

Getting to 30%: The Effect of an International Norm on Canadian Municipalities

Jennifer Mowbray  
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## Getting to 30%: The Effect of an International Norm on Canadian Municipalities

Currently in Canada there is a democratic deficit. Decades after women gained the right to vote and to hold elected office they continue to be under-represented in government. In municipal government, of 23, 821 elected officials only 5734 are women – just 24 per cent. Many of the issues local government is addressing are relevant to women – recreational services and facilities for children, housing, community safety, public transportation – and yet women are not stepping up to have their voices heard. Given that the proportion of the world's population living in cities has increased from one-third of the world's population in 1950, to one-half in 2000, and will reach two-thirds (6 billion people) by 2050. (Tibajuka 2005), perhaps it is time to start paying attention.

The primary focus of this paper is to place Canada's efforts in increasing women's participation in municipal government within an international framework, where norms and standards with regards to the participation of women in government have been emerging over the course of several decades. The global and the domestic are increasingly interconnected with blurred boundaries, and this makes it more critical to examine the effects of international policies on the domestic realm. (Sasser et al. 2006, Slaughter 2004, and Tarrow 2005) Preliminary observations and analysis of reasons for studying gender representation in municipal politics are outlined. Then the historical international evolution of the movement to increase women's participation in municipal government through international agreements, conventions, conferences, programs and practices are detailed. It then moves on to an assessment of how Canada is doing in this international context and an through an examination of the work various domestic organizations are undertaking shows a surprising interaction with the international norms, and international organizations. Finally, some possible prescriptive options that may lead to more equitable representation for women in Canada's local communities are proposed. While many of these topics have been addressed regarding women's participation in other levels of government, this paper places a unique emphasis on the local level.

### **Women in Local Government – Why We Should Care**

In a 2001 report the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) identified three changes that occur local communities once women gain leadership roles:

- The issues promoted: a greater emphasis on social issues - housing, safety, clean water, sanitation, education, health services, childcare, etc.
- The style of leadership: more inclusive, collaborative and consultative, more tolerant of different points of view, more people oriented, more democratic and facilitative in decision making.
- The impact on equality: shows women they can be political aware and politically active, provide role models, promote policies and projects to improve the lives of women

The three reasons they've identified serve as a useful framework for a discussion of having women involved in local decision making.

#### *Women's Inclusion Affects the Issues*

Feminist research on the topic of mirror representation have found that women's views are different to men's as they have different relationships with institutions and society; and that with these different viewpoints come different demands and priorities (Newman and White 2006). Similarly, in her 1994 book *How Women Legislate*, Sue Thomas found that female representatives place priority on policies

that concern women, family and children while males prioritized financial and economic policy. Bird (2003) found that women were more likely than their male counterparts to criticize the democratic status-quo; and to promote policies that were family friendly and citizen focused while Tremblay (2001) found that women are more resistant than men to the idea of curbing the welfare state. Women focus on different issues than men do, and their priorities reflect their position as primary care-givers and their greater reliance on government spending in social services.

### *Women's Inclusion Affects the Process*

In addition to changing the topics being discussed in local government, once women gain leadership roles they also change the way politics are done. In 1985, author Grace Saltzstein found a strong statistical significance between the presence of a female mayor and the proportion of female administrators, women in managerial and women in non-clerical positions. This is not only an increase in the number of women working in government, but also a substantive shift in the work that they are doing, as women leaders do things differently. Fox and Schuhmann, in a 1999 study of 435 female and 440 male city managers across the United States, found that there are clear differences in policy processes between female and male-lead municipalities. Their results showed that female city managers were more likely than their male colleagues to incorporate citizen input and prioritize community involvement in the decision-making process; to emphasize communication; and to perceive themselves as facilitators (while male managers framed themselves as "policy entrepreneurs" at the top level of a clear hierarchy). These findings related to women in leadership roles in the specific domain of local government align with a results from women in general leadership and management roles which showed that, in general, women leaders/managers are more likely to offer praise to employees; to be sensitive to the needs of their subordinates, and to place a higher value on compromise and the participation of all members in decisions (Lunneborg 1990).

Women are more likely to operate in a collaborative fashion and to seek input from others; they are more likely to be considerate of the opinions and satisfaction of those around them and these characteristics fit well with the proximity that local government has to the people. Women's leadership style is ideal for a municipal government; whose proximity to the people it serves allows for a greater public participation in the process and the corresponding increase in legitimacy that accompanies this engagement. (Abelson et al. 2003).

### *Women's Inclusion as a Matter of Equality*

Governments are seen to be more legitimate and more when the rate of women participating in elected office approaches or replicates the rate of women in the general public (Newman and White 2006). The theory that women represent women is the theory of numerical representation; where the characteristics of the elected official reflect the characteristics of those who elected them. This concept is in line with those of descriptive representation or mirror representation and is contrasted with substantive representation. In the first grouping, elected representatives "stand for" their electorate, and in the second they are "acting for" their electorate. Whether women are necessary to represent the position of women voters is not the issue. The point is not to find an exact match for each elector within the elected body, but rather to ensure that all our characteristics find a match. Government should be diverse enough that any individual can look at their elected representatives and see elements of themselves represented, not an exact replica, but elements. The presence of a diverse range of perspectives is what gives elected bodies and their decisions legitimacy (Trimble and Arscott 2003).

Finally, it is worth noting the importance of local government as an arena in which change can be driven. When women get involved in municipal governments, it forms an early stage of a career ladder for representational politicians who will move from local to national assemblies. (Stevens 2007) The 2001 French Parité laws, by successfully establishing parity at the local level, lead to a “contagion effect” and increased participation at the other levels of government, by establishing the presence of women in politics as a norm, and not an exception. (Bird 2003)

### **Women’s Participation in Municipal Government - International**

The movement behind increasing women’s participation in all government traces its roots to the work of the United Nations (UN), beginning with the 1952 Convention on the Political Rights of Women; the 1966 International Covenant on civil and Political Rights; and the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Canada signed on to CEDAW in 1980 and ratified the optional protocol in 2002.

In 1985, the *World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the UN Decade for Women* in Nairobi developed a document entitled ‘Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies’ on the issue of the advancement of women. A 1990 report from the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women was where the 30% benchmark for women’s involvement in political decision-making first gained serious traction, and the numerical benchmark was further stressed in a 1995 UN Human Development Report. In 1995, a review of the implementation of the Nairobi strategies identified twelve key areas where inadequate progress had been made in advancing the cause of gender equality and developed the Beijing Platform for Action.

“The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment. It aims at... removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making.”

Following the adoption of the Beijing Platform the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and created the Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s) which recognize the fundamental role of women in development. Within the MDG’s the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments is identified as one of the key indicator of progress in promoting gender equality.

The movement within local governments came to the forefront following the Beijing Action Plan in two separate conferences in 1996. At the United National Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), the final documents and resolutions stated that: “the effective role of women in decision-making in local authorities should be ensured, if necessary through appropriate mechanisms” (Paragraph 46). The commitment was matched by one from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Round Table Conference, which emphasized that women should participate in all components of city activities, especially as elected officials.

With the issue of women’s participation in municipal government having become an international priority area, the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), in April 1997, established an international taskforce on Women in Local Government. The task force was to address the “political

and professional under-representation of women in decision-making positions, and to develop gender mainstreaming in local government policy development and service provision” (IULA 1998b). Their work was the foundation of the November 1998 adoption of the Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government by the IULA in Harare, Zimbabwe. The document recognizes the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the United National Declaration on Women and Platform for Action that were adopted in 1995 in Beijing, and went on to commit members to:

“strengthening our efforts to make equal the number of women and men in decision-making bodies at all levels and in all policy areas, and our efforts to ensure women’s qualitative participation in councils, committees, and other groups related to decision-making in local government” (IULA 1998b).

In 2004, the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) and the World Federation of United Towns and Cities (UTO) merged and created United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). This merger stemmed, in part, from one of the commitments made by mayors and local leaders at Habitat II, the 1996 United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul. In the final declaration of their founding congress they reaffirmed the commitments adopted in the Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government that the IULA had adopted in Harare in 1998 (UCLG 2004).

IULA’s declaration and its precursors have affected a wide range of disparate actors. In Ghana, the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) represents all of Ghana’s local governments. NALAG ratified IULA’s Worldwide Declaration of Women in Local Government, and recognized that women were under-represented at the district (local) level of governance in the decision-making and development practices. In cooperation with the IULA, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), they consulted with both male and female local government representatives to develop a policy paper on the position of women in local government, and then developed a training manual and workshops to support female candidates and elected officials (FCM 2009d). Similar work was undertaken in Mali, also with FCM and IULA, in 2006. They founded the Women’s Caucus of the Association des municipalités du Mali. The Caucus now works with the central government on gender equality – especially the right of women to own property, and holds training workshops for women considering running while advocating for legislation guaranteeing 30 per cent of municipal positions to women (FCM 2009d). In Bolivia, the Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia (ACOBOL) was established to promote and develop women leaders in local government. Following their creation, they put their support behind the *Law of Citizen Groups and Indigenous Peoples*, which requires 30 per cent of each political party’s candidates to be women, and after its adoption women’s representation rose from 18 per cent in 1991, to 46 per cent in 2004 (FCM, 1999d). ACOBOL also holds campaign training, advocates for gender budgeting, and drafted legislation aimed at addressing harassment and gender violence in politics. In Ghana, in Mali, and in Bolivia, Canada was involved through the work of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Some countries responded to the international consensus to increase women’s participation in municipal government by instituting quotas. In 1992 India passed the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment which guaranteed women 30% of seats in local administrations (Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI’s)). This increased participation rate meant that one million more women sat on municipal councils in 1994, after the amendment took effect (Kumari 2005). Ten years later, more than 1500 women panchayat leaders

across the country presented a list of demands – first among them was to raise researched representation in the panchayats to 50%, second they called for the same allotment in the federal and state legislatures (Kumari 2005). While India limited their initial efforts at quotas to the local level, France made an across-the-board commitment, and on June 6, 2000 passed The Parité Law. The law requires half the candidates in all municipal, senate, and legislature elections to be women and resulted in substantial headway towards achieving parity at the municipal level. The percentage of women elected to council jumped from 25.7 to 47.5 per cent in the 2001 municipal elections (Bird 2003).

France was not alone in Europe in its efforts to increase women’s involvement. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CCRE) formed a Women’s Commission, and in 2004 they surveyed municipalities across the European Union, to compile an inventory of best practices for “women friendly” cities. Primary among their criteria was parity in local decision-making. One of the best practices they highlighted for the achievement of this goal was found in Swedish town of Ostergotland, which helps newly elected women in their first term to integrate into the municipal administration; and works to raise awareness among men – all with a view to taking advantage of “the specialist knowledge and roles of women” (Gaspard 2005).

An area that has seen success through quotas and through changing societal norms regarding women’s participation in municipal government is the Asia-Pacific Regions. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) implemented a multi-phase Advancement of Women in Urban Local Government program in 1999. Their efforts culminated in the Summit of Women Mayors and Local Officials in Asia Pacific, with 24 participating countries, in June 2001. The results are examined in the UNESCAP study, *Women in Local Government in Asia and the Pacific: A Comparative Analysis of Thirteen Countries*. The report identified barriers to women’s participation in the region as: patriarchal social systems; financial dependence of women; lack of exposure to political processes and of media support; cultural and social prejudices; discriminatory practices; family responsibilities; and the high cost of running for and holding public office (UN ESCAP 2001). At the time of the conference, participation rates for women in local government ran from 2 per cent to 33 per cent, and the higher success rates were due almost exclusively to quota systems.<sup>1</sup> They identified three key factors that affect women’s involvement:

- Laws, practices, and initiatives that ensure participation  
Ex: Statutory provisions, national policies and programs, local government requirements, role of NGO’s, training, regional and international conferences etc.
- Barriers to Participation  
Ex: Fundamental inequality, political and economic instability, discrimination, the male dominated environment of political institutions, costs
- Impact of the Political System on Participation  
Ex: Local government system, electoral system, ward vs. at-large systems, quotas and reserved seats, political party support for women, the adversarial nature of politics

To address these issues they proposed: changes to the systems within which local government operates, working to change the attitudes towards women in local government, and developing strategies and training to increase the number of women.

### **Women’s Participation in Municipal Government - Canada**

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B

Canada has also been working to improve the participation of women in municipal government, and has been meeting with some success. In 1998, the IULA published a comparison of the participation rates of women in municipal government in a variety of countries. Canada was then at 22 per cent participation, and ranked below Costa Rica, Chile, Sweden, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Uganda, Finland, Colombia, Venezuela, Ghana, South Africa, the Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom; and tied with France, Belgium and Honduras.<sup>2</sup> According to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) women make up 24 per cent of municipal councils. Within this general participation rate, 25 per cent of councilors and only 16 per cent of mayors are women – women find themselves outnumbered as mayor in a 5:1 ratio. In absolute terms, of 23821 elected officials just 5734 are women.<sup>3</sup> Based on current statistics, Canada would need 1412 more women in elected office today to reach the 30 per cent target, even as the percentage of female mayors and city managers has remained stagnant over the past 10 years (Szymborski 1996).

FCM, the keeper of these statistics and an active partner in international efforts has also been working to advance the participation of women in local government in Canada. FCM is a member of the United Cities and Local Governments, and signed the Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government. In Canada, they are one of the major drivers of efforts to increase women's participation in municipal government. In 1996, just post-Beijing, they published *Gender and Municipal Development: Guidelines for Promoting Women's Participation in Partnership Program Activities*, and in 1997 worked with Montreal's Femmes et Ville to produce *A City Tailored to Women: The Role of Municipal Governments in Achieving Gender Parity*.

In 2003 FCM launched the *Increasing Women's Participation Project* and the results of their survey of 152 FCM member municipalities were published in September 2004. The survey showed that women are under-represented in most municipal councils in Canada, with 86 per cent not having equal representation of elected women on council; 14 per cent reporting no women on council, and less than one per cent of councils having no men on council. The survey also identified barriers and best practices. Among the barriers identified were: a lack of information about municipal government; municipalities and women's networks lacking established links and relationships; lack of practical support for women looking to get involved – daycare, timing of meetings etc.; and family responsibilities. (FCM 2004) They found that these barriers were even more daunting for women who are marginalized based on race, ethnicity, poverty, immigration status, age, sexual orientation, or disability with only one per cent of elected municipal representatives are from visible minorities. Finally, the survey showed that women elected officials bring more collaborative and inclusive processes and that when they're involved in the process there is more support within the community for the results.

Following the results of the survey an Action Plan was developed, with four distinct steps: leadership, information and communication; inclusive policies and practices; and partnerships.

- Leadership – FCM would develop a national vision in line with the IULA declaration, set goals for progress and report on them. This reporting would include tracking statistics on municipal electoral representation.
- Information and Communications - FCM would work to become the central location for information for women and municipal government.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix D

- Inclusive policies and practices – develop tools and templates for cities to make their cities more inclusive.
- Partnerships – create a steering committee within FCM to work on the issue and find partners

Many of these actions were undertaken, for example, FCM now maintains a database of elected municipal representatives where more than 99 per cent of all municipalities are included (FCM 2004).

In 2005, FCM established the Standing Committee on Increasing Women’s Participation in Municipal Government to seek and support initiatives to increase women’s political participation in municipal government. The committee is made up of 24 elected municipal officials from across Canada. Since its inception the Standing Committee on Increasing Women’s Participation in Municipal Government has worked with the Standing Committee on International Relations and FCM International to mainstream gender equality in FCM’s domestic and international activities. This collaboration has led to the exchange of best practices between FCM members and its international partners.

Within Canada, one of the ways the Standing Committee aims to increase women’s participation in municipal government is through a series of awards and scholarships. Since 2006, an FCM scholarship has been presented annually to a female college or university student deemed to have submitted the best research paper on a topic related to women in politics. FCM’s scholarship program for secondary school students began in 2010, with five awards awarded annually.<sup>4</sup> The scholarship is open to female students enrolled in any year of study in secondary school and who are making a contribution to their school’s leadership teams or student councils. These awards serve two purposes: they encourage young women to begin thinking about municipal political life, and they encourage the emergence of academic literature in the discipline. The Ann MacLean Award for Outstanding Service by a Woman in Municipal Politics was created in April 2009 and is awarded annually to a former woman municipal politician who has shown exemplary service to her community and constituents, and to mentoring women who want to run for elected municipal office. The award is named in honour of former FCM President Ann MacLean, the retired longtime mayor of New Glasgow, N.S.

From 2005 – 2006 FCM held a series of workshops and events across the country to discuss how best to get more women active in municipal government. The result was “Getting to 30%”, a document which outlines a set of strategies and tactics FCM identified and developed for municipal councils to use to further the involvement of women in municipal government.

In 2007, the committee began to build a national network of regional champions. The Regional Champions Campaign was publicly launched at FCM’s 71st Annual Conference in Quebec City in June 2008. The City of Toronto, under FCM Standing Committee Chair and Toronto Councillor Pam McConnell, quickly emerged as a champion of the program. Their handbook, *Toronto Regional Champions Program: Increasing Women’s Participation in Municipal Government*, lays out the program objectives, its main elements, and activities. The program is a “one-year mentoring, job shadowing and education program where young women are matched with Toronto women councilors with the goal of providing information and support to young women interested in learning about the role of elected women in municipal government” (City of Toronto 2008). After their year in the program, mentees are provided with information and guidance on future leadership activities, including the application process for the city’s agencies, boards, commissions, and corporations. In 2009 FCM

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<sup>4</sup> FCM organizes the county into the following five regions: British Columbia, The Prairies and Territories, Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada, and a scholarship is allocated for each.



produced a similar document; *I'm a Regional Champions, now what?* The document outlines the role of the champion – to deliver campaign schools, organize public meetings, recruit potential candidates to run in municipal elections, and use the news media to promote women's participation in municipal government.

The current FCM program, *Getting to 30%*, was approved in 2010, and aims to increase the number of women of all ages involved in leadership and decision-making roles in municipal government, with a particular emphasis on women in rural and remote areas. A manual and curriculum were developed and are being offered through a series of municipal campaign school workshops, webinars, and mentoring opportunities across Canada in advance of municipal elections.

While FCM acts as an umbrella organization, many other leaders on the issue have emerged. Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City, among others, have also ratified the IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government, and have instituted strategies to increase women's participation. (FCM and Femmes et Ville, 2004) In Ottawa, the *City for All Women Initiative* (CAWI), funded by Status of Women Canada and run by the City of Ottawa and local women's organizations worked to increase women's access to services and employment and to promote decision making processes that are more inclusive while training women on municipal government and lobby strategies. In the province of Quebec a wealth of programs address the issue. The provincial government, in 2002, began a 5 year, \$5 million program, *A l'égalité pour décider*, to increase the number of women sitting on local and regional councils. In Montreal a local organization, Femmes et Ville, held an International Seminar on Women's Safety in 2002 which resulted in specific recommendations for cities to ensure safety of their women citizens – including the involvement of women in the process (Femmes et Ville 2002); and Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie has offered campaign schools for aspiring women municipal candidates. In 2000, the Network of Montérégia Elected Women Representatives was established, with all women mayors and councilors in the region as members who work to collect data, advocate, and work to increase the rate of women joining their ranks.

In Atlantic Canada, the St John Status of Women Council, through their *Make Your Mark Campaign*, hosts complimentary lunch and learn sessions to increase the involvement of women in municipal government by building their skills, networks, and confidence. In 2004, the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM) created the Women in Local Government (WILG) group after a resolution was passed at the annual meeting to create a steering committee to identify barriers to women's participation in municipal government and to make recommendations on how women could be better engaged in decision making. Since then, the WILG has initiated a public education campaign, manages a mentoring program for those interested in running, and administers a bursary program for women municipal administrators. The program matches mentors with mentees; provides them with a framework of meetings and events throughout the year; and checks in with both parties throughout the year to evaluate the progression of the relationship (WILG 2006).

The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) has the Women in Municipal Government Committee. In 2009 the committee conducted a survey of women in municipal elected office regarding their decision to enter into formal politics, what motivated them currently, and what their plans were for the future. The survey revealed that a desire to have a voice in their community – to articulate “their unique perspectives, values, experiences and visions” was often cited as a reason for entering politics and while barriers were identified the respondents saw none of them as insurmountable. The barriers that the respondents identified fell into three broad categories: fear of criticism/pressures of the position;

lack of knowledge of the role and the importance of the position; and the costs of running and serving (monetary, work-life balance etc). To address these barriers those surveyed recommended education sessions to increase interest and explain the value of the work.

At the 2009 Annual Convention of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM), the membership resolved to strike a steering committee to identify barriers to women's participation in municipal government and how better to engage them. In June 2010, the steering committee published *Ballot Box Barriers: An Action Plan for Engaging More Women in the Municipal Democratic Process*. At the time, only 15 per cent of Manitoba's municipal elected officials were women.<sup>5</sup> The report examines what various provinces are doing to address the issue, the work of FCM, identifies twelve barriers to be addressed, and sets out a three point, four year, action plan. The barriers range from family responsibilities, the perception of municipal politics as an old boys club, less financial independence, a feeling of being less qualified, less profile in their community, systemic impediments, lack of information about the process and role models, to negative perception of women in leadership positions. To address these barriers AMM recommended information campaigns on the benefits and the process; campaign schools; and mentoring programs. The report specifically addresses the origins and importance of the 30 per cent benchmark established by the United Nations.

A final point worth noting about the issue in Canada is the effect of a rural-urban divide in women's success in attaining municipal office. There are theories that argue more women will be engaged in each situation. The desirability hypothesis holds that women will have less positions of power in situations that are more desirable – where there is more power or prestige - and so would predict that women would hold fewer council seats in urban centres, where there is more power. The opposing hypothesis is the cosmopolitan hypothesis, which posits that larger cities, with their more diverse and more educated population make more progressive choices and so elect more women to council (Gidengil and Vengroff 1997 and Gavan-Koop and Smith 2008). Another theory on why cities might have more women elected is that they have a larger eligibility pool. They have more women in managerial and professional occupations, and who comprise part of the strata of the population regularly recruited to, and interested in government.

In a 2010 study, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities found that 60 of 81 urban municipalities (74 per cent) and only 44 of 116 rural municipalities (38 per cent) of rural municipalities have at least one woman on their councils. Gavan- Koop and Smith found opposing results, with women forming more than 50 per cent of elected office in small and medium municipalities in metropolitan Vancouver, while large municipalities in the region have fewer women, - that the percentage of women increases as the community gets smaller (1997). Trimble (1995) found outcomes similar to those of the AMM and contrary to those of Gavan-Koop and Smith and concluded that women are more likely to win elected office in larger municipalities than in smaller ones, and in urban areas more than in rural ones.

## **Solutions**

Despite the barriers to women becoming elected municipal officials listed previously, there are methods to encourage them. The obstacles that continue to prevent women from running for municipal office can be grouped into three categories: social, organizational, and institutional. (Newmann and White, 2006)

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, at the same time 5 of 13 federal representatives (38%) and 18 of 57 provincial representatives (32%) were women.

Exposing women to political life, changing the electoral system, changing the financing and funding of campaigns are the three key places to start.

### *Politicize women*

Key to increasing the participation of women in local government is the idea of political socialization – without being exposed to the idea of politics and its effects, women are less likely to be interested in local government, and much less likely to run. When women choose to enter municipal politics and government “it is often because they have been socialized towards an interest in a life in politics” (Newman and White 2006). As women become more involved with community organizations – shelters, food banks etc, - it increases their contact with local government and makes it more likely they’ll get involved, especially as municipal government addresses those specific concerns (Andrew 2004 and Tindal and Tindal 2009).

If woman are interested in running for municipal office they need to start building their profile in their communities. In Canada, municipal elections are frequently the victim of low voter turnout, which makes it even harder for a challenger to remove an incumbent from council. Incumbents enjoy name recognition, and better and more news coverage and their lingering presence on councils means that the male: female ratio changes slowly (Bashevkin 2009). When the incumbency effect is combined with the recent series of amalgamations with its reduced number of seats, it means municipalities are often among the governments least adaptable to change among their elected officials.

### *Changes to the Political System*

There are some changes that can be made within the political system to increase women’s participation in local government – a switch from single to multi member districts, and political leadership on the issue chief among them.

A switch from ward elections, to at-large elections is likely to increase women’s success. Ward election, with their single member plurality process, tend to lower the number of female and visible minority candidates because the voter can choose just one candidate (Massicotte 2001). Switching to an at-large system, like a switch to proportional representation, equalizes elector votes and allows for a more representative legislature by providing greater opportunity to historically disadvantaged groups by allowing candidates to vote for multiple candidates. In short, if an elector gets to cast only one ballot, then women are forced into direct competition with men for the position. In an at-large system, electors can cast their vote for a number of candidates and can choose to support a woman candidate, even if she is not their absolute first choice (Matland 2005).

Richard Matland has done research into the effects on women’s success in government of an electoral system under single member districts (SMD) - with only one representative elected per geographic area - versus an electoral system with multi-member districts (MMD) - with several legislators elected per geographic area. The difference the system makes is quite marked. The chart below shows how the MMD systems elect a higher percentage of women and how their ratio is increasing at a greater rate.

<b>System/year</b>	<b>1945</b>	<b>1950</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>SMD</b>	3.05	2.13	2.51	2.23	3.37	8.16	15.42	18.24
<b>MMD</b>	2.93	4.73	5.47	5.86	11.89	18.13	21.93	27.49

Percentage of Women MP's across 24 National Legislatures, 1945-2004, SMD systems vs. MMD  
Source: Matland 2005

Real-life examples of this phenomenon can be seen through a comparison of women's' success in municipal government in Edmonton and Calgary. Their success rate is slightly higher in Edmonton, and this may be due to its electoral structure – Calgary has 14 wards, with one alderman elected/ward while Edmonton has six wards in a two councilors/ward system (Sampert 2008). Similarly, in Manitoba, where municipalities can choose to operate on an at-large or a ward system the 97 municipalities with a ward system 35 have at least one woman, while among the 100 at large system, 69 have at least one woman (AMM 2004). Finally, it is worth noting that The Inter-Parliamentary Union shows that 80% of countries that have met the Beijing target have quota systems (IPU 2007).

MacIvor (1996) argues that in most of the countries that are greatly increasing their female representation it is a change in the behavior of the political elite that makes the difference and that here in Canada those elites are more likely to be keeping women out with their “old boys clubs”. Still, if a city is willing to make a change, it can be done. London, England introduced a system of partial proportionality rules and the mayor's office took action to ensure that women would be encouraged to run – and women's representation rose to 40 per cent (Bashevkin 2006). In Canada, FCM has drafted a sample resolution to be put to councils, which recognizes the imbalance in representation, confirms women's input and involvement is critical in local government and commits to working to address the barriers preventing women's participation.<sup>6</sup>

### *Changes to Funding*

Finances also play a role as electoral campaigns processes represent a major financial obstacle for women and link to a lack of organizational contacts (Brodie 1991, MacIvor 1996, and Karam 2005). The benefits of reforms to political financing in Canada in 2003, which limit financing from individual, unions, and corporations, were cited by Macdonald (2005) as alleviating a key barrier to women financing their political campaigns. Regulating the amount of money that can be spent, through limiting campaign expenses limits, and by capping donations from any single source would have a direct impact on this barrier to women's participation in local government by making electoral participation more affordable to them (Trimble and Arscott 2003) . While municipal government campaigns are frequently seen as less costly than provincial or federal ones, that is not always the case. In Vancouver, where there are currently no limits on what can be spent by a would-be councillor on their campaign the most expensive campaign spent \$128, 402, of which the candidate had received \$128 239 in cash....<sup>7</sup> If that becomes the standard required for success, women will be hard pressed to compete.

Canadian municipalities continue to suffer from a scarcity of female representation. This lack exists in spite of the international consensus and agreements, many of which Canada is a signatory to, which recognize the importance of a minimal benchmark of 30 per cent of participation of women in the political process. Canada needs to increase the percentage of women in local politics to meet domestically the standards they are espousing overseas. The barriers to this participation are similar internationally and domestically, but there are actions that can be undertaken. In Canada, organizations

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix E for the full text of the resolution.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/election2008/candidate-profiles-councillor.htm>

like FCM, Femmes et Ville, and Women in Local Government are doing what they can, but changes to funding, to political will and to the system would greatly enhance the effectiveness of their actions. When more women run, more will win, and Canada will arrive at a more representative local government that is better equipped to make the best possible policy.

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## Appendices

### APPENDIX A – List of Acronyms

ACOBOL	Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia
AMM	Association of Manitoba Municipalities
AUMA	Alberta Urban Municipalities Association
CAWI	City for All Women Initiative
CCRE	Commission of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
FCM	Federation of Canadian Municipalities
IULA	International Union of Local Authorities
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MMD	Multi-Member District
NALAG	National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PR	Proportional Representation
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
SMD	Single Member District
SMP	Single Member Plurality
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UN	United Nations
UNSM	Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities
UN ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UTO	United Towns Organizations
WILG	Women in Local Government (UNSM)

## APPENDIX B – Women in Local Government in Asia and the Pacific - % of Total, 1998

<b>Country</b>	<b>Year Women were eligible to vote and stand for local government</b>	<b>Women in Local Government Seats % of Total</b>	<b>Women in Central (National) Government % of Total</b>	<b>Percentage of Seats allocated to Women Representatives (Quota) % of Total</b>	<b>Women Mayors % of Total</b>
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	1938	2	5.3	No Quota	0
<b>India</b>	1947	33.3	7.9	33.3	
<b>Pakistan</b>	1970	33	2.9	33	
<b>Nepal</b>	1955	24.1	7.9	20	0
<b>Bangladesh</b>	1947	33.3	11.2	33.3	0
<b>Thailand</b>	1932	6.7	7.8	No Quota	0.5
<b>Malaysia</b>	1957	9.8	14.1	No Quota	0.7
<b>Philippines</b>	1937	16.5	12	No Quota	18
<b>China</b>	1949	22.1	21.8	No Quota	69.3
<b>Vietnam</b>	1946	19.8	26.2	No Quota	3
<b>Japan</b>	1946	6.2	10.7	No Quota	0.5
<b>Australia</b>	1908	26.3	25	No Quota	15
<b>New Zealand</b>	1910	31.5	30.8	No Quota	26

Source: UN ESCAP. 1998. *Women in Local Government in Asia*.

## APPENDIX C – A Global Comparison: Percentage of Women Elected to Local Government

Country	Percentage of Women Elected to Local Government
Costa Rica	73
Chile	48
Sweden	42
Nicaragua	34
Bolivia	34
Uganda	33
Finland	31
Colombia	30
Venezuela	30
Ghana	30
South Africa	29
Dominican Republic	28
United Kingdom	27
<b>Canada</b>	<b>22</b>
France	22
Belgium	22
Honduras	22

Source: FCM. 2004. *Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making*.

## APPENDIX D – Women in Local Government in Canada, selected years, 2004-2009

Province	2004				2006				2007				2009			
	Mayors		Councillors		Mayors		Councillors		Mayors		Councillors		Mayors		Councillors	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Alberta					288	56	1178	373	290	58	1184	377	270	75	1144	402
British Columbia					150	37	822	377	148	38	816	379	140	44	825	384
Saskatchewan					745	65	3203	508	747	70	3191	529	709	86	3166	543
Manitoba					191	8	859	126	185	11	843	129	183	15	833	145
Ontario					380	63	2157	656	374	72	2131	713	370	74	2111	715
Quebec					1033	154	5679	1901	1053	165	5691	1958	1045	169	5635	1937
New Brunswick					90	15	403	137	91	15	396	134	87	16	373	148
Nova Scotia					52	4	293	87	51	5	294	87	51	4	290	90
PEI					63	12	273	109	57	20	284	117	57	17	280	118
Newfoundland					227	52	985	371	225	55	998	372	224	57	989	374
NWT					17	6	74	51	26	7	69	48	17	4	65	47
Nunavut					20	5	92	54	19	7	109	60	19	6	114	65
Yukon					5	3	21	9	5	4	21	12	5	3	20	12
Totals	3309	419	16314	4534	3261	480	16039	4759	3271	527	16027	4915	3177	570	15845	4980

Source: FCM, Database of Elected Officials  
(Years selected based on availability)

## APPENDIX E – Sample Model Resolution for Support from Council

### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the following wording be adopted:

**WHEREAS** in Canada, women’s representation in municipal government is 21.4 per cent and women make up just 20.7 per cent of members of Parliament, placing Canada 44<sup>th</sup> out of 188 countries for the number of women in national politics;

**WHEREAS** there is a democratic deficit; one that sees half our population underrepresented in our political institutions;

**WHEREAS** we want to close that gender gap because Canada and our communities cannot afford to lose the insights and expertise of half of their citizens; and

**WHEREAS** we need women in municipal government to reflect the life experiences of women;

**BE IT RESOLVED** that Council will strive to address the barriers that impede women’s participation in our community; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that Council support the Federation of Canadian Municipalities’ national campaign to increase the number of women on Council to 30 per cent of the total by 2026.

Source: FCM. 2009c. Getting to 30% by 2026.