

Regional Workshop on  
Women's Participation in Local Governance –  
**Exploring the way forward**

17-19 November, Bangkok, Thailand



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### **Regional Workshop on Women's Participation in Local Governance – Exploring the way forward**

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# Regional Workshop on Women's Participation in Local Governance – Exploring the way forward

*"Gender equality does have an impact in shaping politics and governance at local and national level towards achieving the development goals and the rights recognized at the international level. Together we can make 2030 an expiration date for gender inequality"*

**Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women Executive Director**

**17–19 November, Bangkok, Thailand**

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# Abbreviations

<b>BRH</b>	Bangkok Regional Hub
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CLGF</b>	Commonwealth Local Government Forum
<b>GNH</b>	Gross National Happiness
<b>RDMA</b>	Regional Mission in Asia
<b>UCLG</b>	United Cities and Local Governments
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>UNECOSOC</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Council
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>VAW</b>	Violence against Women
<b>WEF</b>	World Economic Forum
<b>WLSN</b>	Women Leaders at the Sub National Level



# Introduction

The Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Women's Participation in Local Governance 'Exploring the way forward' held in Bangkok on 17-19 November brought together 120 women leaders and practitioners of women's rights and governance. The participants of the workshop included women political leaders, elected representatives, women civil society leaders, policy experts, as well as United Nations and United States Agency for International Development staff from twenty countries in the Asia-Pacific Region.

The workshop sought to reinforce cross-regional partnership by bringing together governments, multi-lateral and bilateral agencies and civil society leaders to jointly determine a course of action to achieve greater and more effective women's leadership in improving participatory local governance. The regional workshop, co-hosted by the USAID Regional Mission in Asia (RDMA) and United Nations Development Programme Bangkok Regional Hub (BRH) demonstrated the collective commitment to build momentum for joint action on enhancing women's participation in local governance.

## The presentations and discussions during the workshop focused on four main areas and objectives:

1. Present and discuss the report "Gender Equality: Women's Participation and Leadership in Governments at the Local Level Asia and the Pacific 2013"
2. Identify and prioritize strategies for institutional reform measures and capacity development of women's leadership in government and civil society
3. Discuss and identify best practices, options and strategies for improving key aspects of women's participation in local governance, especially as leaders on issues that empower women and girls; electoral systems, framework and methodology for measuring effectiveness of women's participation in governance policy solutions to addressing prevention of violence against women, gender-sensitive budgeting; and political environment and its impact on women leadership at the local level
4. Identify concrete opportunities and encourage enriched regional co-operation, exchange of knowledge, experiences and best practices and cross-fertilization of efforts for enhancing women participation in local governance, especially in advocacy efforts that have a significant impact on the lives of women and girls

The workshop had a mix of plenary sessions, panels, and working group discussions to foster inputs from all participants and to ensure an exchange rich in substantive subject expertise as well as practitioner experience. This approach helped to maximize participation and produce high quality discussions including proposals for practical follow up action. In addition to participating in the workshop, women leaders and civil society groups were allowed to share and display their successful gender empowerment experiences and works, setting up colourful booths recreating a warm Thai street-market atmosphere.



# Session I

## Opening Plenary



In the opening remarks **Ms. Caitlin Wiesen-Antin, Chief of Regional Policy and Programme Support, Bangkok Regional Hub of UNDP**, briefly introduced the workshop's objectives: "We would like to engage you and your experience working with local communities so that we can get ideas on how to increase women's political participation, both at local and national levels. The fact that women's political participation in Asia is well below global average is of concern to all of us. There are common problems such as difficulty for women to raise political finances, and to break into an area traditionally dominated by men."

It is generally difficult for women to break into politics at the national level unless they are from a politically influential family. While at the local level, it is easier for women to attain leadership positions as it costs less money, and campaigning and influencing a smaller geographic area is manageable when one is new in the political arena. It is therefore strategic to enter the political arena as local leaders and graduate to the national level"

The workshop was not just about launching a study, it is also about empowering women to participate in local governance through sharing experiences with those who have succeeded in this daunting task.

Ms. Wiesen-Antin highlighted four strategic points for effective participation of women in politics: the "4 Ms", shared by Ms. Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator and former Prime Minister of New Zealand.

- *Mentoring* (women in politics mentor and share lessons on their strategies and experiences to those starting out)
- *Mobilization* (need to speak with constituency)
- *Men* (change perception of male-dominated sphere and create male champions)
- *Money* (resources are needed for women to effectively participate in politics)

The workshop was successful at fostering knowledge sharing on multiple levels. It provided a platform to launch the report 'Gender Equality – Women's participation and leadership in governments at the local level', and an opportunity for participants to share experiences, find critical role models and mentors, and explore ways and means to strengthen women's participation in local governance.

The focus on participation of women in governance at the local level was emphasized given the important role it plays as a first step in building up broader political participation of women. For those women who venture into politics, engagement the local level ensures a manageable geographic areas and costs less money. Furthermore, the engagement and experience at the local level is crucial for women to help women participate in politics at the national level. Developing capacity and acquiring knowledge, skill and tools is also critical to empowering women to participate effectively in local governance. Gender sensitive budgeting, mobilization of voices and people, and strategic networking will help women to garner capacity and support when they participate in election to or run for the political office at the local level.

Ms. Wiesen-Antin ended her opening remark with a call for action: "**This is the time to make a difference and influence the full sphere within this region.** Leave here today as committed individuals, as committed women to make a difference for this region."



In her opening address, **Ms. Carrie Thompson, Deputy Mission Director, USAID RDMA**, reiterated that historic, economic, socio-cultural factors continue to exclude women from achieving political rights. The region adopted the International Bill of Rights of Women (CEDAW) in 1979, and even after Beijing +20, significant social, political and economic challenges remain that hinder the progress of women. Ms. Carrie stressed the United States' commitment to working with women and girls to expand their opportunities and choices. She shared the experience of USAID's governance programme in Thailand that promotes gender equality and respect for gender diversity.

The programme encouraged women and other stakeholders to adopt the principles of women's equality and human diversity and provided 400 women leaders with an opportunity to enhance leadership skills, skills and tools to engage in local governance. **The programme enabled women to impact their daily lives**, by increasing women's voices to foster sustainable development, making communities free of violence and reducing pollution.

**Mr. Michael Eddy, Director of the Office of Governance and Vulnerable Populations at USAID RDMA**, stated that the most effective investments of governments have been in promoting women-led governance.



Speaking about her experience as a woman activist in the civil society in Nepal, **Ms. Pabitra Subedi, Programme Coordinator at SAC Nepal**, said that despite Nepal's move towards democracy, most of the women still do not have a voice and cope with domestic violence. She emphasized that women's participation in politics is both a local and global issue and threat, noting that gender inequality affects women in most countries of the world. She spoke about the barriers women face when they attempt to participate in the political process, which are due to social, cultural and economic factors and to entrenched patriarchy within society.

In rural Nepal, due to cultural prejudices and practise, women are not even allowed to enter their own home during their menstrual period. However, thanks to the consistent efforts of women's groups and civil society organisations there is an increasing recognition about the role of women in politics and governance. The various efforts by civil society organisations and women's rights groups to enhance the skills, knowledge and opportunities for women are making a difference in Nepal.



**Ms. Encop Sofia, Member of Parliament, Banten Province, Indonesia**, shared her perspective about the cultural and socio-economic factors that affect the political participation of women. Democracy calls for people to work together to make communities better and to address social injustice within the community or society. Though the Indonesian constitution declares the equality of women and men, in reality there are many hurdles for women to achieve social and political equality.

There is a provision for the political parties to ensure that 30 percent of the candidates are female. While such a provision enables women to participate in the local, sub-national and national politics, the representation of women in politics has not registered much growth. In the context of Banten, religion is a major influence and this often creates hurdles for women to actively participate in governance and politics. The concepts of 'Ulama', 'Umaro' and 'Jwara' are important socio-cultural factors that influence those in engaged in politics or in the public sphere. The concept of Ulama refers to religion, Umara has more to do with the arena of governance and government and Jawara refers to the knowledge of traditional culture and art. Every person involved in politics or contesting elections as a candidate is expected to have deep understanding of religion (Islam), bureaucracy, and culture. Since female

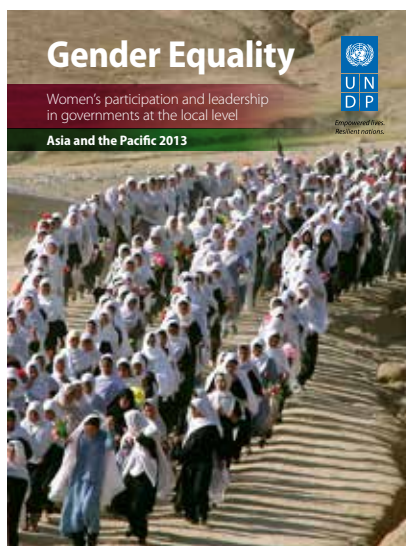


candidates are expected to have knowledge and influence in all these arenas, women from lower socio-economic backgrounds are usually excluded, which means that most women in politics come from privileged social classes.

Women are expected to play multiple roles at home, in the community and in politics, and more often such competing roles and expectations adversely affect women's effective participation in local governance or politics. Indonesia is the third largest exporter of domestic workers in the world, and many migrant domestic workers struggle at the cost of their dignity and rights. Unless women are active in politics, such issues will never get the attention of government or policy makers. The Bantanese government has ensured the rule of law wherein there is provision for protection of women and children from violence, including domestic violence. Women's role in local government is yet to be recognized, and women's political participation is important to protect women's rights and end a feudal and patriarchal culture. **It is important to have small pilot projects to test innovative ways of increasing women's leadership and participation in governance. Such projects can also help to create space for scaling up innovative initiatives.**

# Session II

## UNDP Gender Equality Report 2013



*"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, World Economic Forum (WEF), Founder and Executive Chair

The highlights of the **Gender Equality Report in the Asia Pacific Region**, focussing on Women's Participation and Leadership in Government at the Local level, was presented by Ms. Mithulina Chartterjee, the lead author of the report. The key findings of the report formed the basis of further discussions and possible ways to address the challenges and barriers to effective political participation of women in governance.



The report highlights the positive consequences of women's political participation and how it contributes to the quality of governance. The trend shows that women are making a change through women's participation and leadership styles, increased transparency, less corruption and better advocacy for women's rights. However, women are still under-represented across the countries in the Asia Pacific Region.

Studies in the report point out that political participation of women may lead to qualitative and substantive changes in the quality of governance at the local level. They also show that women involved in politics and active in the civic arena

contribute to create an environment, which is more sensitive and responsive to people's needs, ensuring better quality and inclusiveness of service delivery. Women's leadership styles are viewed as reliable, responsible and honest.

While the report provides an overview of the political and economic trends in the Asia-Pacific region in relation to women's political participation, it also highlights major challenges to women's participation in local government. Within the region, many countries are still in the midst of political and economic transition and moving towards democracy. The historical, cultural and political trajectories of many countries often create hurdles for effective participation of women in local government, sub-national and national governments. Though sixty percent of the population live in the region, the overall percentage of women in politics or leadership positions in the government is relatively less. Though there are international conventions such as CEDAW (1979) and resolutions of UNECOSOC (1990) calling for the target of thirty percent in 1995 and fifty percent of women's participation in elected bodies, by 2000, in most of the countries percentage of women in elected bodies is much less than the target. The UN General Assembly Resolution (2011), the resolution of the UN Human Rights Council (2013), the UN Secretary General's Report and UN Electoral Assistance framework (2013) reiterated the need to increase the participation of women in politics and governance.

**The findings of the report show that the overall rate of women's representation increased slightly at the national level, but decreased at the sub-national level.** Among all the countries in the region, only Timor Leste and Nepal have achieved the target of thirty percent of women's

representation at the national level. At the sub-national and local level, only a few countries such as India, China, Australia, and Nauru and Niue registered an improvement in terms of women's representation. The changing sub-national trends since the year 2010 indicated that while there was 3 percent increase in East Asia, there was a decrease of 2.3 percent in South Asia and a decrease of 9 percent in the Pacific Region. Though there is an improvement in the percentage of women's representation in urban local councils, the percentage of women's representation seems to have decreased in many of the rural councils. The analysis shows that only 8.1 percent of women were elected into leadership positions such as the chair of the councils. However, there are positive improvements at the local governance level in different countries. There is an overall improvement of women's participation at the local government bodies/councils in India, China, Cambodia, and Viet Nam. Despite improvements in certain countries, with a rate of representation at around 28 percent, women are still under-represented in all tiers of local government institutions.

In most countries in the region, despite economic growth or better gender equality indices, women's voice or representation has remained low. Data show that while more educated women seem to be getting into local governments in East Asia and the Pacific Region, there are less educated or professional women getting elected into the local governments in South Asia. There are many institutional factors that could facilitate women's representation in governments. Countries with explicit constitutional guarantees and gender parity tend to have higher rates of female representation in governments at various levels. In Mongolia, for example, the representation of women in government jumped up from 10 percent to 15 percent due to electoral system support indicates that enabling institutional reforms can increase women's representation at the national, sub-national and local level. The affirmative action and legislative framework, such as women's reservation (33 percent to 50 percent in many sub-national states in India), has resulted in large number of women elected in to local governments and a significant number of them elected to leadership roles. The quota system in Indonesia also increased women's representation in elected bodies. Afghanistan also witnessed an increase to 35 percent women in the provincial councils. While there are arguments for and against quota systems or reservation to increase women's representation, the overall trend shows that such affirmative action and quota/reservation systems enable more women to get elected at the sub-national and local levels.

The report highlights the major impediments for women's political participation and effective representation of women in elected or government bodies. The gender-stereotype, socio-cultural and religious practises, entrenched patriarchy within political parties and society, and multiple identities of women (such as religion, class, age etc.) often adversely affect the political participation of women. Absence of a critical number of inspiring women's leaders to provide mentorship to the women interested in political participation often face an issue of self-confidence to enter in the election or political representation.

The report also identifies a few strategic areas for further action and advocacy. There is a need for concerted advocacy at the international and national levels for increasing women's representation and participation in local government. Investments in leadership development and as well efforts to enhance the capacities, skills and tools for women's political participation would go a long way in increasing women's leadership and participation in local, sub-national and national governments. One of the major challenges is the absence of a good data base on women's political participation at the local level and hence one of **the crucial areas for action is the development of a coherent and effective database on women's political participation and representation at all levels of government. The post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda would provide an opportunity to advocate for women's representation and political participation in government.**



Commenting on the report, **Dr. Sutada Mekrungruengkul, Assistant to the Rector of Academic Affairs of the Nation's University, Thailand**, pointed out that the level of women's participation in the political and public sphere would depend on the degree of gender equality within a given society. Often the predominance of money in politics and a male-dominant political environment in many countries inhibit the effective political participation of women. Unless there are enabling and effective policies protecting women's right, mere formal representation of women in government would not transform the situation on the ground.

Unless there is enabling social, cultural and political environment, and unless women's actively participate in the power-struggle within politics, the leadership capacity of women may not get realised. In the absence of such an enabling social-political condition, capacity building programmes for few women leaders may result in the desired change. Dr. Sutada did not favour a quota for women's representation and felt that women's rights advocacy is more important than merely pushing to increase the women's representation in governments. She advocated for educating the voters to make informed choices and emphasized power of the votes rather than promoting a quota system to increase the women's representation.



**“Women's political participation is critical in fulfilling the potential of democracy.** Women make essential contributions to achieving and maintaining peaceful and secure communities, the full realization of human rights, the eradication of disease, hunger and poverty, and the promotion of sustainable development” said **Ms. Caroline Horkens, Programme Manager of Fund for Gender Equality at the UN Women.**

The two key principles for UN Women are: i) representative democracy and fair and just representation of women (as well as others who are under-represented); ii) quality of governance, which is not merely about numbers but about substantive leadership of women that would help to increase responsive and accountable governance systems. Studies by UN Women showed that only five countries reached the 30 percent target of female representation, and that there is a need to overcome multiple socio-economic and political challenges for ensuring effective women's leadership and participation. Ms. Horkens identified the following areas for further advocacy and action:

1. Make local and national elections free and fair for women and for everyone.
2. Promote affirmative measures such as quota or reservation for increasing women's representation, voter registration, changing the media bias and ensuring campaign finances and other enabling conditions for women to actively participate in politics.
3. Build accountability for women's rights in public institutions. Gender responsive budgeting, and adequate financing and support for women's rights and women's movements are crucial for ensuring women's leadership.
4. Capacity development of grassroots women leaders in enhancing their skills and capacities in the areas of advocacy, public policy, governance, leadership skills, language, and effective communications.
5. Using the post-2015 agenda as an opportunity to strengthen women's leadership and participation in political and electoral process to ensure fair and just representation of women at all levels of governance. The Fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) focuses on achieving gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. The target 5.5 is to “ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life”.

There are international opportunities, such as Beijing+20 platforms, that can contribute to strategic vision for gender equality, development and peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The UN Women fund for gender equality prioritises two thematic areas: economic and political empowerment. Women's political empowerment focuses on:

- Mobilizing for legislative and policy change;
- Increasing and strengthening women's leadership; and
- Engaging women in electoral politics.

The fund has an active portfolio of 67 programmes; 54 of which were completed 18 months after implementation. In 2013, political empowerment programme reached 1 million women at the grassroots level; 39 of all programmes and 57 percent of all grants were dedicated for women's political empowerment, with majority of programmes based in the Asia-Pacific region. Most of the programmes (70 percent) focused on the local-level strategies to increase women's leadership and political participation, both as candidates and voters. Most of the programmes (72 percent)

used The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to advance policy recommendations, ensuring minimum quota for women-held political position and proposing gender-responsive budgeting.

During the discussions on the report, Dr. Sutada and Ms. Chatterjee pointed out that women's group will have to network with broader stakeholders in political process, such as media, political parties and other large civil society networks, rather than only focus on networking among women's organisation. Ms. Horkern emphasized the need to develop strategies and approaches based on specific social and political contexts and that there is no magic potion to dramatically increase the representation. A few workshop participants pointed out that the report did not include a survey on how voters perceive the women leaders elected in their countries.

The report presentation was followed by a group exercise to discuss its various aspects and findings.

### **Box 1: Comparing views: the value of capacity building programmes**

The debate highlighted two different perspectives on women's leadership and participation. Dr. Sutada stated that gender equality is not a product of politics or political processes or women leaders, but rather that gender equality derives from social dynamics and social change. As a result, leadership training is not helpful because leaders are 'naturally born'. However, many grassroots women leaders disagreed with that perspective. **Ms. Wannakanok Poh-itaeda-oh, President of the Association of Children and Youth for the Peace in the Southern most Provinces of Thailand (Luukrieang)** challenged the perception that leaders are 'natural born'. For example, she is from Yala province in Southern Thailand, and needed support and leadership training to acquire confidence and empowerment to become a female leader in the community. In a predominantly Muslim population in Yala province, women have little access to opportunities or to develop knowledge or skills. It is the leadership and capacity building programme that enabled her and many other women in the province affected by violent conflict to build confidence and skills to become a leader for peace and democracy in the community. Dr. Sutada clarified that while empowerment of women and advocacy for women's rights is important, she did not think that capacity development programmes alone would lead to real empowerment.



## Session III

### Empowering Women to Participate in Local Governance: Experience from the Field

The session focused on grassroots experience and country perspective on various efforts towards empowering women to participate in local governance. The session consisted of two parallel panels: women in local government and women in civil society.

#### Panel 1: Perspective of Women in Local Governance

**Dr. Nyo Nyo Thinn, Member of the Parliament, Yangon Region, in Myanmar** and **Nihal Farook member of the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council, Sri Lanka**, presented their respective experience and perspective on women in local government.

Dr. Nyo Nyo Thinn talked about women's empowerment and political participation in the context of the transition of Myanmar into a relatively more democratic country. Due to decentralization of governance, after the election in 2010, 14 sub-national governments and 14 regional/state level parliaments emerged. Despite the move to liberalise political process and to initiate multi-party elections, there are only 25 (2.8 percent) women members out of 883 members of the Parliament. There are no women leaders represented in the 330 township administrations, and there are only 19 (out of 16,743) women ward/village administrators. Hence, the transition to democracy *de facto* excluded women from effective political participation at all levels. The entrenched culture of patriarchy, the exclusion of women leaders during the military rule, and the stereo type of women "as mothers and those who need protection" marginalise women and severely restrict their participation in politics. There is still a very limited understanding and recognition of CEDAW within amongst high-level decision makers and in the policy making process. **The increasing violence against women, the lack of adequate budget allocation and the many years of militarization of government and society pose serious challenges to women's empowerment, leadership and political participation in Myanmar.**



Nihal Farook provided an overview of women's political participation and the challenges to the emergence of women's leadership at the local level. In Sri Lanka, women's representation in parliament is a mere 6 percent, one of the lowest rates in South Asia. Though the first woman prime-minister in the world was in Sri Lanka, the women's political participation is much less than most of the countries in the region. As there are religious, social and economic challenges for effective political participation of women, there is a need to empower women by creating enabling conditions, including improving their perspectives, knowledge, skills and leadership qualities. As there are multiple challenges for women and various social-cultural and political impediments to actively participate in politics, **the only viable way to increase the representation of women is through quota system or reserving seats for women in all elected bodies.**

## Panel 2: Perspectives of Women in Civil Society

The second panel on the perspective of women in civil society discussed experiences from Thailand and Cambodia. **Dr. Farung Meeudon Lecturer at Khon Kaen University in Thailand** presented a model for successful women empowerment for participation in governance. **Ms. Ros Sopheap, member of the Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP) and Executive Director of Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)** presented the experience of women's representation and participation in local governance with reference to the women's rights movement and civil society in Cambodia.

Women's political participation at national level in Thailand has improved over the years. The number of women members in the parliament and sub-district administration has seen an increase.



Dr. Farung Meeudon shared the experience of the USAID supported programme to empower women in political participation in local governance. The programme included efforts to build leadership capacity, access to information and active monitoring of governance at the local level. Since the beginning of democratic transition in 1932, Thailand has witnessed chequered political history that oscillated between democratic governance and authoritarian governments. Despite the multiple shifts in governments and process of governance, there is more recognition about the need for more women leaders in politics, though there

are still socio-political challenges for women to have adequate or full representation in the government at various levels.

The study done by Dr. Farung Meeudon through focused group interviews and discussions with women's groups in Thailand showed that social mobilization of women at the grassroots level to get involved in community work and social initiatives enabled many women to play a leadership role in local governance. The initiatives to promote leadership skills and to build capacity for development in the areas of budget literacy, public policies, women's development, communication and facilitation skills and advocacy enabled a significant number of women to fruitfully engage with the local government at the level of municipalities and sub-district administration in Thailand. **The initiatives to monitor governance using various tools and approaches, such as community score cards, social audits and citizens' charter, helped women to develop experience and expertise to participate in local governance and strengthened civic engagement at the community level.** Despite all these efforts, **the entrenched gender-stereotypes and mindset created barriers for women to actively participate in politics or governance.** Such a mindset is revealed in the response of a person interviewed for the study; "If a women become head of the villages, how could they set of tents or catch thieves?"



In Cambodia, women's representation in commune council is 18 percent and only 5 percent of the chiefs are women. Ms. Ros Sopheap described the historical and social context of decentralization and women's political and civic participation in Cambodia. It was with the decentralisation process in 2002 that women's political participation acquired significance. The efforts of various women's groups and sharing the knowledge on gender and decentralisation helped to build the capacity of many women activists and leaders at the community level. The various networking and

capacity development on decentralization and gender resulted in the formation of the Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP).

The CPWP bridged women councillors and activists at the community level and women leaders at the national level. This enabled women to share experiences, knowledge and skills; it also helped to them to engage with political parties. **As women make up 52 percent of the population, they are still under-represented with very few women in leadership positions in the government; more advocacy and efforts are needed to increase the influence and presence of women in leadership roles.**

Discussions followed the panel presentations, and the main highlights are summarized in Box 2.

### Box 2: Skills for the effective participation of women in politics and in the civic arena

The experiences in Thailand showed that multiple skills are required for gender empowerment and to ensure effective participation of women in politics: political campaigning, negotiation skills, strategic networking skills with media and all other relevant actors; information and knowledge on local governance, budgeting, public policy advocacy; and monitoring governance. While there were few women leaders with such skills, the key challenge was how to spread them among a large number of women. In contexts of conflict and violence, the peace-building and political negotiation skills also made women's leadership more effective. There was a recognition that women's groups and initiatives also need to engage with men to change their mindset and to obtain more support for women political participation.

In Cambodia, CPWP provided training to female leaders, but later realized that male leaders also benefitted from gender-sensitising trainings to help strengthen women's participation in politics.

#### Identification of the major challenges to women's political participation

Participants, during group discussions, identified these key challenges:

- 1) Gender stereotypes and consequent social mindset that restrict opportunities for women.
- 2) Lack of adequate resources for women to effectively participate in politics.
- 3) Lack of adequate role models to mentor women interested to join politics.
- 4) Violence against women adversely affects the active participation of women in public life.
- 5) Gender Inequality resulting in the inequality of opportunities for women.
- 6) Lack of legal protection and adequate constitutional guarantees to equal rights and opportunities for women.
- 7) The dichotomy of women's rights and spaces in the private and public sphere where women are expected to play multiple roles.
- 8) The control of the political party by men and a patriarchal mindset.
- 9) Insufficient implementation of laws and policies to ensure rights and opportunities for women.
- 10) Various kinds of religious fundamentalism, poverty, and lack of commitment from governments, which severely restrict the participation of women in public sphere or politics.

### Recommendations from participants

- 1) Build broader multi-stakeholder alliance for strengthening women's leadership and participation in governance.
- 2) Capacity development to enhance leadership skills and expertise in politics, public policy governance.
- 3) Challenging and changing social norms and patriarchal mindset through public education and campaigns.
- 4) Set clear advocacy targets for achieving women's representation in elected bodies and government.
- 5) Providing support and mentorship for women to move forward in the leadership role from local to national level.
- 6) Multi-level engagement and networking at the local, sub-national and national level.
- 7) Research, knowledge, good practises and policy proposals to strengthen women's space and role in politics and governance.
- 8) Building regional networks in the Asia-Pacific region to exchange experience, best practises, leadership models, advocacy strategies and policy options to strengthen women's participation in politics and governance.
- 9) Seeking accountability and transparency in relation to women's rights, policies, programmes, and budget. Accountability tools such gender responsive budgeting, social audit, budget monitoring and right to information would help to monitor governance and strengthen accountability.
- 10) Encouraging young women to engage in the political process and governance.
- 11) Encouraging men in political parties, civil society and government to champion gender equality and women's participation in government. Support women's leadership and role in political parties.
- 12) Monitoring the media and work with media organisations to change the gender biases and patriarchal mindset within the media.
- 13) Making effective use of technology, new media, internet, social network etc to share experience, to learn good practises and to influence the attitude of a large cross section of society, particularly women.
- 14) Promoting peace and religious harmony and building alliances against religious fundamentalism and fanaticism.



## Session IV

### Exhibition: Inspiration, Innovation and Success



At the conclusion of Day 1, participants were invited to visit the inspiring exhibition set outside the conference room: a real marketplace of ideas and innovative experiences to promote gender empowerment and to showcase success stories realized in the field.

Best practices in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Cambodia and Bhutan were presented.

- Ms. Smanmali Gunasinghe, member of the central municipal council, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka presented an initiative to increase awareness and vigilance against the Dengue fever.
- Ms. Pabitra Subedi, described the experience of micro-finance, peace promotion and good governance and women's participation in local governance.
- Ms. Sary Kong from SILAKA, Cambodia, presented their engagement to empowering women's leaders at the sub-national level (WLSN project).
- Mr. Jamba Tobden, Manager of the Institute for Gross National Happiness (GNH) in Bhutan presented the initiative to include the GNH in the post-2015 development goals of the country.



# Session V

## Regional and Global Perspectives for Enhanced Women's Participation in Governance

The session was introduced by **Ms. Thusita Pilapitiya, Policy Adviser on Decentralisation and Local Governance at UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub**. **Ms. Suranjana Gupta, Adviser at the Huairou Commission**, and **Ms. Megan Praeger, Regional Programme Coordinator of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)** presented the perspective and experience of strengthening women's political participation by international organisations. **Ms. Rento Ika Praesty, representing United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)**, shared the experience of women working in conflict areas such as Ache in Indonesia.



Ms. Gupta introduced the work and programme of Huairou Commission (HC), a coalition of women's network and organization formed during the Beijing conference on women's rights. HC works with grassroots women's leadership in community development to improve their everyday life and living conditions and reconfiguring their power-relations with other actors.

Huairou's priorities areas of work and approach included the following:

1. Strengthening grassroots women's organizing and leadership (women to explore collective leadership, women normally get isolated as an individual leader).
2. Promoting grassroots women to identify priority and develop practices and knowledge and transfer practices to trainers and teachers.
3. Building constituencies and networks – allow local practices to be expanded.
4. Influencing and changing public policy processes at local and national levels by building partnerships at different levels to leverage their knowledge and practices.

The work included engaging with local government and convening dialogue and opportunities to interface between the local and national governments. Grassroots groups of women become one of the key stakeholders in the local governance process. Ms. Gupta talked about a girl who studied up to 4<sup>th</sup> class and got elected in the local government of a village of 8,000 people thanks to the support and capacity development inputs she received from the women's group. In her role she promoted education and construction of toilets in the village. This demonstrated that **strengthening grassroots women's organization and leadership can make a significant difference to facilitate women's political participation at the local government level**. Once women are in position of power, they can further develop leadership skills and compete for broader leadership role in the government.



At the international and regional level, the United Nations plays an important convening role in bringing different stakeholders together to create space for dialogue and collaborative mechanisms. **It is important to support the processes and spaces for women leaders at the grassroots level to build capacity through reflection, peer learning and practical experience.**

Ms. Pilapitiya pointed out that it is important to reconfigure the relationship between grassroots women in rural and urban areas. She also noted that it is crucial to work at the national level to build knowledge-action-advocacy networks to strengthen the political environment for women's political participation

**“Creating room for women and getting them elected is not enough.** There is a need to create an enabling institutional environment and supporting/mentoring so that the women leaders become successful in their leadership roles. **A holistic approach beyond mere representation is necessary to strengthen women’s leadership and participation”** said Ms. Megan Prager, based on the experience of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) in the Pacific Islands. She also noted that it is important to identify political opportunities for women. In Solomon Islands, the 2015 election represents a crucial opportunity for women to get elected, as women have never been represented before. For this to happen, it is necessary to develop strategies to enable women to use this new opportunity of getting involved into politics (presenting their candidacy).



In many Pacific Island nations, there is a need to embed the gender-equality framework in the local governments. The lack of awareness and limited space for local government to negotiate with the national government also pose a challenge for effective women’s participation at the local level.

The work of CLGF indicated that peer support learning networks and cross-council networks at the national and regional levels helped to increase the understanding of the issues and learn from experience best practises about recruitment policies, budgeting, and working with male

allies. Such spaces for practical learning helped to build confidence as well as leadership skills and capacity.

Few women alone would not be able to make a difference, unless they work in partnership with various stakeholders, along with civil society organization and through collective action. It is also important to identify effective entry points for women in the political and governance process. Localizing the MDGs and SDGs would also give women an opportunity to involve in dialogue at all levels.



“Women could play a positive role as peace actors in the context of conflicts” said Ms. Retno Ika Praesty, based on the work of UCLG in Aceh in Indonesia. **Women leaders could be trained as non-violent negotiators and their negotiation skills are often more effective than their male colleagues.** Gender equality, then, has to be promoted within a broader social, political and racial equality framework. South-south cooperation will enable women to learn from the experiences of other countries in the region and beyond. She stressed the need to advocate quota system to achieve the target of 30 percent women in elected bodies and government.

### Box 3: Quota system: yes or no?

In the discussions following the presentations, **Mr. Phil Matsheza, Team Leader for Governance and Peace building, UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub**, pointed out that **temporary measures such as a quota system or reservation for women in politics would be important to bridge the gap as there is an unequal race**. Ms. Suranjana Gupta and Megan Praeger agreed with argument for the quota system. Ms. Gupta also shared the experience of local governments in India where the reservation system has enabled more than a million women to enter the political arena. Though many participants thought the quota system was 'tokenistic', they felt that it allowed women to achieve meaningful political participation and succeed in their leadership roles.

A participant from Iran mentioned the importance of a nuanced understanding of culture in different contexts and countries. The UN agencies should be sensitive to make a distinction between their role in developed countries and developing countries. Many of the political practises in developed countries may not be practical in the cultural or religious context of a developing country.

In Bhutan, the eligibility to participate in elections requires a minimum of Bachelor Degree. This provision aims at ensuring that the political candidates are qualified, though it may exclude many capable women at the community level. Many of the women leaders in Bhutan questioned the quota system as they felt such 'favours' are demeaning to their dignity.

It was also pointed out that there is a need for broader regional and global perspective on women's empowerment, leadership and political participation as large number of women move out of their community and countries in search of jobs. Many times such women do not have any protection or the ability to claim their rights or to participate in social and political process. Hence, it would be also important to have cross-national perspective on women's rights, empowerment and leadership. There is a need to work collectively at the national, regional and international level to strengthen women leadership and political participation.

## Session VI

### Effective Leadership as a Multiplier Effect on Empowering Women and Girls: Prevention of Violence Against Women



The session focused on how various strategies and approaches to prevent violence against women (VAW) could create a multiplier-effect in promoting women's empowerment, leadership and political participation. **Ms. Erin Doss, Thailand Team Lead, USAID RDMA**, facilitated the session and discussion.



**Ms. Amy Sunseri Senior Technical Advisor, Health Policy Project at Plan International** illustrated the health policy project (family planning, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS), which helped to improve policy, remove barriers, and generate data in preventing violence against women (VAW). Effective tools to monitor as well as to exchange policy perspectives to prevent violence against women could encourage good policy practises. The global policy scan often helped to identify effective policy practises; regional consultations and a user-friendly handbook to facilitate analysis and action contributed to the efforts to prevent VAW.



**Mr. James Lang Regional Advisor, Ending Gender-Based Violence, at UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub** illustrated the perspective and experiences of policy practise on prevention of gender-based violence.

“Violence against women does not happen in isolation, not in a vacuum, and not different from other forms of injustice. One in three women reported having experienced violence. Many of them experience sexual and physical violence from their own partners. There is a variance in the types of violence across different countries. **Violence against women is a governance issue as well. It is about changing the social norms, systems and institutional structures.**”

Mr. Lang explained the context, concepts and policy framework related to gender-based violence. He noted that it is necessary to advocate for both prevention and responses to violence against women. For this, he implied that it would be important to understand the drivers and factors that inhibit safety, security and peace. He also said that it requires fighting against systematic violence and challenging the belief that men could control women's bodies. Mr. Lang noted that prevention and response would have to be a part of a comprehensive approach to stop VAW, and that the causes and solution to VAW unfold across all levels of society. He said that VAW has a personal/individual dimension such as quarrelling, transactional sex, and childhood emotional abuse. At the macro level, he noted, the causes of VAW include the high level of gender-inequality, low level of education, limited access to divorce, limited laws or non-implementation of laws, lack of police responses, high rates of crime in the society and hyper masculinity.

A more comprehensive approach to responses includes the following:

- Comprehensive laws on justice, services and prevention.
- Responsive institutions–institutions need to understand their role, prioritize and prevent VAW.
- Participation and voice–CSO, government, and private sector–everyone has a role to play to end VAW, voices of all actors are equally valued–What are the difference struggles, potentials that each sector can contribute?
- Coordination, communications and motivation – Need for mechanism to coordinate and communicate across sectors from all levels. Are the laws being implemented from central level down to the local governments? How to get the system right?
- Sustainability and scaling up–how to integrate into government policies, to build effective systems to end VAW, to support long-term change?

**It is important to work both at the macro- level (policy development, government institutions, and social advocacy to change attitudes and behaviour, adopting effective prevention mechanisms) and at the micro level, addressing the individual/personal dimensions of violence against women.**

#### **Box 4: Participants' inputs on the policy framework**

Participants described how VAW is addressed in different country contexts.

**Indonesia:** There is a national bill to address domestic violence; the challenge is that the national bill does not provide tools to facilitate local implementation. How to apply the national regulations? UNDP may consider developing guidelines, with particular attention on how to implement the provisions at the local level.

**Thailand:** In the context of the Thai Muslim communities in three southern provinces, violence related to religion and forced marriage of young girls are still a problem. Although the national law prohibits child marriage, it is not enforced in these provinces/communities as it conflicts with the religious belief.

**Philippines:** There is a national law and a gender development fund. However, women do not have access to it; they are not even aware of the fund, and corruption in local government prevents further action. Awareness raising in the community is therefore essential.

**Sri Lanka:** Bad examples are set by people in power (politicians) and violence caused by alcohol abuse is a common phenomenon. The legal system is slow in punishing perpetrators of violence. Women face violence at home but cannot denounce it. The general perception/ expectation on the role of women, which is widely promoted on national television, is that her duty is to be responsible for the household and the family. Also women engaged in politics are expected to manage the household. Despite being in a post war context, the military system is still so strong that even small business and agriculture are taken over by the military and women are not empowered to speak out.

**India:** India has a strong law on preventing domestic violence. The increasing instances of rape and public protest against rape also led to a strong law against rape. **Awareness is a game changer;** without awareness about the laws, policies and women's right, many women may not even report violence, as suggested by data of the areas where violence reporting is higher (areas where there is also more awareness). Changing social attitude requires working with children and young adults to change their attitude and perspectives. Women need to be provided with moral support to back them up and to make sure they know that there is someone on whom they can fall back.



**Cambodia:** There is a law on human trafficking and sexual exploitation; national action development plan including gender perspective. There is also a gender action plan on VAW, national policy, commune council for women and children, women and children committee, and national strategies against VAW. However, there is no monitoring mechanism to follow up on the existing legal or policy framework.

**Maldives:** There are progressive policies on VAW. However, there is not effective implementation as enforcement agencies are not sensitive to the issue; cases are not followed up, the procedure is so slow that victims of violence often do not get justice. There is an awareness gap, sensitivities of enforcers and lack of effective institutions.

**Nepal:** There are a gender-based Act, Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, and a District Development Coordinator to help follow up issues. However, there are many challenges to implement the act and raise awareness about the law, women's rights. Sensitization of men is also important to prevent VAW.

**Viet Nam:** Viet Nam has a good gender-based violence law, but there are still challenges / gaps in implementing it. Men, especially those in leadership positions, have to be involved in the prevention process: men in local government can help to educate the people in their communities.

# Session VII

## Improving Key Aspects of Women's participation



During this session four different working groups discussed various aspects of strengthening women's leadership, gender empowerment and political participation: electoral system, monitoring and evaluation, gender-sensitive budgeting and impact of political environment.

### Working Group 1: Electoral System

The working group discussed the various options and strategies to strengthen the participation of women in electoral system. **Dr. Manju Thapa Tuladhar, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Adviser at USAID Nepal** facilitated the session. All the participants listed various **challenges for women to enter electoral politics. These included the social-mindset, the perception that 'politics is meant for men', the lack of adequate campaign finance, the patriarchal and male-centric perspective of political parties, and challenges due to religious-cultural impediments for women to actively participate in the electoral system.**

A participant from Thailand explained how she contested as an independent candidate to the Senate. She lost due to the lack of support from political parties and she could spend only 2 million Bhat while her opponent who won the election spent 33 million Bhat.

In Cambodia, there is an increasing recognition of the role in politics and governance. The experience of Cambodia stressed the need for voter-education among women and the creation of awareness campaigns to support competent women candidates who could serve the cause and rights of women relatively better. All the commune council in Cambodia have women as members, though they are expected to be responsible for children and women's rights issues.

In the case of Indonesia, religion (Islam) plays an important role and it is important to network strategically with religious leaders and others actors. While there is a quota system at the local governance level, there is no quota for women in Parliament.

In Bhutan, only university graduates are allowed to be candidate in the election and the government provide a support of 1 Million Bhutan Ngultrum for each of the candidates; candidates are not expected to spend their private money in the election.

The strategies proposed to reform the electoral system included the following:

1. Advocacy for gender-sensitive policies and effective participation of women in electoral politics.
2. Reforming electoral laws to ensure transparent, fair, free and gender-sensitive elections.
3. Gender-sensitive approach of election-management bodies such as the election commission.

Participants identified some tools for women to be successful in electoral politics: Access to campaign finances; ability to engage with media and strategic understanding of media advocacy; mentoring young female leaders and creating space for women in politics and governance; ability to engage with mainstream political parties/credible leaders to prove they add value to the overall political process.



## Working Group 2: Monitoring and Evaluation for Increased Women's Political Participation

The group discussed and identified best practices for collection, management, monitoring and evaluation of data on women's local participation from around the world and considering possible replications throughout the Asia-Pacific region, at the country-level and regionally. **Mr. Nasheeth Thoha, Policy Coordinator at UNDP Maldives** facilitated the working group discussions. There were fifteen participants in the working group, mostly from civil society organizations (CSOs) in Afghanistan, Iran, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

There is lack of reliable and publicly available data on gender equality and women's political participation in many countries of the region, mainly due to the missed acknowledgement of the right to information. Participants presented the situation of information availability and public data relevant to monitor and evaluate women's leadership and political participation in their countries.

- **Afghanistan:** The Ministry of Woman Affairs works through a gender equality project with other government employees at different levels to ensure they get the right data. Focal points are responsible to check them.
- **Laos:** Few non-governmental organisations (such as the Laos Women Union) collect data on gender development through the action learning system, where data is collected while awareness raising is conducted. Efforts are being made for international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) to work together, but this cooperation has not yet been implemented.
- **Iran:** In a small project, a local community mobilization consultant works with women in the community to first obtain the trust of the local community. The consultant then conducts face-to-face interviews to collect data such as gender equality. The Local and National Council check the accuracy of the data.
- **Viet Nam:** CSOs provide an annual report to Ministers on the number of women leaders in organizations. The data is reliable, but it needs to be integrated with data at national level.
- **China:** The Statistics Bureau is controlled by the government and the data on gender participation may not be reliable. Gender disaggregated data was collected through UNICEF.
- **Myanmar:** There is no reliable data from the government. At present, the number of NGOs is increasing and they are collecting gender-related data, which can be accessed.
- **Cambodia:** Data collection should be integrated in the data collected by governments like census every 10 years and national demography survey/health conducted every 5 years. There is a plan to expand gender-based related questionnaire, which should be consistent with what the International/private organizations use.
- **Indonesia:** Macro-level data disaggregated by gender does exist, but other data is not disaggregated. Hence, it is difficult to calculate women's participation. Reliability of data is still an issue.

**The working group discussed the relevance of national/international benchmarking and targets for women's participation in local governance.** Though benchmarks/targets are often set up based on international standards, in many countries, civil society organisations were not aware of how or who decided on the benchmarking and targets without inclusive consultations with the primary stakeholders. In countries like Laos, during every election a target of certain percentage of women gets proposed. The discussion also focused on the tension between quantitative and qualitative indicators. While many suggested SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound), when it comes to women's empowerment, leadership and participation, the quantitative data often fail to give indications about empowerment or leadership. **Many countries and organizations were good in setting targets and indicators. However, the real challenge was in achieving those targets or indicators.** It was pointed out that setting indicators and targets for a specific project was feasible if it was done at the project design stage and it would be possible to monitor and evaluate such a projects. However, when it comes to broader politics, there are too many unknown variables and factors that affect the political trajectory, effectiveness of political participation and winning an election. Hence, in the larger context of women's empowerment and leadership in politics, the quantitative indicator would not be able to give a clear measure of the complexity of factors, and issues that affect the political outcome in a particular contexts as even within a given country there could be so much diversity of contexts, particularly in relation to the women's empowerment, leadership and participation. While there are good examples of how mainstreaming of gender indicators help the outcome of a project, there were questions about how 'mainstreaming' would lead to women's empowerment or participation in politics. In Fiji, in renovating markets in 13 Municipalities, the donors and local councils incorporated the mainstreaming of gender issues. The gender-action learning, using different tools such as gender-balance tree, vision-journey, empowerment map etc, helped to integrate indicators within the project. The monitoring and evaluation was done during the project, and not at the end. Such an approach helped the participants to review, reflect and improve the quality of the project. The discussions also indicated the challenges in collecting, collating and accessing data. While most of the countries did not have a strong system to systematically collect and collate all data regarding the quantity and quality of women's political participation at the local government, some countries (e.g. India) had a robust system and few countries (e.g. Iran) were in the process of developing such a system. However, in the absence of the right to information in many countries, accessing data and information also proved to be challenging for many civil society organisations and women's group.

### Working Group 3: Gender-Sensitive Budgeting

The working group facilitated by **Ms. Liviana Zorzi United Nations Volunteer at UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub**, discussed in details the budget practises in different countries and the implications for women. Since there is a wide range of practises, many of the participants felt the need for clarity and skills-building on gender-responsive-budgeting exercises.

Gender-sensitive-budgeting perspectives and experiences are varied in different country contexts. While in few countries such as Nepal, there was a progress, in many countries gender-sensitive budgeting did not go beyond the rhetoric.



In Nepal, there is a total allocation of 21.71 percent in the gender-responsive budgets and there was a gender-responsive budget committee under the Ministry of Finance to oversee the gender-responsive budgets. At the local level there is 10 percent allocated for women, 10 percent for children, 15 percent for disadvantaged groups and 15 percent for agriculture.

In India, there were more than thirty civil society organisations and groups involved in budget monitoring and advocacy for budget transparency and accountability. Many states

adopted gender-responsive budgets, though in terms of real implementation there was a big gap. In India, there were also innovative initiatives in gender-responsive budgets as well as civil society monitoring of the budgets such as Kerala Budget watch ([www.keralabudgetwatch.org](http://www.keralabudgetwatch.org)) wherein all information, analysis and critiques of budget is shared with media, civil society and government, often forcing government to take corrective measures.

It is important to know the budget cycle to be able to advocate effectively for gender-sensitive budgeting. In different countries, there are different budget cycles depending on the financial year in that particular country. In many countries, government simply does not allocate a budget even after announcing a policy for women's rights. For example, the prevention of domestic violence act was passed through, but there was no budget allocation for safe-houses for women victims of violence.

Hence, the real challenge is that even where there are efforts for gender-sensitive budgeting, the entrenched patriarchal system within the government and bureaucracy often undermines the gender-specific budgets or even earmark budget meant for women's rights or issues.

**The major problem is that in most of the countries budgeting is a centralized bureaucratic process rather than a participatory process.** Civil society organisations did not have a significant role, except in a few countries, in budget formulation or budget monitoring. The major challenge is that budget analysis and advocacy requires specialized expertise, training and advocacy strategies different from general advocacy. Most of the civil society groups lack a deeper understanding of the budgetary process or budgetary expenditure patterns to effectively intervene or advocate for effective gender-sensitive budgets. Hence, most of the participants felt the need for training in budget analysis and advocacy to effectively intervene at the national and sub-national level to influence budgets as well as to monitor budgets. Participants also felt the women's political participation and leadership in government would create a more enabling environment for advocating the gender-sensitive and gender-responsive budgets.

#### Working Group 4: Impact of Political Environment on Women's Leadership at the Local Level

The working group discussed political systems, levels of decentralization, socio-political conflicts, economic conditions, power of formal and non-formal leaders and networks in relation to the women's political participation at the local level. The working group discussions were facilitated by **Ms. Sanda Thant, Gender Specialist at UNDP Myanmar.**

The discussions identified the following factors that affect women's leadership and political participation: social values, patriarchal society, gender stereotype, ideology of women's role.





The key factors that prevent women from assuming leadership role are:

- Reluctance of acceptance in male dominant societies, most politicians are male – these attitudes act as a barrier for women to participate in politics. If women do not receive support from other women, the job is tougher.
- Women are expected to be primary care givers in the family. This often conflicts with the time and expectations of a leadership role in the society or politics. These often meant women had to carry out two roles with lots of pressure to fulfil leadership responsibilities and domestic responsibilities at the same-time, often constraining the space for women to effectively move in to active leadership role in politics.
- Financial / economic issues – candidates need to raise funds to support election campaigns. When compared to male counterparts, women have less access to election funds.
- Women may have to give up jobs in public sector to join the leadership role in politics, often risking their income security.

Many women who got elected and moved successfully in politics became victims of success and internalized patriarchal values. Many such women leaders often follow the main-stream male-values rather than standing up for the rights of women.

The support systems for women leaders are not strong or comprehensive enough in most of the countries. Women need support of other women who are in leadership positions, acting as role models. There was recognition among participants that a strong support system for women to participate in politics would make a positive impact.

It was pointed out that many of the successful female politicians at the national level had strong family support and that many of them were from socially and economically privileged background. This also demonstrated that **it is more difficult and challenging for women from less privileged or more marginalised background to break the barriers of social norms, lack of finance and religious prejudices and barriers.**

Patriarchal norms and values within political parties and media often create huge barriers for women, where without 'god-fathers' or 'patron's many found it difficult to succeed in politics at the national level. The experience of women's group and leaders in the south of Thailand pointed out the patriarchal and patronizing role of media in relation to the women's political leadership roles. In many countries, women often get into political leadership role due to the family ties and kinship rather than their roles as women leaders within the society. Such family-feudal driven women leadership models reflected the patriarchal system within political parties where they were in their capacity as daughter, wives or mothers, rather than women's rights activists or representative of women.

Despite some positive examples of women's political participation at the local level in Indonesia, India, Cambodia, Philippines, where women leaders can contribute to advance women's issues and rights, the situation in many countries show that at the national level women still need to overcome many obstacles to become leaders and participate in political processes. **Creating a successful political environment for women requires more awareness raising and also finding champions within the government, media and civil society to promote and strengthen women's political participation at the local and national level.**

## Session VIII

### Exhibition: Inspiration, Innovation and Success



On the second day, new innovative initiatives and inspiring success stories by women's organisation and civil society groups were presented. Ms. Salma Hamza, Member of the urban council, Kattankudy, Sri Lanka, described her work with internalised displaced people, who were empowered to successful entrepreneurs and social activist in Sri Lanka.

The organisation was founded in 2002 and works with community based groups and civil society organisations on empowering women and ensuring rights to children.

The presentation by the representative of the Kinerja Programme, funded by USAID, Indonesia, illustrated the project that promotes gender equality in five provinces (from Aceh to Papua), in close association with women leaders and local governments in the provinces.

Kinerja's gender strategy has four pillars:

1. Ensuring women's active participation in various approaches of the program (multi- stakeholder forum, citizen journalism, breast feeding concerned father's group, advocacy processes, strengthen women's capacity in monitoring public services, programme to train women civil servants to take more role in decision-making processes). Work with women leaders/mayor and male leaders which have gender equality perspective.
2. Supporting local governments in providing integrated services for violence against women and children victims in Papua province, strengthening public service to address VAW — promote healthy relationships, counselling room, support groups among VAW survivors.
3. Supporting local government in ending child marriage through adolescent reproductive health promotion in east Java — working with religious leaders and local authorities.
4. Supporting local governance in providing integrated services for VAW using three approaches:
  - Structural intervention (creating local policy and mechanism)
  - Content (assisting service providers, for example, VAW survivors)
  - Culture (changing social norms — so VAW is not acceptable)

The third presentation was on the Women Development Forum (WDF, supported by UNDP, in Bangladesh) The Forum was meant to enhance the capacity of women to strengthen their role and to promote women's leadership at the local level.

Finally, Ms. Meach Sotheary, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Cambodia, presented their ways and means to increase women's participation in the civic and political life of Cambodia.

# Session IX

## Improving Key Aspects of Women's Participation



The plenary session presented the summary outcome of the four working group sessions on electoral system, monitoring and evaluation, gender-sensitive budgeting and political environment. **Ms. Ketty Kadarwati, Programme Development Specialist at USAID Indonesia**, facilitated the session.

Most of participants pointed out that the biggest challenge for policies and programmes in favour of women's rights lies in the implementation. Citizens and women should have a say in the budget and there is a need to enhance the capacity of women's organisation and civil society groups to do budget analysis and advocacy for budget transparency and accountability. It would be important to monitor policy promises, parliament, and media and also to initiate collective advocacy for ensuring gender-sensitive laws, election commissions and more affirmative action and quota system to increase women's political participation.

# Session X

## The Way forward for Enhancing Effective Women's Participation in Local Governance

Taking into account all the inputs and recommendations that emerged during the workshop, the co-hosts of the regional workshop, UNDP and USAID, proposed a follow-up regional programme with up to five outcomes for a strategic framework.

The session was led jointly by **Mr. Phil Matsheza, Regional Cluster Leader, Governance and Peace Building, Bangkok Regional Hub of UNDP** and **Ms. Patty Alleman, Regional Senior Gender Advisor, USAID RDMA** seeking inputs from participants and sharing their forward looking perspective.

### Box 5: Main take-away from the workshop



Mr. Matsheza highlighted how the discussions and presentation helped to identify key challenges faced by women to effectively participate in political and governance processes and also some of the ways and means of overcoming the hurdles. Mr. Matsheza invited participants to identify some “take-aways” from the workshop. Participants identified following points:

- 1) Raise **resources and funding to enhance the capacity** and enabling environment for women to emerge as leaders and effectively participate in politics and governance. The major challenge is to change the mindset of the people and this requires a long-term perspective and plan.
- 2) The workshop provided a space for great learning through exchange of ideas, experiences and tools from different countries. There is a need to create a **regional network to strengthen women's political participation at the local governance**, using e-groups, facebook and sharing information and experiences on a regular basis.
- 3) The discussions on the **quota system** to increase the political participation of women were useful. Knowledge on it can help taking forward the idea in Sri Lanka and other countries in which the system is not in place.
- 4) There is restriction of funds for women to effectively participate in election and hence there is a need to find **creative ways to raise resources**.
- 5) Active **networking among various stakeholders** and linking up with **male champions** for strengthening women's leadership would be important.
- 6) There are so many challenges in the **Pacific**. They need support and would like to learn from the experience of women and civil society groups from other regions.



Ms. Alleman summed up the top five priorities identified during the presentations and discussions:

1. After the MDGs, the SDGs will be an important instrument to foster women's participation in local governance, CSOs and development.
2. Best practices need to be researched, analysed and adapted to other cultural contexts.

3. Communication — find effective platforms and networking, to exchange best practices and promote dialogues, move the agenda forward through discussions at any level (linking local and national levels together).
4. Training — what are the most effective training modules, how to be multi-dimensional, how to attract private sectors?
5. Individual success stories are key and can have a multiplier effect. This is a huge selling point for the private sector and other players to collectively move the agenda forward.

In his remarks, Mr. Matsheza reiterated **the commitment of UNDP to build on this Regional Workshop and strengthen the programme on women's leadership and participation in local governance at the national, regional and global level.** He expressed deep appreciation for the wisdom, participation and passion of all the attendees in the session, and noted that this would ensure the voices of women would increase in the region. He also stated that it would be important for the participants in the respective countries to link up with UN facilitation so the voices of women also can be heard at the national level.

Ms. Alleman expressed **the commitment of USAID to support women's voices, leadership, and participation in the local governance.** The work of USAID focuses on the local level. She reiterated that women's leadership roles involve influencing people and process. While few thought 'leaders are born', she mentioned the need to go beyond the conventional notions of 'leader' and focus on the perspective, knowledge and skills required for enhancing the ability to influence. Women require support and mentoring, effective influencers at various levels of politics and governance.

#### **Box 6: A personal experience: the deputy governor of Bangkok**

One of the highlights of the session was the brief presentation by **Ms. Pusadee Tamthai, Deputy Governor of Bangkok.** She told her story as a woman in politics and said dreams could come true if women work much harder than men. She worked three terms as a member of the parliament and now she is working at the local governance level.

Local governance is important: it is there that one can directly link up with people and can be more supportive to the livelihood and tackle the problems of people on the ground. If anyone would like to improve the quality of life or have a direct impact on the ground, it would be more fruitful to work at the local governance, than in national politics. She needed also to raise financial resources for her election. Often it was hard to get financial contribution from women and she had to set up many dinners and meetings before she got some contributions from women. She got much active support from male friends and men in general.

She found that women are not often only careful about the way they spend money but that politics is their last priority.

She said that participation of women in politics is very important to advance the cause of women and it is important to change the prevailing mindset of women themselves.



# Session XI

## Closing Session

### Box 7: An inspiring woman leader: Fawzia Koofi

Ms. Pilapitya invited an inspiring woman to be present at the closing of the workshop: Fawzia Koofi, a real leader in the midst of lots of challenges and conflicts in Afghanistan. Fawzia could not be present at the workshop, but she was introduced to the audience and a video-clip of her interview with the CNN was shown to get a sense about her challenging work and commitment.

The nineteenth daughter of a local village leader in rural Afghanistan, Fawzia Koofi was left to die in the sun after birth by her mother. But she survived, and perseverance in the face of extreme hardship has defined her life ever since. Despite the abuse of her family, the exploitative Russian and Taliban regimes, the murders of her father, brother, and husband, and numerous attempts on her life, she rose to become the first Afghani woman Parliament speaker. She is currently an Afghan parliamentary lawmaker, accomplished author, and internationally known outspoken advocate for the rights of women and children, democracy, and moderate Islam. She is the first female in the Afghan Parliament to be elected as Second Deputy Speaker, and she heads the Parliament's Women Affairs Commission. She started her political career in 2001 when she began to promote a "Back To School" campaign targeted at the rights of women in Afghanistan to an education. By 2002 she took employment as a Child Protection Officer with UNICEF, and in 2005 she was elected as a parliamentary representative for Badakhshan province, her native region in the rural mountains of northern Afghanistan.

In the CNN interview she discussed the following:

- **Violence Against Women (VAW) law** and how it affected women (on child marriage, prevent Sharia law to be used). There is no support for this law in parliament, demonstrating how the condition of women is declined. It is difficult for women and activists to take the voice of women forward.
- **The concern is beyond women's rights**, it is on the democratic system–freedom of speech, media, etc. Democracy in Afghanistan is endangered, women are not included the peace process, women's rights are compromised; it is necessary to make sure that the voice of 55 percent of society is included.
- **International community** should provide more support and keep their commitment to promote women's rights.



**Mr. W. Patrick Murphy, Charge d'affaires (a.i), US Embassy Bangkok** presented the award for innovative presentations in the exhibition.

"I am a man. Men are part of the problems and also part of the solution." he said in his closing remarks. The US government (through USAID) works on developing local governance to increase participation of women participation in Asia Pacific and around the world, as well as in the US. There is room for improving women's participation in governance. Mr. Murphy worked for three women secretaries of state, who were phenomenal

leaders. He thought of them as leaders before thinking of them as women.

One of the areas where women can make enormous contributions is in resolving conflicts. There have been nine female Nobel Peace Laureates. Times have changed; half of our population can do more to solve the world's problems. Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, Jodi Williams in the US — they started at the local level with local problems and conflicts. The differences they made have affected our lives. They bring special skill sets and certain perspectives in resolving conflicts, most of which were created by men. And women can see how the sides can come together to make peace. **Start locally, governance is local — begin small to achieve enormous impact.**

Mr. Murphy congratulated the organizers and participants for their passion, interest and dedication to make a difference at local level, which translates to the global level.

In his final closing remarks Mr. Phil Matsheza, expressed deep appreciation for the partnership of USAID in organising the Regional Workshop. The active interest of so many people to participate in the workshop and get passionately involved in discussions and debates demonstrate the relevance and importance of strengthening women's leadership and participation at the local level. He thanked all participants and speakers and expressed how it was rewarding to work with USAID and other agencies to promote such an important area of work necessary for genuine democratic governance and peace-building in societies and countries.







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