Women in Local Government in Asia and the Pacific

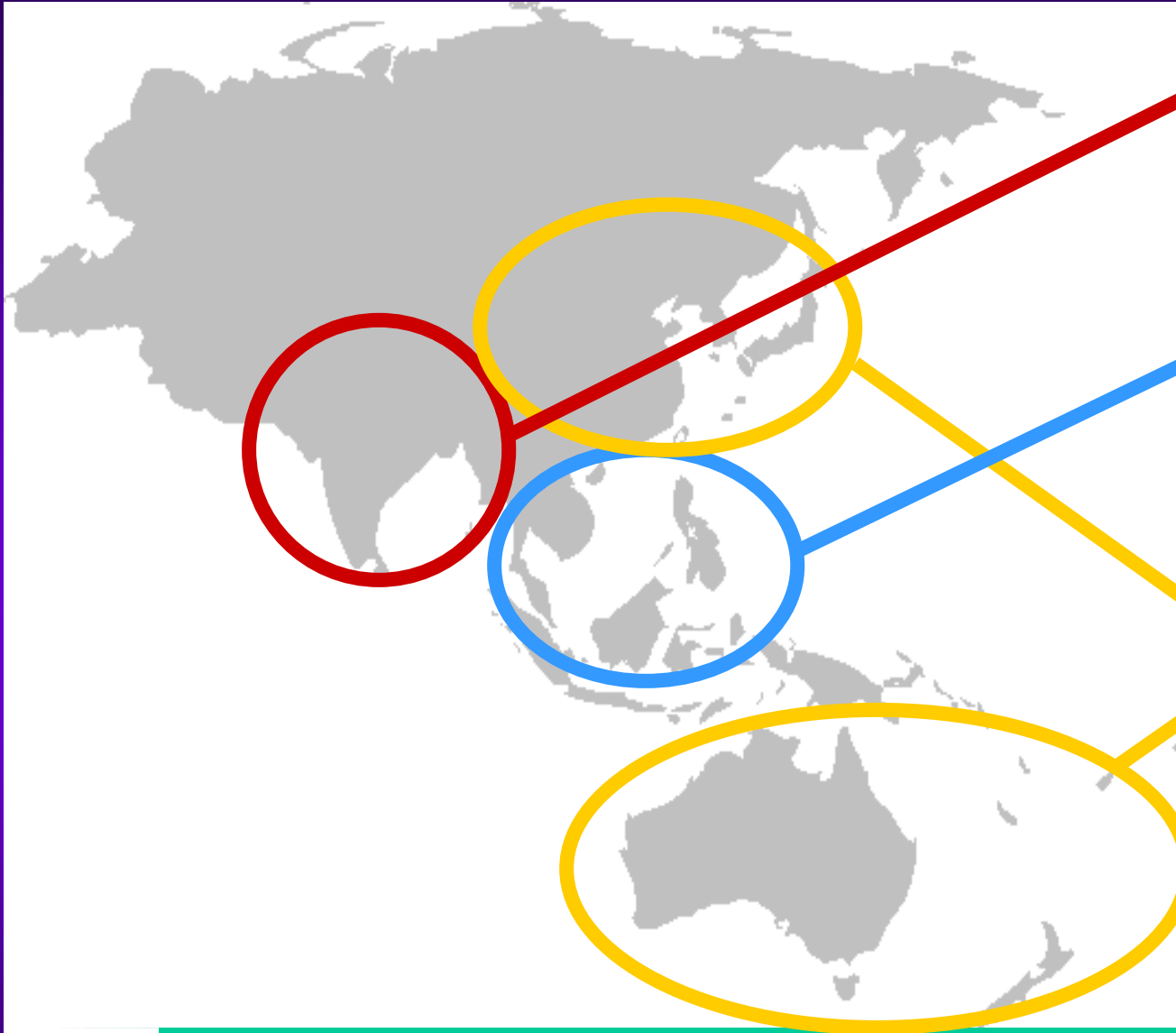## A comparative analysis of thirteen countries

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

This report highlights

- Barriers to women's involvement

- Initiatives that have increased women's participation

- The transformative leadership that women provide

- Regional and country-level strategies for increasing women's involvement

South Asia

Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh

South-East Asia

Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines

East Asia and the Pacific

China, Vietnam, Japan, Australia, New Zealand

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

Content of Report

- **The Current Situation**

- **Factors That Affect Women's Involvement in Local Government**

- **The Impact of Women As Transformative Leaders**

- **Proposals for Change**

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

The Current Situation

Women are underrepresented in local government in the Asia and Pacific region

Women in Local Government

South Asia	% of seats
Sri Lanka	2
India	33
Pakistan	Not known
Nepal	24.1
Bangladesh	33.3

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

Women in Local Government

South-East Asia	% of seats
Thailand	18.1*
Malaysia	9.8
The Philippines	16.5

*urban seats only

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

Women in Local Government

East Asia and the Pacific	% of seats
China	22.1
Vietnam	26.6
Japan	6.2
Australia	26.3
New Zealand	31.5

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

Women in Local Government and Central Government
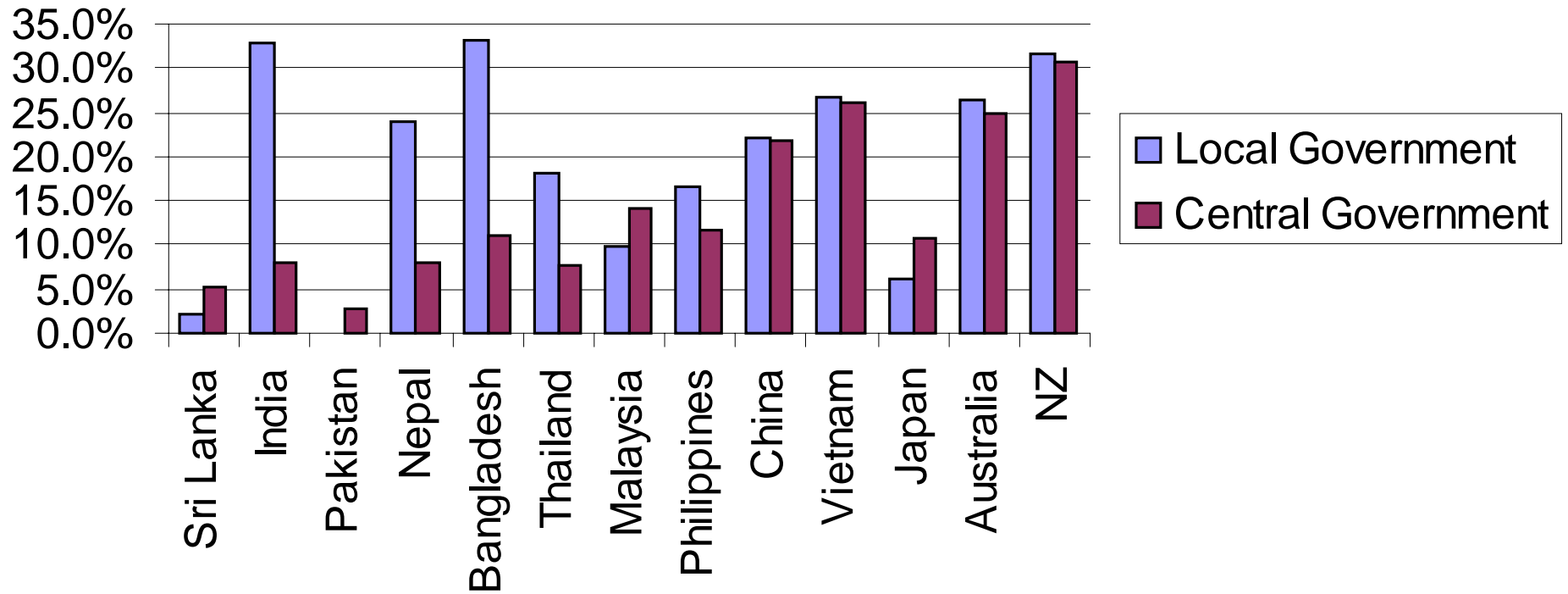
Factors that Affect Women's Involvement in Local Government

There are three key factors that affect women's involvement

Factors that Affect Women's Involvement in Local Government

1. **Laws, practices and initiatives**

2. **Barriers**

3. **The political system**

Laws, Practices and Initiatives that Ensure Participation

a. Statutory provisions

b. National policies and programmes

c. Local government requirements

d. Role of NGOs

e. Training

f. Regional and International Conferences

g. Initiatives by women in local government

h. Data Collection

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

Barriers to Participation

a. Fundamental inequality

b. Political and economic instability

c. Discrimination

d. The Male environment within political institutions

e. Costs

Impact of the Political System on Participation

a. The Local Government system

b. Electoral system

c. Wards versus at-large systems of elections

d. A quota of reserved seats for women

e. Access to and effectiveness of reserved seats

f. Kinship ties

g. Political party support for women

h. The adversarial nature of politics

Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership is based on a new political paradigm: a politics that is both transformed to ensure that power is used to create change and develop people and communities; it is non-hierarchical and participatory; and it gives priority to disadvantaged sectors. Politics are seen as transformational when they work for economic, social and political equality for women within a humane and sustainable society.

Transformative Leadership

Some believe that:

"it is in the contradictory experience of progress and oppression that the transformative power of women's political work is located"

Cohen, Jones and Tronto, *Women Transforming Politics. An alternative Reader,* 1997, p.3.

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

The Impact of Women as Transformative Leaders

a. The issues they promote

b. Their style of leadership

c. Their impact on equality

The Issues They Promote

These women say

- They have a greater sense of social issues and the well being and welfare of their communities

- They have a commitment in improving the environment within their communities

- They have different priorities

- They focus on change

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

Their Style of Leadership

- **Places a higher emphasis on the importance of good communication with their communities**

- **Uses democratic and facilitative forms of decision making**

- **Leads by example, focusing on the issues rather than personalities**

- **Is more assertive, innovative and conscientious**

Their Impact on Equality

They say they encourage equality by

- Encouraging more women to be politically aware and to participate

- They promote gender equity policies

- The provide role models for other women

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

Their Impact on Equality

- **They improve the status of women**
- **They have changed the environment of local government**
- **They have changed the focus of policies and services**
- **They have accelerated change**

Proposals for Change

The priority is to increase significantly the number of women in local government

A common strategy

A comprehensive country-level strategy that takes into account the specific issues related to the status of women in society, structures of government and the culture of governance, needs to be discussed and adopted in order to increase the representation and participation of women in local government

Changes Needed

1. The systems within which local government operates

2. Attitudes towards women in local government

3. Strategies to increase the number of women

4. Training

The Systems Within Which Local Government Operates

- A quota of reserved seats for women

- Proportional representation systems of voting

- The number of elected positions at community level be maintained

- Ward systems

- EEO programmes

The Systems Within Which Local Government Operates

- **Payment**

- **Good governance policies**

- **Consultation processes**

- **Funding for gender and development**

- **Women's standing committees**

- **Political parties to recruit women candidates**

Attitudes Towards Women in Local Government

- Changes to the culture of Local Government

- Gender awareness programmes

- Local Government to be more women friendly

- Opportunities for newly elected women to learn the system

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

Strategies to Increase the Number of Women

- Change policies and structures that perpetuate women's subordinate status
- Policies on economic and social empowerment
- Communities and services that take account of the needs of women
- Financial support, childcare and training opportunities

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

Strategies to Increase the Number of Women

- Women's associations

- More women encouraged to participate

- Funds to assist women to run for election

- Statistics to be collected to increase the visibility of women

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

Training

- **Training programmes to help women in Local Government develop skills and self confidence**

- **Training for women candidates**

- **Workshops on gender awareness for women and men**

- **Training programmes for girls and young women on their potential for decision-making positions**

Regional Support

A regional structure needs to be considered as a pivotal part of changes put in place to ensure the numbers of women in Local Government increase, training and support networks are established and to assist with ensuring that the political environment becomes more women friendly and political agendas include women and development issues.

Regional Action

- **Establish regional targets for increasing the number of women within timeframes and monitor progress made**

- **Promote exchange of experience, information and comparative research**

- **Promote regional, sub-regional and country based training programmes**

- **Resources to support training and campaigns for women candidates**

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors

Conclusion

This analysis and the Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors are first steps towards achieving gender balance in local government.

The momentum created by these activities must be built upon if the goal of gender balance in local government is to be achieved.

Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors