

The concept of women's political participation goes far beyond electoral politics. In many countries the most effective access women have had to political decision-making has been through popular avenues such as non-government organizations, people's organizations and their own women's groups. Moreover, many women political activists contend that high political position and the individual successes of women in party politics do not guarantee a change in women's political status, let alone their ability to exercise their political rights.

are women. For this is not about putting more women in public office. This is about using power to bring about the transformation of structures."

During the Congress, Ms. Santiago described her women-centered vision of a new political paradigm as one where politics is both transformed and transformational. Transformed in the sense that it uses power to create change, to develop people and to build communities, is non-hierarchical and participatory in its structures and processes.

Transformational because it is issue-based, development-oriented and gender-responsive, seeking economic, social and political equity between genders and among sectors.

Where Women Are Involved ... Things Get Done

by Maria Victoria (Mavic) Cabrera-Balleza

However, others stress that women have made real gains from electoral politics through lobbying efforts and other actions taken on the outside, so there is a need for women to be involved in electoral politics and get into positions of control and decision-making. It is still overwhelmingly the case that in most parts of the world, high-level economic and political decisions are being made without consideration of women's perspectives. The universal recognition of women's political rights and the strength of their voting numbers are nowhere reflected in their direct role in government.

The Congress brought together some 200 women from 27 countries, who have made a name for themselves in various fields, including veteran women politicians.

Elective vs. appointive positions

Women have different views and approaches to getting into positions of public power. Some take advantage of the quota system while others register with women's sections of political parties. Historically, in some countries, e.g., Germany, Canada, Iceland, Nigeria, the Philippines, Spain and Russia women have formed their own political parties.



Lynn Lee

Maria Victoria (Mavic) Cabrera-Balleza is a member of the ISIS International Communications Program. She took part in the First Asia Pacific Congress of Women in Politics held in Manila in June 1994. Mavic also writes for and edits *Women Envision*, another regular Isis publication.

Politics of numbers vs. the brand of politics

But is it enough just to have more women in public power-politics? Would a critical mass of women holding power, e.g., a ratio of 40 to 60 or even 50/50 with men make the necessary difference? The answer would largely depend on the brand of politics that women who will be in power will espouse.

As Irene Santiago, one of the organizers of the First Asia-Pacific Congress of Women in Politics held in Manila, Philippines in June 1994, states,

"We are not asking to have the same kind of politicians only that they

A case in point is the experience of Dr Kanwaljit Soin, the women's sectoral representative in the Singaporean parliament. Dr Soin's political career started four years ago when the Singaporean parliament began a scheme of providing six reserved seats for various sectors. A person has to be nominated by 12 Singaporeans in order to be included in the selection list, from the list, elected parliamentarians will choose the six representatives. In an interview conducted by the author during the Women in Politics Congress, Dr Soin relates,

"I called up a number of women friends to grab the opportunity. While doing that, I went into some kind of self-reflection and asked myself, why should I push my friends when I myself



Dr. Kanwaljit Soin (left) & Mavic Cabrera-Balleza

am not interested? It was then that I decided to submit my name for nomination."

Dr Soin was chosen for one seat while the rest were given to men.

In Norway and Denmark, quotas have been used successfully to increase the number of women in party leadership and electoral slates, a number of political parties provide that 40% of candidates be women. In some other Nordic countries women are demanding 50% in the party leadership and electoral line up.

Tahmina Daultana is an elected member of the National Assembly of Pakistan. In my interview with her during the congress, she said,

"I don't want to get into the quota system because I do not want to be a "dummy" of the group or party who endorsed my appointment."

Ms. Daultana is proud to say that she planned her political career for eight years and considers being born to a



Tahmina Daultana, National Assembly Member, Pakistan

political family an advantage. Her father was a former member of the Pakistani National Assembly, and she is the Secretary-General of the opposition party Pakistani Muslim League in the state of Punjab and she chairs the party's Women's Wing.

Ms Jung-Sook Kim, South Korea's Vice Minister for Political Affairs relates how she came to run for political office,

"I was approached by the Korean Democratic Liberal Party in 1988 and was persuaded to run for a seat in the National Assembly, a rare opportunity in a country with strong Confucian tradition like South Korea"

Ms. Jung-Sook Kim lost the National Assembly elections by a very slight margin but went on to become the first woman Vice Minister in-charge of the Department of Women's Affairs in South Korea, she was appointed to the post by the present administration. Ms. Jung-Sook Kim is again planning to run for the next National Assembly elections in 1996.

Strategies for moving forward

Strategies recommended by the Congress to get more women into the public and political arenas:

- o Demand that statistics documenting the participation of women and men in public and political life be available. Governments to do an inventory of public appointments, disaggregated by gender and the appointing authority, so we can see in which areas the shortfalls lie, published regularly, such information would guide women's NGOs and legislators to put pressure where it is needed.
- o Nominate as many women as possible to high-level government positions. Women who are already in powerful positions can influence policies to benefit women, they can also bring more women up the political ladder as in the case of Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway who appointed a cabinet with 50% women.
- o Create women's networks in business, professions, government, trade unions and women's organizations to share experiences and create solidarity, and create support groups for women candidates and nominees.
- o Encourage the formation of women's organizations and work to strengthen those which already exist. Women derive leadership, advocacy, and administrative skills from participating in women's organizations. Apart from being good training ground, women's organizations can become a major route for entry of women into public life and to advance women's interests.
- o Advocate and lobby for the incorporation of a women's political agenda in the platforms of political parties and make candidates accountable for the positions they take on key women's issues.
- o Lobby and organize for electoral reforms to make elections less expensive and violent, more participatory, and with more room for candidates from marginalized groups, such as indigenous communities and the other-abled.
- o Lobby governments to respect and implement the provisions of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other international agreements that ensure women's rights to participate, on equal terms, in the political and public spheres.
- o Identify possible sources of funding support for women candidates and facilitate training on fund raising and preparing budgets.



Jung Sook Klm, South Korea's Vice Minister for Women's Affairs

The Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics, CAPWIP

Included in Congress recommendations was the formation of more organizations to serve as a support base helping women to assume more visible and active political roles. One such group is the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP) which organized this First Asia-Pacific Congress of Women in Politics. It aims to create a critical mass of competent, effective, and committed women politicians holding elective and appointive posts, who will exert transformational influence on national leadership and regional decision-making.

CAPWIP will work with existing networks such as the League of Women Voters, research and training centers for women in politics and parliamentarians' associations such as the Japanese Federation of Women Parliamentarians. Where no such groups exist, CAPWIP may facilitate the setting up of a national affiliate. At present, the center has 25 national

affiliates from various countries in the region.

Services provided by CAPWIP include counseling national affiliates on firming up a program of action and facilitating training to build or strengthen the affiliate's capability to carry out campaigns, mobilize media, etc. In addition, CAPWIP assists affiliates in forging links with women's support groups regionally and internationally.

The Korean Institute for Women and Politics (KIWP) also advocates for the expansion of women's political participation. Chaired by Jung-Sook Kim, who is also one of the founders, KIWP conducts research to expand women's political participation and provides education and training programs for prospective women political leaders. The institute hopes to raise funds to support women candidates in future elections.

In Russia, a new women's political party, the Women of Russia Party, has formed to address issues ignored by other parties, e.g. high rates of unemployment of women, now seven out of ten unemployed persons are women, and, women's representation in official positions has fallen from 30-40% to 5.6%. The party was formed after a coalition of women's groups sent a questionnaire on women's issues to 27 political parties, only 3 responded.

In the Philippines, women who were active in the movement to oust then President Ferdinand Marcos initiated the formation of Kababaihan para sa Inang Bayan, KAIBA, (Women for the Motherland), a women's political party. It fielded women candidates in 1987 in the first elections after the dictator was deposed. Four women ran for congressional

seats while one ran for the senate but only one won and she also ran under the banner of other parties not only KAIBA.

Looking back, activists in the Philippine women's movement believe that they did not necessarily come out as losers, it was a great learning experience and they gained a lot of

insights from their first attempt to crash into the electoral arena. In one of their assessments after the elections, it was pointed out that for women to have a 'fighting chance' in Philippine politics, it is important to have efficient campaign machinery set up at least a year before the elections. KAIBA's experience also underscored the need to have a strong mass base primarily composed of organized groups of women from different sectors, and the importance of having substantial campaign funds to support women candidates. KAIBA has been dormant since the 1987 elections.

Making a difference

The small number of women in positions of public power is one of the root causes of the marginalization of women, as economic and political decisions at the national and international levels are being made without inputs from women.

Where women are involved, things get done. Studies indicate that women parliamentarians in Finland, compared to their male counterparts, are initiating more



Vietnam's Center for Women and Public Policy

Dr. Bong-Scuk Sohn, Director of the Center for Korean Women and Politics visited Hanoi in early 1994 at the invitation of the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU). Her trip was part of the activities of the Asia-Pacific Women in Politics Network. One of its aims was to assist the VWU to establish the Center for Women and Public Policy, as part of a planned Center for Women and Politics.

The Vietnam Women's Union

Dr Sohn reports that the VWU, the only women's organization in Vietnam, boasts 11.00 million members, every five years it holds a National Women's Congress. According to Decision Number 163, the VWU is responsible for recommending women ministers, congresswomen, women officials in political parties and women public officials. It has a central headquarters and three administrative sections, that is, Province, District-Quarter and Commune-Ward, and, ten departments such as the Research Department, the International Cooperation Department etc. The Union's executive committee is the Presidium with fifteen members, nine from the central section and six from the local communities.

Women in politics

In terms of women's participation in politics, the Vice President of Vietnam is a woman and among sixteen ministers, four are women, including the Minister for Education. There are 73 women, or 18%, out of a total of 395 representatives in the national congress, they have a five year term, and women make up about 30 percent of representatives in local assemblies. Potential congresswomen are recommended to the National

Fatherland Front (NFF) by the Personnel Office of the VWU. The NFF takes charge of nominating candidates for the congress nationwide and a candidate then has to be elected by popular vote in local electorates, individuals can also run for election.

Center for Women and Public Policy: women's leadership education

The VWU has a great interest in strengthening women's leadership, in technical training for women and achieving equality between women and men. Thus the VWU will place the Center for Women and Public Policy under its Personnel Department which will lead to the establishment of a Center for Women and Politics to take charge of women's leadership education.

Leadership training is especially important for the 18% of women in the national legislature and the 30% in the local assemblies as most are not professional politicians but functional representatives, therefore they lack knowledge in managing political organizations or participating in the policy decision-making process.

In the short-term, the VWU is considering offering a program called 'Leadership Training Lecture Series' once a week or once a month, and holding workshops to build leadership and get ideas on how to train women leaders. In the longterm, the Center for Women and Public Policy will eventually become the main training center for women leaders. Through this process, they can exchange ideas and experiences with other centers, such as the Center for Korean Women and Politics.

legislation which benefits women and other disadvantaged groups. Obviously, women cannot depend on most men to put forward issues like reproductive rights, child care, sexual harassment, violence against women, etc. Moreover, it is all the more difficult to expect men to bring in women's perspectives in addressing issues such as economics, justice, peace, military, trade etc.

In many countries, there is a growing lack of respect for traditional politicians so the entry of women into politics in considerable numbers may improve politics. This assumption is substantiated by a survey conducted in Australia in 1991 where sixty-four percent of respondents believed that men enter politics for reasons of personal ambitions and desire for money and only eleven percent believed women had the same motives; and, only thirteen percent believed men were motivated by altruism and concern for community welfare while fifty-four percent believed women were motivated by altruistic concerns.

Therein lies the rationale of transformed and transformational politics. Women's direct involvement in politics is a change that has long been welcomed and anticipated. Moreover, participation is a learning experience which can improve the quality of work of both women and men, especially in fields which are traditionally unfamiliar to them. Balanced participation by women and men in decision-making through more women gaining positions of public power, will bring about a new logic, a new epistemology and a new way of being in the new world order.

Regardless of the approaches or paths women take to get into positions of public power, in aiming to become part of the partisan political mainstream many also want to influence and change it.

Sources: Center for Korean Women and Politics Newsletter, Oksan Bldg. No.402, 157-33 Samsung dong, Kangnam-ku, Seoul Korca 135-090, tel: 82-2-528-1201-3, fax: 82-2-528-1204; Shirkat Gah, Newsheet, p.29, Vol VI, No. 2, 1994.

References: Santiago, Irene; Soin, Kanwaljit, speeches delivered during the First Asia-Pacific Congress of Women in Politics, Manila, Philippines, 21-23 June, 1994.