

# **A global analysis: What has worked for women in politics and what has not, 1975-1998**

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The question, which this paper is supposed to answer, is indeed a "64 thousand dollar question." The way it was formulated could give the impression that what is expected as an answer is a series of recipes. Clearly, this paper will provide none. While it is obvious that women's involvement in the political process is, nowhere in the world, proportionate to the 50% of the population which they represent approximately or to their input to society - whether this input is or is not accounted for in the GNP - there exist no ready-made solutions immediately applicable in any context.

Politics is not a series of techniques but a very complex phenomenon which, in every region of the world and for that matter in every single country, is deeply rooted in historical and institutional developments and has evolved against the background of cultural values, including religious or ideological values. What may have worked - or not worked - in the last 20 years in Sweden, Russia, South Africa or Argentina in a given social and political context and with a specific cultural and spiritual or ideological background may not work or on the contrary work in China, India or the Philippines where the political conditions, the historical background and the relationship between men and women are completely different.

It is very true however that **in some 20 years there has been a dramatic evolution almost everywhere in the world in women's participation in the political process.** This evolution concerns the perception of women's political participation, its need and meaning for society as a whole, as much as - if not more than - the actual scope and impact of women's involvement in politics and the techniques and strategies applied to develop it.

Clearly, what follows will be more of a brief and incomplete shopping-list than a detailed analysis and a review of specific success stories or failures. Furthermore, it is worth stating that this paper is not based on personal political experience but on data accumulated by the Inter-Parliamentary Union for which the question "what works and what does not work" has been at the heart of 20 years of steady work. In this context, it is relevant to mention that the IPU is just launching a series of in-depth interviews of women politicians around the world to learn about their experience of what has worked and what has not for them individually and the difference they have made on the political process. The outcome of this inquiry will be analyzed and interpreted at a meeting in 1999 at which an equal number of male and female politicians, belonging to Parliaments and to Governments, along with representatives of the media, political scientists, sociologists, philosophers, historians, specialists of opinion and electoral polls, etc., will reflect on the kind of "genderised" democracy we all advocate for the third millennium.

## A Change in Perception

In 1985, the IPU came to the Nairobi Conference with a first set of data on women's electoral rights and their representation in national Parliaments since the early 60s, but its statement that the low number of women in politics was detrimental for society as a whole did not seem to capture much attention. The sense of priority was elsewhere then. Indeed, the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies say almost nothing about women's political participation; they are even more sketchy and general than the document of the First Conference, in 1975 in Mexico. This would be inconceivable today and it is revealing that 10 years later the Beijing Conference was mandated to give priority to women's political participation and initiatives such as the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP), the Global Network of Women in Politics (GlobalNet) and their congresses have developed.

Disappointing though it was, for the IPU, the Nairobi experience provided a strong and useful incentive. It showed the need for work and reflection regarding women's political participation and it also helped to focus its programme on the status of women on political participation with the idea of nurturing the UN and national thinking and strategies in that respect.

To go beyond mere rhetoric, what was then needed was to take stock of the national, regional and world situation with regard to women's political rights and participation in politics. Clearly, this must be done on a permanent basis as **an on going monitoring of developments**<sup>1</sup> not only internationally by the IPU and the UN but also nationally or even locally.

What was also needed was to involve political actors themselves in reflection on the why and the how of the obvious scarce presence of women in governments and parliaments, on its incidence for society at large, and finally to identify ways of correcting this imbalance.

What was needed more than anything else was advocacy: with men of course, but also with women.

## Where Are We Now?

Democracy is no longer perceived as the private and exclusive domain of men. When adopting the *Universal Declaration on Democracy* in September 1997, the Parliaments of the world represented in the IPU stated that one of the founding principles of democracy is:

*"The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences."*

No one, some 20 years ago, would have dared define women's political participation as one of the keys to democracy. So it may be said that **"what has worked"** is the identification of women's exclusion from the political process as a democratic deficit.

**"What has worked"** is providing irrefutable evidence of the extent of this deficit with historical data, statistics and the sharing and assessment of experience.

Among the many studies and surveys which the IPU produced with that aim is a poster showing the world map with very factual data: the percentage of women and men in all Parliaments of the world, a chronology of women's electoral suffrage, historical data on women's presence and leadership positions in Parliaments. In a world that has evolved from the culture of oral transmission to that of

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<sup>1</sup> See IPU's regular surveys and web-site with permanently up-dated data on women in Parliaments world-wide: <http://www.ipu.org>

visual transmission, the poster has probably had a stronger educational and advocacy role than any document agreed by States after arduous diplomatic negotiations or sophisticated dissertations by scholars. If the Government or even some NGOs in each of the countries represented at this Second Congress could produce and disseminate a similar poster presenting the state of the art nationally or federally, or even provincially or locally, this would certainly generate a change of vision and hopefully encourage women's involvement in politics. This could be particularly effective if the poster highlights that - as stated by the IPU in its Plan of Action<sup>2</sup> - *"the combination of efforts on the part of all of society's component is indispensable to tackle and resolve the problems facing society,"* and it if is presented to young people in schools, training centers and universities.

**"What works"** is a resolve for change in women themselves that leads to action and women's continuous organized discussions and networking.

**"What works"** is a resolve for change which leads to measures that come about through a combined pressure from above (the State institutions) and from below (the NGOs and the women's movement).

**"What has also worked"** or rather starts to produce results is involving men politicians along with women politicians to look into the situation and analyze the democratic process "through a gender lens."<sup>3</sup> At the international level, the most rewarding exercise so far was the IPU Conference on the theme *"Towards Partnership Between Men and Women,"*<sup>4</sup> in February 1997 in New Delhi. This was an occasion when an equal number of men and women MPs from all over the world came together to discuss ways to develop a new social contract that respects the dual nature of the composition of society and to dialogue on such "hot" issues as the procedures for selecting candidates to elections or the financing of electoral campaigns.

The event showed that it has become possible to advance from the usual discussions on women and by women - which are still very necessary - to a broader dialogue between men and women: not just with men who sympathize with the cause but with men who have fears and strong views, are reluctant or even opposed and who would rather have the status quo prolonged than run the risk of losing an inch of political privilege.

This reveals a **major change in outlook that has taken place quietly in some 20 years**. In addition, the New Delhi Conference showed that a change in the established mind-set of both men and women can be initiated when what is addressed are not just the difficulties and obstacles faced by women in politics but rather the imbalance and general grievance for society as a whole when women are not involved in the political process on a basis of equality with men: in law, in numbers and in visibility and impact.

## **A Change in Perspective**

The experience of New Delhi leads to the question: What has changed so dramatically in 20 years that it has become possible to initiate a parity dialogue and to have a fresh outlook on the way in which politics meets the needs of society as a whole?

Has the number of women politicians increased significantly? A look at the overall evolution of the presence of women in national Parliaments worldwide will highlight the rather **small numerical**

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<sup>2</sup> *"Plan of Action to Correct Present Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Politics,"* Series Reports and Documents N° 22, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> This expression was used in the context of the Fifth Conference of Women Presiding Officers of Parliament in Cape Town in July 1998.

<sup>4</sup> See IPU brochure entitled *"Towards Partnership Between Men and Women in Politics,"* Series Reports and Documents N° 29, 1997.

**advance of women MPs in 20 years**<sup>5</sup>. From a regional perspective, this advance is indeed very small for Asia even if, at first sight, that region can be proud to be over the world average and among the highest regional averages; on the other hand, the advance is dramatic in the Pacific.

1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 11.0% women MPs worldwide</li> <li>▪ 13.5% women MPs in Asia</li> <li>▪ 3.0% women MPs in Pacific</li> </ul>
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 12.7% women MPs worldwide</li> <li>▪ 13.7% women MPs in Asia</li> <li>▪ 11.8% women MPs in Pacific</li> </ul>

As always, though, global and regional percentages tend to hide as much as they reveal as in fact the situation in a handful of countries tends to distort the overall picture of the situation in either Asia or the Pacific. While important changes have taken place within a number of countries in the 2 regions, as can be seen from the tables in annex 1 and annex 2, it would be proper to carry out a country-by-country analysis based on the political, social or even economic developments in the countries concerned. Such work must be encouraged since experience shows that **it provides solid grounds for future progress**.

### Regional Averages as of August 1998

Regions are classified by descending order of the percentage of women in the single or lower House

	Single or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses combined
Nordic countries	36.7%	---	36.7%
Americas	15.4%	14.1%	15.2%
Europe OSCE ( <i>Nordic countries included</i> )	15.0%	10.5%	14.2%
Asia	14.1%	10.0%	13.7%
Europe OSCE ( <i>Nordic countries not included</i> )	12.7%	10.5%	12.3%
Sub-Saharan Africa	11.4%	12.5%	11.5%
Pacific	9.9%	21.8%	11.8%
Arab States	3.5%	2.5%	3.3%

From a global perspective, it may be argued that, if **women have been able to strengthen their political visibility and impact without making dramatic progress in numbers**, this may be directly due to a **change in outlook**:

- In society at large for which generally it is no longer awkward for women to be able not only to vote but also to be elected and hold political and leadership positions;
- In men who, almost everywhere now, are being "hammered" with the concept of gender equality, at least implicitly, and who have become accustomed to study alongside girls at schools and universities and to see women as part of the paid labor force, and hence find it more difficult to resist and oppose women's penetration and influence on the political scene;

<sup>5</sup> See in IPU publication "*Women in Parliaments: 1945-1995*," series Reports and Documents N° 23, 1995, an analysis of progress and setbacks of women in the world's Parliaments in 50 years of electoral and parliamentary history.

- In women themselves who are becoming increasingly aware of their political weight and also of their responsibility in the public sphere on the basis of equality with men.

## AN EVOLUTION IN THE LEGAL AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The changes that have taken place in the last 20 years with regard to women in politics have not come about through the natural change of society alone. From the perspective of "**what worked,**" it may be said that, as politics does not exist in a vacuum, the promotion of the gender concept and corresponding voluntary measures that were not particularly targeting politics as such have played a decisive role in fostering women's involvement in politics. In addition and with varying success, some strategies and techniques have been used with the direct aim of raising women's interest in politics, securing women's access to elective office and, once "there," ensuring that women have an impact on politics whatever their numbers in parliament or in government.

The last 20 years have been marked by the battle to win **legal recognition of gender equality**. This was carried out by women and to a lesser extent by men sympathetic to this cause. The CEDAW was only adopted in 1979 and there is still a long way to go before it is implemented satisfactorily. Yet its very existence and the steps taken to transform its international norms into national reality - combined with the mobilization generated by major events such as the Beijing and Cairo World Conferences - have **already had an important direct or indirect impact on women's political participation**.

The enactment of a Law on Gender Equality - often to comply with CEDAW - has in many countries around the world greatly facilitated women's political participation, both because the national debate generated by the adoption of the law emphasized women's positive contribution to society and because the law itself created a legal basis for this contribution to be assessed and safeguards to ensure respect of gender equality in practice and generated the establishment of **remedies in case of violation**. For example, in the wake of that legislation, a number of Nordic countries have established an Ombudsman on Equality whose action has helped to remedy violations of the principle of equality and turn it into tangible reality.

In a more immediate relation to politics, discussions about the **Electoral Law** or its revisions have in many countries provided an opportunity to highlight the need to increase the proportion of women with an elective mandate or may indeed have been centered on that need. It may well be that, in the last resort, the existing law remained unaltered but, no doubt, **some impact was made**, for good or far bad. More than anywhere else, this is true of India where the debate on the reservation of 33% of seats for women has caused a tidal wave. One major issue in that connection is, of course, which system is best suited to help the election of women and this question which deserves to be discussed per se will be covered later.

**Education and its contents are important factors:** as expressed at the New Delhi Conference by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Ms. Sheikh Hasina, "*It is ineffectual merely to legislate equality and provide women with various legal safeguards if women remain unable to appreciate their rights fully and lack the knowledge and skill to defend them.*" IPU's Plan of Action insists that all educational material should be scrutinized so as to eliminate any messages conveying explicitly or implicitly the idea of superiority of men over women; it further insists that the same material and identical chances and duration of compulsory schooling need to be offered to boys and girls, by law and in practice, and it states that this equal education of boys and girls needs to cover civic education. Formal education is only one part of the educational process-- while it is clear that the positive messages it conveys will be blurred if family and community values run against gender equality and the importance of partnership between men and women, it has played and will continue to play a central role in promoting women's political participation in the last 20 years.

Last and not least, **economic emancipation has often proved to be decisive** for women. Even when - as is still often the case - men continue to control the product of women's paid work, economic

empowerment, albeit token, helps to give women the kind of personal autonomy that is needed to make personal political choices on the occasion of elections and, in some cases, to run for election. This economic emancipation is facilitated by formal education, whether in the form of professional training or a university degree, but for women it often takes other routes: a modest but very common one, especially in Asia, is the informal sector; another is the ownership of land and properties which patriarchal laws tend to render very difficult but which is now being debated from a gender perspective.

As a matter of fact, in some 20 years, almost all IPU surveys and debates regarding women's political participation have highlighted **the central role played by the combination of education and economic emancipation to raise women's awareness of the importance of their participation in politics**. The more women are literate and educated, the less they are economically dependent, the less they are ready to leave politics to men as those "who know" and can decide on their behalf; also men feel less justified in barring women from freely exercising their political rights and choices, including that to run for an elective mandate.

## **WOMEN ASPIRING TO AN ELECTIVE OFFICE: WHAT WORKS?**

### *A major deterrent: the system of values and practices in politics*

Politics is associated with a specific system of values and practices which women find so alienating and daunting that they feel either excluded or reluctant to engage in it. Being adversarial and confrontational, politics is perceived by women as belonging to a male world. This makes women choose either to adjust to the milieu and act the man's way, or to assume and impose their different identity. In addition, the current political system is more than often labeled as dirty and corrupt and this renders it most unattractive for women. For them, these are probably among the most difficult barriers to overcome.

On the other hand, women benefit from a positive prejudice on the part of the electorate which tends to place hopes in them and to believe that they are not only serious about the job but also honest and can bring fresh values to the world of politics. While this prejudice can be a burden it certainly acts as a catalyst for women to take office and as an incentive for parties to present female candidates.

### *Preparation for campaigning and for parliamentary work*

In Asia and the Pacific and also in Latin America, the family political background has proved to be a decisive factor for many women politicians. But beyond the incentive that constant exposure to politics since childhood and family ties with political leaders may generate, it takes skills to be in politics. It will not work at all, or will not work for long, if those skills are not developed by women aspiring to an elective mandate.

But who can provide the necessary training? Beyond the fact that political flair and charisma cannot be acquired through training, there exists no formal training for either men or women that can adequately prepare them for the complex process of politics.

According to the former Prime Minister of India, Shri H.D. Gowda, women as much as men gain expertise from practical experience. Political parties may be the most usual channel for men, but for women it is most common for this on-the-job training to take place not so much in political parties and their women's wings but rather within NGOs, within the women's movements, youth movements and trade unions.

In most countries women's political training takes place at the very local level: one of the most striking and inspiring example is of course the system of Panchayat in India which provides

unprepared women with an opportunity to conquer inhibitions and gain self-confidence, to overcome prejudices and to take their share of responsibilities on public issues.

It may be worth saying at this point that if women tend to be more numerous at the local or provincial level than at the national level, this may be so not only because women feel more at ease at the local or provincial level, or because the political game is less tough locally than nationally, but merely because a national mandate detracts more dramatically from the family: parliamentary sessions take place in the capital city of the State and involve long and repeated absences from home, especially when roads and transport facilities are poor, distances are long, climatic circumstances are unpredictable and can be dramatic, as is the case of Bangladesh or the Philippines.

Organized citizenship training for the female electorate and electoral preparation for female candidates remain a rare commodity in most countries and regions. As they realize the growing importance of women in the political arena, political parties and their women's wing tend to have an increasing interest in this connection but no survey has been carried out to appreciate the kind of work performed by them and their results. In so far as information is available in this respect, there are few NGOs which dedicate themselves to that activity with either the female electorate at large or potential female candidates. The Training Institute of CAPWIP in Manila is probably among the pioneers, at least in Asia. As far as candidates are concerned, full-time professional trainers, either male or female, are rare in the field and one has to count on a rather limited pool of persons: seasoned politicians (usually no longer in the limelight of politics) who are ready to act as mentors, a few individuals who have developed and tested a number of techniques and will request fees for sharing them, political friends and supporters who may include parliamentary advisers and staff and personnel from political parties, and finally some organizations from other countries which may be the promoters of a given message. With the increasing complexity of political and parliamentary work, the need for electoral and parliamentary preparation is sure to grow and diversify. Basically, citizenship, electoral and parliamentary training is a relatively new field of activity and one which will certainly expand, diversify and become more sophisticated and interactive in the next few years, especially if financing becomes available for it; the IPU itself is considering ways to develop activities in this respect in the context of its programme of technical assistance to parliaments.

According to persons who either benefited from some form of training or dispensed it (including in the context of a handful of IPU's training sessions for new parliamentarians), training pays off. This is especially the case when it is very pragmatic and deals with topics of immediate interest for candidates and future or newly elected parliamentarians: organization of the campaign, building of the electoral image, speaking skills, communication and media, campaign financing, work with volunteers and NGOs, parliamentary procedures, techniques and practices, process of preparation and adoption of the law, analysis of the different components of the national budget, how to deal with the electorate in the constituency, the role of governing and opposition parties, etc.

### ***Reconciling politics and the family***

Politics takes tremendous dedication, hard work and time, which entail a sacrifice on the part of one's private life. This is true for men as much as for women but it is a mere fact that this side of politics is not viewed and lived in the same traumatic manner by male politicians as by female politicians. This is why another important factor for women to run for elective office is support within the family and also the sharing of family responsibilities, especially vis-à-vis children and the elderly or the handicapped.

The testimonies by women politicians within the IPU show that this is an equation which is rarely resolved satisfactorily, if resolved at all. Indeed, women of so-called developing countries have an immense advantage vis-à-vis their counterparts from more developed countries: domestic help, either paid or within the extended family, is common in developing countries while it is a luxury in developed countries. Also, possibilities for women politicians to count on the continuing support of the family differ considerably between developing and developed countries: an extended family and

grandparents living under the same roof as their grandchildren are common features in the developing world while this is increasingly rare in the developed world where after school young children tend to come back to an empty home; finally, families divided by divorce are far less numerous in the developing world.

Beyond domestic arrangements, we seem to be at the initial stage of a phase in which political parties are taking better account of women - and men - who are keen to reconcile family responsibilities and political commitments. This involves steps such as ensuring that the timing of political meetings is indicated in advance and respected and also that these meetings are scheduled as far as possible during hours that do not coincide with the time when priority has to be given to the family; it also involves providing free or inexpensive facilities such as kindergartens for small children or day-care centers. Such arrangements, which are of great help, are far from being common in institutions such as parliament, for which reason young women aspiring to an elective mandate are faced with dramatic dilemmas with regard to their children.

### ***Getting the party's nomination and electoral support***

Today, political parties are predominant in political life and in the running of institutions and they can mobilize considerable support and logistics for electoral campaigning. Against that background, the number and electoral chances of independent candidates, as later the number and impact of independent MPs, are bound to be limited. But if self-nomination and organizing one's candidature is a real challenge in terms of getting the necessary support, logistics and financing for women wishing to run as independents, it is also a real challenge for women to obtain the nomination from a political party.

The chances are higher for women when the party has realized that women can be an electoral asset.

They are also higher if the party has incorporated the gender dimension in taking one or all of the following steps:

- Establishing a committee on gender equality or a gender "focal point" with a mandate to scrutinize the party's policy in that connection;
- Reorienting the party's women's wing so that it promotes women's vision and secures support for women within the party, and not just offering women's support to the party; and most importantly,
- Reviewing rules and practices for internal elections to ensure equality of access by women and men to the leadership positions in the party and to local and national elective mandates.

Often, when parties are asked why they do not nominate more women for candidates to Parliament, they answer that it is hard to find women with both the necessary political status and readiness to accept nomination. This seems to place the burden on women but in fact it poses the question of how women can have access to the governing structures of parties because it is a universal fact that parties tend to nominate their elite, who inevitably concentrates at the top: in most political parties, women are still very rare in high decision-making spheres.

### ***Electoral mechanisms established by political parties***

Let's face it, available data seems to indicate that, so far, there are relatively few political parties which have established electoral mechanisms aimed at increasing the proportion of elected women, in either their internal structures or indeed in the Parliament or other elective bodies.

For example, available data show that there are few parties which, in a context of multimember majority voting, have made it a rule to put forward at least one woman candidate in each constituency. In the absence of consolidated reliable data on the results produced by this measure, it would seem only logical to say that a number of factors ranging from the individual charisma of the candidate to the characteristics of the constituency in which she runs may be decisive.



In the context of proportional voting by list, the possible options used by parties are as follows:

- Including at least one woman or a given percentage of women in each electoral list
- Including at least one women in an elective position in every closed list
- Alternating between women and men in every list
- Establishing that a certain percentage of lists will be headed by women

They all work. What is missing is, again, consolidated reliable data on the real extent of the use of these techniques by parties and the actual percentage of results.

### *Which electoral system works best for women?*

This, in a sense, brings us straight to the question of which electoral system works best as far as women are concerned:

- Majority system
- Proportional system
- Mixed system

Here again, IPU's world inquiries lead one to be rather prudent but it seems safe to state that the proportional system is the most conducive to the election of women, provided that a number of safeguards are applied (hence the importance of the electoral techniques just mentioned).

### *Quotas or not quotas?*

Are quotas the solution? One thing is very sure: although not meant only for women, quotas are a political feature which has particularly developed in the last 20 years to offer answers to the scarce representation of women, they raise great hopes, are associated with a certain stigma and generate passionate debates. Another thing is indubitable: quotas cannot be a long-term solution but only a temporary measure to compensate for a long-existing imbalance; what remains to be seen in every individual context is how long the temporary measure needs to be in place to generate the expected redress. Many surveys carried out by the IPU have tried to find out if and how they worked<sup>6</sup>. On their basis as much as in the light of the views expressed by women MPs who have experienced quotas under all their "avatars," one would be tempted to say: it depends of the type of quota and the context.

For the record, it may be said that there are basically 2 main categories of quotas: those which target the candidatures and those which target the seats to be filled (i.e. the outcome of the electoral process); the latter are comparable to reserved seats, the only (relative) difference relating to the way in which the seats are filled. In addition, quotas can be established by law or by the political parties themselves as part of their own electoral policy.

Quotas established by law and aimed at ensuring that the election will "produce" a pre-established percentage of women in Parliament existed for decades in the former Soviet Union and countries with a similar system. All the women from Eastern and Central Europe who refer to their experience of these quotas have very disparaging words to qualify the distortions which they generated, such as creating an unbreakable ceiling, without permitting the development of a real political space for women in parliament.

A recent version of quotas by law tends to impose upon all political parties an obligation to present a given percentage of women candidates. This solution seems to produce rather good results, even if political parties may argue that they have no way to meet the quota owing the scarcity of potential

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<sup>6</sup> See more especially the latest world survey entitled "*Men and Women in Politics: Democracy Still in the Making*" which contains a full chapter on the issue. Series Reports and Documents N° 28, 1997

women candidates and will not be disqualified if they fail to meet the established quota, thus leading to the election of a still limited percentage of women.

The type of quotas that seem to be the most effective are those self-imposed by parties, with varying degrees of flexibility: a fixed percentage, a fixed target, an incentive.

Reserved seats (normally provided for in the Electoral Law) are helpful in facilitating the presence of a handful of women in a Parliament that, otherwise, would include none or just a minute number. However, one could argue that the only proof of the efficiency of the measure is when women previously occupying a reserved seat are eventually nominated by parties to take part in the electoral race and, having been directly elected to the same House owing to their recognized parliamentary efficiency, enlarge the overall proportion of women in the Parliament and generate women's political vocation.

### ***Pros and cons of exclusively feminine political parties***

Strictly women's electoral lists have worked in a limited way and on a rather short term. Existing examples, such as the pioneer women's party in Iceland, show that they create a shock-wave which can be productive but on the other hand their impact is very limited if the platform is centered around so-called women's issues; the electorate has difficulties in adjusting to a vision of politics that does not encompass all issues or respond to the needs of both women and men.

### ***Developing one's own assertiveness***

All testimonies of women politicians heard within IPU debates show that a number of ingredients are needed for female candidates to succeed. Among them, developing personal assertiveness comes high. However, while it is not easy to overcome personal inhibitions and gain the necessary self-confidence, it is even less easy to overcome cultural inhibitions based on gender patterns. Overcoming the latter goes much beyond personal resolve and derives from a combination of other factors: for example, a governmental policy to promote the concept of equality, the impact of international events such as the FWCW which create a supportive environment, circumstances in which women are placed such as the Panchayat, examples of successful women and mentors, etc.

With regard to personal potential, public speaking skills are certainly most important, as is developing the ability to interact with the media; this can be done both through practice and organized training.

Women also say that, in acquiring a public image, they further have to take special care of the way in which they dress, make-up, behave, etc. Men do not seem to be under the same scrutiny as women in that respect. There are, of course, campaign advisers who specialize in the development of the public image and can provide helpful orientation but this is generally not free of charge.

But this is not enough: woman candidates (as indeed the male candidates) have to get used to being the center of attention in public gatherings, being exposed to the demands of the electorate and offering responses. Here practice only will make a difference.

### ***A weak point: financing***

One of the weakest points for women wishing to run for elections is financing. This is also true for men but women politicians tend to assert that the challenge faced by them in that connection is even more crucial than for men who tend to be less reluctant to take financial risks and also to benefit from long-established networks which women say they do not have.

Generally, public funding is not available and women's campaigns have to be financed entirely by the candidate herself or her family, friends and supporters. Against that background, at the IPU Conference in New Delhi there was a general consensus that public funding, even if only partial,

would particularly benefit women. It was very much stressed that such funding should be accompanied by clear and transparent rules and regulations.

Many ideas were floated on ways to compensate the scarcity of funding for women's electoral campaigns<sup>7</sup>, but indeed there are few concrete available examples that could be quoted here of what has truly worked or not worked in the last 20 years in that connection.

Among recommended measures are:

- Political parties should, as a matter of principle, put forward at least one-third women candidates and allocate to them one-third of their campaign resources.
- Political parties and international financial institutions such as the World Bank should establish special funds which can be used to offer cash contributions or interest-free loans to women candidates or to reimburse their campaign expenses.
- The establishment of systems for at least partial public funding of campaigns should be generalized.
- Wherever public funding of political parties is possible, incentives should be put in place, i.e., the amount of funding or refunding of election campaign expenses should be linked to the percentage of women candidates put forward by each party and/or elected to Parliament.
- In those countries where funding is provided to parliamentary political groups, an additional premium should be foreseen, linked to the proportion of women MPs.
- The establishment of foundations for financing women's electoral campaigns should be encouraged and developed.

Regarding the latter recommendation, the best examples of success are initiatives such as Emily' List in the US which are tending to spread around the world.

It should also be said that field work, human resources and logistical support offered by parties and by NGOs can greatly compensate for the scarcity of funding. However, it would appear that in regions like Asia or the Pacific, parties rarely tend to place importance on women candidates or to offer them the (costly) logistical support that would compensate for lack of funds. NGOs usually lack the necessary means; there remains the human resources which, no doubt, are a very important asset.

Finally, non-public sources, if not properly controlled by law, may expose candidates to corruption.

#### ***Another weak point: support networks***

All women heard within the IPU agree that support networks during the electoral campaign and subsequently during their parliamentary mandate are either weak or simply not available or not on a continuing basis. NGOs and the women's movement should certainly listen to this complaint and try to offer better answers to the need of women politicians as, for example, is done in Brazil by the *Centro Femenista de Estudos e Assessoria*. This NGO provides support to women candidates and carries out permanent monitoring of the legislation and advocacy within the Federal Congress and ensures dissemination of information with the women's movement.

#### ***The media: a permanent challenge***

In today's politics, learning to interact with the media is as indispensable as learning to interact with the electorate. Whereas this represents a challenge common to all politicians, there seems to be an additional challenge for women: that of learning to get the media to capture their political message instead of concentrating on the very fact they are women and on their appearance. This means,

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<sup>7</sup> *New Delhi Declaration*, para. 30. See also the summary of the Moderator of the debate on the subject, the keynote presentations and excerpts from the debate, on pp. 66-77 of the brochure on the Conference, Series Reports and Documents N° 29, IPU

learning what works, namely learning how the media operate and learning ways of conveying a clear and specific message through them.

## **WHAT WORKS ONCE THERE, IN PARLIAMENT?**

### *Getting acquainted with the political environment and its rules*

If one wants to be effective in Parliament, one has to learn parliamentary rules and procedures. Learning unwritten parliamentary rules and informal arrangements will however be almost as important.

Unless they receive a special training in that connection - and such training is rather rare and in any case does not concern women MPs only but MPs at large - newly elected women MPs tend to lack skills in dealing with legislation and, even more importantly, with the budget. They will have to count on political friends and seasoned parliamentarians, either female or male, and also on experienced parliamentary assistants and parliamentary staff who can provide orientation and support. Incidentally, benefiting from office facilities and personal parliamentary assistance will make a great difference; this of course applies for all MPs irrespective of gender.

### *Widening the scope of action beyond the fields usually associated with women*

It is obvious that the possibilities for women to be involved in all committees depends on their overall number in the Parliament. This number being generally low, surveys carried out by the IPU show that, with a few exceptions which mainly concern the Nordic countries, women tend to be present in committees dealing with social issues more than in any other committees. When a reasonable number of women become involved in committees dealing with foreign affairs, or the budget, or security, or justice, etc., they can bring about changes in the approach to the subject and the legislation prepared so as to cover, whenever relevant, the specific vision and concerns of women. This, of course, implies that they have a gender approach or feel that they have a special responsibility vis-à-vis the female electorate, which is far from being the most common case. It is also worth keeping in mind that whatever their own thinking and resolve regarding the need for a gender approach to politics, MPs elected on a party platform will have to give priority to the party line and will have very limited room for maneuver, especially when it comes to public debates and voting.

### *Promoting legislation on issues of direct concern to women*

For women to make a difference in Parliaments they do not need to be represented in all areas of work: They can opt for certain areas or issues which are particularly relevant for women and try to promote legislation on them. This involves not only such issues as reproductive rights or divorce; it may concern such varied questions as, for example, land tenure, de-mining or consumer quality control, etc.

### *Networking*

Experience proves that, the fewer they are, the more it is important for women to network among themselves beyond party lines and also with sympathetic men in the parliament. Thanks to networks, women can exert influence both on legislation and on rules and practices regarding nominations and elections to leadership positions as well as conquer some of these positions: Bureau of the Parliament, Bureaus of the Committees, Spokesperson, Rapporteur, etc. An all-party women's caucus will turn into a very effective tool in Parliament if it obtains official recognition and technical support. A similar phenomenon can be observed at the international level and the best example of women becoming effective and having an impact on the overall decision-making process is the IPU's Meeting of Women Parliamentarians.

### *A woman in the chair*

Does it make a difference if, instead of being a man, the presiding officer of the Parliament or the Chamber of Parliament is a woman? If one listens to what women presiding officers of Parliament have to say in that connection, the answer seems to be: yes it does.

It first makes a difference - and no small one - as a symbol and an example.

It then makes a difference on the parliamentary culture: women tend to be less exposed to sexist remarks, men to respect parliamentary language.

It also impacts on the parliamentary environment: to the extent that the presiding officer can have a say on the overall operation of Parliament and the organization of sessions, a woman presiding officer can propose or impose arrangements which, in normal parliamentary circumstances, take into account the fact that MPs have a family. They can also see to it that women's needs as much as men's needs are met as regards accessible facilities within the parliamentary precincts; depending on the level of facilities available in Parliament, these facilities can run from toilets to hairdressers, from day-care centers to laundrettes, etc.

While many of these things may seem to be ancillary, they can may make quite a difference in practice, not just to make the life of parliamentarians at large more comfortable but, as far as women MPs are concerned, to improve their sense of equality with men and strengthen their position and self-confidence. In a broader sense, the presence of a woman in the Chair may work as an incentive for women to become more closely interested in politics and in some cases to run as candidates.

### *Acting politically, not necessarily in a man's way?*

Does it take a manly approach to think and act politically? Should the fact that the "language" and culture of politics has been developed by men determine politics and political behavior? The choice will of course depend on the individual woman. However, the experience of Nordic women shows that the more numerous they are, the less women will adopt the traditional language and behavior of male politicians. The doubt still remains as to whether women will change politics or politics will change women but a womanly style of politics may eventually emerge, or in any case a "genderised" style of politics.

### **What's missing most?**

Tremendous and far-reaching changes have taken place in some 20 years that somehow touch the nerves and bones of politics. In a sense, women can look to the future with great confidence. However, there are still many missing or insufficiently strong ingredients of success. **Among the most dramatic are the following:**

- Political will, especially at the level of political parties;
- Financing;
- Effective interaction with the media;
- Support networks;
- Sharing of family responsibilities;
- A gender approach to politics.

The last point is far from being the least important. At the end of the day, one should not have to ask "Why women in politics? What difference does it make?" but rather:

- How can politics possibly be defined and implemented without women or with a disproportionate number of men and women?

- How could politics really meet the needs of society if women are not sufficiently involved in defining and implementing it? Is it right that legislation on reproductive rights, or divorce or inheritance, or land-mines, or nuclear power plants, or trade or tourism be defined only or mainly by men?
- How come that at the end of this century political parties, parliaments, governments and international organizations such as the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union are still at the initial stage of incorporating in their techniques and rules and in their reflection and work the principle that men and women are equal and can be political partners?
- How long can political parties and their most entrenched male leadership continue to consolidate or simply maintain male political privileges when all arguments have been defeated and there is an overwhelming agreement on the principle that politics is to be defined by women and men together if it is to offer responses to the concerns and needs of both of them? Isn't the king now naked?

What are at stake after all are democracy and the good of society, which is what politics is supposed to be about.

## Annex 1

**Asia 1975:** Lower or Single House - 14.3%      Both Houses Combined - 13.5%  
 Upper House or Senate - 6.2%

*Statistics established by the IPU on the basis of data provided by National Parliaments*

Order	Country	Lower or Single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats	Women	% Women	Elections	Seats	Women	% Women
1	Dem. Rep. of Vietnam (1)	04 1975	424	137	32.3	---	---	---	---
2	Mongolia	06 1973	336	77	22.9	---	---	---	---
3	China	01 1975	2885	653	22.6	---	---	---	---
4	Dem. People's Rep. of Korea	12 1972	541	113	20.9	---	---	---	---
5	Lao People's Dem. Rep.	12 1975	45	4	8.9	---	---	---	---
6	Iran (Islamic Rep. of)	06 1975	268	20	7.5	06 1975	60	2	3.3
7	Indonesia	07 1971	460	33	7.2	---	---	---	---
8	Israel	12 1973	120	8	6.7	---	---	---	---
9	Rep. of Korea	02 1973	219	12	5.5	---	---	---	---
10	Bangladesh	03 1973	315	15	4.8	---	---	---	---
11	India	03 1971	518	21	4.1	03 1974	243	17	7.0
11	Pakistan	1973	146	6	4.1	1975	45	1	2.2
12	Sri Lanka	05 1970	157	6	3.8	---	---	---	---
13	Cambodia	09 1972	126	4	3.2	09 1972	40	0	0.0
13	Malaysia	08 1974	154	5	3.2	05 1972	60	2	3.3
14	Philippines	11 1969	109	3	2.8	11 1971	8	1	12.5
15	Nepal	1975	108	2	1.9	---	---	---	---
16	Japan	12 1972	491	7	1.4	07 1974	252	18	7.1
17	Thailand	01 1975	269	3	1.1	01 1975	100	9	9.0
18	Bhutan	1975*	150	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
18	Singapore	09 1972	65	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
	Maldives (2)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	Rep. of Vietnam (1)	1973	?	?	?	1973	60	?	?

1 Prior to reunification in April 1975

2 November 1979 was the first legislature of the Maldives after the country became independent on 26 July 1965

\* Renewal at varying dates

**Asia 1998:** Lower or Single House - 14.1%      Both Houses Combined - 13.7%  
Upper House or Senate - 10.0%

*Statistics established by the IPU on the basis of data provided by National Parliaments*

Order	Country	Lower or Single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats	Women	% Women	Elections	Seats	Women	% Women
1	Vietnam	07 1997	450	118	26.2	---	---	---	---
2	China	1997-98	2979	650	21.8	---	---	---	---
3	Lao People's Dem. Rep.	12 1997	99	21	21.2	---	---	---	---
4	Dem. People's Rep. of Korea	04 1990	687	138	20.1	---	---	---	---
5	Philippines	05 1998	217	27	12.4	05 1998	23	4	17.4
6	Indonesia	05 1997	500	57	11.4	---	---	---	---
7	Bangladesh	06 1996	330	30	9.1	---	---	---	---
8	India	02 1998	543	44	8.1	03 1998	220	19	8.6
9	Mongolia	06 1996	76	6	7.9	---	---	---	---
10	Malaysia	04 1995	192	15	7.8	03 1998	69	12	17.4
11	Israel	05 1996	120	9	7.5	---	---	---	---
12	Maldives	12 1994	48	3	6.3	---	---	---	---
13	Cambodia	05 1993	120	7	5.8	---	---	---	---
14	Thailand	11 1996	393	22	5.6	03 1996	260	21	8.1
15	Sri Lanka	08 1994	225	12	5.3	---	---	---	---
16	Iran (Islamic Rep. of)	03 1996	266	13	4.9	---	---	---	---
17	Singapore	01 1997	84	4	4.8	---	---	---	---
18	Japan	10 1996	500	23	4.6	07 1995	252	35	13.9
19	Rep. of Korea	04 1996	299	11	3.7	---	---	---	---
20	Nepal	11 1994	205	7	3.4	06 1997	60	5	8.3
21	Pakistan	02 1997	217	5	2.3	03 1997	87	1	1.1
22	Bhutan	1997*	150	3	2.0	---	---	---	---

\* *Renewal at varying dates*

## Annex 2

**Pacific 1975:** Lower or Single House - 1.7%      Both Houses Combined - 3.0%  
Upper House or Senate - 8.1%



*Statistics established by the IPU on the basis of data provided by National Parliaments*

Order	Country	Lower or Single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats	Women	% Women	Elections	Seats	Women	% Women
1	New Zealand	11 1975	87	4	4.6	---	---	---	---
2	Fiji	05 1972	52	2	3.8	11 1970	22	1	4.5
3	Australia	12 1975	127	0	0.0	12 1975	64	6	9.4
3	Nauru	12 1973	18	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
3	Samoa	02 1973	47	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
3	Tonga	05 1975	23	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
	Kiribati (1)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	Marshall Islands (2)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	Micronesia (Fed. States of) (3)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	Palau (4)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	Papua New Guinea (5)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	Solomon Islands (6)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	Tuvalu (7)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	Vanuatu (8)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

- 1 February 1978 was the first legislature of Kiribati after the country became independent on 12 July 1979.
- 2 November 1991 was the first legislature of the Marshall Islands after the country became independent in September 1991.
- 3 March 1993 was the first legislature of Micronesia after the country became independent in September 1991.
- 4 November 1992 was the first legislature of Palau after the country became independent on 1 October 1994.
- 5 July 1977 was the first legislature of Papua New Guinea after the country became independent on 16 September 1975.
- 6 August 1980 was the first legislature of the Solomon Islands after they became independent on 7 July 1978.
- 7 August 1977 was the first legislature of Tuvalu after the country became independent on 1 October 1978.
- 8 November 1979 was the first legislature of Vanuatu after the country became independent on 30 July 1980.

**Pacific 1998:** Lower or Single House - 9.9%      Both Houses Combined - 11.8%  
Upper House or Senate - 21.8%

*Statistics established by the IPU on the basis of data provided by National Parliaments*

Order	Country	Lower or Single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats	Women	% Women	Elections	Seats	Women	% Women

1	New Zealand	10 1996	120	35	29.2	---	---	---	---
2	Australia	03 1996	148	23	15.5	03 1996	76	23	30.3
3	Fiji	02 1994	70	3	4.3	02 1994	34	3	8.8
4	Samoa	04 1996	49	2	4.1	---	---	---	---
5	Solomon Islands	08 1997	49	1	2.0	---	---	---	---
6	Papua New Guinea	06 1997	109	2	1.8	---	---	---	---
7	Kiribati	07 1994	41	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
7	Micronesia (Fed. States of)	03 1997	14	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
7	Nauru	02 1997	18	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
7	Palau	11 1996	16	0	0.0	11 1996	14	1	7.1
7	Tonga	01 1996	30	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
	Marshall Islands	11 1995	33	?	?	---	---	---	---
	Tuvalu	03 1998	12	?	?	---	---	---	---
	Vanuatu	03 1998	52	?	?	---	---	---	---