

# GQUAL'S THEORY OF CHANGE

Enhancing Global Governance  
Through Women's Equal Participation  
in Decision Making.

GQUAL



in

# The Need

## ■ The Problem We Address

Despite notable progress, women remain significantly underrepresented in key international leadership spaces. This persistent gender imbalance is not only a violation of the right to equality, but it also undermines the quality, legitimacy, and impact of global decision-making across critical areas—from climate change and peacebuilding to economic development, foreign policy, and human rights. Many of these issues disproportionately affect women, yet their voices and leadership remain largely absent from the spaces where global policies are shaped.

Still, gender gaps remain stark and persistent. GQUAL's data reveals that in its 78-year history, the International Court of Justice has had only six women judges, compared to 109 men. In the Americas, just 13% of members of the region's three main legal bodies—the Inter-American Juridical Committee, the Inter-American Commission, and the Inter-American Court—have been women over the past 65 years. At the UN Treaty Bodies level, the UN Committee Against Torture has just two women among its ten members, while the UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of Migrants, with 14 members, includes only four women. Within the UN Special Procedures, eight positions have still never been held by women. In Europe, the UK, Italy, and France have never appointed a woman to the European Court of Human Rights, which still comprises only 36% women judges. In Africa, while the key human rights bodies of the African Union have parity, key regional courts of justice—such as ECOWAS and East African Court, have 20% and 9% representation of women, respectively.

## ■ Why Is This Important?

International and multilateral bodies play a decisive role in articulating global consensus, building legal norms, and sustaining cooperation among states. These bodies shape and uphold treaties, international judicial decisions, "soft law" standards, and political and multilateral agreements—such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Pact for the Future, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—which, in turn, guide national policies and help hold governments accountable. When women are excluded from international decision-making, it not only impacts global governance; it creates a ripple effect that reinforces inequality at all levels, from the global to the most local.

The complexity and global significance of the issues these institutions address make equal representation of women not only a right but a necessity. Diverse and representative bodies are more likely to develop inclusive, legitimate, and effective solutions. Evidence shows, for example, that international tribunals are more likely to address gender-related harms when women serve on the bench. The recognition of rape as torture by the Inter-American Court, and its classification as a war crime and crime against humanity by the ICTY, for example, happened under the leadership of women judges who elevated these perspectives.

In today's context of rising authoritarianism and armed conflict, shrinking civic space, and backlash against women's rights, improving nomination and selection processes and enhancing these bodies' composition is more urgent than ever.

## Our Target Audiences

PRIMARY	SECONDARY	ALLIES
Women leaders, lawyers, judges, academics, diplomats, and experts — particularly from the Global South and marginalized groups — who face systemic exclusion.	States, international institutions, and multilateral organizations that must reform to achieve gender parity. Particularly gatekeepers (generally men) occupying key positions within those organizations.	Civil society organizations, academia, philanthropy, professional associations, and global campaigns that influence norms, laws, and selection practices.

## Our Solution Explained

GQUAL's Theory of Change is grounded in the conviction that women, in all their diversity, have a fundamental right to equal and inclusive participation in international decision-making. GQUAL works to transform national and international justice institutions, UN human rights bodies, and multilateral governance spaces—including diplomacy, peace and security, climate governance, and trade—by increasing women's representation and influence, particularly from the Global South. Its ultimate objective is to institutionalize gender parity as a permanent, non-negotiable standard in international leadership through transparent, accountable, and merit-based nomination and appointment processes.

GQUAL recognizes that sustained change requires shaping ideas, norms, and agendas within the multilateral system through evidence-based legal advocacy. Strategic networking and thought leadership—grounded in rigorous research and data—are therefore central pillars of our Theory of Change. GQUAL produces and curates empirical research, legal analysis, and comparative data on women's representation, nomination practices, and structural barriers across institutions. This evidence base underpins informed public debate, supports advocacy with States and international bodies, and provides credibility and authority in policy discussions.

Through global convenings, high-level dialogues, coalition-building, and sustained engagement with

decision-makers and expert communities, GQUAL translates data into influence, ensuring that gender parity is framed as a governance, legitimacy, and accountability imperative rather than a symbolic aspiration.

At the same time, GQUAL understands that underrepresentation begins long before formal nomination processes and cannot be addressed without strengthening the pipeline of future women leaders. Mentoring, accompaniment, and leadership development are therefore integral to its Theory of Change. GQUAL works directly with women judges, lawyers, academics, diplomats, and practitioners—particularly from underrepresented regions—to support their readiness for international positions. This includes understanding obstacles within the pipeline and once in position, mentoring career pathways, navigating opaque and informal selection systems, increasing professional visibility, building strategic networks, and preparing for nomination and election processes. By investing in women with the qualifications and experience required for international roles, GQUAL addresses the structural and informal barriers that prevent women from accessing leadership opportunities, even when formal equality commitments exist.

In parallel, GQUAL plays a catalytic role in generating and consolidating international legal standards on women's equal participation in decision-making. Its legal advocacy has contributed to authoritative interpretations of States' obligations under international human rights law, most notably through CEDAW's article 8 and General Recommendation No. 40, as well as resolutions, guidelines, and official reports adopted by UN and regional bodies. By framing gender parity as a binding legal obligation—rather than a discretionary policy choice—GQUAL helps shift the conversation from political goodwill to legal accountability, embedding parity within the core content of the right to equality and non-discrimination.

Building on these legal standards, GQUAL translates norm-setting into concrete institutional change by advocating for improved nomination and selection processes at both national and international levels. At the national level, GQUAL promotes transparent, public, and participatory procedures that explicitly include gender parity as a mandatory criterion and allow for civil society oversight.

At the international level, it works to embed parity into election rules, guidelines, and institutional practices, challenging opaque political bargaining, informal gatekeeping, and gender stereotyping in appointments. By using established legal norms as advocacy tools, GQUAL equips States, institutions, and civil society actors with clear benchmarks against which appointment processes can be assessed, challenged, and reformed.

# The Work

## Inputs



## Interventions (Core Strategies)

### 1 Data & Research-Driven Discussion and Thought Leadership

Produce and disseminate evidence on gender parity gaps, highlight barriers, track progress, to sustain advocacy, drive change and expand support for women candidates. Integrate this with narrative change and thought leadership by reframing concepts of leadership and meritocracy, elevating women leaders as visible role models, and strategically shaping the global discourse to establish gender parity as the accepted norm.

### 2 Pipeline Strengthening & Leadership Mentoring

Strengthen global coalitions and alliances, expand mentoring and fellowship programs (especially for women from the Global South), establish alumni networks, and dismantle barriers in career pathways to international leadership.

### 3 Develop International Laws and Accountability Mechanisms

Through advocacy and litigation to create clear, mandatory standards that guarantee women's equal and inclusive participation in decision-making at all levels.

### 4 Reform National and International Selection Practices

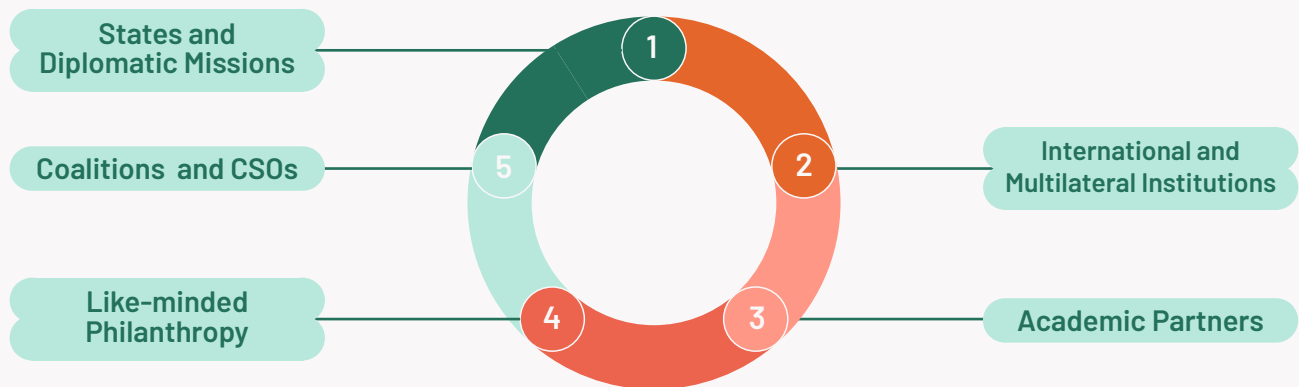
Reform procedures to include gender parity as a key criterion, and advance binding international standards such as General Recommendation No. 40 (GR40).

## Secret Sauce

We work to build a global, data-driven advocacy movement that mobilizes diverse sectors to reimagine and reform how international positions are filled, demanding transparency, accountability, and parity, while encouraging and supporting a wider and more diverse group of women to access leadership spaces and succeed in them.

Finally, GQUAL recognizes that progress remains fragile without institutional safeguards and sustained pressure. Its Theory of Change therefore relies on the interaction between legal norm-generation, evidence-based agenda-setting, strategic networking, mentoring of future leaders, and advocacy for structural reform to create durable change. By simultaneously strengthening the pipeline of qualified women candidates and transforming the rules and practices that govern appointments, GQUAL works to ensure that gender parity becomes firmly embedded in the structures, processes, and culture of international governance.

## Partners



## Behaviors to change

### → States

Nominate and elect women through transparent, parity focused processes.

### → Multilateral and International Institutions

Institutionalize gender balance, collect and publish data, ensure inclusive work cultures and elect in parity.

### → Women Candidates

Apply, compete, and thrive in international leadership roles with increased support.

### → Gatekeepers

Promote institutional changes and help women break ceilings.

### → Civil Society & Allies

Advocate, monitor, and hold institutions accountable.

## Our Big Idea

# Make gender parity in leadership a non-negotiable standard.

## Full Mission

A global south led campaign aiming at achieving women's equal participation in international decision-making through the improvement of national and international selection processes and the empowerment of women candidates.

# The Results

## ● Pathways

### → Systems Change

Secure legally binding frameworks that make parity irreversible in national and international nomination and selection processes.

### → Cross Fertilization

Expand the conversation beyond international justice into climate change negotiations, oceans governance, trade, peace & security, diplomacy, and arbitration through partnerships.

## || Outputs



## Short-Term Outcomes (6–12 months)

- 1 Expanded global coalition and network with stronger presence across regions and deepened gatekeepers' engagement.
- 2 Increased visibility and mentoring opportunities for Global South women candidates.
- 3 A better understanding of obstacles faced by women on their professional careers to reach international decision-making positions.
- 4 GR40 implementation begins at national and institutional levels.
- 5 Strong political commitments from regional or international institutions.
- 6 Improved transparency in national nomination processes and international selection processes

## Long-Term Outcomes (12–36 months)

- 1 Gender parity sustained in treaty bodies, OAS, and UN Special Procedures.
- 2 Women appointed to historically male-only roles (e.g., UN/OAS Secretary-General, ICJ judgeships).
- 3 Broader multilateral sectors (climate, trade, peace & security, arbitration) adopt parity frameworks.
- 4 National governments and international institutions institutionalize transparent, parity-based nomination systems.
- 5 Women leaders from the Global South increasingly visible and supported in global governance.
- 6 Main professional obstacles to women's ascend dismantled.

## BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal)

**By 2035, achieve 50/50 gender parity across international justice and governance bodies, with legally binding frameworks in place to sustain equality.**

### Vision

A global governance system where diverse women's leadership is the norm, not the exception – making national and international institutions more representative, effective, and just, and inspiring future generations to reimagine leadership itself.

### The One-line Theory of Change

Because women remain underrepresented in international leadership despite global commitments, we work in national and global governance spaces to help states and institutions achieve gender parity through research, advocacy, leadership development, and narrative change, in order to make parity the norm by 2035.

# GQUAL's ToC in a Nutshell

## The Need

### Problem

Women remain underrepresented in International Justice and Governance Bodies which decisions affect billions. Nomination and selection systems are opaque, politicized, and male dominated.

### People

- Women leaders (esp. Global South).
- States & institutions, gatekeepers
- Allies: CSOs, academia, philanthropy, professional networks.

### Reason

Parity is essential for legitimacy, effectiveness, better decisionmaking, and fairness in global governance.

## The Work

### Mission

A global south led campaign aiming at achieving women's equal participation in international decision-making through the improvement of international selection processes and the empowerment of women candidates.

### Partners

- Partners Like-minded coalitions and CSOs (1for8Billion, IGC, Arbitral Women).
- Philanthropy.
- States.
- Intl. & Multilateral Institutions.
- Women in leadership
- Academia.

### Behaviors

- States adopt parity-based nominations.
- Global governance institutions enforce transparency, parity & inclusion in elections.
- Women compete with support & visibility.
- Gatekeepers help breaking ceilings.
- CSOs monitor & hold accountable.

### Interventions

- Data & Research-driven discussion and Thought Leadership
- Develop intl law & standards
- Reform national and Intl selection (GR40)
- Pipeline Strengthening & Leadership Mentoring.

## The Results

### Big Idea

Parity in global governance becomes a non-negotiable standard.

### Impact & Vision By 2035

50/50 parity across international justice bodies and key leadership positions, secured by legally binding frameworks. International institutions become inclusive, just, and representative.

### Pathways

- Systems Change: Secure legally binding frameworks that make parity irreversible in international selection processes.
- Cross Fertilization: Expand the conversation beyond international justice into climate, trade, peace & security, diplomacy, and arbitration through partnerships.

# EQQUAL

#ChangeThePicture

