

# Canada and equality between women and men – the results

To have a voice. To have a choice.

## Citizens' campaign for women's representation in local Pakistani government

*In past elections, tens of thousands of women ran for local government under new legislation that reserved 33 percent of the seats for them.*

Many of the 36,000 newly elected councillors were illiterate, poor, and had no experience in politics. To help them reach their potential the Government of Canada funded a \$2-million project through its local partner, the Aurat Foundation, to establish five provincial and 70 district resource centres.

The centres taught the new politicians important skills such as managing budgets; using the legal process to redress wrongs; planning and carrying out projects to improve the quality and delivery of social services, while contributing to equality between women and men; sharing information among themselves; creating influential local and national networks; and building awareness about women's rights.

Many women councillors have applied their new knowledge and skills to lobby for and obtain greater funding for water, sanitation, health, and education projects in their communities. Others have helped constituents win legal battles or have themselves successfully challenged dishonest officials. One milestone was the first-time observance in several districts of March 8, International Women's Day.

Although the centres were originally intended to assist the councillors, about half the daily visitors are women seeking help with personal problems, which are often associated with family breakdown and violence. A growing

number of the centres now offer women's literacy courses, vocational training, information and support on how to access credit, basic health care services, as well as putting women in contact with their elected council members.

Another unexpected outcome is increased mobility by women as they attend council meetings, meet to network or lobby for their constituencies, or visit the centres. One senior official, impressed by the number of women attending a district meeting, remarked that he'd never seen so many women and wondered from where they had all emerged.



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