

ISSUES IN WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

by

Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After the spotlight had faded on the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, gender concerns such as the issues of women's equal participation in decision-making and their access to power have been conveniently shunted off to the sidelines in a region besieged by economic meltdown, inter-country feuds, natural and human-made disasters and a host of other problems.

Half-a-decade after the Beijing Conference, it is apropos to take stock of the modest advances made by countries in the Asia-Pacific region towards the goal of women's political empowerment, probe the obstacles, examine the opportunities, and plot future directions. This paper has drawn from the country reports submitted to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP), papers from recent regional and global gatherings on women's political empowerment, as well as studies undertaken by the network of the Center in Asia-Pacific for Women in Politics (CAPWIP).

Obstacles to women's empowerment spring from cultural stereotypes and institutional barriers in the public sphere. Resilient gender roles remain a major stumbling block to women's participation in decision-making on a basis equal with men. These stereotypical views are of two kinds: the first deems women unfit for leadership, the second makes excessive demands on women who aspire to public positions of leadership. On the other hand, the public sphere has built-in barriers to women's equal participation in decision-making and politics. These include the lack of political will, the lack of a critical mass of women in politics, existence of an "all boys network", and the "winner take all" type of electoral system that effectively rules out minority groups such as women.

The past decade has yielded opportunities for advancing women's political empowerment starting with cheaper and more efficient telecommunications facilities. This signifies cheaper access to greater information, use of telecommunications to facilitate organizing and networking for concerted action on common issues, and using media to influence values. The second opportunity lies in the heightened interest in advocacy for democratic governance, including the willingness of aid agencies to provide support for initiatives that seek to democratize government and decision-making to include heretofore marginalized groups such as women. The third opportunity is in the call for an alternative leadership paradigm: a critique of the prevailing leadership style of dominance and control identified with male attributes; and a call for a leadership style that is more inclusive, fostering unity between peoples and countries, safeguarding rather than exploiting the environment—which are in greater consonance with female attributes.

Finally the paper poses two challenges in terms of future directions: creating an enabling environment for women's political empowerment, and political organizing as a strategy for women to gain power. The first goal sets down specific tasks for government; political parties; the business sector, trade unions and cooperatives; and media and educational institutions.

The second goal focuses on women's initiative and autonomy in pursuing their political agenda, the sharing of responsibilities between women and men, and support from NGOs and international aid organizations.

Women's political empowerment, in the region as elsewhere, is a fundamental challenge for the coming millenium. It will engage half of the world's population—the women, their organizations and movements. But it will also demand a commitment from government and other social institutions: media, schools, the business sector, trade unions, cooperatives—to help, not hinder, the cause of equality.

This challenge is a play for high stakes: redefining politics, community, relationships, and everything in-between, so that the future will not bring more death, destruction and fragmentation, but will be one of healing, building, wholeness and reconciliation.

A. INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK

Women's equal participation in decision-making and their access to power are critical issues that have long been ignored. This political marginalization accounts for the trivialization, if not gross disregard, of concerns important to women the world over. The Fourth World Conference on Women accorded this issue long-overdue recognition as one of the twelve critical areas of concern in its Platform for Action (BPFA).

The BPFA underscored the need to incorporate women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making to ensure that women's interests are taken into full account. Moreover, the BPFA did not limit politics within the purview of public governance. In a more inclusive sense, politics encompasses the power relations that operate at various levels of society: from the most personal, i.e. family relations, to the most visible and public levels as in governments and international bodies.

This broadened understanding is significant because it sees through the tokenism of one woman, or several women, in national and local government bodies: one female parliamentarian does not constitute women's political empowerment. The BPFA further recognizes that politics is not an end in itself, but is rather a means to address such basic needs and issues as employment, education, health care, and violence against women.

Women's political empowerment is premised on three fundamental, and non-negotiable, principles. These are:

1. The equality between women and men;
2. Women's right to the full development of their potentials; and
3. Women's right to self-representation and self-determination.

Governments in the Asia-Pacific region generally affirm these principles which are enshrined in all, if not most, of their laws. But legal rights are often not reflected in reality: women in the

region have yet to achieve equality, particularly in their right to self-representation and self-determination.

Four years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, some progress has been achieved in women's electoral political participation. Many have been emboldened to run for public office, a number have been elected. Governments and political parties have responded to the BPFA's call for action by establishing various forms of quotas and reservation systems for candidates and legislative bodies. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in particular, have been at the forefront of raising gender awareness: developing the rationale for women in politics and providing the necessary training in self-confidence and skills building for the women who take up the challenge.

Most countries in the region have succeeded in fostering cooperation among governments, NGOs and other sectors in working for women's issues including women's political empowerment. Governments have drafted national plans and strategies for women's development but the stress on women's political empowerment is by no means universal. Gender-based research and establishing databases for women are of minor significance; in some cases they are overlooked.

On the eve of the millennium and almost half a decade after Beijing, the question of what still needs to be done to achieve women's equal access to power and decision-making remains of little or no priority. Notwithstanding their reported accomplishments, countries in the region have not recorded a dramatic increase in women's political participation.

Given that political empowerment is a long and time-taking process, four years after Beijing may be too short a time to expect major results. But it is critical to pose the questions: What hinders women's access to power and participation in decision-making? How can we facilitate the achievement of this goal? This paper seeks to provide a starting point for all concerned in re-assessing their efforts and re-strategizing to hasten the process of women's political empowerment.

Preparations for this paper started with a review of the country reports submitted to the UN Economic and social Commission for the Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on progress of governments in implementing the BPFA.¹ Affiliates of the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP) were also commissioned to prepare sub-regional papers on the status, critical issues and future directions of women's political participation. Likewise surveyed were conference outputs and papers from recent regional and global gatherings on women's political empowerment.²

Many factors hinder women's equal access to power and decision-making. This paper focuses on strategic issues that have been neglected, or paid scant attention to, during the past four years of BPFA's implementation. Critical in effectively addressing the question of women's political empowerment, these issues are:

¹ Reports were prepared by various countries for an April 1999 meeting of ESCAP. A country survey on the BPFA's implementation was also undertaken by ESCAP.

² Refer to the bibliography for a listing of these.

1. Pervasive influence of traditional gender roles that constrict women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles.
2. Persistent institutional barriers to women's access to power that cut across various socio-political institutions.

This paper proceeds to explore ways to address these issues, while citing existing opportunities for advancing women's political empowerment.

B. OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

B.1. Persistence of traditional gender roles

Perhaps the most resilient obstacle to women's political empowerment are gender stereotypes concerning women and leadership. Seeming to be commonly held across countries by both women and men, these stereotypes are of two categories. The first regards women as unsuitable for leadership positions; the second demands that women in power and authority be capable of, and excel at, everything--the "wonder woman" syndrome.

B.1.1. Stereotype of women as "followers, not leaders"

Women's priority is family

Traditional gender roles make women primarily responsible for children's upbringing and home maintenance tasks. Women are expected to focus their lives on taking care of their families to the detriment, or exclusion, of other concerns. Boys are given priority for schooling over girls whom, it is assumed, will later be provided for by husbands. As adults, women are expected to care for children, spouses, parents and relatives. They are responsible for keeping the family together. Their involvement in community, church, social and political organizations is deemed secondary to obligations at home and the demands of earning a living. But today women's earnings are considered essential, rather than supplemental, to the family income. The reality is that women are no longer confined to the domestic sphere. Their space has expanded: they are regular bread-winners who actively engage in community, church and other social activities.

Women are not qualified to take on leadership positions

Since women are excluded from leadership roles, they are deprived of opportunities for leadership skills training. Girls have less chances for schooling and opportunities are drastically limited for them to develop skills and talents in the public sphere. They are praised for obedience and subservience, implicitly dissuading them from aspirations to leadership. Higher education is a privilege many women do not enjoy. They are passed up for training opportunities at work because it is not cost efficient to invest in women who may give up work anytime for the sake of family. Domestic responsibilities make it difficult for women to go for training or further studies because they simply do not have the requisite hours for study.

The public sphere is men's domain

By tradition the public sphere is male domain. Men venture into the world as workers and traders, academics and artists, inventors and scientists, legislators and enforcers of law and order, as well as spiritual and secular leaders. Women, on the other hand, have been confined to their homes and relegated to the background. But women have overcome this circumscription by claiming their equal right to participate in the public sphere. As half of the world's population, women cannot remain isolated from the public domain, particularly with the sweeping effects of globalization. Women have increasingly made their presence felt in the public sphere. But men continue to dominate that sphere especially at the top levels of government, business, social institutions and religion.

Leadership resting on more masculine-identified qualities continues to be the dominant paradigm. Qualities deemed essential for leadership such as toughness, aggressiveness and control are considered male attributes. Women who want to gain leadership find that they need to fit into the "man's world" which asks them to be male clones.

Stereotyped positions open to women

Women in the leadership hierarchy of governments, the private sector, political parties, trade unions and social movements are often in positions that are an extension of their roles in the private sphere. The positions of secretary, treasurer, public relations officer, or person-in-charge of logistical support echo the care-giving and home maintenance functions traditionally ascribed to women. Premised on the assumption that housework is of inferior value to paid work, assigning women to quasi-domestic roles in the public sphere strengthens the stereotype that they are suited for lesser responsibilities.

Women's multiple burden blocks political participation

Women have an equal right with men to participate in politics and assume leadership roles. But the demands of traditional gender roles and economic and social obligations leave them little time and energy to pursue this. Men must share in the demands of the domestic sphere so that women can exercise their right to actively participate in the public sphere. Women and men have an equal stake in family welfare and should be equally responsible for the family. To encourage more women to take on leadership positions, it is imperative to challenge the traditional gender division of labor in theory and in practice.

B.1.2. High expectations from the public for acceptance of women in leadership roles

People have different expectations of male and female leaders. Foremost among these differences is that men leaders are not expected to be primarily responsible for their families' needs, while women leaders are expected to fulfill this role too. It is normative for male leaders to set aside family concerns for needs of their constituents and other job-related demands. In contrast, women leaders are expected to give full and equal time and energy to raising children and taking care of home while discharging their functions as politicians.

Women leaders are also expected to possess exceptional personal traits and qualifications in terms of educational background, professional accomplishments, active membership in community, church or other civic groups. They should be accessible to their constituents at all times without neglecting their roles as wife, mother, daughter. As women they are expected to be beyond reproach; yet they must be politically astute to engage in comprises that are part of traditional politics. This can put the political novice in a bind.

Women, especially those who are presented as an alternative to traditional male politicians, are expected to create an impact in changing the situation of women or addressing critical issues such as poverty, health care and education within a short time from their election or assumption of leadership. Since women in leadership is something out of the norm, they are expected to repeatedly justify the authority vested in them, to vindicate the electorate's choice of a woman as leader, by being infallible. This is one unspoken expectation.

Newly-elected women in countries that have recently introduced a reservation system find themselves being criticized for failing to push the women's agenda forward. Their critics forget that most of these women are political neophytes still learning the ropes. Moreover the issues to be addressed cannot be solved overnight.

The exacting conditions imposed on women leaders work to discourage other women from pursuing executive positions. Undue and unfair expectations make them feel inadequate to consider venturing into politics, in the first place. This reduces the pool of future women leaders who can be challenged, motivated, groomed, mentored and developed for a calling in politics.

B.2. Institutional barriers in the public sphere

B.2.1. Lack of political will

Women do not enjoy the same privileges and opportunities as men although all countries in the ESCAP region have legislation that guarantee equality before the law. For instance, while everyone has the right to seek public office, very few women file certificates of candidacy because they lack access to the substantial resources needed for a political campaign. Women's representation in leadership is limited to the middle and lower levels of authority with a "glass ceiling" obstructing their rise to top positions. Clearly the existence of legislation, policies or quotas is not sufficient to ensure women's increased access to decision-making positions. A strong political will on the part of government, political parties and other organizations is needed to create an environment conducive to women's political empowerment.

B.2.2. Lack of a critical mass of women in politics

One or two women who attain decision-making positions in a political sector dominated by men will be ineffective in influencing decisions. The majority of men can ignore the women's concerns, or attack them should they have opposing views. Unless women comprise a

significant proportion of leadership positions, say 30 per cent, they will have little influence over the decision-making process and outcome. The imperative of a “critical mass” of informed, articulate and engaged women holds true at all levels: women in top leadership, at the middle levels and women on the ground as rank and file. Individual women leaders at the top are tokens with no real weight; while the lack of an articulate and active base at the bottom makes for an organization without focus.

B.2.3. Existence of the “all boys network”

The male-dominated leadership structure develops a culture that excludes women. The “all boys network” (occasionally “old boys network” combining the worst features of seniority and machismo) is an informal clique of men in positions of power and those close to them. They bond by engaging in activities such as after-work drinking or sports which women have no time for given their multiple burden. During these activities, work-related matters are discussed and even decided on. Women’s absence at these occasions works against their effective participation in decision-making.

B.2.4. Differential access to political resources

Electoral politics draws heavily on the support of male-dominated political parties and big business. Seeking an elective position entails enormous costs which most women cannot afford on their own. Through membership in a political party, women may seek to gain the support needed for a political campaign. But women are not given priority by parties as candidates because they often lack an organized constituency. Women candidates endorsed by political parties usually fit one or more of the following categories: membership in a political family or clan, membership in the elite, well-connected to influential people, or celebrity status.

Most women leaders in the region trace their ascent to power to relationship with a male political leader: as wife of a slain leader or daughter of an older, if not deceased, politician. While most women eventually come into their own as leaders, it does not change the fact that women, compared with men, have limited access to the support of political parties and private business interests.

B.2.5. Type of electoral system

The type of electoral system in place also impinges on women’s successful entry into electoral politics. Based on experience, the majority or “winner-take-all” system diminishes women’s chances of getting elected because they must garner the majority vote to win a seat. On the other hand, a proportional representation system is more flexible for the majority number of votes is not needed to win seats. Depending on the type of proportional representation scheme being used, political parties or candidates will have a percentage of legislative seats that reflect the number of public votes they get. The proportional representation system results in more diverse composition of a legislative body enabling more of the traditionally under-represented groups such as women to get elected.

C. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

C.1. Cheaper and more efficient telecommunications facilities

C.1.1. Cheaper access to greater information

The world has entered the information age. Cheaper access to a wide variety of means of communication such as television, radio, movies, print media, Internet, telephone and facsimile allow a rapid dissemination of information within and among countries. In a matter of minutes events in Southeast Asia are flashed or broadcast to viewers and listeners around the world. During the Fourth World Conference on Women, viewers worldwide received regular reports on the sessions in Beijing through the entire gamut of above-mentioned media. Such technological advances facilitate increased awareness among a wide and diverse group of people concerning critical issues and the situation of women in different parts of the region and the world.

The relatively low cost of these media, and their availability, make them useful tools for presenting and discussing issues of concern to women, as well as urging them to action. The Internet, radio and videotape can likewise be utilized as teaching media that make possible long distance learning for women. The Internet, in particular, is a very powerful tool for gathering and disseminating information from a host of sources to the widest range of users. Materials such as training modules, case studies of women role models, best practices in politics, and women's experiences in advocacy can now be easily accessed.

C.1.2. Facilitating organizing and networking for concerted action on common issues

Information and knowledge are a source of power. Technological advances in communications allow more women to gain access to this source of power. The availability and accessibility of telephones, Internet and facsimile have changed the way organizing and networking is done. Such facilities provide quick dissemination of information and feedback not previously possible. Coordinating for concerted action is now easier for women-- linking them to other women's groups beyond their immediate community, sharing expertise and experiences, and identifying common issues and possible courses of action. Through these facilities women can more fully participate in discussions, formulate their stand on critical issues, and take action such as lobbying for their agenda.

C.1.3. Utilizing media to influence values

Mass media is a powerful tool for transmitting and changing cultural values. Television, radio, movies, books, magazines and other forms of print media are extensively available throughout the region. The younger generation, in particular, is readily influenced by this medium through the sheer amount of exposure it receives. Media's power to influence and shape people's

attitudes lies in its ability to bombard the audience with messages that reinforce particular values. Almost all countries cite the predominance of traditional gender stereotypes in the portrayal of women and men in mass media. However, majority of the information campaigns undertaken by government ministries and NGOs are one-shot activities or are of limited duration, such as the celebration of International Women's Day (or Women's Week or Women's Month). Governments and NGOs should tap and employ the entire spectrum of mass media on a sustained basis to promote a shift in values and attitudes towards gender equality; and to advocate for women's equal political participation.

C.2. Greater interest in advocating democratic governance

The collapse of authoritarian governments, particularly during the last quarter of this century, has sparked interest in supporting democratization of governance among international development agencies, social movements and the academe. The pressure to open up authoritarian societies towards more democratic governance has been fueled by the exposure of its citizens to ideas and conditions in democratic countries as well as media coverage of socio-political movements for change. All over the world people aspire for a better quality of life and assert their right to take control over their lives. Such aspirations have led to a redefinition of the role of citizens and governments in society.

Bilateral and multilateral donors increasingly support initiatives in this sphere by providing greater financial and technical resources for such activities as dialogues and fora, research and training in good governance. The availability of assistance from these donor agencies acts as a catalyst for governments and NGOs to examine how their institutions and processes of governance can be made more responsive to citizens' concerns, particularly those of such disadvantaged sectors as women.

This assistance has also stimulated research on the situation of women, analysis of what needs to be done to address their issues, and action planning at local, national and regional levels. International organizations such as the UN have been staunch advocates of women's issues through highly-visible international conferences that attract attention and participation of governments and NGOs. Follow-up activities to these conferences, such as monitoring and evaluation, have been essential in advocating continued action for women's empowerment.

Interest among bilateral and multilateral aid agencies in the area of governance is an opportunity for women to draw support for strengthening their participation in decision-making and access to power. Such support can stimulate research, training, advocacy and networking activities towards women's political empowerment. Research on women's experiences in electoral politics, for instance, can help build an inventory of strategies that have proven effective for women in securing public leadership positions. A national database on women and their fields of expertise can generate a roster of nominees for appointive positions in government and other institutions. Documentation and analysis of good practices can develop new models for women's leadership that can make governance more accountable and inclusive.

C.3. Call for an alternative leadership paradigm

As the world changes, people's problems change and so do people's expectations of their leaders. The prevailing leadership style in the world today is under heavy criticism for its failure to adequately address current socio-economic-political problems. The traditional leadership style heavily draws from masculine-linked attributes. It emphasizes control of and dominance over people and resources as the key to leadership. It is referred to as masculine because the values, attitudes and behaviors it promotes are those reinforced primarily in men by society. This type of leadership can be further described as hierarchical, imposing its authority through discipline and sanctions. The flow of information is controlled with the structure of work processes and institutions compartmentalized.

The masculine style of leadership has evolved from a long history of attempts to dominate nature and other cultures as a means towards progress and development. This style of leadership has resulted in great advances, but at what cost? A host of problems, including widespread violence and armed conflict, continuing poverty, large-scale environmental degradation and mismanagement of resources, is attributed to the ineffectiveness of the current style of leadership. Not in the least, it has caused or perpetuated the marginalization of women, as well as created class, ethnic and sectoral disparities.

Social scientists, business leaders, international donor organizations, NGOs and women's movements are proposing an alternative style of leadership, called by a number of names such as women's leadership as women's leadership, transformational leadership or Beta style-leadership.³ This kind of leadership draws from values, attitudes and traits considered as feminine since it is women who have been socialized to internalize and model these. Women's leadership style values diversity and flexibility. It recognizes the interdependence of people and their environment, encouraging openness and collaboration. Emphasis is on building networks rather than hierarchies among people with a clear and shared sense of vision and purpose. The feminine-linked leadership style is considered better able to deal with a rapidly changing environment since it seeks to manage change rather than control it. Leaders facilitate participation, information sharing and involvement of people in decision making. Problems and their solutions are conceptualized from a holistic perspective that places importance on both process and outcome.

However, the feminine-identified style of leadership is not limited to women alone. Men certainly possess the qualities described above albeit in varying degrees of development. While these feminine-linked traits and values are not traditionally reinforced in men, there are exceptions. These men who are exceptions are able to practice this style of leadership and become effective leaders. Training programs are being designed to help leaders in business, government, and social movements develop this alternative style of leadership in men.

The new leadership paradigm should combine or blend the best of masculine and feminine-identified attributes: gentle but firm, brave but prudent. Attuned to this style of leadership, women have a certain advantage. Once they attain a critical mass in politics and are extensively engaged in decision-making, they will change the way priorities are set as well as the way programs are developed and implemented. By the nature of women's leadership,

³ See The Second Stage by B. Friedan and Megatrends for Women: From Liberation to Leadership by P. Aburdene and J. Naisbitt.

responses to issues will be more inclusive of the needs of a multitude of sectors rather than for the benefit of a privileged few.

D. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR PROMOTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Women's full participation in politics is a fundamental and non-negotiable right. The United Nations Secretary General's report on Equality in Political Participation and Decision Making posed this question: "To what extent is the general advancement of women needed before it is possible to have full participation in politics? Or rather, is it the case that full participation in politics is necessary to achieve the general advancement of women?" Each question presupposes a different strategy in addressing the problem of broadening women's political participation.

The first question makes as a precondition to women's full participation in politics the satisfaction of their practical needs such as access to education, health care, livelihood and legal status. But if it has been women's absence from positions of power that occasioned their marginalization, the question is: How can they push for their practical needs to be prioritized in a situation where men still dominate in decision-making in government?

The second question underscores the need to promote women's full and equal participation in decision-making positions to ensure that their needs are prioritized and addressed. This strategy further implies that women can and should take control of their future instead of being dependent on the action of others. Women can set and pursue their own agenda. Increased political participation of women is, after all, not only an end in itself but also a means to address issues that are of importance to them.

D.1. Creating an enabling environment for women's political empowerment

Fostering a more inclusive and transformative type of politics means creating a more generalized political participation. Politics is not simply the once-in-a-quadrrennium exercise of choosing candidates. It is an entire cycle that begins with shared concerns espoused by an awakened constituency, holding officers accountable to addressing those concerns. Political participation is therefore a continuing process.

It is necessary to create an environment that will facilitate the election, appointment or promotion of a sufficient number of women to decision-making positions. The goal of a "sufficient number" refers more to a situation where it is no longer remarkable for women to be put in positions of power rather than a specific target of say 20% or 30%. Yet this environment is not simply for producing women leaders but also to develop a new and active citizenry among women.

A strong political will on the part of government and the leadership of political parties, business, trade and labor unions, academe and other social institutions is critical in achieving an

environment conducive to promoting women's political participation. It is not enough that relevant legislation is passed, provisions of international conferences ratified, quotas instituted, or policies adopted. These kinds of commitments must be translated into action via implementation of specific strategies directed at increasing women's access to power and their number in decision-making positions.

D.1. 1. The Government

The setting of quotas or targets for women's representation in legislative bodies and the different leadership levels of the bureaucracy has been proven effective in increasing the percentage of women in decision-making positions in some countries. Here we issue a caveat: although quotas are useful to advocate women's inclusion, governments must be careful to ensure that the quota percentage does not become a "glass ceiling" that pegs the proportion of women to a specific figure.

Based on experience, the use of quotas for legislative seats is enhanced by the use of the proportional representation system of election. Proportional representation facilitates the inclusion of more women because they need not get the majority vote in order to win a seat. Governments which provide special subsidies for political campaigns can also consider allocating incentives to parties that include a significant percentage of women in their list of candidates; or to parties that secured women election into office.

Fuller and more adequate statistics on women's political participation is needed. The availability and use of sex-disaggregated statistics on decision-making bodies at all levels is necessary to convince government leaders to pursue changes favoring women's increased representation in these structures. It can also be used by NGOs and national women's machineries to monitoring and follow-up individual ministries with regard to increasing the proportion of women in higher level positions. Governments can also include specific targets and goals for women's political participation in their national development plan for women.

D.1.2. Political Parties

Political parties play an important role in helping women get elected. But women will remain marginalized through their low representation in the party's list of candidates, unless party members realize that women can be an electoral asset. Political parties can establish a committee on gender equality to review its policies and procedures for candidate selection and ascending to leadership positions in the party. Experience has shown that self-imposed quotas for the inclusion of women in a party's list of candidates is more effective than one that is mandated by law. The committee on gender equality can also examine processes in a party such as the setting of schedules of meetings to ensure that it does not conflict with family time. It can also plan for the provision of free or inexpensive childcare facilities.

Parties can draw up a roster of women candidates interested in running for electoral office or nomination for appointive positions in government. They can help these women prepare for leadership positions by facilitating formal and informal mentoring schemes. Seasoned politicians, senior party members and political advocates can coach potential women candidates on such

topics as how to organize and work with a constituency as well as to advocate for issues. Political parties can likewise organize training on parliamentary procedures, understanding the government budgeting system, building an electoral image and using the media effectively. Finally, adequate financial and logistical support of political parties to women during the conduct of their campaign is very critical.

D.1.3. Business Sector, Trade Unions and Cooperatives

Although not widely documented, these sectors have had experiences in successfully advocating for women's greater access to leadership and decision making positions. The strategies that worked include:

1. Affirmative action for women's appointment or representation in administrative and managerial positions.
2. Consciously providing equal opportunities for women to plan their careers and develop their potentials.
3. Review of policies and procedures that constrain women and men from attending to family responsibilities such as scheduling of training on weekends and extended working hours.
4. Use of sex-disaggregated data for advocating for women's equal representation in decision-making positions and monitoring this.

D.1.4. Media and Educational Institutions

Mass media and the formal education system are powerful means for conveying and transforming the values affirmed by a society. Their influence has so far been under- utilized in advocating for gender equality in general and women's increased political participation and leadership in particular. It is high time to mobilize both institutions for our tasks through:

1. Continuing gender sensitization for teachers, school staff, school administrators, media, advertising and public relations practitioners, actors, directors, writers and other artists. Their personal biases influence the way they teach, conceptualize, prepare and execute materials as well as programs and activities. It is critical that these individuals support women's rights to equal participation in decision-making and leadership.
2. Encouraging girls to aspire to become leaders and not just followers. More women should be portrayed as leaders and in positions of power in television, movies, radio, literature and textbooks. Women in leadership roles should be depicted as the norm instead of the exception.
3. Identifying and popularizing women leaders as role models. Alternative leadership models should be studied and practiced in schools. This includes reinforcing leadership qualities in both sexes and providing them with equal opportunities to practice these.
4. Removing traditional gender stereotypes from school curricula, textbooks and all media materials.

5. Creative use of media forms to reinforce the concept of gender equality, the rights of women and equal sharing between women and men of responsibility for child rearing, family care and home maintenance.

D.2. Political organizing as a strategy for women to gain power

In order to achieve women's political empowerment, it is not enough that social institutions create an enabling environment for change. Women must come to their own decision to actively participate in politics and decision-making at all levels.

Women's organizations in the past two decades or more have scored significant gains in the struggle for gender equality. Through consciousness-raising, organizing, mobilizing, networking and lobbying, they have raised gender to the level of public discourse, pioneered creative programs and institutions, pushed the limits of advocacy and reform. All this they have done save one step: to sit at the table of power to make the decisions that matter in the life of people and community. Thus failing to translate their gains into political power, they have made those gains vulnerable to legislative whimsy, fiscal cutbacks, economic meltdown.

Politics is viewed not just in terms of electoral politics but in the whole range of political processes in society such as an active citizenry serving at times as a lobby for legislative reform, at others as watchdog against environmental abuse. It is imperative that women, individually and in concert, decide to tackle the sphere of politics to secure the gains of the past decade and to move the women's agenda forward into the new millenium. Government can be supportive, men can become allies, even champions, funding agencies can help, but in the end, it will be the women—and no one else—who will tackle and push their political agenda, and sustain their foray into the brave new world of politics.

D.2.1. Increasing women's self worth

Individual women need to raise their self-awareness, and examine their own values and attitudes towards gender equality. Women and men are brought up within a culture that espouses given roles and expectations of both genders. In the process of becoming gender sensitive and politically empowered, women should examine these culturally defined roles and expectations to determine whether they promote or hinder their development. Christine Pintat⁴ stresses that what has worked for women's political empowerment is the resolve for change within women themselves that leads to action, continuous organized discussions and networking. The resolve for change is an effect of women's self-acceptance and higher self-esteem.

D.2.2. Sharing of responsibilities and power between women and men

⁴ See Christine Pintat's paper for the 2nd Congress of the Global Network of Women in Politics, Makati, Philippines 1998.

Women's full participation in politics is not possible unless there is a sharing of power and responsibilities between women and men in both the public and private spheres. The multiple responsibilities borne by women--including child rearing, family care, home maintenance, economic activity, and community and political involvement--are also the full responsibility of men by virtue of their equality with women. Social institutions, beginning with the family, school, the church and media, which are primarily responsible for educating children, have a critical role to play in bringing this message across. The government, business sector, social movements and civil society as a whole must also reinforce this message through a review of their values, structures, policies and procedures to ensure that these are not biased against women and men fulfilling their rights and responsibilities in both the public and private spheres.

On the personal level, women and men must examine their own values and attitudes to determine if they are biased against the full sharing of responsibilities. These biases have to be changed to make it possible for long-term changes in the family and the larger social institutions to occur.

D.2.3. Support from non-government organizations

Social movements have been at the forefront of the struggle for women's political empowerment. NGOs have also been a catalyst for organizing women into constituency groups that can lobby for their issues in government as well as act as pressure groups vis-a-vis other sectors such as business. Beyond winning specific demands, women's organizing should aim to penetrate leadership positions at various levels of political and social institutions.

Organized women can be a strong force in demanding their right to equal political representation. It is important however, that women's groups remain autonomous, espousing their own agenda. Organized groups are a good training ground for women aspiring for higher positions of power in legislative bodies as well as in national and local governments. These groups likewise serve as a support network for members who run for elections or are already in leadership positions.

Ideally, their constituency's support should start when women decide to run, during the campaign period, and, if elected, throughout their term; or, if not elected, in planning out their next move. The relationship between a leader and her constituency should be one based on constant dialogue, feedback and joint action. A strong partnership is particularly important in helping women leaders stay on track with the group's agenda and providing moral support as these women try to penetrate male-dominated ranks of power.

Yet the political moment begins much earlier: when a self-conscious community defines what it wants and decides on the track of politics to secure its needs. The community therefore yields up its representative whose leadership precisely rests on the community's trust and confidence. The leader or politician represents his or her community and is accountable to it.

D.2.4. Support from international aid organizations

Bilateral and multilateral aid agencies should continue to advocate and support women's political empowerment by organizing venues for the exchange of experiences and skills training in promoting women's political empowerment especially among women's groups, NGOs, training institutes and the academe. This includes increasing the allocation of funding for projects that are related to women's political empowerment vis-à-vis other areas of interest. They can also ensure that gender is mainstreamed in all their governance projects. Finally, they can utilize their influence in advocating for and following up the commitments of governments to provide greater political participation and access to leadership positions for women.

E. CONCLUDING NOTES

It is high time for women to claim their right to equal access to decision-making and power. Substantial and sustained gains in other areas of concern such as violence against women, access to education and health care, and economic independence will not be possible unless women tackle the sphere of politics and all its ramifications: by lobbying to put in place appropriate legislation and support programs; by ensuring that these are properly implemented; and by running the entire gamut of the political challenge from electorate to candidate and power-holder. This implies that concerted effort from women to push the political agenda at the local, national and regional levels must continue.

This political savvy must be matched by technological savvy: making use of the unprecedented opportunities offered by new communications technology to advocate, consult, discuss, draw feedback, and build consensus.

Women and men also need to reflect on how their values and attitudes contribute to perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes; and reinforce as well as create institutional barriers to women's political empowerment. A transformation of these values and attitudes at the individual and societal level must take place as a precondition for achieving de facto gender equality.

Women's growing presence in decision-making positions provides an alternative to the current leadership paradigm informed by male-identified attributes. Women's demand for representation is not to replace men's domination but to create spaces for both women and men to develop their potentials and foster a synergy that can take on the challenges of the new millennium. Research on women's leadership styles is still at an early stage and there is much room for evolving this paradigm. Continuing interest and financial support for this area of study is essential.

Finally, the equal right of women and men to assume leadership positions must be instilled among children. Both girls and boys need to have equal opportunities to develop their leadership as well as "citizenship" skills. Leadership does not exist in a vacuum. The role of the constituency is just as important. Political empowerment demands that both leaders and citizens come to an understanding of their responsibilities and help each other in creating the society they desire.

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