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# WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT

## Côte d'Ivoire

PHOTO: USAID/CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The women's political participation and leadership (WPPL) assessment in Côte d'Ivoire, one of an eight-country pilot under USAID's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) Learning, Evaluation, and Research (LER) II activity, uses the latest iteration of USAID's **WPPL Assessment Framework**. The WPPL assessment investigates the barriers to and opportunities for expanding women's participation and leadership in Côte d'Ivoire along socio-cultural, institutional, and individual dimensions. Côte d'Ivoire has great but unrealized potential to make advancements in WPPL. The country has a rich history of women's political activism dating back to its struggle for independence and has adopted important legislation to promote gender equality, including in politics. Chief among these is its 2019 quota law, intended to help address Ivorian women's severe underrepresentation in elected positions.

The assessment findings and recommendations are derived from a desk review of relevant literature and documents, a survey completed by 60 politicians, 19 key informant interviews, and 29 focus group discussions with 255 participants including politicians, civil society, and media in Abidjan, Abengourou, Bouaké, Gagnoa, Korhogo, and Man. The Côte d'Ivoire WPPL Assessment Report can be used by the relevant stakeholders to identify priority areas in which their investments in programs and initiatives to support WPPL are likely to have the greatest and most meaningful impact.

## FINDINGS

### BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

- Patriarchal norms related to men as decision-makers and women as care providers result in the masculinization of the political sphere and poor perceptions of women as political leaders. Unmarried women may face stigma when attending political meetings. These norms also prevent women from pursuing education and training that would better equip them to become political leaders, and when women overcome these norms, their voices are not as influential as men's.
- Marital status limits women's freedom of political choice, with early marriage being particularly harmful. Family and community voting, which is determined by male heads of household or community leaders, is common. Women's domestic responsibilities limit their time and ability to participate in political activities.
- Intimidation, threats, and violence affect women's political activity, particularly their ability to vote. Political violence also has a chilling effect on women's political leadership—both in running for elected positions and once elected. Existing laws on violence against women do not address political violence.
- Gaps in legislation and enforcement capacity undermine women's political participation; although the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) has a gender unit to ensure inclusive elections, it has no dedicated budget or sanction power to enforce the law.
- Parties' candidate selection processes are opaque and favor men, and parties are less likely to financially support women candidates. Women politicians often do not have the necessary personal finances and networks, causing disadvantages.
- Côte d'Ivoire's social and ethnic divisions tend to be addressed by mono-ethnic organizations, contributing to a lack of women's solidarity on political issues.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

- Côte d'Ivoire's 2019 quota law requires political parties to nominate 30 percent women candidates for parliamentary and local elections. Although the law's delayed implementation has not yet manifested in gender parity in political representation, it is a promising step.
- Low levels of confidence and political awareness affect women's rates of political participation; however, surveys indicate women's willingness to participate and efforts to encourage women's political participation and leadership (WPPL) are viewed positively.
- Men politicians overestimate their party's efforts to advance WPPL, but politicians of both genders support measures to increase women's leadership. Almost all political parties in Côte d'Ivoire have women's wings, but men view these wings as more influential over party decisions than women do.
- Women are considered crucial for grassroots mobilization and activism yet are not granted political power by men politicians when their activism is successful.
- Civil society plays a vital role in creating an enabling environment for WPPL in Côte d'Ivoire through advocacy for increasing women's representation and voice in politics, training and mentoring women on civic engagement, encouraging voter turnout among women, and calling for policies to advance gender equality.

**“You know, politics means governing, and in the history of our societies, governance has been exclusively reserved for men. Will men agree to share this power equitably with women? That's the problem.”**  
**—Man party leader**



## SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

### SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

- Donors, the government, and local stakeholders should develop culturally informed educational materials on civic education and WPPL to bolster women's knowledge of and confidence to participate in civic and political life.
- Donors and partners (including civil society organizations [CSOs] and women's organizations) should mobilize nationally influential men and women athletes, actors, musicians, media personalities, and customary and religious leaders as champions to transform gender norms and women's role in political life.
- Donors should work with CSOs, political parties, and the media to develop communication campaigns to celebrate women who have achieved success in decision-making roles in different fields, particularly women in political positions.

### INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- Working with donors and other partners, the government should strengthen CEI's independence and authority, including via monetary support, to solidify recent progress in enforcing the 2019 quota law.
- Working with donors, political parties, and other partners, Côte d'Ivoire should reduce logistical barriers to women's participation; for example, by working with parties' women's wings to advocate for party meetings and political events to take place during the day or in more women-friendly venues.
- To hold political parties accountable for gender inclusion and highlight those making progress, the government should partner with civil society and media to develop a communications and advocacy campaign on the gender balance (or lack thereof) among parties' current representatives in elected office and on candidate lists.
- Donors should work with CSOs, political parties, and the government to push for legislation to reduce violence against women in politics.

### INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- Donors should work with CSOs, the media, and other stakeholders such as organized labor to hold activities that promote solidarity among women, with a particular focus on cultivating cross-ethnic bonds.
- Donors should work with the Ministry of Education to develop outreach plans to families to address attrition rates of girls compared to their male counterparts, particularly among secondary ages and in rural areas.
- Donors and partners such as CSOs, international non-governmental organizations, and parties' women wings should refine and expand political education and training programs to create a pipeline of competitive women candidates.