

Bridging the Gender Gap in the 21st Century Strategies to Increase Women's Participation in Municipal Consultation Processes

**Summary Report
May 2004**

Introduction

In June 2003 the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) launched a one-year research project with funding from Status of Women Canada. The purpose of the project was to contribute to changing municipal consultation practices and policies so that the full diversity of Canadian women has a meaningful voice in the decisions that affect their daily lives. Over the past months the project carried out national research and involved women in six Canadian communities through local participatory action research projects. This summary report presents an overview of the project findings and recommends a national strategy to strengthen women's involvement in public participation, and to bridge the current gender gap in Canadian municipal processes.

Background

FCM's prime mission is to advocate and promote strong, effective and accountable municipal government in Canada and works internationally within a global network for policy development and advocacy on municipal issues and priorities. (Source: Local Government in Canada, 1999) As a member of the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) and signatory to the Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government, FCM recognizes that local government is the level of government closest to the citizens and therefore is in the best position to involve women in the making of decisions concerning their living condition and to make use of their knowledge and capabilities in the promotion of sustainable development. The IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government supports:

- "Strengthening efforts to make equal the number of women and men in decision-making bodies in all policy areas.
- Applying the mainstreaming principle by integrating a gender perspective into all policies, programs and service delivery activities in individual local governments and their representative associations.
- Looking at new ways to ensure women are represented and actively participate by formal as well as informal means in local governance.
- Working for changes of attitudes related to gender issues by awareness raising in the education and within the structure of local government.
- Working with other actors of society to accomplish goals of the IULA declaration.

(Source: The IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government)

IULA, along with the United Nations, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the European Common Market have developed comprehensive policies and plans of action to address historic inequalities between women and men and to support gender equality. These include the development of knowledge networks, strategic alliances to advance gender equality, gender mainstreaming for all policy and program development, and promoting sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis. (Source: Advancing the Commonwealth Agenda for Gender Equality; IULA Declaration; 1995 Beijing Platform for Action)

FCM through its International Centre for Municipal Development (ICMD) is highly regarded internationally for its work on gender equality. It has actively supported increased gender equality in municipal processes through initiatives and publications such Gender and Municipal Development: Guidelines for Promoting Women's Participation in Partnership Program Activities (1996) and A City Tailored to Women (1997 and expanded in 2004). In addition, Canadian initiatives such as Femmes et Ville International, based in Montreal have garnered international attention for ground breaking work in the area of women's safety and inclusion.

In 2002 a knowledge sharing workshop on gender equality was organized by FCM, ICMD with 50 international and Canadian participants. The workshop led to the following questions, and resulted in the current project.

- 1) How are women participating in Canadian municipalities and what barriers do they face?
- 2) What needs to be done to increase women's participation?

The Research Approach

The Increasing Women's Participation project used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather data:

- 152 FCM member municipalities participated in a national survey on women's participation.
- Leaders from 20 women's organizations were interviewed and a workshop was held with the Canadian Congress of Muslim Women at their national conference.

- FCM Board and staff participated in consultations, and two workshops were held with the FCM Canadian Women in Municipal Government committee.
- A Strategic Planning workshop with a small group from the CWMG.
- Review of literature.
- Participatory research at six community sites:

Cowichan Valley, British Columbia (The Cowichan Women Against Violence Safer Futures)

Halifax, Nova Scotia (Halifax YWCA)

Iqaluit, Nunavut (Qullit Nunavut Status of Women)

City of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (City of Saskatoon, Community Services Department)

Thunder Bay, Ontario (Northwestern Women's Centre)

Montreal, Quebec (The Women's Y of Montreal)

The **FCM Canadian Women in Municipal Government Committee** acted as the governance body for the project. An eighteen member **National Steering Committee** developed the research framework, recommendations for national strategies and tools to increase women's participation, and a five member **Working Group** providing direction and support to the Project Coordinator. FCM- ICMD managed the project.

Summary of Key Findings from the Research

1. Canada is losing ground with countries around the world

- Canada, with 21.7% women elected in local government falls behind many countries: Costa Rica (73%), Chile (48%), Sweden (42%), Bolivia (34%), Finland (31%), Ghana (30%), South Africa (29%), United Kingdom (27%). (Source: IULA database <http://www.cities-localgovernments.org>)
- Gender mainstreaming, or the incorporation of gender equality in all stages of policy making, is statutory requirement for members states of the European Union.
- Canada now ranks 37th of 181 countries on the International Parliamentary Union Table on Women in National Parliaments (2003).

2. Women are under-represented in most municipal processes

(Source: National Survey)

Elected Women on Municipal Councils

The overwhelming majority of councils surveyed did not have equal representation of elected women on council:

- 14% reported having **no women** on council at all
- 32% reported having one woman on council
- 40% had more than one woman. but less than 50%.of council member were women
- 13% reported having 50% or more women on council
- <1% reported having no men on council

Representation on municipal councils by women from diverse groups shows a more serious deficit:

Overall 1% of elected women are visible minorities, less that 1% are disabled, and less than 1% are immigrant women

Women on Advisory Committees

- Higher numbers of women participate on Advisory Committee, but women from diverse groups (visible minorities, disabled, immigrant, other) are very poorly represented.
- The average gender make up on advisory committees is 64% men to 36% women.

Women Participating in Municipal consultation processes:

- 7% of municipalities reported participation with over 50% women
- 50% reported participation with 35%-50% women
- 24% reported participation with 15%-35% women
- 19% reported attendance with less than 15% women

Representation by diverse women at municipal consultations was much lower:

42% of municipalities reported that diverse groups of women are not well represented at their consultations

3. There is a need for more information about municipal governance and ways for women and municipalities to access and share information

- Women in all six community sites and municipalities in the national survey identified the lack of information about municipal government as a serious barrier to participation.
- There is no central clearinghouse for information about women and municipal government, participatory government, or best practices in Canada.

4. Significant barriers to participation were identified

Municipalities in National Survey and women in community sites identified similar barriers to participation:

- Municipalities and women's networks may not have established working relationships.
- Municipalities do not generally reach out to involve women in consultation processes.
- Lack of practical supports for women (childcare, transportation, timing of meetings).
- Lack of support from the municipality for more inclusive policies and practices.
- Family responsibilities and lack of time because of women's paid and unpaid work.

5. Marginalized women face more serious systemic barriers to participation

Women who are marginalized because of race, ethnicity, poverty, immigration status, age, sexual orientation or disability participate in municipal processes at low levels and often do not vote. Systemic barriers to participation appear to shut many marginalized women out of participation in their local government:

- Racism and discrimination
- Sexism
- Language barriers
- Politics are viewed as a man's game or an old boy's network
- Marginalized women do not have a voice or influence in their community.

The findings from the national survey and site research indicate a need for more training and awareness raising for municipal staff and elected officials in the areas of racism, gender and anti oppression.

6. Women are actively involved in their communities, but may have given up on municipal government as a way of making change.

- Women choose to work outside of municipal processes because they feel they can be more effective and can have more influence. Women with limited time want to work where they can make a difference.
- Inuit women reported that the municipal system does not reflect Inuit values or traditions.
- Women reported that their voices are unheard and their participation does not lead to meaningful change.
- Women's organizations reported that when municipal governments focus on infrastructure only and not on the social services that are important for women and their families, women chose not to participate.

7. Municipalities, women and women's groups agree there are clear benefits for communities and for municipalities when women participate fully.

- Inclusion pays off – on the economic side it maximizes the potential of everyone in the community.
- Women generally practice more collaborative styles of working that benefit decision making and inclusive processes.
- More participation creates more opportunities for women to take leadership in their communities.
- More knowledge comes forward leading to better services, more efficient use of resources and more informed decision making by elected officials.
- Increased community support for municipal decisions.
- Municipalities are more effective in meeting the needs of women and their families.
- Women are a resource and have skills and knowledge to offer their communities.

8. Policies and practices for gender mainstreaming and inclusive participation are not commonly used in Canadian municipalities

Canada has developed excellent gender mainstreaming tools (Status of Women Canada, CIDA) but these tools do not appear to be adapted or used in municipal contexts.

- Most municipalities reported that they do not use gender-mainstreaming tools, or have training on gender analysis, and no municipality reported collecting gender-disaggregated data. (National survey)
- 72% of municipalities do not have a policy on public participation, 5% have a policy for the inclusion of women, and less than 1% have a policy for the inclusion of women from diverse groups in consultation processes. (National Survey)
- The most commonly reported gender tool was equal opportunity programs for hiring. (National Survey)

9. Partnerships between municipalities and women's organizations are extremely effective but are a largely untapped resource.

- Women's organizations are a potential resource for municipalities, provincial/territorial and national association.
- Effective and successful partnerships were identified in this study that could be used as best practice examples for other communities.
- Women's organizations have access to networks of women who can be enlisted to support municipal governments around shared goals or projects.
- Women's organizations have expertise and tools in areas of consultation, inclusive participatory processes, policy development, gender and anti racism training, leadership development and research that municipalities can access.

10. Effective and inclusive consultation processes lay the foundation for successful partnerships and joint projects.

- Women's organizations reported that successful consultation processes are the first step for successful partnerships and joint projects.
- Women in the community sites reported that positive experiences with municipal consultation processes (experience of being heard, fair and open process, accessible, respectful and safe, comfortable setting, accountable) encouraged them to get more involved in municipal decision-making.
- Consultation processes used in the community research (focus groups, workshops, information sessions, workshops with women and municipal officials, partnership approaches) effectively reached women who do not usually participate.

11. Leadership development and mentoring are needed to enhance participation.

- Aboriginal, Métis, Inuit, immigrant and marginalized women reported that they need skill development and leadership training to participate successfully in municipal processes.
- Elected women need campaign schools, mentoring programs for newly elected women, and support networks.
- Marginalized women said that successful role models, and the presence of women "like them" in municipal processes are powerful motivators for participation, especially for young women.

12. Municipalities and women's organizations need tools, training and resources to increase women's participation.

- Information Tools and Links to national and international information sources.
- Policy Templates and Models on gender mainstreaming and inclusion.
- Consultation Tools and Processes that take into account women's needs and realities.
- Tools for Partnership Building.
- Leadership, Mentoring and Skill Development.
- Best Practices, Case Studies and Lessons Learned.

Recommendations for Next Steps

1. A National Strategy to Increase Women's Participation in Municipal Processes

Canada needs a new vision and a national strategy that would help fully involve women in municipal decision-making processes.

The goal of the national strategy is:

To maximize opportunities for the involvement of women in municipal processes in order for women to attain equal levels of participation with men by:

- Making gender equality in municipal consultation and decision making processes a priority for action in Canada;
- Taking coordinated action to address systemic and practical barriers experienced by women, and by marginalized women in particular, to full participation in municipal consultation and decision-making processes;
- Building effective partnerships and coalitions between local governments, national and grassroots women's organizations.

This new approach could involve different players as follows:

- FCM and member municipalities are the governance organizations with the influence and ability to provide an inclusion framework, that would support the implementation of gender mainstreaming and inclusive participatory practices, and develop partnerships with national women's organizations;
- The FCM Canadian Women in Municipal Government Committee has the national position to support the development of national policy, strategies and projects to increase women's participation;
- Provincial and territorial municipal associations have the ability to support policy development, training and mentoring;
- Municipal councillors, and especially women councilors have the opportunity to facilitate the emergence of new ideas and practices that are more democratic and participatory, and make links at the community level with women's organizations and women;
- Women's organizations advocate at the national, provincial and community levels for increased participation, provide leadership training and information for women on municipal processes, and partner where possible with municipalities.

2. An Action Plan that Includes Four Components

Leadership

FCM would provide national leadership to increase women's participation in municipal processes by working with partners and members to develop and implement a new vision and goals for full inclusion by:

1. Developing a national vision for Canada based on the IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government.
2. Setting national goals for equal participation of women in municipal processes.
3. Managing data and statistics on women's participation in municipal processes nationally and within FCM.
4. Reporting annually on progress towards national goals.
5. Supporting member municipalities to reach goals of increased women's participation.
6. Modeling gender mainstreaming in FCM policy development and consultation practices.
7. Setting up and supporting internal mechanisms to guide and support the implementation of the National Strategy.
8. Initiating partnerships with federal, provincial and community partners and funding bodies.

Information and Communication

FCM and partners in the National Strategy would develop national and community mechanisms to bridge the information gap between women and municipal government and make information on municipal governance, municipal processes, best practices, public participation and gender equality accessible where.

1. FCM would act as a National Information Clearinghouse.
2. Municipalities would provide information at the Community Level.
3. Women's Organizations would provide information on municipal processes and support information linkages between women and their municipalities.

Inclusive Policies and Practices

FCM and its partners in the National Strategy would develop and implement a model Gender Inclusive Policy and Practice Framework for municipal consultation and decision-making processes. The key elements for this strategy would be:

1. Integration of Gender Mainstreaming in policy development and review.
2. Development and testing of model templates policies and practices for gender inclusive consultation and decision making, building on work done in the Bridging the Gender Gap report.
3. Development of tools for gender disaggregated data collection and reporting.
4. Development of a national report card on inclusivity.

Partnerships

FCM and members would use the National Strategy as an opportunity to develop and support new partnerships between women's organizations and municipal governments and their provincial/territorial associations around the shared goal of increasing women's participation in municipal consultations and decision-making. This would be accomplished by:

1. Creating a Steering Committee to guide the National Strategy.
2. Reviewing opportunities for new partnerships at the national and local levels.

3. Recommended Implementation Plan for a National Strategy

In the Short Term.....

- Distribution of the Bridging the Gender Gap report to FCM members, women's organization, and project participants, and posting of the report on the FCM website
- Presentation of recommendations for a National Strategy to FCM Board by the FCM Canadian Women in Municipal Government Committee
- Adoption and approval of a strategic plan and new terms of reference for the FCM Canadian Women in Municipal Government Committee that expands its mandate and supports the implementation of recommendations from the final report
- Approval of a National Strategy by FCM Canadian Women in Municipal Government Committee and FCM Board of Directors.
- Establishment of a Steering Committee to guide the National Strategy.
- Preparation and submission of proposals for funding for the implementation of a National Strategy
- Development of a FCM National Clearinghouse website on women and local governance

In the Longer Term.....

- Implementation of specific projects to increase women's participation including:
 - National workshops in four diverse communities to design model policy and consultation templates, training tools and gender disaggregated data collection tools
 - Development of training tools on gender mainstreaming, gender awareness, inclusivity

- Development of a model policy framework for inclusive municipal participation processes (templates for policy and practice)
- Review of FCM policy for gender mainstreaming and inclusion
- Development of Report Card on Inclusivity
- Organization of a national conference on Women and Local Government
- Conduct training workshops on gender mainstreaming, gender disaggregated data collection, gender and inclusion.

Conclusion

The FCM Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Consultation Processes project has generated enthusiasm, raised awareness on the importance of the full inclusion of women in municipal decision-making processes, and brought forward recommendations for action at the national level, and in each of the six community sites where the research took place.

The project full report and tool kit will be available in French and English July 2004. In addition, each of the six community sites prepared detailed reports on the research, findings and recommendations from the participatory action research in their communities. These reports will be available on the FCM website July 2004.

The full report and tool kit will be available by July 2004. To order a copy please email international@fcm.ca or go to the following link on the FCM website: www.fcm.ca/english/national/wcommittee.htm.

Report prepared by:
Colleen Purdon, Project Coordinator