



# Advocacy Toolkit for Women in Politics

## 4 Conducting Research

“Talking to other people to find out what they know is usually a good place to start conducting your research.”

**R**esearch is key to any advocacy work. When you have done your research thoroughly from the start you will be able to speak from an informed perspective about your advocacy issue.

There are so many resources and tools to help you do research and using a combination is usually the best approach.

### People and networks

Other people are usually a good place to start when conducting research. Start by finding out from people you know who is working on the area you want to do your advocacy and they may be able to direct you along the right path. This may lead you to NGOs working in the field, research institutions in universities, academics, publications or Internet sites you may have otherwise struggled to discover.

NGOs are invaluable because often they work on the ground and can give you access to individuals and communities who are affected by your advocacy topic or issue. You can talk to these people and get specific examples (case studies) of how they have been affected by a policy or law or how the absence of a policy or law has impacted on their lives. If you have available human resources you could also conduct a baseline survey of an area or several areas using a simple questionnaire that you can either ask a sample of people to complete or which you and/or your research assistants can administer (by interviewing people and completing the form based on the responses).

Many NGOs also conduct field research and publish their findings. A collection of their publications will provide a good starting point and, within these publications there will also be refer-

ences to other publications that you can access for more background and data on your advocacy issue.

Research organizations, including government research units such as the Census offices or ministries of health, social welfare and public services, are also a good source of research information. Hard facts and statistics that are reliable can usually be found within these research departments.

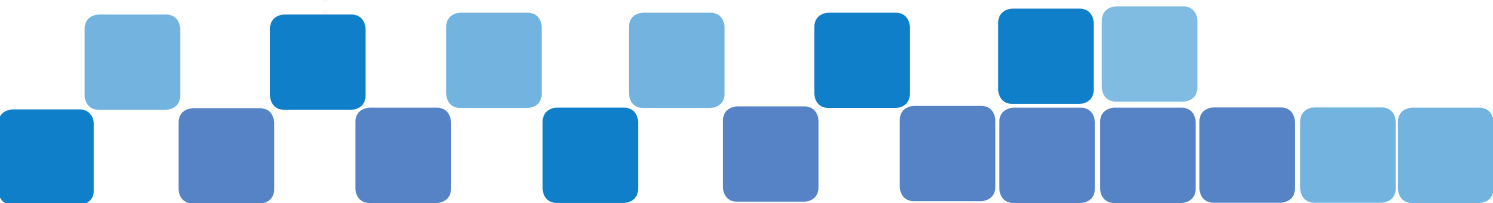
Other good sources of information are government ministries and departments and United Nations agencies, such as UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Childrens Fund (UNICEF), UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women.

### Media

Being a good consumer of media is critical for staying informed and knowledgeable. It is one thing to have plenty of academic knowledge, facts

### Online Research Resources for Women in Politics

- ✓ Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Electoral Democracy in Africa (EISA) <http://www.eisa.org.za/>
- ✓ Gender Links [www.genderlinks.org.za/](http://www.genderlinks.org.za/)
- ✓ UN Women [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)
- ✓ International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)
- ✓ Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>
- ✓ National Democratic Institute (NDI) <http://www.ndi.org>
- ✓ International Knowledge Network for Women in Politics IKNOWPolitics <http://www.inkowpolitics.org>



“The Internet is the biggest reference library you can possibly access without moving from your desk. There is information there about anything and everything.”

and statistics but you also need to be able to relate these to events taking place daily at a national, regional and international level and make the linkages that can help you present your advocacy campaign in the most informed way possible.

To be able to use the media as a research resource you need to access the range of local media – print, radio and television – regularly. Don't just rely on one newspaper. Depending on its ownership and editorial policy it will have a specific angle on a particular news item. Read the others and make your own analysis.

Read the whole paper. The issue you are working on does not exist in a vacuum. Gender based violence, for example, may be linked to economic factors such as job losses or natural disasters.

You may even find it in the sports pages. Don't skip the supplements. Scan through them and you may find there is relevant information and data there.

Often the private sector, UN or NGOs will produce supplements that focus on specific issues such as agriculture or human rights, which can provide valuable information. Clip relevant articles and file them for future reference.

The international news pages can also provide you with links to events taking place at a global level that relate to or have an impact on your local level issue.

Often, however, what is in the paper may be very brief so it is a good idea to look up the issue on the Internet news sites, which often provide more in-depth reporting, analysis and links to other sources.

#### Academic papers and publications

Universities are there to generate knowledge so they are a good place to find research

information that is reliable. Most departments have graduate research students working on their Masters or PhDs.

Identify the department that relates to your advocacy issue and approach them to find out what research has been conducted on that area and by whom.

The university library is likely to have a lot of reference material on the subject. If it is all too academic it is a good idea to speak to a representative of the department to learn more. Have some specific questions ready. If they can direct you to a research student who is working on your area then arrange to interview this person to give you some guidance and information on their findings.

#### Internet

The Internet is the biggest reference library you can possibly access without moving from your desk. There is information there about anything and everything. Set aside some time to go on the Internet and conduct searches on your topic. Because there is so much information it is possible to get information overload (more information than you can process) so be very clear about your search parameters.

Be very specific and try more than one search engine (Google, Yahoo, msn). If being too specific does not get you the information you want then broaden your search parameters by typing in several key words.

Take note of the websites that contain the information you are looking for by book marking them or, if you are not working on your personal computer, write down the web addresses so you can refer back to them later.

Some sites contain documents that you can download and store on your computer or memory flash or print to read later. Create a folder of the relevant documents so that you can always refer to them when you need to.