



Newsletter of the African Women Leaders Project - a project of the Club of Madrid, funded by the European Union's Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights and the Canadian International Development Agency

About AWLP

The African Women Leaders Project (AWLP) is an 18-month Club of Madrid (www.clubmadrid.org) initiative that provides support to high-level women leaders in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Uganda. Nine missions to the target countries are being organized, with Club of Madrid Members and expert political practitioners sharing with African decision-makers leadership experiences related to increasing women's access to decision making in the social, economic and political spheres.

The project contributes to the strengthening of female political leadership and, in the long-term, to greater public confidence in women political leaders and increased women's political participation. Project activities revolve around three pillars: political leadership capacity building and gender awareness; building of sustainable international networks; and advocacy actions.

The project is implemented with the help of local partners in each of the countries. Funding comes from the European Commission and the Canadian International Development Agency.

AWLP encourages Sierra Leone's President to support women politicians



Senator Scott, President Koroma and President Kumaratunga

The Club of Madrid and the Campaign for Good Governance co-organized on December 11-15 the third AWLP mission to Sierra Leone. The delegation was led by Chandrika Kumaratunga, former President of Sri Lanka and new Member of the Club of Madrid; and Senator Gloria Musu Scott, Former Chief Justice of Liberia.

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And More...

Visit our new sections "In Brief" (page 3) with more news on the African Women Leaders Project and "Get to Know..." (page 4), including in this issue an interview with Bernadette French, Project Officer of Campaign for Good Governance in Sierra Leone.



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First AWLP Mission in Nigeria

The Club of Madrid, in partnership with Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) Nigeria, organized the first of three planned missions to Nigeria from 28th to 30th November 2007.

The delegation, led by the Former Primer Minister of the Netherlands Wim Kok and Miria Matembe, Former Member of the Uganda and African Union Parliaments, and Former Minister for Ethics and Integrity, encouraged greater political participation of women.

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Pauline K. Tallen, Deputy Governor and Commissioner for Education and Prime Minister Wim Kok during AWLP trip to Plateau State, Nigeria

AWLP Gets Started in Abuja, Bauchi and Plateau

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Women leaders from Bauchi welcome the Club of Madrid Delegation

“Democracy is more adult with full women’s participation

Wim Kok, former Prime Minister of The Netherlands.

The Club of Madrid delegation shared experiences with female NHR and senators where they identified barriers to women such as poverty and ‘commercialization’ of politics; low levels of education; lack of awareness on women’s role in politics; misinterpretation and misapplication of religious tenets; discriminatory cultural and traditional practices; absence of appropriate legal framework; women’s citizenship issues (regional demographics); family related issues; negative perception of women politicians; and lack of confidence and courage among women.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Dimeji Bankole, welcomed the project with enthusiasm and pledged his full support for effective participation of women in the Parliament. He challenged women politicians to use their positions to mobilise their fellow women to embrace politics in order to improve the well being of their communities. He urged women Parliamentarians to unite and network with their male counterparts to lobby the National Assembly to enact appropriate laws for the promotion and protection of women’s rights in Nigeria. He thanked the Club de Madrid for the intention to establish an Internet Resource Centre in collaboration with the National Democratic Institute and



Local women leaders expressing their concerns to Club of Madrid Delegation during Town Hall Meeting in Plateau

Proposed Strategies to Address Barriers to Women’s Political Participation:

1. Building male and female Parliamentarians’ capacity to enhance networking beyond partisan lines in order to promote positive legislation around gender issues;
2. Networking with veteran politicians and civil society groups outside the Parliament to create awareness in public about the importance of women’s political participation;
3. Creating women’s caucus within Parliament to enable them to work together on gender issues across party lines;
4. Mainstreaming women’s concerns within Parliamentary standing Committees rather than their marginalisation and isolation in the Women Affairs Committee.
5. Deliberate education towards achieving attitudinal change regarding women’s leadership aspirations;
6. Institution of a Trust Fund and enhancing access to credit facilities and empowerment schemes to leverage resources for women in order to reduce poverty among them;
7. Building and nurturing of their constituency base;
8. Instituting awards or other recognition to reward individuals who support women’s political participation.



PM Wim Kok and Miria Matembe with local leaders in Bauchi State

WRAPA within the Parliament, as it will be of tremendous benefit and support to both male and female Parliamentarians.

The Senate Presidency, represented by the Deputy President, Senator Ike Ekweremadu, declared its support for the project and concurred with the need to support women in governance especially recalling the historic role played by women since independence. Sen. Ekweremadu noted the steady progression of women in Parliament and expressed optimism for higher numbers in the future.

In a discussion with religious and traditional leaders in Bauchi State, heads of both Muslim and Christian groups agreed that education was a key factor to women’s access to political leadership; much more so than religion or culture, and that women themselves often reinforce negative stereotypes. The leaders challenged each other to reconsider their role in promotion of women’s political participation.

“The problem is not religion but religious misinterpretation”

Dr. Miria Matembe, former Ugandan Minister of Ethics

The Deputy Governor and Commissioner for Education in Jos, Plateau State, Mrs. Pauline K. Tallen, received the delegation and shared her experiences as a woman politician. She later led the delegation to a Town Hall meeting with women party leaders and other politicians and aspirants for the Local Government elections.

AWLP Third Mission to Sierra Leone

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President Kumaratunga and Senator Scott discuss with women leaders from the civil society

The delegation met with the president of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma who expressed his support for the CoM-AWLP as a valuable programme. The delegation also met with other leaders of the government of Sierra Leone, including the Speaker, Members of Parliament, political party representatives, the Mayor of Freetown, civil society organisations and women leaders and representatives of the UN.

The delegation discussed a broad range of issues concerning the importance of women's participation in politics and governance and identified issues and challenges faced by women in carrying out leadership responsibilities. In the process, mission leaders offered recommendations to address some issues related to further nation building and economic development, while at the same time securing opportunities for equal participation for women in leadership roles.

On 12 December, President Kumaratunga commissioned the AWLP resource centre for women MPs at Parliament. The centre is equipped with computers and internet connection to facilitate MP's access to information and their participation in the AWLP web forums. Training has been provided. Other officials present at the launch were, the Speaker, Members of Parliament, political party leaders and representatives of local and international Civil Society Organisations and the United Nations.

"It is a valuable resource for women political leaders to advance their knowledge and establish communications with the outside world"

Chandrika Kumaratunga,
former President of Sri Lanka

"My government is committed to ensure equal rights and participation at all levels for women of Sierra Leone."

Ernest Bai Koroma,
President of Sierra Leone

Kumaratunga suggested that, while continuing the struggle to enhance participation of women in public life, it is equally important to work *"towards empowering women through education and economically, through improved incomes"*. She recommended that women's organisations give serious consideration to organising micro, small, and medium enterprises in agriculture and small industries for women in order to empower them economically, saying that this was absolutely essential in the struggle to achieve women's empowerment.

She reminded members of parliament that the people who elected them to parliament did so with much hope that their representatives could improve their lives. If women MPs do not succeed in doing this then the struggle to empower women by electing them will be negated. Women leaders in parliament, Kumaratunga suggested, could prove their worth by urgently undertaking projects for poverty alleviation. After a detailed discussion on how this could be achieved, the Members of Parliament agreed to undertake specific projects for poverty alleviation.

"Running a campaign for office as a woman is very challenging but it is the easiest part, once you get elected then the real challenge begins"

Gloria Musu Scott,
Liberian Senator and former Chief Justice



President Kumaratunga after the discussions with Members of Sierra Leonean Parliament

Senator Scott emphasised that women should be supportive of each other especially by strengthening those already in leadership positions at all levels so that they can stand as role models for other women.

The programme continued on 13-15 December with a practical leadership training for female and male parliamentarians led by Senator Scott and Dr. Bernadette Lahai, one of the longest serving members of Sierra Leone's Parliament.

In brief

Club of Madrid Members release Statement on Sierra Leone Elections

Club of Madrid Vice-President Mary Robinson and Member Benjamin Mkapa, Co-Chairs of the organization's Steering Committee on Women and Political Leadership, signed a public statement on October 4, following the successful parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone.

In the statement they invite new President Koroma *"to honour his commitment to supporting women's political participation by placing women in at least 30% of government appointments"* and to *"exercise his office through inclusiveness, equity, consensus and continued dialogue with all the citizens of Sierra Leone"*.

AWLP in Nigerian Women's Summit

AWLP Coordinator, Rosemary Kaduru introduced the Club of Madrid's work on democracy promotion and AWLP's objectives, strategies and activities in a National Summit on Women in Governance (Nigeria, 2-6 October). The meeting was organized by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs in partnership with UNIFEM, NDI, UNDP, UNFPA, USAID and Cross River State government. It brought together a broad group of women political leaders from all over the country with the purpose of establishing an action plan that will guide the agenda for women in governance through 2011.

Participants showed keen interest in the AWLP and warmly welcomed its implementation in Nigeria.

Get to know...CGG

Interview with Bernadette French, Project Officer of Campaign for Good Governance

Why is CGG working with Club of Madrid in AWLP?

Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) believes in networking and collaborating with credible organizations as a very effective strategy for the achievements of its objectives. The AWLP is very much in line with CGG'S objective of increasing citizen's participation in the democratic process through advocacy and capacity building

Why is the project relevant in SL?

Women are the vulnerable beings in societies all over the world and more so in Sierra Leone, where they have been the most marginalized in every aspect of life. Women have and still continue to play a very important role in restoration and peace and consolidating it, but still their efforts are not recognized. The number of women in decision-making positions in SL is still very low. The establishment of the Resource Centre and the experience of the [Club of Madrid] members is a very strategic tool in creating public awareness, capacitating and empowering women.

What has the project achieved so far?

The project has succeeded in provoking the awareness for a collective effort among women's organization in mapping out strategies for the promotion of women's political leadership. It has increased the visibility of women leaders and also the importance of women's political inclusion. CGG has also gained added recognition for its work in strengthening women in governance. In the long term, the AWLP would have contributed to the strengthening of the democratization process in SL through the mainstreaming of gender in all sectors of governance.

What would you like to see in place by the 2011 elections?

We would like to see an environment where opportunities would have been created to accommodate women aspirants to contest without fear of intimidation. More encouraging affirmative action policies would have been enacted to give women the opportunity to be incorporated in positions of leadership.

What are the remaining challenges for women in politics in SL?

Our traditions and culture, which still continues to discriminate against women. How do we get women to be interested in politics?

What are the most moving elements of AWLP missions?

To hear the [Club of Madrid] Members share their experiences, their difficulties, the hurdles they had to cross and how they overcame their challenges. President Kumaratunga moved the parliamentarians a lot. She shared a lot of her experiences with them and they were inspired by her stories. All of the missions had its specific and unique qualities and they all had their impact.

What would you advise a woman who wants to be a politician?

She must be adequately educated. She must be strategically positioned and must find herself a platform from which she should be able to build her constituency. She must be focused and confident. She must be passionate about making a change in her country or constituency.

Upcoming Events with the AWLP

Second Mission to Nigeria, 18-21 February, 2008

The Club of Madrid's second planned Mission to Nigeria will be led by Cassam Uteem, former President of Mauritius. The main objective of the mission will be to support political party leaders to open up space for women to actively participate in politics at all levels. The delegation will also dialogue with high level officials on the electoral law reform.

First Mission to Uganda, 3-8 March, 2008

Kjell Magne Bondevik, former Prime Minister of Norway, will co-lead the first Club of Madrid mission to Uganda, coinciding with the International Women's Day. The delegation will support female parliamentarians and share experiences to enhance their leadership skills and increase their effectiveness. A particular emphasis will be placed on the passing of legislative bills related to women's rights.

Contact Information

For more information on the African Women Leaders Project, please visit AWLP website at www.awlproject.org or contact us at info@awlproject.org

Implementing Partners

Club of Madrid

C/ Goya 5-7. Pasaje, 2ª
28001 Madrid – SPAIN
Tel: +34 911 548 230
Fax: +34 911 548 240

Email: clubmadrid@clubmadrid.org
www.clubmadrid.org

Campaign for Good Governance (CGG)

11A Old Railway Line ,
Tengbeh Town Freetown
SIERRA LEONE
Tel: +232 22 235 626
Fax: +232 22 235 642
Email: cgg@slcgg.org
www.slcgg.org

European Parliamentarians for Africa (AWEPA)

Uganda Office

Room E-2-14
Parliament of Uganda
Parliamentary Avenue
7178 Kampala - UGANDA
Tel: + 256 41 254 947
Fax: +256 41 254 947

Email: awepaug@parliament.go.ug
www.awepa.org

Women's Rights Advancement & Protection Alternative (WRAPA)

Plot 729, House 6,
Behind Rockview Hotel
Off Ademola Adetokunbo Crescent
Wuse II P.O. box 3363, Garki
Abuja - NIGERIA
Tel: +234 9 413 14 38
Fax: +234 9 413 29 32
Email: info@wrapa.org
www.wrapa.org