

# Women in Political Action

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How to change the system

To empower women for political action,  
While we deal with systemic oppression  
Disguised under the “myth of equality”?

“So many people still ask why

We call for more women in politics”,

Women are allowed to be in this room,

What else do you want?

We are being nice to ‘Mary’.

‘Mary’ is white, cis-, middle-class politician,

Which doesn’t make her a ‘bad person’,

Only a privileged one.

What is intersectionality?

Women who are other than ‘Mary’ –

Women of colour, trans, Indigenous,

queer, differently able –

To change the system

We need different women around the table.

We are navigating uncertainty

Of shifting political climate,

Changing election dates,

We deal with locally entrenched power,

aka ‘the old boys club’.

We encounter resistance  
of political parties and structures  
to the inclusion of women.

Gender equity is women's work –  
Under-resourced, underpaid or unpaid.

We are changing the system  
on a shoestring budget  
designed for short-term projects.

“It is doubtful that we will  
achieve the expected results in 3 years”

“Five years would have made more  
possible to make changes”.

Systems change work is dangerous.

It is a risky endeavour  
to confront ‘the old boys club’,  
Especially in the contexts where  
“everyone knows everyone”.

“It puts entire people's livelihoods at risk.”

“We sometimes walk on eggshells”.

Yet we are determined.

We come together united  
Around shared goals and values,

Unlearning competition

And advancing collaboration,

Navigating our differences

Through the lens of equity,

Applying intersectional feminist framework

To ourselves and our partnerships.

We need long-term, flexible funding  
that enables us to respond to emerging needs,  
bridge geographical distance,  
build each other's capacity,  
bring in new partners,  
who are other than 'Mary',  
and learn together.

This is how we can change the system  
to empower women for political action.

This poem is a tribute to the partners from five partnership projects who participated in a three-year evaluation project by Health Nexus. The poem combines some of their most poignant quotes with themes from the evaluation research data. It illustrates the challenges involved in gender equity work as well as partners' perseverance and strengths in facing and addressing those challenges.

Note: The name 'Mary' is used in a generic manner in this poem. It does not describe any of the people involved in the five partnership projects.

An excerpt from the poem was published in the final evaluation snapshot, available online at: Health Nexus. (2020). Partnership Projects for Systems Change on Gender Equity: A Snapshot of Key Learnings. Health Nexus. <https://en.healthnexus.ca>

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