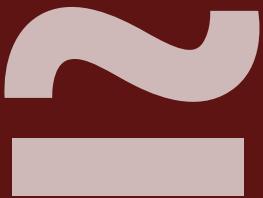
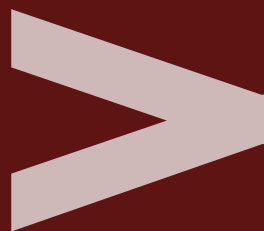
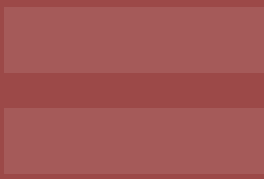
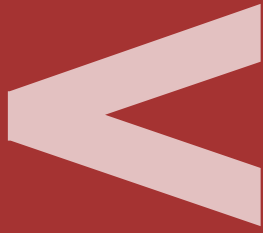




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Claiming spaces for political participation: Crossing the gender divide

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Claiming spaces for political participation: Crossing the gender divide

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Abstract

This paper attempts to provide a gender framework for understanding the right of women and gender minorities to political participation. The author describes observed patterns of political participation in Asia and the Pacific vis-à-vis different types of prevalent governments, electoral and legal systems, and examines if the situation in this region supports general observations. Gains and setbacks in political participation are further analyzed through a gender lens. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for addressing unequal participation of women and gender minorities in political processes.

Key words: political participation, gender, human development

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP, or the UN Member States.

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Claiming spaces for political participation: Crossing the gender divide

INTRODUCTION

The effective participation of women in decision-making bodies, including in political institutions, has long been considered a hallmark of individual rights, women's advancement and the attainment of gender equality. Despite global commitments to advance women's political participation, women's visibility in political life generally remains low. Women, disadvantaged men, and minorities, such as people with disabilities and sexual minorities, often do not have a voice in formal and informal decision-making processes at the national, sub-regional, provincial or local levels. The muting of their voices often means that they have very little control and influence in shaping the development of their communities and countries, which often leads to the perpetuation of legislation and policies that are gender-blind or even discriminatory.

Within the framework of gender-responsive and sustainable human development, the participation of women and gender minorities in governance is enhanced by increasing their rights, entitlements and capacities; and by providing the means for them to make gender-sensitive, informed and responsible choices as citizens, local or national leaders, or even as prominent personalities on the global stage. The effective participation of women in decision-making bodies, including in political institutions, is a keystone in the effort to attain gender equality.

This paper aims to describe gender inequalities in the political participation of men, women and gender minorities in formal political structures within the Asia-Pacific region, analyse the factors that have led to this situation, and identify possible courses of action that may minimize or eliminate gender inequalities. The paper presents the results of documentary research, based on an extensive review and analysis of the literature on gender-based inequalities in relation to political power and decision-making in Asia and Pacific Island nations.ⁱ

I. GENDER EQUALITY: THE BEDROCK OF DEVELOPMENT

Gender inequality stems from discrimination arising on account of gender, by itself, or in intersection with other factors – such as age, class or ethnicity. As recently as 2004, it was noted that differentiated norms based on socially constructed notions of gender continue to favour men and boys in the 21st century, giving them more access than women and girls to the capabilities, resources, and opportunities that are important to the enjoyment of social, economic, and political power (Grown and Gupta 2004).

Gender relations based on patriarchy often deprive women of the right to own property in their own name and to secure credit so that they can be economically independent. These circumstances impede their ability to seek redress against domestic violence, to stand on equal ground with their spouses and other men, and to speak out for their rights. Women's domestication also raises the expectation that their first responsibility is to their families, leaving little time for the meetings, consultations and study that enable them to connect community and national problems to their personal lives.

Gender minority groups, including the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual community (LGBT), are also victims of patriarchal values. They are often subjected to cultural, societal and family discrimination, social stigmatisation and violence. Laying claim to their rights is a problem since their existence as a discriminated sector or group is not even fully acknowledged. Depriving gender minority groups the freedom to express their sexual orientation and gender identity has implications on their ability to exercise their economic, civil and political rights.

A rights-based approach to development holds government accountable for the realisation of human rights and development. However, the participation of claimholders from all sectors of society is seen as expedient to this process. As observed by the Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, "the representation of women in legislative bodies serves as an indicator of society's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment and has the potential to trigger more fundamental changes in gender relations and beliefs about appropriate gender roles" (Grown and Gupta 2004, ix). Hence, it is highly critical to move

forward with the full and equal participation of women, men and gender minorities in governance mechanisms.

The *Right* to Political Participation

Equal participation of women and men in politics and governance is guaranteed by several international instruments. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* expressly states that “everyone has the right to take part in the government of his (her) country, directly or through freely chosen representatives” (UN – OHCHR, 1948: Article 21). It identifies the will of the people as the bases of governance, which is to be expressed in genuine and periodic elections through the exercise of universal and equal suffrage.

The preamble of the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women* (entered into force⁷ July, 1954) asserts that “everyone has the right to take part in the government of his (her) country directly or indirectly through freely chosen representatives, and has the right to equal access to public service in his (her) country...” (UN-DAW). To equalize the status of men and women in the enjoyment and exercise of political rights, state parties agreed that women shall be entitled *to vote* in all elections, be *eligible for election* to all publicly elected bodies, be entitled *to hold public office* and to *exercise all public functions* on equal terms with men, without any discrimination.

The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW, Article 7) extends the scope of women’s political participation. It obliges state parties to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life, and to ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the following rights: (a) to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government; and (c) to participate in non-governmental organisations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country (CEDAW, entered into force on 3 September 1981, from UN-DAW). Article 8 extends this right to the international plane. It instructs state parties “to take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the

opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations”.

The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (UN-DAW 1995) further lays down the foundations for women’s effective political participation. It calls on governments, the international community and civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to (a) take "measures to ensure women's equal access to, and full participation in, power structures and decision-making" (BPA Strategic Objective G.1, in UN-DAW 1995) and (b) "increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership" (BPA Strategic Objective G.2, in UN-DAW1995).

To ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPA) recommends that governments take the following Actions (UN-DAW 1995):

- Take measures that encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective public positions in the same proportion and levels as men;
- Protect and promote the equal rights of women and men to engage in political activities and to freedom of association, including membership in political parties and trade unions;
- Review the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation of women in elected bodies and consider, where appropriate, the adjustment or reform of those systems.

Political parties are enjoined to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women in its structures, allow women to participate fully in all their internal policy-making structures and nominating processes, incorporate gender issues in their political agenda, and take measures to ensure that women can participate in party leadership on an equal basis with men.

The BPA then directs “Governments, national bodies, the private sector, political parties, trade unions, employers' organizations, sub-regional and regional bodies, non-governmental and international organizations and educational institutions” to take actions that would increase women’s capacity to participate in

decision-making and assume political leadership (UN-DAW 1995). Among these steps are to mentor and train inexperienced women in leadership and decision-making, public speaking and self-assertion, as well as in political campaigning; and to develop mechanisms and training that would encourage women to participate in the electoral process, political activities and other areas of leadership.

In September 2000, the United Nations adopted the *Millennium Declaration*, which upholds the principles of “human dignity, equality and equity at the global level”. It articulates one of the fundamental values of development in the 21st century to be the right of men and women to “live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice”, and to assure these rights through the exercise of democratic and participatory governance (UN September 2000).

The third of the *Millennium Development Goals* is “to promote gender equality and empower women.” Indicators for its successful attainment by 2015 include the following:

- Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education,
- Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, and
- *Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament.*

The choice of indicators in Goal three emphasises the perspective that pervasive gender inequality is a product of multiple sources of discrimination, especially as they relate to women’s visibility and capacity to take an active part in their development. Women and girls, in the same way as men and boys, are entitled to broaden their capabilities through knowledge and education, avail of non-traditional choices for productive endeavors, and take part in crucial decisions that affect their security and well-being.

Other international conventions and declarations reiterate and reaffirm the principle that the participation of women in public and political life is an inherent right. Among these are the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), the *Declaration on the Right to Development* (1986), and the *Vienna Declaration* from the World Conference on Human Rights (1993).

Absence of Defined Rights for Gender Minorities

The same amount of attention has yet to be given to the right to political participation of gender minorities. As one group of gender advocates states:...one significant absence in international human rights law has been an express articulation of the specific interests of sexuality minorities (PUCL-Karnataka 2001).

At best, organisations of gender minorities are represented in meetings of the United Nations. ILGA-Europe was granted consultative status on December 11, 2006 along with the *Danish National Association for Gays and Lesbians* and the *Lesbian and Gay Federation* in Germany. In 2008, ECOSOC granted consultative status to the *COC Netherlands* and the *State Federation of Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals and Bisexuals of Spain* (FELGTB). Both are national organisations representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in the Netherlands and Spain (ILGA 2008). Lately, on July 19, 2010, the ECOSOC voted to grant consultative status to the *International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission* (IGLHRC). IGLHRC is one of only ten organisations working primarily for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender human rights to gain consultative status at the United Nations (ILGA 2010).

More recently, an instrument was formulated by an international panel of experts to promote individual rights without distinction on the basis of sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. It was convened by the International Commission of Jurists and the International Service for Human Rights. The principles of the *Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity* affirm the primary obligation of states to implement human rights (Corrêa and Muntarbhorn 2007). Additional recommendations to promote and protect human rights are addressed to other actors, including the UN human rights system, national human rights institutions, the media, non-governmental organisations, and funders. The Accountability Principle of the instrument states:

Everyone whose human rights, including rights addressed in these Principles, are violated is entitled to have those directly or indirectly responsible for the violation, whether they are government officials or not, held accountable for their actions in a manner that is proportionate to the seriousness of the violation. There should be no impunity for

perpetrators of human rights violations related to sexual orientation or gender identity (Corrêa and Muntarbhorn 2007, 31).

What now needs to be done is to be able to translate these principles of international human rights law into national legislations and policies.

Examining Political Participation through Gender Lenses

Governance is the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms through which citizens and citizen groups can articulate their interests, exercise their rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences (UNDP 2000). Through political participation and advocacy, citizens can take part in the governance of their society.

Political participation can encompass a wide range of actions and strategies: voting and voter education, candidacy in national and local elections, lending support to candidates who carry gender-sensitive agenda, campaigning against those who have policies that are 'anti-women's rights', and advocating for the integration of a women's rights agenda in the platforms of candidates and parties (Bello 2003). Women's right to take part in decision-making extends likewise to other aspects of national and global existence that have impacts on their lives, as in the family, the community, economy and culture.

A comprehensive understanding of the nature and dynamics of the participation of women and gender minorities in political life needs to consider the various ways by which gender constructs and power relations between women, men and minorities influence their capacity to operate at different levels of society from the most personal to the highly public. The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* premises its call to action on this thesis:

Inequality in the public arena can often start with discriminatory attitudes and practices and unequal power relations between women and men within the family.... The unequal division of labour and responsibilities within households based on unequal power relations also limits women's potential to find the time and develop the skills required for participation in decision-making in wider public forums (BPA, Par. 187).

Gender and Gender Identity

Gender refers to the social, cultural and psychological aspects of traits, roles, norms and stereotypes associated with masculine and feminine behavior. It pertains to the observed continuum of behaviors and relationships between women and men across different societies, whether young or old, and across historical periods. Gender affects the range of individual identities, sexual preferences, social roles, entitlements, and social-political status that women or men can enjoy.

Gender identity may be construed to correspond to certain behaviors and sexual orientations labeled as either 'feminine', 'masculine', or, 'somewhere in between.' It pertains to a person's sense of identification with either the male or female sex, as manifested in appearance, style of behavior, and other aspects of a person's life (Samelius and Wagberg 2005; Wells 2006; Statistics Canada 2008). Gender roles are the culturally defined behaviors, values, attitudes and beliefs associated with being a woman or a man, feminine or masculine (Doyle and Paludi 1995; Bem 1993). Through socialisation in the family and other social institutions, gender traits, roles, orientations and identities become deeply internalised, so that they seem to be 'natural' processes and are left unquestioned. As Bem notes, "the historically crude perception that women and men are fundamentally different from one another [and] the insidious use of that perceived difference as an organising principle for the social life of the culture" forges a cultural connection between sex and virtually every other aspect of human experience (Bem 1993, 2).

Public and Private Lives

Rosaldo (1974) developed a structural framework that differentiates between the institutions and activities within which women and men move about and interact with each other, or with other individuals of the same sex. She locates men and women within the domestic and public spheres of activity, and postulates that what they do therein "shapes a number of relevant aspects of human social structure and psychology" (Rosaldo 1974, 23).

The *domestic sphere* of human activity in Rosaldo's theory pertains to minimal institutions and modes of activity organised around one or more mothers and their children. It includes childcare, household management, providing food through

poultry, livestock or vegetable-raising, family-based agricultural work, and other activities needed to promote the survival, health and security of family members. Women are accorded little or no powers beyond their respective households, since they are not considered important contributors beyond their domestic domains. As such, Delphy (1984) identifies domestic production as the economic base of patriarchy, and concludes that the 'feminine personality' results from women's domestication.

The *public domain*, in turn, is conceptualised as including "activities, institutions, and forms of association that link, rank, organize or subsume particular mother-child groups" (Rosaldo 1974, 23). Productive work in the public domain includes the cultivation, processing or manufacture of goods, or the provision of services, which can be exchanged for money or for other products. Production in the public domain is critical in the accumulation of wealth, achievement of social status, assumption of political authority, and other forms of power. The public domain is principally organised as a masculine system, including political structures and processes.

Relations of production and reproduction are found within every society. With the advent of industrialisation, the division between the spheres of social production (the public domain) and reproduction (domestic domain) became more distinct, especially because the organisation and relations at work largely took place away from the domicile. This arrangement further marginalised women and intensified the role of the 'housewife' as a career for women (Oakley 1974). The needs of urban-industrial society to look after the care and welfare of its producers also led to the development of relations of social reproduction: the socially organised labour necessary for life to continue, including work in schools, health facilities, markets, food shops, housing and other establishments that promote family welfare (Brenner and Laslett 1996). Similar to pre-industrial society, work within the spheres of social production and reproduction is highly gendered, and states become centers of 'public patriarchy'.

Research demonstrates the extent to which state policies have been shaped by gender relations, including policies relative to the institutions of social provisions, such as social assistance and social insurance programmes, citizens' entitlements, and

public services (Orloff 1996; Brenner and Laslett 1996; Bagchi 2000). By the same token, state policies tend to provide obstacles to women's political participation. Citizenship becomes a gendered construct, and privileges men (productive citizens who contribute to economic progress) over women (unpaid domestic care-givers and housewives). Social and cultural practices, coupled with policies that perpetuate the gender division of labour, have impeded the capacity of women to take part more intensively in the political life of their communities and nations. Thus, a broader understanding of governance needs to scrutinise the ways in which traditional understandings of women's 'private' roles in the family hinder their activities and aspirations to move outside of the domicile and into the public realm (Nussbaum 2003). The dialectic between traditional gender norms and the mounting commitment to gender equality needs to be better understood to enable women to become more active and significant agents of governance.

Patriarchy defines the home as the realm for women's governance, but leaves the administration of the rest of society to men. The challenge is for women to cross this boundary, and to share with men the privilege and responsibility for development and nation-building. Simultaneously, gender equality requires that men also share more fully in the management of the daily requirements of family life.

From the Closet to the Rostrum

Traditional notions of gender also have implications for society's treatment of gender minorities. Gender minority groups include lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, intersex individuals, persons with unusual gender-personalities, individuals with unusual sex-scripts (paraphilias), people living as members of the other sex, transvestites, and everyone else commonly lumped together under the catch-all term 'transgender' (Samelius 2005; Park 2003). The term LGBT has often been used to categorize these groups. It usually refers to the modern/postmodern context of emerging sexual identity categories, and not to any traditional sexual minority groups/identities that predated its existence (Kole 2007), and which may have had circumscribed roles in their respective cultures.

Socially accepted norms are built on the basis of the assumed correspondence yet distinction between sexual identity (born as male or female) and gender identity (exhibiting masculine or feminine traits). Across many cultures however, socially-

acceptable expressions of gender identities other than the stereotype of male-as-masculine and female-as-feminine may be found (Samelius 2005; Murray 2002; Doyle and Paludi 1995).

In India, for instance, traditional sexual minority groups (or identities) include the *hijiras*, *kothis*, *kinnars*, *panthis*, *jogtas*, *dangas*, *alis*, *double-deckers*, *chhakkas*, *dhuranis*, and other indigenous communities who identify and relate themselves by sexual practices (Kole 2007). Early accounts of gender identities in pre-Hispanic Philippine society likewise describes the presence of male transvestite shamans who dressed as women to perform spiritual rituals, and assumed stereotypical feminine behavior. They married other males, but there were also examples of male shamans marrying women even while maintaining homosexual relations (Brewer 2004). The presence of different homosexual groups in Sulu has also been documented (Nimmo 1926, cited in Murray 2002).

In Melanesia, homosexual intercourse is prescribed, not just condoned (Murray 2002). It is an age-defined pattern, based on the belief that homosexual intercourse was necessary to pass on semen to young boys. In Tahiti, there are the *mahu* and the *raerae*. A man who lives a female role in the village and who does not engage in sexual activity would be a *mahu*, whereas somebody who does not perform a female's village role and who dresses and acts like a man, but who indulges in exclusive or preferred sexual behavior with other men would be *raerae* (Murray 2002, 938). Between women, homosexuality was common, and lesbians were generally known as *nimomogh* iap *nimomogh*, meaning 'woman has intercourse with woman' (Deacon 1934, cited in Murray 2002).

Javanese warriors were said to have kept boys who were young and effeminate (*gemblakan*). In Korea, the *hwarang* were age-stratified, but apparently not effeminised. In Japan, 'love between comrades' was said to have flourished among samurai warriors. Mahayana Buddhist monks also had their own forms of relationships with novices (Samelius 2005; Murray 2002, 939).

Outside of these contexts, in modern times, preference for same-sex partners or other forms of sexual gratification and orientation have generally remained hidden in the sphere of 'private lives'. It is when these preferences emerge into the public eye that such behavior is met with ridicule, discrimination, ostracism, abuse and neglect.

Suicide and murder have not too infrequently resulted from social reactions to unacceptable gender identity behaviors. Since public political life is a highly masculine domain, it has been difficult for members of gender minorities to emerge from 'the closet' and to find acceptance as political leaders. Patriarchy, or masculine norms, works against the interests of gender minorities as much it does against women's rights. This has become the basis for sexual (or gender) identity politics, the quest for the recognition of the rights and entitlements of atypical (or minority) gender groups.

Given these realities, it is important to examine how gender ideology influences the ability of women, men and gender minorities to take part in the public realm of politics and state management so that they are able to promote their interests and rights.

II. THE POLITICAL PROGRESS OF WOMEN AND MINORITIES

Development, Democratisation, Human Rights and Political Participation

A rights-based approach to the promotion of human-development is based on the normative assumption that people worldwide subscribe to the values of democracy. Democratic processes are deemed important, since they entail the active, free and meaningful participation of all citizens in development and in the fair distribution of the resulting benefits (Novak 2005). Implicit in the Millennium Declaration are values linked to democratisation. It identifies the fundamental values essential to international relations in the twenty-first century to include the following: freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility (*United Nations Millennium Declaration* 2000, 2).

Good governance, therefore, is democratic governance. It applies democratic principles, norms and institutions for economic growth and the development of human potentials. It is people-centered and participatory, ensures freedom from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, gender or any other attribute, and guarantees that women are equal partners with men in private and public spheres of life and decision-making (Welch and Nuru 2006). Democratic governance becomes gender-responsive when it takes into account the economic, social, and cultural conditions that influence the opportunities of women and gender minorities to take part in a wide range of governance-related activities (Nussbaum 2003).

Enlarging the capacity of women to become involved in the political life and decision-making processes of their nations is a key feature of human development. Signatories to the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* recognised this:

Women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account (BPA, Par. 183).

Parliamentarians have affirmed the importance of women's participation in politics. In September 1997, the Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) adopted the *Universal Declaration on Democracy*. "The Principles of Democracy", which are part of the declaration, clearly state that:

The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences (IPU 1997, 1).

To what extent have these goals been achieved? What is the profile of the political participation of women and gender minorities?

Suffrage Rights

The right to vote is linked to the democratisation processes of a nation. Democratic freedoms such as freedom of expression, opinion, assembly, association and other civil and political rights coincide with the possession of suffrage rights. Progress in achieving political and civil rights have increased substantially since the eighties. 82 countries, representing 57 percent of the world's population, are now fully democratic. 81 countries have taken significant steps in democratisation, various coups have overthrown 46 elected governments, and 33 military regimes have been replaced by civilian governments. Consequently, multiparty elections are now held in 140 of the world's 193 countries, or in 75 percent of all nation-states (UNDP 2007).

In contrast, in absolute or constitutional monarchies or sultanates, both women and men may be barred from enjoying the right to vote or to be voted in as public officials. This is the case in Brunei, a constitutional sultanate, where both women and men have been denied the right to vote or to stand for election since 1962. In August

2000, a review of the Constitution was submitted to the Sultan for approval, and "an element of an election" was included in the report (US Department of State 2002). Despite this, popular elections have not been held. In the United Arab Emirates, parliament is appointed by the sultan, and in Saudi Arabia, men (but not women) were allowed to vote for the first time only in 2005 (IWDC 2008).

With the exception of Brunei, women in other Asia-Pacific nations have won the right to suffrage. It was also in this region where women were first given the right to vote: New Zealand gave women suffrage rights in 1893 (IPU 2008). A brief summary of this historic moment is reproduced in Box 1 (from NZHistory 2009):

Box 1. 'The Summit at Last'

The suffrage campaign in New Zealand began as part of a broad movement for women's rights in Europe toward the end of the 19th-century. It spread through Britain and its colonies, the United States and northern Europe. The women's suffrage movement was shaped by a strong desire among the feminists of the period to attain equal political rights for women, and a determination to use them for the moral reform of society, as for example, for the prohibition of alcohol use (NZHistory 2009). In 1869, Mary Ann Müller, using the name 'Femina' wrote "An appeal to the men of New Zealand", advocating political rights for women. She said (NZHistory 2009):

'[What] can be said for a Government that deliberately inflicts injury upon a great mass of its intelligent and respectable subjects; that virtually ignores their existence in all that can contribute to their happiness as subjects; that takes a special care to strike at the root of their love of country by teaching them that they have no part in forming or maintaining its glory, while it rigidly exerts from them all penalties; even unto death? ... This is a question that has of late been agitated in England, and women in this colony read, watch, and reflect. ... [It] has struck the writer of these few pages that I might not be wholly vain to make an appeal to the men of this our adopted land.'

Femina was only one of several women in New Zealand who began to write about women's rights, especially on their right to vote. A number of New Zealand's leading male politicians also supported women's suffrage. In 1878, 1879 and 1887, several bills or amendments extending the vote to women were introduced and only narrowly failed to pass in parliament.



Figure 1. Typical Anti Suffrage Cartoon, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. NZHistory.2009. [<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/anti-womens-suffrage-cartoon>].

Meanwhile, the suffrage movement gathered momentum, especially following the



Figure 2. Engraving from *New Zealand Graphic*, 21 July 1894, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. From NZ History. 2009. [<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/the-summit-at-last>].

establishment in 1885 of a New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Its leaders organised a series of signature campaigns on the women's right to vote, and submitted these petitions to parliament. In 1893, nearly 32,000 signatures were obtained – representing almost a quarter of the adult European female population in New Zealand. Despite divisions in the legislature over women's suffrage rights, and a petition from the liquor industry to reject it, an Electoral Bill containing provisions on women's suffrage was easily passed in the house following the presentation of the massive third petition to the legislative council.

The battle was still not over however, as new anti-suffrage petitions were circulated, and some members of the Legislative Council petitioned the

governor to withhold his consent. In a 'battle of the buttonholes', suffragists gave their supporters in parliament white camellias to wear as boutonnieres, while anti-suffragists gave their supporters red camellias. On September 19, 1893 the Governor, Lord Glasgow, signed a new Electoral Act into law. Thus, New Zealand became the first self-governing country in the world to grant all women the right to vote in parliamentary elections. On November 29, 1893, Elizabeth Yates was elected mayor of the borough of Onehunga – the first woman in the British Empire to hold such office.

Other countries in the region that were among the earliest to grant suffrage rights to women include Australia (1902, but with certain restrictions); Kyrgyzstan (1918); Armenia and Azerbaijan (1921); Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan (1924); Turkmenistan (1927); Sri Lanka (1931); Maldives and Thailand (1932); Myanmar (1935); the Philippines (1937); and Uzbekistan (1938). Following the Second World War, many more Asia-Pacific nations granted suffrage to women (Table 1, adapted from IPU 2008).

**Table 1. Years Suffrage Rights Were Granted to Women
In Asia-Pacific Nations (from 1945-present)**

Year	Countries
1945	Indonesia, Japan
1946	Viet Nam, DPR Korea, Myanmar
1947	Pakistan, Singapore, Japan
1948	Republic of Korea
1949	China
1950	India
1951	Nepal
1953	Bhutan [to vote]
1955	Cambodia
1957	Malaysia
1958	Lao PDR
1960	Tonga
1962	Australia [restrictions or conditions lifted]
1963	Afghanistan, Fiji, Iran [Islamic Republic of], Papua New Guinea [to stand for election]
1964	Papua New Guinea [to vote]
1967	Tuvalu, Kiribati
1968	Nauru
1972	Bangladesh
1974	Solomon Islands
1975	Vanuatu
1979	Marshall Islands, Micronesia [Federated States of], Palau
1980	Vanuatu
1990	Samoa

Source: From IPU (Interparliamentary Union). [<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/suffrage.htm>]. Last accessed October 2008.

Like their counterparts in New Zealand, Australian and Filipino women engaged in actively organising local women also came into contact with feminists from Europe and the United States. These early advocates were among those who led the campaign for women's rights in their respective countries. In other states, suffrage rights coincided with the release of a nation from colonialism, as in Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Laos and Cambodia. In other Asian nations, suffrage was part of the democratic rights granted under a socialist or communist government, as in the Central Asian republics, China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In Japan, it was one of the rights included in the post-war Constitution, which was heavily influenced by American libertarian ideals. In other countries, as in Tonga and Nepal, women's suffrage rights followed a shift from an absolute or descendant monarchy to a constitutional monarchy.

The citizen's right to vote is usually guaranteed by the states' constitution. This is true of nations which have either single or multi-party political systems. Examples may be gleaned from State Party Reports to CEDAW (Box 2).

Box 2. Constitutional Guarantees to Equality in Political Rights

State parties, in their reports to the *Commission on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, emphasise that political rights are part of the basic law of their states (from CEDAW State Parties Reports):

- The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal opportunities for women in politics and public life.
- It is stipulated in the Constitution of China that women enjoy the same rights to vote and to stand for election as men, and these provisions are being implemented accordingly.
- The Constitution of India guarantees equal political rights to women and men. They include the right to vote, right to contest elections, right to hold public office and right to form associations and unions. It also provides for positive discrimination in favour of women.
- Article 24 of the Laos Constitution (1991) states "Lao citizens of both sexes enjoy equal rights in political, economic, cultural, social and family affairs". Thus Lao women have the right to participate in the political and public life of the country on equal terms with men. Article 24 of the Constitution (1991) further states "Lao citizens of both sexes enjoy equal rights in political, economic, cultural, social and family affairs". Thus Lao women have the right to participate in the political and public life of the country on equal terms with men.
- The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Myanmar (1974) expressly provides that Myanmar women are entitled to participate in affairs of the State, and the State has allowed equal opportunity to man and woman without discrimination.
- In Malaysia, there is no legal discrimination against a person based upon gender with respect to participating in the electoral process and holding elected offices. Malaysian women have been conferred with the right to vote since independence.
- Universal suffrage was introduced in Samoa in 1991 which gave all Samoans 21 years and over the right to vote. Previously, only women registered in the Individual Voters Roll and registered as chief title holders could vote.
- In Thailand, the 1997 Constitution, Article 30, stipulates equal rights between women and men.
- Article V of the 1986 Constitution of the Philippines expressly provides the right to suffrage to all citizens of at least 18 years of age. It further stipulates that no literacy, property, or other substantive requirement shall be imposed on the exercise of suffrage.

Source: State Party Reports to CEDAW

The grant of suffrage is a first step to enable women to take part in the governance of their nations. To what extent have women taken advantage of this right

in Asia and Pacific nations? Reports for CEDAW provide a few insights (from CEDAW State Parties Reports):

- Bangladesh: In 1997, half-a-million women voters took part in the Union Parishad election (local elections) (CEDAW, 3 January 2003);
- Malaysia: In 1999, there were a total of 9,509,332 registered voters, of which 49.8 percent were women and 50.2 percent were men (CEDAW, 12 April 2004);
- Philippines: The turn out rate for women voters in the May 2001 national and local elections was 76.7 percent versus 75.9 percent among the men (CEDAW, 2 August 2004);
- Thailand: Data collected from 1995 to 2004 indicate that 52.32 percent of women at all levels exercised their right to vote (CEDAW, 24 June 2004).
- India: Voter turnout of women in national elections has increased steadily over three decades: from 46.63 percent in 1962 to 49.11 percent in 1971; 51.35 percent in 1991; and 58.88 percent in 1998. Voter turnout of the men also increased within the same period, but not at the same rate, rising only from 63.31 percent in 1962 to 65.75 percent in 1998 (from IDEA, accessed 2008-a).

Additionally, state parties' reports reveal that more women tend to take part in local than in national election processes. In Thailand, for example, more than half of the votes cast in municipal and provincial council elections were from women. Yet in Bangladesh, whilst many more women participate in the elections for the rural-based Union Parishad, there has been a remarkable increase in women voters' participation in parliamentary elections from 1996 and 2001 (UN DAW 2000).

Women's Representation across Political Systems

An important aspect of political participation is the right of women to be able to 'stand for elections' or to be voted into office. In some nations, the grant of the right to vote did not automatically include the right to be voted to political positions. At times, restrictions were also placed on who could take part in elections, considering factors such as women's land ownership or education.

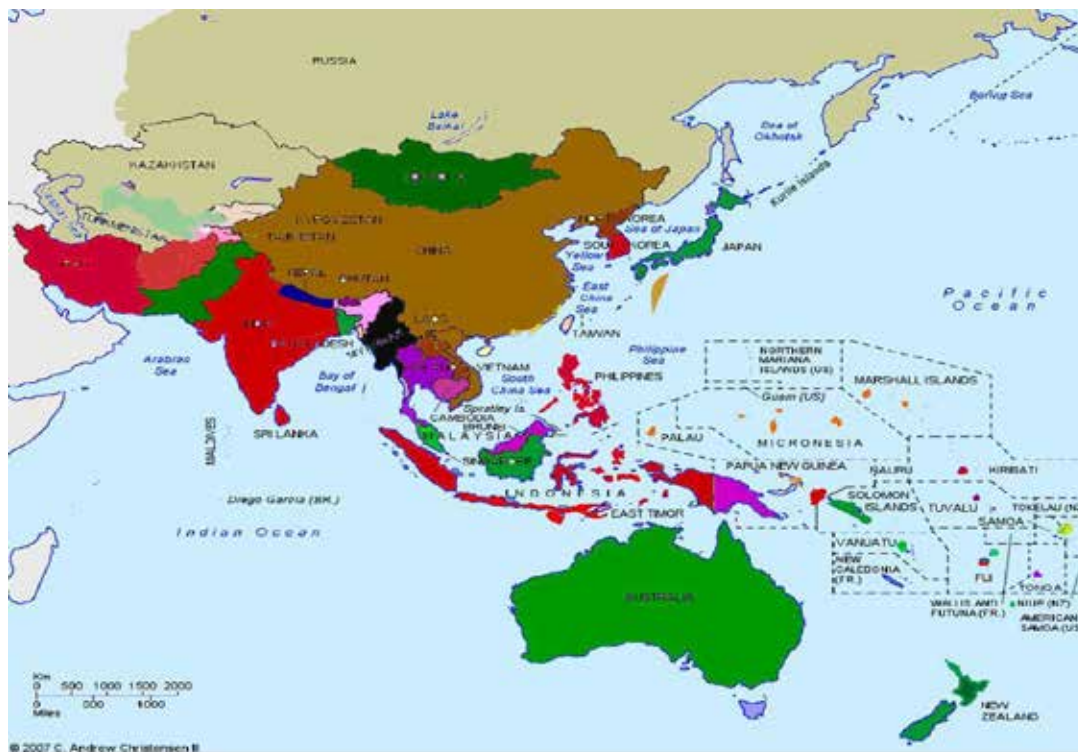
For example, while New Zealand granted suffrage rights to women in 1893, the right to stand for elections was given only in 1919. Australia lifted all restrictions to the right to vote and to be voted upon only in 1962 (see Table 1). Myanmar granted women suffrage in 1935 but they could stand for election only in 1946. Women of Papua New Guinea won the right to stand for elections in 1963, but were allowed to vote only the following year (IPU 2008). Similarly, in North America, Canada gave women the right to vote in 1918 but they could only be voted into office in 1920, and this was subject to certain restrictions that were lifted only as recently as 1960. There is no information, however, that sexual orientation or gender identity has been a restricting factor for enfranchisement.

The opportunity for women to be voted into parliaments or legislatures, or to occupy executive positions of governance, may vary in relation to the forms of government and their attendant political institutions, such as the electoral system and political parties. Moreover, stereotypes attached to the public-private divide in gender identities which locates women within the private sphere (see section entitled *Examining Political Participation through Gender Lenses*) may reproduce women's powerlessness in governance and political life (Nussbaum 2003). Trends in the political participation of women will now be analysed in the context of the political systems present within the Asia-Pacific Region.

Forms of Government in Asia and the Pacific

There are many systems of government present in the contemporary world. Globally, around 55 percent of all nations worldwide employ the *presidential or semi-presidential system* of government. However, in the Asia-Pacific Region, only 27 percent of the different countries govern under this system. Instead, 58 percent of nations in Asia and the Pacific have *parliamentary systems*, the rest being *monarchies* or *one-party states* (UNDP 2008; see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Diversity of Forms of Government in Asia and the Pacific



Source: Derived & re-constructed from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/

Legend: Communist States; Various Forms of Constitutional Monarchies; Parliamentary Democratic Governments; Republican Governments; Limited Democracy; Representative Democracy; Constitutional Government (in free association with the US); Self-Administering Territory of New Zealand; Military Junta

At the Top: Women as Heads of State or Government

Depending on the form of government in a nation, the ‘head of state’ (or symbolic head of government) and the ‘head of government’ (or chief executive) may or may not be the same individual.ⁱⁱ Out of 191 governments worldwide, there were only nine women serving as *Heads of Government* in January 2009 (or only 4.7 percent of all heads of government). Below is a list of the women sitting as heads of government as of this writing (IWDC 2008; Infoplease 2009; Geocities 2009; CIA – World Factbook 2009).

Only two of these female chief executives or heads of government are from Asia (italicized in List 1). They are Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Republic of the Philippines from 2001-2010 and Sheikh Hasina Wajed, elected Prime Minister of Bangladesh in January 2009. As of 2008, there were also two Asian

women occupying vice-presidential positions, namely Annette Lu of Taiwan, Province of China and Sandra Sumang Pierantozzi of Palau (Geocities 2009).

List 1. Women as Heads of Government Worldwide

- Mary McAleese, President of Ireland, 1997 - present
- *Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Philippines, 2001 – 2010*
- Luisa Diogo, Prime Minister of Mozambique, 2004 - present
- Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, 2005 - present
- Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia, 2006- present
- Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile, 2006 – present
- Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, President of Argentina, 2007 - present
- Zinaida Greceanîi, Prime Minister of Moldova, 2008
- *Sheikh Hasina Wajed, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, from January 2009*

Source: Author, at the time of commissioning

Table 2. Summary Distribution of Male/Female Chiefs of State and Heads of Government in Asia Pacific Region

Chief of State		Head of Government	
East Asia			
Male	Female	Male	Female
10	0	10	0
Southeast Asia			
	1 (Pres. Gloria M. Arroyo)	1 (Pres. Gloria M. Arroyo) <i>Chief and Head of State is the same official/ person (Philippines)</i>	
2	<i>Chief and Head of State is the same official/ person (Brunei, Indonesia)</i>		
5	0	5	0
South and West Asia			
3 <i>Chief and Head of State is the same official/ person (Afghanistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka))</i>	1 (President Pratibha Devisingh PATIL of India)	5 (Bhutan, India, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan)	1 Prime Minister Sheikh HASINA Wajed of Bangladesh (since 6 January 2009)
Pacific			
5	<i>Chief and Head of State is the same official/person [Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau]</i>		
	(Queen ELIZABETH II since 1952) 8 countries [Australia, Cook Islands, New Zealand, Niue, PNG, Solomon, Tokelau, Tuvalu]	13	0 <i>(Helen Clark of New Zealand was defeated in elections in November 2008)</i>

Source: CIA. *World Factbook*. [<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html>]. Last Accessed February 2, 2009.

In early 2009, there were three women *Heads of State* in Asia, two of whom are non-royalty. They are Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines, also head of government; Pratibha Devisingh Patil of India, since 2007; and Elizabeth II, Queen of Australia, New Zealand, Cook Islands, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga and Tuvalu since 1952. Table 2 provides a bird's-eye view of political leadership in the Asia-Pacific Region as of January 2009.

To date, no woman has assumed the chief executive position as head of government in East Asia. In the Pacific Region, New Zealand is singular in that it has had two female Prime Ministers, Jenny Shipley and Helen Clark. Overall, more women have led the state and the government in countries of Southeast Asia, South and West Asia (List 2; Geocities 2009).

List 2: Previous Women Heads of Government in Asia

- Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka (1960-1965, 1970-1977, 1994-2000)
- Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India (1966-77, 1980-1984)
- Corazon Aquino, President of Philippines (1986-1992)
- Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan (1988-1990, 1993-1996)
- Khaleda Zia, Prime Minister of Bangladesh (1991-1996, 2001- 2008)
- Sheikh Hasina Wajed, Prime Minister of Bangladesh (1996-2001)
- Jenny Shipley, Prime Minister of New Zealand (1997-1999)
- Helen Clark, Prime Minister of New Zealand (1999-2008)
- Megawati Sukarnoputri, President of Indonesia (2001-2004)
- Chang Sang, Acting Prime Minister of Republic of Korea (2002)

Women as heads of state or government- a rare event world-wide- offers the possibility that women's concerns will be addressed and gender equality advanced. How well have Asian women elected to these positions been able to do this? The author found no studies which provided a feminist perspective on their performance. Instead, capsule biographies taken from various sources, including their official websites, are presented here, to provide some insights on the character and performance of three women CEOs of government and one head of state in the Asia-Pacific Region (see Boxes 3-6).

Box 3. 'Ate Glo' (Sister Glo)



Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (often referred to as GMA) is the 14th President of the Republic of the Philippines, acting as both Head of State and Head of Government. She is the daughter of a past president (Diosdado Macapagal), graduated *magna cum laude* with a degree in commerce, and has a Ph.D. in Economics. She won as Senator in 1992, and was re-elected in 1995. She then ran as Vice-

President in a coalition ticket of the LAKAS-NUCD-KAMPI and won by a landslide vote in 1998. She was appointed Secretary of Social Welfare and Development by President Joseph Estrada until 2001. In January of that year, President Estrada was removed from office on charges of massive corruption through a people's power revolution. As the constitutional successor, Vice-President Macapagal-Arroyo was sworn into office as President on January 20, 2001.

During her first term, Macapagal-Arroyo declared her priorities to include four strategies to "win the war against poverty within a decade" (KGMA 2009): free enterprise appropriate to the 21st century, a modernised agriculture sector, a "social bias towards the disadvantaged" and morality in government. In none of her speeches on the state of the nation however, did she articulate a clear agenda for empowering women.

Her first cabinet included women in strategic positions: as secretaries of Social Welfare, Labour and Employment, Science and Technology, Trade and Industry, Budget and Management. Women known for their gender advocacy also led the National Anti-Poverty Commission and the Peace Panel. Following Macapagal-Arroyo's re-election in 2004 however, a majority of these women executives resigned out of indignation for alleged vote-rigging in the presidential elections.

GMA supported the Philippines' Framework Plan for Women, which focuses on the economic empowerment of women, good governance and respect for women's rights. Under her administration, three important legislations have been passed: the Anti-Violence against Women and Children Act, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, and the Magna Carta of Women (an omnibus law which translates the provisions of CEDAW).

GMA's religious convictions was an obstacle to the implementation of a clearly-defined reproductive health program, a fact that did not escape the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2007 (CEDAW Concluding Comments 2007). Her administration has also been accused of an escalating record of human rights violations, including the arrest and even elimination of women human rights activists. In the official Mid-Term Report on the MDGs, it was admitted that the nation may be unable to meet the goals set for equalising access to primary education (the indicator for gender equality), reducing maternal mortality and providing access to reproductive healthcare (NEDA-UNCT 2007).

GMA is married to lawyer and businessman Jose Miguel Arroyo. They have three children, two sons and a daughter. Their sons sit in the lower house as representatives of different electoral districts.

Sources: Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. [<http://www.answers.com/topic/gloria-macapagal-arroyo>]; KGMA. Official Website of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo: SONA [<http://www.gov.ph/sona>]. Last accessed February 2009. NEDA –UNCT (National Economic Development Authority-UN Country Team) 2007. *Philippines Mid-Term Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals*. Manila: NEDA.

Box 4. Sheikh Hasina: Mother of the Nation

SHEIKH HASINA, Prime Minister of Bangladesh and Head of Government, was the eldest of five children of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, founder of independent Bangladesh. Rahman, along with the members of his family, was assassinated on 15 August 1975. Sheikh Hasina and her younger sister, Sheikh Rehana, survived the massacre as they were in West Germany at that time. In 1980, Sheikh Hasina started her movement against the autocratic rule from the United Kingdom. She was unanimously elected President of the Bangladesh Awami League in 1981, while living in exile in New Delhi. She finally returned to Bangladesh in 1981.



In the parliamentary election held in 1986, she won three seats and was elected to be leader of the opposition. She led the historic mass movement in 1990 and introduced the constitutional formula for peaceful transfer of power. In the parliamentary election held on 12 June 1996, the Bangladesh Awami League emerged as the majority party and Sheikh Hasina assumed the office of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. She succeeded Begum Khaleda Zia, the first woman Prime Minister of Bangladesh, and leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

As Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina adopted a number of policies for the overall development of the nation, focusing on poverty alleviation. Her leadership led to the adoption for the first time by UN General Assembly of a resolution on the role of microcredit in the eradication of poverty. She has also been a strong advocate for the Culture of Peace, and was instrumental in pushing for the declaration by the UN of the period 2001 - 2010 as the International Decade for Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

Along with poverty eradication, Prime Minister Hasina highlighted the importance of the empowerment of women. She passed legislation to ensure adequate representation of women in local government bodies, leading to the election of more than 14,000 women to these bodies in 1997. She took major initiatives to stop violence against women and children. She provided leadership in the field of education, particularly for the education of girls in her own country, as well as advocating for global support on the issue.

She paid special attention to healthcare, family planning, nutrition, women's rights and survival and development of children. She has been a major voice in the UN in support of the cause of children and their rights. At the Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in South Africa in 1998, her proposal for a convention on the right to development was endorsed by the heads of state and governments. She initiated the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission and the office of Ombudsperson as well as Bangladesh's recent accession to six major human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. She is a member of the Council of Women World Leaders, an international network of current and former women presidents and prime ministers whose mission is to mobilise women leaders globally for collective action on issues of critical importance to women's development.

Despite these apparent achievements, Sheikh Hasina was accused of bribery and corruption while in government, and of masterminding the killing of political rivals. She was arrested on charges of extortion in 2008 but later released for medical reasons.

On December 29, 2008, the Bangladesh Awami League led a grand alliance to a landslide victory in the Ninth Parliamentary Election, winning 262 of 299 seats in the National Parliament. Sheikh Hasina took her oath for the second time as Prime Minister of Bangladesh on January 06, 2009.

She married an eminent Bengali nuclear scientist, M. A. Wazed Miah, who passed away in May 2009. They have a son and a daughter, both living in the United States.

Source: Extracted from the National Web Portal of Bangladesh, Prime Minister. [http://www.bangladesh.gov.bd]. Last accessed February 2009; Encyclopedia Britannica. *Sheikh Hasina Wazed*. [http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/256612/Sheikh-Hasina-Wazed]. Accessed February 2009

Box 5. Helen Clark: Mother of the House



Helen Clark was the eldest of four daughters of a farming family. She graduated with honours in 1974 and wrote on political behavior and representation for her Ph.D. dissertation. She was a lecturer in political studies at Auckland University before she entered politics, although her involvement in political work started during her college days, as a member of the Labour Party (Rt Hon

Helen Clark 2009).

Clark was first elected as a member of parliament in 1981, and constantly distinguished herself in this position. She was chairperson of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Select Committee, the ad hoc Disarmament and Arms Control Select Committee, and the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. She was a member of the Government Administration Select Committee and convened the External Affairs and Security Committee. She served as a government delegate to the 1985 World Conference in Nairobi to mark the end of the United Nations Decade for Women. In 1986, she was awarded the annual Peace Prize of the Danish Peace Foundation for her efforts toward international peace and disarmament. Later in her career as minister of parliament, Clark held three important portfolios in the New Zealand government: as minister of conservation, housing, labour and health. In 1989, she became the first female New Zealander to become deputy prime minister, and in 1990, was the first woman member of the Privy Council.

Helen Clark first became prime minister on November 27, 1999 as a candidate of the coalition formed by the Labour Party and the Alliance Party. By that time, she held the distinction of being the longest running female MP in parliament, earning for herself the moniker 'Mother of the House'. Clark's coalition government introduced many liberal policies, focusing on the reduction of inequality (with a special emphasis on the inequities dealt New Zealand's native Maori population), promotion of a sustainable environment, improved social and economic welfare of the people, support for the arts and traditional culture of New Zealand, and ensuring new Zealand's financial stability. She was Prime Minister for three terms, stepping down only in November 2008, when the Labour Party lost to the National Party led by John Key. Prime Minister Key expressed strong support for her candidacy to the position of Administrator of the United Nations Development Program (Scoop 2009), a post she assumed as the first woman Administrator of UNDP in April 2009.

Helen Clark is married to Dr Peter Davis, Professor of Sociology and head of the Sociology Department at Auckland University.

Source: Rt Hon Helen Clark. [http://executive.govt.nz/minister/clark/index.html]. Last accessed February 2009. *Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations: World Leaders*. 2003. Gale Group.

Box 6. Undeclared in Elections: Pratibha Devisingh Patil



Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil assumed office as the 12th President of India on July 25 2007, the first woman to have been elected to this office. Immediately prior to her election as Head of State, Smt. Patil was the Governor of Rajasthan from 2004 to 2007. Smt. Patil has a Bachelor of Law degree and a master's degree in Political Science and Economics. Smt. Patil started her professional career

as a practicing lawyer at the Jalgaon District Court and simultaneously devoted herself to various social activities, especially for elevating the social, economic and political situation of poor women.

She won her first election to the Maharashtra State Legislature from the Jalgaon Assembly constituency at the age of 27. Subsequently she was continuously elected four times as Minister of the Legislative Assembly from the Edlabad constituency till 1985. Thereafter, she served as a Member of Parliament. She enjoys the unique distinction of not having lost a single election to date.

Smt. Patil held various positions both in the Government and the Legislative Assembly of Maharashtra, often in charge of public health, social welfare, education, cultural affairs, and housing. Throughout her public life, she worked actively for the welfare of women and children and the underprivileged sections of society. She had set up hostels for working women in Mumbai and Delhi, an Engineering College for rural youth, the Shram Sadhana Trust which engages in multifarious welfare activities for development of women, an Industrial Training School for the visually handicapped, schools for poor children, a Farmers' Training Centre, and the Mahila Vikas Mahamandal, a Maharashtra State Government undertaking for the development of women.

As president, Smt. Patil has only a constitutional role in Indian politics. Nevertheless, she has not hesitated to voice her opinion on sensitive social issues. In the wake of spiraling crimes like rape and molestation against Indian women, the president emphasised the need for women's security at work places and insists on strict penalties against sexual harassment. She asserts that women should learn self-defence techniques like judo and karate, in order to build their self-confidence to face life's challenges. She has said, "I am deeply committed to the cause of education and would like to see every person, man and woman, boy and girl, be touched by the light of modern education. Empowerment of women is particularly important to me as I believe this leads to the empowerment of the nation" (Lal 2008).

Smt. Patil was the niece of an influential progressive social activist from northern Maharashtra. She is married to Dr. Devisingh Ramsingh Shekhawat, who earned a Ph.D. in Chemistry. An educator and social worker in his own right, he became the first Mayor of Amravati Municipal Corporation, and represented the Amravati constituency as its MLA. They have two children, a daughter and a son.

Source: Extracted from The President of India. Pratibha Devisingh Patil. [<http://presidentofindia.nic.in/profile.html>]. Last accessed Sept 2008.

The profile of the women heads of state from Asia tends to confirm the observation that most women leaders in the region are from the privileged classes, who trace their ascent to power to relationships with male political leaders: as wife of a slain leader or daughter of an older, if not a deceased politician (CAPWIP 1999;

Lithgow 2000). The three women heads of government featured here, President Arroyo, PM Hasina and PM Clark (Boxes 3 to 5), and the lone head of state, Smt. Pratil (Box 6), are all well-educated, with masters or doctoral degrees. Two of them came from prominent families involved in politics - Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Shiekh Hasina, while Smt. Pratil was the niece of a social activist. Only Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, was born to a farming family. As Lithgow observed:

“Many Asian women have achieved high political office because of the strong feudal, tribal and hierarchical traditions and the hereditary social structures which exist in their countries. These range from India’s caste system and Pakistan’s feudal landlords to Sri Lanka’s strong Buddhist dependent-arising culture and the Marian culture of the predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines” (Lithgow 2000, 4).

In their younger years, both Macapagal-Arroyo and Clark worked as professors, and they applied their academic background in their work as Chief Executives: the first by focusing on economic programmes and the second on political representation and foreign policy. PMs Hasina and Clark were political activists in their early careers, and this helped propel them to the leadership position in their respective parties, which for some time represented the opposition in their nation-states. President Pratil was a practicing lawyer who devoted herself to the defence of poor women before becoming a politician.

In all cases, the top women leaders in Asia and the Pacific were catapulted to their positions through political alliances and coalitions. Two different political parties put up Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as a coalition candidate in 1998. Helen Clark first became Prime Minister when the coalition between the Labour Party and several smaller parties through the Alliance Party won a majority in 1999. Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister in January 2009 after the Bangladesh Awami League led a grand alliance to a landslide victory. Smt. Pratil was a compromise candidate of the United Progressive Alliance and its allies.

Prior to their election to the highest positions in their respective countries, these women served as legislators, often as members of the opposition. They became distinguished through assuming leadership in legislative and executive committees or departments. Most of them worked in departments associated with women’s concerns:

health, housing, social welfare and education. It was only Helen Clark who chaired committees often led by men: disarmament, arms control, and labour.

In all cases, the spouses of these women politicians have been supportive of their careers. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's husband avers: "I saw how bored she was, wasting away that intelligence (as a homemaker). So I told her she could go back to school, do what she wanted and I'd support her. I've supported her ever since" (from KGMA 2009). Helen Clark, an avowed feminist, married her partner of five years shortly before she first ran for politics (reluctantly, it is said). He remained in academe even while Clark maintained a high-profile public life, and achieved international recognition in the field of medical sociology (Univ. of Auckland 2004). Hasina's spouse, Dr. Wazed Miah, was a nuclear scientist and former head of the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission. He did not take any undue favour, even when his wife was the most powerful person of the country. But his health suffered considerably when Sheikh Hasina was incarcerated. He passed away in May 2009 (Asian Tribune 2009). Dr. Shekhawat, husband of Smt. Pratibha is a scientist but also a public official in his own right. He is an educationist and a social worker who became the first Mayor of the Amravati Municipal Corporation (The President of India 2008).

In 2006, three women Heads of Government from Asia were ranked as among the World's Most Powerful Women (MacDonald & Schoenberger 2006): Helen Clark (#20), Khaleda Zia, former Prime Minister of Bangladesh (#33) and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (#45). The annual ranking represents a composite measure: "The economic component of the ranking considers job title and past career accomplishments, as well as the amount of money the woman controls" (Egan and Schoenberger 2008). In 2008, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo again made it to the list, this time occupying rank #41 (Egan and Schoenberger 2008).

In different ways, all the women heads of government imbued developmental goals into their policies. Both Macapagal-Arroyo and Hasina have focused on anti-poverty programmes, and all three have been concerned with peace, non-violence against women, health and education. Neo-liberal policies characterised the governments of Macapagal-Arroyo and Clark, with emphasis on the development of business, tourism and other programmes that can attract foreign investments. Clark's

liberal government is also remembered for its policies to reduce inequalities in New Zealand, especially with respect to Maori rights.

Of the three women Heads of Government, however, it is Sheikh Hasina who has most directly addressed women's concerns, especially in terms of providing public services to women, promoting women's rights and empowerment, and instituting mechanisms to improve girls' access to education. In her own long career as Minister of Parliament, President Pratibha Devisingh Pratih distinguished herself as a champion of women, children and other underprivileged sectors. As Head of State of India, she continues to express her commitment to the promotion of women's security, education and empowerment.

Thus, having a woman head of state or of government does not automatically provide an advantage to the agenda for women's advancement and gender equality. In the developing nations of Asia, aid dependence and a neo-liberal policy environment also serve as additional constraints to the promotion of a gender equality agenda. As noted by the UNRISD (2005):

Like male politicians, women address the issues of concern to their constituents and their parties, and for those representing traditional social groups or conservative parties, gender equality may not be on their agenda (UNRISD 2005, 162)...

[S]trained economic circumstances and aid dependence limit resources available for progressive gender-related policies, and tend to sideline social concerns in favour of promoting national economic growth and improving the investment environment (UNRISD 2005, 163).

Gender and Gender-Responsive Governance

While having women as heads of state is an achievement, it does not mean that male-led governments cannot work for the attainment of a gender equality agenda. President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines, for instance, was instrumental in passing the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development in 1995, and for strengthening the women's national machinery, two measures which provided the national machinery greater influence in mainstreaming gender within government. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi pushed for, and his cabinet approved a gender equality plan to put more women in leadership positions (Lewis 2005). Known as the

“female re-challenge plan,” it is composed of a series of measures to improve employment conditions for women and encourage their return to work after maternity leave.

The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak subscribed to the incorporation of women in the process of development, and the equitable sharing of resources and access to opportunities, since the Sixth Malaysia Plan. He also supported legislation to protect the rights and dignity of women, and the establishment of institutional and administrative machinery to plan, coordinate, implement and monitor the development of women (from the official website of the Prime Minister 2009). President Kim Dae-Jung of the Republic of Korea identified the creation of the Ministry of Gender Equality as one of his most important achievements, along with winning the Nobel Peace Prize, during his term in office. The Ministry is charged with handling discrimination issues as well as developing policies to improve opportunities for women (MOGEF 2010).

In the final analysis, it is not the gender identity of a head of government that matters, but the extent to which he or she pushes forward the agenda of gender equality and development in policy, legislation and political action. In addition, the espousal of gender equality by heads of state or government should be analysed in relation to the continuing struggle for political empowerment waged by the women's movement, whose groups lobby and advocate incessantly until they attain their goals, by putting pressure on politicians to sit up and take notice.

Women in Chambers

The parliament (or the legislature) is a key institution in promoting citizens' representation and guaranteeing their equal participation. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) identifies *representativeness* of the membership in parliament as a key characteristic of a democratic institution, that it has to be socially and politically representative of the diversity of the people, as well as ensuring equal opportunities and protection for all its members (IPU 2005). Diversity transcends gender; it refers to women and men of different classes, ethnic and geographic origins, interests, productive capacities and gender identities.

Women parliamentarians assert that equity in the representation of women in parliament is “a matter of equality and justice” and that a government where women are only marginally represented cannot be a true democracy. Women in parliament can transform the patriarchal culture of politics, from that of being adversarial to one of greater consensus. Their presence in parliaments can also re-direct legislative priorities to deriving solutions to problems of poverty, education, health and other social concerns (Waring, Greenwood, and Pintat 2000).

The question to be addressed in this section is: to what extent have states been democratic, in terms of embodying equal representation of women and men in decision-making institutions and processes of governance?

Legislative Mechanisms

In any one of the systems of government, the legislatureⁱⁱⁱ is the deliberative assembly with the responsibility and power to make laws (UNDP 2009). Unicameral assemblies dominate the structure of legislative assemblies in Asia and Oceania by almost two to one, which conforms to the general observation that this is the preferred legislative form in small countries (IPU 2009). Table 3 summarizes the forms of government found in the Asia-Pacific region and the nature of the legislative assemblies present in each of them.

**Table 3. Asia-Pacific Countries by Form of Government and Political System
(N=44: RBAP Clustering*)**

Form of Government	Country	Legislative Chambers	Sub-region
Communist State	China	Unicameral	East Asia
	DPR Korea	Unicameral	East Asia
	Lao PDR	Unicameral	East Asia
	Viet Nam	Unicameral	East Asia
Constitutional Monarchy	Bhutan	Bicameral	South and West Asia
	Thailand	Bicameral	Southeast Asia
Constitutional Sultanate	Brunei Darussalam	-	Southeast Asia
Constitutional Monarchy with a Parliamentary Government	Cambodia	Bicameral	East Asia
Constitutional Monarchy with Parliamentary Democracy	Papua New Guinea	Unicameral	Pacific
	Tonga	Unicameral	Pacific
	Tuvalu	Unicameral	Pacific
Constitutional Government (in free association with the US)	Marshall Islands	Unicameral	Pacific
	Micronesia	Unicameral	Pacific
	Palau	Bicameral	Pacific
Federal Parliamentary Democracy with a Constitutional Monarch	Malaysia	Bicameral	Southeast Asia

Federal Parliamentary Democracy	Australia	Bicameral	Pacific
Constitutional Monarchy with a Parliamentary Government	Japan	Bicameral	East Asia
Limited Democracy	Hong Kong (China)	Unicameral	East Asia
	Macau (China)	Unicameral	East Asia
Military Junta	Myanmar	Military Regime -State Peace and Dev't Council	Southeast Asia
Parliamentary Democracy	Bangladesh	Unicameral	South and West Asia
	Pakistan	Bicameral	South and West Asia
	Cook Islands	Bicameral	Pacific
	New Zealand	Unicameral	Pacific
	Niue	Unicameral	Pacific
	Samoa	Unicameral	Pacific
	Solomon Islands	Unicameral	Pacific
	Vanuatu	Unicameral	Pacific
Representative Democracy / Federal Democratic Republic**	Nepal	Unicameral	South and West Asia
Parliamentary/Presidential	Mongolia	Unicameral	East Asia
Parliamentary Republic	Singapore	Unicameral	Southeast Asia
	Timor-Leste	Unicameral	Southeast Asia
Federal Republic	India	Bicameral	South and West Asia
Islamic Republic	Afghanistan	Bicameral	South and West Asia
Republic	Indonesia	Unicameral	Southeast Asia
	Republic of Korea	Unicameral	East Asia
	Iran [Islamic Republic of]	Unicameral	South and West Asia
	Maldives	Unicameral	South and West Asia
	Philippines	Bicameral	Southeast Asia
	Sri Lanka	Unicameral	South and West Asia
	Fiji	Bicameral	Pacific
	Kiribati	Unicameral	Pacific
	Nauru	Unicameral	Pacific
Self-administering territory of New Zealand	Tokelau	Unicameral	Pacific

Source: Summarized by the author's research team from notes taken from the *CIA Fact Book* and CIA. 2009. *World Fact Book*. [<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook>]. Last accessed January 2009.

*RBAP – The sub-regions refers to clusters in use by UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia Pacific

** Federal Democratic Republic (in CIA Fact Book and World Fact Book).

Among 44 countries within the region, only 13, or close to 30 percent, have bicameral assemblies. These states are mainly the constitutional monarchies (Bhutan, Thailand, and Cambodia), federal and parliamentary democracies (Malaysia, Australia, Japan, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and the Cook Islands), two republics (Philippines and Fiji) and a constitutional government in free association with the United States (Palau). All the communist governments in North East Asia govern through unicameral assemblies, as do most of the nations in the Pacific and South East Asia. There is no elected legislature in Brunei, a constitutional sultanate, or in

Myanmar where a Military Junta governs through the State Peace and Development Council.

Women's Visibility in the Legislature

The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) recommended in 1990 that a critical *30 percent participation threshold* be regarded as the minimum level essential to women's ability to influence key decisions and be taken seriously as equal participants in these decisions (UNDP 1995). In 2005, CSW presided over an intergovernmental meeting to review and appraise progress made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN DAW 2005). The increased presence of women in formal political institutions and elected assemblies was noted as an area where significant advances had occurred since 1995. It was reported that the average proportion of women in national assemblies, within the period from 1995 to 2004, had almost doubled, reaching 16 percent worldwide (Molyneux and Rasavi 2006; IPU 2005). While this was a welcome indicator of progress in the quest for gender equality, it was still far from achieving the desired 'critical mass' of at least 30 percent of the seats in parliaments being filled by women.

In the four years succeeding 2004, this profile improved further. As of October 2008, an average of 18.4 percent of parliamentary seats around the world was occupied by women (Table 4; IPU 2008-a). This represents an increase of 0.07 percent from January of the same year. Women in the Nordic countries have surpassed the critical level, and 41.4 percent of seats in their parliaments are occupied by women. But women from other regions in the world are still the minority groups in their national parliaments or legislatures. Towards the end of 2008, the total number of women in legislative houses per country was as follows: in the Americas - 21.5 percent, in Europe (excluding Nordic countries) - 19.5 percent, in Asia – 18.1 percent, in Sub-Saharan Africa – 18.2 percent, in the Pacific – 15.2 percent, and in Arab states - 9.1 percent (IPU 2008-a).

**Table 4. Percentage of Women in Parliaments, Worldwide
(As of October or November 2008)**

	As of 31 October 2008			As of 30 November 2008		
	Single or Lower House	Upper or Senate	Both Houses Combined	Single or Lower House	Upper or Senate	Both Houses Combined
World Average	18.5	17.6	18.4	18.6	17.6	18.4
Regional Averages						
Nordic Countries	41.4	-	-	41.4	-	-
Europe OSCE [NORDIC Countries included]	21.1	19.9	20.9	21.2	19.5	20.9
Americas	21.7	20.1	21.4	21.2	20.3	21.50
Europe OSCE [NORDIC Countries not included]	19.2	19.9	19.3	19.3	19.9	18.50
Sub-Saharan Africa	17.9	20.6	18.2	18.0	21.2	18.2
Asia	18.3	16.5	18.1	18.3	16.5	18.1
Pacific	12.9	31.8	14.9	13.09	32.6	15.2
Arab States	9.7	7.0	9.1	9.7	7.0	9.1

Source: Interparliamentary Union. [<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>]. Last accessed February 2009.

Among 189 countries who submitted data on the composition of their national parliaments by the end of November 2008, Rwanda occupies the first rank in terms of the percentage of women in parliament (IPU 2009). There were more women than men occupying the lower house of Rwandan Parliament (56.3 percent), while 35 percent of the seats in the upper house were held by women. This is an improvement over women's participation in Rwanda's Parliament in 2003: 48.8 percent of seats in the lower house were won in that election by women along with 34.6 percent of those in the upper house. Sweden and Cuba occupy the next two ranks (in that order) and 10 other European states are in the 1st quartile,^{iv} including the other Nordic countries, Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, Iceland, Germany, Switzerland and Portugal. Two Latin American nations have also overcome the critical threshold, namely Argentina, ranked sixth with 40 percent women in its lower house and 39 percent in the upper house; and Costa Rica, ranked ninth with 37 percent women parliamentarians in its unicameral assembly. Two African states also belong to the uppermost quartile: Angola, ranked eighth with 37.3 percent women in parliament, and Mozambique,

ranked thirteenth with 34.8 percent of the seats in its unicameral assembly occupied by women (IPU 2008-a).

In contrast, only two countries in Asia and the Pacific are in the uppermost quartile, and have attained the recommended critical threshold (see Table 5):

Rank 14 New Zealand 33.6 percent [Unicameral Assembly]

Rank 16 Nepal 33.2 percent [Unicameral Assembly]

Table 5. Ranking of 34 Asia-Pacific Countries by Number of Women (Percent W) in Legislative Chambers (30 November 2008)

Rank	Country	LOWER HOUSE			UPPER HOUSE		
		No. of Seats	No. of Women	(Percent W)	No. of Seats	No. of Women	(Percent W)
1st Quartile							
14	New Zealand	122	41	33.6	---	---	---
16	Nepal	594	197	33.20	---	---	---
25	Timor-Leste	65	19	29.20	---	---	---
28	Afghanistan	249	68	27.31	102	23	22.54
32	Australia	150	40	26.70	76	27	35.50
33	Viet Nam	493	127	25.80	---	---	---
	2nd Quartile						
36	Lao People's Democratic Republic	115	29	25.20	---	---	---
38	Singapore	94	23	24.50	---	---	---
45	Pakistan	338	76	22.50	100	17	17.00
52	China	2987	637	21.30	---	---	---
55	Philippines	239	49	20.50	23	4	17.40
57	Democratic People's Republic of Korea	687	138	20.10	---	---	---
	Third Quartile						
73	Cambodia	123	20	16.30	61	9	14.80
86	Republic of Korea	299	41	13.70	---	---	---
94	Maldives	50	6	12.00	---	---	---
96	Thailand	480	56	11.70	150	24	16.00
97	Indonesia	550	64	11.60	---	---	---
101	Malaysia	222	24	10.80	59	17	28.80
	Fourth Quartile						
106	Japan	480	45	9.40	242	44	18.20
107	India	541	49	9.10	243	23	9.50
111	Bhutan	47	4	8.50	15	3	20.00
113	Samoa	49	4	8.20	---	---	---

122	Sri Lanka	225	13	5.80	---	---	---
125	Kiribati	46	2	4.30	---	---	---
126	Mongolia	72	3	4.20	---	---	---
128	Vanuatu	52	2	3.80	---	---	---
129	Tonga ¹	32	1	3.10			
130	Marshall Islands	33	1	3.00	---	---	---
131	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	286	8	2.80	---	---	---
134	Papua New Guinea	109	1	0.90	---	---	---
136	Micronesia (Federated States of)	14	0	0.00	---	---	---
136	Nauru	18	0	0.00	---	---	---
136	Palau	16	0	0.00	13	2	15.40
136	Solomon Islands	50	0	0.00	---	---	---
136	Tuvalu	15	0	0.00	---	---	---

Source: Extracted from IPU [Interparliamentary Union]. 2008. *Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 30 November 2008*. [<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.]
Last accessed February 2009.

Note: There were tied ranks in the table, ending at rank no. 137 (Guinea-Bissau).

Bangladesh is not included in the table, since its parliament had remained dissolved by this date, & elections occurred only in December 2008.

¹ No women were elected in 2008, but one woman was appointed to the cabinet, and she also seats in the parliament.

Other Asian nations in the first quartile, but which have yet to reach the critical threshold in both houses, are the following: Timor-Leste, Afghanistan, Australia and Viet Nam. Six Asian states are in the second quartile, beginning with Lao PDR and ending with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In all these countries, the number of women in lower chambers exceeded 20 percent. Among the Western nations, Canada (#46), Italy (#52), the United Kingdom (#60) and France (#65) are also in the second quartile.

The United States tops the list of countries in the third quartile, ranked 69, with only 17 percent of seats in both legislative chambers occupied by women (IPU 2008). Chile is also in this quartile (#79), has 15 percent women in the lower chamber and only five percent in the upper chamber. There are six Asian countries in this category, with ranks from #73-Cambodia, to #101-Malaysia (Table 5). Women in chambers within this grouping ranged from 10 percent to 16 percent. However, the percentage of women in Malaysia's upper house was close to 29 percent.

Half of the nations of the region (17 countries) are in the lowermost quartile, starting with Japan and India (Table 5). Mongolia and other nations of South and West Asia, including all of the Pacific island groups are also in the lowest quartile. The proportion of women sitting in the lower chamber or unicameral parliaments within the fourth quartile ranges from ‘none at all’ to 9.4 percent. Only men sit in the unicameral assemblies of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. In Palau, however, two women have been elected to the upper chamber.

Women’s Representation in Houses of Parliament

Globally, the percentage of women sitting in single houses of unicameral assemblies, or lower houses of bicameral legislatures, was only 18.6 percent in November 2008. In the senates or upper houses of bicameral governments, there were even fewer women: 17.6 percent (Table 4; from IPU 2008-a). Women’s political representation in national legislative chambers within the Asia-Pacific region is among the lowest in the world. There is a wide variability however, in the proportions of women sitting in different national legislatures/ assemblies/ parliaments (IPU 2008-a).

In Asian nations, the visibility of women during this period in a single or lower house of parliament was higher than it was in the upper house or the senate (18.3 percent and 16.5 percent respectively). The opposite was observed among Pacific nations. In these countries, women composed close to 33 percent of senate seats, while only 13 percent sat in the lower house (see Table 4).

When women’s political representation is viewed according to Asia-Pacific sub-regions (Table 6), more specific observations can be made as of 2009 (IPU 2008).

Table 6. Asia-Pacific Sub-Regional Profile: Number & Percentage Of Women in Parliament by Chamber and Electoral System

COUNTRY/ REGION	CHAMBERS OF PARLIAMENT	PARLIAMENT	ELECTO- RAL SYSTEM	NO. OF SEATS	NO. & PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN ELECTED	
East Asia					No.	Percent
Cambodia	Senate	Bicameral	Other	9	9	14.75
	National Assembly		PR		20	16.26
China	National People's Congress	Unicameral	P/M	2987	637	21.33
Japan	House of Representatives	Bicameral	Mixed	480	45	9.38
	House of Councilors		P/M	242	44	18.18
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Supreme People's Assembly	Unicameral	P/M	687	138	20.09
Republic of Korea	House of the People	Unicameral	P/M	299	41	13.71
Lao PDR	House of Representatives	Unicameral	P/M	115	29	25.22
Mongolia	State of Great Hural	Unicameral	P/M	75	3	4.00
Viet Nam	National Assembly	Unicameral	P/M	493	127	25.76
South and West Asia						
Afghanistan	House of the People	Bicameral	PR	249	68	27.31
	House of Elders		P/M	102	23	22.54
Bangladesh	Parliament	Unicameral	P/M	300	19	6.33
Bhutan	National Assembly	Bicameral	P/M	47	4	8.51
	National Council		P/M	25	6	24.00
India	House of the People	Bicameral	P/M	543	45	8.26
	House of States		PR	243	23	9.47
Iran [Islamic Republic of]	Islam Consultative Assembly	Unicameral	P/M	286	8	2.80
Maldives	People's Majilis	Unicameral	P/M	50	6	12.00
Nepal	Constituent Assembly	Unicameral	Mixed	594	197	33.16 ²
Pakistan	National Assembly	Bicameral	P/M	338	76	22.49
	Senate		PR	100	17	17.00
Sri Lanka	Parliament	Unicameral	PR	225	13	5.78
South East Asia						
Brunei Darrusalam				-	-	-
Malaysia	House of Representatives	Bicameral	P/M	222	24	10.81
	Senate		Other	59	17	28.81
Myanmar				-	-	-

Indonesia	House of Representatives	Unicameral	PR	550	64	16.84
Philippines	House of Representatives	Bicameral	Mixed	239	49	20.50
	Senate		P/M	23	4	7.39
Singapore	Parliament	Unicameral	P/M	94	23	24.47
Thailand	House of Representatives	Bicameral	Mixed	480	56	11.67
	Senate		P/M	150	24	16.00
Timor-Leste	National Parliament	Unicameral	PR	65	19	29.23
Pacific						
Australia	House of Representatives	Bicameral	P/M	150	40	26.67
	Senate		PR	76	27	35.52 ²
Cook Islands				-	-	-
Fiji				-	-	-
Kiribati	House of Assembly	Unicameral	P/M	46	2	4.35
Marshall islands	Parliament	Unicameral	P/M	33	1	3.03
Micronesia	Congress	Unicameral	Mixed	14	0	0
Nauru	Parliament	Unicameral	P/M	18	0	0
New Zealand	House of Representatives	Unicameral	Mixed	121	40	33.61 ²
Niue				-	-	-
Palau	House of Delegates	Bicameral	P/M	16	0	0
	Senate		P/M	13	2	15.38
Papua New Guinea	National Parliament	Unicameral	P/M	109	1	1.00
Samoa	Legislative Assembly	Unicameral	P/M	49	4	8.16
Solomon islands	National parliament	Unicameral	P/M	50	0	0
Tokelau				-	-	-
Tonga	Legislative Assembly	Unicameral	P/M	32	1	3.13
Tuvalu	Parliament of Tuvalu	Unicameral	P/M	15	0	0
Vanuatu	Parliament	Unicameral	P/M	52	2	3.85

Adapted from: IPU (Interparliamentary Union). *Parliaments at a Glance*.
[\[http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/ToolboxParline.asp\]](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/ToolboxParline.asp) . Last accessed February 2009.

Legend: PR – Proportional representation system
P/M - Plurality/majority system
Mixed - Mixed member proportional system

² Percentage of elected women has reached the critical level.

1. Within **North and East Asia**, there is a higher percentage of representation of women in most communist states, than in the other countries of the sub-region. For

instance, 21.3 percent of the 2987 seats in the National Congress of the People's Republic of China have been occupied by women since 2003. In both the Lao Democratic People's Republic and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, women sitting in parliament exceed 25 percent, coming close to the critical threshold.

In the Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 138 of 687 seats (20.1 percent) are held by women, but only 13.7 percent of the elected officials in the National Assembly of the non-communist Republic of Korea are women. This difference in the representation of women within the two Korean states suggests that there are factors other than culture and tradition which can influence women's political representation in parliament.

In Japan, the representation of women in Japan's bicameral legislature, known as the Diet, is comparatively lower than that achieved by the countries in transition: only 9.4 percent of the members of the House of Representatives (lower house) are women, along with 18.2 percent in the House of Councilors (upper house). Lower levels of women's representation are also evident in Cambodia, where only 6.3 percent of the legislators are women in the National Assembly and 14.75 percent in the Senate. Finally, Mongolia, a republic in transition from communism, has only three women sitting in the Great Hural (four percent).

2. In **South East Asia**, the representation of women in the legislature is associated with the structure of the legislative assembly. Two countries with unicameral legislatures are close to attaining the critical mass. These are Timor Leste (29.2 percent) and Singapore (24.5 percent). The exception is Indonesia, where the representation of women in the unicameral assembly is only 11.6 percent.

It appears more difficult for women in this sub-region to achieve a critical level of representation within bicameral legislatures, especially in the lower house. For example, the representation of women in the Senate of Malaysia increased from 25.7 percent in 1998 to 28.8 percent in their latest elections (2008), coming close to reaching a critical mass. Despite this, only 10.8 percent of seats in the lower house are held by Malaysian women, although this represents an improvement from 2004 (9.13 percent). Similarly in Thailand, more women have been elected to the Senate than to the House of Representatives: 16 percent and 11.7 percent, respectively, although neither group attained a critical number. By contrast, in the Philippines, there were 53

women elected to the House of Representatives in 2007 (22.46 percent) but only four to the Senate (18.2 percent).

3. Women's political clout in **South Asia** varies widely across nations. Moreover, all except one state have fallen short of reaching a 30 percent participation level. Only Nepalese women have succeeded in attaining a critical mass: 33 percent representation in the Constituent Assembly as of 2008. Afghanistan comes close to the desired threshold: 27.7 percent of parliamentarians in the House of the People are women, along with 21.6 percent in the House of Elders.

Women politicians in Pakistan experience mixed results. They have fared better in the lower than in the upper house: 22.5 percent of the seats in the National Assembly but only 17 percent of the Senate. The opposite result is seen in Bhutan, where 8.5 percent of positions in the National Assembly are held by women along with 24 percent of those in the National Council. In India, however, only a little over nine percent of the positions of either legislative chamber are occupied by women.

Women's representation in the unicameral assemblies of Bangladesh, Iran, the Maldives and Sri Lanka are relatively low. Women's participation in Bangladesh's Parliament has reached only 15 percent, while in the Maldives, women make up a mere 12 percent of the People's Majilis. In Sri Lanka, only 5.8 percent of the seats in Parliament are held by women. The lowest representation of women in this sub-region is in Iran's Islamic Consultative Assembly, where the percentage of women in parliament dropped from 4.14 percent in 2004 to 2.8 percent in the 2008 elections.

4. The political representation of women in the **Pacific Sub-region** is at extremes. In the two developed states of this region, women have succeeded in reaching the critical threshold: 35.5 percent of the members of the Australian Senate are women, along with 26.7 percent of those in the House of Representatives. Elected women in New Zealand have reached a critical mass as well: 33.1 percent of the elected members of the House of Representatives are women.

By contrast, the proportion of women in single houses of parliament across 11 Pacific nations included in the IPU Database is only 5.2 percent (computed from Table 6). In Palau, while there are no women in the House of Delegates, 15.4 percent

of those elected to the Senate are women. (No data was available for the Cook Islands or Fiji, which also have bicameral legislatures; refer to Table 4.)

Other interesting observations that can be gleaned from Table 6 include:

- In Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Philippines, greater proportions of women are represented in the lower house. Women's representation in a bicameral assembly's lower house is significant, to the extent that it is the one that is representative of the population distribution, and may have the last say on legislative bills. Nevertheless, the proportion of women parliamentarians in the lower houses of these nations still fail to reach the critical threshold.
- Two countries emerging from conflict, and which have benefited from UN presence in the past several decades, have attained moderately high levels of women's representation - Afghanistan and Timor-Leste, although the same has not been true for Cambodia.
- Women leaders in Nepal lobbied hard with the Maoist party to ensure that at least 40 percent of Maoist seats are reserved for women. As a result, about a third of the 200 women deputies who sit in the new Parliamentary Assembly are Maoists, the party which took about half of the seats in the 2007 elections (Zeenews 2007; Advocacy Project 2008).
- India, which has a long history of an active women's movement, has been able to occupy less than 10 percent of the seats in either the House of People or the House of States. Similarly, in the Philippines, the percentages of women in either the lower or upper houses of Congress remain below the critical threshold, even if it has been accorded the sixth rank in the Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum for 2007 and 2008.

Accounting for Women's Political Representation

Numerous studies have been undertaken to interpret the outcomes of elections vis-à-vis women's representation in legislative bodies. Among the factors that have been identified as important in understanding levels of women's political participation are the following:

- The electoral system, most importantly the manner of being elected or designated to posts;
- Political parties and women's opportunities to be selected as candidates;
- Affirmative actions taken by governments, political parties and women's organisations to raise the visibility and share of women in political positions;
- International cooperation in relation to the introduction of strategies for gender equality;
- The masculinised and patriarchal culture of politics,
- The persistence of gender stereotypes in relation to the public-private divide between women and men, and,
- The influence, achievements and stature of elected women.

Many times, these different factors interact in a single situation, and it is difficult to tease out their separate effects. In the subsequent sections, we shall attempt to outline how women's representation in politics and governance are shaped by, or alter, the nature and dynamics of these elements.

Women Presiding over Parliament

The members of parliament appoint leaders to preside over and manage their proceedings. In republican or presidential systems, the Speaker, Chairperson, or President of either chamber may have succession to the highest position in government. Given the role and status accorded to the presiding officer of a legislative chamber, the assumption of a woman to this position should make a difference in the processes and directions of governance.

The election of a woman to this position represents a symbol, embodying the capacity of women to lead and manage public affairs as well as, if not better than, male legislators. It can change the culture of interaction and the conduct of business in parliament. Male parliamentarians may make less sexist remarks at the expense of women, force them to pay attention and be more respectful of their female colleagues. The organisational culture can change if a woman presiding officer proposes arrangements which take into account the fact that members of parliament have

families that require their presence and attention (Pintat 2001). Facilities that respond to women's needs (as much as men's needs) can be instituted within the parliamentary grounds, including daycare facilities, separate toilets, breastfeeding rooms, grooming salons, launderettes and convenience stores. From the viewpoint of women in the IPU such amenities can actually improve their sense of equality with men and strengthen their position and self-confidence (Waring, Greenwood and Pintat 2000, 108-109).

Most importantly, women presiding officers who effectively manage the affairs of parliament serve as role models for other political aspirants. Their work and visibility can embolden other women to run for candidacy, speak out in parliamentary sessions, challenge the male majority opinion, and initiate legislations attuned to their interests and expertise. Women as leaders of Congress, the House of Representatives, the Senate, or the National Assembly are also in the advantageous position of mobilising women and creating voting blocs around issues relevant to women's rights and gender equality.

Potential and Performance: Women Presiding over Parliament

Since the end of the Second World War, only 42 of 186 states with a legislative institution have at one time or another selected a woman to preside over Parliament or a House of Parliament. This has occurred 78 times in all (IPU 2009-b). As of October 2008, only 31 women were presiding over one of the houses of 189 existing parliaments, 76 of which are bicameral.

In Asia and the Pacific region under study, the following countries have had a woman as presiding officer of a house of parliament. Only one is in place as of February 2009: Fehmida Mirza of Pakistan (see Table 7):

**Table 7. Women in Asia and the Pacific: Presiding & Deputy Presiding Officers
Of Parliament, 1945- 2008**

<u>State</u>	<u>Presiding/Deputy Presiding Officer</u>	<u>Title and Chamber</u>	<u>Years in Office</u>
Australia	Joan Child	Speaker, House of Representatives	1986-89
Fiji	Samanunu Cakobau Tolakuli	Chair, Great Council of Chiefs	1994-95
India	Violet Alva	Deputy Chair, Rajya Sabha-States Council	1962-69
	Pratibha Devi Patel	Deputy Chair, Rajya Sabha	1986-88
	Najma Heptulla	Deputy Chair, Rajya Sabha	1988-92;
			1985-86
Indonesia	Aisyah Aminyh	Acting President, House of Representatives	1998-99
Japan	Takako Doi	Speaker, Diet	1993-96
Mongolia	Yanjamaa Nemendeyen Subaataryn	Acting Chair, National Great Khural	1953-54
New Zealand	Margaret Wilson	Speaker, House of Representatives	2005- 08
Pakistan	Fehmida Mirza	Speaker, National Assembly	2008 -
Philippines	Leticia Ramos-Shahani	Acting President, Senate	1995-98
	Daisy Avance-Fuentes	Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives	1998-2001
Taiwan, Province of China	Yeh Ching-Seng	President, National Assembly	1980-92

Source: From Council for Parity Democracy. *Women Presiding & Deputy Presiding Officers of Parliament since 1945*. [<http://groups.msn.com/shequality>.] Last accessed February 2009.

In addition to the women presiding officers in the Table, as of October 2008 in Central Asia, women were presiding as Speakers of the Legislative Chamber of Uzbekistan, and the Mejlis of Turkmenistan (IPU 2009-b).

Box 7. A Doctor in the House

Dr. Fehmida Mirza created history in March 2008 when she became the first ever woman to be elected as Speaker of Pakistan's *National Assembly*. She is a medical doctor, agriculturist and business woman from Sindh, Pakistan.



Dr. Mirza is married to Dr. Zulfikar Ali Mirza, a close friend of the Co-Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party. Both her husband and her brother, Qazi Asad Abid, are former Members of the National Assembly. She has been elected to the Pakistani Parliament in three consecutive terms - in 1997, 2002 and 2008 - as Member of the National Assembly from Badin, Sindh, which was previously her husband's constituency.

Speaker Fehmida Mirza formed the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC), a group of 76 female parliamentarians, 16 of whom were elected in direct election and 60 of those who were elected on reserved seats. Its purpose is to provide like-minded women parliamentarians a forum to build consensus on priority issues concerning women, and to provide a women's perspective on these issues within and without the parliament. She said: "We will enhance the role of female parliamentarians in proposing gender-sensitive legislation, reviewing and amending discriminatory laws and policies, and ensuring effective parliamentary oversight on the implementation of international and regional commitments, national policies and programmes" (Khan February 2009).

The WPC has sent several proposals to the law ministry, including: reactivation of women's police stations and different police reforms; legislations to curb the trend of violence against women; raising the salary of women police; ensuring transport and housing facilities to women as well as protection at workplace and at home. The WPC also plans to enact legislation against acid-throwing on women. It has also resolved that all female legislators should donate 25 percent of their development budgets for the construction of burns ward in their respective districts.

The Speaker promised that at the end of the parliamentary calendar year, she would present a "Best Legislator Award" to a female parliamentarian whose performance has been exemplary throughout the year, in order to encourage others to perform better (Khan February 2009).

Summarized from: Facebook. Dr. Fehmida Mirza.

[<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dr-Fehmida-Mirza/25607115141>]. Accessed February 2009; Dawn: the internet edition, 2008, March 20.

[<http://www.dawn.com/2008/03/20/top1.htm>]; Khan, Tahir Hasan. 2009, February 25. Female legislators performing better than male counterparts: NA Speaker.

[<http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=25607115141&topic=7211>]. Accessed February 25, 2009; Aisha Aqeel. 2002. I'm Every Woman. *Newsline*.

[<http://www.newsline.com.pk/NewsNov2002/cover8nov2002.htm>]

Box 8. The Day the Mountains Moved



Takako Doi was born in 1928 in Kobe, Japan. Her father was a medical doctor, while her mother is described as an “active free-spirited feminist” (Cleary 1996, 69). Her parents were Protestants and raised their three daughters and two sons alike, allowing all of them to have the education they desired. Takako Doi exemplifies many extraordinary achievements as a Japanese woman. In college, she was only one of two females (out of a class of 150) attending the faculty of law in Doshisha University, and the sole member of the student council. She later became an instructor of constitutional law in the same university, and organised groups around the country for the preservation of the Japanese Constitution. She was the first Japanese woman to serve as chair of any political party (as leader of the Japan Socialist Party) and the first woman to become Speaker of the Diet, or Japan’s lower house of Parliament. She held that post from 1993 to 1996, when she was selected as the party’s chair under its new name, the Social Democratic Party (Encyclopedia Britannica 2009-b).

Takako Doi is well-known as a human rights advocate and guardian of the Constitution of Japan. She is a pacifist, environmentalist, consumer advocate, and friend of the oppressed. She worked hard for the rights of women and children, and won the support of labour unions, farmers, fishers, ordinary workers, and owners of small businesses. From the beginning of her parliamentary career she specialized mainly in foreign and defence policy issues, serving continuously on the Foreign Affairs Committee of the lower house. As a champion of women’s rights, she introduced legislation that would grant nationality to the children of Japanese women married to non-Japanese men, as well as to those born of Japanese fathers and foreign mothers. She wanted to end discrimination against Japanese women in employment and education, and fought to abolish the rule that only girls should take up home economics in secondary school. She also organised women to oppose nuclear development and to organise a nuclear-free zone in Japan.

The success of Takako Doi was followed by the entrance of several other women into prominent positions in various political parties. More women ran as candidates, more of them won, and most of the winners ran on the ticket of the Japan Socialist Party. “The day has arrived for the mountain to move”, Doi declared in the wake of the 1989 upper house election, reciting the opening line of the verse penned by Yosano Akiko, a renowned woman poet (Questia 2009). While Takako Doi rejected the notion of becoming Japan’s first woman prime minister, she remains a role model for young women, and has challenged them to take responsibility for their own destiny. An avowed feminist, she remained unmarried, saying she had not met the right man.

Source: Cleary, William. 1996. “Takako Doi.” In Salokar, Rebecca Mae and Mary L. Volcansek, eds. *Women in Law: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*. Conn: Greenwood Press; Encyclopedia Britannica Profiles. 300 Women Who Changed the World: Takako Doi. [<http://www.britannica.com/women/article-9030808>. Accessed February 2009; Hendry, Joy. 2003. *Understanding Japanese Society*. New York: Routledge.

Fehmida Mirza and Takako Doi are well-educated women; a profile shared by many other women presiding officers in parliament. They are ‘veteran parliamentarians,’ having been elected to their respective legislatures for several terms before their assumption into office as Speaker of the House. Like many other

women heads of parliamentary bodies, these two women hold the distinction of having been the *first women elected as presiding officers* of their respective parliaments.

There have also been four women in Asia who have presided over upper houses of parliament as deputy leaders (see Table 7) – Violet Alva, Pratibha Patel, and Najma Heptulla of India all held the position of Deputy Chair of the Rajya Sabha; while Leticia Ramos-Shahani was acting President of the Philippine Senate.

Dr. Mirza may be considered as a member of Pakistan's political elite, with close ties to the leadership of her party, and belonging to a family that has other elected (or formerly elected) officials. The same may be said of other presiding officers. For instance, Mongolia's Yanjamaa Nemendeyen Subaataryn previously served on the politburo of the People's Revolutionary Party and was Secretary of the Party's Central Committee. She was also acting President of Mongolia from 23 September 1953 to 7 July 1954. Samanunu Cakobau Tolakuli of Fiji is a High Chief and was Chairperson of the Council of Chiefs in 2000. Dr. Najma Heptulla is the grand-niece of a prominent Indian freedom fighter. Leticia Ramos-Shahani was Senate President-Pro tempore when her brother, Fidel Ramos, was President of the Philippines.

In a similar way to Takako Doi however, there are other women leaders of parliament who rose to prominence because of their political activism: former Speaker Joan Child of Australia and former Speaker Margaret Wilson of New Zealand. By and large, all these women leaders have been outspoken political activists both before and throughout their career as parliamentarians.

Both Dr. Mirza and Takako Doi have been outright in their support for gender equality and women's advancement. This is a characteristic shared by other presiding officers. Leticia Ramos-Shahani was one of the key personalities in the United Nations Secretariat actively engaged in advocacy on women's issues, until she became the Head of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. In 1985, she was appointed Secretary-General of the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya. Hon. Margaret Wilson, in a speech she gave in 2001, revealed that she had run for elections as part of the "struggle of women to achieve the liberty to live lives unconstrained by a world that has been constructed and governed within the male experience" (2001). Dr. Najma Heptulla, former Deputy Chair of India's Rajya Sabha, was elected President of

the IPU from 1999 to 2002, after having presided over the women parliamentarians' group of the IPU in 1993.

Thus, even while women in parliament have remained a minority bloc until 2008, among the few who have breached the 'silk ceiling' of political leadership in Asia and the Pacific have been compelling personalities who have endeavored to direct national policy, global action and legislation towards the promotion of women's rights and political participation.

III. COUNTING NUMBERS: DO THEY COUNT?

A Critical Mass: Do Numbers Count?

The use of the term 'critical mass' was popularised by Drude Dahlerup (1988) as part of her analysis of the impact of having women elected to Scandinavian parliaments. At the time she first proposed her theory, 30 percent of those seated in Nordic parliaments were women. In nuclear physics, the concept of a critical mass refers to a threshold value beyond which significant irreversible changes will be observed. When applying the analogy to political participation, it predicts that at a particular critical level of women's participation, qualitative changes in political behavior, institutions, and public policy will ensue and radically transform legislatures (Grey 2001).

Dahlerup's work had been inspired by Kanter's observations on the behavior of minority groups in American organizations (Kanter 1976; 1977a; 1977b). According to Kanter, minority groups could begin to influence the culture of a company if they composed at least 35 percent of the organization. Dahlerup adopted this framework in analysing what would constitute a significant minority size for women politicians, tentatively proposing that when women in parliament reached a proportion of about 30 percent, they would constitute a critical mass and enable the occurrence of a qualitative shift in the assembly (1988). Dahlerup identified six aspects of changes that could result from increases in the relative number of women and men in parliament (Dahlerup 1988, 283-84):

- Changes in reactions to women politicians,
- Changes in the performance and efficiency of women politicians,
- Changes in the social climate of political life (the political culture),

- Changes in the political discourse,
- Changes of policy (the political decisions), and,
- Increase in the power of women (the empowerment of women).

The importance of a critical mass has been affirmed by other political scientists. In the United States for example, St. Germain (as cited by Studlar and McAllister 2001) argued that once women occupied at least 15 percent of legislative seats, they would be more inclined to push for women's issues. Thomas, (as cited by Studlar and McAllister 2001) described the favourable impacts of increasing women's presence in the legislature on legislative style, policy priorities, and policy outcomes. In legislatures with over 20 percent women, they were more likely both to sponsor and shepherd bills concerning women, children, and the family (Studlar and McAllister 2001).

Later studies arrived at contradictory and inconsistent findings however, and have failed to unequivocally confirm the theory of a critical mass. Studlar and McAllister, for instance, found little cross-national evidence that having a critical mass of women legislators is a substantial contributing factor to either women's representational levels or changes in those levels. Instead, they observed that the process of women gaining more seats across Western democracies was incremental, and not an accelerated one engineered by a critical mass (Studlar and McAllister 2001). Consistent with several other studies however, they learned that the electoral system is the strongest contributor to women's representation, followed by an egalitarian political culture.

Bratton (2005) argues that in legislatures in which women make up less than 15 percent of the membership, their presence can still make a difference. Even in extremely skewed state legislatures where men are the dominant majority, she observed that women were generally more active than men in sponsoring legislation that focused on women's interests; they were as successful as men (or even more) in passing the legislation that they sponsored; and were appointed to leadership positions. Grey (2001), on the other hand, concludes that 'numbers count' in the New Zealand Parliament. She states:

...there was evidence of increased feminisation of the political agenda at a time when the gender balance in the House of Representatives rose

to almost reach Kanter's *skewed* ratio of 15:85. Female politicians were more actively involved in debates on child care and parental leave and spoke more proudly of their gender and their intent to represent women as a group once they reached 14.4 percent of the seats in the New Zealand parliament (Grey 2001,15).

Nonetheless, she goes on to say that it may be more important to consider different critical masses depending on what we wish to achieve through group representation. Representation of as low as 15 percent in a political body allows women to have a voice, although it could take a far greater proportion of women throughout the different arms of legislatures to change policy outcomes and the political culture.

More than a decade after proposing her theory of the critical mass, Dahlerup re-examined her original propositions (2005). She now maintains that the notion of 'critical acts' rather than of a 'critical mass' is more important in interpreting the dramatic changes that had taken place in the eighties within Nordic legislatures. She avers that "it is impossible to isolate the effect of the increasing proportion of women from what happens outside the parliament in this period, which was characterized by a strong feminist movement and extensive debates about gender" (Dahlerup 2005, 4). Dahlerup also realised that having a significant number of women in the legislature did not necessarily lead to dramatic, irreversible changes in public policy and legislation.

Comparing differences in the political behavior of only women and men, and not between women, is another logical fallacy that studies on the critical mass suffered from, because there are also differences in attitudes, political priorities and party positions among women politicians themselves. Consequently, Dahlerup (2005) reduces the critical mass theory to only two research questions (from her original six):

- *The policy outcome perspective:* does the proportion of women in political institutions make a difference for the content of political decisions?
- *The politics as a workplace perspective:* does the proportion of women in political institutions make a difference for the possibility of the women parliamentarians to perform their tasks as representatives the way they want?

Dahlerup confirms what other scholars and advocates have been saying. While numbers matter in laying the ground for the gender transformation of the legislative system and its outcomes, the effectiveness of women's representation needs to be studied beyond numbers. It has to be viewed in relation to institutional factors such as the electoral system and the internal dynamics of political parties. It also needs to be examined in the context of socio-economic, political and cultural events: including a nation's history, gender values, the prevailing political situation, the strength of the women's organisations and its networks, and the level of feminist consciousness of politicians – both women and men (Dahlerup 2005).

We will now examine women's political representation in political structures in relation to electoral systems and party life, and determine to what extent the situation in Asia and the Pacific supports Dahlerup's hypotheses.

Electoral Processes and Women's Political Participation

The *electoral system* determines how votes translate into political representation in the legislature and for the chief executive position of the government. Among 193 countries, the plurality/majority system is the most popular electoral system in use today (UNDP 2005). In Asia, half of its nations elect officials through a *majority system*, with only about a fifth using *proportional representation*, while 17 percent engage in *indirect elections*.^v In Pacific countries, the majority/plurality system is the general rule in voting for elected officials (80 percent). 66 percent of the members of legislative assemblies in Asian countries obtain their seats through direct elections; 28 percent are indirectly elected and only five percent are appointed. In countries of Oceania, almost all political representatives are directly elected: 97 percent (IPU 2008).

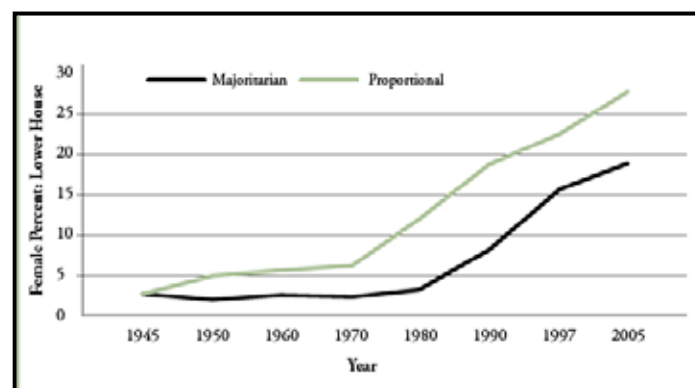
Electoral Systems and Women's Political Representation

Scholars have consistently asserted that the electoral system is the best predictor of the numbers of women in politics (UNRISD 2005; CAPWIP 1999; Pintat 2001). Provided a number of safeguards are applied, the proportional system is deemed more flexible than the majority system, and has been found to be the most conducive avenue to the election of women, since it results in a more diverse composition of a legislative body. It enables more of the traditionally

underrepresented groups, including minority groups and women, to get elected (CAPWIP 1999; Pintat 2001; Dahlerup 2002; Ballington and Karam 2005; Krook 2006; UNIFEM 2008/2009).

Until 1970, the difference in women's representation across the different systems was three percent or less. After 1970, however, there was a marked change and there has been a consistent and substantial divergence in women's representation across electoral systems (Figure 2). This transformation is attributed to the active advocacy of organised women for equal representation in political structures. Between the two broad categories of electoral systems, proportional representation (PR) apparently provides more spaces for women to be elected to office: the percentage of women elected in PR systems across 24 legislatures surveyed in 2004 was 27.49 percent, compared to 18.24 percent in nations using plurality/majority elections, also referred to as 'First-Past-The-Post' (FPTP).

Figure 2. Percentage of Women in Parliament under Majoritarian or Proportional Representations Systems



Source: Ballington and Karam. 2005. *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (Revised Ed.). Available from IDEA.
[http://www.idea.int/publications/wip2/upload/WiP_inlay.pdf].
Last accessed January 2009.

The advantage of PR systems is linked to several factors (Ballington and Karam 2005; Krook 2006). Proportional representation systems, especially those with closed party lists and higher district magnitudes, tend to have much higher numbers of women in parliament than FPTP systems, which involve direct election of candidates in single-member districts. Women have a greater probability of being included in a party ticket, and be voted in, in electoral districts that vote for more than one representative (district magnitude). This likelihood increases with a closed party list,

where elected candidates are ranked, and the ranking determines in which order candidates will accede to office. With a closed party list, party leaders may choose to divide winning slots on the party list among various internal party interests, including those of women's groups or party blocs. Other studies further show that closed lists increase female representation if women are placed near the top, but not if they are placed near the bottom of the list (Krook 2006; Ballington and Karam 2005).

In a majority system, a woman candidate usually has to compete against a bigger number of male aspirants, and only one will emerge the winner in a single member electoral district. Nominating a woman for a single post therefore, may mean explicitly denying the aspirations of the most powerful male politician in the same district. In a male-dominated political party, the chances of a woman aspirant to become its sole district candidate decreases (Ballington and Karam 2005).

Krook observes, however, that these findings have not always been consistent and were often obtained from the voting patterns in industrialised nations. She notes:

PR systems ... do not automatically translate into higher levels of female representation: the impact of their structural characteristics is influenced by political party recruitment practices and broader commitments to equality in representation. By the same token, FPTP systems do not necessarily preclude the election of more women...[P]olitical parties that are determined to elect more women may devise new practices and criteria of candidate selection to accomplish this goal, like all-women shortlists that guarantee whichever candidate is chosen in a district will be female (Krook 2006, 8).

Insights from Asia and the Pacific

It was previously noted that a majority of nations in Asia and the Pacific employ the plurality/majority system and only around 20 percent have proportional allocation systems. Does this make it more difficult for women to be elected into parliament? Can it partially explain the dismal profile of political participation in the region? Table 8 describes the percentage composition of women in Asia-Pacific parliaments in relation to the electoral system used in unicameral and bicameral assemblies.

**Table 8. Number & Percentage of Women in Parliament
By Electoral Systems: Asia and Pacific Parliaments**

Type of Electoral System	NO. OF SEATS IN CHAMBERS	NUMBER OF WOMEN	
		Frequency	Percent
Proportional Representation	1624	250	15.39
Majority	7661	1310	17.08
Mixed	1928	387	20.07
Other	120	26	21.67

Adapted from: IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). Country summary. *Quota project: global database of quotas for women*. [<http://www.quotaproject.org/countryPolitical.cfm>]. Last accessed October 2008.

IDEA .(International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). *Table of Electoral Systems Worldwide*.

[<http://www.idea.int/esd/world.cfm>]. Last accessed October 2008.

IPU (Interparliamentary Union). *Parliaments at a Glance*.

[<http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/ToolboxParline.asp>]. Last accessed February 2009.

PR, mixed systems, and designations through indirect elections have worked more favourably for women in some South East Asian states. Timor-Leste has close to 30 percent women in its National Parliament using PR. In Malaysia, 29 percent of seats in the Senate have been given to women, either through indirect elections or through appointments - twice as many as has been achieved in the lower house using an FPTP system. In the Philippines, members of the House of Representatives are elected using mixed elections, comprising of plurality/majority and PR through closed party lists. As of 2007, 20.5 percent of its seats were held by women, as opposed to the low percentage of seven percent in the Senate, which functions through a majority system. Thailand and Indonesia have not fared so well. Thailand employs a mixed system for electing the members of its lower house (majority and closed party list) and Senate (majority system and indirect designation). The seats given to women in either house have not exceeded 16 percent- too far from the desired proportion of 33 percent. Similarly, the proportion of women voted through PR in Indonesia is slightly less than 17 percent.

Australia has two electoral systems: majority votes for the House of Representatives and PR for the Senate. The number of seats occupied by women in the lower house is 27 percent, but has reached the desired threshold of 35.5 percent in the Senate. New Zealand applies both a majority vote and party list system in selecting members of its House of Representatives. In doing so, close to 34 percent of its parliamentary seats are held by women. Other nations in the Pacific use the majority system. The proportions of elected women in any one of their legislative chambers range from ‘none at all’ to 15 percent.

Overall, when the data is recast in terms of electoral systems, it becomes apparent that PR has not proven to be advantageous to the representation of women in national parliaments (Table 8). Mixed systems however, have led to higher percentages of women represented in legislatures (especially in Nepal and New Zealand), and indirect designations have resulted in the largest proportions of women able to seat in parliament.

Shortlists, closed party lists, legislative and constitutional provisions, and other mechanisms that mandate the inclusion of women in political agencies, have been proposed as tools to increase the representation of women in governance. Linked to the call for attaining a critical mass in political representation, these mechanisms are translated into *gender quotas*.

The Gender Quota

The latest volume of *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009* focuses on the theme ‘Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability’ (UNIFEM 2008/2009). It declares that realising women’s rights and achieving the Millennium Development Goals depend on strengthening accountability for commitments to women and gender equality. It demonstrates that for women’s rights to translate into substantive improvements in their lives, and for gender equality to be realised in practice, women must be able to fully participate in public decision-making at all levels and hold those responsible to account when their rights are infringed or their needs ignored (AWID 2008). It notes that, while women’s political representation has increased over the years, these remain well below the desired threshold and will be

insufficient to achieve gender equity in many developing countries by 2045. The Report states:

Even at the current rate of increase, the 'parity zone' where neither sex holds more than 60 per cent of seats will not be reached by developing countries until 2045 (UNIFEM 2008/2009, 21).

Thus, the report recommends three points for affirmative action to increase women's political representation in legislatures: voluntary political party and media codes of conduct, campaign finance controls to level the playing field for women candidates, and quota systems (Dopplick 2008; UNIFEM 2008/2009). Almost all political systems apply some kind of geographical quotas to ensure a minimum representation for densely populated areas, islands and the like. *Gender quotas* may intersect with these types, as well as with other electoral quotas used by certain states, such as those applied to minorities based on regional, ethnic, linguistic or religious cleavages (IDEA 2009). Regardless of this, it remains unclear whether there is any state that has a quota explicitly for the political participation of gender minorities.

Quotas for women are a form of affirmative action to help them overcome the obstacles that prevent them from entering politics in the same way as their male colleagues (Larsrud and Taphorn 2007). The institution of a gender quota means that women must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, whether it is a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee or a government (Dahlerup 2005). The value of the quota may vary across states, but many countries presently aim to attain gender parity in legislative structures. Austria and Germany, for instance, voluntarily impose a 50 percent minimum quota for women. Increasingly, there are also countries that have quotas which stipulate that neither men nor women can comprise more than 60 percent or less than 40 percent of the national legislature (Robinson 2008).

Quotas can be set by law, such as through the constitution or in special electoral laws. They have been introduced at various levels of the political system - federal, national, regional or local. France for example, has instituted a 50 percent gender quota at the local level. Local councils in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have legislated gender quotas ranging between 20-33 percent. In India, this gender quota

system is combined with the older system of quotas for the scheduled castes (IDEA 2009).

Gender quotas can be classified in several ways. From one perspective, gender quotas include three broad categories of measures: reserved seats, legislative quotas, and party quotas (Krook 2006). *Reserved seats* set aside a certain number of seats for women among representatives in a legislature, specified either in the constitution or by legislation. *Legislative quotas* revise definitions of equality and representation to require political parties to nominate a certain percentage of women among their political candidates. *Party quotas* establish new standards for candidate selection that require the inclusion of a certain proportion of women among their own parties' candidates. Party quotas are adopted voluntarily by political parties to guarantee the nomination of a certain number or proportion of women. Such quotas are not legally binding and there are no sanctions to enforce them (Larsrud and Taphorn 2007).

Dahlerup adds three categories to this framework: candidate quotas, gender-neutral quotas, and fast-track quotas. *Candidate quotas* specify the minimum percentage of candidates for election that must be women, as applied to political parties' lists of candidates for election. Two types of candidate quotas have been identified by Dahlerup: (a) *Legal candidate quotas* which are legislated in the constitution or in electoral laws and require political parties to recruit the mandated percentage of women candidates; (b) *voluntary party quotas* that are adopted by the political parties on their own volition as part of their party philosophy (IDEA 2005, 142). Internal voluntary party quotas are targets set by political parties to include a certain percentage of disadvantaged groups (women, scheduled castes, peasants, or national minorities) as candidates (ACE 2009).

Gender-neutral quotas create a maximum limit for both sexes, such as for example, legislating that neither sex should occupy more than 60 percent of seats in parliament. These rules are instituted to refute the arguments of opponents of quotas that they are discriminatory against men (Dahlerup 2005). *Fast track quotas* may be introduced where women historically have been almost totally excluded from politics, and represent a 'kick-start' for women to gain entry to politics. Rwanda is one country that implemented a fast-track quota for women successfully. Such quotas may also be

introduced to consolidate and further strengthen the gains women have made in accessing decision-making positions—or to prevent a backlash (Dahlerup 2005).

The 2008/2009 *Progress of the World's Women Report* further divides quotas into five categories: (1) constitutional, (2) election law with legally enforceable sanctions and without legally enforceable sanctions, (3) sub-national level, (4) political party, and (5) no quota (Dopplick 2008). It recommends the use of legally mandated constitutional or electoral law quotas because they are compulsory and the strongest means of increasing women's engagement in political competition, regardless of political system (UNIFEM 2008/2009, 22).

The discourse on gender quotas has been varied, complex and contradictory (Dahlerup 2005). Various arguments have been given for and against the introduction of quotas as a means to increase the political presence of women. A summary of these arguments is as follows (from IDEA 2009):

Arguments favouring gender quotas:

- Quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of political seats.
- Quotas imply that there are several women together in a committee or assembly, thus minimising the stress often experienced by the token women.
- Women have the right as citizens to equal representation.
- Women's experiences are needed in political life.
- Election is about representation, not educational qualifications.
- Women are just as qualified as men, but women's qualifications are downgraded and minimised in a male-dominated political system.
- It is political parties that control the nominations, not primarily the voters who decide who gets elected. Therefore, quotas are not violations of voters' rights.
- Introducing quotas may cause conflicts, though perhaps only temporarily.

Arguments against gender quotas:

- Quotas are against the principle of equal opportunity for all, since women are given preference over men.
- Quotas are undemocratic, because voters should be able to decide who is elected.
- Quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications and that more qualified candidates are pushed aside.
- Many women do not want to get elected just because they are women.
- Introducing quotas creates significant conflicts within the party organisation.

Quotas work differently under different electoral systems, but they may be more easily introduced in proportional representation systems. This does not preclude the fact, however, that quotas have also been implemented in some plurality/majority systems. Difficulties in instituting quotas may arise when political parties view the quota as interference in their usual prerogatives to select their own candidates. Dahlerup reminds us that, “in almost all political systems, no matter what electoral regime, it is the political parties, not the voters, that constitute the real gatekeepers into elected offices. Consequently, the party nomination practices should be kept in focus” (IDEA 2010).

As of 2008, there were 15 countries worldwide with constitutional quotas for the national parliament, 46 had electoral laws on quota systems, 33 with constitutional or legislative quotas for sub-national legislative assemblies, and 169 political parties (from 69 countries) with voluntary party quotas (Table 9; IDEA 2009). In many instances, a country may apply a combination of any two or several of these quota systems. Mixed systems that combine majority systems with quota-bound proportional representation systems also exist.

Table 9. Number of Countries and Average Percentage of Women in Parliament by Types of Quota

Type of Quota	Number of Countries	Average No. of Women Elected (percent)
Constitutional Quota Regulation, <i>National Parliament</i>	15	23.4
Election Law Quota Regulation, <i>National Parliament</i>	46	21.1
Constitutional/ Legislative Quota Regulation, <i>Sub-National Assemblies</i>	33	- no data-
Voluntary Party Quota	69	<i>Total political parties = 169</i>

Source:IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). Country summary. *Quota project: global database of quotas for women*. [<http://www.quotaproject.org/countryPolitical.cfm>]. Last accessed October 2008.

The average representation of women in countries that have constitutionally-defined gender quotas is 23.4 percent; while women in parliament within countries with election law quotas average 21.9 percent. In contrast, the average representation of women in countries without gender quotas is 15.3 percent, regardless of electoral system (UNIFEM 2008/2009).

Legislated Gender Quotas in Asia and the Pacific

Gender quotas of one form or another have been instituted in only 12 countries of Asia and the Pacific: Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, and Thailand (IDEA 2009; Table 10).

Table 10. Percentage of Women in Parliament by Quota System, Chamber, and Number of Seats

COUNTRY/REGION	TYPE OF GENDER QUOTA	LEGISLATIVE CHAMBERS	ELECTED WOMEN BY NO. OF SEATS	PERCENT WOMEN ELECTED
East Asia				
China	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament	National People's Congress	637 of 2987	21.33
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament	Supreme People's Assembly	138 of 687	20.09
Republic of Korea	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Local Government; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	House of the People	41 of 299	13.71
South and West Asia				
Afghanistan	Constitutional Quota for National Parliaments; Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament	House of the People	68 of 249	27.31
		House of Elders	23 of 102	22.54
Bangladesh	Constitutional Quota for National Parliaments; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Local Government	Parliament	19 of 300	6.33
India	Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Local Government; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	House of People	45 of 543	8.26
		House of States	23 of 243	9.47
Nepal	Constituent Assembly Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament ; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Local Government ; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	Constituent Assembly	197 of 594	33.16
Pakistan	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Local	National Assembly	76 of 338	22.49
		Senate	17 of 100	17.00

	Government			
Southeast Asia				
Indonesia	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament	House of Representatives	64 of 550	16.84
Philippines	Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Local Government; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	House of Representatives	49 of 239	20.50
		Senate	4 of 23	7.39
Thailand	Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	House of Representatives	56 of 480	11.67
		Senate	24 of 150	16.00
Pacific				
Australia	Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	House of Representatives	40 of 150	26.67
		Senate	27 of 76	35.52
New Zealand	- No gender quotas-	House of Representatives	40 of 121	33.61 ³

Sources: From Table 6 and IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance).

Country summary. *Quota project: global database of quotas for women*.

[<http://www.quotaproject.org/countryPolitical.cfm>]. Last accessed October 2008.

³ New Zealand has reached a 'critical mass' of elected women, even if it has no gender quotas.

Quotas for National Legislatures

The countries of Asia and the Pacific which have instituted one or several gender quota systems for national parliaments are almost evenly divided in terms of their electoral processes (see Table 8). Members of six national legislative chambers across the region are designated through direct elections using majority/plurality votes, while the other chambers with quotas are filled-up through either proportional representation (two houses) or mixed systems (four chambers).

Two of these nations have constitutional quota regulations: Afghanistan and Bangladesh (Table 10). Afghanistan employs a constitutional quota for voting in members of the House of the People and a legislated quota regulation for the House of Elders. These quotas, combined with proportional and mixed electoral systems, have provided more than 20 percent of Afghan women the chance to be included in either

of its chambers. The same cannot be said for Bangladesh however, which has a constitutional quota provision that reserved 13 percent of seats in Parliament to women; women only got 6.33 percent of the seats.

Aside from Afghanistan, there are election law quota regulations in China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Pakistan, Indonesia, and the Philippines (IDEA 2009). China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Pakistan have exceeded the gender quotas in their electoral laws, and all of them employ the plurality/majority system. China set a quota of 22 percent and the percentage of women elected to its National Congress in 2008 comes close to this value (21.3 percent). The Democratic People's Republic of Korea set the electoral law quota of 20 percent for women to be elected to its Supreme People's Assembly; it successfully voted in 20.09 percent. Pakistan's electoral quota law provides that 17.5 percent of seats in the National Assembly are to be allocated to women (60 of 342 seats). These seats are allocated to the political parties proportionally, according to the electoral results. In 2008, the percentage of women directly elected to the National Assembly reached 22.5 percent, while 17 percent were selected through proportional representation to the Senate (IDEA 2009; IPU 2008).

Two states were unable to meet their electoral gender quotas: the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Indonesia. The Electoral Quota Law of 2004 of the ROK recommended that political parties include 30 percent women candidates in their slates. This raised the number of women in its National Assembly to 13 percent from 5.9 percent in the previous election, but this is still below the desired quota. In February 2003, a law was passed in Indonesia that required political parties to consider selecting 30 percent women candidates in each electoral district, under a proportional representation system. 62 women (11.3 percent of 488 seats) made it to the House of Representatives, below the set quota but a bigger proportion than was achieved in 1999 (eight percent; IDEA 2009-a).

The impact of the electoral quota in the Philippines is more difficult to interpret in terms of women's representation. The electoral quota law allocates 20 percent of 250 seats in the House of Representatives to party lists representing marginalised sectors of society, and makes it compulsory for these parties to include women in their lists. To elect one candidate in a party list, each sector must get at

least two percent of the total number of votes cast for the party list system. In the 2007 elections, 49 of 239 seats (20.5 percent) in the lower house were won by women, seven of them representing six different party list groups, including women. This is an increase of almost five percent from the results obtained in 2004 (15.7 percent), and more than three percent of the percentage of women elected to the House of Representatives in 2001 (17.1 percent). Since a mixed electoral system is employed however, many of these parliamentarians have been elected through a plurality vote, and not because of party quotas.

Other factors besides the electoral system apparently influence the successful application of the gender quota or of the election of women to national legislatures. The boxed narratives that follow tell the ‘stories’ behind the gender quotas for national parliaments in selected countries (Boxes 9-11). The experiences narrated, as well as the previous interpretations we have made, fail to depict a clear relationship between proportional representation and the successful use of gender quotas. In some instances, countries with plurality systems and mixed systems have been able to meet and even surpass the set quotas for women’s representation, while those applying PR have not succeeded in meeting their legislated quotas. In addition, it is worth noting that while New Zealand has no legislated gender quotas, it has been successful in having 33 percent of women elected to parliament (Table 10).

Box 9. Afghanistan: Success with Gender Quotas

The Afghan Constitution of 2004 stipulates a quota provision for each of the two main chambers of its national parliament. The lower house, the *Wolesi Jirga*, consists of 220-250 parliamentarians, which is proportional to the population of each of the nation’s 34 provinces. The quota provision states that, from each of the 34 provinces, an average of at least two female candidates should become a member of the *Wolesi Jirga*. This guarantees the inclusion of at least 27 percent women in the assembly, occupying 68 seats. The seats for women in the *Wolesi Jirga* are reserved seats. In case there are not enough women on the list of candidates to fill the seat(s) allocated to women in a particular constituency, the seat(s) in question remain vacant until the next intended *Wolesi Jirga* election.

For the House of Elders, the *Meshrano Jirga*, a mixed electoral system is used (see Table 6). The President appoints one-third of the members, and the gender quota regulation stipulates that 50 percent of these should be women. As a consequence, at least 17 percent of the seats of the *Meshrano Jirga* must be occupied by women.

In the 2005 elections, women occupied 68 out of 249 seats in the *Wolesi Jirga*, or 27.3 percent, complying completely with the gender quota provision. In the *Meshrano Jirga*, 23 of 102 seats (22.5 percent) were held by women, exceeding the gender quota regulation of 17 percent women for this chamber.

Box 10. Re-claiming the Gender Quota in Bangladesh

The quota system in Bangladesh was first introduced in the 1972 Constitution. It provided reserved seats for 15 women in the *Jatiyo Sangshad*, or National Parliament, for a period of 10 years, or five percent of 315 seats in parliament. In 1978, a presidential proclamation increased the number of reserved seats to 30, and extended the period of reservation to 15 years from the date of promulgation of the constitution of the Republic in December 1972. The women were chosen through indirect elections by the 300 directly-elected members of parliament. This constitutional provision lapsed in 1987 but was re-incorporated in the Constitution by an amendment in 1990, to be effective for 10 years from the first meeting of the next elected legislature. This provision also lapsed in 2001, and the Parliament which was elected in October 2001 did not have reserved seats for women.

On May 16, 2004, the *Jatiyo Sangshad* reintroduced quotas for women through the 14th Constitutional Amendment. It increased the number of seats in parliament to 345, and stipulated that 45 seats (13 percent) would be reserved for women in the next parliament. The seats were allocated to parties in proportion to their overall share of the vote (IDEA 2009). In September 2005, these reserved seats were distributed to the political parties represented in parliament in proportion to each party's performance in the 2001 election. The Awami League did not endorse any candidates for the nine seats to which it was entitled, so these were filled by the BNP and three other parties in October 2005.

In December 2008, Bangladesh held general elections for the first time since 2001. Of 281 seats in the National Parliament, only 19 were won by women, or 6.3 percent, through majority elections. This is higher than the proportion of women in parliament in 2001 (two percent) but considerably less than the 30 seats held by women in 1996, or in 1991 (34 seats) and who were designated through indirect elections.

Box 11. Electoral Quotas in East Asia

Two nations in East Asia, governing through two different forms of government, have instituted gender quotas through electoral laws. In March 2007, the 10th *National People's Congress* (NPC) of *China* declared that there should be no less than 22 percent of women deputies elected in the forthcoming 11th election of the Congress. Apart from the National People's Congress, the electoral law of China stated that local people's congresses should all have women deputies and that the percentages of women should be increased gradually. In its last elections, 637 women were elected to the NPC, constituting 21.3 percent of the assembly (IDEA 2009; IPU 2009). This represents a small increase in the number of women sitting in the NPC, which was 20.3 percent in the 2003 elections (604 of 2381 seats).

On 12 March 2004, the *Republic of Korea* reformed its Political Party Law of 2000 to include a quota for women. The quota was applied to both its PR and majority electoral systems for the lower house. For the party list PR portion, whereby 56 deputies are elected to the House of the People, political parties were mandated to include 50 percent women in its candidates' lists. For the majority portion of the election, whereby 243 representatives are elected in single-member districts, it was recommended that political parties include 30 percent women candidates in their slates. The law resulted in an increase of women elected, from 5.9 percent in the previous legislature to 13 percent in the April 2004 election, and then again to 13.7 percent in April 2008.

The proportions of women constituting the parliaments of China and the Republic of Korea still fall below the desired critical threshold. Still, the gradual increase in the election of women, if sustained, augurs well for the use of the gender quota.

Sources: Boxes 9-11: IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). Countrysummary. *Quota project: global database of quotas for women*. [<http://www.quotaproject.org/countryPolitical.cfm>].

IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union). 2009-a. *Parliaments at a Glance*. IPU PARLINE Database. [<http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/ParliamentsAtaGlance.asp>].

Legislated Quotas in Sub-National Elections

Previous research indicates that women's political participation and representation in legislative bodies have been more successful in local level elections. What do the reports say of the countries in Asia and the Pacific?

- *Bangladesh*: In 1993, an electoral law was passed in Bangladesh for the direct election of reserved seats for women in the union *parishad* (union councils). The first elections under this system were held in 1997. Women could be elected for these reserved seats from each of three respective wards, and also run for any of the other general seats in the *parishad*. In the elections, around 12,828 women were elected as members of the union *parishad*. In addition, 20 were elected as chairpersons and 110 successfully won the general seats (ADB 2001).
- *India*: The passage of the 'Panchayati Raj' in India was part of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992. The amendments stipulate that 33 percent of seats in all local bodies (*panchayats* and municipalities) are to be reserved for women. In addition, 33 percent of the seats reserved for the scheduled classes should also be for women (OnlineWomeninpolitics.org 2009). As a result of the Panchayati Raj, more than one million women were elected into the political assemblies of India at the grassroots level.
- *Nepal*: The Act on Local Election required all political parties to field at least one candidate at the ward level in Nepal. It also provided that there must be at least one woman among the nominees to the Village Development Committee and District Development Committee. As a consequence of this Act, more than 100,000 women participated in Village Development Committee elections as candidates and more than 36,000 were elected to the village assemblies (ADB 2008).

- *Pakistan:* An important feature of the Local Government Plan introduced in March 2000 was the provision of a 33 percent quota for women at the district, municipality (*tehsil*) and union councils, and a 20 percent reservation for workers/peasants on all local councils. These reserved seats are directly elected at village level for union councils and indirectly elected at district and sub-district levels for *Zila* and *Tehsil* councils (UN ESCAP 2009). In the local elections held between December 2000 and August 2001, women contested not only the reserved seats but also the open seats in the union, tehsil and district councils and the posts of Nazim and Naib Nazim. In the Northwest Frontier Province however, women were not allowed to vote or run for office because of pressure from religious groups and political parties. This resulted in the loss of approximately 650 seats for women in this region. Out of the total 40,049 seats reserved for women in the local councils, 36,187 were elected. Additionally, 11 were elected as union council Nazim, one as Naib Nazim, and two as district Nazim (Reyes 2002).
- *Papua New Guinea:* The *Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Government* in Papua New Guinea provides for 566 women to be nominated in all 296 local-level governments nationwide, two in each rural local-level government and one in each urban local-level government. In all of its 19 provincial assemblies, with the exception of Bougainville and the national capital district, there should be one appointed woman. It is not known how many women are in local-level governments at present, but it is a well-established fact that they have failed to implement the provision on nominated women (Sepoe 2002).
- *Philippines:* The Philippines' *Local Government Code of 1991* requires that a woman be one of three sectoral representatives that sit in every municipal, city, and provincial legislative council. In 1993, 3,000 women's organisations were accredited for the holding of elections to elect sectoral representatives to the Local Development Councils. Despite this, no elections for sectoral representatives had been held until 2007.

Information on the successful application of sub-national legislative gender quotas again vary across countries. Those in South Asia have had relative success in its application. The same cannot be said of Papua New Guinea however, and the Philippines still has to implement the legislated quota system for the election of women to local assemblies.

Developing Capabilities for Public Life

Despite these limited gains, much can be said for the reservation of seats for women in local governments. The initiative to put up women candidates has often been the handiwork of organised women, who are most active in local level organisations (Tambiah 2003). It enables them to engage government from within the established system, and to bring into formal political discourse the interests and aspirations of women's groups and other minorities (Raman 2003). Supported by her organisation, a local woman politician is able to verbalise and address the interests of her constituents in the ward or district, gain experience and confidence in political decision-making, and enlarge her understanding of the dynamics of representation in governance.

The quota system has opened doors for socially disadvantaged and marginalised groups that otherwise stand no chance of winning positions of formal political authority traditionally obtained through the politics of money, family influence and party patronage (Reyes 2002). It has also provided local women with the opportunity and determination to go beyond their traditional gender roles in the private domain, and to assume the task of community leadership as active agents of social change (Reyes 2002; Raman 2003; Chowdhury 2003).

Local political representation serves as an 'incubation period' for women politicians. It enables them to learn about the culture of politics, and prepares them for open elections against male candidates. As a result of their improved self-confidence, some Indian states now have parity in the number of women and men councilors in local assemblies (UN ESCAP 2007). The number of women candidates for parliamentary elections has increased, including women who were former mayors, district presidents or councilors.

Another perceived advantage (using the women's own accounts) is that participation in local governance better enables elected women officials to straddle their multiple roles: to take part in the political system and at the same time to have time for home and family responsibilities, rather than be forced to relocate to the national capital (UN ESCAP 2007). This diminishes the objections of spouses and family members to their continuing role in politics. While this 'advantage' does not alter gender constructs, it may eventually lead to the transformation of gender relations, as the women become more self-confident and their effectiveness as public officials leave their husbands no choice but to share in household responsibilities (Raman 2003). This is not always the case however, and women politicians may in fact become more laden with responsibilities. As one woman *barangay captain* (village head) in the Philippines put it: "Empowerment can be dis-empowering", referring to the conflicting demands on her time from her constituents and from her family (Torres, de la Cruz & Magcuro 2002).

Contradictions, Co-optations and Challenges

Research on the profile of local women politicians indicate that they are generally young, of low income, inexperienced in politics, and are poorly educated (Reyes 2002; Raman 2003; Tambiah 2003). While women's organisations have used their collective power to put up candidates, the more frequent source of power for candidature has been patriarchy. In many instances, it is the men folk who have 'instructed' the women in their families to run for reserved seats, in order to maintain or consolidate their influence and status in the local community (Basu 2003; Hust 2002). In such cases, unless the elected women gain a gender-responsive perspective, it is unlikely that their political participation will lead to marked improvements in gender equality (Chowdhury 2003; Raman 2003).

In small island countries of the Pacific such as Papua New Guinea, the institution of legislated quotas has not led to the improved representation of women in local governance. While women's groups have waged struggles to attain gender equality, these have been unable to transform a state that has been perceived as weak, unstable, faced with a continuing economic crisis and increasing poverty. Women's participation in Papua New Guinea has been hindered by the poor conduct of the elections, the increasing incidence of electoral violence and general insecurity, the

prevalence of corruption and other factors that characterise the state (Sepoe 2002). In addition, cultural factors have served as constraints. The status of women in Papua New Guinea has diminished from the past, and they are now perceived to have little influence over decisions in the family or community (Brouwer 1998).

In the Philippines, devolution of powers to local governments and the decentralisation of authority have served as hindrances rather than opportunities for women's representation in local assemblies. While the law for quotas representing marginalised sectors in local governments is in place, local officials have been reluctant to enforce them, because the local governments will have to shoulder the salaries and other expenses to be incurred by the sectoral representatives (UN ESCAP 2009-a). As part of their effort, NGOs and people's organisations have sought to be accredited as legitimate representatives of their respective sectors in local councils – a first step towards gaining a seat in local institutions of governance. Despite this, enabling rules will still have to be devised covering the reservation of sectoral seats in local councils, including at least three for women.

Gender Quotas and Political Parties

One of the main obstacles to women's representation in political institutions is the process of candidate selection: comprising aspects of seeking, nominating, financially supporting, campaigning, and including elective candidates in the ballot. Political parties have the structure, resources and networks to mobilise votes, so that independent candidates often have slimmer chances of successfully winning seats in legislative assemblies. Opportunities for women to be represented in legislative bodies therefore, improve if they are selected as candidates by political parties.

Similar to many other features of political systems however, political parties and their dynamics tend to be patriarchal, owing to long years of domination or monopoly by male politicians. Thus, in many nations worldwide, getting a woman selected as a candidate has been a real challenge (UNIFEM 2008/2009). The imposition of gender quotas in political parties serves as a response to this discrimination. Research has generally shown that, without mandatory quotas, the number of women enlisted as candidates by political parties has invariably been much smaller than that of male candidates (Sacchet 2008). Quota provisions, if properly implemented, can remove crucial barriers to women's equal political representation.

These obstacles include: male succession patterns put into place by male party leaders; women's lack of power in the parties, since women are usually confined to the lower echelons of power; and their lack of access to party funds for campaigns and political training (Tambiah 2003; Dahlerup 2003).

Aside from legislated quotas, there are also *voluntary party quotas*. Such quota systems force parties to scrutinise and change their male-dominated gender profile, accept the fact of women's under-representation in governance, examine women's issues that will win support from the electorate, and seriously start recruiting women who share their political conviction (Dahlerup 2003). Voluntary party quotas are more commonly implemented by centre-left-leaning parties, while liberal and conservative parties generally tend to be reluctant about or strongly oppose the adoption of quotas (IDEA 2005, 142).

Voluntary Party Quotas and Women's Political Participation

As of 2008, there were 169 parties in 69 nations worldwide that have installed voluntary party quotas for women's representation (IDEA 2009). Nonetheless, only 6.5 percent of all states with voluntary party quotas have women occupying at least one-third of the seats in parliament. These states with party quotas and which have attained the goal of at least 30 percent women in the legislature include - in Europe: Austria, Belgium, Iceland, Macedonia, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and Sweden; in Latin America: Argentina and Costa Rica; and in Africa: Mozambique.

In the Asia- Pacific region, political parties in the following states have gender quotas: Australia, India, Korea, the Philippines and Thailand. The voluntary party quota provisions in these countries are as follows (IDEA 2009):

- *Australia:* In 2002, the Australian Labour Party introduced a 40 percent quota for party positions, union delegations, and for pre-selection for public office and positions at state and federal level, building on a 35 percent quota introduced in 1994.
- *India:* The Indian National Congress has a 15 percent quota for women candidates.
- *Republic of Korea:* The Grand National Party supports quotas of 30 percent for women candidates.

- *Philippines*: It has a women's party, the Gabriela Women's Party, which represents 250 women's organisations. Another party-list group is the Philippine Democratic Socialist Party, which has a 25 percent quota for women but there are no voluntary gender quotas in the major political parties.
- *Thailand*: Its Democrat Party has a target of 30 percent women candidates for election.

The level of women's representation in these countries with voluntary party quotas is seen in Table 10. Only Australia and Nepal have been able to use party quotas to the advantage of women. For the rest, the results have been mixed. Clearly, existing party quotas have not successfully raised women's representation in the countries where these commitments have been made.

Even so, the presence of political party quotas has enabled women to gain ground in the legislature, as described in the boxed narratives below (Boxes 12 and 13). Moreover, the experience of the Gabriela Women's Party in the Philippines demonstrates the possibility of winning seats through a 'woman's vote'. Gabriela's success in winning two seats in the last elections means a sizable number of voters wanted to have the women's party become part of the House of Representatives.

Box 12. Applying a Gender Quota in the Australian Labour Party

At the National Conference of the Australian Labour Party (ALP) in 1994, a party gender quota was adopted. This was in compliance with Rule 12 of the Constitution of Australia which stipulated that 35 percent of the parliamentary party, members of party committees and conference delegates were to be women by 2002, at both federal and state levels. In 2002, a Special Rules Conference extended the quota target to 40 percent, to be achieved by 2012. These targets were put into place largely as the result of women's action within the party and by party women working within the independent organisation 'Emily's List'.

Since the adoption of the 1994 gender quota, the number of female candidates nominated by the ALP has more than doubled - from 26 to 59. The number of those selected for winnable seats almost quadrupled - from four to 15. In 2002, women composed 30 percent of Labour Ministers of Parliament (MPs) at the Commonwealth level, despite Labour being in opposition (Curtin and Sexton 2004). In the 2007 elections, women won 26.7 percent of seats in the lower house.

Box 13. The GABRIELA Women's Party

The *Gabriela Women's Party* is an offshoot of the biggest alliance of women's organizations in the Philippines, GABRIELA. It first joined the electoral process in 2001 when it fielded its Secretary General, Liza Largoza Maza to run as party list representative under the *Bayan Muna* (People First) Party. Following its successful foray in parliament with the passage of pro-women legislation in the 12th Congress, the Gabriela Women's Party fielded its nominees in the 2004 national party list elections for the first time. *Gabriela* emerged seventh of 66 parties, garnering enough votes to have one nominee serve as the sole women's sectoral representative in the 13th Congress. In the 2007 elections, the Gabriela Women's Party rose to fourth place, reaping enough votes for two party representatives in the 14th Congress (Gabriela Women's Party 2007). Its representatives have been active exponents of bills and resolutions that affect various aspects of women's lives, yet they continue to engage in advocacy efforts for women's rights outside of Congress. There is also a bill pending in Congress which proposes to raise the number of women in government until gender parity is attained (HOR 2009). If the bill is passed, 30 percent of elective and appointive positions should be held by women starting in 2010, 40 percent by 2013, and 50 percent by 2016.

Gender Quotas – Path to Equality in Political Participation?

The analysis of women's representation in political bodies in relation to electoral systems and quota rules, within Asia and the Pacific, lead to the following conclusions:

- There has been no clear advantage in the use of proportional allocation systems in relation to the number of women who have been able to secure seats in parliamentary bodies. In fact, there are states that apply plurality/majority systems that are closer to attaining (or have obtained) a third of the seats in the legislature.
- It is countries with mixed electoral systems that appear to have the best performance in terms of women's representation. Indirect elections, reservations or designations have also led to better chances for women to sit in parliament.
- Only a fourth of the nations in the region have any form of gender quotas in place, be it through constitutional or electoral regulation, or through voluntary quotas. While these rules have generally led to increased representation of women in chambers, both in national and local assemblies, this has not translated into generating a 'critical mass' of women in many of the legislatures. In fact, there are states which have

repeatedly failed to elect women at the quota levels they set for themselves.

Even while the United Nations and many political scientists have previously spoken of the gender quota as a significant factor for improving women's political participation, recent assessments of its application have been more cautious. Larserud and Taphorn posit that, regardless of electoral system, it is *quota reservations for women* that provide the best chances for getting women into parliament. In their analysis, "reserving a tier where only women can stand is guaranteed to elect as many women as the quota makes provisions for" (Larserud and Taphorn 2007, 27). Voluntary party quotas, using percentage regulations with rank-order rules during the nomination process, coupled with list PR elections, also increase the likelihood of a woman being included in a party slate. In the latter case, strict rules would be applied to place women in the first ranks, so that they have a better chance of being included among the elected candidates, rather than if they were placed at the end of the party list. Given the data previously described on the use of voluntary party quotas however, it appears that this avenue for increasing women's political representation remains underutilised, not only in Asia but also in other parts of the world.

Larserud and Taphorn also assert that the least favourable conditions for getting women elected are in the plurality/majority or two-round systems of voting (Larserud and Taphorn 2007). In their view, such systems are apt to discriminate against women. Figures from Asia and the Pacific belie this supposition. Women's organised advocacy for political representation, the influence of the United Nations, and other social and political factors, probably have been as instrumental in states using majority votes to enable critical numbers of women to obtain seats in legislatures.

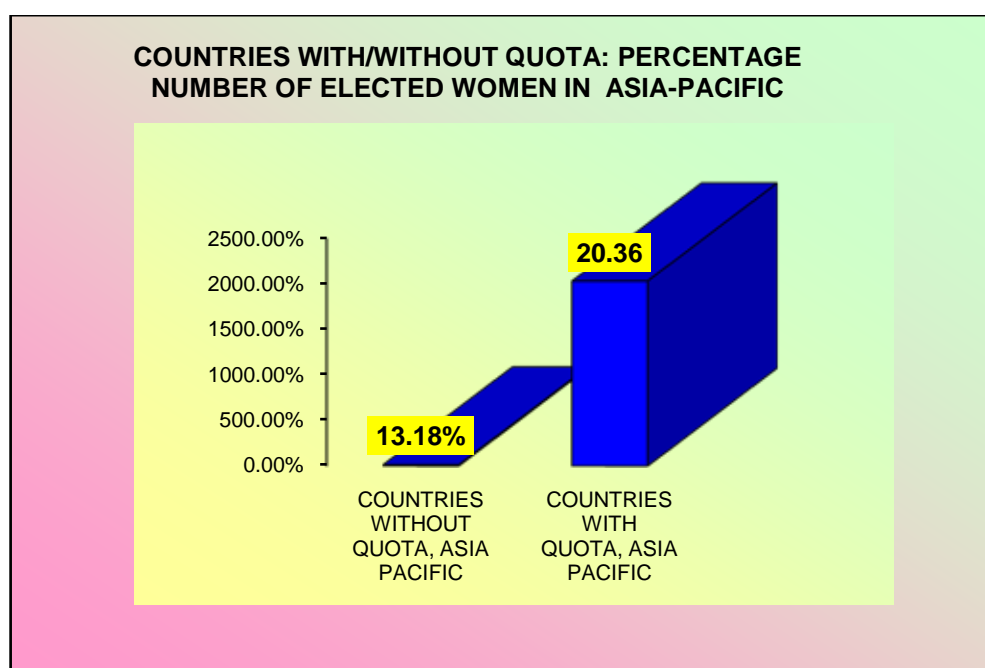
Most recently, Mona Krook spoke of the 'mixed results' obtained through gender quotas (Ireland 2009). She notes that while the presence of gender quotas may have significant effects in some states, there are parliaments where the proportions of women have 'stagnated' or even decreased. Women elected through quotas have not always been able to influence government policy or changed the patriarchal culture of politics. Notwithstanding, women elected through quotas may have been responsible

for the introduction and legislation of bills that specifically deal with women's concerns.

Positively, Krook asserts that gender quotas and reserved seats, especially in local governments, have encouraged more women to run as candidates, including young and poor women, even while elite women from 'political dynasties' continue to run as candidates. In addition, the presence of more women in legislatures has encouraged more women constituents to contact their representatives (Ireland 2009).

Our own analyses support these observations. Thus far, gender quotas – whether legislated or applied voluntarily - have not proven to be the magic wand that opens the doors to women's representation in Asian and Pacific nations where they are applied. This is not to say however, that gender quotas have no value. A comparison of the proportion of women directly or indirectly elected in nations with quotas, with the corresponding percentages in states without quota systems, describes a clear advantage for its application rather than having no quotas (Figure 3):

Figure 3. Average Number of Women (in percent) Elected to Office by Presence/Absence of Gender Quotas in Asia and the Pacific

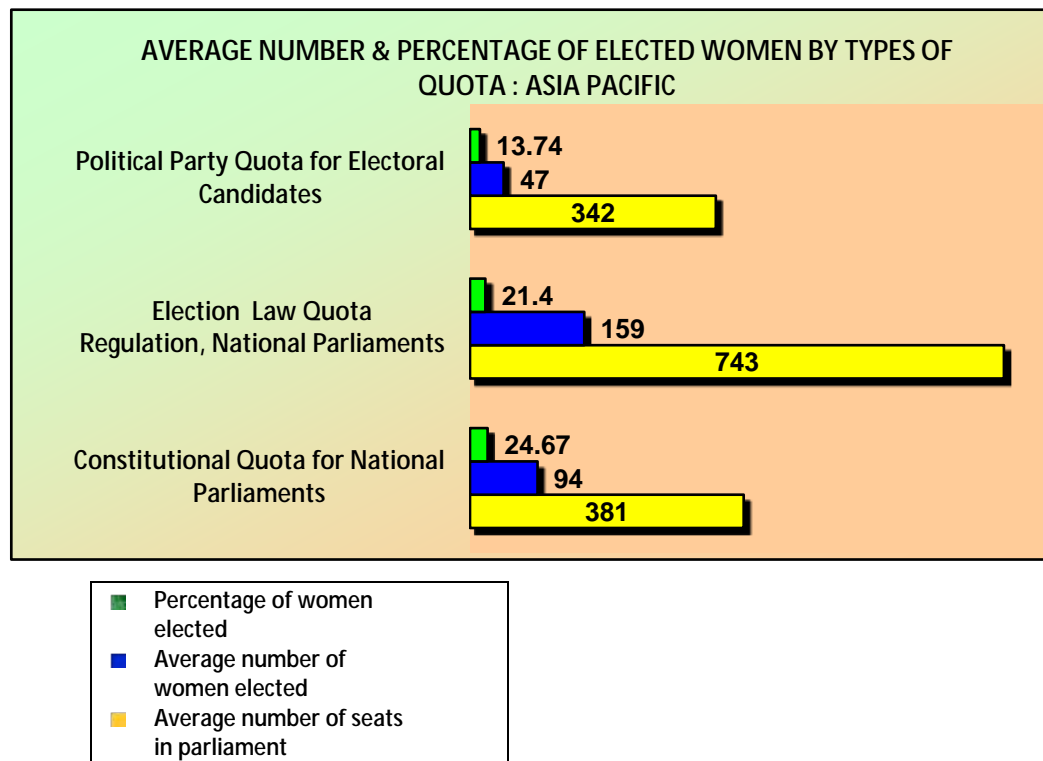


Source: Derived from IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). 2008. Country summary. *Quota project: global database of quotas for women*. [<http://www.quotaproject.org/countryPolitical.cfm>]. Last accessed October 2008; IPU (Interparliamentary Union). 2009-a. *Parliaments at a Glance*. [<http://www.ipu.org/parline-/ToolboxParline.asp>]. Last accessed February 2009.

Regardless of the type of quota regulation, on average almost twice as many women are represented in electoral systems with gender quotas than in those where such regulations do not exist: 20.4 percent versus 13 percent. Furthermore, when the average representation of women is studied in relation to the type of quota regulation, it is seen that the biggest percentages of women are elected (24 percent) in chambers that have constitutional quota regulations, followed by legislated electoral quotas. On the other hand, political party quota regulations have been least associated with getting women into parliament (14 percent), equivalent to the probability of being elected without quotas (see Figure 4). The present findings are consistent with those reported by the UNDP, where the observation was made that “having a certain portion of parliamentary seats reserved for women helps raise the numbers of women in national parliaments” (UNDP 2008, 29).

Given these results, it is clear that there is some significant degree of association between the likelihood of women being elected to legislative chambers and the presence of gender quotas. Moreover, legislated quota regulations appear more effective instruments for promoting women’s representation than voluntary party quotas. These findings however, do not diminish the fact that there could be other factors that increase the possibilities of women’s political representation.

**Figure 4. Average Number and Percentage of Women Elected
By Gender Quota**



Source: Derived from IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). 2008. Country summary. *Quota project: global database of quotas for women*. [<http://www.quotaproject.org/countryPolitical.cfm>]. Last accessed October 2008; IPU (Interparliamentary Union). 2008. *Parliaments at a Glance*. [<http://www.ipu.org/parline-/ToolboxParline.asp>]. Last accessed February 2009.

Women in Ministerial Positions

Apart from the parliament, women's participation in governance should also be visible in executive (ministerial or cabinet) positions where they can influence decision-making processes affecting government.

As of January 2008, 16.1 percent of all ministerial portfolios worldwide were held by women, representing an overall increase of two percentage points since 2005. The number of countries with no women ministers also declined, from 19 to 13 states (IPU 2008). Women ministers in Finland, Norway and Grenada occupy from 50 percent to 60 percent of ministerial positions; those in Sweden, France, South, Africa, Spain, Switzerland and Chile have women in 40 percent to 49.5 percent of the ministries (IPU 2008)

The level of women's representation in national ministries of Asia and the Pacific closely follows that of their visibility in legislative bodies. New Zealand enjoys the highest percentage, with 35 percent of its ministries headed by women. Timor-Leste follows, with women holding 25 percent of its ministries. The next ranks are occupied by Australia (24.1 percent), Samoa (23.1 percent), Mongolia and Nepal (20 percent each; IPU 2008). The percentage of women occupying ministerial or cabinet positions in the other states ranges from zero in Pacific island nations to 14 percent (Table 11). Thus, similar to the region's scorecard for women in parliament, Asia and Pacific nations have been less successful than those in other regions of the world to have women serving as national ministers.

**Table 11. Women in Ministerial or Cabinet Positions⁴: Asia and Pacific States
(As of January 2008)**

Rank ⁵	Country	Total Ministers	Women Ministers	
			Number	Percent
18	New Zealand	28	9	32.1
28	Timor-Leste	12	3	25.0
29	Australia	29	7	24.1
33	Samoa	13	3	23.1
38	Mongolia	15	3	20.0
38	Nepal	15	6	20.0
54	Maldives	21	3	14.3
54	Micronesia [Federated States of]	7	1	14.3
62	Japan	17	2	11.8
65	Lao People's Democratic Republic	27	3	11.1
66	Indonesia	37	4	10.8
68	India	39	4	10.3
69	Marshall Islands	10	1	10.0
69	Thailand	20	2	10.0
71	Malaysia	32	3	9.4
72	Philippines	22	2	9.1
73	China	35	3	8.6
74	Bangladesh	12	1	8.3
74	Fiji	12	1	8.3
76	Kiribati	13	1	7.7
76	Vanuatu	13	1	7.7
77	Brunei Darussalam	14	1	7.1
78	Cambodia	29	2	6.9
83	Sri Lanka	53	3	5.7
86	Republic of Korea	20	1	5.0
89	Vietnam	24	1	4.2
90	Afghanistan	27	1	3.7
91	Pakistan	28	1	3.6
91	Papua New Guinea ⁶	28	1	3.6
92	Iran [Islamic Republic of]	31	1	3.2
93	Bhutan	3	0	0.0
93	Democratic People's Republic of Korea ⁶	33	0	0.0
93	Myanmar ⁶	37	0	0.0
93	Nauru ³	6	0	0.0

93	Palau	8	0	0.0
93	Singapore	17	0	0.0
93	Solomon Islands	23	0	0.0
93	Tuvalu	7	0	0.0

Adapted from IPU (Interparliamentary Union). (2005). *Women in Politics: 2005*.
[http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wmnmap05_en.pdf]. Last accessed October 2008.

Legend:

⁴ Table includes Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers. Prime Ministers were included when they held ministerial portfolios but Vice-presidents and heads of government or public agencies are excluded.

⁵ As ranked by the IPU, *Op.Cit.*

⁶ Sourced by the IPU from Governments or Permanent Missions to the UN, or Public Documents

What comprises the areas of concern of women ministers? The top four portfolios held globally by women are generally focused on socio-cultural affairs, including family concerns, health, education, science, culture, labour and sports (WEDO 2008; Table 12, UNDP 2009). Hence, there appears to be a high degree of gender stereotyping in assigning women to ministerial or cabinet positions in governments.

Davis (1997) attempts to explain this by citing the fact that prior to achieving ministerial office, more women ministers had been assigned to family, social affairs, health and education committees rather than to finance and defence. The question, however, is whether women choose to work in these areas, or are channeled into stereotypical roles, from the moment they are elected into parliament (Stokes 2005). Nonetheless, women in Europe, North and Latin America have held portfolios addressing foreign and internal affairs, defence, justice, communications, transportation and environmental affairs. So have women ministers in New Zealand, the Philippines and other States of the Asia-Pacific region.

Representation of Gender Minorities in Governance

While gender quotas exist, these have really been quotas for women and do not represent affirmative action for gender minorities. Thus, if individuals from sexual and gender minority communities stand for elections or are voted in, they often do so as men or women, or as representing other classifications of minority groups.

Nonetheless, in the Asia and the Pacific region, at least three nations have explicit provisions on the individual rights of sexual or gender minorities – New Zealand, Australia and Nepal (Matzner 2007, Gay411.Org 2009, Ireland 2008; BDS 2009). In December 2007, Nepal's Supreme Court Friday ordered the government to

enact laws to guarantee the rights of gays and lesbians, who have long complained of discrimination in the highly conservative Himalayan nation (Ireland 2008; BDS 2007). Portions of the High Court's ruling are reproduced in Box 14.

Box 14. Neither Male nor Female- but Natural

The Blue Diamond Society and three other groups brought a lawsuit before Nepal's Supreme Court in April 2007, challenging the law against 'unnatural' sex and demanding equal rights and an end to discrimination sexual and gender minority communities. In December 2007, the Supreme Court declared that sexual minorities were 'natural persons' deserving of protection against discrimination, and ordered the government to come up with legislation guaranteeing civil rights for homosexuals. Portions of the Supreme Court ruling read as follows:

"Though lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and inter-sex or LGBTIs are not male or female in terms of sex, or masculine or feminine in terms of gender, they are natural persons. The Articles from 12 to 32 of the Chapter three of the Interim Constitution of Nepal has bestowed each Nepali citizen all fundamental rights. Though they are in minority, by virtue of being Nepali citizen, to enjoy those rights on their own identity are the fundamental rights of petitioners.... The fundamental rights set forth in the constitution and the human rights enshrined in the international human rights treaties in which Nepal is a party, cannot be interpreted on a way that only male and female can enjoy it just because male and female gender are mentioned in the constitution. Aside from the male and female, the third sex such as LGBTI are as well natural persons and therefore LGBTI are entitled for enjoyment of the rights provided by constitution, law and the human right conventions".

Source: BDS (Blue Diamond Society). 2009. *Supreme Court Decision – summary note*. [<http://www.bds.org.np/>]. Last accessed March 2009.

Table 12 lists some of the politicians, parliamentarians, and government officials who have identified themselves as members of sexual and gender minority communities within Asian and Pacific nations. There have been at least eight gays and lesbians, respectively, who have assumed political positions, along with four transgender persons and one bisexual. In many instances, these persons have been the leaders of organizations fighting for the rights of gender minorities. They include Liz Watson in Australia, Alex Au Waipang in Singapore, Rosanna Flamer-Caldera in Sri Lanka and Sunit Pant in Nepal (Ireland 2008).

Table 12. Politicians and Public Figures in Asia and the Pacific with Gender Minority Identities

NAME	COUNTRY	YEAR	POSITION	SEXUAL ORIENTATION
Aya Kamikawa	Japan	2003	First Transgender to seek elected office in Japan [Municipal Official, Setagaya Ward, Tokyo]	Transgender
Tim Barnet	New Zealand	1958	MP	Gay
Andrew Barr	Australia	1973	Australian Politician	Gay
Georgina Beyer [George Bertrand]	New Zealand	1995	World's first transsexual Mayor	Transgender
Bob Brown	Australia	1944	Senator	Gay
Rosanna Flamer-Caldera	Sri Lanka		Co-Secretary General, ILGA	Lesbian
Chris Carter	New Zealand	1952	NZ Politician	Gay
Charles Chauvel	New Zealand	1969	NZ Politician	Gay
Don Dunstan	Australia	1999	Australian Politician	Bisexual
Pegah Emambaksh	Iran [Islamic Republic of]	NA	LGBT right activist	Lesbian
Brian Greig	Australia	1966	Australian Politician	Gay
Ian Hunter	Australia	NA	Australian Politician	Gay
Michael Kirby	Australia	1939	Australian Justice of the High Court	Gay
Rubic Rea	Philippines		First Transsexual Politician in the Philippines [Barangay Captain Zone 4. Angeles Tayabas, Quezon]	Transgender
Kanako Otsuji	Japan	1974	Japans first openly lesbian politician	Lesbian
John Maurice Scott	Fiji	1934-2006	Fijian Red Cross Director	Gay
Penny Sharpe	Australia	1970	Australian Politician	Lesbian
Marian Streetb	Australia	1955	Australian Politician	Lesbian
Louisa Hareruia Wall	New Zealand	1972	Politician	Lesbian
Marilyn Waring	New Zealand	1952	NZ Politician	Lesbian
Giz Watzon	Australia	1957	Australian Politician	Lesbian
Penny Wong	Australia	1968	Australian Politician	Lesbian
Dan Zhou	China	1974	Chinese Lawyer, Gender	Gay

			Minority Rights activist	
Sunil Buba Pant	Nepal	2008		Gay
Samshasha (a pseudonym, also known by the Chinese-character pen-name Xiaomingxiong)	Hong Kong, China	1950	Hong Kong's First Gay Rights Activist and Author	Gay
Suvraj Shri Manvendra Singhji Raghbir Singhji Sahib (known as Manavendra Singh Gohil, Manavendrasingh Gohil, or Manvendra Gohil)	India	1965	Prince of Indian state of Rajpipla and Gay Rights and AIDS activist	Gay
Shabnam "Mausi" Bano (hijra since childhood, therefore out).	India	1998-2003	Member of Madhya Pradesh assembly 1998 – 2003	Transgender

Sources: Changeling Aspects. *Short List of Transgendered Famous People*. 2008.

[<http://www.changelingaspects.com/Lifepercent20Stories/>

Shortpercent20Listpercent20ofpercent20Transgenderedpercent20Famouspercent20People.htm]. Last accessed November 2008.

A Gender Variance Who's Who. *Elected officials*.

[http://zagria.blogspot.com/2007_05_01_archive.html]. Last accessed November 2008.

These individuals have been politically visible either in government or as rights activists (or as both). The majority of them are from Australia or New Zealand, where the acceptance of gender minority groups is most favourable. Yet even in India and Nepal, where culture and society are not as open to gender minorities as the first two, there have been persons with gender minority identities involved in politics. There are undoubtedly many more persons from sexual and gender minority communities sitting in different parliaments or legislative bodies, but they still have to find the courage make their identities public, whilst also being good politicians.

In some cases, gender minority members are elected to positions as avowed lesbians, gay, transsexuals, bisexuals or intersexuals. In other instances, they revealed their gender only after elections. In all cases however, these politicians and other public officials have had legitimate claims to their seats in government by virtue of their experience, ability and education. The following narrative accounts are instructive.

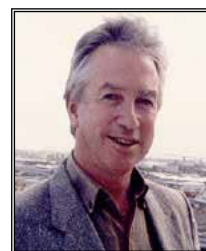
The Political Record of Gender Minorities

In a workshop at the International Conference on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Human Rights at the Palais des Congres in Montreal in 2006, seven elected members of gender minorities averred that they wanted to be recognised for their competence and not just for their sexual orientation (Sutherland 2006).

The lone representative from the Asia-Pacific nations in the panel was Georgina Beyer. She was born a Maori man, worked as a stripper and a prostitute before undergoing a full sex-change operation in 1984 and becoming an actress. In 1990, after she decided to get out of acting, Georgina moved to Carterton, a white, conservative town outside Wellington, on a government-funded work study programme. When the government cut funding for unemployment, she became an ardent advocate for the community. She “shocked herself and the country” when she was elected mayor of Carterton. Later, she ran for Parliament under the Labour Party, becoming the first transsexual in the world to be elected to the position. While in parliament, she introduced a bill which intended to include gender identity as a ground under the New Zealand Human Rights Act of 1993. She also sponsored other bills to promote the rights of gender minorities (Beyer and Casey 1999). In a moment of reflection, Beyer noted that “becoming a pioneer was a great honour and a burden. The expectations are immense” (Sutherland 2006).



Donald Allan Dunstan was the Premier of South Australia from 1967-68 and again from 1970-79. He was a bisexual, and was married twice before taking on a partner (after the death of his second wife). He had a long illustrious record as Premier, being well-known for his reformist acts. During the so-called ‘Dunstan Decade’, aboriginal land rights were recognised, homosexuality was decriminalised, and the first female judge was appointed. He created a ministry for the environment, enacted anti-discrimination legislation, and implemented electoral reforms in South Australia. He was also heavily involved in federal moves for the abolition of the White Australia Policy. He is wellremembered for his efforts to encourage the social, artistic and cultural life of South Australia (Yeeles 1978; Dunstan 1981; Spoehr 2000). Dunstan succumbed to cancer in 1999.





Aya Kamikawa was the first transsexual person to openly seek political office in Japan. She stood for elections to the Setagaya Municipal Assembly in Tokyo in 2003, leaving blank the space for 'sex' in her application. In 2005, she was allowed to change her sex from male to female in the national register, after the enactment of the law concerning special rules regarding the sex status of a person with gender identity disorder. As member of the Setagaya Ward Assembly, she worked for the welfare of various groups of minorities in society: people with visual and/or hearing disabilities, ostomates, single-parent families, homeless people, evening junior high school students, as well as LGBTI people (Rainbow Setagaya 2006).

Sunil Pant, 35 years old, is a Belarus-educated computer engineer who founded the Blue Diamond Society (BDS) in Nepal in 2002, an organisation working for the rights of sexual and gender minorities. In the April 2008 elections, he was named to a seat in the parliament by the Communist Party under a proportional representation system (Ireland 2008). Two developments in Nepal benefited Pant. The first was the significant change in the attitudes of the Maoists towards sexual and gender minorities, such that all three parties vying for elections included gender minority rights in their election manifestos. The real breakthrough however, came when Nepal's Supreme Court declared that sexual minorities were 'natural persons' deserving of protection against discrimination (see Box 14). Several organisations, including a private bank, the Education Ministry and the Home Ministry, have added a third box for the third gender in their forms. The Home Ministry is also working on a policy that will soon be circulated in the districts to give citizenship identity papers to third genders all over Nepal (Larssen 2008). Pant estimates that it will take at least five more years however, to have effective policies, laws and a constitution that respects the rights of sexual and gender minority communities in Nepal, and another 20 years to change the real situation on the ground and to change livelihoods for the better (from an interview with Larssen 2008).



As in the case of women, allowing gender minority groups to claim their places in structures of governance provides the possibility for them to work for the

promotion of the rights of their genders. It has also been an opportunity to take up the cudgels on behalf of other disadvantaged and discriminated groups. The struggle of gender minorities for the recognition of their right to political participation still requires much more active advocacy – in the halls of parliament and in global conventions, as well as in the streets and neighbourhoods they occupy.

IV. OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Several factors have been identified to explain the continuing inability of women to attain critical numbers. Among these are: (a) gender constructions, values and stereotypes; (b) the gendered nature of electoral processes; (c) the level of national development and its impacts on women's rights to development; (d) religious and other cultural beliefs affecting women's mobility, visibility, and leadership; and (e) quality, urgency and gender-responsiveness of democratisation processes (UNIFEM 2008/2009; IPU 2007; Ramli 2005; IPU October 2005; Ballington and Karam 2005; Dahlerup 2005; Nussbaum 2003; Pintat 2001; UNDP 2000; Norris and Inglehart 2000; UN DAW 1997, amongst others).

In this section, we shall examine the interplay between political participation and some of these implicated factors.

The Political is Personal

In South Asia, patriarchy, seclusion, and the power of the family to exercise social control over male and female activities mean that most women are unaware of their rights and lack the means to realise them (Heerah 2006; Asia Foundation 1999; Frankl 2004). Women are told that “they are not intelligent enough to participate in politics... [They] are generally encouraged to believe that politics is much too complicated for them to understand and so it is best left to men” (Ghimere 2006, 7).

India, for instance, has one of the oldest and most active women's organisations. Numerous laws exist to protect women's rights. The Government has often been unable to enforce these laws however, especially in rural areas in which traditions are deeply rooted. Women remain underrepresented in governance and politics, especially in the national legislature, although no legal impediments hinder their participation in the political process. Attitudinal, institutional, cultural and social restrictions are often seen as the impediments to women's political participation

(Geetha 2005). In places where women have made inroads to public life, it has mainly been through the so-called “male equivalence or kinship link” (OneWomen 2008). Moreover, the participation of women in national politics is highly dependent on party decisions, which selects the candidates and provides campaign funds. Even in parties led by women, the participation of women remains abysmally low (Geetha 2005).

In Malaysia, the formulation of the National Policy on Women in 1989 marked a turning point, enunciating for the first time clear guidelines for the effective participation of women in the country’s development (ADB 1998). Despite the progress that has been made in education and employment, concerns regarding the status and position of women prevail (Ahmad 1998). Malaysian women aver that the challenges, constraints and opportunities to their political participation emanate from “a complex tapestry” of factors situated in a multi-ethnic society that has a “heterogeneity of religious orthodoxies, traditional values, political ideals, economic strengths, ethnic loyalties and demands of modern day living” (Hassan 2005, 94). Despite this, the common thread that women have a limited role in politics, remains across the social fabric.

In Iran, the few women who get elected to parliament are severely constrained by normative views that they are inferior, and by society’s demands on them to be modest, silent and invisible. Azam Taleqani, who gained a seat in the first post-revolutionary Majlis, explained that women were expected to be ‘naturally modest’ and this prevented them from “saying too much in the Majlis” (Afshar 1996, 133). In 2008, the percentage of women in the Islam Consultative Assembly was only 2.8 percent (see Table 6), one of the lowest rates in the region.

In the Pacific Island states, women are often denied their rights to decision-making. Thus, they are among the least politically represented in the world, second only to Islamic-Arab women (Gregory 2006; Huffer 2006). Ms. Fiamē Naomi Mataafa, Samoan Minister of Parliament, observed that most Samoan women did not see themselves in a political role, especially because it was also necessary under electoral law to have a *chiefly matai* title to stand for Parliament, a position traditionally occupied by men. Ms. Ekari Malani, a member of the Fijian Senate, said that time and the expenses needed to run campaigns were barriers to women’s involvement in politics. Women candidates were particularly disadvantaged in

conservative rural areas where it was expected that their place was in the home (Gregory 2009). Moreover, violence against women remains a critical problem. In the island nation of Tuvalu, the status of women is determined by their roles as wives and mothers, and on how they obey and respect the norms of Tuvalu society (Kofe 2006). In 2008, there was no woman sitting in parliament (Table 6). Only one woman, Naama Maheu Latasi, has held the position of a Cabinet Minister (1989 to 1993) and was a backbencher from 1993 to 1997.

In China, although gender equality has been a policy since 1949, female activists are expressly concerned that the progress attained by women over the past 50 years is being rapidly eroded. Social and familial pressure for Chinese women to resume their traditional roles as wives and mothers has increased, and violence against women is a problem reported across all socio-economic levels (OneWomen 2001). Women's disempowerment extends to government and politics. Only 21.3 percent of the members of the National Congress are women, and they occupy only a few positions of significant influence at the highest rungs of the party or government structure (see Table 6).

Mongolia's so-called 'Secret History' contains many direct and indirect examples of the Mongol's traditional high regard for women. Mongol women were routinely given extensive military training, and the strongest and most skilled of these fought in wars together with the men (Women in World History 1996; Oestmoen 2009). New economic relations and the destruction of traditional communities however, have altered relations between the sexes and adversely affected women (Worden and Savada 1989). Politically, only three of 75 seats in the State of Great Hural are held by women (see Table 6). As of 2001, there were no female ministers, but one female vice-minister. However, women and women's organisations are vocal in local and national politics and actively seek greater representation by women in government policymaking (US Dept. of State 2002).

The UN considers the Republic of Korea a model country in women's development (OneWomen 2001). Due largely to the collective efforts of the women's organisations, a gender quota of 50 percent in the proportional representation system was instituted in 2004 for both national and metropolitan elections (Hong Chun Hee 2005). Despite this, women have made up only a small percentage of those voted into

parliament across several elections (Table 6). The traditional nature of Korean society accounts for the low level of women's political participation. Legislation to help increase and facilitate women's political participation has been insufficient in addressing women's needs. Many women have also remained indifferent to politics and are naive in their political consciousness (OneWomen 2001).

These short narratives on women's situation across Asia and the Pacific illustrate continuing social expectations across the region that women should place primary importance on their domestic roles. This serves as a deterrent against their involvement in public life. Many capable women shun participation in governance activities because they are straddled by 'husband, hearth, and home'. Scores of women as well as men continue to think in this way: that marriage and motherhood make up a woman's existence, so that politics is man's business. A woman politician from Central Europe competently expresses this opinion:

In spite of a long tradition of active participation in the work force by a vast majority of women, both women and men see motherhood and marriage as the most important goals in a woman's life. A common standpoint is that "politics is a man's business," and that women are too emotional to deal with affairs of the State. The reasons for this are not to be found in education, with women in [my country] being as educated as their male counterparts. It is simply because of the stereotyped and traditional structure of society – northern [part of the country] having a typically Central European and the southern part a typically Mediterranean tradition, both quite patriarchal (Waring, Greenwood & Pintat, 2000, 20).

Women who realise the importance of their public life in the face of these circumstances may struggle with these gender stereotypes and negotiate with their families in terms of sharing household chores and other demands of domestic life. Women politicians with spouses and children who support and share their political commitments are the ones best able to carry on their work in public office. Yet, when all else fails, some women may opt to leave their husbands in order to continue with their political commitments.

Pintat (2001) notes, however, that despite the persistence of traditional roles, women of Asia, unlike their sisters in Europe or the Americas, may have greater freedom to enter public life. This is because 'other women' in developing nations are

often available to take on the domestic roles left behind by the woman politician – through the extended family system or by hiring domestic workers. Such a situation, while convenient, may hinder processes towards gender transformation and equality.

The Social Exclusion of Gender Minorities

If women face tremendous difficulties in seeking political representation because of gender constructions, so do other minority gender sectors. Radhika Coomaraswamy, former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, commented that the cost of transgressing rigid gender roles can be severe (2003). She noted:

Gender-based violence is rooted in the social construct of what it means to be either male or female. When a person deviates from what is considered “normal” behavior they are targeted for violence (IGLHRC 2003).

Discrimination against individuals belonging to gender minorities can take many forms, including the following (Samelius and Wagberg 2005, 21):

- Criminalisation of homosexuality,
- Institutionalised homophobia,
- Abuse in state institutions,
- Pathologising, forced medication and cruel treatments,
- Neglect of the existence and needs of LGBT people with disabilities, young LGBT persons and elderly LGBT persons,
- Diminished access to healthcare,
- Work place discrimination,
- Violence and harassment from official state representatives, including execution.

In addition, LGBTs are subjected to violence and social repression in the form of verbal abuse, silence, ridicule, hate crimes, corrective rape of lesbians, honour related violence and forced marriage. Overt homophobia in political discourse is not uncommon in some countries. Homosexual, bisexual and transsexual persons who traverse the public domain of politics are probably more vulnerable to gender-based violence than other persons from gender minorities (see Box 14).

Box 14. Violence against Homosexuals and Lesbians in Public Life

Manavendra Gohil is the Prince of the Indian state of Rajpipla. He was disinherited after coming out as gay, but was later welcomed back into the family, and had his titles restored. As of 2008, he is the only known person of royal lineage to have publicly come out as gay. Effigies of the Prince were burnt in the state of Rajpipla, and demands were made to strip him of his title (Knowles 2006).

John Maurice Scott was the Director General of the Fiji Red Cross and received a Red Cross award for his role in the hostage crisis during the 2000 Fijian coup d'état. Scott was among the members of the gay community that lobbied to keep the constitution because it protected their civil rights as homosexuals. He was murdered on 1 July, 2001 in Suva along with his partner, Gregory Scrivener, in an apparent homophobic attack with a possible political motive (IFRC 2001)

Pegah Emambakhsh is a 40-year-old Iranian lesbian. She became a refugee in the United Kingdom in 2005 to escape Iranian prosecution against homosexuality, after her partner was arrested, tortured, and sentenced to death by stoning. At first, her demand for asylum was refused by the UK government, and she was arrested by the authorities. After a global campaign and a protest involving several homosexual and human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Emambakhsh was freed and has recently been granted asylum in the United Kingdom (Gammell 2009).

Jorge Armenta Penuelas was president of the Lesbian and Gay Collective in Sonora, Mexico and a candidate for a local legislative seat. He was found murdered together with his partner Ramon Armando Gutierrez Enriquez in their apartment. Although the bodies showed signs of torture, a local prosecutor called the murders "crimes of passion" (IGLHRC 2005).

Many cases from Asia and the Pacific vividly portray how culture muzzles the voices and marginalises the interests of women and gender minorities. If women are to overcome the constraints to political participation brought about by their domestic roles, then gender stereotypes have to be transformed. Women's agency and capabilities need to be developed outside of the confines of domesticity, given value and allowed to flourish. If the political rights of sexual and gender minorities are to be promoted, then the cultural and social biases against their gender identities will have to be transformed. Underlying these changes should be a deep respect for individual rights and a robust commitment to gender equality in all areas of society.

Politics: 'A Man's World'

The dominance of masculine values in politics is another gendered experience that affects the nature of women's participation in governance. The world of politics has been shaped by masculine norms, values and lifestyles (Shvedova 2005). It is characterised by competition for dominance rather than cooperation, de-personalisation of critical issues rather than empathy, and in extreme cases, violence

and confrontation rather than negotiation and compromise. Major decisions may be done through fraternization in 'backroom' meetings in hotels and restaurants, at all hours of day or night. Women's contributions to advancing the party's platform are trivialised. Even when there are women's wings in political parties, its members are usually confined to the lower echelons of power, whose activities are limited to increasing the number of votes during elections, or to social work efforts that promote the party's image(Tambiah 2003).

Women who enter politics may feel alienated from such a masculine culture. The long hours and pace of meetings of the legislature take no consideration of women's multiple roles and often conflict with family responsibilities. Cultural norms restrict the travel and movements of women, preventing them from meeting their constituencies and learning more about issues that need solutions. As a result of gender ideology, women fail to be as vocal and expressive as men whilst in chambers, and are unfairly rated as 'weak' and ineffectual leaders. Women with little or no education who are elected to positions may be unable to fully grasp issues unfamiliar to them. In consequence, they are silenced, mocked, marginalised, or even subjected to harassment and violence (Basu 2003; Tambiah 2003). Day Day Paw, the first and only female Central Executive Committee member of the Karenni National Progressive Party in Myanmar experienced such discrimination. She said, "I regret that I didn't get a higher education. Even though I am now a leader in the main Karenni political organization, it can be difficult for me to have my voice heard" (Cho and Lae 2008, 2).

Women's tighter financial circumstances and lower educational attainments relative to men also figure in the political world. Political parties may be unwilling to share their funds with neophyte women candidates, who run the risk of not being elected. For these reasons, women who have successfully entered politics are often members of the elite, associated with politically influential families, wealthy on their own account, highly educated and with vast social networks they can count on during their candidacies and terms as politicians. The profiles of women heads of state that we compiled illustrate these observations (see Boxes 3 to 6).

Sharma notes that even the quota system for representation can work against women's interests due to women's subordination (Sharma 2000). She observes:

Most of them become mere puppets in the hands of their male relatives [who] act on their behalf and they have no say in the process of decision making. They remain totally ignorant about the facts. It is generally observed that their husbands work on their behalf ... thus making a mockery of the entire process of empowerment (Sharma 2000, 5).

Nevertheless, the experience of taking part in discussions regarding their villages and regions, and making decisions for persons other than those in their immediate families, may serve to eventually transform women politicians' beliefs, priorities, and inner-selves towards espousing rights and equality.

Due to such discrimination, some women who have attained prominence in politics have donned the 'robes' and mimicked the actuation of men in their bid to be heard and respected in legislative bodies. As one woman politician put it: "If you don't have the muscles you cannot get in or stay in" (Daisy Fuentes in WEDO 2001). She traces the obstacles to women's political participation to gender roles and stereotypes, male domination of political parties, and the rigid electoral system.

At the time of this writing, 50/50 in political representation remains an elusive goal, especially in Asia and the Pacific. While there has been progress in many nations, the obstacles to gender parity identified by Ms. Fuentes continue to beset women candidates and gender equality advocates. These are the circumstances which make it important to institute both governmental and voluntary measures to empower women in the political sphere of human development.

A Failure of Development

In the nations of Asia and the Pacific, a direct link between measures of human development and political representation in formal politics is difficult to establish. The 'poor fit' between the Human Development Index (HDI) as a measure of national achievement in human development and a measure of women's representation in parliament (from their share of seats in parliament) is particularly insightful (Table 13).

Table 13. Rankings of 26 Asia-Pacific Nations on HDI (HDR 2007/2008) and IPU's Measure of Women's Political Representation (Women Worldwide)⁷

Countries in Asia-Pacific	RANKINGS	
	HDI	IPU
Australia	3	32
Japan	8	106
New Zealand	19	14
Singapore	25	38
Rep. of Korea	26	86
Malaysia	63	101
Samoa	77	113
Thailand	78	96
China	81	52
Philippines	90	55
Iran [Islamic Republic of]	94	131
Sri Lanka	99	122
Maldives	100	94
Viet Nam	105	33
Indonesia	107	97
Mongolia	114	126
Vanuatu	120	128
India	128	107
Solomon Islands	129	136
Lao PDR	130	36
Cambodia	131	73
Bhutan	133	111
Pakistan	136	45
Nepal	142	16
Papua-New Guinea	145	134
Timor-Leste	150	25

Extracted from UNDP. (2007/2008). *Human Development Report*. NY: UNDP, 229-232;

IPU [Interparliamentary Union]. (2008). *Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 30 November 2008*. [<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.] Last accessed February 2009.

⁷ Ranked in terms of women's percentage share of seats in parliament.

The HDI rankings of 26 nations belonging to the Asia and Pacific region were matched with their rankings on IPU's world classification of Women in National Parliaments (constructed from UNDP HDR 2007 and IPU 2008; see also Table 5). Australia and Japan attained the highest HDI ranks in the region, and were among the top ten on human development worldwide. Regardless of this, the percentage of women in Australia's upper house has exceeded the critical threshold, whilst the obtained result in Japan is only 18 percent, giving it a rank of only 106 in IPU's table (see Table 5). On the other hand, New Zealand, which has exceeded the critical level and has the highest rank in terms of women in parliament, has an HDI rank of only 19. It is outranked on the HDI by the United States (HDI Rank of 12), but the latter ranks only 69 on the IPU classification (UNDP 2007; Table 13).

Both Singapore and the Republic of Korea (ROK) have good HDI ranks but while Singapore belongs to the firstquartile in terms of women in parliament, ROK belongs to the secondquartile (Table 5). More striking is the fact that Nepal, with 33 percent women in its Constituent Assembly and Timor-Leste, with 29 percent women in parliament, are among the countries classified as enjoying only 'medium human development'. In addition, Rwanda, ranked first on gender parity, is classified among those countries with 'low human development' (UNDP 2007).

Hence, there is no clear association that emerges between the level of development and quality of gender equity in Asia-Pacific nations. Factors imbricated with gender biases and stereotypes intervene to diminish the gains of other indices of human development (Norris and Inglehart 2000).

Similar Development, Disparate Political Participation

Australia and Japan have enjoyed economic progress for a long time, and both have consistently had high HDI ratings in the past decade, belonging to nations that enjoy 'high human development' (Table 14). Nevertheless, Australian women have enjoyed greater equality when compared to Japanese women (from the Human Development Reports, 1997, 2001, 2007/2008). Moreover, throughout the years, the percentage representation of Australian women in parliament has consistently been higher than in Japan (Table 6; IDEA 2008).

Table 14. Comparison of Australia and Japan: HDI & GEM
(1997, 2001, 2007/2008)

Country	1997		2001		2007/2008	
	HDI	GEM	HDI	GEM	HDI	GEM
Australia	0.93	0.66	0.94	0.74	0.96	0.85
HDI/ GEM Rank	17	11	2	9	3	9
Japan	0.94	0.46	0.93	0.52	0.95	0.56
HDI/ GEM Rank	7	34	9	31	8	54

Summarized from the *Human Development Reports*. 1997; 2001; 2007/2008 . NY: UNDP.

Within the rubric of gender and culture, differences in the political empowerment of Australian and Japanese women can be traced to the following factors:

- *Organization of women around issues of political participation.* Australian women have a long history of advocating for their political rights, and most of its women won the right to vote, or to be voted as candidates, in 1902. Early suffragists framed their call for equality in citizen's rights within the social norm of women's roles and spoke of "housekeeping the state" (OneWomen 2004). This portrayal of women in the private-public realms remained till contemporary times, with 'Steel Sheilas' being depicted alongside 'Superstar Housewives' in the media. While this image may have pigeonholed women into ministerial positions deemed 'feminine', it contributed to the understanding of women's potential contribution to politics (Savage 2009).

By contrast, Japanese women emerged from the shadows of a highly patriarchal society only after the Second World War. They won the right to vote in 1946, as part of the provisions of a revised constitution. Voting for the first time, 38 women were elected into the House of Representatives, occupying 8.4 percent of the total seats. Until that time, Japan was still largely a rural economy. Being a 'housewife' emerged only in the 1970s, with the rapid industrialisation of Japan (Iwamoto 2001). Improved economic standards, coupled with technological advancements and small family sizes, freed the Japanese women from household drudgery in the seventies. It enabled them to traverse public spaces more often.

Japanese women first acted together on issues that affected their practical gender interests: improving education and school lunches for their children; insuring that the milk, vegetables, and other foodstuffs consumed by their children were safe; volunteering in facilities for the care of the elderly; or advocating for laws that ensured a cleaner environment. Eventually, they realised that entry into politics would enable them to get better and more sustainable results. After completing their daily chores, they went out into the streets and started mobilising to get representatives of their organisations voted into local assemblies and into the Diet (Ogai 2003).

○ *Traditional norms in the face of new realities.* In both countries, the gender ideology on the domestication of women is part of culture and tradition. Australian women have however, been able to struggle against these restrictions more actively than Japanese women. A vibrant women's movement continues to demand equal rights for women, as well as for other minority groups (OnlineWomen 2004). The Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) is a feminist political organisation founded in 1972 as a non-sectarian and non-party-political women's political lobby that surveyed all candidates for the 1972 federal election on their attitudes to feminist issues. It evolved into a lobby organisation for all Australian women with the stated aim of achieving social, economic, educational, political, and sexual equality for women. WEL lobbies politicians, unions, employers, educationalists, and others on behalf of women, and seeks to change social attitudes, and practices, which discriminate against them (Preddey 2008).

In Japan, deeply-entrenched values concerning the family, with strict definitions of women's reproductive roles and responsibilities, defines the lives of many Japanese women (Iwao1998). Women are still expected to stay at home, look after the house and children, and be modest and passive. While more women now take part in political movements, they tend to organise around such issues as care facilities for the elderly and waste management. Some women say they are tired of the intense focus on economic issues and want to give attention to other domestic concerns (PBS 2009). A stereotypical view that women are not interested in politics is still shared by the general public (Takao 2006).

○ *Quotas for Women.* Members of the House of Representatives in Japan are elected through a mixed system. In 2000, the Diet presented a bill to reduce

proportional representation (PR) in the House of Representatives by 20 seats. The cut in PR seats will lead to fewer women being represented in politics.⁴⁹ women's organisations expressed their opposition to this reduction in proportional representation (US Dept. of State 2001).

In Australia, Federal and State election for lower house seats is generally done through a plurality/majority system and upper house seats by proportional representation. As a result, there are higher numbers of women sitting in the Senate (See Table 6). In addition, the Australian Labour Party introduced a voluntary party quota of 40 percent for women candidates in 200. Since then, the number of its women candidates has more than doubled (see Box 12).

Active advocacy for political rights, organised action of women, and a gender-friendly electoral system have made the difference.

Human (Woman's) Poverty

Cagatay uses the term 'human poverty' to describe the relationship between gender, inequality and poverty (Cagatay 2001). Gender inequalities make women and gender minorities more vulnerable to poverty: that is, the deprivation of individual rights that enable a person to enjoy even just a basic or tolerable human life (UNDP 1997). She notes that women are more vulnerable to chronic poverty because of gender inequalities with respect to income distribution, access to credit, control of property and income from work, as well as gender bias in the labour market. As a result, women tend to work more hours than men, have lower education, lower incomes, less capital and less access to credit, information and knowledge (Cagatay 2001, 14).

The unequal participation of women and men in political institutions is also seen as a symptom of poverty. It is linked to discrimination in accessing other individual rights, such as being fully educated and mobile, two factors important for participation in governance (Tambiah 2005). These attributes also influence their ability to obtain employment outside the household, to seek proper healthcare, to access public services and to interact with other women on issues of common concern.

Women's education is essential to their ability to partake of decision-making processes in governance. Unfortunately, 83 percent of the world's men, but only 69 percent of its women, are literate (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2005). This gap in education deprives many women of the opportunity to assume a political role, since the cultural and social capitals that come with education are unavailable to them. It also results in a lack of access to a favourable economic position in the world of work. Khaing Mar Kyaw Zaw, member of the Central Executive Committee of the Karen National Union (KNU), and a leading figure in the Karen Women's Organization of Myanmar, believes that the most important factor limiting women is their lack of education. She says, "women don't participate in the economic, social and political arena because they haven't had a chance to study. When they are growing up, many girls have to stay home to help take care of their families, so they don't go to school. This means that women have limited knowledge compared to men" (Cho and Lae 2008, 1). Education may also continue to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes (Nilan 2008). In Indonesia, women marry later than they used to and are now much better educated. Nevertheless, the discourse of *kodrat wanita* – the traditional subordinate role of women, still dominates media representations of women and political rhetoric.

Knowledge needed for political participation is not confined to having access to formal education. Women's participation in public life and decision-making depends on several knowledge factors, including awareness of their rights and how to claim them, and access to information about laws, policies and the institutions and structures which govern their lives (WOMANKIND 2008).

Mobility and Women's Organising

Social and cultural norms that stress women's domesticity tend to limit their mobility outside of the spaces usually defined as 'women's place'. Both CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action articulate the importance of providing spaces for women to participate in non-governmental organisations and associations concerned with public and political life.

Local associations tackling issues related to daily life may resonate better with women desirous of improving their living conditions and those of their families (UNDAW 1997). Involvement in a women's organisation provides the opportunity for a

potential woman politician to interact with others outside of her home and to recognise the common problems of women and their families. Participation in non-governmental associations (NGOs) affords the experience, skills and perspectives that women may need to take their citizenship a step further from their doorstep. Working in a group also removes a woman's isolation from her community.

Working within an organisation becomes a training ground for women desirous of pursuing a political role. Civil society provides the opportunities to hone the requisites for effective political participation: the development of confidence, self-esteem and the skills to challenge and confront existing power structures; and the development of support networks and positive role models (WOMANKIND 2008). Working collectively through an organisation dispels the notion that women are powerless and incapable of attending to anything but domestic concerns. At the same time, organised action from women provide the avenue for men to 'sit-up and take notice', to recognise the special concerns of women as they fulfill their multiple roles, and to admit that women, too, can effectively assume power and authority.

Entering the public domain through a local organisation inevitably brings many women face-to-face with men in positions of power. Organised action for citizen rights becomes an exercise in what it is like to tread into the masculine realm of politics, a sphere where men may choose to ignore or brutalise women. NGOs provide the organisational framework, build the capabilities and develop the resources for women to succeed in local or national elections. NGOs have also been a catalyst for organising women into constituency groups that lobby for women's issues in government or act as pressure groups vis-à-vis other sectors (CAPWIP 1999). Most importantly, a credible and well-organised NGO, trade union, or women's party serves as the 'mass base' for its selected women candidates.

Religion as Politics

A study of women's political participation would not be complete without a section on religion. Religion has often been an ally of power, and local religious themes and symbols have been used to imbue legitimacy to the authority of political leaders (Demerath and Straight 1997). Yet power in many nation-states has been in the hands of males, as is power in religious groups. Religion therefore, has brought legitimacy to patriarchy. In many instances, religious teachings have been

embellished with local cultural norms, so that an ‘indigenised religion’ may have modified, emphasised or even reversed the essential meanings underlying original religious teachings to make them compatible with culture and tradition (Bhargava 2007). Since priests, rabbis, imams and other religious leaders are generally men, the ‘sacred interpretations’ of religious precepts are often influenced by their patriarchal perspectives, so that patriarchy is mistaken for infallibility. In this way, the patriarchal features of religious ideologies have been used to provide legitimacy to oppressive and discriminatory practices in gender relationships within the family and community. It has served as a deterrent to the participation of women in governance.

Women’s Political Participation across Religions

The major religions in the world are said to have traditionally opposed the presence of women in the public sphere (Bhargava 2007; Afkhami 1995; Norris and Inglehart 2000). A worldwide comparison of women’s participation in governance in relation to dominant religious streams provides some insights (Reynolds 1999; Table 15).

Table 15. The Religious Context Underlying the Number of Women in Politics

			LEGISLATURE		CABINET			
Religion		(No. of Cases)	Percent	All	Mean # of ♀	Percent	All	No. of states
Christianity	Catholic	dominant (40)	15.8		2.4	16.5		
		majority (12)	10.4	13.9	1.5	7.6	13.0	64
		minority (12)	10.8		1.6	6.8		
	Protestant	dominant (27)	15.5		2.5	14.0		
		majority (14)	10.2	13.5	1.3	6.3	10.6	53
		minority (12)	13.0		1.4	7.5		
	Orthodox	dominant (12)	6.7		1.0	4.6		

		majority (2)	7.4	6.6	1.5	7.7	5.1	15
		minority (1)	3.3		1.0	5.3		
	Overall			12.8			11.1	132
Islam		dominant (34)	6.0		1.2	5.3		
		majority (5)	6.4	6.4	1.8	7.8	6.4	46
		minority (7)	8.6		2.0	10.5		
Traditional		dominant (3)	7.0		1.3	6.3		
		majority (7)	9.2	7.0	2.3	10.1	6.9	22
		minority (12)	5.8		1.2	5.2		
Buddhism		dominant (6)	5.4		0.8	4.8		
		majority (4)	13.1	9.1	1.0	2.9	4.1	12
		minority (2)	12.5		1.0	4.4		
Hinduism		dominant (2)	5.5		0.5	2.4		
		majority (2)	11.6	9.7	1.0	5.3	6.0	6
		minority (2)	12.1		2.0	10.3		
Taoism		dominant (0)	0		0	0		
		majority (1)	21.8	21.8	1.0	4.0	4.0	1
		minority (0)	0		0	0		

Shintoism		dominant (0)	0		0	0		
		majority (0)	0	4.6	0	0	0	1
		minority (1)	4.6		0	0		
Confucianism		dominant (0)	0		0	0		
		majority (0)	0	20.1	0	0	5.5	1
		minority (1)	20.1		2	5.5		
Judaism		dominant (1)	7.5		0	0		
		majority (0)	0	7.5	0	0	0	1
		minority (0)	0		0	0		
^a Dominant = over 70 percent; majority = the largest numerical group; minority = a minority but over 30 percent.								

Source: Reynolds, Arnold. 1999. *Women in the Legislatures and Executives of the World: Knocking at the Highest Glass Ceiling*.
[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/world_politics/v051/51.4reynolds_tab01.html]. Last accessed December 2008.

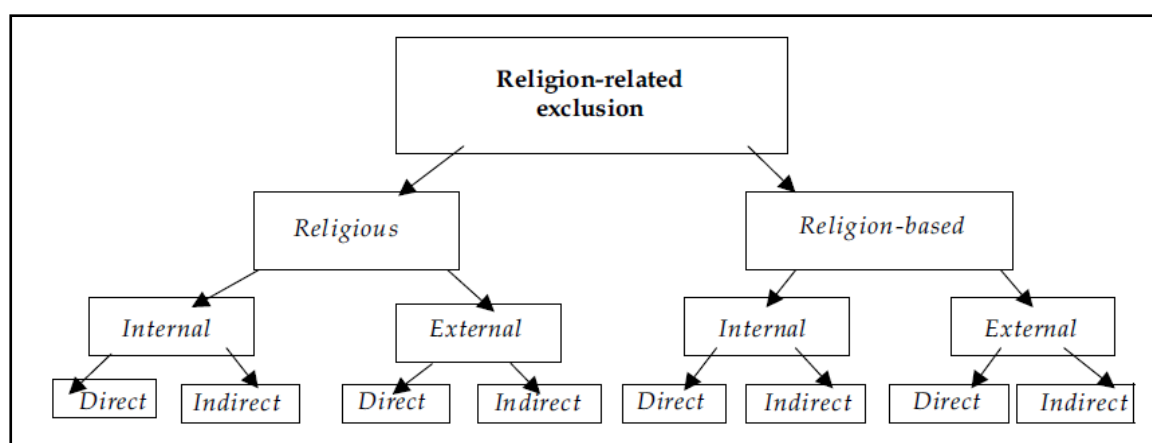
Among 180 nation states, the highest percentages of women in legislative positions were in a country where the majority adheres to Taoism (21.8 percent). The second highest representation of women in the legislature is in a country where Confucianism is a minority religion (20.1 percent; see Table 20; Reynolds 1999; Norris and Inglehart 2000). Christian nations, on the average, have close to 13 percent of women in legislative seats and 11 percent in cabinet posts. Moreover, although the differences in women's representation between Catholics and Protestants are low, women in Catholic countries enjoy a slight advantage in terms of being voted into the legislature or being appointed to cabinet positions (13.5 percent and 13.9 percent, respectively), contradicting the stereotypical view on Catholicism as disfavouring women's visibility in public life. Lowest percentages were obtained from a country

that believes in Shintoism (4.5 percent), 46 Islamic countries (6.4 percent) and 15 nations with Orthodox Christian beliefs (6.6 percent).

Since religion is so closely associated with other aspects of culture and tradition, it is difficult to determine to what extent the first factor is responsible for these findings. Using Bhargava's thesis, women may be excluded from political participation internally by religion, as when they are not allowed to partake of certain religious practices on account of gender (Figure 5; from Bhargava 2007). Islam for example, does not permit women to offer prayers in mosques. There are no known women archbishops, imams or pujaris. In Hinduism, there are restrictions on their participation in religious rituals at the time of menstruation. Entry to temples is similarly restricted during this period (Bhargava 2007, 71).

Women may also endure external forms of exclusion, discrimination which is not directly sanctioned by religion, but which would not occur if the religiously-sanctioned exclusion did not exist in the first place. Roman Catholicism for instance, teaches that marriage is ordained by God and cannot be dissolved by men (the state). For this reason, many women are forced to endure violent marriages rather than seek legal recourse, and allow the continuing denial of their individual rights. By the same token, religious precepts have been cited to dissuade women from entering public life, when in fact, these are merely religion-related cultural norms.

Figure 5. Domain of Religion-Related Exclusions



Source: Bhargava, Rajeev. (2007). Inclusion and Exclusion in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh: The Role of Religion. *Indian Journal of Human Development* 1 (1).

Despite this, religion is not always a negative force in the lives of women and men. Liberation theology has led to the politicisation of priests, nuns, and lay

advocates who refer to its teachings to find common cause with oppressed peasants, workers, women and other minorities, and to work for their freedom and equality. Buddhism in Cambodia has been reinvented and used as a form of cultural capital for the re-creation of community and politics, after the violence of the Khmer Rouge era. In Malaysia and Indonesia, religion has also been instrumental in voicing discontent as well as shared ideals, in the context of claims for *Reformasi*. Concepts such as ‘democracy’, ‘human rights’ or ‘civil society’, are being co-opted by Malaysian and Indonesian Islamists and reinterpreted within Islam (Van Wassenhove 2003).

Women who have embraced Islamic fundamentalism in West Asia argue that Islam has always recognised women’s specific needs. They claim that 14 centuries ago, Islam recognised women's legal and economic independence as separate from that of their fathers, or of husbands and sons (Afshar 1994, 123):

Islamic marriage was conceived as a matter of contract between consenting partners (Koran 4:4, 4:24), and one that stipulated a specific price (*mahre*) payable to the bride before the consummation of marriage. Women must be maintained in the style to which they have been accustomed (2:238, 4:34) and paid for suckling their babes (2:223).

Thus, if fundamentalism is about returning to the golden age of Islam, Muslim women contend that they have plenty of reasons for optimism and much room to maneuver. Moreover, some Muslim fundamentalist women dismiss Western feminism as one of the main instruments of colonialism, and despise the kinds of freedoms that are offered to women in the Western patriarchal setting (Afshar 1994). Such a view is contrary to those of other political scientists who reason that Islamic fundamentalism prevents women from enjoying their civil and political rights (Molyneux and Rasavi 2006; ICWIP 2005; Sharma 2003).

Egalitarian Values and Women’s Political Participation

Another aspect of culture and society is political ideology. The links between democracy, good governance and political participation have been articulated time and again. In the IPU Survey of women parliamentarians, a majority of the women in its sample represented ideologies to the ‘left’ or ‘center’ of the political spectrum (33 percent and 31 percent, respectively). 16.6 percent located themselves on the ‘right’,

while 4.3 percent identified themselves as 'centre right' or 'centre left' (Waring, Greenwood and Pintat 2000). Consistent with their liberal values, these women value equal partnership between men and women as the basis of political freedom. Other studies confirm a correspondence between democratic beliefs and positive values for women's political participation. For instance, left-leaning politicians and governments with more liberal ideologies are often the ones who work for the passage of laws that promote women's rights and gender equality (UNDP 2000).

Women's Participation in Movements for Democracy

In many nations of South Asia, the women's movement arose from the anti-colonial movement. Unfortunately, even if women played important roles during the struggle for democracy, their participation in public life remained minimal after liberation (Ghimere 2006). Several electoral reforms in different countries, led by women's groups, have paid attention to increasing women's participation in local governance. As a result, South Asian women have increasingly been able to take part in local governance (Hamadeh-Banerjee 2000; Tambiah 2003; Basu 2005).

In India for example, the increased political representation of women emerged as the single most significant demand of the women's movement in the last several decades (see section on Legislated Quotas in Sub-National Elections; Basu 2003). Participation in local governance provided lower class women the opportunity to conquer their own inhibitions, gain self-confidence, overcome prejudices regarding women's capacity to lead, and to take their rightful share of responsibilities on public issues (Pintat 2001).

The recent outstanding results of the Nepalese elections in 2008, where women occupied 33.2 percent of the seats in the Constituent Assembly, is a feat that can also be attributed to the efforts of the women's groups (see section on Women's Representation in Houses of Parliament). Nepali Congress leader Uma Adhikari said, "we will bring hundreds of thousands of women to the streets if parties fail to ensure 33 percent seats for women in the CA" (ZeeNews 2007). That did not have to happen however, since a third of the 200 women deputies who now sit in the Constituent Assembly are Maoists (The Advocacy Project 2008).

Similarly, in other nations where civil society organisations have become increasingly drawn into issues of self-governance, women leaders have become the logical choices of their associations to represent women's interests in local councils or local governments (Ramli 2005). Through this avenue, homemakers, small-scale producers, village teachers or volunteer workers for livelihood, health and nutrition programs have been elected to local legislative bodies.

In the Republic of Korea, the women's movement was the key player for dramatically increasing the number of woman legislators in the National Assembly and in establishing a formal political institution, the Ministry of Gender Equality (Eun-Sil Oh 2008). In the Philippines, a national confederation of women's groups transformed itself into a women's party and ran as a party list group (Gabriela Women's Party 2007; see Box 13). In Iran, the Islamic Republic's Women's Organisation, a non-governmental activist group, succeeded in having some of its members elected to the Majilis or to the Assembly of Experts, which is responsible for nominating the national leader (Afshar 1996).

In Vietnam, the Women's Union (WU) is a mass organization of Vietnamese women. The Women's Union in the local levels actively nominates women for election to Party Committees, the National Assembly, and People's Councils at all levels. It has successfully worked for laws, policies and programs related to poverty reduction, education, and reproductive health care. It has played a significant role in advocating for votes for women nominees among its constituencies. WU also collaborates with NGOs to organise training courses on skills needed by women's nominees to win in the People's Committee elections (Vuong Thi Hanh and Doan Thuy Dung 2006).

Eventually, organised women see the need to broaden the base of their mobilisation and raise their voices in legislative bodies, as has happened in Japan. The political group, *Seikatsusha Nettowaaku* (Consumers' Network) originated from the Seikatsu Club Cooperative (see section on Similar Development, Disparate Political Participation). Participation in the Seikatsu Club's activities and community-based volunteer work raised the political consciousness of the housewives. As women began winning elections to public office, they became more actively engaged in both private and public matters, and redirected their concerns from simple issues of family and

community life to women's issues. By April 2003, *Seikatsusha Nettowaaku* had produced 144 female local assembly members (Ogai 2004).

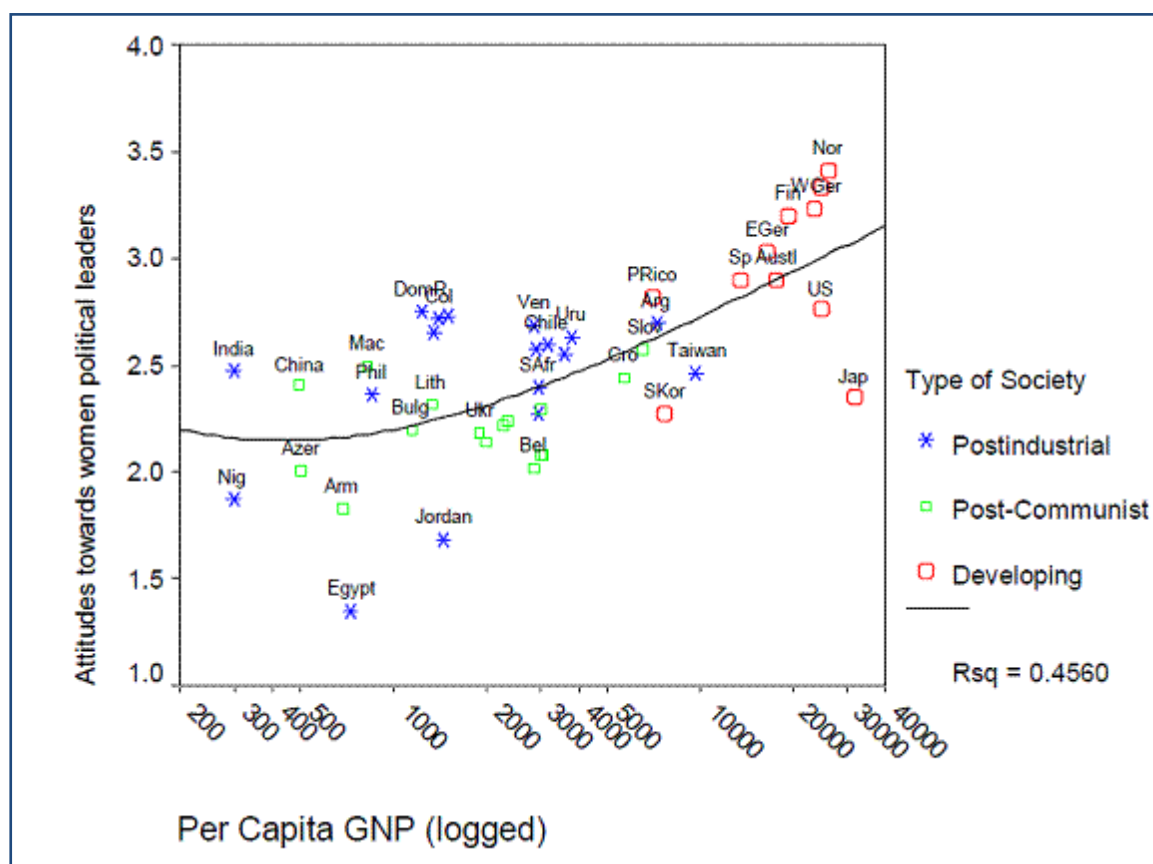
Economic Development and Attitudes on Women's Political Participation

Norris and Inglehart (2000) selected data from the World Values Surveys, taken in 55 societies from 1995 to 1999, to study attitudes towards the political participation of women. They examined the relationships between level of socio-economic development, attitudes towards women's political leadership, and the proportion of women elected to parliaments. One of their findings is that there is a "striking relationship between levels of socioeconomic development and support for egalitarian or traditional gender roles in politics" such that more developed states also express more positive values for women's political leadership" (Norris and Inglehart 2000, 6-7).

In the World Values Surveys, the Scandinavian countries (highest in HDI) are located at the forefront on both indicators in the top right-hand corner of the regression line (see Figure 6). At the bottom corner are Jordan, Egypt, Pakistan and many of the Central Asian post-Communist states (Georgia, Belarus and the Ukraine). Australia, Spain and the United States are above the regression line, and display more egalitarian attitudes than are reflected in the proportion of women elected to their parliaments. Japan, Taiwan, Province of China and the Republic of Korea cluster together below the regression line, showing lower support for women in politics than would be predicted by their level of socioeconomic development alone. Many Latin American countries with moderate levels of development are clustered together in the middle of the graph, along with South Africa and the Philippines. Post-Communist societies like Armenia and Belarus are clustered together displaying more traditional attitudes towards male leadership (Norris and Inglehart 2000, 6-7).

While the relationship between economic development and positive attitudes towards women's political participation is evident, differences across the countries indicate that there are other variables that influence positive views for women to become represented in national legislative bodies. We have identified these gendered factors in earlier sections. They include structural features of electoral systems, legal provisions and procedures for elections, and the patriarchal nature of social relationships and institutions.

Figure 6. Attitudes towards Women Political Leaders, World Values Survey, Mid-1990s



Source: Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart. 2000. *Cultural Barriers to Women's Leadership: A Worldwide Comparison*.
[\[http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/beijing12/ipsa2000culture.pdf\]](http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/beijing12/ipsa2000culture.pdf).

V. CROSSING THE BAR: WOMEN IN POLITICS

Breaking the Chains of Domesticity

It is difficult to generalise the characteristics of the small percentages of women in elected positions, considering the diversity of cultures, political mechanisms and democratic processes within which they function. However, a bird's-eye view of women in parliament is provided by a global survey undertaken by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In 1999, it collected individual testimonies from women of all cultures and different political backgrounds regarding their experiences in politics, in a survey of *Women's Political Experience and their Contribution to the Democratic Process* (Waring 2000). The discussion in this section is largely derived from this study.

A total of 187 women from 65 countries replied to the 1999 IPU questionnaire survey (Waring, Greenwood and Pintat 2000). Women parliamentarians from eight nations of the Asia-Pacific region were included in the study, coming from Australia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, and Vanuatu. Almost half of all the surveyed women politicians were only serving their first terms in 1999, and a little over a fourth were in their second terms of office. Only three women had served for either five or six terms, and only one was in her seventh term of office. The ages of the women politicians ranged from 31 to 70 years (Waring, Greenwood and Pintat 2000, 7-8).

60 percent of the respondents were married, similar proportions were either single or divorced, and a smaller proportion had been widowed. Those assigning themselves to the 'other' category may have been engaged, separated or in a *de facto* relationship. Some of these 'other' categories may also have described lesbian relationships, but the study fails to surface this information. Close to three-fourths of the parliamentarians had children, and over half had only one or two offspring. Only nine of the 187 women in parliament had seven or more children (Waring, Greenwood and Pintat 2000, 9). Across Asia and the Pacific, it is not unusual to see that women in politics are made of the same fabric: relatively mature and free from responsibilities of childcare.

Like the women politicians we featured in earlier sections (see Boxes 3-6, 7-8), all of the women parliamentarians in the IPU Survey had access to education, and a majority completed an undergraduate degree. For the rest, seven percent had a high school diploma, six percent had tertiary training, and 14 percent held postgraduate degrees. All of the women had also been employed or practiced a profession, with almost half of them having been public or civil servants in the past. The next most common occupation among the respondents was teaching, with a majority having been engaged in higher education. Others were doctors, lawyers, journalists, nurses, social workers, farmers, engineers, and an accountant (Waring, Greenwood and Pintat 2000, 9).

The profile of the women parliamentarians in the IPU Survey closely mimics some findings in separate country reports on women in politics, or supports certain hypotheses regarding factors that favour women's participation in governance. The

finding that all these women had completed at least secondary school supports the claim that education is a precondition to political involvement. All of the respondents have also been employed, mostly as public servants, professionals, or educators, confirming the fact that education privileges women to find employment. The nature of their occupations has also been such as to enable them to understand the workings of government, and almost half of them had directly experienced it as public sector employees.

The profile of women in national legislatures differs from that described for women sitting in local councils of governance. In South Asia, for instance, even illiterate women have been able to break into local councils such as the *Union Parishad* in Bangladesh (UNDP 2008; UNDP 2000), the district, *tehsil*, and union councils in Pakistan (Reyes 2002), or the *Gram Panchayat* in India (UNDP 2008). Reyes drew on the results of several studies to draw a profile of women elected to local councils of Pakistan. She reports that most of the women were younger than 45 years of age (57 percent); more than half were illiterate (53 percent); the majority were housewives (73.7 percent); very few owned land; and an overwhelming majority had never contested elections before that time (79 percent) (Reyes 2002).

A case study of Bangladeshi women elected to local councils highlights these features (Democracy Watch 2002):

- Most female members of the Union Parishad (UP) come from relatively lower income groups, most likely as a result of the extensive social mobilization that NGOs have done among poor women in Bangladesh;
- Most members were encouraged to participate in the election by their husbands, fathers and relatives;
- Most of the interviewed members were housewives before they were elected;
- Most of the female members were elected for the first time, and had prepared for election through training.
- Most of the female members admitted to a confrontational relationship with their respective chairpersons and male members,

and do not get much support or cooperation from the men in the UP (WB 2008).

More than 80 percent of the parliamentarians surveyed by IPU asserted that one method of guaranteeing democracy was by ensuring gender equality in shaping democratic governance and assuming its leadership (Waring, Greenwood and Pintat 2000, 18). However, while the constitutions of most countries provided for equality between men and women in political life, the law did not always become a reality. Almost four-fifths of the parliamentarians pointed to prevailing values about gender roles as responsible for the lower participation of women in national politics (Waring, Greenwood and Pintat 2000, 25).

The gap between law and practice was ascribed to women's lack of political status. It was noted that, even in nation states where there was broad political participation, women did not always hold powerful positions of authority. A Nordic politician observed: "We have the highest women's representation in the world (43 percent) but men still dominate as party leaders and in the most 'heavy positions'" (Waring, Greenwood and Pintat 2000, 19). In addition, respondents consistently reiterated that historical and cultural values perpetuated inequality.

Do Women in Politics Make a Difference?

"A woman who enters politics changes; a thousand women who enter politics change politics", Chilean President Michelle Bachelet (quoted by Gutierrez 2008).

After being elected or appointed, the more difficult task for women in public office begins: to make a difference on behalf of gender equality, human rights and development. According to some observers, women appear to bring distinctive styles to leadership and the specific kinds of issues they choose to champion (UN-DAW 1997). These similarities can be traced to the different positions women hold in society, the ways in which different societies constrain women or enable them to fulfill their human potential and the distinct roles that society expects them to play in relation to men.

Although their particular concerns and styles may vary from one society to another (and within societies), they tend to bring to

governance and other public-sector affairs a perspective that in some measure reflects their social and cultural position and the prevailing gendered division of power (UN-DAW 1997, 7).

Given this 'feminine' style, the participants at a United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Women in Public Life report that women bring the following attributes to public life (cited in UN-DAW 1997:7-8):

- A particular concern for justice and the ethical dimension of politics, derived in part from their experience of injustice;
- A talent for setting priorities and accomplishing complex tasks learned in the course of balancing competing demands for their time and attention in the family, at work and in the community;
- An awareness of the value of consensus and agreement, because of their central role in social relationships;
- A concern for future generations.

According to women in local government, their leadership style is characterised by being more inclusive, consultative and collaborative. They are more tolerant of different points of view, are people-oriented and encourage participation. They are in constant communication with their constituencies and favour democratic forms of decision-making. They lead by example and focus on issues rather than personalities. They are assertive, innovative and conscientious leaders (UN ESCAP 2001).

As a result of these so-called feminine attributes, women (more than men) are said to be transparent in their transactions, interact frequently with their constituencies, including women NGOs and other interest groups. They are also said to be less prone to corruption. Women in parliaments are usually the ones to propose bills related to child care and welfare, improvements in labour and employment conditions, pension systems; oppose nuclear weapons, capital punishment and racial discrimination; are more pacifist than men; and, focus on environmental concerns. They have also been the ones who have pushed for the ratification of CEDAW in their respective countries; introduced the establishment of structures to promote and protect gender equality, such as women's machineries and commissions on gender equality; and introduced legislation that will ensure the mainstreaming of gender in

governance, such as through the institution of gender budgets and enabling laws (Ballington and Karam 2005; UN-DAW 2000).

Making an Impact in Parliament

Women's presence in governance machineries will make the difference, first of all, if they attain sufficient numbers to constitute a 'critical mass'. Hence, it is important to introduce enabling procedures that will increase opportunities for women's representation in parliament (Karam and Lovenduski 2005). As elected representatives, women legislators ought to be able to plan together, define a women's agenda, and be heard as a bloc in parliament to introduce bills that improve the situation for themselves and other women. They can initiate changes in parliamentary structures and procedures to include the introduction of proportional norms for men and women's membership in legislative committees. They may act as 'women's whips' and be responsible for organising the parliamentary votes of women in a particular party, as well as initiating the institution of formal or informal quotas for women in their respective parties.

Women in parliaments should take initiatives to alter the language of parliamentary procedures so that women's perspectives are actively sought and mainstreamed rather than sidelined. They have to use their parliamentary platform to "alter public attitudes and to change the discourse of politics so that a political woman becomes as frequent a fixture of the political space as a man" (Karam and Lovenduski 2005,189-190). Women in legislative positions need to constantly apply gender analysis to local, national and international issues, so that appropriate legislation can be devised to address the differential impacts of these circumstances on the men and women in the citizenry.

Women in politics must ensure that they are in constant interaction with the different agents of change, including governments, other women MPs, women's organisations, and other members of civil society. They should be able to develop their networks for gender equality legislation at local, regional and international levels. These partnerships and networks will be enhanced if male parliamentarians are also engaged and brought into gender legislative efforts, especially because political structures remain dominated by men.

Finally, women in political positions have to become positive role models for other women. They need to show other women that ‘women can!’ Parliamentarians, namely women in executive and other government positions, should enable other women to believe that they can effectively assume positions of responsibility and visibility in aid of good governance. They need to demonstrate that there is no real cleavage between the public and private domains of a woman’s life. They need to be models of a transformative, egalitarian and gender-responsive government.

Unshackling Patriarchal Chains

The prospects for increasing women’s visibility in political decision-making hinge on a complex web of factors linked to women’s lives, national development and the nature of governance. The framework for understanding the roots of gender discrimination in Asian and Pacific nations identifies traditional gender identities linked to the gender division of labour as the factor that initially dissuades women and gender minority groups from entering the political arena (see Chapter I, Examining Political Participation through Gender Lenses). The political participation of women and gender minorities in Asia and the Pacific has been examined within this context throughout this paper.

The conclusions inferred from the data circumscribe women’s role in the region as belonging to the private, that is, the domestic domain of human activity and responsibility, while that of men is located within the public (productive) domain. Hence, women who cross over into the realm of politics are judged to be unconventional and unable to meet socio-cultural expectations of the feminine role. By the same token, gender minorities are viewed unfavourably because they do not conform to the male-as-masculine or female-as-feminine norms and stereotypes, and are adjudged to have little or no rights to become paragons of political power and authority. Social institutions, including schools, the media, religious organisations and political structures, spread and perpetuate traditional stereotypes of gender roles and identities.

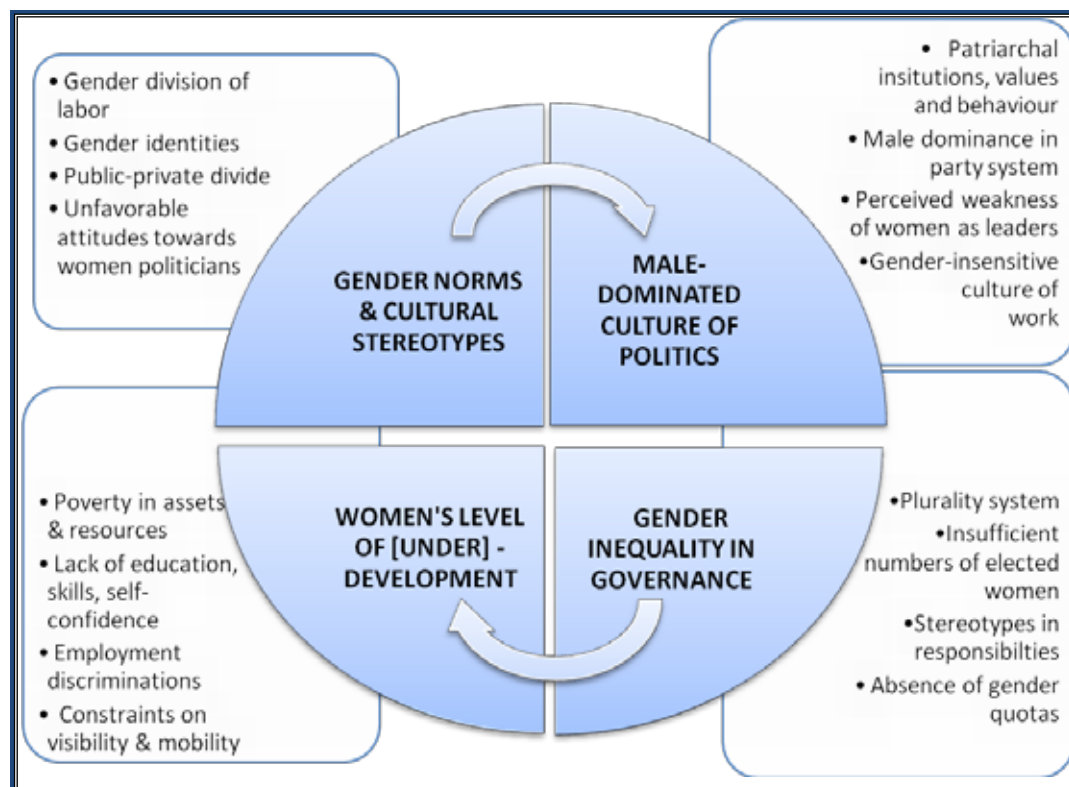
The gender division of labour that privileges men in political life means that political institutions generally perpetuate male dominance and other patriarchal features. Asian and Pacific women’s perceived place in domestic work and social reproduction also leads to the misconception that they do not possess the qualities

necessary to be political leaders, an assumed leadership style that draws heavily from masculine attributes such as authoritativeness, decision-making skills, control of and dominance over people and resources. There is also the notion that men make better leaders than women because they are ‘objective’ rather than ‘emotional’ (supposedly a feminine trait).

Men’s privileged status in public life leads to gender inequality in governance. Gender inequality in the profile of influence and political power across the region has resulted in the outcome that women’s concerns, as well as those of gender minorities, remain invisible or marginalised in laws and state policies. Thus, inequities in economic assets, income and employment, knowledge and information are reinforced. The interrelationship between gender identity, gender inequality in governance, and women’s continuing experience of poverty, becomes a continuous, vicious cycle.

Figure 7 is an attempt to illustrate the interconnectedness between these different factors that serve as obstacles to the political participation of women and gender minorities.

Figure 7. Obstacles to the Political Participation of Women and Gender Minorities



VI. THE WAY FORWARD

If women's full and equal participation in governance is to be attained, a strategic framework is needed to overcome the cultural and structural barriers to gender balance in political representation. Research and gender analysis of these conditions points to the following key areas of action:

1. Institution of measures and mechanisms that will provide women more choices to take part in political decision-making.

Gender stereotypes and electoral processes serve as hindrances to gender-responsive governance, for various reasons. Hence, empowering measures from government, women's groups, social movements and other sectors need to be put into place. Among these are:

- Institutional mechanisms to free women from domestic labour, such as childcare facilities, pre-schools, affordable ready-to-eat food choices and adequate health services for family members;
- Improved policies for women to complete their education and to join the work force, as opportunities which serve to broaden their understanding of women's potential contribution to decision-making and governance;
- Gender-sensitisation of families, especially male members, to transform unequal gender relations to more equitable ones;
- Gender-sensitisation of families, the community, and the public, on gender identities and the disadvantaged position of gender minorities;
- Institution of legal and policy reforms that recognise, respect and protect the rights of women and gender minorities, especially those that will prevent discrimination and violence against these persons;
- Respect for individual rights to freely associate with others, as a precondition for enabling women and minorities to join organisations that address their practical interests and concerns, and to allow them to mobilise around their strategic need for gender equality;

- Mobilisation of gender-sensitive support from governance structures for gender-friendly processes and facilities that enable women to cope with their practical needs as women, such as avoiding late parliamentary sessions, and the provision of breastfeeding and childcare facilities while attending to their public duties;
- Gender-sensitisation of men in parliament, the cabinet and other government institutions on the importance of a gender and development perspective in national life and in the realm of global politics, which requires the full and equal participation of women and gender minorities in governance;
- Gender mainstreaming in policy and legislative structures, including the installation of a sex-disaggregated database, institution of gender-fair language in debates and proceedings, gender equity in legislative committee work, and the infusion of gender-responsive perspectives in the content of policies and legislations;
- Institution of voluntary party quotas and reserved seats for women in the legislature, to increase the chances of women to be included in party slates and in proportional representation seats;
- The establishment of women's parties that can serve as the 'vanguard' for women and gender concerns.

2. Provision of capabilities for effective participation in governance and legislative work.

Many women who wish to enter politics are inexperienced neophytes in legislative processes. Thus, NGOs and government should introduce programs that will educate women on the different aspects of legislative work, public administration and governance:

- Assertiveness training that includes communication and presentation skills, advocacy skills, networking, and use of media for proposed policies and legislations;

- Seminars on drafting bills and other legislative processes, within the framework of human rights and development, and gender-responsive governance;
- Development of perspectives and skills on participatory processes: consultations with constituencies and the public; negotiations, networking and alliance-building; and consensus-building on desired reforms in governance;
- Raising the awareness of candidates and elected women on issues related to poverty, gender, sustainable development, national and global concerns, and their impacts on the situation and status of women and gender minorities;
- Training in effective mechanisms for party work: from seeking candidature, developing a political platform, campaigning, raising financial resources, garnering support from leaders and constituencies, to protecting votes.

3. En-gendering political parties and other political support groups.

Political parties have constantly been named as the gate-keepers of political participation and representation. Specific strategies need to be developed to make them allies in the quest for equality of representation:

- Gender equity campaigns should be addressed to political party leaders, to enable them to comprehend the significance of putting women in elective positions.
- The support of other influential actors – such as the media, academics, and leaders of civil society – should be actively solicited as part of gender-responsive governance.

4. Cross-national research on the political participation of women and gender minorities to take into account differences across regions and cultures.

Studies have shown that women across different regions and cultures experience similar forms of disadvantage on account of gender. However,

gender relations occur within particular cultural, political and socio-economic settings.

- The diversity of inter-related factors that discriminate against women and gender minorities in the realm of political participation needs to be further identified and analysed.
- Appropriate electoral systems, relevant political issues and political processes need to be pinpointed in relation to these contextual factors. What works for one society may be inapplicable in another.
- Within Asian and Pacific nations that implement plurality/majority rules, the electoral system has to be further analysed in order to discover strategies that can push forward the agenda of gender quotas and the reservations of seats for women in parliaments.

Conclusion

The Chinese say ‘women hold up half the sky’. Governance and democracy would totter, or be upended altogether, if women were left out. They need to have the opportunity and the resources to uphold, with men, the structures and institutions that provide the citizenry the *right* to be part of decision-making processes. In this way, they can be directly involved in shaping their present situations and determining their future (as well as those of other vulnerable women and minority groups).

Gender parity in political representation is essential to the achievement of gender equality. Without it, there can be no real progress in human development.

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ⁱⁱ The Head of Government is the Chief Executive Officer of the nation-state, and is the leader of the government and the cabinet. The Head of State is the chief public representative of the nation, federation or commonwealth that he/ she represents (Economicexpert.com. 2008).

ⁱⁱⁱ Legislative assemblies may be unicameral or bicameral. A unicameral legislature has only one structure while a bicameral legislature is composed of two-chambers. The lower house is usually based proportionally on population with each member representing the same number of citizens in each district or region. The upper house varies more broadly in the way in which members are selected: such as through inheritance, appointment by various bodies, or through direct and indirect elections. The authority of the two houses or chambers varies broadly in each country. In many cases, however, one chamber (usually the lower house) has the final say in determining the composition of a bill (UNDP 2009-b).

^{iv} The classification of states into quartiles was constructed by the researcher from the original table of IPU.

^v For instance, voters elect the members of the legislature, but the latter convene to elect their officers, such as the Prime Minister, Speaker of the House, or President of the Senate. As another example: in the Republic of Korea, there are 245 single member constituencies elected through simple majority direct votes. There are also 54 seats allotted through proportional allocation. These seats are divided proportionately among the political parties based upon the votes obtained in the districts, on condition that they have obtained at least three percent of the total valid votes cast or secured five district constituency seats or more (IPU 2008).