

Women's Quotas: How to introduce and implement them better?

Seminar and Workshop for Southeast Asia

**Organised by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and
Gender Development Research Institute (GDRI)**

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In most countries, the political representation of women is still very low. International treaties promoting women's rights and gender equality such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) have suggested government and civil society to use special measures to increase the number of women in politics, administration and judiciary.

By now, it is already visible that women's quotas applied in different countries around the world are the most effective and fastest tool to achieve this. In the past few years, more and more countries have decided to introduce quotas, either in political parties or in local and national parliaments. Proponents of women's quotas in many countries around the world have strongly advocated for this instrument. Currently, over 30 countries have stipulated quota regulations in the constitution, election law etc. Besides, more than 100 political parties in over 60 countries have introduced quotas for nomination their political candidates.

However, it is not easy to adopt women's quotas as they provoke opposition from many groups, particularly male key decision-makers, because they challenge some dominant norms of power and justice. Although the principle of gender equality is widely shared and recognised, it rarely manifests itself in a commitment to assuring women half of the seats in important political bodies.

Women's representation in politics at the national level in Southeast Asia is varied from 8.7 – 27.3%: Thailand = 8.7%, Malaysia = 9.1%, Cambodia = 9.8%, Indonesia = 11.3%, Philippines = 15.3%, Singapore = 24.5%, Laos = 25.2% and Vietnam 27.3%. This percentage is still far from 'the critical mass' of 30% which is claimed as a sufficient number to be able to demand for policies. In the past years, only few countries had successfully advocated in integrating women's quotas in their national laws such as Indonesia and Korea while other countries are still working on it and looking for better chances. Within the group of countries which have integrated quota regulations, there are at least two fractions: those who have successfully integrated and implemented quota regulations and those which integrated quota regulations but still fail to fully implement them in practise. Indonesia is a good example for the latter.

The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung of Thailand Office and the Regional Gender Program Southeast Asia of FES had organised a regional seminar and workshop in cooperation with Gender and Development Research Institute (GDRI) in order not only to exchange experiences on advocating and implementing quotas in the participating countries, but also to analyse and identify some key factors which could help to force the implementation of quota after integration into national law. Further also to work on and to elaborate action plans on advocacy for strategies of introducing and implementing quotas. In context of Thailand, it is to help raise the topic in Thailand while opportunity is open for lobbying during the drafting of the new constitution and new election law.

The first day of the seminar started with a question: Are electoral system gender neutral? Dr. Fleschenberg of University of Duisburg underlined that electoral systems are, by no means,

gender neutral. There are different aspects to stress this conclusion. The status and success of female political actors is largely determined by at least three sets of factors:

1. socio-economic factor (education, professional experiences)
2. political culture (values, norms, political behavior)
3. institutions (political system, party system)

Interlinkages and interdependencies between election system and party system exist. Changing the electoral system of a country might be necessary to increase the share of women. But electoral system or quota provision alone do not guarantee women political participation in high levels.

In Indonesia, for the 2004 election a non-compulsory quota was introduced in which political parties were asked to nominate 30% women in their lists of parliamentary candidates in all level. But there are still many problems concerning the comprehensive implementation of the quota regulation. The greatest obstacles are due to institutional design of electoral system, the structure of political parties and gender ideology. Some lessons learned that it can be stressed is that timing is very important for successful adoption of quota (like in moment of transition), different type of quota will work differently and can be incorporated in election system, political party system or in the constitutional amendment. In case of Indonesia, internal quota in the political parties is crucial and quota adopted in the PR system should be compulsory.

Since 2000, women's representation in Korea has improved significantly. In a political party act, a 30% quota for women was introduced. Crucial for the success was the pressure from civil society and women NGOs. Slowly, the voters' mindset about the need of female representation changed. Education was crucial to support the awareness raising on women's representation. Men and women cooperated in their demands for quota regulations.

The political representation of women in Thailand is still low. At the national level it is at around 10%. The former constitution of 1997 stipulated that men and women have equal rights, positive discrimination was allowed, and legislative amendment was possible to be considered by the Parliament if it was submitted with the approval of 50,000 people. Referring to these articles, women's groups have advocated for the amendment of one Local Government Act to have equal representation of male and female but have not yet pushed it through. As for some other Southeast Asian countries, it can be stated that a higher representation is more likely achieved at local level.

Malaysia is a signatory member of CEDAW and 30% women representation in parliament is declared an objective by the current government. At present, the trend that more and more women are appointed to higher positions can be confirmed. One precondition of a higher participation of women is indeed free and democratic elections to guarantee that women who run for elections have a favorable environment.

In the Philippines, there are several codes and laws on the inclusion of women, but no quota regulations for political parties. Women's representation in parliament has improved from 17% in 2004 to 22% in the elections 2007 for all electoral seats. At the moment, several bills are pending to increase women's representation in politics, among them the Gender Balance Bill which demands a 30% quota for political parties.

The second day of the seminar was reserved for group discussions. Strategies, key stakeholders and action plans for introducing and implementing women's quotas were intensively discussed within the groups.

For advocating quota policies, stakeholders need to be convinced by using gender specific data on the contribution of women to the national economy, etc. These data have to be updated frequently. Civil society must make sure that the data are updated and analyzed. Therefore,

women study centers or institutes such as GDRI are important resources for government planners and lobbyists. Resource persons should be available to be present in government planning departments and bring in their expertise, thereby providing consultancy for the government if needed. Building an alliance which include male decision makers and also an alliance with media. Education is also a key issue. Crisis periods offer windows of opportunity for the introduction of quotas, therefore timing is considered as crucial. It is also important to keep contact with politicians and at the same time build their awareness on gender issues and using the media for this purpose. Networks need to be build and to become more active for recruiting women candidates.

Women's organisations, educational institutions, media, government, political parties, voters, women parliamentarians are among others the key stakeholders in promoting quota policies.

At the end of the working group discussion, action plans in participating countries were designed. Cambodia will focus on supporting academic research and developing a data base. Lobbying for gender quota for local councilors, organising a national workshop for promoting women's quota are action plans of Malaysia. As for Indonesia, will do advocation on quotas and the inclusion of sanctions, monitoring the MPs performance and strengthening capacity among women's politician. Philippines will conduct studies and pressuring for an improved legislation. Thailand will be providing information on quotas to key actors such as decision-makers and media.