

Gender Equality



UN
DP

Women's participation and leadership
In governments at the local level

*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

Asia and the Pacific 2013



UNDP (2014). *Gender Equality Women's participation and leadership In governments at the local level Asia and the Pacific 2013*. Bangkok, UNDP.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP, or UN Member States. UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. On the ground in more than 170 countries and territories, we offer global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations.

Copyright © UNDP 2014

United Nations Development Programme
Bureau for Development Policy
One United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA

Email: pacde@undp.org

Website: www.undp.org/governance and www.undp.org/poverty

Cover photo: Muzafar Ali/UNDP

Design: Inís Communication



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

Gender Equality

Women's participation and leadership
In governments at the local level

Asia and the Pacific 2013

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Foreword	2
Abbreviations	3
Executive Summary	4
1. Introduction	8
2. Political and international frame for women’s participation	9
2.1 Political economy and gender equality challenges in the Asia Pacific	9
2.2 Global framework and standards of women’s political participation	11
3. Methodology	15
3.1 Approach.	15
3.2 Methods of data collection	16
3.3. Data analysis and reporting	16
4. Trends shaping the political space and scope for women at the local and national levels	18
4.1. Trends and comparisons of changes in women’s representation	18
4.2. Institutional norms influencing women’s presence in decision-making.	32
4.2.1. Positive discrimination and equality of opportunity and result	32
4.2.2. Party culture and campaign financing for gender parity	43
4.3. Structural impact of socio-cultural constructs	49
4.3.1. Public-private divide	49
4.3.2. Gender-based violence	53
4.3.3. Intersectional discrimination	54
4.4. Gender influence on politics and development	56
4.4.1 Changing political ethos.	56
4.4.2. Representation and cross-cultural Impact.	57
4.4.3. Women’s agency, development outcomes and policy options	58
5. Institutional facilitators for women’s representation and participation	64
5.1. Role of civil society in advancing women’s political participation	64
5.2 Regional institutions influence on women’s representation	71
5.3 Transnational actors and efforts	74
6. Moving from political to practical: Exploring the way forward	79
References	86
Annexures	89

Acknowledgements

This report was developed under the leadership and guidance of Thusitha Pilapitiya, Policy Advisor, Decentralisation and Local Governance, UNDP Asia Pacific Regional Centre (APRC). Several individuals and organisations have made contributions in the production of this report. It has benefited from the contributions of organisations like CLGF (Gareth Wall and Lucy Slack) and UCLG ASPAC (Desra Hilda Defriana and Bernadia Tjandradewi) who have supported in the provision of research data on level of women's representation in the local governments as well as feedback on the report. UNDP Country Offices in the Asia Pacific region have also been instrumental in supporting data collection and Country Offices that need special mention include Afghanistan- Abdullah Azizi, Zainab Abassi, Ahmad Masood Amer; Bangladesh- Shaila Khan, Aziz Sarder; Bhutan- Rinzi Pem, Annamari Salonen; China- Henny Ngu; Cambodia- Socheath Heng; Indonesia- Gunnhild Naas; Mongolia- Davaadulum Tsegmed; Nepal- Pragya Bhashyal, Yam Nath Sharma; Pakistan- Amir Goraya, Annam Gohar; Philippines- Emmanuel Buendia, Fe Cabral; Thailand- Kwanpadh Suddhi-Dhamakit, Somchai Yensabai; Timor Leste- Zindu Salih; Sri Lanka- Zoe Keeler, Sonali Dayaratne; Vietnam – Bui Phuong Tra, Jean Munro; and the UNDP Pacific Centre- Simone Troller, Isikeli Valemei.

The study would not have been complete without the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. It has gained from the extensive consultations with the diverse actors in each of the sub-regions of South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific Islands. These discussions included elected representatives from local governments, parliamentarian, Election Management Bodies, academic institutions and national and international NGOs from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Pacific Islands, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. Discussions were also held with regional inter-governmental bodies such as the SAARC secretariat, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, the ASEAN Commission on Protection of Women and Children and the Pacific Island Forum secretariat. The perspectives and insights of these different stakeholders enriched the analysis and added value to the report. Special thanks are also due to Cai Cai and Jacqueline Paul of UNESCAP and Ramanathan Balakrishnan of UN Women Asia Pacific Regional Office for their important inputs as well as experts and team members within UNDP APRC such as Phil Matsheza, Practice Leader, Democratic Governance, Sujala Pant, Antje Kraft, Radhika Behuria and Tarika Wongsinsirikul. Mithulina Chatterjee led the report coordination, analysis of the empirical data and drafted the report.

Foreword

The report on 'Gender Equality: Women's participation and leadership in governments at the local level, Asia and the Pacific 2013' is being issued at a critical juncture for women's empowerment in the Asia Pacific region.

As the world prepares for sustainable development goals for post 2015, the lack of participation by women in leadership at local and national levels is of significant concern to everyone. The timely research and analysis of the underlying causes for this problem by the UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub's governance team is therefore of particular assistance to policymakers and all stakeholders who are trying to improve participation and leadership by women leading to also security and safety of women in the region.

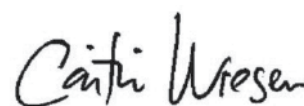
Following from the Women's Representation in Local Government in Asia-Pacific: Status Report 2010 and the regional conference on South Asia Women's Political Leadership in Dhaka held in 2011, and the common declaration on Women's Political Leadership in South Asia, the publication analyzes where progress has been made, and more importantly, where and why progress has fallen short, concluding with recommendations for how changes may be made within the emerging trends in the region.

As increasing women's participation in leadership cannot be discussed in isolation, the publication is also reflective of the status of women in our societies and cultures. This is imperative for the region, and the world to achieve poverty alleviation goals in the post 2015 agenda, and to bridge income inequalities that are prevalent in most countries of the Asia Pacific.

The publication also has collected an impressive amount of statistics on women's political representation at the national, district and local levels, as well as showing the different trends in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands, which can facilitate targeted interventions by the various stakeholders engaged in gender empowerment. Suggestions for continued collection of statistics, and a M&E framework to measure performance in gender through gender disaggregated data especially at the local level are also useful areas which the publication addresses.

As UNDP increasingly engages in South-South partnerships, the publications also strengthens the dynamic development environment in the Asia Pacific region and its sub-regions, regional cooperation for knowledge development and networking. It is my personal hope that this publication will enhance peer learning of lessons and good practices on women's political participation through long-term engagement and establishment of strong networks of provincial councillors, local government associations across similarly placed countries (politically, economically or socio-culturally) and through complementary partnerships with various organisations working at transnational and regional levels.

It is our intention that this publication will be another tool that contributes to strengthening leadership capacities of women in the Asia Pacific region.



Caitlin Wiesen

Abbreviations

ACWC	ASEAN Commission on the Protection of Women and Children
AICHR	ASEAN Inter-governmental Commission on Human Rights
APWLD	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Countries
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CAPWIP	Center for Asia Pacific Women in Politics
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CLGF	Commonwealth Local Government Forum
COMFREL	The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia
CoP	Community of Practice
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FPTP	First-Past-The-Post
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDRI	Gender and Development Research Institute
GEI	Gender Equity Index
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GGI	Gender Gap Index
GII	Gender Inequality Index
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
LOGOTRI	Local Government Training and Research Institutes in Asia and the Pacific
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
NAM CSSTC	Non-Aligned Movement Centre for South-South Technical Cooperation
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PLGE	Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration
Post-2015 DA	post-2015 Development Agenda
P	Proportional Representation
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPC	Secretariat of Pacific Community
TSMs	Temporary Special Measures
UCLG ASPAC	United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WAIPA	Women Parliamentarians of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly

Executive Summary

Political and economic transformation notwithstanding, women's presence in politics in the Asia Pacific region has remained abysmally low and drifting mostly downward. As gender discrimination has a strong cultural bearing in the region, positioning of women's political equality has not yet been central to these transitions. The socio-political structural complexities have contributed to the shrinking of political space for women. Despite advocacy by international organisations, women's representation in politics in the region has witnessed an overall reduction in the last three years. At the same time, the international human rights instruments and bodies are increasingly promoting women's rightful share in the political space including in local governments believing that this can have a significant impact on deepening of democracy, inclusive development and lasting peace.

Methodology

Taking the 2010 Status Report on Women's Representation in Local Government in Asia Pacific as the reference point, this study locates equality of opportunity and its result on women's political participation on the broad canvas of transformation at socio-cultural, historical and institutional levels. Using both primary and secondary data, the study captures the first-hand views of different interest groups—elected leaders, election management bodies, civil society, regional intergovernmental bodies and regional UN agencies—who have played divergent roles in transforming the scenario. The analysis reveals multitudes of scenarios emerging therefrom that influence women's descriptive and substantive representation especially at the local levels.

Trends and Analyses

Although women's representation in the national parliament (lower house) has increased in the Asia Pacific region, the picture remains grim at the local government levels. The data reveals a three per cent reduction in the number of elected women councillors since 2010, which is 79 per cent below the level achieved by their male counterparts as in 2013 (less than 21 per cent are women representatives). As if this was not enough, women's representation across district and provincial councils continued to slide since 2010 except for a slight improvement in rural councils. The number of elected women as chairpersons in rural, urban and provincial councils has not shown any promise though the corresponding higher number in district councils has been noticeable.

Two of the three sub-regions reflect a rather negative scenario. Since 2010, there has been 2.3 per cent and 9.6 per cent decrease in number of elected women in South Asia and in the Pacific (excluding Australia and New Zealand) respectively. East Asia offers a more positive story as women elected to local bodies show a three per cent growth. While the sub-regions might not offer encouraging numbers, some countries in each of the sub-regions have shown promise. In South Asia, 33 per cent reservation in the elected bodies has actually seen women capturing 38 per cent seats in the rural councils across India and 15 of the 28 states with 50 per cent reservation has more than 50 per cent elected women in local governments. In Mongolia, the introduction of Proportional Representation (PR) system has meant 22 per cent women being elected to the local government. Pacific countries appear to be making efforts as evidenced by Vanuatu's recent reservation policy for municipal councils, which have led to 14 per cent women being elected. The 2012 Timor-Leste elections saw women winning 38.5 per cent seats in parliament and 2013

Nepal election has managed to meet the 30 per cent target. While these two countries have reached the 30 per cent target at the national level, at sub-national levels five countries — India in South Asia; China in East Asia; and Australia, Nauru and Niue in the Pacific— have achieved this minimum target.

Notable in this change is the fact that countries have used different kinds of electoral types and systems viz., seat reservations, legislated party quotas or voluntary party quotas and the proportional representation systems. Reservation policy is favoured in South Asia and legislated and voluntary party quotas in East Asia. Pacific is still in its early stages of developing temporary special measures (TSMs). However, affirmative action has had its limitation, given the nature of politics and political processes in the region. Dynasty politics continues to reign supreme as a means for women to make inroads into the political sphere. Since political parties control political processes including the allocation of party tickets, leadership positions, campaign funding, women representation continues to be in the hands of dominant polity in the sub-regions.

Political exclusion and inequality has direct relationship with underlying cultural, social and religious stereotypes, which coupled with violence against women in politics further disadvantage them from exercising their political rights. Whether it is South Asia, East Asia or Pacific Islands, patriarchal cultures are pervasive in the socio-cultural construct of these communities and institutions, which determine and govern traditional gender roles. The public-private structural dichotomy is not conducive to the development of women's capabilities. It affects women's aspirations and inhibits them from actively participating in the political arena and this in turn leads to the paucity of women role models. It is important to note that some of these factors need to be nuanced and contextualised to specific locations to tease out their positive and negative implications.

Notwithstanding such entrenched factors, transformation is still evident in this region. Though women's participation in electoral politics may have remained limited, the political culture related to democratic decision-making, transparency, tolerance and integrity has nevertheless been influenced, indicating a positive intent. It may be construed as a precursor to increasing the role of women in political processes in the days ahead. In similar light, social customs too are evolving wherein women's relationship with both community and family are becoming relatively more equitable which, over time, may contribute to enhancing women's political participation. Many notable examples across the three sub-regions indicate that elected women from various backgrounds have been positively contributing to transforming policies within parliaments and to the larger issue of making development inclusive by ensuring delivery of services as well as accumulating social benefits to the socially-disadvantaged sections. Elected women in local governments in Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam have contributed to poverty reduction, allocation of more budgets to their localities and transparent governance. In India, not only have elected women influenced the delivery of public goods such as water, sanitation, health, education and mid-day meals in schools, but also addressed proximity challenges by locating these services to convenient places within villages and taking up social ills such as alcohol abuse and gender based violence. There are also cases of advocacy on pro-women laws by elected women in Nepal, Pakistan, Timor Leste and Australia.

The process of change has not been entirely organic. Several organisations have facilitated the inclusive processes for ensuring equality of women in the political sphere. Women's movements, civil society groups, regional and international intergovernmental bodies, national agencies, some male allies in different institutions have consistently engaged in advocacy, lobbied, developed

capacities, all of which has supported women's entry into the political space and enabled them to hold their ground against many odds.

However, looking at both the rate of descriptive representation and substantive contribution so far, there are clear indications that the road to equality is slowly being paved. At the same time, this is an important juncture in the history of work of the international community who ought to decide on the next set of goals for global and local axes of actions. This opportunity needs to be seized to 'fast track' women's political equality.

Way Forward

The **post-2015 Development Agenda** could be used as an important anchor to ensure that women's political equality in the local government levels acquires centre stage both in terms of quantitative and qualitative targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underlining its impact on poverty, development, peace and security.

One of the areas that would enable women to claim their rightful spaces in local governments would be to acquire 'numbers' by encouraging the states and political parties to use different kinds of **electoral systems and tools** as enabling factors. For such institutional evolution to be effective, political parties, election management bodies, relevant national agencies for local governments and civil society would need to leverage their cumulative efforts. Together with sub-regional intergovernmental bodies, the UN can play a stellar role by engaging with respective national authorities through inter-country experience sharing and advocacy programmes.

To convert the descriptive representation to substantive participation, developing **leadership capacities** in women through coaching, mentoring, and networking of both candidates and elected women leaders becomes imperative. Training models of transformative leadership need to be promoted at the regional levels. Facilitation of alliance building between male and female councillors need to be enhanced along with raising the political commitment of male advocates for political equality of women within political parties, different levels of governments, election management bodies as well as opinion leaders in communities. Given the large number of stakeholders working in this area in the three sub-regions, cross-organisational partnerships under government coordination and leadership can bring together government, civil society and international agencies to address women's political capacity development at different levels (institutional, organisational and individual) to maximise impact.

As a monitoring framework is important for measuring the implementation of capacity development and the post-2015 sustainable development goals, statistical capacity development assumes critical importance across the three sub-regions. This will help to address the **gender-disaggregated data availability** and access challenge and facilitate informed policy options. The existing initiatives at the regional level such as SAARC Gender infobase, Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, UNESCAP Gender Statistics Programme can be capitalised by regional UN Commission and agencies jointly with regional inter-governmental bodies and international organisations in supporting capacity development efforts for data collection, data management and data use and analysis on women in local governments.

This further calls for wider **research** for better empirical evidence to draw inter-country comparisons on women in local governments. Certain areas demand greater rigour and proof to deduce longer-term trends and impacts in order to inform policy interventions.

Given the experience, strength and the dynamic development environment in the Asia Pacific region and its sub-regions, **regional cooperation for knowledge development and networking** ought to gain importance. In this process, promotion of south-south cooperation and establishing twinning arrangements for peer learning of lessons and good practices on women's political participation can be supported. Further, long-term engagement and establishment of strong networks of provincial councillors, local government associations across similarly placed countries (politically, economically or socio-culturally) through complementary partnerships with various organisations working at transnational and regional levels could be undertaken. In this context, the regional collaborative efforts like the Small Island States Action Plan by the Pacific Island Forum secretariat, Dhaka Declaration conclusions (adopted at the UNDP Regional conference, Dhaka, 2011) and the UNDP six-point action plan on women's political participation hold relevance for advancing empowerment of women within local governments. Other such forums to be tapped are the UN Asia Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism–Thematic Working Groups on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and possible creation of sub-regional community of practice on women in local governments.

1. Introduction

Women's representation in electoral politics remains abysmally low in the Asia Pacific region. Till last year, women held just about 21 per cent elected positions in local governments and 14.5 per cent in the lower house of Parliaments. In fact, the past 18 years has shown little improvement, prompting UNDP¹ to forecast a rather dismal picture as it pointed out that it might be several decades before women attain political equality. Despite the significance of women's representation as critical imperatives for a country's future, they continue to remain marginalised in political forums and elected bodies. In its 23rd session in April 2013, the Human Rights Council underscored the critical role of women in political institutions for ensuring not only women's equality in citizenship but also their role in various axes of public action.

Women's representation is not just desirable; it is critical to the holistic development of a country. Women bring a different perspective based on their experience and outlook. Their focus is not just on 'women's' issues but reflect strains that together help to form a coherent and inclusive society. Clearly, unless women get equal status within local governments neither will the democratic base get strengthened nor will crucial social and political reforms be expedited. Though there isn't a direct co-relation between women's descriptive representation and their empowerment, effective women's participation would influence a number of parameters of governance. While historical inequalities shaping social institutions and political processes have not favoured women's representation in electoral colleges, their participation in electoral processes leading to gender representation has been acknowledged as a crucial factor in influencing a country's growth agenda.

With this background, the regional study maps the comparative changes in women's representation since 2010² in the different sub-regions of Asia Pacific. While enumerating the factors that have influenced the change in numbers, the changed scenario(s) have been analysed in the context of the economic and political transition the region is passing through. Empirical data of gender representation has been used to elicit multiple correlations in order to draw inferences for possible action points to ensure the political empowerment of women. Although structural change is clearly needed, the study adopts a pragmatic approach suggesting strategies and measures to enhance women's leadership within the prevailing socio-cultural environment and political economy in which women operate in public spaces.

Moving on from diagnosing the problem the study points to various actionables including linking with existing networks and working at sustainable change through continued capacity development and strengthening of the institutional framework. With these strategies and measures in place, hopefully, women's participation in elected offices at the local level will improve and their leadership will be enhanced.

1 *Gender Equality in Elected Office in Asia Pacific: Six Actions to Expand Women's Empowerment*, UNDP, 2012

2 *The Asia Pacific Status report on Women's Representation in Local Government*, UNDP, 2010, is the reference point for the current study.

2. Political and international frame for women's participation

2.1 Political economy and gender equality challenges in the Asia Pacific

South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific together make up about 25 per cent of the global landmass and 60 per cent of the global population. It is a region of great cultural, political, economic, religious, historical and geographical diversity with implications arising out of their mutual interactions. Barring a few countries, the region was subjected to colonial imperialism and its legacy has influenced the structure of public institutions and policies and the under representation of women in many political and economic institutions persists.

East Asia

In East Asia, differences in indigenous cultures reflect the ethno-linguistic disintegration—a result of varied migration patterns and religious and cultural sways from India and China. The infusion of different European imperial systems led to the partition of East Asia in governance and development of diverse institutional, societal and economic foundations. Colonial policies including centralisation of resources impoverished indigenous communities, affected their foundation and stimulated nationalism and political organisation complexities.

Governance in East Asia spans democratic, semi-democratic and non-democratic regimes. With the overthrow of authoritarian regimes, many states saw popular participation emerging at the local level. The sub-region saw moves towards democracy in Mongolia, Myanmar and Cambodia. Indonesia moved from a political dictatorship towards democracy and the decentralised system that emerged through political reform pushed for the wider participation of women. Recovering from conflict, Timor Leste is building a new democratic structure. Thailand's democratic system is going through political disturbance with implications for constitutional reform. State control in Singapore and Malaysia remains high. However it is important to recognise that though democratisation is an important pre-condition for women's participation, it has not necessarily increased women's representation.

In East Asia, the diverse political systems and their length of existence have had a bearing on electoral systems and women's effective representation and some political regimes have affected civil liberties and women's rights and freedom. In repressive regimes, male leadership has led to democratic deficits and stemmed women's political growth. This was exacerbated by rising religious fundamentalism as seen in Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and the East Timor. This has reinforced cultural relativism and traditional gender attitudes towards women. The gendered impact of fundamentalism in the region is leading to nationalist and cultural assimilation with control over women's mobility. In East Asia, women's movements have had to overcome colonial regimes, and authoritarian patriarchal state rules. The region has several countries on the economic growth path like China, the second largest economy in the world and Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand. While these changes have positively influenced women's economic participation it has not had the same effect on political participation.

South Asia

The interplay of religion, culture and colonisation has influenced the modern identities and processes in South Asia. The sub-region is shaped by postcolonial state formation and political systems that range from parliamentary democracies to presidential governments as well as authoritarian regimes. Women's participation in the nationalist movements has molded power sharing differently in the sub-region. Although India experienced wide participation of women in such movements, similar mobilisation was not seen in the creation of Pakistan, Bangladesh or during the independence movement in Sri Lanka. This part of the region has also witnessed conflict in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Nepal is going through a constitutional reform process after transition from a monarchical state to a democracy, Sri Lanka has recently emerged from civil war; Pakistan, emerging from martial law, is consolidating its democracy; and the political impasse continues in Bangladesh. Strong religious influences have had implications in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and to some extent in other countries in South Asia. Beyond the national, broader political and historical processes have also influenced local governments. Despite economic growth (though at varying stages in different countries with India being the 10th largest economy in the world) the sub-region wears the worst performer tag in gender inequalities in terms of socio-economic indicators, violence against women and gender parity in political life.

The region is yet to attain political and economic stability and this has affected the progress of democratic, political principles and had an adverse impact on gender norms for women to participate in political life.

The Pacific

Political development in the Pacific has to be seen in the context of colonialism and decolonisation. World War II was a major turning point for all Pacific societies; though they were caught in imperial rivalries and decolonisation from the 1960s. Often, governments were established under colonial regimes with customary leadership of key positions resting with men. The inheritance of these political structures has, however, remained relatively steady apart from regime disruptions in Fiji and Tonga and ethnic conflict in the Solomon Islands and Bougainville. Many Pacific countries inherited the Westminster-system together with first-past-the-post (FPTP) at independence, lowering the chances of women participating in politics. Deeply ingrained customs and religion play a role in their position in the Pacific society. Traditional matrilineal societies were prevalent in the western and northern region, but colonial rule and missionary presence has affected the social structure and patriarchal and hierarchical societies have displaced matrilineal cultures (in parts of Fiji, Tokelau, some islands of the Marshall Islands, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, Palau and Bougainville) where women were making a difference in the public decision-making processes. Local governance systems do function, but they are essentially male controlled. In the two developed economies in the Pacific: Australia and New Zealand, women have been in the local government for a considerable period. Given the rise of some of the Pacific powers, there is an eventual tension between traditional and modern governance means and methods. However, there are now positive signs of emerging regional cohesion with the Pacific's political identity as a member of 15 independent island states and this is important for women's participation in political leadership.

It appears from the above that governance systems create structures and processes that increase gender biases and limit women's access to public resources and this leads to persisting inequalities in various human development parameters.

Gender Imbalances in the region

The East Asia and Pacific Gender Equality Report of the World Bank (2012) and World Development Report 2012 note improvements in challenges to gender inequality in this region that are affected by changes in growth patterns, poverty levels and transformation in structures. The UNDP Asia Pacific Human Development Report (APHDR) of 2010 also highlights the decreasing gender gaps in education, narrowing labour force participation and global averages of women's participation in some countries in the region. While in some countries gender equality in education has improved, the low-income countries (Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea) still suffer from gender gaps. APHDR also showed that South Asia has a lot of catching up to do, as East Asia and the Pacific moves forward. Similarly, Maternal Mortality Rates (MMR) are high in Laos, Cambodia, Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea as well as in South Asian countries such as Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh. Female labour force in intensive sectors are present in the East Asian countries but not in the Pacific Islands, and this affects their employment levels, income and assets. Violence against women in the Pacific is the worst in the world and so is their representation in the political sphere. These gaps also determine the diminishing of space in the public sphere. It is not surprising that the APHDR notes that when it comes to voice and influence, women of this region still do not fare well. Paradoxically, Asia Pacific has also demonstrated women as heads of state, political parties, ministries, local governments and civil society.

In light of such contrasting challenges, it would be worthwhile to review the normative guarantees of the international human rights system and international policies setting the agenda for women's political empowerment.

2.2 Global framework and standards of women's political participation

The first decade and a half of the 21st century has witnessed rise of women's presence in the political sphere, driven in part by socio-political and economic transitions and by the international human rights normative framework.

What the International Bill of Human Rights Spell Out

As international human rights norms are developed through inter-governmental processes, they are an important tool to remind member states of their commitments and negotiate implementation and enforcement of measures based on these norms. The right to equality before the law and the protection of all persons against discrimination are fundamental norms of international human rights law and were enshrined in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) with non-discrimination as an immediate and cross-cutting obligation of the state party. But in the year which marks the 65th anniversary of the adoption of the UDHR, this norm has yet to be fulfilled for women's participation in the political system. More specifically, Article 21 of UDHR (1948) and Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966) underscore not only the right to vote but to be elected through free and fair elections in his or her country. ICCPR General Comment 25 further corroborates this through underscoring the need for effective implementation of the right and the opportunity to stand for elective office. Similarly, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) General Comment 16 mentions the right of individuals and groups of individuals to participate in decision-making processes. Additionally, women's cultural rights are an integral part of their right to participation

in political and public life. In fact, women's political equality rights were specifically recognised in 1952, when the first international legislation was adopted by the General Assembly through the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. This commits member states to ensure that women are eligible for election to all elected bodies established by national law on par with men and without any discrimination. This provided a stimulus for change in the electoral practices of nations. All countries in Asia Pacific have ratified/signed this convention. However, ratifications of ICCPR and CESCR by some countries in this region remain a challenge.

The CEDAW Pronouncements

Most importantly, the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), a landmark treaty in the struggle for women's rights, provides a far-reaching framework for the elimination of gender-based discrimination, exclusion and stereotypes in the public and private domain. Article 7 of CEDAW underpins the obligation of the state parties to eliminate all discrimination against women in being eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies as well as to participate in the formulation of government policy and its implementation. Additionally, to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government. In order to clarify the provisions, the CEDAW committee provided two General Comments on Article 7 and Article 4 (TSMs). While the South Asian and East Asian countries have ratified CEDAW, non-ratification of CEDAW in Pacific Island countries (Nauru, Palau and Tonga) has been an ongoing issue. Reservations to some of the CEDAW articles and inconsistency of national laws are a persisting issue in this region. Sixteen countries have some form of reservations and Malaysia made a reservation against Article 7 (b) for participation of women in government policy formulation. It is important to point out that the Pacific Islands situation may need to be viewed differently given their short independent political history and trajectory of socio-economic development and the introduction in quick succession of the various international norms on gender equality. This has been seen in some quarters to have put additional demand on the resource depleted governments and some NGOs of the Pacific.

The CEDAW General Comment 23 reiterates international standards of equality for gender balance in political decision-making. It draws the attention of the states to the challenges faced by women where men exercise power in confining and subordinating women within the private sphere. It also notes that no political system has conferred women both the right to and the benefit of full and equal participation. This highlights the urgent need to remove formal barriers and introduce TSMs in their legislative frameworks to ensure equal representation of women in political life. Similarly General Comment 25 on TSMs (CEDAW Article 4) has implications as the committee interprets that the convention requires that women be given an equal start and are empowered through an enabling environment to achieve equality of results. This gives further impetus in pushing the States to adopt TSMs to accelerate equal participation of women in the political sphere.

The State parties to CEDAW in the Asia Pacific region have an international and domestic obligation to ensure that it respects, protects and fulfills its duty in ensuring women's political participation. The burden is upon the state imposing limitations to demonstrate that the limitations do not impair the democratic functioning of the society. Through its inter-governmental mechanisms UNESCAP and other UN agencies especially UN Women are working with the states to fulfill these obligations.

The ECOSOC Resolution

However, a target for women's representation was missing and the same was rectified by the 1990 ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) Resolution that recommended a target of 30 per cent of leadership positions to be held by women by 1995, and 50 per cent by 2000. But, at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, it was found that there was minimal progress towards the 30 per cent target and no parliament in the Asia Pacific had achieved it. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) provided a momentum and highlighted the absence of a critical mass of women in political decision-making and the impact of this on democracy, development and peace.

The Role of MDGs

This caught some speed by 2000, when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were set. It underscored how critical it was to focus on women's representation in the national parliament and captured this through a measurement indicator, which pushed the governments to show their commitment through progress. However, the indicator did not focus on women in local governments and it was pointed out that gaps exist in the measurement of a fuller notion of gender equality in MDG 3. The Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) further highlighted the need to promote the role of women in peace and in decision-making. This can influence women's increased and improved participation in the political process in national parliaments as well as in the local governments. All 10 ASEAN countries have also endorsed the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders came together to reiterate their political will to ensure that the member-states increase women's representation in the political process and in government decision-making bodies.

Other UN High-level Initiatives

At the high level inter-governmental meeting of ESCAP with member and associate member states in 2009 in Bangkok, concern was expressed on growing gender inequalities in the region and members released a declaration. Highlighting the Bangkok Declaration, the UNESCAP in 2010 in its 66th session on Beijing +15 noted the progress in increasing women's representation in politics, through various affirmative actions but emphasised the continuing low levels of women's political representation.

The 66th session of the UN General Assembly in 2011 adopted a resolution on women's political participation and urged member states to reform the electoral systems to address the differential impact on women. Political parties were encouraged to remove barriers of direct and indirect discrimination related to participation within the party structure, develop capacities and awareness at local and national levels, share best practices in women's participation at all stages of the political process and monitor the progress.

The Human Rights Council in its 23rd session (April 2013), while discussing the report of the working group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, focused on eliminating discrimination against women in political life especially during political transition. It noted the opportunities for advancing women's representation and also challenges of exclusion of pro-democracy women during political transitions. It laid emphasis on the use of gender quotas (adapted to electoral and political systems) and PR systems with close monitoring for increasing women's representation. While it observed that very few countries have introduced quotas in local governments, it acknowledged the positive impact where countries have adopted it on women's

leadership. Additionally, it highlighted the issues related to socio-cultural constraints that women in leadership positions face and provided recommendations to the states for eliminating structural and societal discrimination against women in political life.

Again in September 2013, the report of the UN Secretary General on women's participation in post-conflict elections and representation in non-elected bodies, highlighted the role of women during transitions and emphasised the importance of their participation in the post-conflict electoral processes. As in other reports, the Secretary General also drew attention to the positive impact of affirmative actions such as quotas and PR systems and insisted that member states support capacity development of candidates and elected parliamentarians in order to further inclusive politics. The need for better comparable data on women's participation in politics at the local level was also highlighted.

The recently released Policy Directive (December 2013) on promoting women's electoral and political participation through UN electoral assistance, gives an impetus for advocacy with member states on women's equal rights and political participation. It should be in line with relevant electoral policy including this policy directive and respect national priorities and decisions. It therefore underscores that advocacy with member states has to be in the form of sharing the international human rights framework, sensitising and encouraging national authorities to understand obstacles, learn about best practices and support their political representation and participation. It also outlines specific ways such as the development of gender-responsive electoral legal frameworks, gender-sensitive electoral management bodies and moves to encourage political parties to set up appropriate mechanisms for selection of women candidates, campaign fund mechanisms and mitigating measures to eliminate risk of electoral violence against women candidates. It provides instructive guidance on various TSMs within the framework of UN electoral assistance.

Looking Beyond 2015

Global thematic consultations for the post-2015 Development Agenda (post-2015 DA) are being made as inclusive as possible. The report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 DA outlines 12 illustrative goals and Goal 2 identified four targets, one of which is elimination of discrimination in political life. The position paper of UN Women on post-2015 DA focuses on three broad areas and one of the areas is gender equality in decision-making power including in national parliaments and local governments with proposed indicators on proportion of seats held by women in both. It emphasises the need to remedy women's participation in democratic institutions and ensure their voices are heard in public deliberations.

Many of these efforts at the international level have tended to focus on securing positions for women at the national parliament level. This has dissipated the focus on women's representation within the provincial, municipal and local governments at the sub-national level. However, as seen more recently, the Human Rights Council and the UN Secretary General's report in 2013 have drawn attention to women in local governments. These are critical levels of democracy at the cutting edge of service delivery. Additionally, political engagement of women at the local level can also help changing patriarchal institutions, gender prejudices and equations within communities, political parties and address political cultures in the long run. It is nevertheless clear that political equality rights of women are considered critical at the highest inter-governmental level.

3. Methodology

3.1 Approach

The transformation in women's political participation in Asia and the Pacific region will be approached from an 'equality' perspective drawing from the commentary³ on CEDAW.

As women's choices are limited due to lack of rights, equality becomes an important ideal. The concept of equality is not only that each person is intrinsically valuable but also recognises the unequal access due to historical disadvantages that have created social norms and hierarchies leading to discrimination based on gender. This is manifested in policies, programmes and institutions. There are some who feel that equality needs to be pushed by those who have displayed intentional bias, thus it is important to understand that equality cannot be limited to restraining incorrect action, but that the state needs to demonstrate the will to take positive steps in the promotion of equality.

The CEDAW Commentary defines equality from various dimensions and levels. Formal equality pertains to 'identical treatment' and essentially focuses on the even-handed application of the content of laws and practices. Thus this study touches on a fuller understanding of the term and briefly assesses women's equality in the public sphere in constitutional and other legislative provisions. The right to formal equality is inadequate in providing women a genuinely equal start. Further, the guarantee of legislative equality is limited for the enforcement of laws and often a challenge. While most countries give women equal political rights as voters and representatives, in reality the exercise of these rights is restricted. It further concedes that formal equality is limited in dealing with underlying inequitable social constructs and may buttress androcentric standards.

Substantive equality on the other hand focuses on "non-identical treatment, which is not discriminatory and requires differential treatment". Transcending equal treatment, substantive equality finds that treating men and women in the same way without also tackling antecedent prejudice would lead to further inequitable societies. This takes into account the differential effect of laws, policies and practices. It also shows that substantive equality of opportunity creates a level-playing field in order to ensure that both men and women in a true and real sense have the same starting positions for political participation. It goes beyond further than establishing opportunity and asks to create equality of results in political participation through quotas or creating circumstances where the chances of winning a seat are the same for women and men in a directly elected public body. Thus this may lead to different treatment for women in order to correct inequitable and historical wrongs that have perpetuated an unjust system. Amartya Sen has argued that "equal consideration for all may demand very unequal treatment in favour of the disadvantaged".

As the process for substantive equality does not change the social structures that are inherently exclusionary, it calls for transformative equality. Transformative equality is about "full and genuine equality" reordering the social hierarchies and power structures and thus reconceptualisation of the public-private divide and redistribution of power and resources. For transformative equality to find foot in the political sphere and for real change in political institutions, historical male models of power cannot shape gender relations in political life. This also means dismantling of public-private divide to erase the dichotomous strands of conjecturing male and female stereotypes and their roles in societies.

3 The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, A Commentary, OUP, 2013

Levels of discrimination must measure equality. In direct discrimination, law prevents women from being elected on certain positions. It also manifests when family members prevent women from exercising their right to vote. This is generally more uncommon than indirect discrimination. Indirect discrimination manifests in voting procedures, or in candidate requirement parameters such as minimum education, property requirement, pre-existing traditional titles or nomination fees.

Another type of discrimination called inter-sectional discrimination looks at intersecting forms of discrimination where women from ethnic minorities, religious minorities and economically weaker communities have fewer chances of becoming candidates or being elected or even being challenged upon being elected.

The analysis attempts to take into account some of the above model of equality but is unable to deal with it comprehensively given the myriad issues and dimensions that need to be covered.

3.2 Methods of data collection

The study is based on a review of secondary data on elected representatives at local and national levels, assessment of electoral systems and a review of relevant institutional, socio-cultural and other factors affecting women's political participation primarily at local government levels. It is supplemented by consultations and interviews with regional and national institutions.

Both quantitative and qualitative indicators are used to analyse data. Quantitative indicators include the percentage of women elected in the lower house and as members and as chairs in different tiers in rural and urban councils. It measures how different electoral systems impact the institutional environment for women to participate in the political process.

The quantitative data on women's representation for countries in the region was collected from the following sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Commonwealth Local Government Forum for Commonwealth countries, United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific, national level organisations with the support of UNDP Country offices, the UNDP Pacific Centre and Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

For qualitative data, a number of interviews were conducted with regional UN agencies, inter-governmental organisations and institutions and NGOs based in Bangkok. Interviews through skype and telephone were also held with elected representatives from local governments, national and international NGOs, Election Management Bodies and academic institutions in a few countries in each of the three sub-regions of East Asia, Pacific Islands and South Asia. Discussions were also held with regional inter-governmental bodies in all the three sub-regions. An unstructured questionnaire was prepared to conduct the interviews with different stakeholders. Additionally, desk review of relevant documentation was undertaken.

3.3. Data analysis and reporting

To provide a perspective to the analysis, an overarching presentation on the socio-political context in the different sub-regions has been depicted showing its implication on women's representation at local and national levels.

The data on women's representation at local and national government levels has been presented for the years 2010 and 2013 in order to evaluate changes in terms of both progress and reversals.

It also looks at the descriptive impact of electoral systems on women's representation. The data further assesses the relationship between Gender Inequality Indices, a country's socio-economic development indices and women's share in the positions of political power at different levels. The quantitative data has been analysed to reflect scenarios emerging in the three sub-regions at the local and national government levels.

The effectiveness and impact of women's participation in this region has been qualitatively assessed. The institutional context of the different electoral systems and political parties helps in understanding the environment and level of political will. The challenges and opportunities to women's political participation emerging from historical, political, legal, institutional, socio-cultural practices have also been ascertained. The analysis uses the equality approach outlined above to deduce the effect of historical, institutional and socio-cultural issues on equality of opportunity and equality of result in women's participation at the local and national levels. It also presents good practices of women's political leadership within the Asia Pacific region at local and national levels. This is reflected in the number of women included in the affairs of governance and how substantive representation that aims to transform the policy agenda and promote gender equal services has traversed a terrain of both pitfalls and successes. It highlights perspectives of elected leaders, election management bodies, civil society groups and UN agencies.

The role of different institutions at transnational, regional and national levels has been factored in to show their influence and impact on women's participation. Institutional partnerships and coalitions have been assessed for opportunities for increasing women's participation at the local levels. It assesses the applicability of recommendations of UNDP regional initiatives captured in the Dhaka Declaration (UNDP Regional Conference, 2011) and six actions on women's empowerment in elected office for national level, to enhance women's representation at the local levels.

The statistics on gender representation have been used to capture trends and reflect the need for policy change in improving women's representation across the region. Analysis of this data can help to advance the agenda for improving women's political representation at the local levels, serving as an advocacy tool not just at the national level but also at the regional level through inter-country comparisons. This study, which would have relevance to policymakers, local governments, UN and civil society organisations, concludes with recommendations on a way forward primarily at the regional level, which will facilitate increasing women's political participation particularly at the local level in the region.

4. Trends shaping the political space and scope for women at the local and national levels

4.1. Trends and comparisons of changes in women's representation

This section examines the extent of progress and reversals since 2010 in elected women's representation at local (rural councils, urban and intermediary and provincial/regional councils) and national levels along with sub-regional trends.

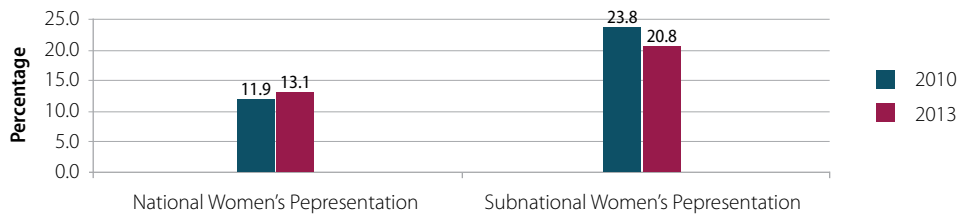
With the 2010 status report on women's representation in local government in Asia Pacific as the reference point, the local governments⁴ in the three sub-regions show some changes. The Asia Pacific region has held local government elections in about 19 countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India (some states), Maldives, Pakistan (Baluchistan), Sri Lanka, Cambodia (commune council), China, Mongolia, Philippines, Vietnam, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The caveat to be kept in mind is that elections have been held either for some tiers or all tiers of local governments, as well as either for all constituencies or in part. It is also important to note that the data across the different tiers of local governments is differentially available. As of 2013, while new data is available for several countries, there are a few where data was either not available for 2010 and 2013 or elections have not been held since 2010. At the national level, representation data for women in the parliament is presented as of November 2013. For purposes of comparison in Asia Pacific as also sub-region wise, the analysis takes into account only those countries where data is available for both 2010 and 2013.

Asia Pacific Regional Representation

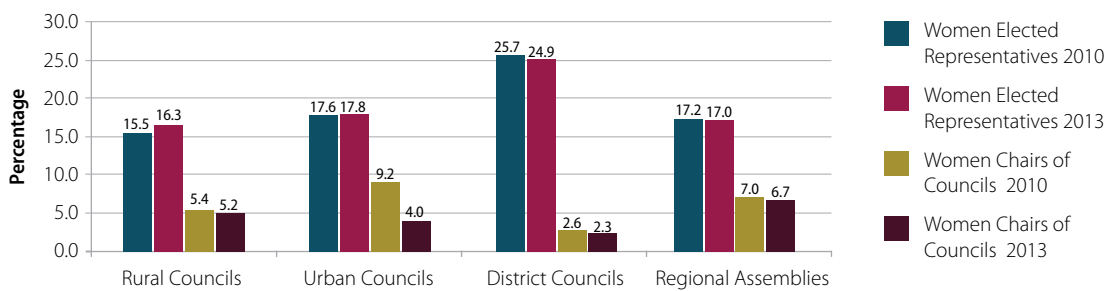
The regional average for Asia Pacific (combined for all local government tiers) in 2013 show that elected women councillors stood at below 79 per cent to their male counterparts in local governments, with a decrease by 3 per cent since 2010 (Figure 1). Hence, as a region, there is a lot of catching up to do. Figure 2 reveals that there has been a decrease in women's representation across district and provincial councils since 2010 and a slight improvement in rural councils. In South Asia, as of 2013 there are about 23.5 per cent (combined for all local government tiers) women councillors — 2.3 per cent decrease since 2010 (Figure 3a). In contrast, East Asia has 22 per cent, which is an increase of 3 per cent since 2010; and in the Pacific Islands the figure stands at 17.3 per cent (excluding Australia and New Zealand), having decreased by 9.6 per cent since 2010. While there is a positive trend in East Asia, the reduction of women councillors in South Asia and the Pacific is a cause for concern. In terms of intra-sub-regional comparisons, the proportion of women in local councils in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan is higher in comparison to other countries in South Asia. In East Asia, China, Vietnam, Philippines and Mongolia are in the lead

4 For a detailed description of the local democratic institutions, refer to 'Designing Inclusive and Accountable Local Democratic Institutions: A Practitioner's Guide' (second edition 2011)

for women representation in local bodies as of 2013. In Pacific, the highest proportion of women has been recorded in Nauru, Niue, Australia, New Zealand and Samoa.

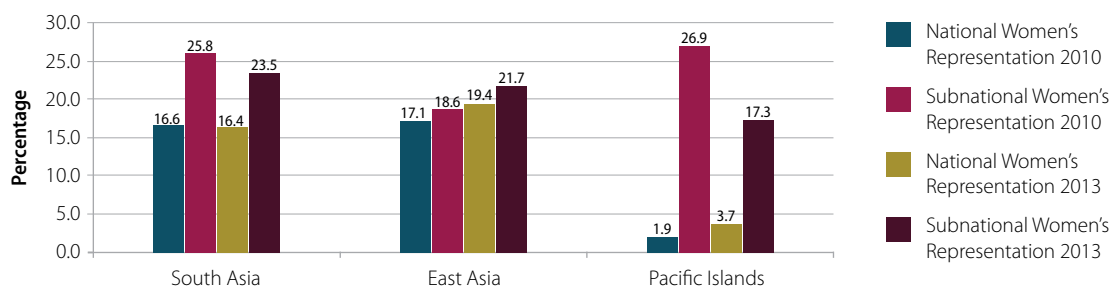


Asia Pacific
Figure 1



Asia Pacific
Figure 2

The proportion of women exercising leadership within local governments in Asia Pacific is more limited with a maximum of 6.7 per cent reached in 2013 at the provincial level (Figure 2). Overall, there is a significant increase in women occupying chairs in district councils and reduction in rural, urban and provincial levels as of 2013. The tier of government is also denoted by relative importance and lower level councils are attached less importance than district or provincial councils. Thus the increase in leadership at the district level is a positive development but the downward trend in provincial councils is unfortunate. Given the lack of data, the sub-regional comparison will not reveal the true picture. However, with the available comparable data for 2010 and 2013, the break up in the three sub-regions shows a maximum of 3 per cent in urban council leadership positions in South Asia (please note that data for chairpersons was not available for India, where at all tiers, not less than one-third positions are reserved for women as chairpersons in the rural and urban councils), a maximum of 6 per cent at the district level in East Asia and a high of 20 per cent at the provincial level in Pacific Islands.

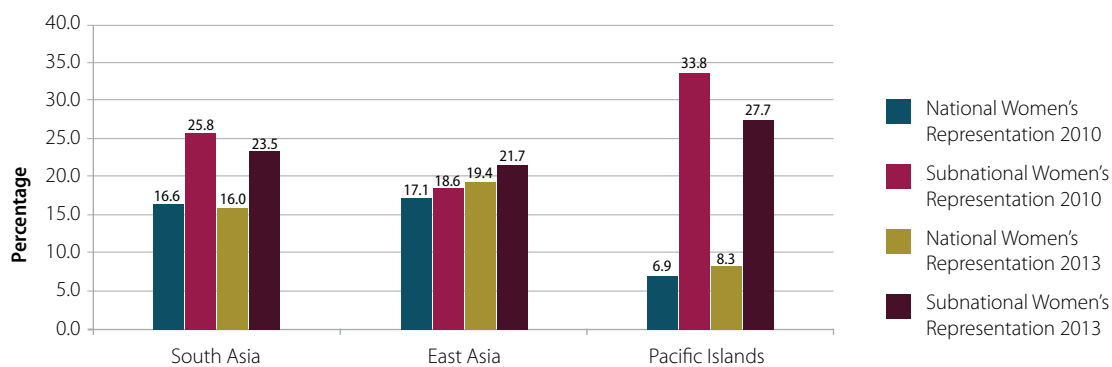


National vs. Sub-national Women's Political Representation

Figure 3a

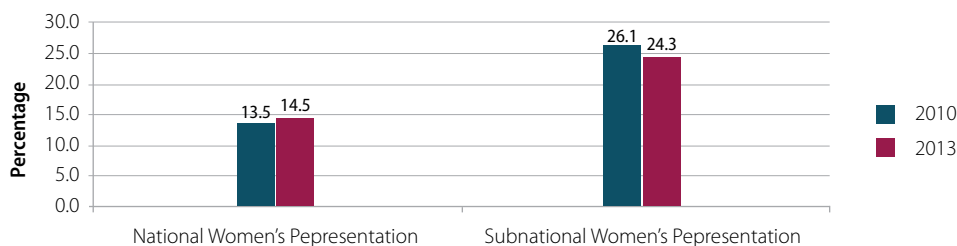
National Level (lower house) vs. Sub-national Representation

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data as of November 2013 shows that the proportion of women in parliament in the lower or single house in Asia Pacific (covering 34 countries including Australia and New Zealand) is about 14.5 per cent (Figure 4). The three sub-regions (Figure 3b) vary from 19 per cent of women in Parliament in East Asia (with 2.3 per cent increase since 2010), to 16 per cent in South Asia with a slight decrease since 2010 and the lowest with about 8.3 per cent in Pacific Islands (including Australia and New Zealand) registering an increase of about 1.4 per cent since 2010. While the Pacific shows an increase, it is apparent that the Parliaments in the Pacific region (reaching 3.7 per cent without Australia and New Zealand- Figure 3a) are lagging behind. An overall low percentage in the Pacific especially at the national level and the reduction of women councillors at the local level reveal that their socio-political history continues to have a bearing on the acceptance of women leaders. In the 66th progress review session of UNESCAP on BPfA in 2010, Palau as a representative of the whole of Pacific Islands acknowledged the continuing challenges of women's participation in public life. Some notable achievements are in East Asia, which include the 2012 Timor-Leste elections, which led to women winning 38.5 per cent of seats in the parliament. In South Asia, Nepal's election in 2013 has met the 30 per cent target. On comparison to the two countries that have reached the minimum 30 per cent target at the national level, at sub-national levels, there are five countries that have achieved this target—India in South Asia; China in East Asia; and Australia, Nauru and Niue in the Pacific. In contrast with sub-national representation, women's national representation is found to be lower in this region by almost 7.7 percentage points (Figure 1 excluding Australia and New Zealand). Across the three sub-regions, sub-national representation of women is higher than national.



National vs. Sub-national Women's Political Representation

Figure 3b

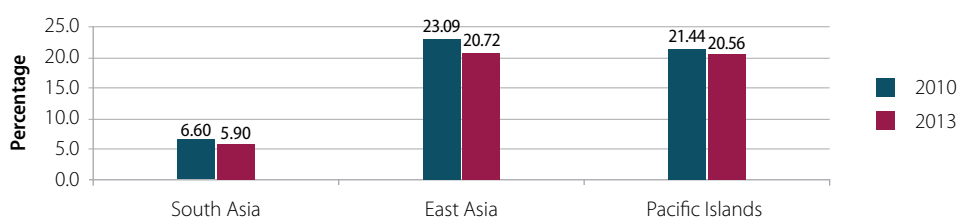


Asia Pacific

Figure 4

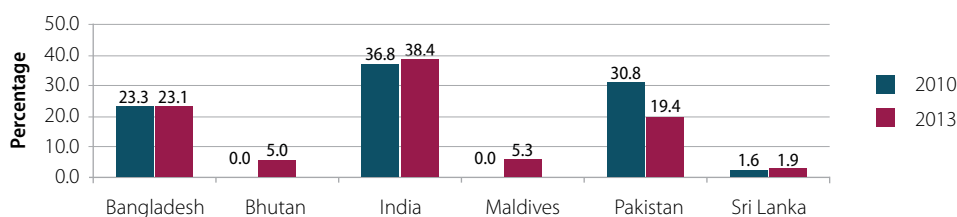
Rural Council Representation of Women in Asia Pacific

In all the three sub-regions, where comparable data was available, rural councils have registered a decline (Figure 5). In South Asia, the percentage of women across the countries as deduced from Figure 6 has not changed much since 2010 and Pakistan has had elections in only one of the four provinces. The representation of women in East Asia has improved for the one-party states such as Cambodia, China and Vietnam but for a democratic state such as Philippines, the percentage of elected women has gone down considerably (Figure 7). The percentage of women in local governments in the Pacific has reduced in three states in comparison to 2010 but positive changes are seen in other island countries such as in Nauru, Niue, Kiribati and Samoa. In Vanuatu, in addition to the five reserved seats for women, one more woman has been elected in the municipal council (Figure 8).



Women Elected Representatives - Rural Councils

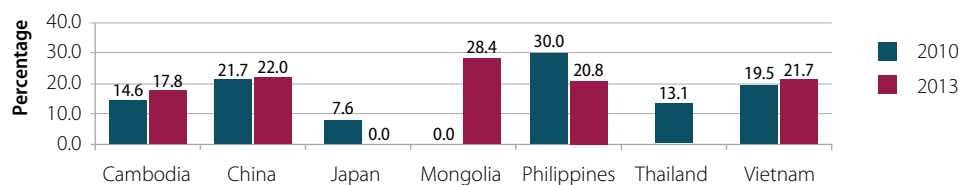
Figure 5



Women Elected Representatives - Rural Council

South Asia

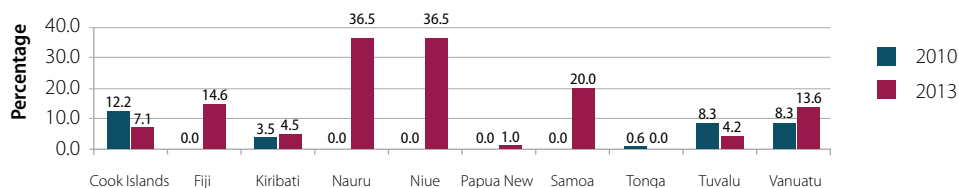
Figure 6



Women Elected Representatives - Rural Council

East Asia

Figure 7

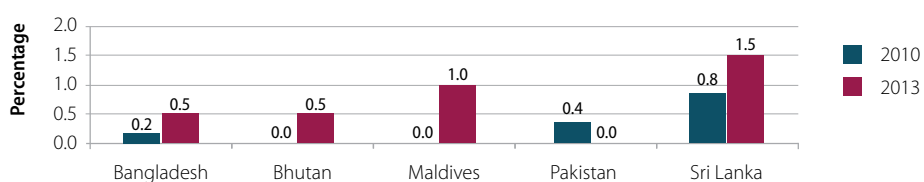


Women Elected Representatives - Rural Council

Pacific Islands

Figure 8

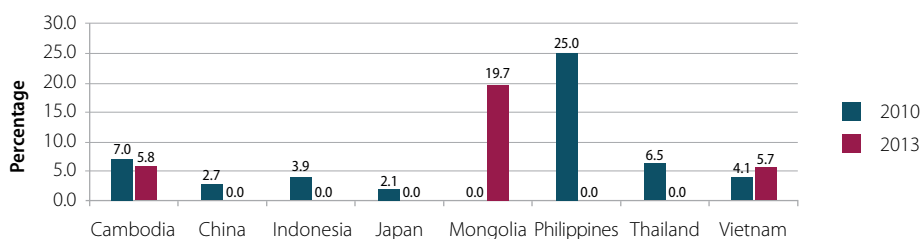
Since 2010, women are doing better in leadership positions (as chairs) in South Asia even though the overall percentage is very low with highest in Sri Lanka (1.5%) —note that data for India was not available (Figure 9), with little difference to report in East Asia except with Mongolia having achieved almost 20 per cent (Figure 10) and the Pacific showing an overall positive trend (Figure 11) in the attainment of leadership in rural councils. The data for leadership positions is not widely available.



Women Chairs - Rural

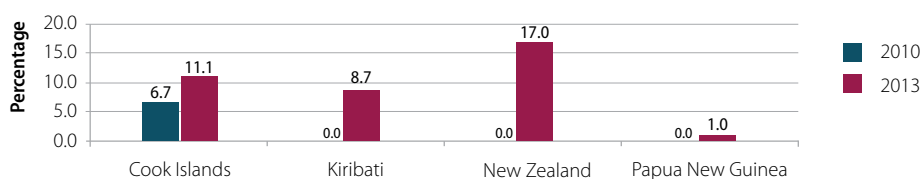
South Asia

Figure 9



**Women Chairs - Rural
East Asia**

Figure 10

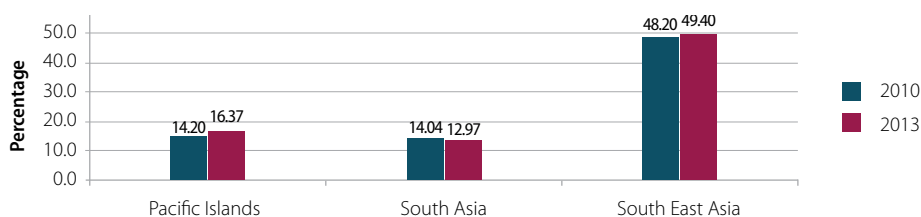


**Women Chairs - Rural
Pacific Islands**

Figure 11

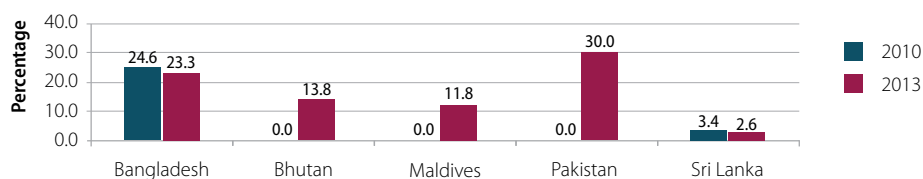
Urban Council Representation of Women in Asia Pacific

Overall, the urban councils show an increase in East Asia and the Pacific Islands (Figure 12). Across South Asia, elected women representatives have gone down as evident from Figure 13. Here again data for India was not available, as this would have revealed a different picture. In East Asia, China has reached gender parity in their urban councils (Figure 14). Similarly, Australia is the only country showing an increase among the Pacific (Figure 15) thus reflecting that developed economies are recording higher women's representation in urban councils. It is difficult to make any meaningful interpretation, as data is extremely thin for chairs/heads of urban councils and with the data available; a decrease is witnessed in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. It is also important to point out that data is not disaggregated for some countries in this region and the urban council statistics is clubbed with rural councils or other tiers.



**Women Elected Representatives
Urban Councils**

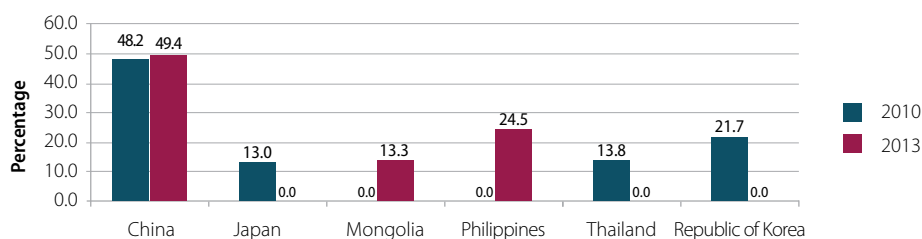
Figure 12



Women Elected Representatives - Urban Council

South Asia

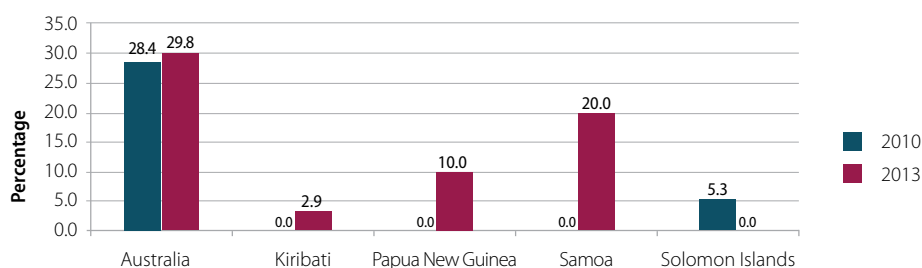
Figure 13



Women Elected Representatives - Urban Council

East Asia

Figure 14



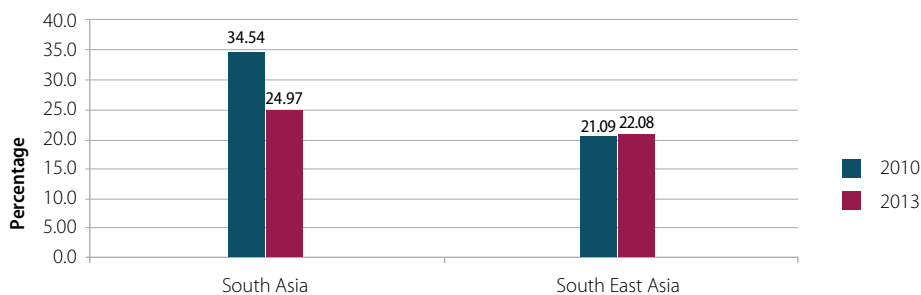
Women Elected Representatives - Urban Council

Pacific Islands

Figure 15

District Council Representation of Women in Asia Pacific

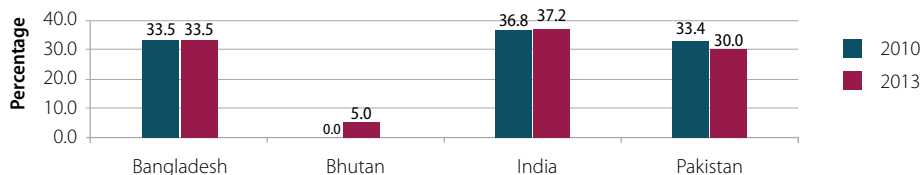
Many countries do not have elected district councils in this region. South Asia shows a reduction in elected women (Figure 16) with a decrease in Pakistan, and a slight increase in India.



Women Elected Representatives District Councils Figure

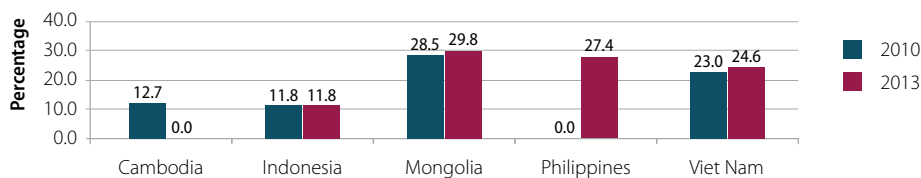
Figure 16

East Asia is doing better and has gained, across different countries since 2010. No comparable data is there for Pacific. As far as leadership positions go, Bangladesh shows no change and Vietnam is the only country that reflects improvement in electing women as heads of district councils.



Women Elected Representatives - District Council South Asia

Figure 17

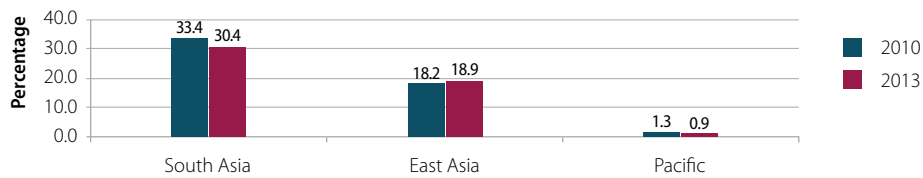


Women Elected Representatives - District Council East Asia

Figure 18

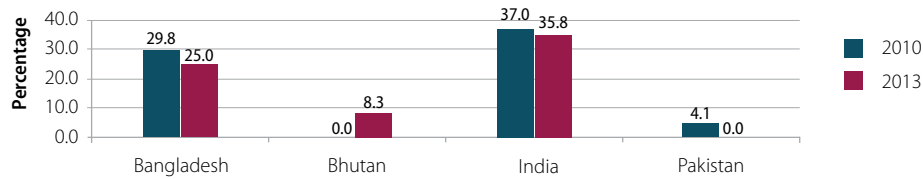
Provincial Council Representation of Women in Asia Pacific

At the provincial level, again there has been an overall drop in South Asia since 2010 (Figure 19) as evidenced in Afghanistan as well as in India (Figure 20), but slight improvements are recorded in East Asia, in Mongolia and Vietnam (Figure 21). The Pacific Island data available only for Solomon Islands show a decrease.



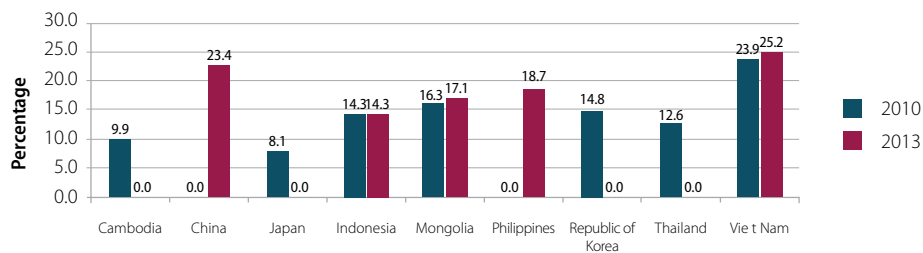
Women Elected Representatives Provincial/Regional Assemblies

Figure 19



Women Elected Representatives - Provincial/Regional South Asia

Figure 20



Women Elected Representatives - Provincial/Regional East Asia

Figure 21

Women positioned as heads of provincial councils reflect an increase for Vietnam and New Zealand.

Given that women comprise over half the percentage of the population, their under representation in local governments across tiers is staggering in all sub-regions. However, unavailability and access of data is evident across the levels of local government and is of critical importance for correct approximation of the status as well as for tailoring policy directions to address the women's representation challenges. The issue of data has been taken up in greater detail under section 5.3.

Electoral System Impact on Descriptive Representation of Women

The data clearly follows an established pattern that shows more women getting elected under PR and mixed systems than under the FPTP majority or plurality systems. Thus, there is a positive correlation between PR systems and women's representation.

In Asia Pacific, six countries have adopted proportional or mixed electoral systems (Annexure: Table 6) at the local government levels. The impact of this is visible in the results. In East Asia, women do better in the PR system practised in the local governments in Cambodia (17.8%), Indonesia (13%) and Mongolia (22.1%). In South Asia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka practice PR with different results. The Pacific countries mainly follow FPTP or plurality/majority systems and this partly explains the lower women's representation levels in parliament and local government.

Fast tracking women in politics: Mongolia shows the way

With a changed electoral system, introduction of PR and a minimum of 20 per cent candidates to be women, Mongolia went to elections in 2012. Though many parties included women symbolically, to meet the electoral law provisions, women won by increasing their representation from 3 to 15 per cent at the national level. The introduction of the PR system in the local government also led to 22 per cent women being elected.

Source: True, Niner, Parashar and George 2012

The electoral system effect remains the same at the national level. Overall there are 12 countries in this region with proportional or mixed systems and 16 have plurality/majority systems. The use of the PR system shows higher representation of women in parliaments in Cambodia (20%), Indonesia (19%) and Timor Leste (38.5%). Those using plurality/majority systems show lower representation as in Malaysia (10%), India (11%) and Maldives (6.5%). Those using mixed systems, such as Philippines (23%) and Nepal (30%), have better representation of women.

Quota Impact on Descriptive Representation

To increase seat sharing by women in national parliaments and in local councils, quotas are used as seen by the data in Table 6. In Asia Pacific, five countries use reserved seats for women at the national level and eight at sub-national, four use legislated candidate quotas at national and two at sub-national levels and four used voluntary party quotas at national levels.

On average, female representation at the national level stands at 22.6 per cent in countries in Asia Pacific that have quotas compared to 8.2 per cent in countries that do not have quotas (Table 6). The impact of quotas at local government levels reveals 21.4 per cent women's representation vis-a-vis 14.5 per cent in those countries where there is no quota. However it is found that maximum number of countries in the Asia Pacific region have adopted some form of quota reflecting commitment towards improvement in gender representation through fast track mechanisms.

Pakistan's changing legal local government provisions

The 18th amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan devolved the responsibility for the development of local government laws to the provinces. Gender quotas in Pakistan have undergone a change and four provincial assemblies were at different stages of passing their local government laws in 2013. In Punjab, the legislation has reserved limited seats at the municipal committee/corporation and district levels of local governments (for example two in every 13 in directly elected district councils and 10 per cent indirectly-elected in the Metropolitan Corporation). In Sindh, the local government act has reserved 1 out of 9 in the directly-elected first tier of local government and 22 per cent indirectly-elected in the higher councils /committees or corporations. In Khyber Pakhtun khwa, representation of the women will be 13 to 20 per cent in village/neighbourhood councils. In Balochistan, women's seats are 33 per cent of the members elected on general seats.

Source: Democracy Reporting International

Overall, South Asian countries lead in the application of the reservation policy for women in the local governments. At a sub-regional level, in South Asia, the constitutions in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan provide for reserved quotas for women at the sub-national level. Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh have also made provisions at the national level and legislated candidate quota at the national level is found in Nepal. Countries with quotas at the local level such as India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan have led to 25 to 37 per cent of women in local governments compared to 2 to 8.5 per cent in countries without quotas. In India, over one million women have been elected in local government bodies in rural and urban areas, which is more than all the women in local councils across the world. Additionally with one-third reservation for women at all tiers as council chairs in India, this has strengthened their space for assuming leadership. On the other hand, Sri Lanka, with discretionary quotas has very low representation in rural and urban councils as well as in provincial councils. The trend is the same at national levels. The implementation of reserved seats has led to a higher number of women in national parliaments in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

In East Asia, as is evident from Table 6, women's representation is highest in China (31.6%) with their mandatory quotas, followed by Philippines (23%) with their reserved seats at the local government level and 22 per cent in Mongolia with legislated party quotas. The picture of women's representation in national parliaments in East Asia shows that China has reserved seats, legislated candidate quotas exist in Indonesia, Mongolia and Timor Leste and voluntary political party quotas are found in Philippines and Thailand. Although the maximum representation of women in parliament is found in Timor Leste with legislated candidate quotas this does not necessarily have the same effect in raising women's critical mass in other countries.

In the Pacific, reserved seats exist for women in Bougainville (7.7%) and Samoa (10%). Voluntary political party quotas have been enforced by the Labour Party in Australia (40%) and New Zealand (45%) at the national level. Only Vanuatu (11%) has reserved seats for women at the sub-national levels. Except in the case of Australia and New Zealand, the low representation is evidence of its lack of reservation policies.

Correlation between Gender Equality Indices and Women's Representation at Sub-national and National levels

While many of the gender equality indices are limited in their measure of various dimensions of equality, some of them assess political empowerment as part of their composite measure. Here an analysis of four gender indices is done to assess the correlation with women's representation at the sub-national levels. With global Gender Gap Index (GGI) which covers political empowerment as one dimension (Figure 22), there does not appear to be any clear correlation with the women's representation in the local government. Countries with a higher gender gap (e.g. Pakistan) appear to have higher representation and countries with a lower gender gap (e.g. Sri Lanka) have lower representation. With both Gender Equity Index (GEI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), the correlation is strong in some countries (Figure 23 and 24) but other countries with very low GEM (Figure 24), still record higher levels of women's representation. Again with Gender Inequality Index (GII), countries with high and low inequality record higher representation of women (Figure 25). Across the gender indices, the correlations are stronger for countries in East Asia. At the national level, the correlations across gender indices are similar to that of the sub-national level. Thus, as is apparent from above no clear correlations can be drawn. The UNDP study on gender equality in elected office in the Parliament in Asia Pacific also saw no clear relationship between the Gender-related Development Index and the share of women in the elected office in the Asia Pacific region.

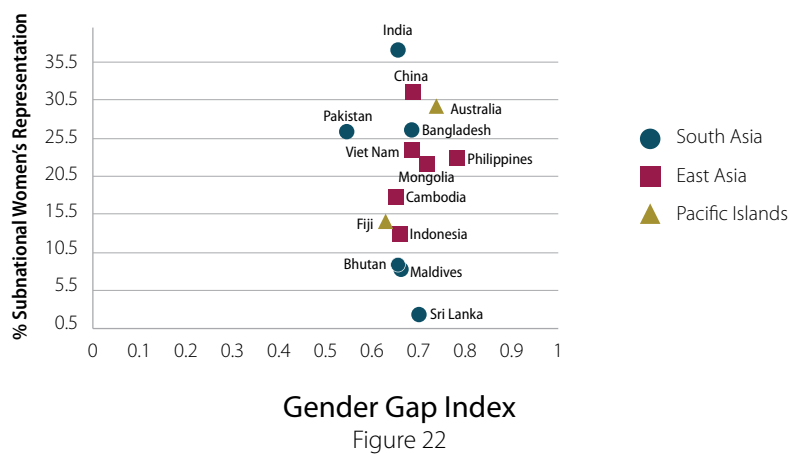


Figure 22

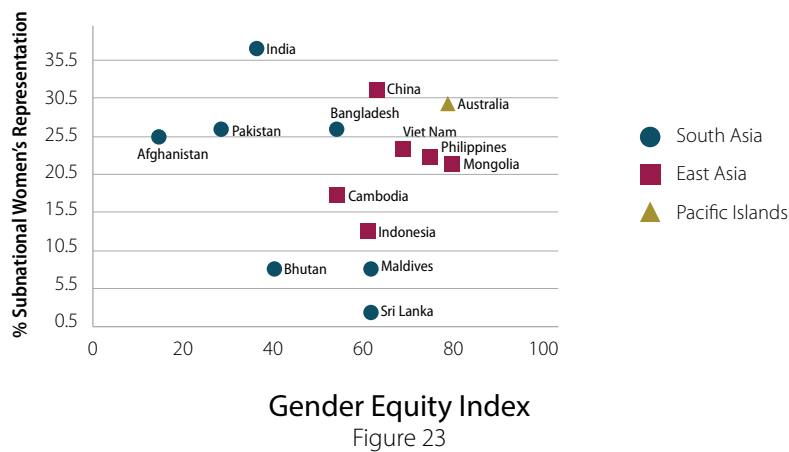


Figure 23

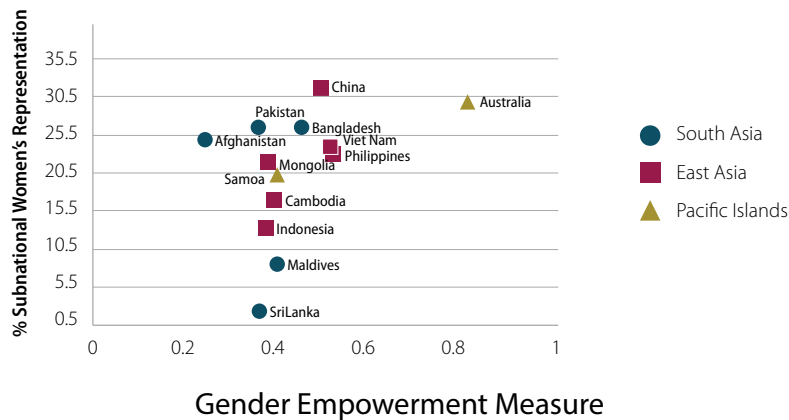


Figure 24

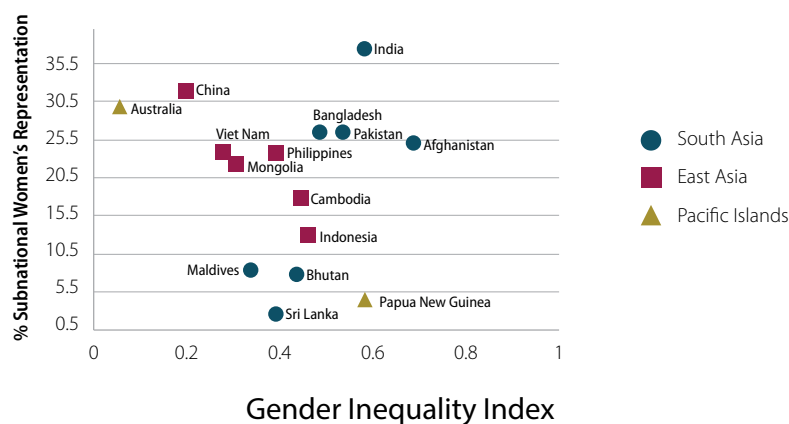


Figure 25

However, it may be interpreted that countries with higher equality are able to have more women in the local governments without reservation policies. But countries that have a long way to catch up on gender disparities may require stronger quota policies.

Relationship between Country's Economic Development and Women's Political Participation

The Asia Pacific region has been affected by the economic meltdown leading to economic disparities that further dissipates women's agency and impacts their decision-making potential and prospects. Figure 26 show that GDP per capita, reflective of a country's progress in economic development, is not a good predictor of female representation at the sub-national level. While a few countries with higher growth such as China, Mongolia, Philippines, Australia and Samoa show higher representation of women, and a group of Pacific countries with low GDP per capita have lower representation, it is still difficult to arrive at a firm conclusion. There are a few countries with low growth but higher representation of women and vice versa. Economies like Japan and South Korea perform poorly in women's leadership. In Japan for instance, women's representation in local and regional bodies is only about 8 per cent. To illustrate further, Pacific countries that are relatively more affluent such as Fiji, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are not seen to be bringing more women in the governments at both levels.

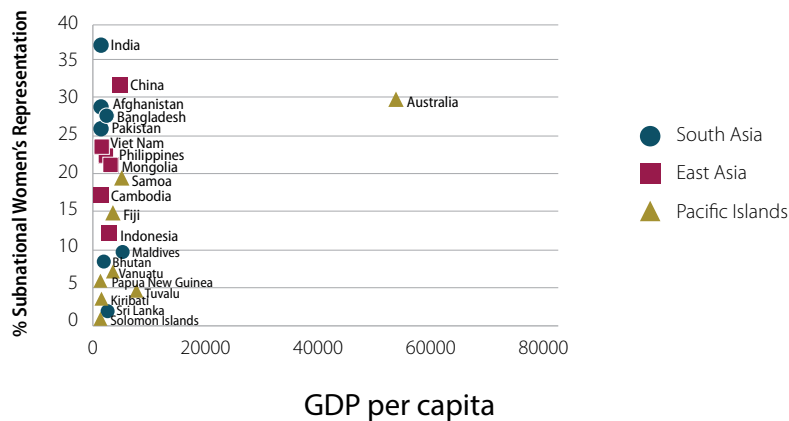


Figure 26

In general, while incomes have grown, women’s political voice at the national or local levels has not. In fact, income growth may lead to new gendered preferences and have negative impact on equality of gender. Although growth-gender equality relations are weak, it cannot be assumed that economic development has no bearing on reducing gender equality in the political process. A study in China reveals that the link of economic development with the presence of women in local governance at the aggregate level is weak. This situation however changes when it comes to the economic status of women at the individual level which enabled investment in education of girls, raising of political consciousness, improved selfhood and ultimately in taking an active stance in politics. Earlier studies also show significant relations between socio-economic levels of development and the percentage of women in parliaments. Globally, there are disparities in gender representation in parliament in relatively similar type of economies. In other parts of the world, more prosperous states have been found to be more egalitarian and supportive of women’s role in politics.

Given the mixed results, the reasons must be explored. In many instances, institutional constraints and social norms are the cause and are discussed later.

Association between Literacy Rates, Labour Force Participation and Women’s Political Participation

As evident from Figure 27 higher adult literacy rates reflects a higher representation of women at sub-national level in the sub-region of East Asia and the Pacific countries. However, this trend is not visible for South Asia where despite low adult literacy rates, women’s representation is higher, as a result of their reservation policies. With a few exceptions, the results are similar for labour force participation. Even though some countries do not display a positive correlation, women’s higher literacy rates and better labour force participation (Figure 28) does appear to have positive implications for women’s political representation. Other empirical evidence from China, which has showed that women with higher education accounted for a greater number of women participating in local governance further, corroborates this.

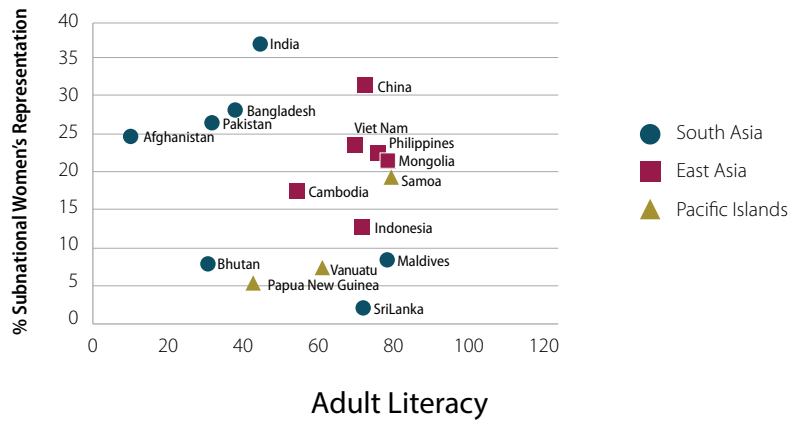


Figure 27

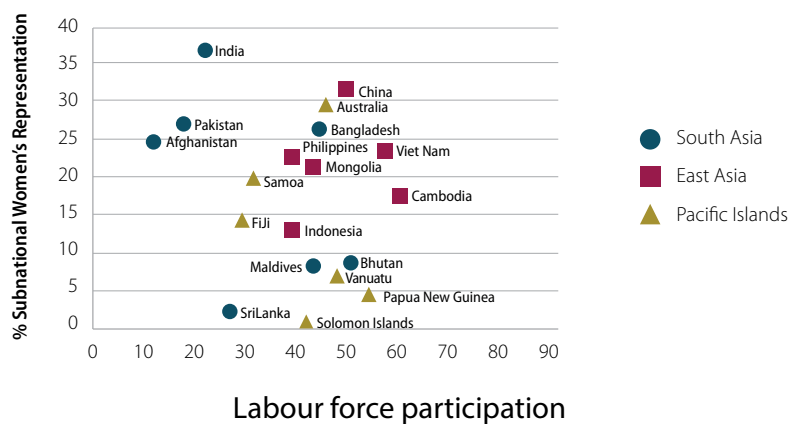


Figure 28

4.2. Institutional norms influencing women's presence in decision-making

This section refers to institutional environment that influences women's participation and decision-making opportunities. It specifically covers constitutional and electoral processes and the visible gender skew. It discusses the impact of different electoral systems, gender quotas at different levels and deals with arguments in favour and against it.

4.2.1. Positive discrimination and equality of opportunity and result

Unless the state fulfils its duty to advance equality, discriminatory practices and social exclusion may continue. The start is ensuring equality in the country's supreme law. Thus it would be worthwhile to look at some of the constitutions in this region.

Constitutional Equality of Political Rights

A comparative study of constitutions in Asia Pacific region done by UN Women revealed that as far as gender equality in political participation and freedom of association is concerned, most countries have this provision in their constitution except for Sri Lanka and Maldives in South Asia, Malaysia and Singapore in East Asia, and Australia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga in the Pacific Islands. Positive examples include illustrations from few country's constitutions in the three sub-regions under the provision on political participation and freedom of association.

What supreme law says

Afghanistan: 'The elections law shall adopt measures to attain, through the electorate system, general and fair representation for all the people of the country, and proportionate to the population of every province, on average, at least two females shall be the elected members of the House of People from each province. (Art. 83)

India: Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes. Clause (3): Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. Clause (4): Provided further that not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women. Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality.

Philippines: The party-list representatives shall constitute twenty per centum of the total number of representatives including those under the party list. For three consecutive terms after the ratification of this Constitution, one-half of the seats allocated to party-list representatives shall be filled, as provided by law, by selection or election from the labor, peasant, urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, women, youth, and such other sectors as may be provided by law.

Vietnam: All citizens regardless of their ethnic origin, sex, social status, belief, religion, educational level, occupation and term of residence have the right to vote upon reaching the age of eighteen and stand for election to the National Assembly and the People's Councils upon attaining the age of twenty one as provided by law (Art. 54).

Papua New Guinea: 2. Equality and participation. We declare our second goal to be for all citizens to have an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, the development of our country. WE ACCORDINGLY CALL FOR—(1) an equal opportunity for every citizen to take part in the political, economic, social, religious and cultural life of the country;(2) the creation of political structures that will enable effective, meaningful participation by our people in that life, and in view of the rich cultural and ethnic diversity of our people

for those structures to provide for substantial decentralization of all forms of government activity; (5) equal participation by women citizens in all political, economic, social and religious activities; (9) every citizen to be able to participate, either directly or through a representative, in the consideration of any matter affecting his interests or the interests of his community; and (10) all persons and governmental bodies of Papua New Guinea to ensure that, as far as possible, political and official bodies are so composed as to be broadly representative of citizens from the various areas of the country; and.. (Preamble, National Goals and Directive Principles)

Vanuatu: (1) The Republic of Vanuatu recognises, that, subject to any restrictions imposed by law on non-citizens, all persons are entitled to the following fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual without discrimination on the grounds of race, place of origin, religious or traditional beliefs, political opinions, language or sex but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and to the legitimate public interest in defence, safety, public order, welfare and health –...(h) freedom of assembly and association;... (Art. 5)

Source: UN Women

From these examples, we surmise that those countries with constitutional guarantees for gender parity, have been able to support greater political representation of women. A constitutional framework as the supreme law has a valuable role in tackling power asymmetries in society. Apart from specific clauses on political participation, clauses on non-discrimination and equality can also advance gender equality. Such constitutional guarantees of equality also serve as the basis for advancing women's participation in the political sphere. By and large, most countries in the Asia Pacific have no challenges posed by the constitutional arrangement including the Pacific Islands, which are gender neutral. There are however, examples like the Maldives that did not allow women to hold the positions of President and Vice President and amended the constitutional provision only in 2008. At the same time, practices such as in Afghanistan where the post-conflict constitution development process allowed for the presence of women in its drafting helped to influence the reservation of seats for women.

"In the Cook Island, (Rakahanga Island) there's a by-law that means on our island women can't be elected. We are trying to change that. We need to work together as women to put together a proposal to the Island Council to allow women to stand as candidates. We have to change minds too about women being elected. We have to convince people that the custom will allow women to be elected and to flourish."

Tohoa Tuteru Rakahanga Island, Cook Islands

Source: CLGF Pacific Women's Leadership stories

However, political and ideological grounds inform implementation of constitutional rights and thus it is important to work simultaneously on other institutional, socio-cultural and political measures that frame women's real access to public space.

Electoral Designs and their Implications for Women

Electoral systems have a critical bearing on women's participation but these are influenced by the political system as well as political will. Among the three broad categories of electoral systems, namely, majoritarian, proportional and mixed; proportional systems have benefitted women most. Evident from the data presented earlier, this mechanism provides an opportunity to reflect the diversity of the population including women. At the same time it is important that within PR systems, inclusive political party lists are encouraged through nominations of women at the top end of the list or through a ranking rule, which provides them opportunities to win seats at the national and local government levels. Where they are clustered at the end of the party list they are at great odds of obtaining a seat. Also PR should be considered in light of district magnitude in terms of number of seats, open or closed lists that allow voters to impact the election of candidates within a party list. In plurality/majority systems, political parties are encouraged to have internal gender quotas for candidates running for office and supporting women to contest from a winnable seat. Currently, women are mostly given seats that are difficult for them to secure.

Cambodia: Making a difference

Cambodia's efforts in improving women's participation at the commune level are worth noting. Here, the PR system and affirmative policies have increased nomination of women by political parties. Of the 26% women contesting in commune/sangkat council elections in 2012, 18% got elected and 95 were commune chiefs. Analysis of party lists showed a favourable trend in nomination of women with some being elected to the position of commune/sangkat chief. However, this trend needs to grow substantially to correct the low representation of women and their effective participation in local political process and development.

Source: COMFREL (The Committee for Free and Fair Elections) Cambodia

In East Asia, the PR system has incentivised in order that parties maximise their appeal by nominating different groups as was observed earlier in Timor Leste, Cambodia and Indonesia at the national level and in Cambodia and Indonesia at sub-national levels. At the same time, despite plurality/majority and FPTP systems, high women's representation is witnessed in Vietnam and China. Here one has to look into affirmative action policies of the political parties.

In South Asia, while Sri Lanka's Local Authorities Elections Act, 2012 provides for a mixed system with 70 per cent elected through FPTP and 30 per cent through PR list, the new law makes the quota of 25 per cent of the nominees for youth and women discretionary so political parties can easily ignore them when choosing candidates. Civil society has been demanding for greater nomination of women in party lists. Though reflected in some manifestoes, it has not been implemented for lack of political will.

Nepal leading the way

As far as quotas on nomination in PR systems go, Nepal has shown the way in South Asia. The journey from 1 per cent in 1959 to 30 per cent in 2013 took place in the midst of the Maoist movement, democratic reform challenges, constitutional reform, party stands, decentralisation and the peace agreement. While designing the interim constitution, a separate chapter on political parties underscored the need to include gender and ethnic groups. The electoral law pushed by the Election Commission with the support of civil society movements integrated the spirit of the constitution and developed the PR system assigning a 50 per cent candidate quota not just to achieve equality of opportunity but also result. It also ensured women's representation from various ethnic groups and geographic areas. Through tough negotiations, the then Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) bargained with political parties to achieve this result. Questions on the quality of women's participation were countered with the view that opportunity to women would beget capacity. The crucial role women played in the Maoist struggle, the many equality campaigns by women's organisations, the women's wing of the political parties and international support were influencing factors. With support from academic institutions, these organisations worked with the Election Commission for the development, approval and implementation of the electoral law. This guaranteed one-third seats for women in the Constituent Assembly in 2009. While numbers have reduced slightly in 2013 elections since 2009, women's representation still stands at 30 per cent and the country retains its position of meeting the international target of minimum 30 per cent. An NGO network ascribes the downward trend to a reduction in the nomination of female candidates by major political parties, the allocation of unwinnable constituencies and the fielding of inexperienced women.

While local government elections have not been held in Nepal for 11 years, the 1999 local self-governance act provided for one woman member in each ward of the Village Development Committees and the Municipality. Recognising the importance of women's participation at the national level, the current CEC of Nepal also felt that empowering women for participation in political life at the community level helps broaden the constituency for democratic decision-making, and is crucial to the effective application of good governance at all levels. The need for activating local governments and pushing for increased women's representation at this level through legislative and electoral reform has been emphasised by him. The Election Commission has drawn up a gender and inclusion policy to engender the electoral processes at different steps and develop a gender sensitive Commission, when the elections are held in 2014.

Source: Interview with former (Mr. Bhojraj Pokharel) and current (Mr. Neel Kantha Uprety) Election Commissioner and Ms. Sharmila Karki, President, Federation of Nepal NGOs

Most Pacific countries have FPTP systems. However, one of the latest developments has been under the Fiji Constitution 2013, which adopted the open list PR system. The French parity laws being exercised in French Polynesia and New Caledonia resulted in increased numbers of women in governments with the PR list systems. With the on-going self-determination process in French Polynesia, learning from their PR system may be more readily available and acceptable to other

Pacific Island countries. However, given that in much of Melanesia and Micronesia countries in the Pacific, political parties are not well developed, introduction of the list PR systems is constrained. Party quotas work in countries where there is strong party tradition. As mentioned by the PIF secretariat, affirmative actions in Pacific Islands require much more discussion and thinking.

Struggle and Value of Quotas for Women

Quotas are not a matter of affirmative action rather a positive duty of the state to alter institutional structures that disadvantage women. Countries that adopted quotas saw this as the only way to make women enter the political sphere. Mandatory quotas ensure both equality of opportunity and equality of results.

The South Asian experience

Gender quotas in South Asia especially at the local government levels have been able to prepare the ground for entry of large numbers of women in the political process. Bangladesh was the first to adopt quotas recognising that women have the right to be part of political process. Despite several challenges, Bangladesh reservation policies for women in the Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad (local government units) and national parliament (where a debate for increasing the seats to one third for women is ongoing as well as women to be directly elected) have created an enabling legislative environment for women's engagement in politics. In India, as a former union minister of local government described, it is obvious that "without reservation women will not be there at all and with reservations – when we look at all the advantages that come out with it, we should take this as the first hurdle crossed and the rest of the race is yet to be run." So, there is no alternative to reservation. Generally, locally elected women had little or no association with politics and for most the act of contesting the first election signalled their entry into it.

The provision of reservations had played a determining role in crossing social and institutional barriers. In Afghanistan, timing has played an important role where a constitutional quota was introduced during the drafting process after the end of civil conflict. Similarly, in Nepal, women's role in the Maoist struggle and the women's movement helped in pushing political parties and persuading the election commission for higher representation. Crisis created an opportunity during the constitutional development process to improve gender outcomes at the national and sub-national levels. Transition to democracy has provided spaces for political reform and introducing affirmative measures.

In South Asia, the reservation policy has seen mixed political responses as evident from one example of progress and one reversal in the recent times. Needless to say, this has to be contextualised in the socio-political context of these countries.

Progress

In India, 15 of the 28 states have already provided for 50 per cent reservation for women in local governments (panchayats) through amendments in their respective local government (Panchayati Raj) acts. In most of these states where elections were held on the basis of 50 per cent reservation, the percentage of elected women representatives is more than the stipulated 50 per cent as some women are elected from unreserved seats. In fact, a new Constitutional Amendment is expected to enhance the reservation of seats for women in local governments from one-third to 50 per cent across the country.

Reversal

In Afghanistan there has been a policy retreat through a regressive step where Parliament passed a law in July 2013 to reduce the provincial council seats reserved for women from 25 to 20 per cent. A Provincial Councillor reflected.....

"My perspective about women representation is not very optimistic as currently the Afghan government and national assembly reduced the quota of women in the provincial council from 25 to 20 per cent. Furthermore, the government does not have a strategic vision about women's future and role in the government and political arena. However, the government and the international community should help Afghan women preserve the gain made in last 11 years. Women are not united in Afghanistan and men in politics can easily influence them."

Judge. Najla Aqubi, instrumental in pushing for these quotas during the constitution drafting process remains worried, and feels that women will have a difficult time in the next round of elections in 2014 with the reduced quota.

Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India and interview with Afghanistan Provincial Council representative and Judge Najla Aqubi, former Deputy Secretary of the Constitutional Making Commission and current Deputy Country Representative, The Asia Foundation, Afghanistan.

East Asian experience

Reservation is not a popular policy in East Asia. Legislated and voluntary party quotas are preferred options. However, many groups are advocating for change with their governments.

East Asian Women's representation frontrunner

Timor Leste has proved to be a success at descriptive representation at national levels. Redefeto's (a women's network) campaign for gender quotas of 30 per cent for women in party lists with every third candidate to be a woman, was initially opposed. This did not deter the Timorese women. With the investment of the UN Transitional Administration into capacity development of women candidates, incentives to political parties and quotas for women in campaign offices and the election commission - 26 per cent women came to govern in the new assembly in 2001. While this was achieved without quotas for women in the election law, gender quota in the 2007 election law, amended in 2011 (with penalties) subsequently prescribed one woman in every three candidates. This led to 38.5 per cent women in the National Assembly being highest in the Asia Pacific and ranked 18th globally.

Source: Quota Project and UNDP and NDI Guidebook for empowering women for stronger political parties

Some other positive initiatives include the efforts of the Philippines in the enactment of Magna Carta for Women, which states the need to ensure the participation of women in all levels of development planning and programme implementation with at least 40 per cent of membership of all development councils from the regional, provincial, city, municipal and barangay levels to be composed of women. China's Communist Party considered a combination of multi-candidate elections with mandatory quotas so that women make up at least 20 per cent of the reserve cadres at provincial, city and county levels. However the organic Law of the Village Committees in China specifying an 'appropriate number' of women in these committees has not been effectively implemented. In Indonesia, the electoral law mandates women to comprise 30 per cent of nominees in the candidate list at national and sub-national levels ensuring that one in every three nominee is a woman. The forthcoming general elections in Indonesia in 2014 will have large numbers of women contesting (38 per cent registered contestants). The women's movement has pushed for reforms and the Election Commission is rigorously enforcing the 30 per cent quota in party lists and has penalised parties (including disqualification of candidates) for non-compliance. However, new laws on local government currently being negotiated in Indonesia are without any discussion on affirmative action policies for women, as fundamentalist groups may not accept quotas. Vietnam Women's Union Central Committee has made proposals to increase women's representation by 30 per cent both in the national assembly as well as in people's provincial councils.

Thailand civil society's struggle for quota at the local level

For women, the road to politics is not smooth. The decentralisation of local administrative power through upgrading the status of the Tambon council to Tambon Administrative Organisation (TAO) in Thailand was an important step. While drafting the TAO legislation, it was noted that gender issues were completely neglected particularly in changing of the composition of the members. Although formally women are not barred from such bodies, in practice in the TAO consisted mostly of men. So the struggle with political parties including with the Parliamentary Committee on administration and pro-democracy groups started in 1991. Women's groups campaigned for a clause, that would have one man and one woman reserved for the two newly elected representatives to the TAO from each village but this attempt failed.

Over several years organisations like Gender and Development Research Institute (GDRI) and others struggled to promote a 50 per cent gender quota at the TAO level for a temporary period. GDRI petitioned with parliament through a large signature campaign to amend Article 3 of the local government act. The draft bill was under Agenda 19, five years ago when the government was dissolved. However, the process was restarted and it was on the urgent list and on Agenda 3 before the recent dissolution of the government in 2013.

Source: Interview with Dr. Suteera, GDRI, Thailand

The Pacific Island experience

Some countries give prominence to gender quotas as evidenced from Vanuatu's recent legislation reserving five seats for municipalities whereby 11 per cent temporary special quota for women's representation in the Municipal Councils will be effective for four terms (16 years).

In 2013, the Government of Samoa passed a law for reserving five seats for women in Parliament. But the qualification requirement of the matai title for contesting elections in their constitution acts as an impediment for women's representation in the Samoa island councils. Constitutional reform implies questioning of the tradition, which can take a long time to take effect considering that powerful men in the government prefer the status quo. The PIF secretariat is currently working with the Samoa government to do a matai survey to look into the number of women matais as well factors that make women take up the matai titleship.

Reservation in the Pacific

The autonomous government of Bougainville was the only elected body in the Pacific that had three reserved seats till last year. Three women MPs are elected from these special seats to the 39-member House of Representatives. The process, however, was not without obstructions. Here, it is interesting to note that the Constitutional Commission of Bougainville vetoed the argument that women's political role was against the custom and strongly held that special seats be reserved for them as otherwise it would be difficult for them to contest the single member constituency seats. The Commission recognised the strengths of the matrilineal society as well as the critical role-played by women in the post-conflict peace process.

Source: Jon Fraenkel, 2006

In Papua New Guinea, a lone woman Parliamentarian created a momentum to reserve 22 seats for women in a 111 national seat assembly in 2011. Recently Papua New Guinea pushed through the quota legislation in Parliament, but the constitutional amendment required to enact is proving to be a difficult task. In Kiribati, a referendum is required to change the constitution. Prior to 2006 women held 13 seats in the 103-seat parliament in Fiji and women's movements are now pushing for 50 per cent representation in the 2014 Fiji elections.

Without quotas, few women show the resolve at the local level to get elected to provincial councils in Solomon Islands. At the national level, women are struggling in their demand to reserve 10 women seats in Parliament. However, recently, a male parliamentarian urged the National Coalition for Rural Advancement (led by the Prime Minister) to proceed with its plan to introduce legislation to reserve 10 seats for women.

The 1997 Tuvalu Falekaupule Act, decentralising more authority to local governments in the management of Island Affairs is intended to encourage wider participation. This seeks to improve women's participation for earlier they could not be involved in community decisions and were not even able to air their views. They are now discussing government budgets, health issues and making submissions. This Act has been instrumental in increasing women's involvement not only as candidates but also as elected members of the Kaupule.

Source: Graham Hassall, 2011 and Jon Fraenkel, 2006

In many countries like Papua New Guinea, Kiribati and Samoa, resistance to TSMs was observed at senior government levels, in political parties and by a few women who already enjoy a high political status, as it is perceived to be undemocratic and unfair. However, in the Pacific context, reservation of seats is recommended as more conducive to fast track women into politics, given the lack of well-developed political structures within parties. At the same time, a situation such as that in Bougainville and Vanuatu should be avoided where large numbers of women contested for

the reserved seats and none contested for open constituency ones. Additionally, the capacity and resources available to them are limited at this point of time in their political history. The country's efforts at catching up have to be seen in the light of the fact that there isn't a level playing field. Clearly a lot of support and attention is required in the Pacific, given their relatively short socio-political history post independence.

To Reserve or Not

Many global institutions advocate for appropriate quota measures matching the electoral system and transparent nominations by political parties for a qualitative jump for women in political institutions. Proponents of quota argue that there is an evident imbalance in the representation and that political parties are biased in their nominations, which are undemocratic and block voter's rights. Quotas therefore introduce an equity dimension by ensuring a fair system through bringing women in leadership positions, which generally is prejudiced against them. Increased quotas will help address the statistical discrimination, and over time, the quality of representation. Further, women's perspectives are critical to effective decision-making as they bring in a different world view based on their experiences. Clearly there are wide disparities in women's equality that need to change through policy or programmatic interventions. These can be advocated only when gender sensitive women and men are in power. Quotas provide greater scope for women and address their aspiration gap. They also help in creating role models among women leaders, leading to an increased investment in their capacity development to fulfil their leadership roles adequately.

Despite their positive influence, quotas remain contentious across Asia Pacific. Political ideologies, social norms about gender and the fear of loss of political power are possible inhibiting factors. Arguments put forward against them include the belief that the concept is undemocratic and could generate inefficiency. In India, the national parliament has struggled with the issue of quotas for women. Many political parties object to the 33 per cent reservation in parliament and the legislative assembly arguing that women elected will be from the elite class or those with family members in positions of power. It should be noted that political parties are perfectly agreeable to their own family member in politics or as proxies. In the Indian context, they also face the issue of addressing caste inequality within reserved seats for women. Women's representation is also weighted with representation of religious or ethnic minorities. Others raise the 'undemocratic' flag, for this is more in the nature of an appointment instead of an elective process. Women parliamentarians in Papua New Guinea opposed quotas as they felt that it conveys the impression that women are undeserving and incapable of fulfilling the demands of the position. Further, it could act as a disincentive for women to invest in their potential as quotas have already created their space. Some feel quotas lead to tokenism without these women actually making a real difference. This has obviously been proved wrong in countries such as India where women elected in the local governments have asserted their leadership and are making changes.

While it is important to ensure democratic fairness and respect for electoral choice, in many countries, the voter's choice is manipulated through vote buying, and family voting. Hence it is important to note these realities while ensuring a gender-sensitive approach.

The trend across the world is in favour of reserved seats as in South Asia as this ensures equality of result. At the same time, the proposal of quota systems has to be calibrated against a number of factors. Quotas should harmonise with the electoral systems, have implementation procedures, penalties for non-conformity, measures for counter attack and necessary political inducements. Another important dimension in the case of India is the tenure of rotation of seats for women in the

local government which is understood to mean that at every election there is a rotation and that no woman gets a second chance which hampers both her political and programmatic continuity as well as development of leadership. The Expert Committee on leveraging panchayats (local governments) for efficient delivery of public goods and services, April 2013 has recommended increasing the term to two to three tenures that elected women are able to serve.

There are different views on the time period for quotas. Whether quotas should be permanent or temporary is difficult to decide as previous experiences at the national level in Bangladesh and Mongolia have shown a negative trend when quotas are removed. At the local level, it would perhaps be even more difficult; taking the example of Bangladesh, women have only won seats that were reserved for them despite having a quota system for decades. In Afghanistan, an Afghan women's rights activist opines that although the quota system at national and local is very effective; it should be for a defined period so that women can enhance their capability and capacity.

The Policy Directive on promoting women's electoral and political participation through UN electoral assistance is cautious in its approach for recommending a quota to national authorities and advises the need to look at all political ramifications, legal framework and electoral system, protocols for quota mechanisms to be effective, and enforcement measures to ensure that political parties observe quotas.

While quotas help in increasing numbers of women, other governance elements such as political culture and accountability mechanisms all play an important role in actualising gender equality.

4.2.2. Party culture and campaign financing for gender parity

Political parties, their structures, their cultures and their systems have a critical influence on creating spaces for women in the political sphere. Politicians represent an amalgam of interests of the geographical electoral district they represent, social groups they are expected to patronise, party lines and the various commercial groups they are expected to serve. Unstable political regimes, corruption and criminalisation of politics have had differential impact on women's political role in the Asia Pacific region. The operation of the party cadres at the grassroots level also influences how local governments are perceived with implications for women.

Party tickets

In the Asia Pacific, political parties play a critical role in mobilising voters and providing party platforms for public recognition and funds. Party membership also means access to resources and networks, which are aggressively cornered by men and women tend to lose out. The existence of the patronage system is extremely male dominated which clearly influences the selection of women in party list or their structures. Political parties acting as gate keepers have resisted sharing power with women and creating parity in the party list resulting in women being allocated seats where outcomes did not matter or creating stand-ins for men. In their quest to consolidate power, parties look at men as preferred candidates and women as dicey options given their weak constituency. Women are associated with fewer resources, negligible networks, less political experience and thus a high risk to be given party tickets. For instance, while there is an improving trend in Cambodian politics both in terms of more women interested in politics and parties being more receptive, low representation of women in local sangkat councils is due to the view of male politicians that women are less competent with less chances of success. This pushes women candidates to the lower ranks in the party list and these candidates have claimed discrimination by their male equals.

Without a Party

Badam Zari, National Assembly Candidate, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) was the first-ever woman contesting in the May 11 general elections from the FATA, one of the poorest and least developed regions of Pakistan. She says it wouldn't have been possible to prepare for the elections on her own. Zari's family, especially her father-in-law and brothers supported her decision. While campaigning she was accompanied by her husband, cousins and nieces.

She was optimistic about winning in the elections and said the response she received from the people in her constituency has been positive. She prefers to contest as an independent as it provides flexibility in decision-making and she is not compelled to follow the advice of any political party. Even if defeated she was determined to continue her mission to improve the socio economic conditions of FATA.

Source: UNDP Pakistan

Party positions

Leadership positions are assumed to be a male preserve and this bias plays out in promotion of women in the party cadres or to decision-making posts. Male politicians or party workers assume and denigrate female candidates or elected member's inadequacy in political processes and thus exclude them from decision-making positions. Though the party system has benefited from women in the party structure who have been working as party grassroots workers, the party has not enhanced their position within their decision-making structure. Women councillors in Bangladesh maintained that they faced many difficulties because of their gender as parties refrained from elevating their current status to be equivalent to men despite their honesty and integrity. Further, as seen in Sri Lanka and India, many women who have worked in campaigns to secure votes for men, have never received support from the same political parties either to boost their position or provide them access to political resources. A Provincial People's Council Vice chair in Vietnam noted that the party policy documents on women's political participation are not sufficiently strong in stipulating the required percentage of women in the party committees and the documents usually use the word "prioritise" but their implementation does not show preference and if women are not prioritised, nothing much happens. In China, during the election of village committees, party cadres decline women to be selected for critical positions despite their outperforming male cadres. It is observed in the Pacific where there are political parties, their structures are developed through the local route and women who succeed at the local level have also gone on to perform a national role. But in general, parties tend to use them as instruments to mobilise women voters and not for leadership positions.

Party control

Parties tend to control and maintain status quo and prevent the emergence of differing priorities that women may want. Many women find it difficult to fit into the established party structure and ideology. While women gain access to political participation through the PR systems and quotas, it also builds pressure on the women to vote along party lines rather than gender lines. At the local

level, party allegiance may be limited in some countries but not in others. In the one-party system in Vietnam, the party has complete control over policies and resources and women have to tow the party line. In India, in some states such as West Bengal, the party has a stronghold at the local level and women as party cadres have to align resources to those people in the villages who vote for the same party. It is often seen in several countries such as Thailand, Bangladesh or India where women parliamentarians tend to follow the party diktat as party loyalty is considered above cross-party alliances on gender equality issues.

Who controls?

An NGO in Vietnam, observed that the political bureau of the communist party decides on the policies and work of government. Unqualified women are included in the party list along with qualified men and as a result the voters who are influenced by the communist party choose the qualified man. The same scenario exists for local government elections as the communist party dominates decisions and policies. This sentiment was echoed by a woman Provincial People's Council Vice Chair, who said, "There should be an important regulation on developing a source for women cadres, so as to avoid a situation where during the National Assembly and People's Councils' elections, the local Party Executive Committees rush to identify women to 'meet the target set by the upper level' and they are just nominal candidates". It is comparatively easier to work with the party to advocate for women representatives at the local government levels and apparently, the communist party have also passed a resolution towards 15 percent women in the Executive Committee in 2015 and 35% women in the elected body in 2016 for the next term at both national and local levels.

Despite this, one has to recognise the relatively high level of descriptive representation of women in Vietnam both at the national and local levels.

Source: Interviews with NGOs

Dynasty-led Party

Another obstacle women face in politics is the need to be either wealthy or well-connected, otherwise a political career is out of their reach. Currently, most women representatives are either affluent or belong to political families. Though East Asia has had many women leaders at national and local levels, national leaders like former President Corazon Aquino or Provincial Councillor Calo of Philippines, or President Sukarnoputri or Deputy Mayor Ratu Tatu Chasanah of Serang, or Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar, or Prime Minister Shinawatra or Provincial Council President Rangorak Suwanchawee of Thailand, have one thing in common and that is a familial dynastic relationship with their husbands, fathers or brothers. The same is also evidenced in Indonesia, where the Election Commission has been able to push the political parties to comply with the stipulated quotas, but parties are filing the quota by nominating women from their families, without the requisite qualification instead of women from the party structures. At the same time, there are women who have entered politics due to their strong interest in certain sectors such as environment or health and sanitation. An example is of the mayor of Surabaya, who was the head of the green and park department of the city. She used the environmental actions as her entry in

politics. In the case of Japan, environmental degradation in the past has often been considered as the entry for women to be active in politics.

Philippine's Breakers

'Breakers' is a Philippine's phenomena. The kinship factor has been an important element for entry into politics at the local level and dynasty politics prevents qualified women outside the electoral process from making an entry. Those that make it to being a barangay captain (although few), usually have strong political family backing. Additionally as the mayors and governors can do a maximum of three terms of three years in one go, women from political families (wives or daughters) are elected to serve as 'breakers' for three years before the 'man' can continue for another nine. The 'breakers' phenomenon is leading to many women getting elected. This is not always the case and there are some who enter politics without family connections and are powered by a strong commitment to their constituency.

Source: Interview with NGOs

Similarly in South Asia, most women heads of state have risen in politics mainly due to their family connections. In Bangladesh, women in local government were found to be there because of their associations with family members who were either active in politics or were part of central and local government which influenced their environment for learning political acumen. But there are many women in Bangladesh who joined politics as students and are involved in the party structure along with either their father, father-in law or husband. Else they have been part of the freedom struggle directly or have grown in the family fighting independence. Research has shown that some male members in Pakistan encourage their women to participate in politics to take advantage of reserved seats for themselves to be involved in politics through them. In Afghanistan, it is important to note that a Provincial Council member coming from a well-educated family entered the political process despite family opposition. Political lineage is a phenomenon, which is also common to Pacific Islands, and a few women MPs who have made it to the parliament in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa have all had influential family connections with institutional political status.

However, it is important to state that though some of these women may have chosen the familial pathway to enter the political arena, they have not remained as a titular head but have shaped the nation's polity, identity and progress. It is therefore vital to outline that the familial route provides women with the environment to learn political knowhow and make a choice to enter this field. As a female mayor of Philippines said "Kinship may be our entry into politics but what matters is really what we do when we are in office." Nonetheless, this cannot be the only route, which undermines movements and institutional paths, especially for the weaker sections. Political socialisation is important and women like men gain experience as they move up the ladder from the grassroots in the party organisation or come as proxies due to familial connections.

Party funding

While the support of powerful networks is as important for women as men in advancing their careers in the political process, it is equally important to have the financial backing as elections require large sums of money. Since women enter the arena with less campaign resources, they are also not seen to have power and connections, which acts against them. In South Asia, elections are about money, muscle and power. Thus without financial resources, winning elections is a far cry. The situation of women candidates is further complicated as a result of their limited integration in the powerful political and economic networks which are essentially male dominated. As the urban councillor from Sri Lanka said, the commercialisation of politics has made it very difficult for women to compete in elections and unless women have the backing of political family and access to party resources, she is unlikely to be able to contest and win. Similarly, in Afghanistan, the Provincial Council member noted “We cannot ignore the economic obstacles that women face in Afghanistan. For instance, during my political campaign, it was very difficult for me to organise a campaign session as I did not have money even to cover the cost of tea.” Funding constraints puts them at a disadvantage and contributes to the lack of level-playing field.

Vote buying

In Thai villages women who run for office, face barriers resulting from male-determined norms. In some areas, local elected leaders use the political structure as a tool to advance their economic interests. The system is kept in place by a patron-client relationship in which locally elected leaders act as clients to government officials and as patrons to villagers. The system has benefited bureaucrats and the local business elite, as both have an interest in conserving and reproducing it. One of the most common techniques used to do so is vote buying. “If you don’t buy votes, the people won’t elect you”. Women don’t have much chance of participating in local administration and the sub district heads own and control all the major business in the areas. Those who challenge their authority do so at their own risk. Election rigging techniques used involves the shifting of voter’s registrations to the village of the upcoming election three months prior to the election. A critical mass are paid by the candidate to shift their house registration to the village where the election is to be held, thus, virtually ensuring a win.

Source: GDRI, Thailand

Political campaigning is extremely expensive in the Pacific as the infrastructure is poor and islands are scattered. ‘Big man’ culture prevalent in Pacific Island societies governs norms of who can hold political office and is normally based on clan based exchange (sharing of wealth with ‘wantoks’) and material accumulation. This essentially translates into vote-buying and thereby disadvantaging potential women candidates. Women are not seen to be possessing wealth and status and thus are not fit for representing their constituencies through political positions. Pacific politicians receive funding from different sources. The mercantile relationships of certain candidates with mining and forest timber loggers are also a source of funds for campaigns. In order to secure seats, these politicians indulge in vote buying by funding influential community headmen—big men. Innovative ways of vote buying are being practiced in some of the Pacific states in the form of gifts to the electorate which range from food and cash parcels, agricultural implements or meeting

education and medical expenses. Additionally, the sitting parliamentarians such as in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea have taken advantage of MP funds and ministerial cars for political campaigns. Given the funding constraints, women's pathways to entry into politics remain the connection with male chiefs (as wives or daughters), foreign nations or businessmen.

Resolved to win...

When she stood in the 2006 provincial election Rhoda Sikilabu, Provincial Councillor from Solomon Islands did not have the same campaign funds as her male counterparts. However, her strong resolve enabled her to win against six male candidates as voters were desperate for change and development.

Source: Intrepres

Overall money politics does marginalise the majority of women who neither engage in this kind of politics nor have such connections and networks to do so.

Efforts on campaign funds for women have been minimal. In East Asia, fund raising efforts are seen only in Cambodia where one of the parties provides support in kind to women. Another attempt has been made in Papua New Guinea through its campaign finance laws to support women candidates. Some recommend envisaging a different model of campaigning and selection of candidates in the Pacific that can encourage people of all economic status to be part of the political leadership.

Using campaign funding

The Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC) includes measures that encourage the election of larger numbers of female candidates via campaign financing legislation. It refunds 75 percent of costs incurred by any woman candidates who secure 10 percent or more of the constituency vote in Papua New Guinea. However, political parties have not backed women candidates despite this incentive as they still consider women a high-risk candidate.

Source: OLIPPAC, Government of Papua New Guinea

The Policy directive on women's political participation through the UN Electoral Assistance indicates need for creation of a state funding mechanism in a non-partisan manner for supporting women political candidates, which is in line with the core obligation of member state outlined in the CEDAW General Recommendation 25. It also encourages fund raising initiatives for women candidates by civil society, an alternative way of securing funds to overcome their obstacles of funds for campaign activities. Mass media can support campaigns by providing them free airtime. Other affirmative actions can also include exemption or lowering of fees for nominations or party

primaries. Election management bodies should also look at options to create funds for women and pushing political parties to create level-playing field for women.

Thus, clearly, political parties barely create any incentives to attract women into party structures even if they constitute 50 per cent or more of the voters. Ideally, for their own gains they should be ensuring women's presence in the party through giving them funds for campaigning, providing capacity development and bolstering them in the party hierarchy. Democratisation of party compositions, increasing women in party structures at different levels are issues that can help improve the party profile and also have implications for women's political participation.

While institutional issues such as electoral systems and campaign funding play a critical role in fast tracking women into the political process at local and national levels, many other challenges require attention by government, political parties, national women's machinery and other national and international stakeholders so as to work on inadequate and under-representation of women. Therefore policy reactions have to look at issues that are much more fundamental and deep-rooted and beyond electoral involvement. Efforts merely directed at changing institutions cannot have far-reaching effects if cultural descriptions and metaphors continue to purvey stereotypes of women. Similarly, simple attempts at altering cultural traditions cannot go far until seconded by the institutional reform, which will reinforce changing of socio-cultural beliefs.

4.3. Structural impact of socio-cultural constructs

4.3.1. Public-private divide

Deep-rooted cultural, social and religious stereotypes regarding the role and responsibilities of men and women in society discriminate against women. Social hierarchies emerging from cultural norms give rise to inequalities, which result in treating women as inferior, excluded and obscured. A domain where gender differences are most visible is in the disproportionate weight of household work and care giving assigned to women. This social divide has underpinned women's status and perpetuated patriarchal positions, practices and traditions that govern women's identities and roles and going further has shaped institutions, pushing women into the private space. This pervasive divide constrains women's mobility and access to education, information and resources and hinders their political participation and empowerment.

Private Space

Across Asia Pacific countries, the norm is that the public sphere is for men and the private is for women. The family, which is the foundation of the political system, creates inhibitors that guide women's roles. Vietnamese men describe 'good women' as submissive, good wives with good character. On the other hand, a 'good husband' is a man with a generous income. Despite progress in gender equality, Vietnamese society is still grounded on feudal ideology with the corollary of gender discrimination and prejudice. The Provincial People's Council vice chair in Vietnam, received many opportunities but faced as many difficulties and challenges because she is a woman. Popular constructs of women preclude them from entering social work and hence political work is seen as a man's domain. The traditional agricultural economy in China has a bearing on the division of labour, which is highly gendered whereby a man takes control outside the household and women look after domestic concerns. This is reinforced by the perception of women having low quality (*disuzhi*) in rural areas. In Indonesia, even in urban areas where women are far more educated and men far more liberal, men still feel that a wife should work till she has a child and thereafter

be at home. In some parts like North Sumatra, a male official held that, “strong patriarchal values influence behaviours and dictate social norms whereby man must work and provide and women must receive and enjoy”. The disproportionate responsibilities perpetuate structural inequalities and put limits on women’s participation capacities.

In Thailand, all discussions with men showed that women are not discriminated against entering politics. However, most men felt that traditionally women have an important role at home. This gender ideology is substantiated by a common phrase used here: “Men are the front legs of the elephant and women are the back legs”. In Cambodia, a custom known as Chha’p limits women’s mobility and therefore her access to opportunities outside the private space of the household. These traditional notions tend to permeate public institutions and male norms lead to indirect discrimination resulting in reducing women’s voice in the political sphere. In the Philippines, when identifying barriers that restricted women from entering local government, it is pointed out that attitudes that put politics and decision-making into the male preserve, cite women to be physically and intellectually incapable of managing towns. Such beliefs come from the traditional Filipino cultures that do not regard women as important agents of change.

The implications of gender roles and the divide are explained by the Union Parishad representative from Bangladesh who said that all family responsibilities are assigned to women, allowing them little time to socialise or form networks and even less politically relevant ones. The gendered political networks are male biased limiting women’s leadership prospects. This leads to reductions in their aspirations and impact women contesting elections. Additionally, the male Upazila Parishad chair and vice chair persons (district local government head) from Bangladesh observed that a country’s progress is linked with the advancement of women for they comprise half the population. He acknowledged that women are better at work when compared to their male counterparts but highlighted that their male dominated society as well as radical fundamentalist groups undervalue women and drive them to the private space resulting in their low access to education and other assets. Women in Pakistan face challenges from their own families, tribes, clans and local spiritual leaders. A Pakistani NGO shared their perspectives on this issue and said, “Our society is male dominated and the prevalent perceptions are that women’s place should be restricted to the private sphere.” In Afghanistan, cultural practice still requires women to have a male guardian in the public space or her electoral card without a picture to prevent her from a backlash. These only reflect restrictions that women face in being able to exercise their rights as an individual. Social norms have influenced institutional practices too, invisibilising women further in the public space.

Women's background experience helps

A former Indian minister remarked that women's socio-economic backgrounds in the public space also shape their leadership potential. For instance, women who live in the hills tend to be in charge of the economic life of the families and the community for almost the entire year because their husbands usually migrate to the plains for work. This makes the women more self-reliant and self-confident. Introduced to the public sphere they take on the task easily and more effectively. Similarly women from weaker economic groups tend to belong to the disadvantaged social groups like Scheduled Castes (SC)/Scheduled Tribes (ST) and have to earn their living in public space where the usual disadvantages of women of having to deal with men are there, but the act of coping provides a learning process. This is proved in the state of Karnataka. Against 33 percent reservation for women within the SC quota, the share of women actually elected was 54 percent. In other words, the more disadvantaged you are economically and socially, the more likely you are to take advantage of the new opportunity as a woman. Women from the weaker sections of SC often displayed more assertion and social leadership in taking up as *panchayat* (local government) leaders than men from their class.

Source: Interview with former Minister of Panchayati Raj, Mani Shankar Aiyar

The presence of a very limited number of women representatives in some Pacific Island countries show that exclusion of women has been impacted by strong traditional customs such as practice of fa'aaloalo (respect) or traditional matai (chief) system which puts social obligations on women and prevents women from being elected. Pacific women trying to enter the political arena are accused of being unauthentic and acting 'above themselves' and in fact threatened by men and other women who feel that the customary power structures are being faced with danger of erosion. Providing a different perspective, a regional network in the Pacific points out that the pace of change will be slow given the deeply entrenched indigenous traditions, culture, societal governance norms and values. For instance voting, though a new concept, has been adopted, but running for Parliament and the local government is taking time as it is not part of their tradition. Political campaigning is viewed as culturally demeaning for the 'survival of the fittest' norm that underlies it, does not find acceptance as some Pacific indigenous communities do not feel comfortable putting down another from the community.

Religious Influence

Religious laws in some countries in the Asia Pacific region have restricted women's access to public space and have relegated women to the private space. Religious assimilation arising out of increased religious fundamentalism has had implications on controlling women's mobility. Religious institutions have tried to develop social and cultural norms that prevent women from moving into the public space. In some countries, such as East Timor, Catholicism has reinforced traditional gender relations with viewing women's primary role as being wives and mothers. As claimed by some, the belief that man is a natural leader, is deeply ingrained in the Thai psyche and greatly influenced by religion (95 per cent are Buddhists), where there is a gender hierarchy within Buddhist practice and the monks revered as religious leaders, have a strong influence on the role and status of women. Some Buddhist sects have rules where only men can be monks and women

can only be nuns who are assigned tasks of care giving which reinforces the popular perception of women's role in the private sphere. About five per cent of Muslim Thais also have traditional ideas about man-woman roles in society. An official in Indonesia mentioned that with their 90 per cent Muslim population, the religious sentiments promote women's role within the family and the fundamentalist with greater hold at the local levels find it difficult to accept a woman as a leader. While the religious leaders also tried to hold sway at the national level, government intervened and these trends are now changing. In Vanuatu, the traditional chiefs and church leaders attempted to pass a law preventing women from wearing western dresses, considered fit for men. A Pakistani NGO observed "People tend to confuse culture with religion and formulate arguments using religion as a basis for restricting women's participation in the public sphere and politics in particular which is considered to be a male domain."

A male councillor in Bangladesh highlights that there are many families that provide no positive affirmation to women to enter politics and in fact impede them in many ways. Owing to religious obligations as well as misinterpretation, most Muslim women are prevented from engaging in politics. Bangladeshi women candidates have even found it difficult to register themselves as social and religious restrictions have impeded them to meet male personnel in registration offices.

Source: Interview

Role Models

The absence of a critical mass of women leaders as role models at the national and local levels acts as an impediment for women to view the political space as an avenue for participation. There is an aspirational gap between men and women as far as political ambitions are concerned. These aspirations are also shaped by social norms as leadership is seen as a masculine trait or role. The results showing limited leadership positions for women shown in Figure 9 to 11 are consistent with World Values Survey, which show that people consider men as better political and economic leaders having better chances of winning a seat. In India, a study showed that when women became elected representatives for the first time, having only male role models to follow, they took to masculine ways and were not representing women's interests. Another study in China found two-thirds of both men and women seeing politics as 'men's business'. Such social belief diminishes the aspiration of women to take part in local governance, which is accentuated by men also considering it unsuitable for women to play such roles in village matters. Male politicians in Cambodia feel that women should not be in leadership positions, as the commune/sangkat chief, as they lack understanding of security challenges. These perceptions have lasted because women (as a result of less exposure to public spaces) are unable to identify their capabilities in governance. Women who consider running for election often confront such challenges to their leadership potential from within themselves, their husbands, the outgoing village head, government officials and the voters. A former village head in Thailand said "how can a woman lead my village when I retire. I wouldn't have it. It would bring shame to the reputation of my village". With few female role models close at hand, this lack of self-confidence often results in women's retreat from formal politics. Thus quotas have been seen to be changing mentality and public opinion of women as leaders. To support this, some studies have shown that quotas in India at the local government

level have led to a reduction of subconscious prejudices in men about the capacity of women as leaders and two rounds of reservations in some states has translated into increased votes leading to women holding office even after removal of quotas as a result of rotation. Women also feel that becoming role models is important for opening doors to other women to enter local governments. Further, when women role models are created who are not following the prevalent social norms that subordinate them, it also helps other women to question those norms.

However, this persisting divide makes women less confident of their abilities to perform in the public arena and to step forward as political entities. In fact research has shown that despite similar credentials and experience, women tend to perceive themselves less qualified for political office. The public space of party politics is also much derided as well as perceived as a space for unhealthy competition, corruption, political maneuvering which women cannot negotiate. Branding politics as dirty is also a reflection of the public-private separation. Dirty politics is associated with men who can meander through it while women should remain in the safe havens of home. Finally the public-private dichotomy lies at the very heart of political participation of women and determines her challenge to not only enter the political field but also demonstrate credibility and impact.

4.3.2. Gender-based violence

The public-private divide widens with gender-based violence (GBV). GBV is not only an indirect but also direct discrimination against equality, which has significant and serious implications on political rights as well as other rights. It is used as an instrument to prevent women from taking their rightful space in political life and makes them extremely vulnerable. The disproportionate impact of violence faced by women stems their voice and undermines their participation in political life.

Women who have been found to assert their leadership as political candidates have faced multiple forms of violence, which are sometimes verbal in nature like threatening or discrediting, and other times take the form of physical harassment. It also includes mental torture, sexual violence and even murder of women leaders by political parties. Character assassination and familial violence have also been used to silence them and make life difficult for women to be in the political space making them even quit their fledgling careers and shorten their social objectives. Harassment of women candidates dissuade them from political participation and provide further reason to families and communities to discourage them from joining political processes. At the local level, political career paths may be more accessible but at the same time pose a security risk for women in the process of challenging social hierarchies at this level. Men raise questions on women's security and use this to restrict their mobility.

The Urban Councilor in Sri Lanka, Salma Hamza, faced violence during campaigning for her party (when she was not even the candidate). Her vehicle was torched and she could not even claim insurance. "Violence against women in politics is a big threat; and my friends often tell me, they burnt your vehicle – they may bomb you. But I maintain my courage. I received some support from the women CBOs during my campaign but they are also fearful of violence against them."

Source: Interview

In Afghanistan, Halima Askari, deputy head of a Provincial Council highlights the violence and insecurity women in leadership constantly face. Threats and incidence of violence is something that plays on the mind of the potential candidates and elected women and negatively impacts their participation. This is not only confined to the women candidates but is extended to her supporters who also face the brunt of violence.

Additionally fear of violence and absence of convenient modes of transport have further excluded women in Bangladesh from the electoral process. A female vice chair in Upazila Parishad of Bangladesh said that despite being involved in politics, as a woman, she had to face various forms of political harassment by the fundamentalist forces in her area such as attacks while she was participating in her district programmes. However she never retreated. An NGO representative also noted that religious fundamentalism has increased risk of violence with implications on reduction of their mobility. The elite at the local level have also used religion to sanction violence against elected women in order to suppress them. However, as some NGOs in Bangladesh are very large and rural-based with good reach of women, women are challenging fundamentalism resulting in the lowering of violence against women.

In Pakistan, while quotas have brought women into the public space, there has been backlash, as men considered their presence as a violation of social norms and this has resulted in discrimination and maltreatment. Furthermore, a highly patriarchal society here enforced rules and subjected some women to such levels of abuse and public humiliation that it has limited their self-identity and voice. In Nepal as well, an NGO noted that violence against women is experienced and elected women have received threats against their family members.

Intimidation and slander is a constant feature faced by many women intending to run for elections. Elected women especially from poorer and marginalised groups have faced dire consequences of being raped and killed. Examples from India show how elected women leaders in one state have been stigmatised and sexually harassed. Another elected woman who had dared an upper caste leader and showed determination to fight corruption in the local food ration shop was burnt to death along with her grandson.

The South Asia regional conference on women's political leadership organised by UNDP in 2011, which included national level parliamentarians, also noted the experience of violent and humiliating assaults on women candidates during campaigning. The Asia Pacific region has been a witness to violence against women voters, potential candidates and those who have been elected. The hunger for power and substantial financial resources involved makes political parties and candidates unleash a culture of violence and women politicians tend to become easy targets. One author was right in noting that the courage required to run for office is inhuman.

4.3.3. Intersectional discrimination

The intersectional approach factors the vulnerabilities arising out of socio-political and historical dimensions in understanding the numerous challenges faced by the individual. These vulnerabilities of women are on account of multiple identities due to their class, caste, ethnicity, religion or belief, political identity, nationality, health, status and age. Thus inter-sectionality makes women suffer from overlapping forms of discrimination, multiplying their burden and resulting in a substantial underrepresentation and exclusion of women in the political decision-making process.

The cumulative discrimination faced by women belonging to ethnic minorities saddles her with additional weight. An ethnic minority woman experiences discrimination differently than a woman from majority community as well as from men as a result of not only her gender, but also her ethnicity. CEDAW General Comment 28 recognises these intersectional patterns of discrimination that not all women are discriminated similarly. A woman from a schedule caste in India compared to a woman or a man from a general caste/dominant caste face multiple discrimination in political life, which arises out of gender, caste, poverty and even location in the village.

Multiple identity should be celebrated but more often than not it acts as an impediment. Rohingya women of Myanmar present a tale of being discriminated against not only because they are women, but also an ethnic and religious (Muslim) minority. Today they are stateless, have no freedom of movement and are at risk of being trafficked. While they have political rights to elect and be elected in all levels of administrative institutions, Rohingya women have practically no political status.

Source: Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Forum News, Vol 23 No. 2, November 2010

In other parts of Asia Pacific, intersectional discrimination has also played out. As observed in China and Vietnam, that despite the growth in their economy, the growth in the lives of the ethnic minority has not happened. This is reflected by the fact that Vietnam's 60 per cent ethnic minority women (twice the rate) in comparison to their majority Kinh's give birth without prenatal care. Similarly in China, urban Han, Hui and Manchu do better in terms of education and health compared to their rural ethnic minority kin. Thus the lower human development parameters of the ethnic minority women are also going to impair women's participation in the political process.

Apart from social development measures, institutional reforms are also necessary to start addressing discrimination based on inter-sectionality. These efforts could include the constitutional changes as was done by Philippines. The 1987 Philippines Constitution guaranteed that for three consecutive terms after the ratification of the constitution, one half of the seats allocated to party list representatives would be filled by those representing labour, peasant, urban poor, indigenous, cultural communities, women and youth groups. Similarly, quotas have helped more women from minority communities to enter national and local governments, which would have been difficult through regular electoral mechanisms. The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2006 has made provisions for political parties to focus on the principle of inclusiveness during the selection of candidates for the Constituent Assembly and while preparing the list of such candidates, women, dalit, backward class, adibasi, janajati, madhesi and other groups must be proportionally represented. A study found that 'without the assistance of quotas, minority women's representation is abysmally low. Their odds of election are 1 in 14 compared to majority men, 1 in 2 compared to minority men, and 1 in 3 compared to majority women. But, with the assistance of quotas, some or all of these odds improve.' It advocates for campaigns to include diverse women candidates within party gender quotas. At the same time, mixed quotas that combine national minority quotas and party gender quotas have not proven to be beneficial to minority women as exemplified by the instance of Fiji.

There is anecdotal evidence to show that leadership of women from minority groups is emerging in some countries even without quotas. It is also felt that disaggregated data collection by the

Election Commission can help them understand the representation of women from different groups of society in the national and local governments and enable electoral reforms for improving representation of women from weaker sections of the communities. There is a need for developing an enabling environment for image building of women with different backgrounds from minority groups, indigenous communities, women with disabilities and other historically marginalised women through public drives so that they can effectively participate in the leadership roles in government.

The scope of this issue has been presented as an area that requires in-depth research to have empirical evidence for establishing causal relationships for informed policy-making.

4.4. Gender influence on politics and development

4.4.1 Changing political ethos

The intention here is not to label all male politicians as bad and all women politicians good but to understand how the presence of women is changing the political arena. In general, political norms and habits controlled by men reveal certain styles that normally encourage competition instead of collaboration, violence above conciliation, and indifference in place of empathy.

Asia Pacific women have greater tolerance levels as well as better people-oriented leadership capacities. This has been demonstrated in a few Asia Pacific studies that reveal that women leaders practice a style of leadership that is participatory, inclusive, and consultative leading to increased transparency in local governance. An NGO in Sri Lanka strongly advocated for women leaders at the local and national levels as they felt that they create a calmer political environment and help to reduce the "bad impression of politics", which is symbolised with corruption and violence. They further stated that women representatives at the local level are perceived to be less corrupt and more credible by the electorate.

A former Prime Minister of India said that women will bring the strength of their moral character and ingrained financial discipline and fiscal responsibility to the panchayats (local governments)...

Source: Expert Committee Report on Panchayats 2013

In East Asia, when dictatorship and corruption have played out in the political sphere, women leaders have been relatively better known for their attributes of honesty, self-sacrifice and fortitude. One of the reasons for the outcome of the 2012 elections in Mongolia that helped to increase women's representation is the fact that the citizenry were disgruntled with corruption, which was linked with male leadership and which viewed women as reliable, responsible and honest. UNESCAP's work has revealed that women's presence has succeeded in transforming the way politics is practiced and changing the political agenda to include issues that also improve women's quality of life in addition to men's. The UNESCAP 2001 summit of Mayors and Councillors also underlined the need for men and women to practice value-based politics.

Value based politics

A male *Upazila Parishad* representative in Bangladesh compared the presence of women to “Quality seeds results in quality fruits” – in other words, sound political leadership can bring positive changes. Thus by having a critical mass of women, significant changes in the political culture of the local governments can be expected. A women councillor from Bangladesh asserted that women always work with honesty and integrity and avoid conflicts. Political violence will reduce and the political environment will improve with women working in large numbers as pressure groups within the parties. One vice chair in Bangladesh noted “My family environment nurtured political conscience, ideology, ethics and honesty with a deep sense of political responsibility.”

Source: Interviews

Transformative politics is also about observing values of distinction in work, integrity and accountability, respecting both genders and creating responsive citizenry. An inter-country survey showed that women in local government make an impact and practice transformative leadership as they bring in a different style and approach the job differently. It revealed that local government women make changes in the way local politics works with resultant impact on the political culture. A grassroots perspective helps in making local government politicians more people-oriented and bridges the gap between marginalised groups and elected representatives. Local government women also try to work on consensus building on development issues, with an objective to work out details for achievement of activities rather than to politicise the issues. They are much more democratic in their decision-making and encourage discussion with their colleagues and are also more tolerant and avoid confrontational politics. They are more persuasive, committed and feel obligated to take positions on behalf of the community. Local council processes have changed because of different styles of women. There appears to be a change in their language of interaction, making the discussions more friendly than acrimonious. Given the different operating styles of women, anecdotal proof suggests that male councillors are observing and learning.

At the same time, with low numbers in decision-making bodies, women have to settle with the style of operation that men are comfortable with and if they address matters as men, they are scorned at and deemed arrogant. Thus for an appreciable impact on the political style, a critical mass of women with staying power in politics is a prerequisite.

4.4.2. Representation and cross-cultural Impact

As a former Minister from India put it “The fact that one-third of those present in the local bodies is women and in many Indian states it has already reached half, must inevitably alter gender relationships. Of course, this will be more in some and less in other places and cannot possibly leave the earlier situation totally unchanged. More importantly the mere presence of women in these bodies will alter the relationship that women have with the communities at large and their families in particular.” This is corroborated by research, which shows that husbands of locally elected women in India are sharing the household work and seeking their advice. The increased number of women in local government has had a positive impact on the improvement of women’s status in society with people gaining a better understanding of their living and working conditions.

With women in greater numbers in local governments or at the national level, their agency is strengthened to question the existing state of affairs, institutions and social customs and to protest against repression and issues such as control over natural resources. Some elected women feel that they have been able to make more women politically conscious and dynamic in understanding their political rights and aptitudes.

The situation would vary as per the operating environment of the local councils based on the country context, which needs to be analysed before drawing broad conclusions. For instance, while reservations in India have facilitated participation, social and institutional exclusions are often roadblocks that have to be negotiated. As recounted by a former union minister in India, many who vote for women do so because they are confident that the man will run the show; the elected woman is merely playing a token role and that the system accepts this. He pointed out however that “the role of male relatives is not necessarily about diminishing empowerment... I was in a gram sabha meeting in Rajasthan where this lady of 60 was very competently answering the questions I asked her. But the next few replies were given by a man who I later realised was her husband. So I reprimanded the lady, and she said, ‘we have been married for 42 years –we have built a home and family and now that I have a new responsibility – what is your objection to him helping me?’ One has to think— did she stand because he asked her to; is he merely substituting her or is he doing what she wishes?”

It is important that both men and women recognise the positive implications of acting together to achieve gender equality. Men, in some situations have rallied for policy reforms for women because of a better understanding of gender responsive reforms and development. Therefore there has to be a growing realisation that both men and women stand to gain from collective and complementary participation. The concept of power sharing requires to be understood by both and relooked at. The PIF secretariat noted that there has to be a drive for partnerships not just restricted to women’s movements but also networking with men’s agencies including male parliamentarians.

4.4.3. Women’s agency, development outcomes and policy options

“...when you undermine poverty, it has a huge differential impact on women and men. It’s women who still have to provide the food, get the water, get the firewood, try to hold the family together. Therefore, we need more women at the table.”

*Mary Robinson,
former President of Ireland, and
former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Unless all genders are socially and politically in positions of influence to inform legislations, policies, programmes and institutions, only the interests of those who are more powerful will be served. Women’s representatives should be active in political platforms to represent their views and influence gender equality reforms. In order to exercise genuine power and achieve actual participation, individuals need to combine into interest groups for advocacy and campaigning, while simultaneously ensuring that the groups are not coalitions of traditional power holders. It is

only as collectives that women can enhance their agency and have the bargaining power to influence the matrices of social powers for institutional reforms. When elected, women must have a strong voice to democratise the political sphere, represent issues, impact policies, increase accountability and ensure delivery of gender-equal services.

Transforming Policies

One critical dimension of women's agency in the political process is their inclusion and influence on policy development. Evidence shows that women and men differ in the way they make policy choices. Thus it is critical that women's agency help in shaping policies that support women's interest. It is also believed that on entering politics women should have the responsibility to work in a transformative way for better outcomes for both women and men. Examples across Asia Pacific disclose the impact of women's agency in different forms. Women in the Nepal Constituent Assembly come from varied backgrounds. The new generation of women entering politics includes women who have been a bonded labour or worked as household help and this is democratising the political space. They have been able to push for constitutional provisions on women's rights, policy on bonded labour and domestic violence laws. This, together with women's caucus of the Constituent Assembly cutting across political parties in both leadership and in agenda setting, is changing the Nepal polity. In Sri Lanka female parliamentarians from different political parties have cooperated on non-partisan issues but a Sri Lankan NGO expressed that unless there is a critical mass of women leaders, their voice will not be loud enough to influence reforms. In Pakistan, an NGO claimed that campaigns for promoting women's participation helped them in autonomously choosing candidates and with women's presence in the political spheres, they have managed to bring about legislative change. Most of the pro-women laws introduced between 2010-2012 have been tabled and moved by women representatives. Women's parliamentary caucus' in Australia and Timor Leste have also worked with civil society to advocate for pro-women laws with the government.

A force to reckon with

Surabaya Mayor, Tri Risma Harini, a former public servant, who won the election in 2010, is concentrating on making Surabaya (Indonesia's fast growing second city) a better city rather than indulging in politics. She wants to alleviate poverty so people can have a decent quality of life and make the city a safer city for all without any discrimination. She has not only cleaned up public spaces but made basic services such as education and health free. She is ensuring that her city is free of corruption and has an administration running with integrity. With the city moving in the right direction, she has been able to attract big investors in and around Surabaya.

Source: UK Financial Times, 2014

The IPU world-wide survey of 2008 presents that women and men have differences in their world-views and bring varied interests and perspectives because of the different background influences they bring to the table. Men who were surveyed corroborated this. The concerns expressed by women parliamentarians fall in the social, physical and development domains with greater impact

on the private sphere of the families. Overall the parliamentarians felt that a complementary partnership must be forged between men and women as well as among women parliamentarians.

Women's Perspectives in Service Delivery

Studies have shown that politically empowered women are more responsive to citizen needs and make a difference to living standards of people. Good examples in Cambodia and Bangladesh demonstrate that women local government leaders were not only better at decision-making and allocation of public goods but also more approachable to women in their communities. Women in India have been found to be more vocal in local processes when they have female local government leaders. An NGO in Philippines noted that with women mayors, more women participated as a sense of collective was felt and many issues emerged. When women are elected in the local governments, women citizens are better represented in village meetings and more involved in local processes. In Vietnam, an NGO evaluation showed that women have been able to contribute to poverty reduction, increased budget allocation to their locality, and provide transparent and good governance.

Actions speak louder than words

Pauline Waqaniboro served as a councillor with Labasa town council in Fiji. The only female councillor, she was also the deputy mayor. "In 2005, my friends suggested that I run for the local council because I had successfully helped a lot of people. They said, 'we need a leader like you.' I contested a seat that was traditionally regarded as an Asian Party seat. My Fijian community did not support me and two of my colleagues ran against me. I just kept quiet and stuck to my goals, motivations and morals and in the end of the day I was voted in. I facilitated the Clean-up Campaign, the first of its kind to involve civil society in council initiatives. It is now being followed in other municipalities as a positive way to encourage civic engagement and pride, with the added benefit of reducing costs. I have also been instrumental in securing resources for community projects including new computers, books for the municipal library and funding for school maintenance, infrastructure and convenience facilities. Once elected, you have to think as well as act in a bigger way because once you are voted in you are there for those who voted for you and also those who did not. You are there for everybody, regardless of race, colour, creed and gender."

Source: CLGF Pacific women's leadership stories

The case of India at the local government level is interesting as the effectiveness of women leadership in panchayats (local governments) was clearly noticed in almost all states after completion of first phase of the panchayat (1995-2000). In fact, after the first local government elections, many claimed that reservations for women would lead to the creation of proxies of vested interest groups. But studies conducted in several Indian states have shown that the reservation policy at the local government level has improved substantive representation of women as financing for women prioritised goods increase in areas where leadership positions in the local government were reserved for women. These goods included drinking water infrastructure, sanitation, education and health as well as issues of alcohol abuse and domestic violence problems in villages. An all India survey of women in local governments indicated that while the elected women representatives

focused on issues with regard to health and sanitation, potable drinking water, better education, proper performance of the midday meal programme, as well as targeting of subsidised loans to disadvantaged groups, the elected male representatives were preoccupied with construction of roads and buildings and cleaning tanks. Thus elected local government women in India are being perceived to be different from men. Women leaders are addressing proximity challenges of women by locating a water source, health centre or a crèche at a convenient position. Some other Indian studies present that female leaders tend to mature during their second term and enlarge the nature of their investments for both men and women. There is also evidence that women make cost-effective public service delivery, which improves with experience as well as control over corruption. Another state level study reveals that women after two years in their position feel as competent as their male counterparts in delivering their responsibilities. Also evident in India is that a younger generation of women is participating in the local governments. Comprehensive studies covering almost 15 states in India show that 40 per cent of ward members at an aggregate level belonged to the 21-25 years age group and about 33 per cent as chairs. The performance of these younger women representatives was better than those who were above 35. The above, reflects a paradigm shift that women are bringing into governance.

Outstanding woman leader

Radha Devi is the chair of a block-level local government in Uttarakhand, India. If an important aim of *panchayati raj* (local government) is to secure the involvement and support of the entire village community then Radha Devi has made this a reality. It is the measure of her support in the rural community that she has been elected continuously. During the first term she has been able to defeat a very influential man who spent huge sums on elections. She defeated another influential person in the second term too. She has also provided leadership to a team of emerging women leaders which resulted in more than five out of seven *panchayat* members being women in the two terms she served.

She has taken a keen interest in improving the implementation of several government programmes (ICDS, health and welfare programmes). Construction of toilets and drains was speeded up and her *panchayat* was awarded for sanitation. More elderly persons started getting pensions. Radha helped several needy families to get insurance benefits, so much so that Life Insurance Corporation declared it as a model village of well-insured people. She worked hard particularly for the vulnerable families and worked tirelessly to ensure that the benefits of government schemes reach the intended beneficiaries. When due to undue influence of some outsiders, a road sanctioned earlier was taken away from her *panchayat*, Radha Devi protested till the road was given back to the village. When some members of the village were threatened with displacement she struggled to protect their rights and ensured justice.

Source: Director, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, 2010

It is also true that many countries in the Asia Pacific region have women leadership at the very top as heads of state and government or in local governments; however, their performance and scores are not high in the advancement of the gender equality. For instance, in Indonesia, there is

a mixed picture of women's representation with increase in the percentage of women at the local level, yet west Java is afflicted with gender inequalities such as high rates of MMR and trafficking and passage of discriminatory regulations. Similarly in Bangladesh, women have one of the worst human development indicators. Hence, while many countries in the Asia Pacific region have seen movement for gender equality, there is a need for greater empirical research to establish causal relationships between women's political representation and their practical gender needs and strategic interests.

Fighting for women's rights

Salma Hamza, Urban Council Member, Sri Lanka was the first Muslim woman political representative from the remote and disadvantaged eastern part of the country. Not only did she face hostility from her community, her father, a priest was also ostracised. Even her brother, a politician chose to stand against her. She stood her ground because she was moved by the situation of women in the community and believed that they faced difficulties due to violent and natural disasters in her area.

Since men do not think about women; woman politicians have to be in decision-making positions to represent their issues. She understood that the political class has power, and as a representative she could raise her voice for women, and here she felt that quotas were important for increasing the numbers of women. She flagged provincial level issues to her party leaders and even though not allocated a budget (being in opposition), she provided ideas during the council discussions and brought up issues that will lead to development for women. She has brought up issues such as equal wages and inheritance rights and sought council decisions. Through her life, she is demonstrating how to be a role model for other women.

Source: Interview

Before any conclusions get drawn, one needs to look at a number of structural problems. Gender issues cannot be isolated from the political and institutional conditions that shape good governance. In some countries they have not even reached the critical mass or established the critical alliances that are required for making a policy, passage of a bill at the national level or social delivery at the local level. Another important variable that needs to be considered is that women in local bodies can be effective to the extent that local governments are empowered by their governments in terms of functions, finances, functionaries and freedom. One cannot consider the issue of women's empowerment in isolation from the larger empowerment question of the local bodies as a whole as women can function only within the generality of constraints placed on the local bodies. This is a barrier in India where effective devolution to local bodies has remained a challenge. Likewise, the Bangladesh local government system has also posed challenges for women where independence and autonomy of women ward commissioners in undertaking development initiatives is thwarted by certain norms. Further, the analysis of the Afghan Provincial Council representative of the law for the provincial council is that it is not effective as it allows very limited responsibilities and a new law should provide them with more roles especially in planning of development. Similarly, allocation of marginal and gendered portfolios to Chinese women in their village committees further reproduces their limited status within the local socio-political structures.

It is also critical that a transformative agenda is set in motion that will require the women in elected positions and the women electorate as well as the men to develop a political agenda that is transformative and respects, protects and fulfills development opportunities of a community as a whole comprising all its segments and stratification. Transformative equality needs to be seen in the context of patriarchal structures and societal hierarchical gender relations, which reduce women's agency and decision-making power. The political institutions are male defined and are the products of male political processes where institutional masculinity continues as an invisible characteristic. Women enter this male framework governing the local and national political institutions. Thus it is critical to address the patriarchal nature to change the institutional and social norms and improve the functioning and impact of women in the political system.

As we can gauge from this entire section, the formulation of women's interests is shaped by multiple social identities, observance of various ideological, political or religious rules, party loyalties and political career paths and socio-cultural impediments. Equally relevant and important are the institutional links with strong women's' movements or international organisations who work to create the necessary operative environment to influence gender equality agendas at different levels of government.

5. Institutional facilitators for women's representation and participation

5.1. Role of civil society in advancing women's political participation

Reforms in general require broad-based coalitions, and civil society groups have been extremely significant partners of this coalition. There is widespread concurrence that civil society is instrumental in reforming the political climate towards equal inclusion of women and men in political decision-making and enlarging the space for women to take their rightful share in the public space. In particular, the role of women's movements in increasing women's political representation cannot be over emphasised. Civil society plays myriad roles ranging from advocacy, lobbying for institutional measures, helping society become more inclusive and preparing women to enter the political sphere, stay there and making a real difference by overcoming challenges. In this process, they are an important actor that can help in identifying women's political empowerment issues and challenges, shaping public opinion on the need to focus on them as well as gender sensitisation of men in community and in politics. There are several organisations with different mandates, playing multiple roles and operating at various levels towards political participation for women and some are illustrated below.

Advocacy and Lobbying

International and national civil society organisations are critical proponents in exerting pressure for policy reforms to enable entry of women in the political sphere at the national and local levels and provide support for integrating a gender perspective in policy-making.

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (**International IDEA**) aims to support sustainable democracy globally. It invests into capacity development to develop stronger and legitimate democratic institutions. It mainstreams gender into its areas of cooperation including political participation. In particular, the International IDEA has an Asia Pacific programme that aims to support constitution building, citizen's engagement in democracy, electoral capacity building in collaboration with national stakeholders in countries like Nepal, Philippines, Timor Leste and Fiji as well as in partnership with regional forums of ASEAN, PIF and Non-Aligned Movement Centre for South-South Technical Cooperation (NAM CSSTC). Given their work in this region, UNDP's institutional relationship with them can help in fostering women's participation in these on-going democratic processes. Also in capitalising complementary partnerships in these countries as well as in other UNDP supported countries in the Asia Pacific. The work on South-South cooperation can be strengthened in collaboration with International IDEA and its partnership with NAM CSSTC to foster cross-regional expertise sharing.

Further, the **Commonwealth Local Government Forum** (CLGF) as an associated organisation officially recognised by Commonwealth Heads of Government, has a wide network of local

government associations and other related government actors. The Commonwealth Principles on Good Practice for Local Democracy and Good Governance (Aberdeen Agenda), guide much of advocacy work of CLGF and its members, which have been endorsed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government and included in the Commonwealth Charter. It has been playing an important role in global advocacy at the highest level to put local government in villages, towns and cities at the heart of development. This theme was captured in the Kampala Declaration of May 2013 that emerged through a process of close collaboration with their Commonwealth country partners and UNDP. The Declaration additionally urged national governments and development partners to integrate developmental local government into the post-2015 DA. It also suggested that 2014 be the year for developmental local government including commitment to women's participation. Given their participation in the global task force on the post-2015 DA, CLGF's advocacy on integrating local government targets across all of the SDGs and making governance more inclusive must be leveraged to strengthen voices in global advocacy. Additionally, the 2013 MoU between CLGF and UNDP provides a good opportunity to foster regional level work on women in local governance with CLGF in the Asia Pacific countries.

Similarly, the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) as a worldwide network of local and regional governments (mayors, councillors, presidents of regional authorities and local governments associations from around the world with 24 local government associations in the Asia Pacific) represents their interests on the global stage. UCLG has focused on enhancing the influencing role of local government in global governance as well as its impact on citizens including promotion of women in local decision-making. **UCLG ASPAC** with their first female Secretary General at the hub of affairs in the Asia Pacific region wants to advance the work on women in local governments. In its Executive Bureau and Council Meetings held in Colombo in November 2013, UCLG ASPAC has decided to include at least one representative of lady mayor or councillor in the structure of the Presidency of UCLG ASPAC in order to support gender empowerment and bring more elected women in the organization. As part of their initiatives, they are creating a working group on women in local governance as well as aiming to ensure increasing the representation of women mayors and councillors from the Asia Pacific at the UCLG world council meetings. The TOR and the composition of the UCLG ASPAC working group is still being worked out and will include a cross-section of people (mayors, councillors, academics, experts and international development agencies). Through the working group on women in local government, they hope to influence global campaigns around their strategic priorities outlined for 2010-2016 and beyond.

The UCLG's Standing Committee on Gender Equality (headed by the Vice Mayor of Paris) discussions and the global conference of elected women in 2013 led to the Paris Agenda for equality of women and men in local life with important agreements. One of these focused on equal representation of women in local decision-making in the SDGs of the post-2015 DA as well as working with political parties and governments to achieve this parity and help local governments establish Standing Equality Committees. It further underlined the need for equality in public policy making and service provision through participation of local governments and for local governments to work with different organisations towards elimination of gender-based violence. Given their participation in the Global Task Force of local and regional governments for post-2015 DA and Habitat III, the advocacy for recognising the locus of local governments as political actors playing a critical role in economic, social, political justice, advancing the agenda of tolerance and peace, is gaining ground. Here the importance of women in local and regional governments should be a central piece to achieve the SDGs in the post-2015 DA. Thus there are many areas of cooperation including on UCLG's virtual global observatory on decentralisation and local democracy (GOLD) for knowledge development and Asia Pacific regional peer learning in the area of women in local governments.

At a regional level, the **Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)** is a large network of feminist organisations and women working in the Asia Pacific region and has been actively participating in the open working groups on the post-2015 DA. They have advocated for women's decision-making roles at different levels. APWLD has partnered intensively with various institutions such as ASEAN Commission on the Protection of Women and Children (ACWC), parliamentary caucuses and UNESCAP. Their close collaboration with UNESCAP as a co-organiser of the CSO meeting in 2013 was to ensure that the civil society voice is integrated in the inter-governmental processes. They see this as a platform for advocating for qualitative indicators on women in decision-making among other issues. At the national level, they have been advocating with different actors.

Critical role of Nepal NGOs

Nepal is hailed as a success and the **NGO Federation of Nepal** (5000 NGOs) President talked about their experience on focusing on inclusive participation of women from different groups. They have engaged in intensive advocacy with political leaders and women's wings of parties with memorandums and the bill on 33 per cent reservation of women in Parliament was passed for inclusion in the interim constitution. The CSOs demand for the PR system to ensure that women and marginalised groups are represented was one of the big movements. The Federation is also lobbying with political parties for at least 33 per cent reservation to be included in the constitution, which will be drafted. They have collaborated with the media to write extensively about the importance of women's representation in parliament. They worked with political parties to influence their gender equality agendas in their manifestoes, by laws as well as development of gender-friendly governance mechanisms. They have also focused on women leaders in the past three elections through leadership development of women parliamentarians with sharing of experiences of good practices from other regions. They have supported women parliamentarians in drafting of important legislations such as the Domestic Violence Bill.

Source: Interview with Sharmila Karki, Executive Director of NGO Federation of Nepal

At the national level, civil society groups have been lobbying for reforms. In South Asia at the local level, for example in Sri Lanka, NGOs have supported women's participation in political parties. There are groups such as the **International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES)**, a leading research centre that has been lobbying with political parties to increase the nomination of women. An NGO in Bangladesh shared their efforts to improve women's representation at both the national and local levels. They have lobbied with the Election Commission and other stakeholders to push for direct elections instead of nominations in reserved seats and for a minimum of a one-third female candidates in the party list for the National Parliament. They used advocacy tools such as public campaigns, round tables, petitions and position papers. While nominations have increased, they still have many challenges to overcome. The NGOs in Bangladesh have also been working with some of the parliamentarians to increase their sensitivity of the importance of their political positions and developing the capacities of women parliamentarians in tabling bills.

Capacity Development

Enhancing capacities has an intrinsic value and is fundamental to empowering women in the political process. Many organisations are playing this core role. An important organisation working in this field with whom UNDP already has a global partnership is the **National Democratic Institute (NDI)**. It is working worldwide to provide extensive support to democratic institutions and strengthens political and civic organisations, as well as ensures citizen participation with inclusion of marginalised groups and transparency and accountability in government. They have a good presence in South Asia and East Asia in about 13 countries working with the different political and civic organisations. NDI has worked with UNDP in different ways and this includes case studies of party activities in promoting women's political empowerment as well as toolkits that can be used by political parties for greater inclusion of women during different electoral processes. Given the importance of working with political parties for gender responsive governance both at national and sub-national levels, UNDP's partnership with NDI at a regional level can strengthen the processes of political empowerment of women. The experience of NDI can be leveraged for strengthening the work with locally elected councils.

Taking forward the partnership with **CLGF** —that is playing an important role in capacity development of local government bodies in about 16 commonwealth countries in the Asia Pacific— will foster partnerships with local government associations. CLGF work on issues of local governance is drawn from the needs of their members. Given their capacity, the focus of CLGF is primarily on strengthening local governments as a whole and women in local government as a sub-set. While women in local governments is not their main thrust, in the Asia Pacific, their work in this area is on development of networks of women councillors in few countries, sharing of experiences of different models of women in local governments in their regional consultations and documentation. Their presence is stronger in the Pacific on this issue given the low representation of women and they have been working with both local governments as well as regional entities like PIF secretariat to advance the gender equality agenda. They have been however able to advocate on this issue more generally in the context of developing local government with the heads of the government. Given their strengths with the Commonwealth Heads of Government, they are in a position to take up the issue of gender equality in local government more squarely through an agreement with the Board members of Commonwealth. The Commonwealth secretariat has catalysed adoption of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015 by the Commonwealth countries, which sets out a framework that includes gender, democracy, peace and conflict resolution with a focus on women's representation in parliament. CLGF has been working closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat through the Gender Equality Plan and can benefit local governments in advancing gender equality with greater synergy under this Action Plan.

APWLD is also engaged in capacity development, research and advocacy on women's human rights particularly using law as a tool for transformation of women's status. Their Women in Power programme facilitates transformative leadership of women political leaders through capacity development and solidarity building. They are assessing different pathways for women to enter the political arena such as political dynasties, party members, community processes and trade unions. In particular, their work on transformative leadership is focused on infusing a feminist agenda among potential leaders and elected parliamentarians. They have been working in the Pacific Islands to conduct trainings for elected women and political party representatives, working with church leaders and male politicians to lobby for institutional reforms such as quotas as well as organising round tables with different actors such as the PIF, the UN and other stakeholders to focus on women's political participation. In East Asia, they have worked with the South East Asia

Women's Caucus, ACWC and ASEAN Inter-governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and plan to organise trainings and round tables with them. They have organised some cross-country exchanges of female local government leaders within and between East Asia and South Asia countries to encourage learning. This is followed by collaborative documentation of women leaders exchange of experiences and programmes at the national level that emerge from this exchange.

Civil society especially women NGOs of the Pacific and the trade unions, have been the important drivers of gender equality and human rights in the Pacific. **Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Women (PACFAW)**, a network of the National Council of Women of 15 Pacific countries has been engaged since 2000 on women's empowerment through research including ways for greater involvement of Pacific women in parliament and local governments. They have conducted surveys on the country's status of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW and other issues relating to women in the Pacific.

PACFAW has been acting as a resource group for other women NGOs and developing training materials as well as undertaking advocacy on various issues including political empowerment of women. Apart from broader civic education on women's rights, they have prepared candidates in Tonga and the Cook Islands, supported campaign efforts in Solomon Islands, provided TSM information to political parties in Fiji and negotiated policy change as a member of PRNGO Alliance (Pacific Regional NGOs), which is an alliance of 13 regional NGO bodies. As a member of PRNGO, PACFAW has worked with the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat on gender issues supporting the Pacific Leadership Programme. It has also been associated with the monitoring and evaluation of the Commonwealth Plan of Action (CPoA) on Gender Equality. However, capacity and financial resource constraints come in the way of their efforts.

Source: Interview with Ms Susana Tuisawau, PACFAW

Another regional organisation, **CAPWIP** works on a vision of transformational politics where power is used to create change in an equitable manner to develop communities ensuring that the disadvantaged and marginalised are prioritised for development. Politics is seen as transformational when they work for economic, social and political equality within a humane society.

There are other NGOs, working at a regional level in all the three sub-regions on gender equality as well as specifically on political empowerment of women. Regional NGOs are also able to see the socio-political factors that drive reforms in the countries and tailor interventions accordingly. Thus regional level partnerships can strengthen the work of capacity development of women leaders.

At the local government level, Bangladeshi NGOs have organised workshops and trainings for the Union Parishad and local administration on the role of women representatives. They are working with the peasant class for landless poor women to be elected. They work with men in the community to discuss patriarchy and their success is shown in the fact that women are able to share their feelings of subordination with men as they are now more open. They are also enabling elected women in the union parishads (where seats are reserved) to get their due role as ward commissioners as their share of resources is less when compared to general wards that are mostly held by men. They also support them in understanding their roles and procedural rules; otherwise they are marginalised and prevented from heading the union parishads. At the local government level, though formal equality may exist, it is an uphill task for the women to work the system. They have been working with the elected women leaders to speak about the discriminations or violence faced by them.

Source: Interview with Ms. Khusi Kabir, Nijera Kori

At the national level, civil society groups have been developing capacities for leadership and facilitating efforts for changing socio-cultural norms. In South Asia at the local level, in Sri Lanka, NGOs are working at the grassroots level mobilising communities to vote for women representatives standing for village council elections (Pradeshiya Sabhas). In India, a large number of NGOs and women's movements have supported consciousness raising and women's leadership capacities to transform politics. The All India Institute for Local Self-government and the All India Council of Mayors have also conducted trainings. In Pakistan, NGOs like **Aurat Foundation**, **Shirkat Gah** have played important roles for empowering women in local governments. This resulted in quotas for women in some provinces. CSOs such as those in Nepal helped in compiling a list of qualified women to contest elections for political parties. They have supported women in public speaking, mobilising demonstration in support for quotas for women in local government as well as lobbying using the mass media to increase women's seats in the political parties. With the Election Commission in Nepal planning to work on women's representation at the local government level, it is critical that they are supported by civil society to improve women's preparedness to participate effectively in the political process.

NGOs in East Asia, have been playing their role to support women's participation in the political process. In Cambodia, organisations like **COMFREL** and **Ammara Organisation** have conducted political trainings for women, working with political parties in enlisting qualified and potential women candidates. In Philippines, NGOs such as **PdY Asia** have worked on women's leadership development, which has led to women contesting and winning elections on their own. They have also worked on training of elected women in local planning and budgeting ensuring participation of women from the community in planning, which has influenced the integration of women's priorities and allocation of budgets for the same. Their focus on transformative leadership has helped to make the planning process more consultative.

CEPEW, an NGO in Vietnam, is working on women's political participation at the local level. Before the elections, they worked with Communist party leaders, Fatherland Front at local levels on the issue of women's right to politics and the benefit of women's participation in decision-making for community development. Working with male and female voters, they raise awareness on women candidate's work, support female candidates during electioneering for presentation of action plan to voters. Once the women are elected, the NGO would assist them to improve their negotiation skills for participation in people's councils to be able to work with party leaders. In one commune, the NGO support led to increase in the number of elected women from 9 to 32% by primarily working on the gendered mind-set of the community leaders and the Fatherland Front. With limited resources, the NGO is not able to undertake advocacy more widely to address the issue of ensuring qualified women on the party list.

Source: Interview Ms. Ngo Thi Thu, CEPEW

Gender and Development Research Institute (GDRI), established in 1990 in Thailand as a research arm of the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women was mandated to strengthen the role of women in decision-making. It has served as a catalyst and a mediator between the political parties and qualified women, aiming to encourage capable women to contest in the elections at the national as well as at provincial and local levels. They have worked on creating a political pipeline of selected qualified women to enter the political process. Campaigns have been launched to persuade the electorate to vote for women candidates as well as on policies on women with political parties that would eventually pave the way for the inclusion of women's concerns in government policies. They were a significant force behind the move to guarantee women's rights in the constitution. They played a major role in enhancing leadership skills for women, stimulating political interest among them. The women then ran for the TAO election and many won. At the regional level, GDRI is the focal point of the Asia Pacific Women in Politics resource network (APWIP) for East Asia, a forum for experience sharing.

There are other kinds of agencies also involved in capacity development. In Philippines, local government women have set up their own networks such as the provincial women's commission and the women municipal mayor's league. Similarly China has been working on expanding the capacity of the women cadres at the provincial and local government levels with some provinces keeping numerical targets to increase women in people's congresses. China Association of Mayors has a branch of women mayors supporting their capacities. All China Women's Federation's branches have been making efforts in promoting a dialogue on gender equality to address existing stereotypes, lobbying for quotas in village committees and conducting focussed training for women to take part in village governance. Vietnam's Women's Union and National Committee for the Advancement of women has been preparing women to enter local governments as well as preparing communities to vote for them.

In the Pacific, women's movements, NGO activism within the sub-region may be comparatively lower but the trend is improving with a number of national organisations such as **Fiji Women's Rights Movement**, **Bougainville Women's Federation**. A coalition in Vanuatu of women candidates and former MPs is mentoring and supporting women. In one Pacific Island country, one leader expressed that as a leader she could have been more effective within the political institution with

the support of a lobby and the coalition of women's movements from outside which was not mobilised enough within her country. Civil society has helped to ensure that women's access to public spaces is not limited. For instance in Vanuatu, an NGO prevented the passage of a discriminatory code on constitutional grounds, which would have sanctioned women on their dress code and thus controlled their mobility.

In addition to CSOs, it is also important to engage with regional inter-governmental institutions for leveraging their advantages.

5.2 Regional institutions influence on women's representation

Inter-country collaboration is critical for improving national development results with cognisance of the experience across Asia Pacific and within the sub-regions set in different contexts of regimes, governance measures and reform tracks. The inter-country forums are important venues for facilitating a GO-NGO dialogue and inter-governmental cooperation. Within each of the sub-regions, an increased momentum for dialogue and cooperation has been emerging on gender equality issues. The sub-regional inter-governmental mechanisms are playing diverse roles including advancing women's participation in the political sphere. This is evident in the work of PIF, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) with their member states.

Association of South East Asian Countries

The ASEAN was set up in 1967 and its Political Security Community aims to promote political development adhering to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as inscribed in the ASEAN Charter. It further provides the basis for cooperation between the ASEAN member states and development of a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society, regardless of gender, race, religion, language, or social and cultural background, are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN integration and community building. It also lays emphasis on promoting and supporting gender-mainstreaming, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality and mutual understanding.

Further the work of the ASEAN Committee of Women that reports to the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women has women's political participation as one of the areas for advancing gender equality in the sub-region. The ACWC which is a programmatic and issue based group, also plans to focus on women's participation in politics and decision making, governance and democracy through the promotion of TSMs for increasing women's participation in the decision-making level in public and private sectors; however this has not been prioritised. The issues such as capacity, resource, inter-group collaboration and consensus based decision-making process poses challenges in the effective functioning of the above ASEAN mechanisms.

Given the stated objectives of the various ASEAN community, committee and commissions towards gender equality, it may be worthwhile for the UN as a joint entity (UNESCAP, UN Women and UNDP) together with the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) and ACWC to engage and explore entry points for collaboration with the Political-Security Committee on the promotion of political empowerment of women at the national and local government levels towards the

post-2015 DA. This can help in increasing the visibility and the stake of the issue within this sub-region as well as provide greater strength to the sectoral committees.

ASEAN Women Parliamentarians

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly with 10 ASEAN member states and many other countries in the observer status has been in operation for a number of years and recognises equality between men and women and the role of women as political leaders. AIPA has a separate forum for women parliamentarians (WAIPA), which comprises of parliamentarians from lower house and senate, committees of Parliaments, government officials and local agencies. This forum has been meeting regularly to take up different issues and pass resolutions, which are to be implemented by the national machinery. Some of the resolutions have urged member countries and ASEAN country parliaments to take effective measures to enable all women to be involved in the political decision-making processes. In addition, to bring together women leaders and policy makers from neighbouring countries for exchange of experiences and expertise as well as improved coordination among women and men in politics in order to promote balanced gender equality. ASEAN Secretariat and AIPA are tentatively planning a consultation on gender equality concerns to come up with a gender equality framework for the region based on the various resolutions through the mobilisation of women parliamentarians. Apart from WAIPA representatives, this will have all other above-mentioned relevant committees and other stakeholders and one of the areas of focus may be gender balance in power and decision-making positions. Thus there are several opportunities for collaboration.

Pacific Island Forum

The PIF was created in 1971 to strengthen regional cooperation and integration with a Pacific plan (2005) stating gender equality as an objective along with a separate gender policy for the advancement of women in the Pacific. In the area of women's political empowerment, the PIF (gender unit) has been facilitating a number of activities. This included the development of the Small Island States Action Plan (SISAP) on women's political participation outlining activities such as mock parliaments for potential and elected parliament representatives, civic education and advocacy. The PIF has been instrumental in pushing for some of the reforms such as the reservation of seats in Samoa which was commended in the Foreign and Economic Minister's meeting, and other countries were encouraged to make similar provisions. The fact that interest is generated is evidenced by a request from Tonga's Prime Minister's office on TSMs. With Vanuatu and Tuvalu also having introduced temporary special quotas for women and Papua New Guinea and Federated States of Micronesia having legislation on similar quotas pending, the shift in political will is evident. This is also substantiated by the Forum Economic Ministers meeting in 2013, which voiced support for the introduction of such temporary special measures. In 2013, the PIF adopted a Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGE), which generated a new momentum in the sub-region and underscored the required commitment of the Forum Leaders towards addressing a number of gender issues. These included accelerating women's full and equal participation in governance reform at all levels and leadership in decision-making through various measures including TSMs.

Additionally the PLGE Declaration called for a monitoring and reporting framework, which includes three indicators for measuring progress on women in decision-making. The monitoring framework is providing an impetus to the countries to report on progress in the ministerial meetings as more countries use the forum to share their achievements. To address the disaggregated data gaps, the PIF secretariat is working with the Secretariat of Pacific Community (SPC). SPC has a gender

statistics programme where they are looking at improving gender-disaggregated data in different countries through working with national statistical offices. The current set of indicators for women in decision-making under the gender statistics programme looks at women's representation at Parliament and government levels. However the monitoring framework under the PLGE Declaration does have an indicator at the local government level. The PIF secretariat also wanted a group to come together to work on the women in decision-making dimension of the PLGE declaration to review indicators and support key custodians of data and stakeholders. Therefore the monitoring and reporting framework provides a space for greater advocacy, which could be expanded qualitatively.

Overall, the PIF secretariat faces a number of challenges in terms of resource capacity, monitoring of national level activities and coordination. There are a number of actors at the national as well as at the regional level working in the area of women's political participation and coordination has emerged as a major challenge. It is important to bring some key players working in the area of women's political participation together on one plane. With a high level political group behind the PLGE declaration, the PIF secretariat is in the best position to coordinate, as they have to report back to the Pacific country leaders on how the coordination is moving in these areas.

South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation

The South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), set up in 1985 comprises of eight member countries committed to economic, social and cultural cooperation. As it is a relatively new organisation, it is still in the early stages of cooperation. Given the stark gender disparities in South Asia, development dialogue on gender equality is being taken forward by the SAARC secretariat in collaboration with a number of organisations in the sub-region. SAARC is driven by its Social Charter and has several internal mechanisms such as the SAARC Ministerial Meeting on Women, the SAARC Technical Committee on Women and Children and has passed a number of resolutions that refer to gender issues. Their efforts include partnership with UN Women to help member states in development of a SAARC gender info base (SGIB). SGIB is a South Asian repository of qualitative and quantitative data and information on gender related issues and women's empowerment covering non-conventional parameters on feminisation of poverty, health issues (including HIV/AIDS), and violence against women (especially trafficking). They have also traditionally partnered with UNESCAP on a number of issues. They have worked with SAARC Human Resource Development Centre in trainings on gender equality in the region. Given trafficking is a cross-border issue, they have adopted a convention on trafficking.

Based on the 17th SAARC summit (Maldives, 2011), a gender policy advocacy group is being formed with a composition from government, NGOs, think tanks, the private sector, UN Women and UNESCAP. This group will look at broader gender issues across the SAARC region and recommend policy directions to the government and other SAARC related mechanisms. The SAARC secretariat has made preparations in terms of research, available good practices on some of the gender issues and would be able to take them forward as these issues come up for consideration by the member states. SAARC as a regional mechanism has not historically looked at women's political participation as it is viewed as a country rather than a regional issue. Since the gender policy advocacy group is a new group, there is a good opportunity to work with a number of UN agencies to support SAARC member countries on sharing good practices in empowering women in local governments and national parliaments. The SAARC secretariat can showcase their good practices to other sub-regional mechanisms.

5.3 Transnational actors and efforts

This looks at the focus of different UN agencies (such as UNDP, UNESCAP and UN Women) working on women's political participation at the regional level in the Asia Pacific. This section determines how the relevant recommendations emerging from these regional processes for national level representation are also applicable for women's participation at the local government levels.

UNESCAP and post-2015 Development Agenda and Gender Statistics

ESCAP is the regional development arm of the UN and serves as the main economic and social development centre for the UN in Asia and the Pacific. ESCAP provides the strategic link between global and country-level programmes and issues and supports governments of the region in consolidating regional positions. It has been advancing gender equality in the region through inter-governmental dialogue and development efforts. It functions as a moderator of regional follow-ups of international frameworks and goals such as CEDAW, BPfA and the MDGs. The current gender equality priorities of UNESCAP have been on women's economic empowerment and violence against women. The various regional strategies in terms of inter-governmental meetings have not only taken stock of gender concerns and progress in the region, but served as a platform for peer learning, south-south exchange of experiences. Long-term engagement emerging from these exchanges has led to tangible results in some of the member countries. ESCAP also sees the importance of engaging consistently with the various sub-regional mechanisms such as ASEAN, SAARC and PIF to strengthen capacity and sustained political will among the member states on women's political participation. It has been playing a key role in the post-2015 DA. The 2013 Bangkok Declaration emphasised that the post-2015 DA should be "holistic, inclusive, equitable, people-centred and universal", and should aim to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development. The Declaration also recommended that the Agenda should "address all forms of inequalities and the factors underpinning them". Within this framework, gender inequalities should be looked at from the perspective of both equality of opportunities and equality of outcomes. Thus, this momentum should be used to address political inequality by ensuring that women's participation and leadership at both national and local levels of decision-making is integrated into the SDGs.

Data challenge and data solution

Crucial to the implementation of the SDGs is a monitoring framework. The opportunity provided by the focus on data led evidence is at the centre of debates on the post-2015 DA. Pacific leaders also confirmed in the Pacific Plan to focus on development of statistical capacity building in their sub-region to ensure informed policy making towards post-2015 DA. Empirical and analytical challenge remains in this region and requires the collaborative effort of multi-lateral regional bodies as well as national agencies. There are very few governments in the region who publish local government data and the gender make up is generally not collated. It also needs to be taken into account that data does not remain unaffected by politics. Political choices govern the availability of data as it reveals situations in countries and thus their unavailability makes independent verification difficult. With such obscurity in data, gender inequities are hard to measure especially the active, free and meaningful participation of women in political processes. Evidence on women's political empowerment necessitates not only reliable generation of data but also thorough interpretation based on which approximation can be done. A general lack of official disaggregated data on local

government reflects the low level of political will and commitment attached. While this study revealed that it was difficult to get data from many countries in each of the sub-regions, the data was least available in the Pacific revealing both a lack of availability of disaggregated data as well as its systematic collection.

At the same time, there are opportunities to capitalise development of gender statistics for local governments as outlined below. UNESCAP through its inter-governmental process is supporting statistical capacity development to provide disaggregated data by sex, ethnicity, age, location and will focus on methodological development for data collection and processing as well as using the gender data for making informed policy choices. They are developing a framework with a regional core set of gender indicators in Asia and the Pacific. Of the 12 proposed areas of concern, one focuses on participation in public life and decision-making and there is currently only one indicator, which looks at “proportion of candidates standing for election to local government bodies who are women”. It may be worthwhile to look at options and strategies for supporting the governments in the region to develop a gender-disaggregated local government data system. There is a scope for not only enhancing the set of indicators for local government but also strengthening the capacity of the organisations in building systems of data collection, analysis and its use for informing policies by working with the national statistical organisations, government ministries of local government, national women’s machineries and planning commissions and departments. In this process, it is important to collaborate with the PIF secretariat and SPC under their gender statistics programme as well as with CLGF who plans to work with local governments as data collectors, data managers and as data users and ensure that data is disaggregated by gender, geography, income, disability and other categories.

UN Women Engaging in the Asia and the Pacific

Recognising the complex challenges of a diverse region, UN Women focuses on priority areas that are fundamental to women’s equality in this region. While they focus on a number of areas, their main priorities are violence against women and women’s economic empowerment where policy reform, capacity development and public awareness are major strategies. They concentrate on working at the national level where the potential for impact is the maximum. On women’s political participation, although their current portfolio is still being developed, they have had a number of past engagements in this area in Aceh, Timor Leste, Cambodia, as well as in South Asia where they have worked at capacity development of women at both national and local government levels. Their attention has been on informing national electoral regulations, voter education, training for women candidates, leadership skills for women members of political parties on gender-based violence for instance, among others. They see the continued importance of supporting capacity development of women candidates, supporting TSMs, as well as gathering evidence and options of working beyond TSMs to encourage women’s political participation. It also underlines collaborating with political parties to raise women cadres at the local levels, besides working with religious groups and social hierarchies at the local level.

UNDP’s Support for Strengthening Women’s Political Participation in Asia Pacific

The UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Centre implements the UNDP Regional Programme for Asia and the Pacific with the overarching goal of promoting attainment of the MDGs. Provider of technical support, it acts as a knowledge promoter and manager through producing regional public goods, addressing issues of regional (cross-border and trans-boundary) dimensions, and

addressing issues common to multiple countries in the region. Among its wide areas of support, gender equality and women's political participation is one critical theme. To support this, the evaluation of the democratic governance area of the Asia-Pacific Regional Programme, conducted in 2012, recognized that UNDP's ability to engage with governments could influence the enabling environment for women's political empowerment.

Throughout 2010-2012, UNDP Asia Pacific Regional Centre initiated a series of dialogues aimed at raising awareness and building momentum for action to increase women's political representation and leadership. The PIF secretariat with UNDP support in 2010 facilitated the national stakeholders in the development of SISAP on women's participation in decision-making. This plan recognising the low percentage of women's representation in Parliaments and the local governments despite setting a target of 30 per cent in the 1994 Pacific Platform for Action, drew up the plan for five years until 2015. The broader plan laid out five main areas of focus such as public support, institutional reforms including electoral systems and TSMs, legislative reforms through amendment of local governance acts, constitutional amendments and political party reforms, capacity development of women candidates and elected MPs for raising gender equality issues in the parliament. Additionally, national consultations helped develop national level plans for seven Pacific states including Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, RMI, Tuvalu and Palau. While as mentioned earlier, some actions under this plan have been owned and taken forward by the national organisations, a concern of the Pacific Islands Forum secretariat has been about monitoring the progress of SISAP owing to lack of resources.

Pacific Island Mock Parliaments . . .

The work on mock parliaments under SISAP has seen movement in Palau, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Kiribati and Papua New Guinea with two more planned in Solomon Islands and Tonga in 2014. This led to increased confidence in women to stand for elections as well as getting elected as evidenced by the women in Papua New Guinea, RMI and, Kiribati who are now in parliament and debate gender issues. Other outcomes of mock parliaments have been seen in the establishment of a task force of women comprising of senators and other groups undertaking advocacy to get women in the Senate and the House of Representatives. These outcomes have generated an interest from the parliamentary counsel of other countries for mock parliament trainings and thus the interest is not limited to the national women's machinery alone. Interestingly, requests to conduct similar mock parliament type trainings have also come from the local government levels so as to enable women to take up positions within the local government levels.

Source: Interview with Ms. Seema Naidu, Pacific Island Forum Secretariat

Moving from Pacific to South Asia, UNDP Bangladesh in collaboration with the UNDP Asia Pacific Regional Centre organised a regional conference in October 2011 to take stock of the numbers and quality of women's political representation in the national parliaments in South Asian countries as most are still lagging behind in their international minimum target of 30 per cent. The Dhaka Declaration that emerged from this process urged the relevant stakeholders to reform electoral systems and institute affirmative actions (candidate quotas, reserved seats, campaign finances). It proposed that political parties follow democratic principles and put women in

decision-making seats, ensure engagement of the excluded and younger generation in politics, protect women from violence, provide conducive working environment within parliamentary structures, develop capacities, undertake civic education and collect and monitor data on elected women. The Declaration has much relevance for women in other sub-regions as well as at the local government levels. The issue of pluralism and inclusive decision-making is not only restricted to national parliaments but also holds good for the local governments. The Dhaka conclusions are extremely suitable for local governments especially for advocating with country governments (relevant ministries), election management bodies and political parties. Its relevance can also be extended to sub-regional mechanisms such as SAARC to advocate for quotas for women in local governments and organizing capacity development activities that equip women to run for positions in local government. The youth, both girls and boys in the villages, peri-urban areas and in cities should be nurtured to play their role in the political process in the local bodies which will develop social capital and generate a consciousness with implications for changes in social dynamics. A similar initiative South Asian Women's Parliamentarians Conference was organised in Dhaka in July 2012 with the support of The Asia Foundation, which debated issues affecting parliamentarians in the region. Synergy and linkages between such related activities can be forged to maximise impact and continued momentum for women's political participation.

More broadly, UNDP recommended a six-point institutional reform action plan⁵ to increase women's representation in the national parliaments of the Asia Pacific member states, which could also serve as a guideline for improving women's representation in local governments. The adapted recommendations of the six-point action plan for local government would require advocacy with states in the sub-regions either by encouraging states through the sub-regional inter-governmental platforms or on demand by the states themselves. These can be integrated into their national action plans for local governments. Several routes for institutional measures can be taken. Encouraging states to undertake constitutional amendments to introduce quotas through experience sharing from other country models such as that of India or recent reservation in Vanuatu can support reforms in different sub-regions. It is important to consider the geo-political situations in the different sub-regions where states are still waiting to gain political stability of their democratic regimes. Nevertheless the constitutional reform process in Nepal for instance can help in incorporating affirmative actions of quotas for women at the local level. Apart from sharing experiences, one can strategise with Election Management Bodies to tailor electoral systems and provide necessary technical support in developing appropriate PR systems that will help women gain more access at the local levels. Women working as grassroots party workers could be actively supported by political parties and given priority for seats in the provincial and other intermediary levels of local governments. This would require intensive work with political parties in developing favourable party-selection rules and nomination procedures for gender equality in local governments. Through local government associations, efforts need to be strengthened to create a pool of women candidates. Civil society in some states like the Pilipina or the Gabriela Party in Philippines or NGOs in Nepal have created such women candidate pools as well as lobbied for them with political parties. Women's role in legislative development within the national parliament could create more avenues for women in the local governments for instance by allocation of greater resources for women's priorities which local government representatives can access. Extensive networking and capacity development of local government associations for potential and elected women candidates as well as building public opinion can further strengthen women's participation in local governments.

5 Gender Equality in Elected Office in Asia Pacific: Six Actions to Expand Women's Empowerment, UNDP 2012

Women's participation and leadership is critical to addressing many challenges that plague this region. One such critical issue is that of peace-building. To advance the UNSCR 1325, in 2010 UNDP Asia Pacific Regional Centre, launched the N-Peace initiative to promote women's leadership for conflict prevention, resolution and peace building in six countries in this region through dialogue, training as peace advocates and recognition of peace champions. A post conflict stage in most states emerging from conflict is a long drawn period. During this phase, peace negotiation, peace building and conflict prevention continue to be critical elements of a state building process. Political negotiation needs to continue at the national as well as at the sub-national levels. Women are not only survivors of various forms of atrocities of the conflict but can also help breakdown the cliques of power of men that create factions which can only breed future conflict. Women have played different roles in conflicts in Nepal, Indonesia (Aceh) and Sri Lanka. The participation of women in the Maoist movement of Nepal was one of the factors that helped create equity in power sharing in their Parliament. Countries like Timor Leste, Afghanistan or Fiji as they emerge from the conflict and strengthen the state, women's participation in local governments as well as in the national parliament can help broker peace at a much faster pace and build sustainable communities. Women will bring their experience, new perspectives and interests into the decision-making process and should be active participants in the social and political processes and institutions that may follow. Civil society and the political parties could encourage women who have been part of the struggle as combatants or as survivors to be potential candidates for the different levels of government. These elected women could be further supported by skill development in advancing negotiations for peace. Further given the legitimacy and perhaps better reach of the elected representatives within the government, active engagement with them can help advance the peace process.

The various initiatives and partnerships reveal a major scope for strengthening women's leadership potential and advancing the political empowerment agenda. However, there is a need for institutional continuity of these efforts with the partners in order to take forward the recommendations through sustained and systematic engagement and institutionalisation and other efforts at regional and national levels.

6. Moving from political to practical: Exploring the way forward

“Countries will need to start thinking of human capital very differently – including how they integrate women into leadership roles. This shift in mindset and practice is not a goalpost for the future, it is an imperative today,”

*Klaus Schwab, WEF founder and executive chair
on the release of the 2013 annual gender equality-focused report
of the World Economic Forum.*

The **trends and analyses** show that Asia Pacific has a long way to go in ensuring women’s descriptive representation at both national and local government levels. Overall, elected women councillors in the Asia Pacific region stood at below 79 per cent to their male counterparts in local governments in 2013, which in fact has dropped by three per cent (from 24 to 21 per cent) since 2010. The general trend of a slight decrease in women’s representation across district and provincial councils in the same period, is a cause for concern. Leadership positions also show a similar drift with reduction in rural, urban and provincial councils but substantial increase in district councils. The sub-regional picture highlights a negative trend in local government representation of women in two of the three sub-regions of South Asia (2.3 per cent decrease) and the Pacific, which excludes Australia and New Zealand (9.6 per cent decrease) and increase by three per cent in East Asia since 2010. In comparison to the sub-national level, the proportion of women in parliament in the lower house in the whole of Asia Pacific (covering 34 countries including Australia and New Zealand) is about 14.5 per cent, which is up by 1 per cent in the last three years. However, the relationship between women’s representation and gender equality indices, a country’s economic development, adult literacy and labour force participation, is not firmly established across most countries in the three sub-regions; though there appears to be a positive correlation with some of the indices in many countries of East Asia.

An assessment of the political economy, institutional and socio-cultural factors reveal a deeper picture behind the emerging representation trends. The countries that have used different kinds of quotas, namely seat reservations, legislated party quotas or voluntary party quotas and PR systems have a higher representation of elected women at both local and national levels. However, it is also observed that political parties have immense control and power over women’s representation, allocation of leadership positions, campaign funding and overall participation in the political process. Powerful family connections seem inevitable for the majority of the women to make inroads into the political sphere.

As evidenced, cultural, social and religious stereotypes coupled with gender based violence disadvantage women from exercising their political rights in all three sub-regions of Asia Pacific. Public-private structural obstacles result in the absence of women in the political scene. Whether

it is South Asia, East Asia or Pacific Islands, patriarchal cultures are pervasive in every socio-cultural aspect of the communities and institutions, which govern the traditional gender roles. This dichotomy is inimical for the development of women's capabilities and prevents them from actively participating in the political arena. It is important to note that some of these factors need to be nuanced and contextualised to specific locations to tease out their positive and negative implications. The impact of colonial legacies, political systems, religious interpretations, social foundations, political instability, conflict as well as economic transformations is also evident in women's political representation and leadership in the three sub-regions.

Women's participation has however positively influenced the political ethos whereby women have helped to create a culture of value-based politics in improving democratic decision-making, transparency, tolerance and integrity at varying degrees in different countries. Similarly, social customs are evolving wherein women's relationship with both community and family are changing. Many examples across the three sub-regions depict that elected women from various backgrounds are contributing to the development of their society by meeting women's concerns, ensuring delivery of services as well as accumulating social benefits.

The conclusion that the study draws from trends and analyses is that gender equality does have an impact in shaping politics and governance at local and national levels towards achieving the development goals and the rights recognised at the international level. The study provides evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, that there is scope and space to focus on developing policy towards institutional reforms, capacity development and gender disaggregated statistics to enhance women's participation in political processes and positions particularly at the local government levels. This needs to be achieved through broad and extensive partnerships with varied types of organisations at multiple levels. It is important to underscore the fact that while reform is facilitated by space in the specific organisational, policy and governance context including differing social structures in the Asia Pacific countries, its effectiveness crucially depends on the level of broader and sustained engagements and consultations which must therefore be an important thrust in the way forward.

Institutional Reform Measures

Political experience, political contribution and political efficacy are particularly affected by women's significant participation that can be addressed through measures and positive duties of the state and facilitation of non-state actors. International recognition of the value addition of quotas in producing equality of opportunity as well as results has enabled 'fast-tracking' political representation of women. While it is important to address both social norms and electoral systems to increase women's representation, it is well established that changing the rules of the game will make it relatively easier for women to claim their rightful spaces more quickly.

Quotas have been effective in improving both descriptive and eventually substantive representation. This has led to a better appreciation and attitudinal shift towards women as legislators and as local leaders. Quotas help break the vicious cycle and create political opportunities for women in policy making, improving their efficiency and enabling policies to be more relevant to the needs of both women and men. It helps in negating stereotyping of women as incapable of possessing leadership capacities and eroding the more structural challenges that women face at the societal level. While quotas are politically polemical, institutional designs can help in alleviating some of the concerns. In some countries, not only is there no alternative to reservation for women but the tenure of these reservations ought to be long as well. At the same time, in other countries,

appropriate legislated candidate quotas can help in boosting the numbers of women. Institutional measure of quotas could also look at inclusion of women from excluded and marginalised groups in local councils to address inter-sectional discrimination. Political transitions have been apparent in the various sub-regions of the Asia Pacific and it is important that these key phases of change are used as opportunities for mainstreaming inclusive governance by pushing institutional measure of quotas for women.

Thus states that want to make incremental reforms need to be encouraged to take bolder actions that will enable the transformation of institutional inflexibilities, which in turn will help modify the social dynamics. In this endeavour, it is important to consider appropriate positioning of the subject to influence both public as well as political drives. Evidence shows that this requires effective political engagement in order to create space for dialogue that influences the institutional evolution to be ready for quotas. Such change also takes place due to robust networks as multiple groups such as women's movements, civil society, international agencies, international policy environment and regional inter-governmental forums play a role in this space to make quotas a reality. Towards this, it is important to also engage political parties and election management bodies and other relevant actors and bring them together at a regional level to learn from the positive experiences. Learning from reservation policies at the local level demonstrated in South Asian countries and legislated and voluntary party quotas in East Asia, inter-country advocacy could be undertaken. Further, advocacy with political groups through the regional inter-governmental forums on TSMs and meeting campaign costs for women could be important agendas. Civil society needs to work with their national machineries, think tanks, and government representatives in the sub-regional mechanisms so that political will at senior levels can be raised on these issues.

The UN may want to work with the sub-regional inter-governmental mechanisms such as the ASEAN Political Security Community and ACW, PIF and SAARC to encourage appropriate TSMs for the various national authorities. This can help in better acceptance as they learn through their own inter-country mechanisms and see a more organic process of transformation than one, which is externally driven.

The institutional measures should also look at the local devolution constraints within which the elected women have to operate as they can be effective to the extent they have powers, finances and autonomy.

Capacity Development for Leadership

No electoral system will yield effective results for substantive representation unless both elected women and men are trained, mentored and sensitised to gender responsive behaviour and participatory processes in order to adequately address community needs. For this to happen, leadership capabilities of women candidates and elected women in local governments must be enhanced through training and mentoring programmes. The process of such trainings should move beyond merely augmenting and refining skillsets and instead sharply focus on developing those leadership skills that enable a transformative approach so as to bring about equality in its fullest sense between men and women in order that they shape their lives and societies relevantly. Thus opting for training and networking opportunities among women district/provincial councillors, regional civil society groups working with women in local governments on new generation themes such as transformative leadership can empower women to focus on transforming the way politics works to develop economic, social and political equality. While this approach alone cannot be seen as a one-stop solution, it will generate ideas for civil society in the region to provide

capacity development support for transforming female and male councillors' leadership. Further the leadership development of local government women can also be supported using the mock parliament model conducted for elected women in the Pacific. Coaching and mentoring could focus on moving women to decision-making levels. Mentoring by experienced men to improve women decision maker's political skills could result in developing solidarity and respect. Enhanced capacities would help women negotiate better for a greater share in key party positions and could also lead to greater recognition by political parties. There is also a need to increase the strength of allies of male advocates within political parties, national and local governments and election management bodies in order to raise the level of political commitment towards gender equality reform and democratisation. Given that policy making process has implications for both national and sub-national levels, cross-party strategies, greater involvement of women's caucus and developing male allies can further support the transformative agenda and ultimately balanced development.

Alongside, states must proactively work towards changing institutions and societal norms. Social institutions need to look at a fundamental shift in mind-sets and attitudes. It would be essential to work with opinion leaders in society such as religious leaders, influential male community leaders, traditional leaders (e.g., chief systems in the Pacific Islands or in South Asia), youth and the media thereby bringing together both inhibitors and facilitators of women's political participation in order to move broader public opinion on women's leadership role. While working with state actors is imperative, engaging with non-state ones is essential for building movements and affecting societal customs. Civil society can further support the development of a regional network of male councillors who could work as allies of female councillors and help in face-to-face interactions between them from different countries.

In order to build synergies, it is important to strive for cross-organisational partnerships, rather than to engage with individual actors. Given the number of stakeholders, a sector wide approach (SWAp) could be adopted to work with regional entities both inter-governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as multi-bilateral agencies to maximise impact. For instance, to address the issue of women's capacity development (institutional, organisational and individual levels) for political participation, PIF, SPC, UNESCAP, UNDP, UN Women, other aid agencies along with Pacific civil society networks and other relevant actors could be brought on one platform with an overall governmental coordinating body. At the national level, the UN System wide UN Development Assistance Framework and UNDP Country Programmes can work with government counterparts and other stakeholders to take forward a SWAp on capacity development for women's political participation in order to strengthen the UN System wide focus in this area.

Statistical Strengthening for Informed Policymaking

Strengthening the initiatives suggested above can only come about if there is an accurate picture to work with. Here, there is a need for collection of gender-disaggregated data for analysis and such statistics will help in increasing the visibility of women. Data availability and access on women's political participation needs to be addressed through both regional and national level systems.

The regional initiative on disaggregated data on women in local governments will be valuable. This will help in understanding trends and undertaking cross-country comparisons and will also enable the determining of broader policy interventions. Here, there are opportunities to work with sub-regional inter-governmental mechanisms, international NGOs, sub-regional women's networks and regional UN agencies. The UN could support regional inter-governmental mechanisms and

their current initiatives (SAARC gender infobase, ASEAN PSC and ACW, PIF PLGE, SPC gender statistics) to strengthen regional benchmarks on women in local governments with timeframes. Monitoring frameworks, could set indicators with quantitative and qualitative dimensions and ensure milestones such as the necessary legislations, constitutional amendments required for institutional targets to take effect as well as changes in the socio-cultural environment. This may be linked to a gender-differentiated impact of varied policy outcomes and used for advocacy with the relevant policy and political institutions. The progress could be monitored at the heads of state meetings at regional inter-governmental forums.

UNDP with its effective regional as well as strong national presence could support these processes by working jointly with other UN agencies such as UN Women and particularly in close partnership with UNESCAP on their work on gender statistics capacity development. Similarly, UNDP could collaborate with CLGF in their data capacity development initiative with local governments. CLGF could take this up in their regional events with heads of state and UCLG aspac in their council meetings. These are important platforms to garner and pique political interest in this area.

Informed policy making is also hampered by the paucity of wide research on inter-country comparisons on women in local government in the Asia Pacific region. There are many dimensions that need to be studied for greater empirical evidence to deduce longer-term trends and impacts. This could include generating demonstrable proof on the impact of women's representation and leadership in local governments across Asia Pacific countries or evidence of inter-sectional discrimination and elite bias in local governments. Further, as stated by the Human Rights Council, evidence on impact of violence against women on their political participation is weak. The empirical research needs to account for women's participation amidst institutional and societal constraints. Such research is also important to establish women's demonstrated ability as leaders to overcome the statistical discrimination, which is often used as a frame to undermine their leadership. These studies could involve engagement with academic and research based institutions as well as civil society groups working on gender equality research in local government.

Regional Cooperation for Knowledge Development and Networking

It is important to take cognisance of the rich experience across Asia set in different contexts of regimes, governance measures and reform tracks. Regional experience sharing of successful Asian led initiatives by governments, multi-bilateral agencies, regional organisations or successful and feasible initiatives of other regions can help to improve development results. At the same time, given the dynamic development scenario and women's political participation challenges at the local level, leveraging and sharing knowledge and experience in this thematic area with partners becomes significant.

Given UNDP's regional cooperation experience, it could work towards improving cross-regional experience sharing of good practices on women's political participation through facilitating south-south tripartite agreements between governments in the region for experience sharing and twinning arrangements for increased institutional cooperation. This could be complemented with regional conferences on sharing of good practices and devising ways of integrating them in programmes and projects. In this effort, support could be given for channelling of comparative experience of other sub-regions or regions in women's political participation to the ACW, ACWC, SAARC, PIF and other regional or sub-regional networks jointly with UNESCAP and UN Women.

South-South cooperation would be an important tool to foster this further through triangular agreements. Here countries with good practice of institutional measures, transformation of socio-cultural practices with positive implications on descriptive and substantive representation of women could be partnered with. This could ensure sustained engagement in order to influence policy. For instance, the supportive electoral systems of Nepal or Indonesia's election management body; India's reservation policy and its developmental impact or the Vanuatu reservation policy might be beneficial to other countries. South-South cooperation has been tried on a bilateral basis for instance by India with Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Maldives albeit without much progress. The lesson learned was that sustained dialogue with country governments and institutions on both sides is an essential requirement to take this forward. UNDP can play a crucial role in this process to support this bilaterally or under the aegis of the sub-regional intergovernmental mechanisms.

Regional strategies for capacity development, peer-to-peer learning and networking could lead to establishing longer-term organisational twinning arrangements. In this process, it would be helpful to cooperate with organisations such as CLGF, UCLG aspac, LOGOTRI (network of local government training and research institutes in Asia Pacific), CityNet (Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements) to strengthen the focus of their networks of local government associations on women's representation. Through learning from good practices on women's political participation, local government associations can use national level networks as platforms for advocacy and lobby with governments and political parties. Regional networking can therefore provide an impetus to creating an enabling political environment for women's participation particularly centred on women in local governments. Twinning agreements between national organisations can be done to ensure sustained cross-learning. Equally important is building an Asia Pacific regional network of universities, research centres, think tanks and other knowledge institutions to address the research gap as well as build momentum on this issue with these organisations.

At the UN level, UN Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women is currently focussing on issues other than political participation of women and therefore could be associated with to ensure focus on this crucial area. The UNDP regional collaborative efforts initiated under the SISAP by the PIF secretariat, Dhaka Declaration conclusions (adopted at the UNDP Regional conference, Dhaka 2011) and the UNDP supported six point action plan on women's political participation outlining constitutional reforms, political party reforms, electoral reforms and capacity development, hold extreme relevance for advancing empowerment of women within local governments and could be taken forward through regional cooperation.

It is important to establish a regional network of concerned donors to leverage their interest in the region. For instance, Australia is investing into the Pacific on gender equality and Japan in Nepal, Afghanistan and Cambodia.

It may also be worthwhile to establish or strengthen a sub-regional community of practice (CoP) on women in local governments in the three sub-regions of Asia Pacific to develop further understanding of policy instruments that can initiate and sustain change for women to participate in local governments. This CoP could include local government associations, local government ministry officials, civil society, election management bodies and other experts.

Post 2015 Development Agenda

International initiatives such as the Beijing PFA and the MDGs or Habitat III create a momentum to put women's rights issues at the centre of political and government decision-making processes. Thus, post-2015 DA could be used as a critical anchor to place women's political equality rights issues especially at the local government levels at the centre of this discourse and consultation on development of the SDGs. The opportunity created by the report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 DA with the recommendation of a target under Goal 2 (one of which is elimination of discrimination in political life), must be seized. Thus a joint UN position paper on this subject from Asia Pacific under the auspices of UNESCAP could contribute to the Open Working Group (through the inter-agency technical support team established under the umbrella of the UN System Task Team), provide substantive inputs to the thematic consultations on inequalities and governance and global Task Force on local and regional governments towards post-2015 DA. This could ensure that women in local government indicators are integrated across the SDGs to enable future policy and programmatic interventions to boost women's political empowerment agenda at different levels.

References

- ASEAN, 'ACWC Work Plan (2012–2016) and Rules of Procedures', ASEAN Secretariat (November 2012)
- Ballington J and Matland R E, 'Political Parties and Special Measures: Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral processes' (January 2004) OSAGI & Department of Political Affairs Experts Group Meeting, New York, USA
- Basu A, 'Women, Political Parties and Social Movements in South Asia' (July 2005) Occasional Paper 5, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
- CEDAW General Comment No. 23: Political and Public Life (Article 7&8) (16 session 1997 A/52/38)
- CEDAW General Comment No. 28: Core Obligations of State Parties (Article 2) (December 2010 C/GC/28)
- CESCR General Comment No. 18: The Right to Work (Article 18) (6 February 2006 E/C.12/GC/18)
- CESCR General Comment No. 20: Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (Article 2) (2 July 2009 E/C.12/GC/20)
- CLGF, 'An analysis of the role of local government in the high-level panel's report on the post-2015 development agenda: A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development' (CLGF June 2013)
- Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Adopted and opened for signature and ratification by General Assembly resolution 640 (VII) of 31 December 1953, entry into force 7 July 1954, in accordance with Article 6
- Dersnah M A, 'Women in Political and Public Life: Global report for the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice' (2012)
- Drage, J 'Women in Local Government in Asia and the Pacific: A comparative analysis of 13 countries' (2002) UNESCAP
- DRI, 'Key issues for local government elections in Pakistan' (November 2013) Briefing Paper 42, Democracy Reporting International
- EIGE, 'Gender Equality Index Report', (2013) European Institute for Gender Equality
- Fraenkel J, 'The Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Pacific Parliaments' (2006) Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat by the Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development & Governance
- Fredman S, 'Human Rights Transformed: positive rights and positive duties' (OUP Oxford 2009)
- Freeman M A, Chinkin C and Rudolf B, 'The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, A Commentary' (OUP UK 2013)
- Huffer E (ed.), 'Land and Women: The Matrilineal Factor—cases of RMI, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu' (2008) PIF Secretariat

Hughes M M, 'Intersectionality, Quotas, and Minority Women's Political Representation Worldwide' (August 2011) *American Political Science Review*

Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, 23rd session (19 April 2013 A/HRC/23/50)

International IDEA, 'International IDEA's Asia and the Pacific Programme' (March 2010) The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

ICRW and UN Women 'Opportunities and Challenges of Women's Political Participation in India: A synthesis of Research Findings from select districts in India' (2012) International Center for Research on Women and UN Women

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 23 March 1976, in accordance with Article 49

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 3rd January 1976, in accordance with Article 27

IPU, 'The role of Parliaments in enforcing gender equality and women's rights: 15 years after Beijing' (2 March 2010)

Inter-parliamentary Union. Women in National Parliaments. Latest: January 2014. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

Mason A D, Badiani R, Nguyen T V, Patrick K, Carpio X, 'Toward gender equality in East Asia and the Pacific: a companion to the World Development Report (2012) Washington DC, World Bank

Pande R and Deanne F, 'Gender Quotas and Female Leadership' (2011) Background Paper, World Development Report

Norris P and Inglehart R, 'Cultural obstacles to equal representation (2001) *Journal of Democracy* Volume 12, Number 3 July 2001

Pacific Women in Politics <http://www.pacwip.org/>

Priya, S K, 'Study related to Discrimination against Women in Law and in Practice in Political and Public Life, including during times of Political Transitions' (2012)

Quota Project <http://www.quotaproject.org/>

'Representative Democracy and Electoral Reforms in Sri Lanka' (January 2013) Research Department – One Text initiative

Seda F S, 'Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems in Indonesia: A case study' (2002), IDEA

Small Island States Action Plan Advancing women's participation in decision-making processes: 2010-2015 (November 2010) PIF Secretariat

Thomson S S, 'Making a Difference: Women in Local Politics in Thailand', Gender and Development Research Institute and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

True J, Niner S, Parashar S and George N, 'Women's political participation in Asia and the Pacific' (2012) SSRC, Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum

Towards holistic Panchayati Raj: Twentieth Anniversary Report of the Expert Committee on Leveraging Panchayats for Efficient Delivery of Public Goods and Services' (April 2013) Volume 1 Policy Issues

UCLG, 'Global Conference Of Local Elected Women: Paris Local and Regional Governments' Global Agenda for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life (February 2013) UCLG

UN, 'Promoting women's electoral and political participation through UN Electoral Assistance: Policy Directive' (24 December 2013) UN Electoral Assistance, Department of Political Affairs

UN, 'Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with particular emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership', Report of the Expert Group Meeting (UNDAW, UNDESA, ECA, IPU October 2005)

UNDP, Power, Voice and Rights: South Asia Regional Conference on women's political leadership 2011, Dhaka, Bangladesh (Dhaka Declaration)

UNDP 'Gender Equality in Elected Office in Asia Pacific: Six Actions to Expand Women's Empowerment', (2012) UNDP

UNDP 'Women's Representation in Local Government in Asia Pacific' (2010) UNDP, 2010

UNDP 'Power, Voice and Rights, A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific' Asia Pacific Human Development Report (2010) UNDP

UNDP 'Women's Political Participation and Good Governance: 21st Century Challenges' (2000) UNDP

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948

UNESCAP, 'Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2013', UNESCAP

UNESCAP, Report of the High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its Regional and Global Outcomes, UNESCAP (E/ESCAP/BP A/Rep. 28 October 2004)

UNESCAP, Report of the Asia-Pacific High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform For Action and its Regional and Global Outcomes, UNESCAP (May 2010 E/ESCAP/66/14)

UN, Addressing inequalities: The heart of the post 2015 agenda and the future we want for all (May 2012) Thematic Think Piece of ECE, ESCAP, UNDESA, UNICEF, UNRISD and UN Women

Wang Z and Dai W, 'Women's participation in Rural China's Self-Governance: Institutional, Socioeconomic, and cultural factors in a Jiangsu county' (2012) Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration and Institutions

World Bank, Main report. Vol. 1 of World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development. Washington DC, World Bank Group

WEC, 'The Global Gender Gap Report 2013' (2013) World Economic Forum

Annexures Women's Participation and Leadership in Governments at the local level Asia Pacific 2013

Table 1: Data for Women Elected Representatives in Rural Councils as of 2013:

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
South Asia							
Bangladesh: Union Parishad -	2013	59,111	13,666	23.12	4547	25	0.55
	2010	54,899	12,782	23.28	12,669	22	0.17
Bhutan:	2013	1249	63	5.04	205	1	0.49
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
India: Gram Panchayat -	2013	N/A	N/A	38.4	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	2,678,183	984,273	37	N/A	N/A	N/A
Maldives: Island and Atoll Councils -	2014	1074	57	5.3	207	2	0.97
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
Pakistan: Union Councils -	2013 (elections held only for Baluchistan)	7624	1480	19.4	667	0	0
	2010	79,651	24,508	30.77	6,125	22	0.36
	2013	3604	70	1.9	269	4	1.49
Sri Lanka:	2010	3243	51	1.6	236	2	0.84
East Asia							
Cambodia: Commune/Sangkat Councils -	2013	11,459	2,038	17.8	1,633	95	5.82
	2010	11,353	1,656	14.58	4,863	340	6.99
China:	2013	2,337,658	513,583	22.0	Less than 1% no exact figure	N/A	N/A
Indonesia: Village (desa) -	2010	2,337,659	507,272	21.7	N/A	N/A	2.7
	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	73,842	2,888	3.91

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/ Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/ Heads of Councils (%)
Japan: Town/Village: Mayors and Councillors -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	13,870	1,051	7.56	987	21	2.12
Mongolia:	2013	6994	1983	28.4	330	65	19.7
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Philippines:	2013	1,491	310	20.8	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	1,345	403	30	13,345	3,336	25
Thailand: Tambon Administrative Organization -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	122,656	16,047	13	4,869	316	6.4
Vietnam: Commune People's Councils -	2013	277,761	60,302	21.7	N/A	N/A	5.67
	2010	N/A	N/A	19.53	N/A	N/A	4.09
Pacific Islands							
Cook Islands: Outer Island Local Governments -	2013	56	4	7.14	9	1	11.1
	2010	49	6	12.2	15	1	6.67

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
Fiji: (elected local councils suspended and then replaced by appointments from 2006 to present)	2013	158	23	14.6	12	0	0
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kiribati: Island Councils -	2013	199	9	4.5	23	2	8.70
	2010	199	7	3.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Zealand:	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	53	9	16.9
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nauru: 14 village councils	2013	63	23	36.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Niue: 14 village councils	2013	63	23	36.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Papua New Guinea:	2013	6138	61	1.0	287	3	1.05
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
Samoa:	2013	N/A	N/A	20	286	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tonga: Town and District Offices -	2013	178	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	179	1	0.6	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tuvalu: Kaupule Councils -	2013	48	2	4.2	8	0	0
	2010	48	4	8.3	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vanuatu: Municipalities -	2013	44	6	13.6	0	N/A	N/A
	2010	48	4	8.3	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 2: Data for Women Elected Representatives in Urban Councils as of 2013:

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
South Asia							
Bangladesh: Pourshavas and City Corporation ⁶ -	2013	4,531	1,056	23.31	316	2	0.63
	2010	1,635	403	24.65	380	5	1.32
	2013	29	4	13.79	4	0	0
Bhutan:	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
India:	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2014	17	2	11.76	2	0	0
Maldives:	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2013	1163	349	30.1	58	0	N/A
Pakistan:	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

6 A few new city corporations were created after 2010 such as Narayanganj, Comilla, Rangpur and Gazipur and elections to some of the Pourshavas were not completed by 2010.

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
Sri Lanka: Urban and Municipal councils -	2013	417	11	2.64	41	2	4.88
	2010	379	13	3.4	60	6	10
East Asia							
China:	2013	439,000	216,866	49.4	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	443,060	213,555	48.2	N/A	N/A	N/A
Japan: Cities and Special Wards: Mayors and councilors -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	21,321	2771	12.0	806	10	1.24
Mongolia:	2013	45	6	13.3	1	0	0
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Philippines: City Mayors -	2013	143	35	24.48	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	25	122	20.5
Republic of Korea: Gu/Si/ Gun councils -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	2,888	626	21.78	2,888	8	2.7

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
Thailand: Municipality and Special Zones of Bangkok and Pattaya -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	25,905	3,577	13.0	2,009	136	6.7
Pacific Islands							
Australia: Local councils -	2013	N/A	N/A	29.8	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	5070	1440	28.40	551	119	21.6
Kiribati:	2013	34	1	2.94	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	31	0	0.0	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Zealand:	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	13	4	30.8
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Papua New Guinea:	2013	500	50	10.0	26	0	0
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Samoa:	2013	N/A	N/A	20	26	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
Solomon Islands: Honiara City Councils -	2013	12	0	0	1	0	0
	2010	19	1	5.3	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tonga:	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	23	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 3: Data for Women Elected Representatives in Intermediary/District Councils as of 2013

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
South Asia							
Bangladesh: Upazila Parishad -	2013	1446	484 (each Upazila has 2 vice chairs of which 1 under law is female)	33.47	482	2	0.41
	2010	1,425	477	33.47	475	2	0.42

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
Bhutan:	2013	20	1	5	20	1	5
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2013	N/A	N/A	37.19	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	157,973	58,112	37	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pakistan: Zila - Tehsil Council -	2013	699 (elections only held for Baluchistan)	210	30.04	32	0	N/A
	2010	6,127 6,127	2,044 2,027	33.36 33.08	110 396	05 05	4.5 1.3
East Asia							
Cambodia: Municipal, district & Khan councils -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	2861	362	12.65	193	2	1.0
China:	2013	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Japan:	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
Indonesia: Kota and kabupaten-	2013	15,427	1,818	11.8	491	N/A	N/A
	2010	15,427	1,818	11.79	491	N/A	N/A
Mongolia: Soum -	2013	295	88	29.8	9	0	0
	2010	6605	1880	28.4	336	0	2.9
Philippines:	2013	234	64	27.3	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Viet Nam: District People's Councils -	2013	21,072	5188	24.62	N/A	N/A	6
	2010	N/A	N/A	23.01	N/A	N/A	3.92

Table 4: Women's Representation in Provincial and Regional Assemblies as of 2013

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
South Asia							
Afghanistan: Provincial Councils -	2013	420	105	25	34	1	2.94
	2010	420	125	30	34	5	15
Bhutan:	2013	72	6	8.3	13	1	7.69
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
India: Zila Parishad -	2013	N/A	N/A	35.8	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	15,583	5,763	37	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sri Lanka:	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	417	17	4.1	8	0	0
East Asia							
Cambodia: Capital and Provincial Councils -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	374	37	9.89	24	N/A	N/A
China:	2013	2987	699	23.40	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
Japan: Prefecture Assemblies and Governors -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	2,755	223	8.09	47	1	2.13
Indonesia: Provinces -	2013	2,008	288	14.34	33	0	0
	2010	2,008	288	14.34	33	0	0
Mongolia Aimag -	2013	744	127	17.07	21	0	0
	2010	529	86	16.2	21	1	4.8
Philippines:	2013	946	177	18.71	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	81	16	19.8
Republic of Korea Si/Do Councils -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	761	113	14.85	761	0	0
Thailand: Provincial Administration Organisation -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	1,901	240	12.6	75	7	9.3
Viet Nam: Provincial People's Councils -	2013	3,822	962	25.17	N/A	N/A	4.67
	2010	N/A	N/A	23.88	N/A	N/A	1.56

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/ year	Women Elected Representatives			Women Chairs		
		Elected Representatives Total, incl. chair person (#)	Of Which Total Elected Women (#)	Women Elected Representatives (%)	Chairs/- Heads of Council Total (#)	Of Which Women Chairs/Heads of Council (#)	Women Chairs/- Heads of Councils (%)
Pacific Islands							
Australia: State and Territory -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	428	165	38.55	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Zealand: Regional, city and district councils -	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	66	13	19.6
	2010	999	294	29.4	85	14	16
Palau:	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	16 governors	4	25
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Papua New Guinea:	2013	14	N/A	N/A	20	N/A	N/A
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Solomon Islands:	2013	172	3	1.74	9	0	0
	2010 (Elections not held in Northern Province)	39	1	2.6	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vanuatu:	2013	99	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	99	0	0.0	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 5: Comparison of National vs. sub-national Women's Political Representation as of 2013

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/year	National Women's Representation (%)*		Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)**
		Lower or single House	Upper House	
South Asia				
Afghanistan	2013	27.7	27.5	25
	2010	27.3	27.5	30.00
Bangladesh	2013	19.7	N/A	26.63
	2010	18.6	N/A	26.60
Bhutan	2013	6.4	8.0	8.03
	2010	8.5	24.0	No locally elected governments
India	2013	11.0	10.6	37.13
	2010	10.8	10.3	37.00
Maldives	2013	6.5	N/A	8.53
	2010	6.5	N/A	No locally elected governments

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/year	National Women's Representation (%)*		Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)**
		Lower or single House	Upper House	
Nepal	2013	29.9	N/A	N/A
	2010	33.2	N/A	No locally elected governments
Pakistan	2013	20.7	16.3	26.48
	2010	22.2	17.0	32.40
Sri Lanka	2013	5.8	N/A	2.27
	2010	5.3	N/A	3.03
East Asia				
Cambodia	2013	20.3	N/A	17.8
	2010	21.1	14.8	12.37
China	2013	23.4	N/A	31.6
	2010	21.3	N/A	21.70
Indonesia	2013	18.6	N/A	13.07
	2010	18	N/A	14.34
Japan	2013	8.1	N/A	N/A
	2010	11.3	18.2	11.96
Laos	2013	25.0	1.8	N/A
	2010	25.2	N/A	No locally elected governments

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/year	National Women's Representation (%)*		Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)**
		Lower or single House	Upper House	
Malaysia	2013	10.4	25.0	N/A
	2010	9.9	28.1	No locally elected governments
Mongolia	2013	14.9	N/A	22.16
	2010	3.9	N/A	22.30
Myanmar	2013	6.0	29.4	N/A
	2010	4.3	3.6	N/A
Philippines	2013	27.1	N/A	22.84
	2010	22.1	13.0	N/A
Thailand	2013	15.8	N/A	N/A
	2010	13.3	16.0	11.73
Timor Leste	2013	38.5	N/A	N/A
	2010	29.2	N/A	No locally elected governments
Viet Nam	2013	24.4	N/A	23.83
	2010	25.8	N/A	22.14

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/year	National Women's Representation (%)*		Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)**
		Lower or single House	Upper House	
Pacific Islands				
Australia	2013	26.0	N/A	29.8
	2010	24.7	35.5	28.10
Cook Islands	2013	N/A	N/A	7.1
	2010	N/A	N/A	12.2
Fiji	2013	N/A	N/A	14.6
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kiribati	2013	8.7	N/A	3.72
	2010	4.3	N/A	1.75
New Zealand	2013	32.2	23.1	N/A
	2010	33.6	N/A	29.40
Nauru	2013	5.3	N/A	36.5
	2010	0.0	N/A	N/A
Niue	2013	N/A	N/A	36.5
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A

Sub-regions/Countries	Reference date/year	National Women's Representation (%)*		Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)**
		Lower or single House	Upper House	
Palau	2013	0.0	N/A	N/A
	2010	0.0	15.4	N/A
Papua New Guinea	2013	2.7	N/A	5.5
	2010	0.9	N/A	N/A
Samoa	2013	4.1	N/A	20
	2010	8.2	N/A	No locally elected governments
Solomon Islands	2013	2.0	N/A	0.87
	2010	0.0	N/A	3.9
Tonga	2013	3.6	N/A	NA
	2010	0.0	N/A	0.6
Tuvalu	2013	6.7	N/A	4.2
	2010	0.0	N/A	8.3
Vanuatu	2013	0.0	N/A	6.8
	2010	3.8	N/A	3.85

* National figures taken from: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

** Total subnational representation calculated by averaging the percentage of women represented across the different levels of subnational government.

Table 6: Summary of Local Electoral Systems for National level (lower house) and Councils in the Asia-Pacific Region

Country	Electoral system							Percentage of elected women in lower tier-LG councils (as of 2013)
	Electoral System National level (lower house)	Electoral Type National level (lower house)	Legal quotas for women	Percentage of elected women in lower house (as of November 2013)	Electoral System Lower tier LG councils	Electoral Type Lower tier LG councils	Legal Quotas for women	
South Asia								
Bangladesh	FPTP	P-M	Reserved seats 50 seats	19.7	FPTP, single-member ward constituencies	P-M	Reserved seats 3 seats Union Parishad and one vice Mayor position in Upazila Parishad	26.63
Bhutan	FPTP	P-M	N/A	6.4	FPTP	P-M	N/A	8.03
India	FPTP	P-M	N/A	11	FPTP, single-member ward constituencies	P-M	Reserved seats 33-50% (varies from state to state)	37.13
Maldives ⁷	FPTP	P-M	N/A	6.5	FPTP	Block Vote	N/A	8.53
Nepal	Paralell	Mixed	Legislated Candidate Quota 33%	29.9	FPTP, multi-member ward constituencies	P-M	N/A	N/A

⁷ Law on Local Governance has not been passed by parliament as of February 2010. Previously the now dissolved Island Development Committees were elected by FPTP, Block Vote.

Country	Electoral system							Percentage of elected women in lower tier LG councils (as of 2013)
	Electoral System National level (lower house)	Electoral Type National level (lower house)	Legal quotas for women	Percentage of elected women in lower house (as of November 2013)	Electoral System Lower tier LG councils	Electoral Type Lower tier LG councils	Legal Quotas for women	
Pakistan	Parallel	Mixed	Reserved seats 17%	20.7	FPTP UC as a multi-member constituency	Indirect PR list	Reserved seats 13-33% (range varies in the 4 provinces as per new laws in 2013)	26.48
Sri Lanka	List PR	PR	N/A	5.8	List PR	PR (Urban and Municipal Councils)	Discretionary quota 25%	2.27
East Asia								
Cambodia	PR	List PR	N/A	20.3	List PR	PR Commune Councils	N/A	17.8
China	Indirect	Legal quotas	Reserved seats 22%	23.4	elements of TRS and Block Vote	P-M	1 (village committee in some provinces)	31.6
Indonesia	List PR	PR	Legislated candidate quota 30%	18.6	List PR	PR DPRDs (provincial, regency and city)	Legislated Candidate Quota 30%	13.07

Country	Electoral system							Percentage of elected women in lower tier-LG councils (as of 2013)
	Electoral System National level (lower house)	Electoral Type National level (lower house)	Legal quotas for women	Percentage of elected women in lower house (as of November 2013)	Electoral System Lower tier LG councils	Electoral Type Lower tier LG councils	Legal Quotas for women	
Malaysia	FPTP	P-M	N/A	10.4	No local elections	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mongolia	MMP	Mixed	Legislated candidate quota 20%	14.9	FPTP and PR	Mixed	Legislated candidate quota 30%	22.16
Philippines	Parallel	Mixed	Voluntary Party Quota	27.1	Block vote	P-M	Reserved seats 1 of 3 sectoral representative in municipal, city and Provincial legislative council 3 seats/LG unit	22.84
Thailand	Parallel	Mixed	Voluntary Party Quota	15.8	FPTP Multi-member ward constituency	P-M	N/A	N/A
Timor-Leste	List PR	Legal Quota	Legislated Candidate Quota 33%	38.5	FPTP, single member <i>aldeia</i> (ward)	P-M	2 women and one female youth in the suco council	N/A
Viet Nam	TRS	P-M		24.4	FPTP using multi-member electoral units	P-M	N/A	23.83

Country	Electoral system							Percentage of elected women in lower tier-LG councils (as of 2013)
	Electoral System National level (lower house)	Electoral Type National level (lower house)	Legal quotas for women	Percentage of elected women in lower house (as of November 2013)	Electoral System Lower tier LG councils	Electoral Type Lower tier LG councils	Legal Quotas for women	
Pacific Islands								
Australia	AV	P-M	Voluntary Political Party 40 %	26	N/A	N/A	N/A	29.8
Cook Islands	FPTP	P-M	N/A	12.5	N/A	N/A	N/A	7.1
Fiji	AV	P-M	N/A	N/A	FPTP, multi-member ward constituencies	P-M	N/A	14.6
Kiribati	FPTP	P-M	N/A	8.7	FPTP	N/A	N/A	3.72
New Zealand	MMP	Mixed	Voluntary Political Party 45%	32.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nauru	MBC	Other	N/A	5.3	N/A	N/A	N/A	36.5
Niue	FPTP				N/A	N/A		36.5
Palau	FPTP	P-M	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Country	Electoral system							Percentage of elected women in lower tier LG councils (as of 2013)
	Electoral System National level (lower house)	Electoral Type National level (lower house)	Legal quotas for women	Percentage of elected women in lower house (as of November 2013)	Electoral System Lower tier LG councils	Electoral Type Lower tier LG councils	Legal Quotas for women	
Papua New Guinea	AV	P-M	N/A	2.7	FPTP	P-M, limited PV	2 appointed	5.5
Samoa	FPTP	P-M	Reserved seats 10%	4.1	FPTP	N/A	N/A	20
Solomon Islands	FPTP	P-M	N/A	2.0	FPTP, single-member ward constituencies	P-M	N/A	0.87
Tonga	BV	P-M	N/A	3.6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tuvalu	BV	P-M	N/A	6.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.2
Vanuatu	SNTV	Other	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	Reserved seat (1/ward- total 5 seats in Municipalities	6.8

Notes:

P-M = Plurality-Majoritarian; FPTP = First-Past-The-Post; PV = Preferential Voting; AV = Alternative Voting; TRS = Two-Round System; SNTV = Single Non-Transferable Vote; BV = Block Vote; MBC = Modified Borda Count; List PR = List Proportional Representation; PR = Proportional Representation; MMP = Mixed Member Proportional

Source: Electoral System Design, International IDEA and Global Database of quotas for women – updated as of Jan-Feb 2014

Table 7: Direct/Indirect Methods of Representation

Country	Lowest-level elected bodies	Upper-level elected bodies		LG heads		Appointments
		Direct elections	Indirect elections	Direct elections	Indirect elections	
South Asia						
Afghanistan	No constitutionally elected bodies exist at the level below provincial. The Constitution makes provisions for direct election of district, municipal and village councils	Provincial Council members – directly elected. The Constitution makes provisions for direct election of district, municipal and village councils.	N/A	The Constitution makes provisions for direct election of mayors.	Provincial Councils indirectly elect their chairpersons	N/A
Bangladesh	Union Parishads(Rural) and Pourashavas (Urban)– directly elected	Upazila Parishads and City Corporations – directly elected	N/A	UP and Upazila chairperson and Pourashava and City Corporation mayors – directly elected	N/A	MPs act as advisors of their respective UZPs and their advices are to be treated as mandatory as per Upazila Act 1998
Bhutan	Gewog Tshogdu directly elected	N/A	DzongkhagTshogdu composed of members from Gewog and Thromde representatives and municipalities	Gewoggup is directly elected	Dzongkhag Thromdem chairperson is elected by Dzongkhag Thromde members	Thromde level – National Assembly members (ex officio) + Government staff (non-voting members)

Country	Lowest-level elected bodies	Upper-level elected bodies		LG heads		Appointments
		Direct elections	Indirect elections	Direct elections	Indirect elections	
India	<i>Gram</i> and <i>Nagar Panchayat</i> members – directly elected	(i) <i>Samiti</i> and <i>Zilla Panchayat</i> members – directly elected (ii) Municipal and Municipal Corporation Council members – directly elected	N/A	(i) <i>Gram Panchayat</i> chairpersons are elected according to individual state legislatures – can be direct or indirect (ii) <i>Nagar Panchayat</i> , Municipal and Municipal Corporation chairpersons are elected according to individual state legislatures – can be direct or indirect	<i>Samiti</i> and <i>Zilla</i> chairpersons are elected by their respective <i>panchayats</i>	
Iran	Village and City Councils-directly elected	Provincial Councils, Rural District Council and Urban District Councils-indirect election by majority vote by urban, cities and rural district councillors respectively			Mayors and village managers are indirectly elected	Mayors of municipalities are appointed by the City Council, vetted by the Ministry of Interior

Country	Lowest-level elected bodies	Upper-level elected bodies		LG heads		Appointments
		Direct elections	Indirect elections	Direct elections	Indirect elections	
Maldives ⁸	Island Office members directly elected by their respective communities	Atoll Office members directly elected by their respective communities		N/A	Indirectly elected from among the members of each council	N/A
Nepal ⁹	Village and Municipal Council members – directly elected	N/A	District Council members – indirectly elected by members of Village and Municipal Councils; leaders of lower-level LGs are members	VDC and Municipal chairpersons and vice chairpersons are directly elected by their constituents	DDC chairpersons, vice chairpersons and area or <i>llakar</i> eps are indirectly elected by Village and Municipal Council members	(i) District Council: Local members of National Assembly and House of Representatives (ex officio members), and 6 members nominated by the District Council from the general public (including at least 1 woman and DAG representatives) (ii) DDC: local members of the National Assembly and the House of Representatives (ex officio members), and 2 members nominated by DDC from District Council (including at least 1 woman)

8 As envisaged with the draft Law on Local Governance is currently being debated and enshrined in the 2008 Constitution. Currently there are no formal sub-national governments in the Maldives.

9 Since 2002 interim local bodies have replaced the elected VDCs, DDCs and Municipalities.

Country	Lowest-level elected bodies	Upper-level elected bodies		LG heads		Appointments
		Direct elections	Indirect elections	Direct elections	Indirect elections	
Pakistan	Union Council members – directly elected		(i) District/City District Councils – composed of UC nazims and others (district nazim and district naibnazim + others – women, peasant/worker, minority representatives) elected by all UC councillors in the district/city (ii) Tehsil/Town Councils – composed of UC naibnazims and other members (tehsil nazim and tehsil naibnazim , and others – women, peasant/worker, minority representatives) elected by all UC councillors in the tehsil/town	Union nazimandnaibnazim are directly elected on a joint ticket	Elected union councillors are not permitted to stand for election as nazim of any tehsil/town or district/city. Tehsil/district nazims are elected by all the UC members in their respective jurisdictions. Naibnazims at tehsil and district levels are chosen by their respective councils from amongst their own membership	None

Country	Lowest-level elected bodies	Upper-level elected bodies		LG heads		Appointments
		Direct elections	Indirect elections	Direct elections	Indirect elections	
Sri Lanka	<i>Pradeshiya Sabha</i> , Urban and Municipal Council members – directly elected	Provincial Council members directly elected from district constituencies	N/A	N/A	(i) Provincial Council has a chairperson and a vice chairperson elected from amongst its members by majority vote (ii) <i>Pradeshiya Sabha</i> , Urban and Municipal Council led by a full-time chairperson, nominated by the majority party or group, who holds office for a four-year term	Provincial Executive: governor appointed by the President responsible for executing the policies of the Provincial Council through a board of ministers headed by a chief minister and no more than four other ministers. The governor appoints the chief minister, and the other ministers on the advice of the chief minister
East Asia						
Cambodia	Commune and <i>Sangkhat</i> Council members – directly elected	N/A	Municipalities, Districts, Khan, Provinces and Capital Councils are all indirectly elected	N/A	Council chief for all levels are the top candidate of winning party. Commune/ <i>Sangkhat</i> also have 1 st and 2 nd deputy chiefs which are leaders of second and third parties.	None

Country	Lowest-level elected bodies	Upper-level elected bodies		LG heads		Appointments
		Direct elections	Indirect elections	Direct elections	Indirect elections	
China	Village Committees, Village Representative Committee -directly elected	Urban Residents Committee—directly elected	N/A	Village Committee comprising chairperson, vice chairperson and members, directly elected	N/A	N/A
Indonesia	Regency and <i>kota</i> DPRD members – directly elected from electoral districts	Provincial DPRD members – directly elected from electoral districts	N/A	Heads and deputy heads of regencies, <i>kotas</i> and provinces are elected through direct and general elections and on the basis of a joint ticket	N/A	Provincial, regency and <i>kota</i> secretariats: (i) regional secretaries appointed by the President on the recommendation of the regional head from amongst the civil servants (ii) the DPRD secretariat – headed by the DPRD secretary (appointed by the regional heads with the approval of the DPRD)
Republic of Korea	<i>Gun/Gu/Si</i> Councils, -directly elected	<i>Si/Do</i> councils directly elected	N/A			Chairperson of councils elected by local council representatives

Country	Lowest-level elected bodies	Upper-level elected bodies		LG heads		Appointments
		Direct elections	Indirect elections	Direct elections	Indirect elections	
Malaysia	District Councils, City Councils and Municipal Councils – members appointed by the state government from nominees recommended by ruling political parties. Presidents of District and Municipal Councils and mayor of City Council all appointed by the state government					
Mongolia	<i>Soums</i> /districts, <i>Soum</i> Citizens' Representative <i>Hural</i> –directly elected; Capital cities Citizens' Representative <i>Hural</i> –directly elected.	Rural <i>aimags</i> - <i>Aimag</i> Citizens' Representative <i>Hurals</i> -directly elected	N/A	N/A	<i>Aimag/soum</i> /capital chairpersons and presidiums elected by Citizens Representative <i>Hural</i> members	<i>Aimag/soum</i> /capital governor nominated by CRH and appointed by Prime Minister

Country	Lowest-level elected bodies	Upper-level elected bodies		LG heads		Appointments
		Direct elections	Indirect elections	Direct elections	Indirect elections	
Philippines	<i>Barangay</i> Council members – directly elected except for Youth Council representative	(i) Municipal and City Councils comprising both directly elected members and president of the municipal/city chapter of <i>barangay</i> captains (ii) Provincial Board composed of both directly elected members and indirectly elected members (president of the provincial chapter of <i>barangay</i> captains, etc.)	<i>Barangay</i> captain – directly elected Municipal mayor and vice mayor – directly elected Provincial governor and vice governor – directly elected	N/A	(i) <i>Barangay</i> Council: <i>Barangay</i> Youth Council chairperson is a member. Elected by 15- to 21-year-old <i>barangay</i> electorate (ii) Municipal and Provincial Councils – appoint sectional representatives (women, workers and disadvantaged groups) (iii) Municipal and Provincial Councils – constituent Youth Councils are represented	
Singapore						
Thailand	<i>Tambon</i> Administrative Organization-directly elected	Provincial Administrative Organization -members directly elected Municipality–members directly elected	N/A	TAO executive -directly elected PAO head -directly elected Municipal mayors-directly elected	N/A	None

Country	Lowest-level elected bodies	Upper-level elected bodies		LG heads		Appointments
		Direct elections	Indirect elections	Direct elections	Indirect elections	
Timor-Leste	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Viet Nam	Commune People's Council members – directly elected (following screening process)	District and Provincial People's Council members – directly elected (following screening process)	N/A	N/A	(i) Chairperson, vice chairperson and other members of the People's Councils' Standing Committees – indirectly elected by People's Councils (ii) Chairpersons of all People's Committees (Commune, District and Provincial) are elected by People's Councils ¹⁰	N/A
Pacific Islands						
Fiji	Direct election of Town Council members suspended by government in early 2009.	Direct election of City Council members suspended by government in early 2009	N/A	N/A	City and Town mayors indirectly elected by councils	Advisers to City and Town Councils can be appointed by the Minister of LG

10 The President of the People's Committee is a member of the People's Council. The other members of the People's Committee are not necessarily members of the People's Council. The results of the election of the members of the People's Committee must be approved by the President of the People's Committee of the immediate higher level; the results of the election of the members of the People's Committee at provincial level must be approved by the Prime Minister

Country	Lowest-level elected bodies	Upper-level elected bodies		LG heads		Appointments
		Direct elections	Indirect elections	Direct elections	Indirect elections	
Papua New Guinea	LLG Council members – directly elected except for TUC, Employers' Federation and women representatives		Provincial Assembly members – indirectly elected (LLG representatives, MPs) except for women representative and traditional chiefs	LLG heads can be directly elected	LLG heads can be indirectly elected by their councils Provincial Assembly head is the provincial MP	N/A
Solomon Islands	Provincial, City and Town Council members – all directly elected	N/A	N/A	N/A	Provincial premiers and city/town mayors – indirectly elected by their respective councils	N/A

Table 8: Examples of Measures for Quotas in the Asia Pacific (updated as of 2014)

Country	Measures focusing on candidates (party list quotas)	Measures focusing on institutions (i.e., reserved seats)	
		Directly elected	Indirectly elected/appointed
South Asia			
Afghanistan	NA	According to the Electoral Law, at least 20% of the seats of each provincial council shall be allocated to female candidates with the most votes. The remainder of the seats shall be allocated to the candidates who receive the highest number of votes regardless of gender (Electoral Law, Article 30 (2)).	NA
Bangladesh	NA	1/3 directly elected seats are reserved in Union Parishad, Paurashave, City Corporation and 1 seat reserved in UZP	Provision for 1/3 women members in UZP
India		Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) have reserved seats in the same proportion as the population of SC and ST bears to the total population. Not less than one-third (including seats reserved for SC and ST women) of seats and chairs reserved for women, however 50% seats are now reserved for women in 15 of 28 States and there are moves to standardize this nationally. Seats are allotted by rotation to the different constituencies in a panchayat Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality.	

Country	Measures focusing on candidates (party list quotas)	Measures focusing on institutions (i.e., reserved seats)	
		Directly elected	Indirectly elected/appointed
Nepal	NA	NA	For the Village Council (VC) and District Council (DC), 6 persons, including 1 woman, are nominated by the VC and the DC respectively from amongst workers, socially and economically backward tribes and ethnic communities, downtrodden and indigenous people belonging to the class who are not represented in the VC and DC respectively. For the Village Development Committee (VDC) and District Development Committee (DDC) 2 persons, including 1 woman, are nominated by the VDC and DDC respectively from amongst the nominated members of the VC and DC respectively. For the Municipal Council (MC) no less than 6 and no more than 20 persons, including women from the same groups as above, are nominated by the MC. For the municipality, the municipality nominates 2 persons, including 1 woman, from amongst the nominated members of the MC

Country	Measures focusing on candidates (party list quotas)	Measures focusing on institutions (i.e., reserved seats)	
		Directly elected	Indirectly elected/appointed
Pakistan	NA	<p>The Constitution provides the following principle: 'The State shall encourage local Government institutions composed of elected representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation will be given to peasants, workers and women' (Article 32). At the provincial level, 4 main provinces reserve seats for women in Provincial Assemblies: Punjab (66 seats); Sindh (29 seats); Khyber Pakhtun Khwa (22 seats); and Balochistan (11 seats). General seats are elected based on first-past-the-post or simple majority rule in single member constituencies, while reserved seats for women are proportionally distributed among parties based on the number of general seats secured by each political party in the Provincial Assembly (Constitution, Article 106 (1,3)).</p> <p>The provinces of Sindh and Punjab adopted local government laws in 2013 with reduced numbers of seats reserved for women: 1 out of 9 in the directly-elected first tier of local government in Sindh, and two in every 13 in Punjab. At higher, indirectly elected tiers, Sindh law provides for a 22% of reserved seats for women and Punjab has legislated for about 10% of reserved seats for women at that level. Legislation is under preparation in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtun Khwa, with proposals to set the minimum number of seats reserved for women at 33%, which carries the same standard that previously applied to all local councils in all provinces, as set by the Devolution of Power Plan (DPP), adopted in 2000 and expired in 2009.</p>	<p>For the Zilla, Tehsil and Town Councils, such number of women to represent 33 percent; peasants and workers to represent 5 percent; and minorities to represent 5 percent from minority communities of the unions in the respective LGU. The Electoral college for filling these seats comprises the members of the Union Councils in each LGU</p>

Country	Measures focusing on candidates (party list quotas)	Measures focusing on institutions (i.e., reserved seats)	
		Directly elected	Indirectly elected/appointed
Sri Lanka	NA	Sri Lanka's Local Authorities Elections Act, 2012 provides for a mixed system with 70 percent elected through FPTP and 30 percent through PR list, the new law makes the quota of 25 percent of the nominees for youth and women discretionary so political parties can easily ignore them when choosing candidates.	NA
East Asia			
Cambodia	Party List Quotas	NA	NA
China	NA	There are no provisions to ensure representation of women in the Organic Law, but some provinces have passed a law that all village committees have to include at least 1 woman. The Organic Law makes provisions for the representation of minorities whereby 1 member of the minority should be included in the Village Committee/Urban Residents Committee	NA
Indonesia	According to article 55 in the Electoral Law 8/2012 the list of nominees for members of the People's Representative Council and Regional House of Representatives shall contain at least 30% women's representation and out of 3 nominees, there should be at least one female nominee.	NA	NA

Country	Measures focusing on candidates (party list quotas)	Measures focusing on institutions (i.e., reserved seats)	
		Directly elected	Indirectly elected/appointed
Mongolia	Electoral law outlines that for local council elections, at least 30% of the candidates on political parties' lists must be women.	NA	NA
Philippines	The 1991 Local Government Code No.7160, Section 41, para. C, requires that a woman be one of three sectoral representatives that sits in every municipal, city, and provincial legislative council. For each LGU there are 3 sectoral representatives, i.e., 1 woman, 1 agricultural or industrial worker; and 1 representative for the urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, disabled persons, or any other sector as may be determined by the <i>Sanggunian</i> concerned. The Commission on Elections promulgate the rules and regulations for effectively providing for the election of such sectoral representatives. Presidents of the Youth Councils also are ex officio members		
Republic of Korea	When any political party intends to recommend its members as candidates to run for seats in local councils contested through the proportional representation system, a political party shall recommend not less than 50% of the candidates from among women. When any political party intends to recommend its members as candidates to run in the election for local council members of local constituencies after their term of office expires, such political party shall recommend not less than 30% of the total number of the candidates to run in the election for nationwide constituencies from among women. In addition, when any political party intends		

Country	Measures focusing on candidates (party list quotas)	Measures focusing on institutions (i.e., reserved seats)	
		Directly elected	Indirectly elected/appointed
Republic of Korea	<p>to recommend its members as candidates to run for one of district representatives of a city ('Si') or a province ('Do') council or district ('Gu'), county ('Gun') or city ('Si') council, the party shall recommend women in not less than 1 constituency within the relevant constituency for the National Assembly member (Article 47 (3-5)).</p> <p>For the list proportional representation election for local councils, political parties shall 'recommend candidates falling under every odd number in order of the candidate roll from among women' (Article 47 (3)).</p>		
Timor-Leste		<p>Both men and women, without discrimination, may participate as candidates and be elected Local ('Suco') Chiefs or Members of the Local ('Suco') Councils. The Electoral Law further stipulates that Local ('Suco') Councils shall be composed of the Local ('Suco') Chief, the Chiefs of all the villages that are included in the local districts ('Sucos') and, additionally, two women, two youth representatives, one of each sex, and one elder (Law No. 2/2004 on the Elections of the Local ('Suco') Chiefs and the Local ('Suco') Councils, Articles 2 (2) and 3 (1)).</p>	

Country	Measures focusing on candidates (party list quotas)	Measures focusing on institutions (i.e., reserved seats)	
		Directly elected	Indirectly elected/appointed
Viet Nam	The standing bodies of provincial- and district-level People's Councils (PC), after consulting with the Standing Board of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front Central Committee and the People's Committees of the same level, propose the proportion, number and composition of PC deputies to be elected – ensuring that an appropriate number of women and, in localities with many ethnic minority groups, ethnic minorities are elected to the PC. The same applies for commune-level PC, but no consultations with the Viet Nam Fatherland Front or People's Committees are required.	NA	NA
Pacific Islands			
Papua New Guinea	NA	NA	2 women are appointed to be members of LLG Councils in rural areas, and 1 woman is appointed to be a member of LLG Councils in urban areas 1 woman representative is appointed to be a member of each Provincial Assembly
Vanuatu	-	For Municipal Council elections, 1 seat in every ward in a municipality must be reserved for a woman (Amendment to the Municipalities Act, 2013).	-

Source: Global Database of quotas for women – updated as of Jan-Feb 2014

Table 9: Relationship between gender inequalities and women's representation at national and local levels

Country	International conventions – discrimination against women (CEDAW) Ratification/ Accession/ Succession Year	GII* (2012)	GEM** (2007)	GEI (2012)***	GGI (2013)****	National Women's Representation (%)	Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)
South Asia							
Afghanistan	2003	0.712	0.264	15	-	27.7	25
Bangladesh	1984	0.518	0.486	55	0.6848	19.7	26.63
Bhutan	1981	0.464	-	41	0.6651	6.4	8.03
India	1993	0.61	-	37	0.6551	11.0	37.13
Maldives	1993	0.357	0.429	63	0.6604	6.5	8.53
Nepal	1991	0.485	0.486	47	0.6053	29.9	N/A
Pakistan	1996	0.567	0.386	29	0.5459	20.7	26.48
Sri Lanka	1981	0.402	0.389	62	0.7019	5.8	2.27
East Asia							
Cambodia	1992	0.473	0.427	55	0.6509	20.3	17.8
China	1980	0.213	0.533	64	0.6908	23.4	31.6

Country	International conventions – discrimination against women (CEDAW) Ratification/ Accession/ Succession Year	GII* (2012)	GEM** (2007)	GEI (2012)***	GGI (2013)****	National Women's Representation (%)	Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)
Indonesia	1984	0.494	0.408	62	0.6613	18.6	13.07
Japan	1985	0.131	0.567	57	0.6498	8.1	N/A
Laos		0.483	-	56	0.6993	25	N/A
Myanmar	1997	0.437	-	-	-	6.0	N/A
Malaysia	1995	0.256	0.542	56	0.6518	10.4	N/A
Mongolia	1981	0.328	0.410	81	0.7204	14.9	22.16
Philippines	1981	0.418	0.560	76	0.7832	27.1	22.84
Thailand	1985	0.36	0.514	71	0.6928	15.8	N/A
Timor Leste	2003	-	-	...	-	38.5	N/A
Viet Nam	1982	0.299	0.554	70	0.6863	24.4	23.83
Pacific Islands							
Australia	1983	0.065	0.870	80	0.7390	26.0	29.8
Cook Islands		-	-	-	-	-	7.1
Fiji	1995	-	-	-	0.6286	-	14.6

Country	International conventions – discrimination against women (CEDAW) Ratification/ Accession/ Succession Year	GII* (2012)	GEM** (2007)	GEI (2012)***	GGI (2013)****	National Women's Representation (%)	Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)
Kiribati	2004	-	-	-	-	8.7	3.72
New Zealand	1985	0.164	0.841	82	0.7799	32.2	N/A
Nauru	-	-	-	-	-	5.3	36.5
Niue	-	-	-	-	-	-	36.5
Palau	-	-	-	-	-	0.0	N/A
Papua New Guinea	1995	0.617	-	60	-	2.7	5.5
Samoa	1992	-	0.431	-	-	4.1	20
Solomon Islands	2002	-	-	-	-	2.0	0.87
Tonga	-	0.462	0.363	-	-	3.6	N/A
Tuvalu	1999	-	-	-	-	6.7	4.2
Vanuatu	1995	-	-	-	-	0.0	6.8

* UNDP Human Development Report 2013

** UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008

*** Social Watch 2012

**** World Economic Forum Report 2013

Table 10: Relationship between country's economy and women's political participation

Country	GDP per capita (current US \$) ¹¹ 2012	National Women's Representation (%)	Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)
South Asia			
Afghanistan	687	27.7	25
Bangladesh	752	19.7	26.63
Bhutan	2,399	6.4	8.03
India	1,489	11.0	37.13
Iran	2,137	3.1	N/A
Maldives	6,567	6.5	8.53
Nepal	690	29.9	N/A
Pakistan	1,257	20.7	26.48
Sri Lanka	2,923	5.8	2.27
East Asia			
Cambodia	944	20.3	17.8
China	6,091	23.4	31.6

¹¹ World Development Indicators; World Bank national account data 2012

Country	GDP per capita (current US \$) ¹¹ 2012	National Women's Representation (%)	Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)
Indonesia	3,557	18.6	13.07
Laos	1,417	25	N/A
Malaysia	10,432	10.4	N/A
Mongolia	3,673	14.9	22.16
Philippines	2,587	27.1	22.83
Thailand	5,480	15.8	N/A
Timor Leste	1,068	38.5	N/A
Viet Nam	1,755	24.4	23.8
Pacific Islands			
Australia	67,556	26.0	29.8
Fiji	4,467	-	14.6
Kiribati	1,736	8.7	3.72
New Zealand	37,749	32.2	N/A
Palau	11,006	0.0	N/A

11 World Development Indicators, World Bank national account data 2012

Country	GDP per capita (current US \$) ¹¹ 2012	National Women's Representation (%)	Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)
Papua New Guinea	2,184	2.7	5.5
Samoa	3,620	4.1	20
Solomon Islands	1,835	2.0	0.87
Tonga	4,494	3.6	N/A
Tuvalu	4,044	6.7	4.2
Vanuatu	3,183	0.0	6.8

11 World Development Indicators; World Bank national account data 2012

Table 11: Relationship between Literacy, Labour force participation and women's political participation

Country	Adult Literacy (% aged 15 and above)	Labour force participation (% of female aged 15 and above) 2012	National Women's Representation (%)	Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)
South Asia				
Afghanistan	12.6	16	27.7	25
Bangladesh	48.0	57	19.7	26.63
Bhutan	38.7	66	6.4	8.03
India	54.5	29	11.0	37.13
Maldives	97.1	56	6.5	8.53
Nepal	43.6	54	29.9	N/A
Pakistan	39.6	24	20.7	26.48
Sri Lanka	89.1	35	5.8	2.27
East Asia				
Cambodia	67.7	79	20.3	17.8
China	90.0	64	23.4	31.6
Indonesia	88.8	51	18.6	13.07
Japan	-	48.0	8.1	N/A
Laos	81.5	76	25	N/A

Country	Adult Literacy (% aged 15 and above)	Labour force participation (% of female aged 15 and above) 2012	National Women's Representation (%)	Total Subnational Women's Representation (%)
Malaysia	89.6	44	10.4	N/A
Mongolia	97.7	56	14.9	22.16
Philippines	93.7	51	27.1	22.84
Thailand	92.6	64	15.8	N/A
Timor Leste	-	57.8	38.5	N/A
Viet Nam	86.9	73	24.4	23.83
Pacific Islands				
Australia	-	59	26.0	29.8
Fiji	-	38	-	14.6
Kiribati	-	-	8.7	3.72
New Zealand	-	62	32.2	N/A
Palau	90.5	-	0.0	N/A
Papua New Guinea	53.4	71	2.7	5.5
Samoa	98.4	40.9	4.1	20
Solomon Islands	-	54.0	2.0	0.87
Tonga	99.3	54	3.6	N/A
Vanuatu	76.1	62	0.0	6.8



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

For more information, please contact:

United Nations Development Programme
Bureau for Development Policy
One United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA

Email: pacde@undp.org
Website: www.undp.org/governance and www.undp.org/poverty