

# **Women in Local Government in Asia and the Pacific**

A comparative analysis of thirteen countries

This comparative report draws together a picture of women's involvement in local government in the Asia and Pacific region. It is based on 13 country reports prepared for ESCAP and LOGOTRI and highlights continuing barriers to women's involvement in local government, initiatives that have increased women's participation and the transformative leadership that women provide in local government. It also outlines regional and country-level strategies for increasing women's involvement in local government.

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This comparative analysis has been prepared by Jean Drage, School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

## **Executive Summary**

### **1. Introduction**

This comparative report has been prepared for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors being held in Phitsanulok, Thailand from 19 to 22 June 2001.

This report has been compiled from 13 country reports submitted by the following countries:

- South Asia: Sri-Lanka, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh
- South East Asia: Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines
- East Asia and the Pacific: China, Vietnam, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

### **2. The Current Situation**

Women are underrepresented in local government in the Asia and Pacific region. Statistics show the percentage of women in local government seats range from a high of 33 percent to a low of 2 percent. There are even fewer women in management positions in local government.

Women in South Asia and the East Asia and Pacific sub-regions have had more electoral success overall than those in South-East Asia. In South Asia this success is directly related to a quota of reserved seats being allocated for women, a measure that, when introduced, instantly changed the level of women's involvement. In East Asia and the Pacific the numbers reflect the length of time women have been able to vote and stand for election; the overall level of development in most of these countries and the social and economic circumstances within which women live, and the long campaigns for changes to increase the numbers.

Women have had more success at gaining access to decision-making positions in local government than to those at central government level. Research has shown that this is due mainly to:

- local government being easier for women to fit into their lives along with family responsibilities and employment;
- local government being more accessible as there are more positions available and less competition for places than in central legislatures;
- reserved seats for women on local authorities (in some countries);
- more acceptance of women in city and community government as it is seen as an extension of women's involvement in their communities.

### **3. Factors that Affect Women's Involvement in Local Government**

There are three key factors affecting women's involvement:

#### **3.1 Laws, Practices and Initiatives that ensure participation**

These include:

##### *(a) Statutory Provisions*

All 13 countries have statutory provisions that guarantee women the right to participate. All have also signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which guarantees political and civil rights, although there are some reservations in some countries.

##### *(b) National Policies and Programme*

These guarantees have led to policies and programmes which aim to work for change in women's lives. Some governments have established specific women's departments and plans.

##### *(c) Local Government Requirements*

Some local governments are required to ensure participation although this is not always gender specific.

##### *(d) Role of NGOs*

NGOs have taken a major role in encouraging women to participate.

##### *(e) Training*

Training is a crucial factor in encouraging women to participate and in ensuring this participation is effective. Training is provided throughout the whole region by NGOs, governments, political parties and training institutes. Some local governments have set up orientation and training programmes for women.

##### *(f) Regional and International Conferences*

These provide support, training and momentum for initiatives that increase the numbers of women.

##### *(g) Initiatives by Women In Local Government*

Women within local government encourage women to participate and have established their own associations for support and training.

##### *(h) Data Collection*

The collection of data on women's participation in local government adds to the visibility of women.

#### **3.2 Barriers to participation**

These include:

##### *(a) Fundamental Inequality*

While women have constitutional rights they are not seen as equal, their roles are closely tied to their reproductive and household activities, and politics and community affairs are seen as unsuitable for them. In many countries women are constrained by obstacles such as culture and tradition (the view that men are superior to women), religion, political turmoil, violence, money, workloads and lack of opportunities. Demographic statistics, particularly in the South Asia sub-region, show low literacy rates, poor health rates and poverty, all of which point to

a lack of basic rights to such things as education, health care, safety and employment opportunities.

*(b) Political and Economic Instability*

Political and economic instability affects the development of a political culture with democratic norms. Socio-economic norms and religious interpretations are frequently used for challenging and reinterpreting women's rights and creating insecurity for women. And while women have equal political rights to participate, in reality they can be actively discouraged to do so. Highly patriarchal societies enforce rules, responsibilities and behaviour for women, enforcing these norms in ways that affect their self-confidence, limiting their access to information and skills and reinforcing their lower status.

*(c) Discrimination*

Women face discrimination when standing for office and when elected or appointed to local government positions. Attitudes that put politics and decision-making into the male preserve see women as incapable of management and governance roles

*(d) The Male Environment within Political Institutions*

While there are few women on decision-making bodies the styles and modes of working are those that are acceptable to men. This can limit the extent to which women can raise women's issues and issues of social justice. Some also find they are judged harshly by society and by their colleagues.

*(e) Costs*

Campaign expenses are prohibitive for women, particularly while they continue to earn less than men in the labour market. Once elected the rate of remuneration can be insufficient for what is, in some countries, almost a full time job. The lack of childcare and the timing of meetings can also be a barrier.

### 3.3 Impact of the Political System on Participation

The following aspects of political systems can affect women's involvement:

*(a) The Local Government System*

Women's involvement in local government can depend on the level of democracy practised. Women can be disadvantaged by a system of local government which is strictly controlled by central government, is totally reliant on central funding, has little accountability to its community and to which members are appointed. Women are more likely to participate in a devolved system of local government that, while working within central or state government statute, has more autonomy, greater financial freedom, holds regular elections and is open to change.

*(b) Electoral System*

The electoral system used for electing representatives has had a significant impact on women's access to political office. Proportional representation party list systems of election can result in more women being elected.

*(c) Wards versus At-Large Systems of Election*

There is also some evidence that local elections based on ward representation improve women's chances of being elected as women candidates are more likely to be known to voters than in an at-large election across the city. Wards also

enable more women to stand for election as campaigning costs are not as high as in a city wide election.

*(d) A Quota of Reserved Seats for Women*

The introduction of quotas systems for women in local government in many countries in the South Asia region has resulted in significant increases in the number of women being elected and employed.

*(e) Access to and Effectiveness of Reserved Seats*

Even with quotas there are barriers to women accessing reserved seats and effectively participating once there. In some cases reserved seats are decided through indirect election and women in reserved seats have little autonomy. Reserved seats can be seen as having an inferior status and a lack of constituency and the ability to be part of decision-making can still be blocked from within the system. Considerable support and training is needed to assist women to learn the way in which the political environment works and support is also needed to help them fulfil both their public and private roles.

*(f) Kinship Ties*

While kinship ties have enabled many women to access political positions, their election or appointment into political environments that remain inherently conservative and male can mean they have little opportunity to change policies, particularly for women. For women without family connections, barriers to participation remain.

*(g) Political Party Support for Women*

Political parties have historically acted as gatekeepers to women's participation in politics as with few positions available they only field a token number of women candidates, believing instead that voters prefer male politicians.

*(h) The Adversarial Nature of Politics*

Women are not prepared to be involved in political environments which support an aggressive culture, combative debate and personality conflicts as well as male colleagues who have difficulty coping with women and so belittle and personally attack them. The increasing corruption in politics is another disincentive.

#### **4. The Impact of Women as Transformative Leaders**

There is a growing recognition of the impact that women have on political institutions and agendas. Their different approaches to governance have been defined as a version of transformative leadership, a framework within which power is used to create change and develop people and communities. This type of leadership is non-hierarchical and participatory, and it gives priority to disadvantaged sectors.

As part of the research undertaken for the 13 country reports on which this analysis is based, questionnaires were distributed to women in each country in order to find out the impact these women have on local government and the impact that more women are likely to have. It is clear that these women believe they practise transformative leadership. The evidence they present is of different agendas and styles from men and they show that their presence has an impact on local government and on women in general. The nature of their leadership is

defined by the issues they promote, their style of leadership and their impact on equality.

#### *4.1. The Issues they Promote*

These women say they have:

- a greater sense of social issues and the well being and welfare of their communities. Their priorities are more likely to centre on housing, safety, clean water, sanitation, education, the social implications of policies, health services, childcare, poverty alleviation and community development.
- a commitment to improving the environment within their communities. In planning city development, local government women take into account the physical considerations, the quality of life, harmony in art and culture and environmental development.
- different priorities and are prepared to spend time on issues that some men find trivial such as family issues, dowry problems and violence against women and children.
- a focus on change, preferring a more democratic and transparent approach to governance in an effort to move away from the adversarial and, in some cases, corrupt image of politics.

#### *4.2. Their style of Leadership*

They say their leadership:

- is more inclusive, collaborative and consultative
- is more tolerant of different points of view
- is more people orientated
- encourages participation
- places a higher emphasis on the importance of good communication with their communities
- uses more democratic and facilitative forms of decision-making
- is based on leadership by example, focusing on the issues rather than personalities
- is more assertive, innovative and conscientious.

#### *4.3. Their Impact on Equality*

The women said that they encourage equality by:

- encouraging more women to be politically aware and to participate
- promoting gender equity policies
- providing role models for other women and promoting women to decision-making positions
- improving the status of women by promoting policies, projects and funding for development that increases understanding of conditions for women and children
- changing the environment of local government, making it more people friendly, consultative and more transparent.

- changing the focus of policies and services within local government to take account of the real needs of the community.
- accelerating change.

## **5. Proposals for Change**

The priority is to increase significantly the number of women in local government. It is clear that 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.

The research suggests four key strategies.

### *5.1. Changes to the systems within which local government operates*

- A quota of reserved seats for women to be implemented in countries where few women have been elected. These reserved seats to be permanent, filled through direct and open elections and to have the same status as general seats
- Proportional representation systems of voting be implemented
- The number of elected positions at community level be maintained
- Wards systems for electing representatives be retained
- EEO programmes to ensure more women are employed in local government and to enable more women to move into senior management positions
- Elected representatives to be paid at a level that will enable more women to participate
- Local government implement the policies outlined in Agenda 21 on good governance
- Consultation processes be established to ensure women participate
- Funding allocated for gender and development that emphasises capacity building, networking and advocacy
- Women's standing committees be established
- Recruitment by political parties of women candidates

### *5.2. Ways of changing attitudes towards women in local government*

- The culture of local government needs to change to ensure that women are treated fairly and equally and to make sure that discrimination against women is not acceptable
- Gender awareness programmes for men and women need to be developed
- Local government needs to be more women friendly. Consensus style politics and meetings at times that fit into the other responsibilities that women have, will enhance the political environment

- Opportunities need to be made available for women as soon as they are elected to learn about local government and their governance role and to provide them with support.

### *5.3. Strategies to increase the number of women*

- Strategies need to be adopted to change policies and structures that perpetuate women's subordinate status
- Policies on economic and social empowerment are needed to enable women to participate on an equal footing with men
- Local government needs to work closely with NGOs, civil societies and women's groups to develop communities and services that take account of the needs of women
- Women in local government need financial support, childcare, support systems and training opportunities
- Women's associations to be established for women councillors and managers in local government to provide a voice for women's views and a base for networking
- Women in local government need to encourage more women to participate
- Funds to be established to assist women to run for election
- Gender-disaggregated statistics need to be collected to increase the visibility of women.

### *5.4. Training*

- Training programmes to be established by NGOs, political parties, educational and political institutions to help women in local government develop skills and self confidence and to enable them to learn the functions and processes within this tier of government
- Training to be provided for women candidates on the political system, local government functions and processes
- Workshops be provided on gender awareness and development for both women and men in order to educate people on women's rights and the importance of women's equality
- Girls and young women's education should include training on self-reliance, self-confidence and their potential for decision-making positions.

## **6. 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 become more women friendly and political agendas include women and development issues. While there are already regional networks in the Asia and Pacific area that focus on women's empowerment, none of these focus primarily on women in local government.

Regional actions should focus on:

- Establishing regional targets for increasing the number of women in local government within timeframes and monitoring progress achieved.
- Promoting exchange of experience and information as well as comparative research.
- Promoting regional, sub-regional and country-based training programmes on gender mainstreaming, training for women already in local government and for women aspiring for positions in local government.
- Catalysing resource mobilisation at the country level to support training and campaigns for women candidates in local governments.

## **7. Conclusions**

This comparative analysis of the 13 country reports on women in local government in Asia and the Pacific 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.

## 1. Introduction

The experience gained in Asia and the Pacific through a number of initiatives and 'best practices' aimed at improving living conditions in urban and rural areas indicates that these may not take root and spread unless they are supported by good governance and state reform, particularly at the local level. One of the key elements of good governance is women's representation in policy-making forums, local authorities and civic organisations. Unless women are involved in the decision and policy-making process of the state, changes in women's political, and to some extent social and economic status, will continue to be marginal.

The role of women in leadership positions has been the focus of much debate in the last two decades. At the international level, the United Nations conferences on women have, in particular, advocated the need to increase the number of women in decision-making positions, not only to ensure that women's interests are represented but also because of growing evidence that women's involvement improves the way in which leadership and decision-making is practised. Within the Asia and Pacific region the initiatives to encourage women's political participation have, up until now, focused mainly on women's leadership at central government level. However, women have always been an integral part of their communities and they take a very active role in village life, community organisations, towns and cities. Local government is much closer to this level of participation and is often a first step into a political decision making arena in which real differences can be made.

This comparative report draws together a picture of women's involvement in local government in the Asia and Pacific region. It is based on 13 country reports prepared for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and highlights continuing barriers to women's involvement in local government, initiatives that have increased women's participation and the transformative leadership that women provide in local government. It also discusses regional and country-level strategies for increasing women's involvement in local government.

### Background

The participation and representation of women in local government has been poorly documented in Asia and the Pacific, as it has been internationally. In recognising the importance of women's involvement in decision-making in this tier of government and the need to develop local and regional strategies to increase this involvement, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific initiated a project in 2000 to document and increase awareness of the current situation as well as to identify strategies that will increase the number of women in local government.

An Expert Group was established to prepare State of Women in Local Government reports for selected countries in South and East Asia and the

Pacific. The Expert Group comprised selected women from the following countries: Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. This group met in Thailand in June 2000 to discuss preparation of these reports.

The objective of these country reports was to document the situation and the perspectives of women in local government; to increase the awareness of the transformative role women can play in local government; and highlight the issues and constraints they face while working with and leading local government. The State of Women in Local Government country reports include:

- 1) In-depth qualitative and comparative analysis of issues of women's participation and representation in government.
- 2) Relevant gender statistics.
- 3) The steps taken by government organisations, NGOs, political parties, civic society and the media to increase the role of women in local government and to gender sensitise local government.
- 4) The further steps needed to promote the role of women in local government
- 5) Profiles of successful elected and appointed women in local government which emphasise the factors that contributed to their success and difficulties they have faced.
- 6) A regional database of individuals and organisations working on promoting the role of women in local government.

Information in these 13 country reports incorporates demographic data on women's lives, including education levels, labour force participation, share of income, fertility rates and mortality statistics. These reports also include: descriptions of the political and government structures in each country; statistics on women's participation in politics; statutory requirements that provide women with political and civil rights; and the special measures taken to train and support women to participate in local government and other activities by NGOs, political parties and others that supports women's involvement. Qualitative research was also carried out in order to gather first hand material on the experiences of women already in local government. Questionnaires were distributed to 20 women in local government in each country and while this number was seen as being too small for the results to be interpreted as representative of all women in local government, they have been looked at alongside other research results.

The preparation of these individual country reports on the State of Women in Local Government was a joint project of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Network of Local Government Training and Research Institutes in Asia and the Pacific (LOGOTRI) and the Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements (CITYNET). Funding was provided through the Japan-ESCAP

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The reports were prepared by:

Country	Expert
Comparative analysis	Ms Jean Drage, School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
Australia	Ms Roslyn Irwin, Lecturer in Social Science, Southern Cross University, PO Box 157, Lismore NSW 2480, Australia
Bangladesh	Dr Farzana Islam, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka and Member Centre for Urban Studies Dhaka, Room 402, Minita Plaza, 54 New Elephant Road, Dhaka 1205, Bangladesh
China	Ms Wang Jinping, No. 9, Salihe Road, Ministry of Construction Building, Beijing, and Ms Deng Ou, Fushun Municipality, Liaoning Province, China
India	Dr Sneha Palnitkar, Director, All India Institute of Local Self Government, Sthanikraj Bhavan, C.D. Barfiwala Marg, Andheri (West), Mumbai 400 058, India
Japan	Ms Atsuko Miwa, Consultant, 80-1-308, Kitashirakawa-Oiwake-Cho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-8224, and Ms Hiroko Hashimoto, Professor, Jumonji Women's College, Suga-Sawa, Niza-Shi, Saitama-Ken, Japan
Malaysia	Madam Yong Ai Lin, Local Government Department, Ministry of Housing and Local Government of Malaysia, Tingkat 4, Blok K, Damansara Town Center (Pusat Bandar Damansara), PO Box 12579, 50782 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Nepal	Ms Savitri Devei Shrestha, Lumanti, Shelter Group for Housing, Koupondole, Lalitpur, PO Box 10456, Nepal
New Zealand	Ms Jean Drage, Lecturer in Local Government and Politics, School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations, Victoria University of Wellington, PO Box 600, Wellington, New Zealand
Pakistan	Ms Rukhshanda Naz, Aurat Foundation, H. No. T 255, Khyber Colony No. 2, Tahkai Payan Peshawar, NWFP, Pakistan
Philippines	Ms Mary Jane C. Ortega, City Mayor, City Hall, City of San Fernando (La Union) 2500, Philippines
Sri Lanka	Mrs Mana Gunatilake, Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, No. 330, Union Place, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Thailand	Ms Premrudee Charmpoonod, Mayor, Phitsanulok Municipality, 1299 Boromtrilokanak 2 Raod, Muang District, Phitsanulok 65000, and Mr Noppadon Sinpaisansomboon, Division of Public Health and Environment, City of Municipality Phitsanulok, 1299 Boromtrilokanak 2 Road, Muang District, Phitsanulok 65000; and Ms Cholada (writes the report on behalf of Ms Premrudee and Mr Noppadon, and Mrs Wattana Phaisurat, Bureau of Local Government Affairs Division, Department of Local Administration, Sunantha Palace, Ratchasima Road, Dusit, Bangkok 10300, Thailand
Vietnam	Mrs Le Thi Quy, Centre for Family and Women's Studies, 6 Dinh Cong Trang, Hanoi, Vietnam

### Objectives of this Comparative Report

The objectives of this comparative analysis of the 13 country reports prepared on the state of women in local government in Asia and Pacific countries are to:

1. Present a picture of women's involvement in local government across the Asia and Pacific region.
2. Highlight the factors that promote women's participation in local government and the barriers that continue to limit or constrain this involvement.
3. Describe initiatives that have been taken to actively increase women's involvement in local government.
4. Document the impact that women have as transformational leaders in local government.
5. Develop proposals, for discussion at the Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors, on both regional and country based initiatives to bring more women into local government

### Sub-regional structure of Comparative Analysis

This comparative report is designed to set the scene for the Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors in Phitsanulok, Thailand in June 2001. While the structure of this comparative report is based on presenting the issues and strategies for change, it is also designed to be a tool for workshop discussions. As these workshops will be organised within sub-regional groupings this report presents much of the data from the 13 country reports sub-regionally. This will ensure ease of access to information specific to each country or sub region as well as to issues that are common across the whole region. It will also assist with the development of strategies for future action on a sub-regional basis.

The sub-regional groupings in this report are:

#### **South Asia**

Sri-Lanka, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh;

#### **South-East Asia**

Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines;

#### **East Asia and the Pacific**

China, Vietnam, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

## 2. The Current Situation

International data collected on the extent of women's participation in government at both local and central levels shows that, despite some improvements in some parts of the world in the last two decades, women are still profoundly underrepresented. For women in Asia and the Pacific, the picture is similar. The highest percentage of women in local government seats is 33.3 percent and the lowest is 2 percent. Women have had the most success in the South Asia and the East Asia and Pacific sub-regions while the South-East Asia sub-region has the lowest numbers of women. As the following discussion will show the reasons for this are related to a number of factors:

- The length of time women have had the right to vote and participate;
- Political and electoral arrangements;
- Whether or not there is a quota of reserved seats for women;
- The level of development in a country; and the social and economic circumstances in which women live.

This section records the statistics on the numbers of women currently in local government positions in the 13 countries in this report. It also provides a brief overview of local government in each country. The intention is to present a picture of the current situation to provide a starting point for future discussion.

### South Asia

As Table One shows, in three countries in this sub-region (India, Nepal and Bangladesh) women hold between 24 and 33 percent of seats in local authorities. These statistics are directly related to the introduction of quota systems for women in the local government systems in these countries. The impact of these quotas can be seen when compared with the much lower percentages of women in other levels of government and in management positions.

Table One: Women in Local Government in South Asia, 2000

Country	Year women were eligible to vote and stand for Local Government	Women in Local Government seats % of Total	Women Mayors % of Total	Women in Senior Management Positions in Local Government	Women in Central Government % of Total
Sri Lanka	1938	2	0	13.7	5.3
India	1947	33.3			7.9
Pakistan	1970	33			2.9
Nepal	1955	24.1	0	2.3	7.9
Bangladesh	1947	33.3	0	3.8	11.2

### *Sri Lanka*

At the local government level, Sri Lanka has both provincial and local government. There are three types of local authorities at the local level: 14 Municipal Councils, 37 Urban Councils and 258 Pradeshiya Sabhas, the latter

being rurally based. Elections are run on a proportional representation system and there is a requirement that 40 percent of the candidates on the nomination lists are required to be between the ages of 18 and 35 years. This is to ensure youth representation on local authorities. Women hold 4 percent of provincial council seats and 2 percent of municipal and urban council seats. So far there have been 3 women mayors although there are none at present. Slightly more women have been appointed to management positions in local government – an average of 9.5 percent at provincial level and 23.3 percent at local level (13.7 percent in the top positions). At central government level there are 12 women MPs (5.3 percent), the highest decision-making positions (President and, until recently, the Prime Minister) are held by women, and two other women hold ministerial responsibilities for women's affairs, social services, health, trade and food.

### *India*

India has three types of urban local government: municipal corporations for cities with more than 0.3 million people; municipal councils for towns smaller than this; and nagar panchayats for villages in transition to becoming towns. These local bodies are all elected. There are also three tiers of rural local authorities: the district council for about 1,000 villages; the block panchayat samiti for about 100 villages; and the village panchayat at the village level. The rural local bodies are funded by and act as implementing agencies for state governments. Elections to both the urban and rural local bodies in India are ward based with one third of the wards being reserved for women candidates. Some other wards are reserved for candidates from socially underprivileged sections. There are about 1 million elected women representatives in panchayats and municipal bodies in India. There is also a one third reservation for women for the position of chairperson on these local bodies. Only 5.7 percent of the total number of government administration positions are filled by women. At central and state government levels in India, women occupy 7.9 percent of the parliamentary seats and approximately 5 percent of state level seats. In the past 50 years since independence the number of women elected to state legislatures has averaged 3 to 5 percent while at parliamentary level the average has been between 5 to 7 percent. At the national level there is currently one woman Cabinet Minister and 8 Ministers of State in a Cabinet of 70.

### *Pakistan*

On the western side of this sub-region, Pakistan consists of four provinces: Punjab, Sindh, North Western Frontier Province and Balochistan. Local government is established within these provinces with rural areas being divided into Zila councils (districts), Tehsil councils (sub-districts) and Union councils (village level). Elections have until recently only been held infrequently. However under a Devolution of Power Plan introduced in 2000, elections have now been held for Union councils. At all levels of local government 33 percent of seats are now reserved for women and 20 percent reserved for workers/peasants. These reserved seats are filled through direct election on Union councils while on district

and sub-district level councils, these reserved seats are indirectly elected. At central government level there are 9 women elected to 304 seats (2.9 percent): 7 in the 217 seat National Assembly (3 percent) and 2 in the 87 seat Senate (2.3 percent). At the ministerial level there is currently one woman minister of state (1 out of a total of 21). At provincial level there are only 2 women elected to the 483 provincial assemblies seats (0.4 percent) and no women ministers.

### *Nepal*

Nepal has 58 municipalities and 3,995 village development committees. Municipal councillors are elected on a ward basis and mayors elected at-large. Women have had the right to exercise and contest the franchise since 1955 and one woman was elected to the Kathmandu City Municipal Board in the very first local elections. A quota of 20 percent of seats has been allocated to women as an acknowledgement of their need to participate in the decision-making process in local bodies. The Local Bodies Act states that at least one of every five seats in each ward of the municipality should be reserved for a woman. In addition there are also six seats reserved for social workers, disadvantaged, caste and aboriginal groups. Currently there are 806 elected women (24.1 percent) in municipal government. At central government level the Parliament has both an upper and lower house. Overall there are currently 21 women in parliament (7.9 percent): 9 in the National Assembly – the upper house (15 percent) and 12 in the House of Representatives – the lower house (5.8 percent). There are few women in the civil service – 2 at senior management or special class level (2.3 percent).

### *Bangladesh*

Bangladesh is divided into six administrative divisions within which are districts and Thanas or sub-districts. Local government is divided into 225 urban based municipalities or Pourashava and 4,451 rural micro areas known as unions and about 80,000 grams or villages. Elections are held for urban local government with councillors/commissioners elected on a ward basis while mayors and chairmen are elected at-large. While elections are held every five years, at present, due to political reasons, many Purashavas, municipalities and city corporations' terms are over and elections have not been held. Local authorities are strictly controlled by central government and totally dependent on government funding. One third of municipal and union seats are reserved for women and in the last elections in 1997 for union seats nearly 48,000 women stood for seats. Currently Bangladesh has a woman Prime Minister and a woman leader of the opposition. However their high position in politics is not a reflection of women's political position overall in this country as both women come from political families and their election has not led to a great number of other women being elected. There are 300 seats in the national parliament and 30 of these are reserved for women. The rest are directly elected and in the general election held in 2000 seven women were directly elected so increasing the number of women in central government to 37(11.2 percent).

## South-East Asia

Overall the numbers of women in decision-making positions in local government in this sub-region are the lowest in this comparative report (see Table Two). All the countries in this sub-region have three levels of government, central, state or province and local.

Table Two: Women in Local Government in South East Asia, 2000

Country	Year women were eligible to vote and stand for Local Government	Women in Local Government seats % of Total	Women Mayors % of Total	Women in Senior Management Positions in Local Government	Women in Central Government % of Total
Thailand	1932	6.7	0.5	0.06	7.8
Malaysia	1957	9.8	0.7	0	14.1
Philippines	1937	16.5	18	32.5	12

### *Thailand*

Thailand has three levels of government: central, provincial and local. At central government level the bicameral parliament has an appointed Senate of 200 members and an elected House of Representatives with 500 members. Provincial government is based on 75 provinces that are divided into districts, sub-districts and villages. At local government level there are cities and municipalities that govern urban centres in the provinces. As well there is the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration administered by an elected governor and divided in 38 districts. Some positions in local government are elected and some appointed but this is changing. The first election held for a mayor resulted in a woman being elected in Prathumthani. Currently there are 8 women mayors (0.53 percent) and women fill approximately 6.79 percent of local government seats in Thailand. 30 percent of city clerks are women as are 40 percent of executives. There are 44 women in the National Parliament (7.8 percent): 22 women in the Senate (10.9 percent) and 22 in the House of Representatives (6.1percent).

### *Malaysia*

Malaysia also has three levels of government: central, state and local. The bicameral National Parliament has a 43 seat Senate and a 193 seat House of Representatives. All central government seats are elected as are the 373 seats at state level. While there are also 2,921 seats at local government level, elections to local authorities have been suspended since the 1960s. The 1976 Local Government Act replaced the system of elected representatives with one in which local councillors are now appointed. These appointments are political ones made by supporters of the Front, the party in government. In 1998 there were 285 women in local government seats (9.8 percent) and one woman mayor (0.7 percent). In state legislatures there are currently 21 women (5.6 percent) and at national government level there are 39 women (14.1 percent), 18 in the senate (29 percent) and 21 in the House of Representatives (9.8 percent). There are also two women in the Cabinet. Within the public service the gap between men

and women widens as they move into higher grades. The distribution is fairest in the managerial and professional group.

### *Philippines*

In the Philippines central government consists of a bicameral legislature with 24 senators and a 220 member House of Representatives. At provincial and local levels there are 78 provinces, 87 cities, 1,534 municipalities and 42,000 barangays. Currently 2,102 women councillors have been elected to the 12,680 contested seats (16.5 percent) and women fill almost 18 percent of mayoral posts and 12.7 percent of vice-mayoral positions. At the gubernational level women are in 233 of the 1544 positions (21.3 percent). At central government level there are 29 women (12 percent): 2 in the Senate (8.3 percent) and 27 in the House of Representatives (12.2 percent). The Philippines has a woman President and 2 women in the cabinet heading social welfare and tourism departments. Within the government bureaucracy there are more women than men. Women are in 32.5 percent of the highest level positions, 72.2 percent of second level positions and 34 percent of third level positions.

### East Asia and the Pacific

The number of women in political positions in local and central government in the East Asia and the Pacific sub-region is comparatively high compared to the other sub-regions in the study. In Australia and New Zealand all local body representatives are elected, in Japan and Vietnam the majority are elected and China has a system of direct and indirect election. The current situation is shown in Table Three.

Table Three: Women in Local Government in East Asia and the Pacific, 2000

Country	Year women were eligible to vote and stand for Local Government	Women in Local Government seats % of Total	Women Mayors % of Total	Women in Senior Management Positions in Local Government	Women in Central Government % of Total
China	1949	22.1	69.3*	NK	21.8
Vietnam	1946	19.8	3	2.1	26.2
Japan	1946	6.2	0.5	3#	10.7
Australia	1908	26.3	15	5.1	25
New Zealand	1910	31.5	26	5.8	30.8

\*Mayors and deputy-mayors in cities only

#Senior management positions in prefecture and designated city offices only

### *China*

China's local government consists of a system of local people's congresses at provincial, prefecture, city and county levels. Those above the county level are elected indirectly by people's congresses at a lower level while counties and cities are elected directly by the people. The number of women on these local congresses range from 4,524 at provincial level (21.5 percent) and 144,367 at the county level (22.1 percent). There are a large number of women mayors in

city level government in China – 463 (69.3 percent). At central government level the National People's Congress has 650 women delegates (21.8 percent).

### *Vietnam*

Local government in Vietnam consists of people's councils and people's committees at provincial, district, commune, ward and township level. People's councils consist of locally elected people. People's committees are elected by the people's councils as they are the executive of people's councils as well as administrative bodies of the State in localities. Women have clearly had more success at being elected to people's councils than appointed to people's committees. Currently the percentage of women on people's councils at provincial level is 22.5 percent, 20.7 percent at district level and 16.3 percent at commune level. Data on women on people's committees at these levels of local government show a range between 4.5 percent and 6.4 percent. At the central government level women have been elected to 26.2 percent of seats in the National Assembly, there is a woman vice President and five women ministers (11.9 percent). On the administration side there are 46 women chiefs of government departments or institutes (13 percent).

### *Japan*

Japan has a two-tiered system of local government with 47 prefectures at the regional level and municipalities at the local level. Of these municipalities, 12 are designated cities with populations of over one million, 659 cities, 23 special wards of Tokyo and 2,558 towns and villages. In total there are 3,872 women in local government seats at this time (6.2 percent). There are 158 on prefecture assemblies (5.5 percent), 1,821 on city assemblies (9.8 percent), 1,702 on town and village assemblies (4.2 percent) and 191 on special wards assemblies (19.7 percent). Heads of each local government (mayors and governors) and representatives of its assembly are directly elected. Deputy heads of local government (deputy mayors and vice governors) are appointed and are usually high-ranking officials, either of the central government or the respective local governments. Currently there are 2 women governors, 3 women mayors, 2 women town heads and 1 woman village head while 10 women are deputy leaders (7 vice governors and 3 deputy mayors). At senior management level the numbers of women are also low – 3.4 percent in prefecture offices and 2.9 percent in specially designated city offices. At the national government level there are 43 women elected in the upper house, the House of Councillors (17.1 percent) and 35 in the lower house, the House of Representatives (7.3 percent).

### *Australia*

A federal state, Australia has a national government, 8 state/territory governments and 683 units of local government, 254 of which are urban councils. Of 6,637 local politicians, 1,745 are women (26.3 percent). All councils are headed by a Mayor or President who is either directly elected by the people or by the other councillors. Currently there are 122 women mayors (15 percent). At central government level there are 22 women in the Senate (28.9 percent) and

34 in the House of Representatives (23 percent). Within the state government there are a total of 37 women in the upper houses (23.6 percent) and 94 in lower houses (21.4 percent). In total there are 29 women at ministry levels in the federal and state governments. While women's employment within the senior public service is increasing there are no women chief executives at federal level and 7 at State/ territory levels. There are 35 women chief executives in local governments (5.1 percent).

### *New Zealand*

There are 86 units of local government in New Zealand, 74 of which are territorial authorities (city and district councils) and 12 regional councils. Some of these local authorities also have community boards. All territorial authorities have an elected mayor while regional councils elect a chairperson from among those already elected to the council. Currently there are 19 women mayors (26 percent). In total there are 596 elected women in local government at present (31.5 percent), 259 of them being on city and district councils, 37 on regional councils, 281 on community boards and 19 mayors. At central government level there are 37 women MPs in the 120 seat Parliament (30.8 percent). New Zealand has a woman Prime Minister and a woman Leader of the Opposition and 11 women hold ministerial portfolios (50 percent of women elected in the governing parties), 7 of them in Cabinet. Within the public service 23.9 percent of chief executives are women. Women have not been as successful on the senior management side of local government as only 5 chief executives are women (5.8 percent).

### **3. Factors that Affect Women's Involvement in Local Government**

While women are underrepresented in positions of political power worldwide they have clearly had more success at gaining access to local level decision-making positions than to those at central government level. The reason for this has been attributed largely to the everyday realities of women's lives. Participation in local government is easier for women to fit into their lives, along with family, household responsibilities and employment. Local government is also seen as more accessible as there are more positions available and less competition for places than in state and central parliaments. Local government can also be less intimidating as it is an extension of the great deal of involvement that women already have within their communities. As a result of more women being elected to local government councils, the environment has become more open to them being there, to women's issues being on the agenda and to equal employment opportunities for staff. Much of this acceptance has been aided in the last two decades by a very active women's movement, campaigns developed to increase the numbers and, in some instances, by the statutory requirement for quotas of women.

Despite this progress, however, as our figures show there are still fewer women in local government than men. Part of the reason for this is historical as originally only land and property owners could vote or stand for office and as early laws prohibited women from owning land, local government has inherently been very male. As the figures in Tables One to Three show, in some countries in Asia and the Pacific women have had the right to vote and stand for political office for only about 50 years. Cultural and traditional barriers to women's involvement in public life can run alongside limits on other basic rights such as education, health care, and employment opportunities as well as political freedom and safety. Further barriers to participation can include discrimination against women candidates by political parties and by electors; the difficulty of being elected within first-past-the-post electoral systems as opposed to proportional representation systems and in at-large districts as opposed to ward systems; the costs of being involved and the need to juggle other responsibilities alongside the commitments of public office; and the fact that women are just not prepared to stand for local government because of the adversarial nature of politics.

The State of Women in Local Government country reports, on which this comparative analysis is based, all provide specific details on the laws, practices and initiatives that ensure women have the right to participate, and the constraints and issues that remain in each country. All country reporters were asked to provide indepth analysis of the factors that help and hinder women's participation and access to decision-making positions in local government. An overview of much of this information follows. It is again presented sub-regionally and the countries in each sub-region are in the same order as in the last section. Within each sub-region the information is presented under four headings: Laws

and Practices that Ensure the Right to Participate; Programmes and Initiatives that Support Women's Involvement; Barriers to Participation; and The Impact of the Political System on Participation. (These are also presented in tabular form in the Appendix at the end of this report).

One crucial point to be made first though is that all of the 13 countries in this analysis have statutory provisions that guarantee women the right to participate and all have signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which guarantees political and civil rights for women, although there are some reservations to this.

### South-Asia

#### *Laws and Practices that Ensure the Right to Participate*

All countries in this sub-region have constitutions that guarantee rights to equality and freedom. **Sri Lanka's** constitution guarantees freedom of speech, expression and association and while there are no laws that promote women's participation in urban local government the Constitution stipulates that no person shall be discriminated against on the grounds of sex. There is also a special provision for the advancement of women, children and disabled persons. In elections for local authorities the law requires that at least 40 percent of candidates on nomination lists are between the age of 18 and 35 years, this being to ensure youth representation in this tier of government. In 1998 a Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms received submissions requesting that similar provisions be made for women's representation. While this Commission of Inquiry rejected this proposal on democratic grounds it did recommend that election of representatives to local bodies should be based on a ward system. Other recommendations proposed by this Commission to ensure women's participation in local authorities were the creation of forums for dialogue between elected councillors and youth and women's groups, compulsory inclusion of women and youth on various committees and opportunities for women, youth and other special groups to contest elections. There are several government-run programmes for training employees and those elected to local authorities, although most of these programmes are not gender specific. The Sri Lanka Institute of Local Governance was recently established to provide this training.

In **India** the constitution includes prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth and equality of opportunity in matters of employment. In 1992 the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Indian Constitution reserved one third of all seats for women in local government in urban areas and a one third reservation of all chairpersons' positions on these local bodies for women. This legislative move was seen as a major breakthrough in ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in local government. It was also seen as ensuring democracy and effectiveness within local government. While these amendments were introduced only at local government level there is

now a very active campaign to also have quotas for women at other levels of government activity.

Reservation of a quota of seats for women, however, is only the first step in ensuring that a certain number of women are involved in local government. The next step has been to ensure they have the capacity to fulfil the role and make a difference. To this end most local governments run orientation / training programmes on all aspects of local government, including legislation, budgeting, services and management. As well, Urban Development Programmes at both central and state government levels organise training programmes on municipal administration, urban development and capacity building. All levels of government in India also collect gender-disaggregated data for use in policy and programme formulation and quantitative and qualitative data on the number of women and men employed in the various levels of government and on elected women's participation rates.

**Pakistan's** constitution states that women and men have equal rights and guarantees equality of citizens before the law, forbidding discrimination on the basis of sex alone and providing for affirmative action for women. The Principles of Policy state that steps will be taken to ensure the full participation of women in all spheres of national life. This policy provides for reserved seats for women with about 10 percent of seats reserved for women in the National Assembly and 5 percent in Provincial Assemblies. There is also provision for 33 percent reserved seats for women in local government.

While **Nepal** also has a constitution that guarantees formal equality for women, the government is currently initiating new policies to promote women's opportunities in education, employment and political decision-making in order to overcome some of the inequities that continue for women in this country. As part of this, Local Government legislation requires that a minimum of 20 percent of all elected positions be reserved for women. As well, there are legal provisions to reserve 6 seats on local authorities for members representing social workers, disadvantages, deprived caste and aboriginal groups. The municipalities also develop programmes to increase women's participation in their decision-making processes and other activities. Special provisions have also been implemented to enable more women to be employed in the civil service and the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare has a role in training women to take on these jobs.

In **Bangladesh** the constitution provides for formal equality of women and men with women being entitled to the same fundamental rights as men. Article 10 of the constitution ensures the participation of women in all spheres of national life; Article 65(3) provides for reserved seats for women in parliament and Article 9 provides for the special representation of women in local government. One third of seats on local councils are reserved for women commissioners and there is a 10 percent quota for women in the civil service. However difficulties have been

experienced with these reservations as the responsibilities of women ward commissioners are not gazetted and the resulting confusion over their roles has undermined the status of these elected women. To date, they have mainly dealt with women's issues, particularly micro-credit programmes, handicrafts and professional training programmes. The spin off is that women are becoming more concerned about their rights and this has led to local government being compelled to introduce services for women such as transport, childcare and violence against women.

#### *Programmes and Initiatives that Support Women's Involvement*

Initiatives and support for women in **Sri Lanka** have come mainly from within local government itself. While some NGOs have launched programmes to increase women's participation and political parties have provided basic political education, a few local authorities have set up women's organisations and training programmes have been implemented for both elected and employed women. These training programmes include different aspects of gender and gender equity.

NGOs and the women's movement in **India** have been strong advocates for change. They have emphasised the need to strengthen women's participation and leadership, have provided training and support for women and they work on consciousness raising, their aim being to change women's perceptions about the need to be involved and to transform politics. Local governments have also set up orientation and training programmes to encourage women to participate in local governance. This training has specifically included material on municipal legislation, budgeting and taxation, service delivery systems (solid waste management, water supply, sewerage, health care services, traffic and transportation), poverty alleviation schemes, community and environmental management, shelter committees, reforms in municipal administration, functioning of ward committees, communication skills and women and development. Similar training programmes and workshops are organised by Urban Development departments at central and state levels. These include, in particular, capacity building programmes for elected women members and diploma courses on aspects of municipal administration for women employed in local government. Among the many groups providing training for elected women in local government is the All India Institute of Local Self Government, one of the premier training institutions. Women mayors meet during meetings organised by the All India Council of Mayors and have set up a formal association for support and interaction in order to exchange ideas and effective urban service delivery. There are also associations for women officials.

While one political party in **Pakistan**, Jamat-I-Islami, has started a training programme for women, it is at the NGO level that strategies for increasing women's participation in local government have been based. The Aurat Foundation, a women's organisation committed to the empowerment of women in governance roles, initiated a campaign based on public meetings, the preparation

and distribution of information and intensive lobbying to increase the number of women in local government. As a result quotas for women were bought in for local government seats in the Punjab and Balochistan provinces and for the first time in Pakistan's history individuals and groups were involved in the Local Government Plan 2000 which focused on devolving power and includes opportunities for training of councillors. Under this plan elections for local council were held between December 2000 and August 2001, with direct election for all seats and 33 percent of all seats being reserved for women. As a result the Aurat Foundation and several other organisations have started a campaign called the "Citizens' Campaign for Women's Representation in Local Government" as it was expected that at least 20,000 to 25,000 women would be elected to the lowest tier of the Union Council alone and these women would need support for campaigning as candidates and for effective participation once elected.

In **Nepal** the Municipal Association of Nepal, a non-governmental federation of urban local bodies, has conducted an orientation programme for local women on their role and the development of leadership. The Urban Development Training Centre has conducted similar programmes for women and different municipalities provide their own local courses.

In **Bangladesh** women are encouraged to participate by women's wings within political parties, NGOs, women's groups and civil society organisations, most of which run workshops and seminars which highlight the initiatives needed to improve the position of women. One NGO, Nijera Kori, organised women and encouraged them to participate in local elections. Local government has also encouraged women's participation through different programmes. In particular, the National Institute for Local Government conducts training programmes for women commissioners. These programmes focus on empowerment of women, gender and development and women's rights.

### *Barriers to Participation*

Demographic data from countries in the South Asia sub-region shows the inequitable position women are in when compared to men and this lack of real equality creates major barriers to women's participation in public life. In most cases women's lives are constrained by obstacles such as culture and tradition (the view that men are superior to women), religion, political turmoil, violence, money and lack of opportunities. Demographic statistics show low literacy rates, poor health rates and poverty.

For women in **Sri Lanka** increased access to education, employment and health care over the last 40 to 50 years has opened up opportunities for greater participation in the social life of this country. However, several constraints continue to prevent women from participating equally with men. These have been identified as gender inequality within families caused by male dominance and an inequitable division of labour within households which means that women's responsibilities to their family and children prevent them from

participating fully in outside activities. As well, assumptions about gender roles assign political and community affairs to men and exclude women from what are perceived to be unsuitable activities for women. As a result women feel vulnerable to intimidation as they are more likely to be publicly criticised for their activities than men are.

The demographic figures for women in **India** also show considerable disparities between women and men, these differences being the result of the traditional view that men are superior to women. Women's work is confined to the household and rearing of children and women's identity is attached to her father, husband and son. Women make up about 28 percent of the labour force and overall literacy rates show that for women the rate is 39.3 percent and for men 64.1 percent. While considerably more women are participating in formal politics (as a result of the quota system) and in grass roots political movements, obstacles such as the cost of standing for election and the abusive political environment remain. Even the smallest of elections requires money to stand as a candidate and women candidates face intimidation, violence and slander combined with ongoing opposition from men. Few electoral opportunities and a desire to field a winning candidate make most political parties shy away from fielding more than a token number of women candidates. Even if they are chosen, kinship and affinity factors play a major role. If elected, political representatives in local government find the role is demanding and all "new recruits" need time to gain experience and learn the rules and procedures. Effective participation can be hampered by a lack of understanding of urban development issues and municipal laws and administration; no knowledge or experience in dealing with the complexities of civic issues and urban service delivery systems; a lack of support and co-operation from colleagues and officials; the lack of money and resources; fear and insecurity; a lack of confidence and family responsibilities. As well, many women have found that they are often not equipped to become members of political parties as they have difficulty in attending meetings on policy issues as they are expected to fit in with the established structure and ideology of the party. While traditional values and attitudes prevail, women's issues are not part of the political agenda.

In **Pakistan** nearly two thirds of the adult population cannot read or write and nearly half of the population does not have access to basic primary health care and safe drinking water. Only 19.1 percent of women in rural areas are literate compared to 48.6 percent of men and in urban areas 52.2 percent of women are literate compared to 74.6 percent of men. Women have on average 8 children and both maternal and infant mortality rates are high. It is estimated that the maternal mortality rate is 340 for every 100,000 live births and the infant mortality rate for girls between the ages of 1 and 4 years is 66 percent higher than for boys. Pakistani society is so entrenched in culture that customary and traditional laws and practices usually override statutory law. Political turmoil, economic instability, martial law, war and internal strife have all affected the development of a democratic political culture, norms of sexual equality and respect for human

rights and the rule of law. All of these social, cultural, economic and historical factors have directly and indirectly affected the status and rights of women at every level of society and have negatively impacted on opportunities to participate in decision-making.

While the constitution guarantees equality, protection and non-discrimination, socio-cultural norms and religious interpretations are frequently used for challenging and re-deciding women's rights and creating insecurity for women. And although women have equal political rights to participate as voters and representatives, in reality they are actively discouraged to do so. They are prevented from exercising their right to vote by their families, tribes, clans, and local and spiritual leaders. Identification requirements also place hurdles in the way of them voting and agreements are made between candidates and political parties to restrain women from casting their vote. Even when they manage to be selected for local government seats, women face further barriers through the need to please the chairperson and other male councillors or they have no access to development projects and are unable to meet the needs of their constituencies. A highly patriarchal society enforces a set of rules, responsibilities and behaviour for women and subjects them to levels of abuse and public humiliation that enforce these norms, affect their self-confidence, limits their access to information and skills and reinforces their lower status.

Women in **Nepal** are in a similar position in that their literacy rate is 30 percent as compared to 66 percent for men, their health status is poor with 70 to 80 percent of women being anaemic, and infant and maternal mortality rates are high (the maternal mortality rate is 515 out of 100,000 live births). With the average life for women being 53.5 years as opposed to 55 for men, Nepal is one of the few countries in the world where life expectancy is lower for women than for men. The patriarchal structure within this country gives priority to the male child because he will earn the livelihood for the family, be responsible for elderly parents and ultimately be the decision-maker. Girls are socialised to be gentle, unassertive and to make sacrifices. Self-esteem, assertiveness and decision-making are not skills that are encouraged as girls are confined to the inside world of the home and lack access to the outside world of information, knowledge and resources. Religious belief places restrictions on young women, out of concern for the preservation of their chastity. As a result they face early marriage (in rural areas marriage can occur between the age of 12 and 14) and the perils of early pregnancies.

The purity of women is also an issue in **Bangladesh**, one of the poorest countries in the world. The reproductive years of 13 to 45 are a crucial part of women's lives and are a major determinant of their inability to participate in public life. Bangladesh women suffer from poverty, poor health (the maternal mortality rate is 850 per 100,000 births), a lack of awareness of the value of education and other social stigmas. Both primary and lower secondary schooling is free for girls

but the dropout rate is significant after this with statistics showing that the number of boys far exceeds the number of girls in secondary and tertiary education.

While considerable progress has been made in the election of women to local government positions in Bangladesh through the reservation of one third of all seats, reserved seats are not seen as having the same value as general ones. As well, once elected as women ward commissioners many women have found further obstacles as their positions are not equal to those filled by men. The fund they receive to do their work is comparatively lower than that received by male commissioners and as none of their work responsibilities have been gazetted for these women they cannot take development initiatives and actions without the permission of other ward commissioners, many of whom have been uncooperative. This is often due to the fact that male ward commissioners are opposed to women being in these positions and are not keen to share their financial or political power. On top of this is the reality for these women of having to juggle their local government role with their domestic schedules so making it difficult for them to take on committee leadership positions.

#### *The Impact of the Political System on Participation*

While all countries in this sub-region have processes that formally guarantee the right to participate in political activities, the informal practices that continue to support traditional and cultural inequities remain strong and create significant barriers for women. All of these countries have introduced quota systems within their local government systems in an attempt to break down these barriers: a legal requirement that takes a big picture approach rather than just attempting to chip away at the problem. For women in these countries a fundamental shift in numbers and thinking was needed rather than a case of getting a few more women into politics. For instance, since **India** gained independence in 1947 the development of a political system with equal rights and opportunities has neither resulted in women gaining access to decision-making positions as of right nor led to women's issues being part of the political agenda. For women in this country constitutional guarantees have not meant effective participation or political equality. The demand for a quota of 33 1/3 percent of elected seats for women was not based on the concept of advantage or privilege for women but rather it was seen by women to be a vital measure that ensured they became part of the mainstream of politics and development.

In **Nepal** where socio-economic and cultural discrimination is strong, quotas were introduced because of the belief that women have political rights and that reserved seats ensured their participation.

For women in **Bangladesh**, reserved seats for women commissioners and quotas for women in the civil service has meant the difference between almost no women in these positions and the recognition that women have the right to be there.

While the implementation of quota systems has resulted in considerably more women being elected and employed in local government than before, there are still barriers that continue to act against their effective participation. For example, when compared with directly elected positions, reserved seats can be seen as having an inferior status and a lack of constituency. As well, the ability to be part of decision-making can still be blocked from within the system. Considerable support and training is needed to assist women to learn the way in which the political environment works and support is also needed to help them fulfil both their public and private roles.

Another factor that has had an impact on women's participation rates is family connections. Many women in politics, particularly in parliamentary leadership roles, have achieved these positions, albeit indirectly, through personal associations with male politicians. This trend is also seen in local government. For example, in Bangladesh, of the 20 women commissioners who participated in this country's survey, 18 had family members who were or had been in central or local government or were active in political parties and all of them had been politically conscious from childhood and had been involved in politics for a long time. There is no doubt that while kinship can be responsible for political participation it also provides an environment for learning political skills and competition. And this environment is often very different to that in which other women in the same country are socialised. For women without such connections, barriers to participation remain while political environments are still inherently male and traditional.

The reality of women's lives in this sub-region is that while they have constitutional rights, they are not seen as equal, their roles are closely tied to their reproductive and household activities, and politics and community affairs are seen as unsuitable for them. In some cases the increasing corruption in politics has added to this as growing disillusionment over the inability of political parties to deliver and a lack of faith in the electoral process itself has resulted in a general downward trend in overall voter turnout. In Pakistan the reported voting rate of 61.9 percent had decreased to 35.4 percent by 1997.

### South-East Asia

#### *Laws and Practices that Ensure the Right to Participate*

All countries in the South-East Asia sub-region have constitutions that guarantee citizens the right to participate. **Thailand's** constitution guarantees women the right of vote. It has also ratified the Convention on the Political Rights of Women that guarantees political freedom. Formal barriers to the advancement of women in the civil service were removed in 1991 when the government ordered all government agencies to review their discriminatory regulations so that female civil servants could hold any positions except those related to national security. The National Women's Coordination Board, a government agency, has been set up to strengthen the potential of women, but at present their work has been mainly restricted to urban areas. At village level the Community Development

Department promotes women's roles and works to set up women's groups but these are currently more focused on the economic aspects of women's lives rather than their political role. At local government level local organisations have been established to strengthen communities and encourage participation and development. These provide women with the chance to be elected as a community leader. They also can lead to the setting up of women's development groups that help strengthen communities and women's role in that improvement. The Thailand Municipal League has attempted to promote the role of women in local administration. In particular, the Phitsanulok Municipality supports women to join the administration and as a result of this council objective there are currently three women, a deputy mayor and two councillors who have had the opportunity to learn and participate in local government.

In **Malaysia** the Federal Constitution ensures all Malaysians of all races and gender freedom to choose representatives of the people; freedom of movement; freedom of speech, assembly and association which includes the right to form and join associations, trade unions, political parties; freedom of religion and rights in respect of education. However there are neither laws nor policies mandating women's representation in local government nor any affirmative action programmes for the recruitment of women into public service employment at local government level. And while Malaysia has signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women they have a reservation to Article 7 (b) on the right to participate in the formulation of government policy.

The Women's Affairs department within the Prime Minister's Department and NGOs promote women's participation in development. The Women's Affairs department also plays a significant role in gender sensitisation at government and non-government levels through training programmes and research on women's needs to ensure these are incorporated in policy development. Liaison officers have been appointed at state and district levels to monitor the implementation and impact of projects for women.

The **Philippines'** Constitution recognises the fundamental equality of women and men and the New Family Code of 1987 affirms women's rights, such as participation of women in major decision making activities in the community and in their homes. Much progress was made on gender and development under the leadership of President Corazon Aquino. In particular, the Philippines Plan for Gender Responsive Development 1995-2025 was adopted. This is the government's 30 year blueprint of policies, programmes, projects and strategies wherein women are both major participants and beneficiaries in national development. Since 1996 the GAD or women's budget directs all government agencies to allocate five percent of their budgets to address gender issues. Women's concerns have also been integrated into the government poverty alleviation programmes through projects designed to spread economic opportunities, stopping violence measures and the setting up of day-care centres.

Under the Philippines Development Plan for Women, the National Commission on the Role of Filipino women undertakes programmes to raise the consciousness and train people in the government on gender analysis and sensitivity in planning and data collection.

A deliberate effort has also been made to have women represented in all decision-making bodies. The Department of Interior and Local Governments issued an administrative order stipulating 30 percent representation of women in all barangay assemblies and in all mandatory consultations within local and central government. As well the Local Government Code provides for a sectoral representative for women in the different local government units. And several local government have set up Focal Points for Gender and Development in order to mainstream women's concerns in the bureaucracy. Currently the House of Representatives is considering legislation that would mandate that one third of appointive positions in both local and national government be reserved for women and that political parties reserve one third of their party slate of official candidates for women in elections for the municipality/city councils and provincial boards.

#### *Programmes and Initiatives that Support Women's Involvement*

The National Council of Women of **Thailand** works to promote women's participation in public and local activities in order to increase knowledge of the political system and to encourage and support women to take part in political activities and to work together to find solutions which will improve the lives of women. The focus is on improving access to and the quality of education, employment, family life, health and Thai culture for women.

The focus of the National Council of Women in **Malaysia** is on legislative reform that will ensure equality of opportunity for women rather than on undertaking initiatives which will increase women's participation in local elections. However the Women's wings within political parties have lobbied their parties to increase women's representation at all levels of government as women are a big part of the membership of political parties. They have used forums such as closed-door meetings, dialogues and the annual National Assembly of their respective parties to make such calls to the leadership. Government seminars are held for all new councillors on their roles and responsibilities and these assist in equipping both female and male councillors with skills to perform effectively.

In the **Philippines** there are many NGOs that support women in local government within the broader framework of women in politics and decision-making. These include the Women's Legal Bureau which conducts legal training for elected official and advocacy campaigns for women in politics. Also, a coalition of 13 women's networks for politics, the Sama-samang Inisyatiba so Pagbabago ng Batas at Lipunan has committed itself to advancing a legislative agenda on women's issues.

The Centre for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics, based in the Philippines, advances women's political participation through training and support programmes and the Centre for Legislative Development provides training for staff, legislators and NGOs. The Women's Empowerment Lobby Group was recently formed to lobby for budget allocations for women's programmes in local government. Gender awareness training is provided by several organisations for both elected representatives and for those employed in local authorities. Women in local government have also set up their own networks. The Provincial Women's Commission is pioneering integrating women and gender concerns and the Women Municipal Mayors' League has also been established.

### *Barriers to Participation*

Traditional views on women's role in the family are strong in this sub-region. In **Thailand** such views have resulted in women not being perceived as credible leaders, this belief continuing to inhibit women's political participation. According to the old Thai tradition there is a belief that a woman is not strong enough to stand by herself and so had to stay at home and participate only in household traditions. Political involvement was strictly for men only. Women face economic, social and cultural obstacles and as a group they are forced into a passive role in society. Although NGOs work to involve women in development and community administration in towns the reality of women's lives makes this particularly difficult. While literacy rates are high and educational opportunities are increasing for women, girls from very poor families may start earning a living after six years of schooling to help her family, thus losing the chance to continue to a higher educational level.

The lack of quality education at a high level is a factor identified in **Malaysia** that has limited both women's involvement and their ability to speak effectively once elected. However this is changing as a result of an emphasis on equal opportunities in education and more women having access to tertiary education. Family responsibilities and the practical difficulties of balancing family commitments act as barriers to participation and to furthering their careers. Those appointed to local authorities have had to work long and hard as a party worker at the grassroots level and at senior levels within the women's wing of the party at the division, state and even federal levels before being considered for appointment. This climb to the top is not an easy one, their struggle often not being rewarded until they are between 40 and 60 years of age. Academic achievement is also a prerequisite for entry into local government as is the necessity to perform well at the selection interview. Even within the various women's wings training is not provided on leadership or local government.

The multiple roles of women were also identified as a barrier that significantly affects women's participation in the **Philippines**. They have little time to attend and participate in major decision-making and many still believe that such decisions should be made by their male counterparts. This in turn contributes to women's belief that they will not be heard, that their concerns are less important

and that they lack knowledge on aspects of urban governance. There is little awareness of women's legal rights in terms of access to resources and membership of decision-making bodies. Some survey respondents, in identifying barriers that restricted women from entering local government, pointed to attitudes that put politics and decision-making into the male preserve – women were seen to be physically and intellectually incapable of managing towns. Such beliefs come from the Filipino culture which did not regard women as important agents of change. As well, traditional governance practices, such as making important decisions during evening drinking sprees, excluded women from fully participating.

#### *The Impact of the Political System on Participation*

A major barrier to women's participation in **Malaysia** is the closed political system at local government level. While elections are held for representatives at central and state level, elections to local authorities have been suspended since the 1960s. Currently political appointments to councils are made by supporters of the ruling party, with the result that less than 10 percent of nominated members are women. As well, there are no laws that mandate a quota for women's representation nor are there any affirmative action policies for the recruitment of women into employment at local government level. While the civil service at Federal and State levels operate within an open system the support services at the local government level is a closed system and the workforce is not transferable. With few women in the council they are not able to form a strong and united voice to speak on women's issues and concerns.

Electoral systems can be a major determinant of women's success in elections. Research has shown that proportional representation systems can result in more women being elected, one reason being that they come in on party lists rather than on electorate seats. The **Philippines** party list system enables under-represented groups, including women, to be elected to the Congress. The 1987 Philippines Constitution guaranteed that for three consecutive terms after the ratification of the constitution, one half of the seats allocated to party list representatives would be filled by those representing labour, peasant, urban poor, indigenous, cultural communities, women and youth groups. This led to the success in the 1988 elections for the House of Representatives of a women's party list organisation, the Abanse! Pinay party. The name Abanse! Pinay represents a commitment to advancing women's rights and welfare by fighting for women-friendly legislation. They are actively promoting legislation for women as well as the amendment of existing laws which discriminate against women. Currently government committees are scrutinising laws on trafficking in women and minors, women's empowerment and domestic violence.

Family connections have had a significant impact on women's access to political positions and there is evidence of this in parts of this sub-region. In the Philippines most of the women who participated in the survey came from politically connected families. For instance, the husband, father-in-law and

mother-in-law of one mayor had been mayors of the town before her. Other women without such connections had previously proved their ability to manage their towns through a long record of public service. The influence and support of family members is also identified in Malaysia as contributing to political careers and to overall achievement. However the need to have family connections in order to access decision-making positions can also act as a barrier for women without such ties.

Political appointment as opposed to direct election can also impact on access to decision-making positions. In Malaysia where all local government seats are gained by political party appointment women's representation is less than 10 percent.

The collection of statistics on women highlights information on the realities of their lives and is useful for accurate policy and programme development. The Women's Affairs department in Malaysia collects gender-disaggregated data by sectors and agencies so that women's needs are identified.

### East Asia and the Pacific

#### *Laws and Practices that Ensure the Right to Participate*

All countries in the East Asia and Pacific sub-region have basic laws on the right to participate and have also signed commitments to international covenants that guarantee political and civil rights. China and Vietnam both have constitutions that provide guarantees for women. Article 48 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of **China** stipulates that women are to enjoy equal rights in political, economic, cultural and social affairs and in family life. The Constitution, along with Election Law and legislation which Guarantees the Rights and Interests of Women also guarantees the right to vote, to stand for election and to hold public posts regardless of nationality, race, gender, occupation, family background, religious belief, education, property and length of residency. Article 10 of the Law Concerning the Guarantee of the Rights and Interests of Women also states that all levels of government "shall have appropriate numbers of women deputies and try to gradually increase the proportions of women deputies." And Article 11 when referring to the appointment and training of women cadres, states that "all State organs, social bodies, enterprises, and institutional units shall adhere to the principle of equality between men and women." A Program for the Development of Chinese Women (1995-2000) has been implemented with local government being urged to implement it. Its chief objective is to increase women's participation in decision-making and management of state and social affairs. Over the last five years national conferences have been held on the training and selection of cadres and five year plans have been established at provincial and local government levels. Selection and training is done at grassroots level and in college and polytechnics. Some provinces have established specific policies on women's participation that include a percentage of women in people's congresses within a specific timeframe. For example, Hebei Province set an

objective of at least 25 percent women, this to be gradually expanded to 30 percent by 2000.

**Vietnam's** 1946 constitution also gives women and men equal rights to vote and to stand for election. And the amended Constitution 1992 Article 63 declares that "male and female citizens have equal rights in all fields – political, economic, cultural, social and family." Official documents such as the Politburo 04-ND/TW, July 1993, stipulate that there should be an increase in the number of women in positions of authority in all sectors within Party Committees and in the Government and there is other legislation on Marriage and the Family and the Penal Code 1992 which include references to political rights for women.

Once appointed or elected to local government in Vietnam all women and men are entitled to special training and to sit an examination at the Ho chi Minh National Political Academy. The personnel department within the local authority decides who shall attend this training and while the number of women trainees is still low (15 percent in 2000) special efforts are being made to increase this.

In **Japan** Article Five of the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society (June 1999) stipulates the importance of women's equal participation in decision-making processes and some individual local government have enacted local ordinances to promote gender equity. A few special measures have also been taken at both central and local government level to increase the numbers of women's employees. For instance, in 2000 the National Personnel Authority organised an unprecedented seminar to encourage female students to apply for national government officer positions and has encouraged Ministries to recruit and promote women.

As well as the basic right to vote and stand for election for all citizens over the age of 18 years, federal and state level legislation also protect women's rights in **Australia**. The Federal Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act, 1986, and similar state legislation prohibits discrimination against women in the workplace. EEO legislation also applies to employees of all local councils and to elected representatives in carrying out their duties. At the local government level, reforms in the 1990s resulted in new legislation for planning in which consultation with communities is required.

Democratic and civil rights in **New Zealand** are ensured through The Bill of Rights Act 1990, Section 12 on Electoral Rights which states that every New Zealand citizen who is 18 or over has the right to vote and is qualified to stand for election. This legislation ensures freedom of thought, expression, belief and association. Section 19 of this Bill also ensures that one's civil and political rights will be free from discrimination "on the ground of colour, race, ethnic or national origins, sex, marital status, or religious or ethical belief" The Human Rights Act 1993 further enforces existing human rights legislation by establishing a Human Rights Commission which has both an educational and compliance function.

These Acts also affirm New Zealand's commitment to International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, Human Rights and Discrimination against Women.

New Zealand's local government has, like Australia, been through significant reform in the last two decades, reform that has particularly stipulated that one of its purposes is the effective participation of local people and communities. The Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 requires all council meetings to be open to the public and the press and while some business can be held in committee there must be lawful reason for doing this and the Ombudsman can review such decisions. The Local Government Act 1974 requires all councils to prepare annual plans, detailing its policies, activities, performance targets and costs. The special consultative procedure requires local authorities to publish a draft of these annual plans, call for submissions from the public, publish an annual report which matches these policies and activities against the annual plan and be subject to independent audit.

#### *Programmes and Initiatives that Support Women's Involvement*

All countries have NGOs that promote women's involvement in local government through gender awareness, training and affirmative action programmes. The national organisation of women in **China**, the All-China Women's Federation, provides training and recommends women for appointments. This organisation uses all newspapers and magazines published by Women's Federations to publicise the contribution women can make to economic, political and cultural development and they support the training courses provided by schools and colleges. They have also established a database of women and recommend candidates for appointments in departments at all levels of government. Many women have been successful in achieving appointment. For example, of 1710 recommendations in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region between 1992 and 1997, 714 women were appointed to positions above the county level.

Within local government itself the China Association of Mayors has established a Branch of Women Mayors in response to an increasing number of women becoming leaders of local governments. Initially women mayors used this organisation to meet and share their personal experiences and developments as women leaders and to study the law and characteristics of women in management. More recently they have sponsored courses on economic theories for women mayors and on management and sustainable development.

In **Vietnam**, the Vietnam Women's Union and the National Committee for the Advancement of Women both represent the rights and interests of women. Prior to the 1999 People's Councils elections both of these organisations worked with local government to organise training for women candidates. This training focused on political, economic and cultural information, gender awareness and leadership skills. As well, the National Committee for the Advancement of Women ran campaigns to support women candidates, to encourage people to vote for them and to raise the issue of women in society in general. The success

of this approach was seen through an increase in the number of women elected, attitudinal changes to women and leadership and increased self-confidence among elected women. A similar campaign will be used in future.

In **Japan** the League of Women Voters of Japan and the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association have taken leading roles in what has been called the “Japanese women’s silent revolution”, a movement which aims to change the belief that ‘women are not politicians’ and increase women’s representation in politics. The League of Women Voters was initially established when Japanese women obtained the vote in 1945 and its focus has been on raising the awareness of women voters, clean election campaigns and monitoring policies on consumer issues and the environment. The Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Association provides both training and information on women in politics. Initially the Association ran a training course in 1994 for people who intending standing in the 1995 unified local elections. Of the 36 candidates on this course, 24 were elected. Since then this training course has expanded into two, one for new women candidates and the second for incumbent assembly members, both women and men. Training involves detail on election regulations, local politics and administration and effective campaigning. A campaign fund is also available. The Association also publishes a monthly journal and has a circulation of 10,000.

Other groups established for similar purposes include two that were set up following women’s international and regional conferences. Two women who participated in the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing set up a Back-up School to Send Women to Assemblies. The electoral success of those who completed their first course resulted in 20 more prototypes being set up throughout Japan and a great number of course participants became local councillors / assembly members at the 1999 Unified Local Election. Training is provided on election law, campaigning, key issues in local government and the experiences of women who are already elected. Another network of women who had attended a regional Asia and Pacific Women in Politics forum in Manila in 1998 started a ‘Campaign for Increasing Women in Politics’ which focused on those prefectures and local councils where there was no women representative. An unusual feature of local government in Japan is the inclusion of consumer representatives. NGOs successfully lobbied for consumer groups to be part of metropolitan council in the 1970s and as the majority of consumer cooperative members are women, the majority of these representatives have been women.

In **Australia** and **New Zealand** the major initiatives at NGO level aimed at increasing and supporting women in local government have come from the Women’s Electoral Lobby and women in local government themselves. The Women’s Electoral Lobby is a feminist lobby group that aims to achieve social, economic, educational, political and sexual equality for women and works to increase the participation of women in politics and provide information to voters. When initially established in Australia in 1972 they surveyed all candidates for the federal election on their attitudes to feminist issues and published these results

so that all voters could assess their candidates. This organisation has branches throughout Australia and lobbies politicians, unions, employers, educationalists on behalf of women and seeks to change societal attitudes and practices which discriminate against women.

New Zealand's Women's Electoral Lobby encourages women to vote, to be active in political parties and to stand for political office. In particular they have supported women candidates in practical ways by providing training, information and fundraising. They publish a quarterly national newsletter providing research and information for women, lobby at central and local government levels and hold public meeting and publicity campaigns.

Women within local government have also initiated programmes to encourage women to participate. Many elected women participate in seminars talking about their experiences as councillors, what the issues are and how to stand for office,. Some have also approached women informally to encourage them to stand for office. The Australian Local Government Women's Association has been involved in a number of initiatives. The Queensland branch has initiated a mentoring programme for women and prior to the last elections targeted councils where women were either not represented or under represented by advertising in local papers for women candidates and then helping in the elections. Some of these women were elected. The NSW branch regularly conducts pre election seminars in both urban and rural areas with very successful results. And the Tasmania branch has been involved in a joint initiative with local and state government to encourage women into local government by running seminars that provided information on local government and running campaigns. Victoria has the most comprehensive and well-funded programme to date. This was initiated in 1997 by a coalition of the Australian Local Government Women's Association, Women's Electoral Lobby, the Ladies of the City Action League, the Women's Planning Network (Victoria) and local authority organisations to strengthen local communities, local government democracy and good governance by increasing women's participation. Developed in three stages, the programme initially focused on practical assistance to women candidates such as developing an information kit containing practical advice, and case studies. The second stage involved the appointment of a project officer who conducted workshops, media campaigns, mentoring programmes, set up a database, and established a website to monitor the elections. As a result women's representation was increased by 4.5 percent in March 2000. Stage three aims to support and enhance the skills of elected women and encourage them to take on leadership positions.

### *Barriers to Participation*

While constitutions, legislation, policies and practices provide formal rights and equality, in practice there are many informal constraints or barriers that continue to prevent women from participating in local government. Within the East Asia and Pacific sub-district constraints range from institutional and political to cultural

and societal barriers. Appointed women also face difficulties in being selected for senior positions.

Tradition, ideology and attitude are barriers for women in China, Vietnam and Japan. While there are officially no formal constraints on women participating equally with men and voicing their opinion, the tradition of male decision-makers is strong. In **China** traditional beliefs about the superiority of men have a negative impact on how women see themselves as decision-makers, as innovators and as being confident enough to be competitive. Particular evidence of this is seen in the election of village committees where cadres reject women to take up important posts. Women cadres who have worked hard or outperformed men cadres would usually be found fault with and rejected. Outdated methods of selecting women cadres make it difficult for outstanding talents to emerge and in some regions, particularly poverty-stricken regions, there are few women cadres. Women's role within the family also impact on their ability to participate in local government as there is still a strong belief that 'it is unruly for women to work all day away from home'. Some survey respondents identified the dual responsibility of families and public life as creating both work and psychological pressures as they just did not have the same support and time for keeping abreast of issues as men because of their family responsibilities. The fact that there were few women on decision-making bodies means that these women have to work within styles and modes that are acceptable to men. As a result women find they cannot be open about women's issues and social justice. Some also find they are judged harshly by society and by their colleagues as if they handle matters like a man they are said to be arrogant and seeking the limelight. Their achievements can also be treated suspiciously as some say they have attained these through special means or favour. In essence, legislative equality does not guarantee real equality as laws are not enforced, traditional attitudes prevail and prejudice and discrimination continues to occur.

In **Vietnam**, the remnants of Confucianism ideology, family responsibilities and lack of training all influence the level of success women have had at achieving public decision-making positions. Survey respondents cited outdated concepts of 'respect for men and disdain for women' as still existing and impacted significantly in elections. They see this attitude of disdain towards women as being responsible for the lack of confidence that voters have towards women candidates. Leadership positions, in particular, are seen as being men's positions as of right and this leads to prejudice when promotions to leading posts are made. A prevailing belief that women's work is to take care of their families while men participate in politics means that the family burden can constrain their involvement in public life. Families have to be supportive to enable women to take on the extra responsibilities and even when they are, the workload is high juggling both home and council work.

In **Japan** evidence of the tradition of male decision-makers is seen particularly in rural areas where more than half of the village and town assemblies and 10

percent of city councils have no women members. Survey respondents in Japan cited the patriarchal society which considers women as inappropriate to be politicians and so does not trust them with decision-making positions. As a result male governors and mayors do not appoint women to senior positions. Some women had faced gender-related discrimination when standing for election from their opponents, including mass dissemination of handbills that contained slanderous information on the women candidates. Once elected some assembly members also experienced discrimination from their male colleagues, including sexual harassment and antagonism over campaigns promoting gender equality and equality of children born to unmarried couples. Two of these women have formally complained. Other constraints for women are funding, insufficient training, the election system and a general lack of awareness about the need to increase women's participation in politics.

Barriers limiting women's participation in both **Australia** and **New Zealand** fit within four broad categories – attitudinal, financial, competing responsibilities and personal characteristics. Among survey respondents, attitudinal barriers were frequently mentioned with women pointing to the aggressive political culture, combative debate and personality conflicts as well as male colleagues who had difficulty coping with women and so belittled and personally attacked them. The few women employed at senior management level in local government have similar experiences. They found that conservative attitudes meant that women did not fit the image they had of a chief executive level job – the 'man in charge' concept. In Australia the harassment and intimidation of one woman chief executive resulted in a public enquiry and subsequent dismissal of the council. The enquiry found that "a lot of the hostility to, and prejudice against her [had], as one of its principal causes or roots, the fact that she is not only a women, but a forceful and successful one at that." The financial cost of campaigning, particularly for mayoral office, is seen as a deterrent as is the rate of remuneration for the almost full time positions on council, particularly for those who have no other source of income. Meeting times and lack of childcare support are also barriers to participation.

#### *The Impact of the Political System on Participation*

On the whole, women in the East-Asia and Pacific sub-region have had the right to vote and stand for local government for a longer period than other countries in the Asia and Pacific region. For women in New Zealand and Australia this right was gained in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century while for women in Japan and Vietnam it was the 1940s. This period of time is, in itself, a factor in the greater level of success that women have had in gaining local government positions.

Electoral success is also dependent on the realities of women's lives, the system of local government and representation within a country, and the type of electoral system used for choosing decision-makers. In highly urbanised countries like Australia, New Zealand and Japan the high levels of participation in education and the labour force equate with increases in life expectancy. Put alongside the

steady increase in the number of women in the public sphere and a growth in the women's movement, all of these factors have contributed to an increased number of women in local government.

The type of local government – whether it is a second, third or even fourth level of government – can be a factor in the relative importance of that decision-making body and so have an impact on the number of women who gain office. Local government positions at the community level are not always as valued as those in provincial, state and central governments. Whether mayors are elected or appointed can also impact on the number of women in these leadership positions.

The lack of official statistics and general information recorded on local government systems and elections, when compared to that known about central government, also reflects the relative lack of importance attributed to this level of government. In New Zealand the Department of Internal Affairs publishes election statistics after every local government election. These include comprehensive data on the representation of women. However, apart from information on chief executives, statistics on the number and the gender makeup of those employed in local government are not collated. In Japan national statistics on local politicians are collated by the Ministry of Home Affairs but any gender breakdown of this is only available through special request.

The electoral system used for electing representatives has had a significant impact on women's access to political office. Research on women's political participation has identified proportional representation party list systems of election as enhancing women's electoral success. Women's chance of election is increased if they are ranked highly on political party lists. There is clear evidence of this in the increase in women elected to New Zealand's Parliament since the Mixed Member Proportional system was introduced, a jump of almost 10 percent in just one election. There is currently a proposal to change to a single transferable voting system for local government elections in New Zealand. In Australia a preferential voting system is used for electing councillors and an optional preferential system when Mayors are elected.

There is also some evidence that at-large systems of election can disadvantage women as women tend to be known in their local communities through their involvement in local groups and community activity rather than throughout the whole city. Local elections that are based on ward representation can ensure that women candidates are known to voters. They can also encourage more women to stand for election as campaigning costs are not as high as in a city wide election.

Quotas to increase the number of women have not been favoured in this sub-region. While quotas within political parties and parliaments were debated in Australia in the 1990s the Australian Labour Party was the only one to introduce a target of 35% for endorsement of women in winnable, generally safe, seats.

This target has not been reached and there is some doubt that it will be in the near future. Women are often the most vocal critics of what they see as a move away from a traditional 'merit-based' system. In Japan both national and local governments have set numerical and time bound targets for women's representation on advisory councils. While these targets have not been enforced they have been voluntarily implemented and in August 2000 the national government publicly announced it had reached its target of 20 percent. As a result of lobbying by women's organisations in Japan some of the political parties have taken initiatives to recruit women candidates. The Democratic Party has also established a special fund for women candidates

In New Zealand a considerable reduction in the number of local authorities and elected positions as a result of reforms in the last two decades has led to fewer opportunities to participate in community level decision-making, a tier of government in which women have historically had greater electoral success than in other areas of government. While the percentage of women elected has continued to rise, the actual number of women has decreased significantly. Added to this is the concern that many elected positions at community level have been replaced by appointed positions. Appointments for these boards are made by central government and there is clear evidence that fewer women are appointed than the number elected in the past. Added to this is a problem that not enough women stand for election. Election statistics show that women candidates have a greater chance of being elected than male candidates, particularly in urban areas but it is clear that women do not stand because of the cost and, also other commitments in their lives. There is also some evidence that the adversarial nature of politics is disliked by many women and that local government is still perceived as both male and conservative.

#### 4. The Impact of Women as Transformative Leaders

Much of the research on women and politics has had a quantitative focus, describing the number elected, the political environment and the factors that help and hinder women's ability to be involved. In more recent years, however, there has been growing recognition of the impact that women have on political institutions and agendas as well as on approaches to governance. It has become clear that while a small number of women have attained the highest political positions in their countries, a critical mass of women is still to be elected and there is no place in which women hold the same number of seats as men. Nevertheless it is also clear that many of the women who have succeeded have transformed the way in which politics is practised and they have changed the political agenda to include issues that improve women's lives. Some believe that "it is in the contradictory experience of progress and oppression that the transformative power of women's political work is located".<sup>1</sup>

Consequently some recent initiatives that have focused on increasing the opportunities for women's political participation have worked from the basis that more women in government will mean better futures for other women and their children and for future generations. Such an approach also comes from the perspective that women with political power have a responsibility to work in a transformative way to ensure that their involvement makes a difference in terms of outcomes for women. One example of this in the Asia Pacific region is that developed by the Centre for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics whose vision of transformative politics is based on a new political paradigm: a politics that is both transformed and transformational. Within this framework politics are 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.

"This framework sees governance as adhering to excellence, integrity and accountability, gender equality, sustainable development and peace. It is also a framework that sees the necessity of creating a critical mass of competent, committed and effective women politicians in elective and appointive positions in government; and of developing a responsive women citizenry. It is the partnership of these two – the women in government positions and the women electorate, that will promote and put into practice the women's transformative political agenda that will: guarantee equal rights and opportunities to every member of society in charting the course of

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<sup>1</sup> Cathy J. Cohen, Kathleen B. Jones and Joan C. Tronto, editors, *Women Transforming Politics. An Alternative Reader* (New York University Press, 1997), p. 3.

development, and always serve the common good as opposed to private means.”<sup>2</sup>

Questions about transformative leadership were included in the questionnaires that were used to collect information from women in local government for the individual country reports on which this comparative analysis is based. The criteria for selecting women to participate in this survey were based on the factors that contribute to good governance and the transformative role of women in local government. These factors were:

- Responsiveness and accountability to the local community
- Across the board ethics-based government
- Inclusive and consensus building policies – “power with rather than power over”
- Sustainability in terms of institutions and programmes as well as the environment
- Gender equity
- Age and experience in local government.

In reality, selection was also based on the practical circumstances of these women’s lives as with their very high workloads and the realities of juggling many roles it was difficult for many to have the time to participate in answering the questionnaire.

The intention was to highlight the impact of women’s involvement on local government and the impact that more women might have. Women participants were asked whether they felt they had different concerns and priorities to men; whether increasing the number of women in local government would make a difference and what they had done during the time they had been in local government.

It is clear from the responses to these questionnaires that women believe that they do have an impact on local government and that they do practise transformative leadership. However, while the basic right to participate is continually undermined by the political system and through the barriers imposed by tradition and culture, some women are still dealing with the first hurdle of just getting into local government. This sometimes means they have to start with a more conservative approach and work within party lines than have different agendas to promote. The exciting thing is that even in these repressive systems we see women making a difference even if only initially in small ways. A summary of much of the material in the questionnaire responses follows.

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<sup>2</sup> Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP), *Platform for Action 2, Promoting the Empowerment of the Women Electorate in the Asia-Pacific Region*, August 1997, p. 1.

### *The Difference Made by Women*

Research has found that women in local government believe they make a difference as women leaders; they bring a different style to local government; and they consciously approach the job in a different way. Many also believe that increasing the number of women in local government will “accelerate the pace of change, promote collaborative styles of leadership and decision-making, broaden perspectives and move communities forward.”<sup>3</sup>

Evidence of this difference in countries in the Asia-Pacific region shows that women:

- Have a greater sense of the social issues and the well being and welfare of their communities and factor these into the decision-making process
- Promote policies and activities which strengthen communities
- Encourage participation
- Emphasise the importance and the practice of good communication with the community
- Have a different approach to the way their local authority is governed
- Develop a team approach
- Set different priorities
- Bring the mediation skills that they have developed as mothers, the ability to have clear goals, to juggle many tasks at once, and to be practical.
- Are dedicated, responsible, practice what they preach and show a great deal of spirit
- Stimulate and encourage other women to be part of development

### *A Different Agenda*

Women’s concerns and priorities are more likely than are those of men to centre around people’s needs for safety and clean water supplies and for community facilities rather than just the traditional roads, rates and rubbish. Women also have a strong focus on women’s issues and a human rights flavour in their goals for local government, suggesting that changes in local politics will lead to changes in society, less discrimination against women and greater flexibility in work and childcare. By bringing a grassroots perspective to local government, women make it more people orientated and closer to the community it serves. Some survey respondents suggested that:

- There are differences in the interests of female and male councillors in that women’s interests focused on environmental issues, childcare, education and caring while men are more interested in construction, maintenance and planning for water supplies, sewerage, roads and urban development.
- Women are more concerned about the social implications of policies and give priority to issues which impact on people’s lives such as

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Drage, 1997, *Weaving a New Pattern: Women Political Leaders in Local Government*, Local Government New Zealand Research Monograph Series Paper No. 6, p. 88.

employment, care of elderly, poverty elimination, the rights of women and children, education, health care and sanitation, family planning, quality of life and social support.

- Women are more concerned with social issues such as health services, poverty alleviation and community development. They also tended to work out the details and aim to achieve consensus on specific policies and programmes rather than to politicise issues.
- When dealing with the needs and priorities of women in planning city development, local government women not only take into account the physical considerations but they also consider harmony in art and culture, the quality of life, a healthy city, and environmental development. And in their involvement with their communities, it is suggested that women actually contribute more at all levels of politics than men.
- Women ensure a more democratic and transparent form of governance by standing on a unified platform with other women to pressure municipal government to present information such as the budget in detail
- Women give importance to issues that men find trivial, such as family and marriage disputes and dowry problems. They also feel they work from their heart as their own experiences help them understand the causes and nature of gender discrimination.
- There is also a belief that women's work in the home and with their children has made them more concerned than men are about aspects of health, cleanliness, water, sanitation, housing conditions and the environment.

### *A Different Style*

The women suggest that they take a democratic approach to governance and management within their councils and with their communities, encouraging participation in decision-making. Their styles were described as being:

- More inclusive, collaborative and consultative

The style of some woman mayors was described as involving everyone, consulting and sharing power. Women also broaden the governance outlook and outcomes and they expect discipline from councillors. Women use more democratic forms of decision-making, preferring to consider, debate and discuss with their colleagues rather than resort to orders.

- More tolerant of different points of view

Women work around the problem and look at it more fully rather than taking a confrontational approach to it. They don't always have fixed views and prefer win-win solutions.

- More caring, people orientated and respectful,

They facilitate opportunities for community representatives to make submissions to the council.

- Change focused, in particular wanting to clean up the dirty image of politics.

This approach is based on honesty and an effort to create a corruption free society.

- More open, informative and professional  
Some women issue regular newsletters to report on their activities and the major issues being dealt with in their local authority.
- More innovative and conscientious  
Some women have made bold and pioneering strides. They are practical and will stick with issues and projects throughout and they can put themselves in the place of others. They also take effective decisions and demonstrate self-confidence.
- More persistent, persuasive, committed and unafraid of challenging the structures.

### *The Impact of Increasing the Numbers of Women*

Successful and competent women act as role models and earn respect not only for themselves but also for women in general. Many women believe that being a role model helps demonstrate that women can participate effectively in local government. This in itself opens doors for more women. The range of issues considered by councils has also extended, council processes have changed because of different styles of women and community perceptions of the council have changed as a result of increased openness, accountability, breaking down the 'red tape' and a preparedness to listen.

Some examples from the survey material suggest that:

- Women are particularly well-suited to coping with change itself and the diversity of issues that local government is now required to consider as their approach is distinctly different to that of many of their male colleagues. They have a strong sense of wanting to demonstrate a different way of 'doing' politics and not simply operating in the same way as many male politicians. These qualities, if possessed by significant numbers of people, have the capacity to transform the local government environment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that male councillors and appointed staff have observed and learnt from the examples that have been set by women colleagues.
- Women have a greater understanding of equity issues and the need for more women decision-makers results in an increased number of women participating, gender equity policies being mainstreamed and a greater diversity of role models for women being seen.
- The increasing numbers of women in local government has had a positive impact on the improvement of women's position in society as it creates an increased understanding of conditions for women and children and leads to policies, projects and funding for development and to promotion of other women to decision-making positions.
- Once women reach decision-making positions in urban local governments, more concern is shown for the improvement of living and working conditions of women. Women's activities become favourable and are included in the allocation of budgetary funds to women's work.

- Women's status has improved with increasing participation of women and more women in elected positions. In particular, the concept of 'respect for men and disdain for women' is gradually changing.
- In a political climate in which opportunities have been opened up for women and minorities to participate, women have been able to take advantage of these to provide women's services.
- Women in large numbers have come out against atrocities on women, in defence of their traditional control over crucial resources such as water, forests and land, mass literacy drives and other issues. They are also coming out against ecological degradation, price rises and protests against repression.
- In supporting women's groups and being part of their programmes on health, cleanliness, environment, security and family issues, more women have become conscious of their own worth and ability.
- Women members participate more actively in women's issues – health, welfare, atrocities against women and violations of human rights.
- The environment in which local government operates has changed. It is more people friendly, more transparent and less corrupt. It has also changed in relation to the poor and women. Issues like familial disputes, dowry issues, domestic violence, mother-child healthcare, education opportunities, women's cooperatives, income earning and credit programmes and emergency funds and relief in times of disaster have received special attention.
- For some women their most important achievement has been to make women more politically aware and active and to help them understand their political rights and capacity.
- Women's groups are working together collaboratively to promote women's participation in public life and the economic welfare of women.

#### *The Impact Women have on their Cities/Communities*

When asked what they had done to improve their local authorities women in the Asia and Pacific region had long lists. Some examples of programmes initiated, continued or supported include:

- Women's centres, youth centres, arts centres, community owned child care centres, playground projects, petitions to oppose development that would impact negatively on the district, safety councils, trusts to deal with unemployment, urban and community projects, campaigns to improve local hospital and health services, environment projects, pensioner housing, landscape projects, swimming pools, independent economic development projects, EEO projects, urban and community renewal programmes, a recreation review. Different processes were also initiated by some women in order to improve consultation, participation, planning, decision making, working as a team with council and develop a culture of cooperation and collaboration, changing the language and using more user friendly approaches

- Changes to council policies, land-use planning instruments and new and improved infrastructure, facilities and service. Specific projects relate to community services and facilities such as art galleries, parks, aquatic and sports centres, childcare and community centres. And apart from projects that involve their councils directly, women have had a significant influence on more broadly based initiatives through their work with community and business organisations or through their contacts and influence on state and federal committees and with state and federal politicians. Some of these projects are main street programmes, revitalisation of central business districts, obtaining a sexual assault counsellor for the town, community festivals, business enterprise centres, projects to build relationships with indigenous and non-indigenous communities, crime prevention, community safety and health programmes for older people.
- Gender equity policies have been implemented which provide for training and promotion of women employees and improve their working conditions, increase the number of women on advisory committees, consciousness raising and gender mainstreaming policies.
- Local programmes and projects for the improvement of the urban environment, farm economy, garden, field and fruit tree development and programmes to mobilise people in the construction of infrastructure, roads, electricity and safe water supply.
- The pace of civic construction has accelerated in order to provide basic and much needed facilities, water supplies, housing and controlling pollution. Cultural, educational and public health management projects have included a nine year compulsory education plan, welfare facilities, rest homes, libraries and centres for women's activities. Urban economic programmes have targeted outside investment for local projects which build community infrastructure and activities.
- Increased development to districts has occurred through completion of projects on time and these improvements have not gone unnoticed. This has helped to secure more federal and state funding for the district, created the capacity to do more and developed community pride as the district as won awards for this transformation.
- Developed proposals for programmes on energy and environmental concerns for women with the result that a recycled paper project has been set up to solve waste problems and increase the income in the community.
- The provision of clean water, waste management, city cleanliness has improved, street lighting provided, slum development, food packages for workers, programmes that address the needs of poor children, such as noon meal centres.
- Projects which improve the municipality and assist its residents, such as programmes for education and basic needs for internally displaced and a housing and resettlement programme. This has also included successfully fighting for a significant percentage of the city budget.
- Initiating and actively supporting public utility services such as provision of sanitary facilities, housing and drainage, and community services such as

libraries and playgrounds. Setting up programmes such as labour camps, health initiatives for women and children and environmental conservation.

### *Support for Other Women*

Women believe they have a responsibility to promote women's participation and improve the status of women generally. Many work actively to increase the numbers of women in this tier of government and to ensure that women's issues are kept high on the agenda. Descriptions of what they had done included:

- Running workshops for women interested in running for office and encouraging them to participate.

As a resource for these workshops, suggestions were made for a information kit which outlines what local government is about, the importance of women in local government, how to campaign and what a councillor does. This kit could be distributed to women's groups and to individual women.

- Encouraging women to apply for positions in local government

In line with research evidence, women in this part of the world stand for local government because they are encouraged to do so. Most of them were already heavily involved in their communities, knew a great deal about local issues, had already earned a public profile for the work they have done and now wanted to move on to more formal public participation where they could influence decision-making. They are involved in recruiting more women and increasing the number of women in consultative roles on various committee and programmes.

- Promoting women as political leaders and supporting them once elected or appointed

This involves demystifying these positions, helping women feel more comfortable and helping them learn the ropes. Being prepared to be part of mentoring programmes also assists other women. Supporting the promotion of women in decision-making positions in political, economic, cultural and social aspects at various levels. Offering solutions to increase female cadres in direction and management work and raise the percentage of female executive and the proportion of women participating in people's councils. There is some evidence that women stay in local government longer as a result of the satisfaction they get from the job.

- Setting up and supporting services for women

Setting up women's centres, negotiating contracts for women's services. The recognition that women are disadvantaged in many areas of their lives and poorly represented in all spheres of political activity has given many local government women a sense of responsibility to other women generally.

Participating in formulating and carrying out specific policies to improve women's situation in society. Promoting and supporting women's organisations, initiating economic empowerment programmes and ensuring better access of women to services. A focus on improving the status of women has included encouraging women to provide information on issues of local governance and seeking justice for women who have been harassed.

- Public speaking, participating in women's activities and running conferences for women in local government

Being a guest speaker at meetings, seminars and conferences. Taking part in activities organised by federations of women, trade unions and other mass organisations to improve the quality of women's lives and providing financial support for women's activities. Mobilising demonstrations in support of a quota of women in local government and organising workshops for women on local governance. Taking part in radio and television programmes promoting women's participation and lobbying for an increase in women's seats within the political parties. Organising forums to discuss women's issues, safeguard women's rights and help women with income earning activities.

## 5. Proposals for Change

This comparative analysis shows very clearly the impact that women are having on the political environment, their cities and communities and on the status of women. It also shows that there are big differences between the levels of development throughout this whole region and this in itself raises different issues for women and means that different approaches need to be taken to ensure that women gain access to political decision-making positions in local government.

So what needs to happen? Achieving a significant increase in the number of women in local government is a priority. While it is clear that in all the 13 countries in this comparative analysis women have formal provisions that ensure their rights to participate and there is a great deal of political activity and initiative at NGO and community level that continues to work for change, there are still many barriers to be overcome. The following strategies have been identified as addressing the issues and constraints discussed in this report. To overcome the barriers that remain there are several broad areas that need to be addressed. These are the systems within which local government operates, the attitudes towards women in local government and the strategies that need to be developed to enable a greater number of women to move into local government as elected representatives and as senior managers. There are also specific recommendations on training as this is an area that has received a lot of attention in the country reports. Some of the changes recommended are similar and relevant to the whole Asia and Pacific region and some are relevant to particular sub-regions. Common recommendations for the Asia-Pacific region are presented below. These are followed by recommendations presented in sub-regional format (the latter are also presented in tabular format in Appendix B at the end of this report). They are all presented as a guideline for future discussion.

It is clear that 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.

The research suggests four key strategies for the Asia-Pacific region. These are:

### *1. Changes to the systems within which local government operates*

- A quota of reserved seats for women to be implemented in countries where few women have been elected. These reserved seats to be permanent, filled through direct and open elections and to have the same status as general seats
- Proportional representation systems of voting be implemented
- The number of elected positions at community level be maintained
- Wards systems for electing representatives be retained

- EEO programmes to ensure more women are employed in local government and to enable more women to move into senior management positions
- Elected representatives to be paid at a level that will enable more women to participate
- Local government implement the policies outlined in Agenda 21 on good governance
- Consultation processes be established to ensure women participate
- Funding allocated for gender and development that emphasises capacity building, networking and advocacy
- Women's standing committees be established
- Recruitment by political parties of women candidates

## 2. *Ways of changing attitudes towards women in local government*

- The culture of local government needs to change to ensure that women are treated fairly and equally and to make sure that discrimination against women is not acceptable
- Gender awareness programmes for men and women need to be developed
- Local government needs to be more women friendly. Consensus style politics and meetings at times that fit into the other responsibilities that women have, will enhance the political environment
- Opportunities need to be made available for women as soon as they are elected to learn about local government and their governance role and to provide them with support.

## 3. *Strategies to increase the number of women*

- Strategies need to be adopted to change policies and structures that perpetuate women's subordinate status
- Policies on economic and social empowerment are needed to enable women to participate on an equal footing with men
- Local government needs to work closely with NGOs, civil societies and women's groups to develop communities and services that take account of the needs of women
- Women in local government need financial support, childcare, support systems and training opportunities
- Women's associations to be established for women councillors and managers in local government to provide a voice for women's views and a base for networking
- Women in local government need to encourage more women to participate
- Funds to be established to assist women to run for election
- Gender-disaggregated statistics need to be collected to increase the visibility of women.

#### *4. Training*

- Training programmes to be established by NGOs, political parties, educational and political institutions to help women in local government develop skills and self confidence and to enable them to learn the functions and processes within this tier of government
- Training to be provided for women candidates on the political system, local government functions and processes
- Workshops be provided on gender awareness and development for both women and men in order to educate people on women's rights and the importance of women's equality
- Girls and young women's education should include training on self-reliance, self-confidence and their potential for decision-making positions.

More specific proposals for change in each sub-region are:

#### South Asia

##### *System*

1. Legal provision be enacted for a quota of reserved seats for women representatives in all local governments in this sub-region. These quotas to be permanent.
2. Direct and open elections be held for these reserved seats.
3. Reserved seats to have the same status as general seats on local councils, ie. work responsibilities clearly gazetted for all decision-makers with equal access to funding and resources.
4. EEO programmes be established to enable women employed in local government to move into senior management positions.
5. Local authorities to establish systems that ensure women are able to participate in and are consulted on issues in their communities.
6. Standing committees on women's issues be established on local authorities.
7. Political parties to actively recruit women candidates for local elections.

##### *Attitudes*

1. Local government needs to take a lead role in developing a culture that treats women equally and fairly. Women need to be on an equal footing to men in decision-making positions and in communities.
2. Local government has a responsibility to develop awareness of gender issues through programmes for men and women.

##### *Strategies*

1. A common strategy needs to be adopted, informed by a common vision, in order to bring about changes in the policies and structures that perpetuate women's subordinate status.
2. Policies are needed on economic and social empowerment for women to enable them to ultimately participate on an equal footing with men.
3. Local government needs to work closely with NGOs, civil societies and other women's groups to develop communities and services that take into account the needs of women.

4. Women in local government need financial support and childcare.
5. Support systems and ongoing training opportunities need to be established for women in local government.
6. Statistics needs to be collected at regular intervals and research encouraged on women in representation and management roles in local government to increase the visibility of women. Gender-disaggregated data also needs to be collected for policy and service development in local communities.

#### *Training*

1. Gender awareness training programmes be established and supported by government agencies, non-government organisations and political parties for men and women on the rights of women and their potential for leadership.
2. Training programmes for women on political structures, processes and issues in local government and support for them to stand as candidates.
3. Training programmes for women newly elected to local authorities on how the system works, how they can work effectively on the council and with their local communities to identify issues and develop initiatives.
4. Programmes that enhance the self sufficiency of women be established by local authorities.
5. Awareness courses for women in communities on how to use local government to further their interest.

#### South-East Asia

##### *System*

1. To encourage more women to be employed in local government EEO programmes need to be established in order to get women appointed to positions and to support them once there.
2. Local government implement the policies outlined in Agenda 21 on good governance and encouraging greater community participation of women in decision-making and capacity building processes.
3. Local government needs to comply with legislation that stipulates women's representation and allocate funding to ensure this occurs.
4. Both local and central government needs to allocate funding from ODA funds for gender and development for a comprehensive development fund that emphasis capacity building, networking and advocacy.

##### *Attitudes*

1. Local government needs to take a gender-balanced approach and ensure that women are in decision-making positions in governance and management roles, and women's issues are promoted in policy and service provision.
2. Opportunities for women to learn about local government and their role need to be available as soon as they have been elected in order to provide support and help with the adjustment to this governance role.
3. Promotion of women's status will help with building confidence and belief in their abilities.

### *Strategies*

1. Women's associations be established for women councillors and managers in local government. These associations will provide a voice for women's views in local government. They will also provide a base for networking between women in local government, NGOs and women at state and national of government.
2. Women in local government need to encourage more women to participate in local governance. This can be done by networking and by setting up formal organisations.
3. Organisations need to take responsibility to improve the opportunities of women to advance in politics by working together to ensure this happens.

### *Training*

1. Training programmes be established by NGOs, political parties and political institutions to help women in local government develop skills and self confidence to ensure they can be effective and can advance their careers. This will ensure a pool of capable women in local government who will work for balanced development.
2. Educational institutions need to conduct seminars for newly elected women.
3. Workshops be provided on gender awareness and development for both women and men. These should be promoted in order to educate people on women's rights and the importance of women's equality.

### East Asia and the Pacific

#### *System*

1. The system of voting for local government elections should be changed to proportional representation.
2. The number of elected positions in local government needs to be maintained. Despite the greater focus today on participation, the democratic right to elect representatives needs to be ensured at community level.
3. The retention of the ward system for electing representatives also needs to be retained.
4. Quota systems be considered in some instances to increase the number of women in decision-making positions in local government, particularly where few women have been elected.
5. Mechanisms should be established to assist women employed in local government to move into higher management positions. These mechanisms should include: a review of current EEO policies to measure the level of women's participation at all senior levels in local government and the mechanisms currently being used by local authorities to comply with their EEO obligations; training opportunities established for women to enable them to develop skills and qualifications that will enable them to further their careers in local government; financial support for training; and mentoring support.

6. Elected representatives need to be paid more to enable them to participate, this payment covering quality dependent care and set at a rate that will attract younger women.
7. There also needs to be caps set on campaign expenditure.
8. Local governments adopt policies which promote gender equity.

#### *Attitudes*

1. Local government needs to become more women friendly. The culture of politics will be enhanced if there are more consensus style politics; meetings are held at times which fit within women's responsibilities; and workshops are held on gender sensitization.
2. A political environment needs to be developed in local government in which discrimination against women is not acceptable

#### *Strategies*

1. In order to increase the number of women in local government a comprehensive package needs to be developed and distributed nationally. This package to include information kits for women who are considering standing for election; workshop outlines and suggestions on how to support candidates; a media kit for use by women candidates; and a candidate database.
2. Funds be established to assist women to run for election.
3. Best practice models be developed on women and local government and all local government be encouraged to adopt them.
4. A mentoring programme be established to provide support, information, resources and assistance to women in local government
5. Women employed in local government be offered opportunities for career development.
6. Local government women's associations be established.
7. National databases be established on women in local government that provides resources and material for research on women and gender issues.
8. Guidelines need to be developed to measure the impact of all policies and programmes on women and men.

#### *Training*

1. Citizen's awareness of gender, politics and human rights programmes be established for men and women.
2. Training programmes for women candidates on the political system, local government functions and processes and support for them to stand as candidates.
3. Training programmes for elected women in local government functions and processes and in leadership skills.
4. Girls and young women's education should include training on self-reliance, self-confidence and their potential for decision-making positions.

## 6. Regional Support Mechanisms

It is clear that 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 become more women friendly and political agendas include women and development issues. While there are already regional networks in the Asia and Pacific area that focus on women's empowerment, particularly in politics and political activity, none of these focus primarily on women in local government.

It is also clear that regional and international contacts are beneficial in the drive for change. International initiatives on women's rights such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women and Development and the Habitat Agenda of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), have established precedents for putting women's issues onto government agendas and forcing, in some cases, unprecedented changes. Both international and regional strategies, training opportunities, networking and conferences provide women with opportunities to share experiences, develop new ideas and learn new ways in which they can initiate and work for changes which will ultimately lead to greater equity for women at both government and community levels. These contacts can also assist with access to funds for initiatives such as training at the country level.

Regional actions should focus on:

1. Establishing regional targets for increasing the number of women in local government within timeframes; monitoring progress achieved in meeting these targets and undertaking advocacy of gender mainstreaming and gender equality in local government as well as the transformative role that women play in local government.
2. Promoting exchange of experience and information as well as comparative research through networking among women in local government, governmental and non-governmental organisations, political parties and research and training institutes working on the issues of women and local government.
3. Promoting regional, sub-regional and country-based training programmes on gender mainstreaming, training of women already in local government as well as training women aspiring for positions in local government through organising regional and sub-regional conferences and workshops for women in local government to share strategies, network, provide training and support.
4. Catalysing resource mobilisation at the country level to support training and campaigns of women candidates in local governments.

### Regional Targets

The Asia-Pacific Gender Balance Declaration adopted by the conference on 50-50 by 2005: Get the Balance Right has established the target of achieving gender balance at all levels of government by 2005. The conference was organised by the Center for Legislative Development (CLD), the Center for Asia Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the UNDP-Asia Pacific Gender Equality Network (APGEN). While the target itself is achievable, the proposed time-frame is rather optimistic. Even to achieve gender balance on paper would require passage of laws, constitutional amendments, development of administrative procedures and finally holding new elections under the amended legislation. The process is likely to take more than five years. Achieving real gender balance would require attitudinal, cultural and institutional change as well as capacity building of local government. A more feasible timeframe would be 10 to 15 years. It is recommended that the target of gender balance in local government be adopted for regional and country-level actions in promoting the number of women in local government to be achieved within 15 years time or by the end of the year 2016.

Based on this target annual reports on the State of Women in Local Government should be prepared and disseminated around the region. The first State of the Women in Urban Local Government Reports prepared by ESCAP in 14 countries of the region could be taken as the basis for preparing future reports. These reports would also assist in monitoring progress made in achieving the target of gender balance in local government by the year 2005.

### Promoting Networks

Promoting exchange of experience and information among women already in local government, women aspiring for positions in local government, governmental and non-governmental organisations, political parties and research and training institutes working on the issues of women and local government, through out Asia and the Pacific through one regional network is neither possible or desirable. This is due to the fact that the vast majority of these women and organisations do not use English as their first language. Moreover, only those women who usually come from upper and higher middle income groups normally benefit from such regional exchanges. To reach the vast majority of women in local government a system of **cascading networks** would have to be used. Such a system would depend on the development of country level networks linked to a regional network. Thus information and experience sharing on outcomes of research, policies, best practices and advocacy campaigns could be translated into local languages by country level networks and shared among women in local government in those countries. Such cascading networks would be better able to undertake actions at the country level and to monitor progress in achieving gender balance in local government, while the regional network would be able to coordinate actions, share experiences and develop synergies among country

level networks. With the advent of information and communication technologies such networking can be easily achieved through the Internet at relatively low costs.

#### Training and Research

Similar to networking, regional and sub-regional training programmes that seek to provide training directly to women in local government will be able to reach a very limited number of women. In each country there are governmental and non-governmental organisations and research and training institutes that are already providing training to women in local government and in gender mainstreaming of local governments. On many instances the capacities of these organisations and institutions is limited. Regional support to training should concentrate on building capacities of these institutes. In this connection, ESCAP established the Network of Local Government Training and Research Institutes in Asia and the Pacific (LOGOTRI) in 1999. LOGOTRI now has its independent secretariat at the Urban Development Training Centre of the Local Development Training Academy of Nepal. LOGOTRI can become an important partner in promoting training of women in local government and in providing training for gender mainstreaming in local government.

Similarly networks such as the Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements (CityNet), Center for Asia Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP) and programmes such as the UNDP-Asia-Pacific Gender Equality Network (APGEN), the UNDP-PARAGON Regional Governance Programme and the UNDP/UNOPS The Urban Governance Initiative (TUGI) can also play a pivotal role in promoting training and research at the country level.

#### Resource Mobilisation at the Country Level

International and regional organisations can also contribute to promoting gender balance in local government by assisting the country-level networks and organisations in mobilising monetary and human resources for training as well as for helping women candidates fund their election campaigns. This could be done through lobbying with political parties, private foundations and funds in developed countries and through developing linkages between political parties from developed countries and political parties in developing countries similar to the work done by the foundations of the German political parties.

## **7. Conclusions**

The preparation of the reports on the State of Women in Urban Local Government in 14 countries and the convening of the Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors by ESCAP are first steps in a long journey to achieve the goal of gender balance in local government. Both the reports and the Summit have highlighted the issues of women in local government in Asia and the Pacific.

The momentum created by these activities must be built upon if the goal of gender balance in local government is to be achieved. By their very nature both the reports and the Summit are limited in their scope and reach. They need to be followed up by the preparation of more in-depth State of Women in Local Government Reports that cover rural local governments and by convening of country-level summits of women in local government that can establish country-level networks, identify country level training providers and training needs, advocate governmental policy and legislative changes and mobilise the required country-level human and monetary resources.

## Appendix A. Factors That Affect Women's Involvement In Local Government

**South Asia: Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh**

<b>Rights, Practices and Initiatives that ensure Participation</b>	<b>Barriers to Participation</b>	<b>Impact of the Political System on Participation</b>
<p><b>Statutory Rights</b> All have statutory right to equality All have signed CEDAW All except Sri Lanka have a quota of reserved seats for women in local govt. Bangladesh has a quota for women in the civil service.</p> <p><b>National and local Policies and Progs</b> Some local govts provide training / orientation programmes to increase women's participation; Pakistan has a Local Government Plan 2000 for devolving power.</p> <p><b>Role of NGOs</b> NGOs in all countries have taken strong role in advocating women's involvement</p> <p><b>Training</b> Provided by NGOs, political parties and training institutions; e.g. All India Inst. of Local Self-government; Pakistan's Aurat Foundation has initiated 'Citizen's Campaign for Women's Representation in Local Government'; and Nepal has an Urban Development Training Centre.</p> <p><b>Initiatives by Women in Local Govt.</b> All India Council of Mayors</p> <p><b>Data Collection</b> India collects data on gender</p>	<p><b>Fundamental Inequality</b> Inequality creates major barrier, eg through low levels of literacy, poor health and poverty Politics seen as unsuitable for women</p> <p><b>Political and Economic Instability</b> A factor for some countries in this region In Pakistan political turmoil and martial law have affected the development of democracy</p> <p><b>Discrimination</b> Male dominance and inequitable divisions of labour a factor in all countries and can prevent women's involvement in public life. Traditional laws and practices entrench cultures and can override statutory law. Women not always allowed to vote, esp. in Pakistan</p> <p><b>Maleness of Political Institutions</b> Reluctance of some political parties to choose women candidates</p> <p><b>Costs</b> A major barrier as even the smallest of elections requires money to stand as a candidate.</p>	<p><b>Local Government System</b> Elections in Pakistan only held infrequently and by indirect election In Bangladesh local govt. strictly controlled by central govt. and dependent on central govt. funding.</p> <p><b>Quotas</b> Quotas of reserved seats for women have ensured women's participation</p> <p><b>Access to and Effectiveness of Reserved Seats</b> Reserved seats can be seen as inferior – lack of constituency. The system can also block elected women's ability to be part of decision-making and their access to funding for development projects.</p> <p><b>Wards</b> Elections based on ward representation</p> <p><b>Kinship Ties</b> Family connection enable women to gain political positions but do not necessarily lead to other women bring elected.</p> <p><b>Adversarial Nature of Politics</b> Women candidates face intimidation, violence and slander and opposition from men once elected. Financial and political power not always shared with women once elected. Reduction in voter turnout due to increasing corruption</p>

<b>South East Asia: Thailand, Malaysia and Philippines</b>		
<b>Rights, Practices and Initiatives that ensure Participation</b>	<b>Barriers to Participation</b>	<b>Impact of the Political System on Participation</b>
<p><b>Statutory Rights</b> All have constitutions with guarantees for women to participate. All signed CEDAW</p> <p><b>National and Local policies and progs</b> Thailand – National Women’s Co-ordination Board; Malaysia – Women’s Affairs Department; Philippines – Plan of Gender Responsiveness. Also a Local Government Code on women’s representation and quota for women in some local authorities.</p> <p><b>Role of NGOs</b> NGOs are strong in all countries</p> <p><b>Training</b> Provided by government and NGOs. Eg. in Philippines – CAPWIP and Women’s Legal Bureau.</p> <p><b>Initiatives by Women in Local Govt.</b> Women’s Municipal Mayors League in the Philippines</p> <p><b>Data Collection</b> Malaysia Women’s Affairs</p>	<p><b>Fundamental inequalities</b> Traditional views of women’s role in family are strong and family responsibilities can act as barrier to participation; economic, social and cultural obstacles, e.g. educational opportunities for girls and women sometimes limited and restrict women’s ability to participate.</p> <p><b>Discrimination</b> Male dominance and inequitable divisions of labour a factor in all countries. Traditional laws and practices entrench cultures Lack of awareness of political rights</p> <p><b>Maleness of Political Institutions</b> Attitude – politics is a male preserve Women not regarded as agents of change Women’s wings in political parties in Malaysia have no training on leadership / local government. Male governance practices exclude women</p> <p><b>Costs</b> A major barrier</p>	<p><b>Local Government System</b> Elections have been suspended in Malaysia since 1960s. Councillors are now political appointees and few women appointed as they need long political careers and academic achievement to be considered for appointment Governments’ practices exclude women</p> <p><b>Electoral systems</b> Philippines party list system guarantees quotas to particular groups including women and has led to the election of a women’s list party committed to advancing women’s rights</p> <p><b>Quotas</b> Philippines the only country to have quotas for women in some local councils</p> <p><b>Kinship Ties</b> A factor in the Philippines</p>

<b>East Asia and the Pacific: China, Vietnam, Japan, Australia, New Zealand</b>		
<b>Rights, Practices and Initiatives that ensure Participation</b>	<b>Barriers to Participation</b>	<b>Impact of the Political System on Participation</b>
<p><b>Statutory Rights</b> All have basic laws on political and civil rights. All have signed CEDAW</p> <p><b>National policies and programmes</b> All have nat. progs eg: China – a Prog. for the Development of Chinese women; Vietnam – Politburo document has goal to increase numbers of women; Japan – Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society encourages women’s participation; Australia and NZ – Women’s Affairs at central govt. level and EEO policies</p> <p><b>Local policies and programmes</b> Aust. &amp; NZ – legislation requires consultation/ encourages participation. Some provinces in China have set targets for the number of women</p> <p><b>Role of NGOs</b> NGOs strong in all countries, eg All China Women’s Fed.; Vietnam –Nat. Committee for the Advancement of Women; Japan – League of Women Voters and the Ichikawa Fusae Memorial Assoc; Aust. and NZ – Women’s Electoral Lobby</p> <p><b>Training</b> All countries very active</p> <p><b>Initiatives by women in LG</b> Australian Local Government Women’s Assoc; China – Branch of Women Mayors</p> <p><b>Data collection</b> Australia and NZ</p>	<p><b>Fundamental inequalities</b> Tradition and ideology strong in China, Vietnam and Japan, eg in Japan large numbers of rural councils have no women councillors due to tradition of male decision-makers. Women not trusted to do this job. All countries – dual responsibility of women in home and public life makes participation difficult. Family support is essential.</p> <p><b>Discrimination</b> In China women rejected in indirect election for village committees despite hard work. Harshly judged and achievement treated suspiciously. Vietnam -lack of confidence in women by voters due to outdated concept of respect for men and disdain for women still existing</p> <p><b>Maleness of Political Institutions</b> Attitude – politics is a male preserve and women find it hard to raise women’s issues. Women don’t see themselves as decision-makers.</p> <p><b>Costs</b> A major barrier for campaigning for office and for full time positions in local government</p>	<p><b>Local Government System</b> In Vietnam more women successful in elections (26%) than in appointed positions (6%) In NZ and Australia - longer time of voting and ability to stand for office has eventually led to more women being elected. Direct election for mayors in NZ – a factor in more women mayors being elected.</p> <p><b>Electoral systems</b> Proportional party list systems have resulted in more women being elected.</p> <p><b>Quotas</b> Not favoured in this area. Some preference for ‘merit based’ system. Some voluntary targets have been set.</p> <p><b>Adversarial Nature of Politics</b> Discrimination experienced by elected women and women in senior management positions. Aggressive political culture disliked by many women.</p>

## Appendix B. Proposals For Change

Sub-Regions	Systems	Attitudes	Strategies	Training
<u>South Asia</u> Sri-Lanka, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh	A quota of seats for women that are permanent and have same status as general seats Direct and open elections EEO programmes Consultation processes and Standing committees on women's issues Political Parties to recruit women candidates	Local government to develop a culture of equity and fairness Local government develop gender awareness programmes for women and men	Common strategy adopted on changes to policies and structures to enable women to participate equally Local government to work with NGOs and others for services for women Financial support / child care Support and training Gender disaggregated data	Gender awareness on women's rights and potential for leadership Political structures, processes and issues for women candidates and newly elected councillors Awareness of how women can use local government
<u>South-East Asia</u> Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines	EEO programmes to get more women appointed and to support them Implement good governance policies of Agenda 21 Comply with legislation that ensure women's representation Allocate funding for gender and development	Local government to take gender-balanced approach to governance and management and in policy and service provision Opportunities for women to learn their role once elected Promotion of women's status	Women's associations to be established to provide a voice for women and for networking Women in local government to encourage more women to participate Opportunities for women to advance in politics	NGOs, political parties and political institutions help women develop skills and self confidence to ensure effectiveness Educational institutions to offer seminars for newly elected women Gender awareness workshops
<u>East Asia and the Pacific</u> China, Vietnam, Japan, Australia, New Zealand	Proportional representation systems of voting needed Number of elected positions maintained Ward systems retained Quotas systems EEO policies to enable women to move into senior management positions Increased payment Caps on campaign spending Gender equity policies	Local government to be more women friendly – more consensus politics, gender sensitivity and meetings held at times that suit women A political environment to be developed in which discrimination against women is not acceptable	An information package to be developed for women candidates Funds to help women run for election Best practice models A mentoring programme Women's associations National databases Measurements of the impacts of all policies and programmes on women and men	Citizen awareness of gender, politics and human rights Training programmes for women candidates and for newly elected women on local government functions, processes and on leadership skills Self-reliance, self-confidence courses for girls and young women and their potential for decision-making positions