EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

POLITICS, POWER, GENDER JUSTICE
IN THE ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN
Women’s Understandings of Politics,
Experiences of Political Contestation and
the Possibilities for Gender Transformation

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Politics, Power and Gender Justice in the Anglophone Caribbean:
Women’s Understandings of Politics, Experiences of Political Contestation and the Possibilities for Gender Transformation

In an attempt to investigate global strategies for advancing democratic governance, women’s rights and gender equality in the Anglophone Caribbean, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, UWI, St. Augustine campus (IGDS) have collaborated to undertake the proposed research, Politics, Power and Gender Justice in the Anglophone Caribbean: Women’s Understandings of Politics, Experiences of Political Contestation and the Possibilities for Gender Transformation. The study will be conducted over a period of 24 months, and will take place in Dominica, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago in partnership with the following: IGDS, UWI, Mona campus and IGDS, UWI, Cave Hill campus.

The research project examines four strategies to promote democratic governance, women’s rights and gender equality. First, women’s political leadership is explored for the extent to which it creates greater governmental will and capacity to more actively and effectively transform gender relations both within and outside of the state. Second, quota systems are assessed for their impact on effective women’s participation and leadership in representative government. Third, the usefulness of National Gender Policy documents for promoting gender equality is evaluated. Finally, the impact of feminist movement-building on women’s capacity to be effective transformational leaders within democratic political life is investigated.

Each of these factors can expand the spaces for realising women’s rights and gender equality, create greater capacity (among women and men) to achieve transformed gender relations, and shift the gender ideologies that present resistances to women’s effective political participation and leadership. Together, they reflect a core set of historical struggles waged across the Anglophone Caribbean. This project documents the history of struggle in three Caribbean nations. It focuses on specific countries where these struggles appear to have been won. Trinidad and Tobago provide an appropriate case study for examining the impact of women’s contemporary political leadership, Guyana for exploring the impact of quota systems, Dominica for exploring the impact of national gender policies, and the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWiL) for evaluating the impact of feminist advocacy on women’s rights, effectiveness and representation in democratic governance.

These cases thus investigate four global strategies for advancing democratic governance, women’s rights and gender equality. They offer insights into transnational, regional and national alliances between states, international organisations, NGOs and feminist movements,
and demonstrate the relevance of national case studies for understanding regional and global experiences. Indeed, both regional and national case studies are essential if we are to understand how democracy, the state and politics are sites for renegotiating gender relations in different twenty-first century contexts. To this end, the project will undertake two phases of research. The first phase will focus on a regional and historical review of each of the four strategies. The second phase will be based on ethnographic case studies in three countries and of the CIWIL experience.

Together, these two methodologies will explore some key questions: the growing visibility and number of women in political leadership translate into gains for women, both women leaders and those who currently occupy marginalized positions in societies. To what extent is their participation in democratic governance changing inequitable and undemocratic practices within governmental bodies and civil society? Have quota systems helped to increase women's leadership and effective representation of women's interests in democratic processes? To what extent have they transformed governance in political parties and state governance structures in ways that advance women's interests and gender equality? Has the turn to policy solutions been productive for achieving these goals? In particular, what have been the effects of national gender policies on gender relations and struggles for gender justice, and what explains the nature of their impact? How has feminist advocacy empowered women leaders and how has this translated into transformed power relations? How are twenty-first century shifts in gender ideologies, stimulated by women's movements, shaping access to, exercise and redistributions of rights and power among women and men? What are the implications for a generation of younger women in terms of their perceptions of and approaches to both politics in the state and feminist politics? Finally, how does a focus on these questions point analysis beyond policy objectives to further thinking about strategies for their effective implementation?

The intersection of institutionalized masculinism and new exclusionary practices, national gender machineries and policies, women's rights advocacy and civil society mobilization suggests a framework for outlining both the coherences as well as contradictions between democratic practices and women's empowerment. The research will seek to assess when, why and how governance is underscored by gender equality. The Anglophone Caribbean provides an ideal region for conducting comparative research on these intersections. Three countries in particular, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Dominica, offer contexts where democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality can be differently examined. Each brings specific experiences of female political leadership, uneven female representation at parliamentary and local government levels (despite Guyana's quota system), limited success with passing and implementing national gender policies, continued struggles to address women's rights and power, and on-the-ground challenges to women's organizing and advocacy on questions of good governance.

Exploring women's understandings of politics, experiences of political contestation across state and civil society, and the possibilities for gender transformation in the Anglophone
Caribbean additionally requires bridging the gaps between ‘academic’ and ‘activist’ research on the power dynamics surrounding women engagements with politics, leadership, rights and equality. The empirical picture generated can better inform strategic activities aimed at increasing women’s meaningful and influential political participation regionally, and the transformation of Caribbean societies into truly egalitarian spaces.

Overall, then, the problem under investigation is the impact and effectiveness of feminist strategies to promote democratic governance, women’s rights and gender equality in the Caribbean. This problem of engendering democracy and governance must be understood within the context of gender ideologies, masculinist resistances, historical, cultural and political-economic dynamics, institutional practices, women’s movement struggles and generational shifts in perceptions of power and politics.

To this end, the research is guided by one main question:

**Have feminist strategies to engender democracy and governance, with particular attention to political leadership, quotas, gender policies and women’s movement building, effectively advanced women’s rights and gender equality in the Anglophone-Caribbean?**

With these considerations in mind, the questions that will guide the overall research process are:

1. What is the impact of women's political leadership on women's access to and effective participation in parliamentary and local government systems? What has been the impact of elected female representatives at national and local government levels as well as those on boards, commissions and other high level fora? How and to what extent has women's political leadership stimulated shifts in governmental approaches to women’s rights, and ideologies and practices regarding gender equality? What are the implications for the political participation of a younger generation of gender-conscious young women and men?

2. What is the impact of quota systems on women's access to and effective leadership in parliamentary and local government politics? Where and how do the kinds of struggles, debates and resistances that continue to take place in relation to women’s rights, gender equality and democratic participation occur? What are the cultural norms, ethnic and gender ideologies, gender bargaining and political party dynamics that shape understandings and effectiveness of quota systems? What is the relationship between quota systems and women representatives’ contribution to legal and policy reforms as well as women's movements’ inclusion in participatory democratic and governance processes?

3. What is the impact of national gender policies on state planning, legislation and programs that aim to increase gender equality and equity? How are the challenges and limitations that create disjunctures between policy, implementation and transformation of gender
relations understood and negotiated? What impacts have women had on policy outcomes? How have age, ethnicity, class, religion and other intersecting identities shaped women’s approaches to and perceptions of policy level solutions?

4. What is the impact of feminist advocacy on women leaders in political and civic life? How has feminist advocacy empowered women leaders and transformed masculinist Caribbean political spaces so that both can advance gender justice? What is the nature and quality of links between female political elites and feminist movements? What do these links suggest about the significance of culture, notions of difference within and among women, and generational shifts in gender identities and relations?

5. How can a mixed method, gendered approach that includes historical and cross country comparison, national case studies, a region-wide case study, in-depth interviews and participant observation empower female and male leaders to transform gender relations, masculinist privilege, institutional hierarchies, structural inequalities, and both formal rules and informal relations, in order to make democratic participation enhance equality, equity and justice?

These questions bring together intersecting concerns with the power relations in political spaces and the gender ideologies that shape them; women’s investments in as well as strategies for mitigating the costs of leadership; advocacy networks that combine state institutions, political parties and civil society organisations, particularly those struggling for women’s rights; and the opportunities for as well as resistances to transforming democratic governance within the state and political parties. In addressing these concerns, the research aims to generate context-specific and comparative research on the effects and experience of women’s political engagement, advance women’s rights and struggles through the development and dissemination of new knowledge, and contribute to theory, policy and praxis in relation to gender justice as it is being negotiated now and in the future.

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