Forum in previous elections).

38 Transl.: Women's Parliament Forum

## WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?

The VPF resumed its activities in 2012, thanks to funding received from the US embassy. Workshops and interactive women's leadership training were organized in the form of a women's café, which provided opportunities for the general public to interact with women parliamentarians and politicians. This intervention was the first in a renewed series of activities to interact with women politicians and provide training in preparation for the upcoming general election in 2015.

## Summary of Main Findings

Women's parliamentary leadership in Suriname has shown quite an evolution. It went from all-male leadership in 1987 to all-female leadership in 2010. At present, both the Speaker and Deputy Speaker posts are held by women who have publicly spoken in favour of a legislated quota system to ensure greater participation of women in parliament. However, it is not clear how their positions have helped to open spaces for women in their respective political parties.

Women's participation in political decision-making has been difficult to achieve. Despite past progress, a drastic decline in the number of directly elected women parliamentarians took place between 2005 and 2010, where women's presence fell from 23.5% to 9.8%. Data reviewed in the case study suggests two possible reasons for the decline: the formation of large political combinations, and the low ranking of women on candidates' lists.

In the National Assembly, seven of the seventeen standing committees have no women members. One of these is the standing committee for home affairs — even though the ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for gender policy. However, of particular note is the presence of women in the committees for defence; finance; foreign affairs; transport, communication and tourism; and trade and industry, which are not necessarily considered 'soft sectors' where more women are usually found.

The system for electing the president and vice president, who are appointed by the National Assembly, makes it difficult for a woman to fill these positions. Similar to the process for cabinet members (who are appointed), the attainment of executive posts is highly political and subject to negotiations, where women are largely absent — as they are currently rarely found in powerful positions in their respective political parties.

The increase in women who graduate with law degrees is being reflected in the judicial system. Currently, over 50% of the appointed judges and deputy judges of the circuit courts are women, and eight women were appointed as public prosecutors.

In regards to the political representation of women at the local level, there has been a steady increase in the number of women in local councils from 13% in 1987 to 35.7% in 2010, which surpasses the "critical mass" goal endorsed at the Beijing Platform for Action. At the district council level, there has also been an increase

from 13% in 1987 to 29.6% in 2010. Of the 15 current District Commissioners, four are women (26.7%).

In Suriname, maroon women are increasingly found in higher management and political positions in government. This is due in part to the increasing number of Maroon women acquiring university educations.

Preparing and passing legislation on women's rights and equality in Suriname has been scattered, and the low percentage of women in the National Assembly and Cabinet of Ministers indicates that legislative reforms and societal change will probably remain slow. The passing and interpretation of laws tend to be rooted in custom, tradition, religion, ideology, and beliefs regarding what the roles of men and women should be in society.

The National Assembly does not have a formal or informal women's caucus or an institutionalized mechanism to address gender inequality and women's rights. However the Vrouwenparlement Forum<sup>39</sup> is an extra-parliamentary women's caucus that focuses on equal access of men and women in politics. It is currently exploring possibilities for introducing a quota system, introducing the concept of gender budgeting, lobbying for amendments in legislation that are discriminatory to women, and pushing for policies and legislation to stop violence against women.

### Recommendations

1. Temporary special measures and affirmative action with enforceable non-compliance sanctions will be required to increase women's participation in political decision-making.
2. The formal and informal intra-parliamentary and extra-parliamentary women's caucuses need to be strengthened, as these mechanisms play an important role in providing continuous support for women parliamentarians.
3. Further studies are needed to analyze women's access to political participation.
4. Electoral data should be made more accessible and published in a disaggregated form for both local and national elections for voters, candidates, persons elected, and electoral officials, so as to make it possible to quantify numbers and better assess relative participation rates in all stages of the electoral process and over longer periods of time than the last elections.

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<sup>39</sup> *Transl.:* Women's Parliament Forum



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