

Women's full participation in political life is the only guarantee of their rights being protected and upheld.

We believe that when women are involved in politics, their voices and views are heard. Economic and social decisions will then be directly informed and influenced by women's rights and their diverse needs.

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Just Politics in an unjust world

Actions and strategies from the seventh
Asia Europe People's Forum 2008





Thousands of women workers from the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), India, took to the streets of Delhi in March 2008 to demand a Social Security Act for the unorganised sector which comprises 94% of the country's work force. The timely passing of the 'Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act' in December 2008 is expected to provide the necessary safety net for tens of thousands of workers who face the prospect of losing their jobs due to the global economic melt-down.

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Foreword

As always we live in contradictory times. Spaces for greater democratic engagement are opening-up while simultaneously, particularly in the west, citizens are increasingly distrustful and unenthusiastic about politics and politicians, choosing instead to channel energy into green campaigns and protest, like those around the G8.

Processes of decentralisation underway in many countries worldwide have developed new roles for local government and new ways to deepen democracy. At the heart of democracy is the relationship between citizens and the state.

One World Action's work over the last two decades has been to support citizens excluded by gender, poverty, caste, ethnicity, disability, HIV/AIDS status and sexual orientation to participate fully in decision-making and hold their government to account. Promoting and supporting women's rights and women's political participation is a particular focus of our work, highlighted in our current *More Women More Power* campaign which is calling for 50 per cent or more women in elected and appointed positions worldwide.

Questions of democracy, legitimacy, respect for human rights, transparency and accountability have never been more urgent as we face multiple crises: social, economic, financial, environmental, food security. One World Action will continue to work with our partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe for a just and equal world.

Helen O'Connell
Head of Policy
One World Action
February 2009

Executive summary

This report is based on presentations and discussions from the workshop ‘Strengthening Women’s Political Participation and Influence’ and other workshops of the seventh Asia Europe People’s Forum (AEPF-7) held in Beijing from 13–15 October 2008.

The AEPF is a parallel civil society conference to the official Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and is held every two years. In 2008, it brought together over 500 activists, scholars, journalists and politicians from all over Asia and Europe, including a significant representation from China.

The workshop on ‘Strengthening Women’s Political Participation and Influence’ provided an open platform for reflections on the progress, challenges and lessons learned in promoting women’s political participation in Asia and in Europe. Over 80 women leaders and activists put forward innovative strategies and shared experiences of how to achieve equal political participation for women and men.

This report, while building on and complementing One World Action’s Just Politics report, also draws on the experiences, analyses and insights of AEPF-7 participants, mostly women and men who have waged long campaigns to bring marginalised women to the forefront of struggles for social justice in different parts of Asia and Europe.

The major recommendations of this report, aimed at ASEM Governments and international institutions, are at the policy level:

Broad policy shifts

- a) A fundamental re-examination of the basic assumptions of neoliberal globalisation, especially its thrusts to deregulate and liberalise markets.
- b) A reorientation of state reforms toward the goal of deepening democracy, restoring the power of legislatures, revitalising systems of checks and balances, and expanding spaces for public participation.
- c) Reinstating and strengthening policies that support women entering public roles, including equal pay for work of equal value, adequate child care and other maternity benefits.
- d) Reassess the development needs of middle-income countries and ensure that adequate funding is ear-marked for programmes that will address women’s rights and encourage the political participation of women both in middle and lower income countries.

Specific measures recommended to support these policy shifts

- a) Strengthen or institute quotas, reservation of seats, and other forms of affirmative action that bring more women into decision-making bodies and ensure that these actions reflect the diversity of women’s positions in society, contributing to empowering the most marginalised women in society.
- b) Create a supportive atmosphere that guards against defeminisation of women in public roles. This includes informal arrangements and gender-sensitive values and norms as well as enabling measures
- c) Strengthen or introduce gender-responsive budgeting, gender audits, or other tools to explicitly monitor compliance with governments’ commitments on gender equality.
- d) Take steps to tackle the violence that prevents women from entering and participating in political life and to make it illegal for men who have a record of violence and domestic abuse to participate in politics.
- e) Open up opportunities for women to participate in new areas of governance – defence, security, finance and trade.
- f) Establish and well resource Women’s Caucuses – gender commissions/parliamentary committee/women’s federations.
- g) Establish an international solidarity fund to support women entering politics.

In addressing political parties, civil society and women's movements, the report makes the following recommendations:

Towards the goal of deepening democracy

- a) Political parties should renew their links with popular politics, social movements and the public at large. Parties should institute intra-party democracy, and adopt quotas for women and for marginalised groups rather than setting up 'women's wings' which remain relegated to the margins.
- b) Women's movements and civil society groups should network actively with political movements and parties

Towards bringing about a transformative politics of gender

- a) Root their efforts at strengthening women's political participation within a wider process of politicisation and emancipatory struggle. Women's movements must address a range of new challenges, including the resurgence of right-wing, xenophobic, nationalistic and fundamentalist trends in civil society.
- b) Adopt long-term radical agendas and effective mobilisation strategies, advancing from representation to accountability and transformative politics; from critical mass to feminist consciousness and challenging entrenched power structures.
- c) Strengthen or revive classic feminist struggles for equal opportunities at the workplace, maternity and child care benefits, and equal pay for work of equal value.
- d) Remain sensitive to the politics of difference and the diverse structures of oppression within which women are located, while attempting to strengthen women's political participation.
- e) Guard against the twin dangers of tokenism and defeminisation of women in public roles, by ensuring that women's political participation leads to effective mainstreaming of gender concerns in politics, that ALL women are represented, and that democratic spaces are opened up.

- f) Invest in building women's leadership at grassroots level, especially among marginalised communities, to make use of new political opportunities.
- g) Share and exchange innovative strategies for building women's leadership at grassroots levels, including collecting and disseminating data on women's political participation, developing women's manifestos, women's electoral agendas and national plans for action, and developing and popularising case studies of exemplary women in politics and governance.

And finally, a recommendation to the AEPF Organising Committee to set up processes to implement its agreed gender and disability commitments and to eliminate bias in participation, selection of panellists, speakers, chairpersons and discussants.



Activists and women leaders from Asia and Europe meeting with Geoffrey Barrett, ASEM Advisor, European Commission, Brussels

Part 1: Introduction: Context and backdrops

The workshop on ‘Strengthening Women’s Political Participation and Influence’ was held as part of the seventh Asia Europe People’s Forum (AEPF-7) in Beijing from 13–15 October 2008.

The Forum brought together over 500 politically active and visionary women and men – activists, scholars, journalists and politicians – from all over Asia and Europe, including a significant representation from China. The workshop aimed to provide an open platform for reflections on the progress, challenges and lessons learned in promoting women’s political participation in Asia and Europe. Over 80 women leaders and activists put forward innovative strategies and shared experiences of how to achieve equal political participation for women and men.

AEPF-7 took place in Beijing against the sombre backdrop of one of the most serious global financial crises since the Great Depression, provoked by a dramatic collapse of the financial foundations of the global economic system. To many economists, including most of those present at the Forum, the crisis heralded a massive worldwide recession, if not a full-scale depression.

However, a note of optimism came with the recognition that the crisis was a clear and unambiguous indictment of the policies of neoliberal globalisation that had unleashed the hegemony of markets across the world since the late 1980s. These policies have carried heavy costs for a range of vulnerable people and seriously undermined efforts at social and gender justice at all levels.

The meltdown called into question the model of finance-capital-propelled globalisation premised on minimally regulated markets, and its promises of prosperity for all. As governments in the US and UK jumped in with enormous bailout packages to rescue financial institutions, and nationalisation of banks was suddenly a favoured solution, the hypocrisy of neoliberal strictures about the separation of economics from politics stood exposed.

Many participants of AEPF-7 saw the crisis as providing important opportunities for renewed struggles toward people-oriented and just alternatives to capitalism. As Charles Santiago, an MP from Malaysia, declared in his speech at the AEPF-7 opening plenary, “The scale of the crisis and the popular outrage today provide an historic opening for the renewal of the kind of radical politics that advances a genuine alternative to capitalism.”

Others, however, saw that the crisis and imminent end of neoliberal globalisation could provide an impetus for a politics of renewed nationalism and protectionism. In the context of the democratic deficit in many countries of Europe and Asia, the xenophobic reactions to migrants, the rising power of right-wing political movements, and the campaign against terror, this reversion to nationalist and protectionist policies could spell an ever deeper threat to democracy and human rights than ever before.

Coming more than 10 years after the Beijing Conference on Women, the regional exchanges at the AEPF served as a reminder that the picture of women's participation in public and political life was far from rosy even in the advanced democracies of Europe. The ravages of neoliberal globalisation and its 'reform' agendas, which involved cutbacks in state support for weaker sections of the population, have eroded the advances that have been made in bringing women into public positions. However, despite this there was optimism expressed, particularly by Asian participants who felt energised by policies and measures that have been installed in their countries in the preceding decade, primary among which were the democratisation of local governments, institutionalisation of gender quotas, and the establishment of gender budgets.



Charles Santiago

“In 1997 the cause of the financial crisis was unfettered liberalization of financial markets. Governments subsidised the rich with millions of dollars in compensation, while workers lost their jobs and life savings. Ten years later, world financial markets have been gripped once more with panic. This is your classic case of socialism for the rich and free market poverty for the poor.”

Charles Santiago
Member of Parliament, Malaysia
Democratic Action Party

The AEPF process and agenda

The first AEPF was held in 1996, and since then People's Forums have been held biennially as alternative summits to the Asia Europe Meetings (ASEM)¹, which are official meetings between 45 heads of state of European Union countries and selected Asian countries. The forums have provided a space for national and regional network building, analyses of common issues such as security, development, globalisation and their implications for people, and the envisioning of alternative strategies. They are a space for people-to-people relations in Asian and European civil society, and for political mobilisation at the inter-regional level. They also provide a channel for people's organisations to critically engage with the institutions and policies of ASEM member countries.

AEPF-7, with the theme 'For Social and Ecological Justice', was held at a moment when the European Union, in an aggressively pro-business and competitive mode, was pushing through a series of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)² and Asian countries, which would carry far-reaching negative implications for the people of these regions. Several ex- or incumbent politicians, including MPs and councillors, most from progressive parties in various countries of Europe and Asia participated in AEPF-7 and expressed their concerns about these developments.

¹ The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) has been the main multilateral channel between Asia and Europe. ASEM members include all EU member states, India, Mongolia, Pakistan, China, South Korea, Japan and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), bringing the current membership to 45 partners.

² ASEAN partners are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The Just Politics Agenda for More Women in Politics

The Just Politics report and the Agenda for More Women in Politics, published by One World Action in 2008, emerged from a week-long international dialogue held in November 2007, involving 40 women and men from Latin American, African, Asian and European countries. The report emphasises the need to see the quantitative dimension of women's political participation in close tandem with the qualitative or transformative dimension. In other words, advances in 'descriptive representation' (or the better numerical proportions of elected women leaders relative to the populations represented) should be accompanied by measures that ensure their 'substantive representation' (or policy-making that enhances women's rights and opportunities). Neither of these aspects, taken without the other, can produce the 'Just Politics' expected to emerge from women coming into their own in public and political life.

The report recommended that increasing women's political participation through removing various kinds of entry barriers, and enabling the entry of marginalised women, be combined with efforts to transform political spaces toward gender and social justice.

This report builds on and complements the Just Politics report, drawing specifically on the experiences, analyses and insights of participants of the AEPF workshop. The latter consisted largely of women and men who have waged long campaigns to bring women, in particular marginalised women, into the forefront of struggles for social justice in different parts of Asia and Europe. This report summarises presentations and discussions from the 'Strengthening Women's Political Participation and Influence' and other AEPF-7 workshops, as well as insights from interviews with individual participants at the AEPF.

Neo-liberalism

Neo-liberalism is associated with a range of economic policies which heighten economic instability, resulting in reduced wages; de-unionisation; elimination of workers rights; no price control; cutting public expenditure on social services and reducing safety-nets for the poor; reducing government regulation of anything that could hamper profit; selling state-owned enterprises, goods and services to private investors; and replacing 'public and community good' with 'individual responsibility', thus forcing the poor to find solutions to their own problems.

Part 2: Challenges – new and old – to enhance women’s political participation in Asia and Europe

Over two decades of neoliberal policies have profoundly transformed the context of women’s struggle for space and gender justice in the political realm. Hard-won achievements made since the 60s until now, can easily be reversed, and there is a critical need to guard against any erosion of women’s political and economic rights.

Reversals in equal opportunity measures for working women

According to many European participants at AEPF-7, it is more difficult than almost ever before, to be a working woman in countries like Italy, Russia and even Finland. Even where equal opportunity laws won after long battles still exist, they are overridden by the strictures and imperatives of markets. Cutbacks in social spending and welfare reform measures have seriously impacted maternity or parental benefits, including parental leave and affordable child care.

As Boris Kagarlitsky from Russia pointed out, the category of people most adversely affected by the economic reforms, or by the introduction of free market economy in his country were married women and children. According to him women with care responsibilities were being pushed out of the labour market, and single women without the capacity or the resources to sustain themselves were being pushed in.

In many Asian countries, globalisation has feminised poverty through a broadly similar route. The structural adjustment policies promoted by the World Bank and IMF in the 1980s and 1990s led to the systematic reduction or elimination of public subsidies for health, education and other social services across numerous Asian countries. The consequent rise in costs of these services profoundly and disproportionately affected women’s access to them. These ‘reforms’ also shifted the ‘welfare’ functions of states onto households. The burden of caring for vulnerable community members (such as children, older people, ill or disabled persons) has been ultimately and disproportionately borne by women and girls in most Asian countries.

Meanwhile, the promotion of export-oriented economies calling for cheap, ‘docile’ and informal labour, created a highly gender-segmented labour market, which has drawn many millions of women into the workforce in Asia and helped ease their economic conditions to some extent. Despite this, rather than empowering women, however, evidence shows that these low-wage and insecure jobs under exploitative conditions have not done enough to reduce their vulnerability and poverty in the larger context³.

³ Guttal, Shalmali, “Women and Globalisation: Some Key Issues.” Presentation at the Conference: Strategies of the Thai Women’s Movement in the 21st Century, March 28-29, 2000



Luciana Castellina

“I think that we have made great progress on a critical point. In Italy the battles which were fought by women up to the 70s were mainly struggles for emancipation. This meant that we had to capture the same rights as men. The dominant position today is that women don’t want to be equal to men. They are different. What they want is that their difference should be valued. This politics of difference is very strong in Italy.”

Luciana Castellina

Journalist, writer and founder of Il Manifesto magazine, & Former member of the Italian and European Parliaments



Boris Kagarlitsky

“Far from advances in strengthening women’s political participation, I think there has been a major retreat in Russia in the last decade. Because of the market, certain things which were provided for free are now not provided, like child care. This makes it very hard for women who have children to be employed or to engage in politics.”

Boris Kagarlitsky
Director, Institute for Global Research and Social Movements, Russia

Weakening of democratic political processes

Democratic politics has repeatedly shown its capacity to transform the existing order and offer new opportunities for the empowerment of marginalised people. The election of the first Black President of the US in November 2008 is the most dramatic example of this; other instances are the 2008 national elections in Nepal, the popular overthrow of the right-wing coalition in India in 2004, and the spate of progressive electoral victories in Latin American over the past decade.

Nevertheless, the culture of democratic politics has suffered severe setbacks across the world in the decades since the 1980s. The core dynamic of neoliberal governance across the world is a weakening of political decision-making. Market reforms have set in motion a type of de-politicisation, sometimes referred to as a privatisation or marketisation of governance, wherein policy-making powers usually vested in national legislatures are shifted to the hands of private investors or powerful corporate interests.

Luciana Castellina, journalist, writer and founder of the respected *Il Manifesto* magazine and a former member of the Italian and European Parliaments commented, “I would say that women’s participation in political life has decreased over the past 10 years, because general political participation has decreased. I am not interested if there are 2 or 3 percent more women in parliament. The point is that in the 60s and 70s women were active in political parties, trade unions, social movements, and they were taking a very active part in society. But today, people in general have retreated from politics, because politics means so little!”

In a similar vein, Bethan Cobby, Asia Regional Co-ordinator, One World Action, presenting a UK perspective at the AEPF-7 workshop on Local Governance, spoke of the “paradox of increasing intensive experiments in consultation and involvement, but a simultaneous increase in political apathy, disillusionment and alienation, particularly among young black and ethnic minority groups. Voting is at an all time low. This has created a democratic deficit. We now need creative ways to deepen democracy.”

There is also a shrinking of political space in terms of reduced differences among political parties. As Prof. Anuradha Chenoy pointed out in a plenary presentation at AEPF-7, “Politics and policy remain the same, whichever party is in power. In India, even Left parties have to accept neoliberal policies. There is a rightward shift of all parties. Many Left parties of today are like the centrist parties of the 60s, the centrist parties of today are like the rightwing parties of the 60s. Parties have appropriated the power of the people and are less representative. Intra-party democracy does not exist.” All of this has led to an undermining of democracy, masked by euphemistic terms such as “guided” or “managed” democracy, where institutions are in place but citizens’ inputs are not welcome.



Jennette Arnold

“When I speak to young women, especially young women from minority ethnic groups, they say to me ‘I don’t want to be a politician because I don’t want to be a liar’. There is such a negative image of politics. As soon as women join politics, we have to negotiate with it. When we join that political space, attributes are put on us. So we join a class of liars, we join, in my country, a class of people who drink a lot.”

Jennette Arnold
Councillor and Chair of the Greater London Assembly, UK Labour Party

Even in cases where there may be significant proportions of women in state legislative bodies, the diminished importance of these bodies makes this a hollow victory. In fact, as Boris Kagarlitsky from Russia commented, “The less important the body is, the more female participation is visible there.”

Many political parties of the left have lost their relationships with the public at large, and even, in many cases, with progressive social movements. Meanwhile, all over the world, civil society has become a highly contested space in which conservative, xenophobic and chauvinist forces are becoming increasingly assertive. Many civil society groups have organised to push for repressive laws and policies that victimise vulnerable groups such as migrants, refugees, slum-dwellers, or poor people. Various aspects of life have become subjected to processes of commodification, and many participants felt that ‘citizens have been replaced by consumers’.

Despite this, progressive and radical forces within civil society continue to organise and rally against the infringement of civil liberties and the onslaught of neoliberal globalisation. The existing climate only exacerbates the need, not only of empowering women politically but also of their engagement in a transformative politics.

Persistent patriarchies: defeminisation and tokenism

As women make their appearance in public and political roles, they encounter “new” forms of patriarchal reactions, many simply old patriarchies in new settings or forms. Among them are, on the one hand, trends toward defeminisation of women in political positions, and on the other, tokenism. Defeminisation of women in public roles derives from increasing pressures on them to perform and behave like men. Some of this pressure is attributable to the constraints of public management reforms, or what has been termed the “audit culture” – the pervasive application of performance norms based on measurable and quantifiable indicators.

Boris Kagarlitsky warns, “Women, especially at certain ages or stages in their lives need some additional support to keep their careers going without becoming defeminised morally and mentally by trying to behave like men in a man’s world. Countering this requires careful attention to the atmosphere of the work situation, including formal as well as informal arrangements, gender-sensitive values and norms, and enabling measures.

Tokenism, or worse, the installation of women in political positions to suit the political ambitions or interests of men, often family members or party bosses, is rife, and can deeply damage efforts at gender-sensitive and transformative politics. In a context where substantive equality in the form of measures enabling women to fulfil their public roles is denied, having a few women in top positions can work against the majority of women rather than in their favour.



Anuradha Chenoy

“Since the state cannot be relied on for welfare functions, ethnic and religious communities have come to fill this role. Thus all over Asia, we see a rise in ethnic and religious movements and conflicts. The distance between the state and citizens has increased, resulting in an increasing democratic deficit even within democracies. The sense of alienation among marginalised minorities has grown.”

Prof. Anuradha Chenoy
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

Ongoing challenges in the politics of difference

Women’s location within multiple systems of social hierarchy and oppression renders the experience of gender, fractured and uneven. Programmes that advocate for women’s political participation sometimes suffer from a tendency to essentialise women, to treat them as a single category possessing a common set of cognitive, emotional and philosophical characteristics and shared political and ideological positions that set them apart from men.

Not only does this lead sometimes to serious miscalculations of women’s political actions, but it also grossly underestimates the differences and even conflicts that exist, in different contexts, among women of different religions, castes, and other categories. The rise of religious, ethnic and nationalist fundamentalisms in various parts of Asia and Europe has made it imperative to sensitively analyse these differences and their political implications.

Delegates from India, particularly those representing Dalit women from south India, stressed the very specific ways in which Dalit women, devadasis⁴, prostitutes, women from religious minorities, even single women, continued to face political marginalisation. Chilling recent incidents of violence, sexual harassment and victimisation of women who emerged as political leaders or public figures from Dalit communities in different states of India are reminders of the struggles that remain to be fought even as larger numbers of women gain visibility in positions of power.

⁴ The term devadasi originally described a Hindu religious practice in which girls were “married” and dedicated to a deity. In modern India the tradition has become associated with commercial sexual exploitation, as described in a 2004 report by the National Human Rights Commission of India.

Barriers to Women’s Political Participation

The challenges facing women who wish to become involved in the formal political sphere are legion and vary widely in their intensity from place to place. They have been summed up as: Confidence, Culture, Childcare and Cash.

Confidence problems stem in part from women’s relatively late entry to party politics and consequent limited apprenticeship. Culture barriers stem

from the aggressive confrontational style of political competition. Childcare refers to the competing demands on the time of women candidates due to their domestic responsibilities. Cash refers to the relative underinvestment in women’s campaigns by political parties

Source: Women and Democracy, One World Action Seminar Report, June 1997, London

Women and right-wing politics in India

In India, some of the most vocal and visible women in the national political scenario in the early 2000s were charismatic women leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the right-wing Hindu fundamentalist political party. In recent years, mass protests opposing reservation of seats for backward castes in India, and advancing the “merit” argument have been made up substantially of women, usually young, upper-caste women. The politics of right-wing majoritarianism and meritocracy in recent years has created a new visibility for women in the public sphere, for newly assertive, politically active women who espouse a modernist vision of a caste-blind “secular” society which has no place for special privileges to minorities. These scenarios highlight the dangers of conceiving of feminist subjectivity or feminist leadership that is wiped clean of the structures of caste, religion, race and other ideologies.



Ruth Manorama

“Dalit women are challenging the Dalit movements and parties that are very patriarchal. We question the positions that women occupy within Dalit families, Dalit communities, Dalit political parties, associations and mass organisations. In response to this challenge, Dalit organisations are now recognizing gender issues as being critical and more Dalit women are joining politics.”

Ruth Manorama
Convenor, National Federation
of Dalit Women & President, National
Alliance of Women, India



Fatima Cabanag, community level women's leader and elected local councillor, Manila, Philippines

Part 3: Advances made in strengthening women's political participation over the past decade in Asia and Europe

In contrast to the somewhat bleak scenarios sketched in the preceding section, participants, especially those from Asian countries, outlined a range of aspects in which significant advances have been made in the past decade. The three most important reasons for the numerical increases in women's political representation were through the use of:

- a) gender quotas and reserved seats
- b) democratic decentralisation
- c) gender budget initiatives

Gender quotas and reserved seats

More than a hundred countries in the world today employ some form of affirmative action to bring women into political positions, the most common being gender quotas and reserved seats. The momentum for this began in the 1990s.

Countries which display high rates of women in politics, such as Sweden and Norway, historically used only political party quotas as opposed to legislative body quotas. However, consistent struggles by women's organisations across Asian countries have led to a growing trend of 'fast-tracking' women's entry into political bodies through legislative quotas. Some countries like Malaysia and India, however, remain resistant to instituting these measures, especially at the national level.

Quotas are controversial tools. Critics of gender quotas raise a variety of objections. Some point to the large numbers of women in legislative posts, mostly in European countries, who got there without quotas. Many argue that quotas can be patronising to women, and that they can act as a 'glass ceiling' ensuring that women remain within the prescribed numbers and are stigmatised by their channel of entry. Some point out that focusing on numbers misses the point, or even works against the point of bringing about a gender-sensitive political culture.

Demanding quotas in Malaysia

In Malaysia, Cecilia Ng from the DAWN network reports that there are 10.8% women in Parliament (it has never gone over 11%) and 7.9% in state legislatures. Women's groups have been lobbying with national leaders and ministries for quotas to try and create a critical mass of women in parliament. However, given that women make up 50% of university faculties, the Prime Minister of Malaysia asks: "The day is already bright, why do you need a torchlight?" His argument is that gender equality will come naturally, so why push for quotas? As Cecilia points out, "The Ministry of Women and Family Development is caught in a quandary where, on the one hand, they want to push for gender quotas in response to civil society pressure, but on the other hand they are located within a gender regime which is patriarchal."



Cecilia Ng
Development
Alternatives with
Women for a
New Era (DAWN),
Malaysia

The path of quotas also lends itself all too easily to tokenism. As Luciana Castellina from Italy points out, “If women enter parliament and they are not aware that they are different because they are women, if they behave like men, and believe that their duty is to appear like men as much as they can, what is the use?”

One of the most serious critiques of gender quotas is that they tend to oversimplify and homogenise the category of “women”, assuming that all women have identical interests, and glossing over differences based on caste, class, ethnicity, disability and other aspects. Dalit women activists from India spoke of how the women’s movement for several decades failed to recognise the special context and demands of Dalit and indigenous women due to members largely being from upper castes. Indian mainstream women’s movements tended to insist on the priority of the gender/feminist framework over all other frameworks of political personhood. The need then, is to link up gender analyses with analyses of structural and systemic disparities in each society. Quotas must be designed around a political understanding of women’s diversity and difference to ensure the empowerment of marginalised women.

On balance, however, quotas have proved to be a powerful means of dismantling multiple barriers to women’s entry into political leadership. They have forced open doors that otherwise might have allowed only a few privileged or extraordinary women to squeeze through, but would have otherwise remained closed to the majority of women. They have challenged political organisations, parties and movements to find, train, nominate and field women candidates in large numbers.

Quotas speed up entry of women into national legislatures

The proportion of women in national assemblies worldwide has increased relatively rapidly over the past decade, from 11.6 per cent in 1995 to 18.4 per cent as of May 2008. This reflects an accelerated rate of increase. Between 1975 and 1995, the increase had been less than one per cent annually. Most of this acceleration can be ascribed to the use of quotas and other forms of affirmative action.

Source: Progress of the World’s Women 2008/2009, UNIFEM, 2008

By forming a critical mass of female presence in bodies otherwise dominated by men, they have created space for women to act as women. Quotas are not only a way of compensating for, or reversing historical structures of discrimination against women, but also a way of recognising women’s contribution in the political, economic and social spheres. General Recommendation (GR) 35 of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), however, recommends that quotas be seen as a Temporary Special Measure.



Heidi Hautala

“Forty percent of our Parliament is female. And this is without quotas. But I would like to say that the increase of numbers of women in parliaments in elected and executive positions has been very small. But countries that chose to use some kind of affirmative action, like gender quotas, they have made tremendous advances. When parliaments in Rwanda and Tanzania have such large numbers of women in parliament, people begin to realise that this is how it should be!”

Heidi Hautala

Member of Parliament, Finland
The Finnish Green Party & Chair of the
National Council on Gender Equality

Democratic decentralisation

Another promising development for strengthening women’s participation in politics, evident since the 1990s in several parts of Asia, is the trend of democratic decentralisation, or the vesting of greater powers in elected local councils. A UNDP report in 2002 estimated that 80 per cent of developing countries including the transitional economies of Eastern and Central Europe were experimenting with some form of decentralisation. In general, women have found more opportunities for entry into politics in local government, partly as a result of quotas and reservations at these levels. But local government remains a highly contested space and women need to be strong to address these challenges.

In India, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, mandating a third of seats in the elected village councils to be reserved for women, and a proportion of these for Dalit women, has thrown open the possibilities of political leadership to the most marginalised and oppressed women. Over a million women across the country have taken up leadership positions in local councils, a third of these are Dalit women. Women’s groups and grassroots organisations all over the country have moved quickly to make the most of this opening, training and building capacity for grassroots women especially from Dalit communities, and fielding candidates in large numbers.



Etta Rosales

“The Philippine Parliament has passed laws against human trafficking of women and children, domestic violence and rape. All of these laws were passed because of the presence of women in parliament. We have always had women in Parliament, between 11 and 18 percent. A lot of them are wives of members of parliament who have finished their term, so they put in their wives until they can get back to parliament again. That is the negative side. Of course what is positive is that if the wives are independent, they say, ‘no, I’d like to continue’ and then they take over the position, identifying with women’s issues.”

Etta Rosales

Former member of the Philippine Congress for 9 years
Akbayan Citizen’s Action Party



Martha Farrell

“Women need to know that leadership skills can be acquired and learnt. Innovative and intensive structured trainings can help women leaders to carry out their roles and responsibilities more effectively. Training should not be limited to only elected women, but must also target potential women leaders from the community. Civil society organisations, NGOs and women’s groups should play an active role in grooming women to take on public roles.”

Martha Farrell
Director Continuing Education
PRIA, India

In addition, special instruments like gender and development (GAD) budgets have been established in countries like the Philippines. GBIS have arisen in response to varied demands and imperatives in various national political contexts, and have followed a wide range of methodologies, rationales and frameworks. As Jennifer Albano from the Philippines emphasised, “The role of women’s organisations and movements in pressing for enforcement of gender budgets and other such instruments is critical.”



Jennifer Albano

“Five percent of the national and local budgets have been allocated for gender and development activities (GAD). This GAD budget has been presented in several international women’s conferences as a landmark in women’s legislation. It is a significant victory for the women’s movement in the Philippines. But the law is not enforced. We need a strong and dynamic women’s movement to push for enforcement of that law. The main hindrance is the lack of political will of the leaders, even of woman political leader like our President.”

Jennifer Albano
Executive Director, Institute for Politics
and Governance, Philippines

Gender budget initiatives

Inspired by the Australian government’s women’s budget initiative of the mid-1980s, the last decade has produced serious discussions at a global level on gender dimensions of development financing and aid, national budgets, and macro-economic policy measures such as taxation. A range of innovative Gender Budget Initiatives (GBIS) including gender-responsive budgeting processes and gender audits have been adopted in over 60 countries across the world, encouraged by international donor agencies. Most of these initiatives have been successful due to close collaborative work between women’s organisations and parliamentarians.

Just Budgets

The Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 called on governments to systematically review how women benefit from public sector expenditures. It called for adjusting budgets to ensure equality of access to public sector expenditures, both for enhancing productive capacity and for meeting social needs. It also asked governments to facilitate more open and transparent budget processes.

At the 2007 meeting in New York of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the importance of tracking a government’s commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment through analyses of their budgets at national and sub-national levels was emphasised. Gender-responsive budgeting is an initiative that addresses the slow progress in translating government commitments into resource allocations. Gender-responsive budget processes provide a means to ensure that allocations and expenditures are based on analysis of the differences and inequalities between women and men in relation to, amongst other things, incomes, assets, decision-making power, service needs and social responsibilities for care. The implementation of resource allocations for gender equality and empowerment of women needs to be closely monitored.

One World Action’s Just Budgets project examines how gender responsive budgeting (GRB) can be used as an instrument for achieving gender equality outcomes in donor budget support. GRB analyses the implications of public spending and revenue-raising for women in relation to men and can assist in advocating for changes or shifts in public expenditure to match gender policy commitments. GRB can play an important role in enabling women and other poor citizens to exercise their human rights and to increase government accountability to citizens. It can also help to ensure that development co-operation, increasingly flowing into partner countries as general budget support, responds to gender inequalities in society. One World Action’s Just Budgets project provides practical guidance to donors, governments and civil society on strengthening accountability and gender sensitive orientation within budget processes.

One World Action’s work in Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda showed that there are four essentials for achieving gender responsive budgets:

1. Political will
2. Parliamentary oversight
3. Technical capacity
4. Vibrant women’s organisations

Part 4: Lessons learned: Emerging opportunities, innovative strategies, approaches and tools

This section highlights participants' experiences in building women's leadership in Asian countries, particularly in the context of grassroots and marginalised communities, and in post-conflict situations.



Shen Shuji

“China has made several big advances in promoting women’s political participation and gender equality, especially after the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, over a decade ago. We amended the Women’s Law – the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women – wherein the policy of basic equality between men and women was written into law for the first time. This is a historical development, because it now guides all other policies of the government and it has been very important in promoting gender mainstreaming across the government. This law has also made breakthroughs in other fields, in terms of preventing and prohibiting domestic violence and combating sexual harassment. The law also authorises women’s federations to monitor the implementation of this law. So now we have a legal status to monitor the process of implementation, and our voice is more widely heard and has more power.”

Shen Shuji
Vice-president, All-China Women’s Federation
& Former Deputy Governor of Inner Mongolia
Autonomous Region of China

Leadership-building in grassroots and marginalised communities

The formation of women leaders or the process of building women’s leadership calls for innovative strategies and exchanges. The model of a natural “emergence” of individual leaders as among men or in privileged communities cannot be taken for granted. Opportunities and openings for women’s leadership, particularly from marginalised communities such as rural, Dalit or indigenous, are often grounded in a politics of community mobilisation which yield a set of non-traditional and often creative paths of leadership. Several experiences and insights on the formation of such leadership emerged, particularly from activists working with rural, Dalit or ethnic minority women in Asian and European countries. The following are some examples of experiences shared:

- a) Most commonly, women’s leadership emerges from foundations in a social movement, civil society organisation, trade union or other form of grassroots association. This is true to a great extent even in the European context. As Heidi Hautala, whose entry into politics in 1991 was driven by her work in the environmental and anti-nuclear movements noted, “I always tell women that it will be best for them to engage with different types of civil society movements. This is the best way to learn to work with people and to get all sorts of creative ideas. It is also important to keep engaged with civil society groups while being an elected representative.” Grassroots leaders from India and the Philippines also emphasised the importance of continuing mobilisation and organisation of women as the fundamental grounds of their political strengthening.

- b)** Classic conscientisation and political education are still crucial ingredients of any strategy to increase women's political strength. This includes building women's consciousness of their political rights as a critical element for their individual and collective agency.
- c)** Political education for women must include a thorough analysis of power structures, all the way from formal political institutions to civil society organisations and actors. This will enable an assessment of the multiple sites of opportunity for women's political intervention (supranational, national, regional, local political assemblies, legislatures, cabinets, NGOs, women's policy agencies, civil society, courts, constitutions, political parties) and the varied means and modalities through which they can participate (drafting bills, participating in public debates, lobbying legislators and colleagues).
- d)** Leaders must be judiciously identified and encouraged. While activists working with highly exploited communities such as the Dalits of India emphasised the importance of convincing large numbers of Dalit women to contest elections, they also pointed out that not everybody could be a leader. Women who had shown capacity to work on local issues in the context of grassroots organisations or movements were usually promising leaders-in-the-making.
- e)** As part of building the confidence and skills of potential leaders, participants emphasised the need to expose them to political institutions and practices. Fatima Burnad from the Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement shared her plans to help potential Dalit women leaders at the village level to become familiar with the world of politics: "They will have opportunities to meet and talk with politicians, understand good and bad practices. They will also have opportunities to observe Assemblies in session, and to meet with women candidates, women panchayat leaders and women officers. They will be able to observe all the political procedures and to attend different political meetings. This kind of exposure is very important, because these women don't read or write. It is by listening, by looking, that they learn. The Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement is also trying to assist these women in learning languages, English or Hindi, enough to be able to converse. For the next election, our strategy is to see that in every district, 30–50 Dalit women enter the electoral process."
- f)** Another proven strategy is that of highlighting exemplary experiences of women in politics and governance through case studies. The capacity-building program run by the Institute of Politics and Governance in the Philippines, uses "modelling" as a strategy, wherein every 3 years, 10 "models" of outstanding women leaders are given awards, the Bayi Citation. Case studies of female political leaders are developed and their life experiences are used as part of educational modules for potential women leaders.

PRIA's Leadership Building Work with Elected Women Representatives

Society for Participatory Research in India (PRIA) began motivating and supporting women to contest elections. Once elected, they were supported in becoming part of planning and implementation of development processes for their villages and communities.

Many elected women were turned into dummy incumbents for men in their families or for ex-politicians who had nominated them. These men took decisions and represented them at meetings, not even sharing information of the proceedings with them. Several remained silent and could not speak up in front of older men from their families. They were often asked to sit on the floor. Their main responsibility at meetings was to make and serve tea.

Worse was yet to come. Meetings began to be held without their knowledge, decisions taken without their consent, although they were forced to sign the official documents. They lacked the confidence to protest, and the presence of large numbers of men intimidated them. When some women attempted to assert themselves, local government functionaries refused to talk with them and asked them to send their male relatives for discussion. The patriarchal culture of local administration reinforced a sense of worthlessness amongst them. In addition, the adversarial nature of the proceedings, subtle forms of coercion, the timings of meetings, and the pervasiveness

of patronage contributed to curbing and controlling women leaders' political autonomy.

But things began to change slowly. Some of the elected women representatives began to find support from their families. For those from families with political backgrounds, the transition was easier. For others, the factors influencing change were varied, but determination, personal attributes, and most important, their affiliations and associations made the difference.

PRIA's experience suggests that women's leadership is affected not only by the lack of support from the family, society or institutions of local governance, but also by the lack of individual capacities, skills and knowledge. Today, after more than a decade of work, it is clear that we need to focus on developing leadership skills among women. Trainings and capacity building for women leaders cannot be limited to information dissemination on the provisions of local government law. There is need for holistic learning, not only in terms of acquiring specific skills, but also of developing a perspective on the gendered power relations that constrain women's political participation.



Fatima Burnad

“We encourage women to stand for elections. Forget that you are poor, that you are illiterate; forget that you are living in a slum or village. You have the fundamental right to contest elections. When I met one of the newly elected women leaders she told me, ‘Earlier whenever I passed higher caste persons I had to bend my head and fold my hands. But today, they are greeting me respectfully!’ This is a very important change! Even if a Dalit woman owns 10 acres of land she won’t get that kind of respect. But this political status as a leader brings great respect!”

Fatima Burnad
Convenor, Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement, India

Women’s political empowerment in post-conflict situations

It is a historical fact that the wake of crises brings new opportunities. As traumatic as the genocidal civil war in Rwanda was, it was followed by a new constitution in 2003 which wrote in 30 percent quotas for women, taking Rwanda to the top of the list of countries with high levels of women’s participation in central legislatures – 56% in 2008.

At the AEPF workshop, the note of hope for women in a post-conflict, post-trauma situations was brought by Shadia Marhaban from Aceh in Indonesia. Following a bloody 30-year conflict and the initiation of the Peace Process in August 2005, Aceh attained the status of a self-administered territory within Indonesia. It now faces a tension between two scenarios. On the one hand, there is the emergence of large numbers of female ex-combatants into the newly opened-up public sphere, women who had contributed to the war but were neglected after the launch of the peace process. According to Shadia, these are women with little education or political capacity, but eager to enter politics and willing to push for far-reaching changes. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 supports the demands of these women for a space in decision-making bodies. On the other hand there are educated, capable women – academics and professionals – who are already involved in politics in Aceh and in Indonesia, but are afraid to bring changes. Post-conflict Aceh has to contend with the dilemma of what kind of women leaders to support.

Local political parties in Aceh have adopted 30% quotas for women, but filling these quotas is not easy. In this period of transition, according to Shadia, the Acehese are still learning about democracy, about administration, good governance, about how to provide jobs for all the refugees being repatriated. According to her “in a post-conflict situation, the most difficult thing is to bring back the self-confidence of women. The women are poor and they need some capital to start up their lives again. Many are focusing on that, so we cannot push them to go into politics.”



Shadia Marhaban

“The Acehese war had been a silent one for almost 30 years. I had to leave the country in 2002 because of the military operation and travelled all over the world to bring attention to the situation. After the conflict, women combatants and freedom fighters who had fought side by side with their male counterparts in the jungle, realised that their contribution to the peace building process was not valued in the same manner as that of men. These women are key to the peace process, because they are the ones dealing with day-to-day life after returning from the war. They are key to the successful re-integration of former combatants and freedom fighters into post-conflict Acehese society. Many of these women are illiterate or have very little formal education. So we are trying to increase their capacity. But this is not easy because of the challenges of tradition, culture, the norms of patriarchal society, and especially religion.

“Historically there has been a strong tradition of women’s participation in the public sphere in Aceh. During the war with the Dutch, Aceh had a woman Admiral. During the Sultanate, women were fighters. There were four Sultanates in Aceh, with women Sultanas in the 14th and 15th centuries. All this stopped when they had a declaration from Mecca stating that women could not rule.”

Shadia Marhaban
Central Information for Referendum,
Aceh, Indonesia

Dangerous complacency on gender equality

Gender justice, like any struggle against discrimination, is never entirely won. Heidi Hautala, the Finnish MP, warned against the complacency some Nordic countries were displaying about their advances in gender equality, whereby some people argued that it no longer had to be explicitly debated and fought for, “Now that women are well represented in most spheres of life, there is a tendency to say ‘OK, we are all good guys now, so let’s not talk about equality any more.’ But nothing could be more misleading, because gender equality actually needs permanent care and nurturing. It cannot be taken for granted.”

Boris Kagarlitsky from Russia commented that even within Russia’s new Left, there was a tendency to see class and gender as entirely divorced axes of difference and not to question the salience of gender issues. Beyond measures aimed at gender equality, participants stressed the need to keep debates on gender justice alive, and to maintain awareness of gender discrimination as an ongoing, perennial system of discrimination that takes on different manifestations.

Cambodian textile workers demanding their right to join a trade union at a recent May Day demonstration, Phnom Penh



Part 5: Conclusions and ways forward: Towards strengthening women's political participation and inclusion

This section synthesises and summarises the recommendations and strategies that were articulated at the AEPF workshop.

Recommendations to ASEM Governments and international institutions:

Broad policy shifts

- a) Re-examine the basic assumptions of neoliberal globalisation, especially its thrusts to deregulate and liberalise markets and to undermine politics to corporate interests. Democratic and human rights should not be subservient to commercial and financial imperatives.
- b) State reforms should be aimed at deepening democracy, restoring the power of legislatures, and the status of opposition politics. They should revitalise systems of checks and balances, and expand spaces for public participation and democratic dissent.
- c) Restore and strengthen policies that support women entering public roles, including adequate child care and other maternity benefits. Enforce equal pay for work of equal value.
- d) Reassess the development needs of middle-income countries and ensure that adequate funding is ear-marked for programmes that will address women's rights and encourage the political participation of women in both middle and lower income countries.
- e) Institute measures that create a supportive atmosphere and guard against defeminisation of women in public roles. These include informal arrangements and gender-sensitive values and norms as well as enabling measures such as maintaining robust women's and feminist groups.

Specific measures

- a) Strengthen or institute quotas, reservation of seats at all levels of government, and other forms of affirmative action that carve out space for greater numbers of women in decision-making bodies.
- b) Ensure that these quotas or reserved seats reflect the diversity and difference in women's positions in society, to ensure that they empower the most marginalised women in society.
- c) Strengthen or introduce gender-responsive budgeting, gender audits, or other tools to explicitly monitor compliance with governments' commitments on gender equality. Include indicators and strategies for increasing women's political participation in all national economic and social development plans
- d) Take steps to tackle the violence that prevents women from entering and participating in political life and to make it illegal for men who have a record of violence and domestic abuse to participate in politics.
- e) Open up opportunities for women to participate in new areas of governance – defence, security, finance and trade.
- f) Establish Women's Caucuses – gender commissions/parliamentary committee/ women's federations and ensure that they are resourced adequately with ring-fenced finances and have the support of senior parliamentarians.
- g) Establish an international solidarity fund to support women entering politics.

Towards the goal of deepening democracy

- a) Political parties should renew their links with popular politics, social movements and the public at large. Parties should institute intra-party democracy, and adopt quotas for women and for marginalised groups rather than setting up "women's wings" which remain relegated to the margins.
- b) Women's movements and civil society groups should network actively with political movements and parties

Towards bringing about a transformative politics of gender

- a) Efforts to strengthen women's political participation must be part of a wider process of politicisation and emancipatory struggle. Women's movements must address a range of new challenges, including the resurgence of right-wing, xenophobic, nationalistic and fundamentalist trends in civil society.
- b) Civil society organisations and women's movements must adopt long-term radical agendas and effective mobilisation strategies. Women's political agendas should advance from representation to accountability and transformative politics; from critical mass to feminist consciousness and challenging entrenched power structures.
- c) Strengthen or revive classic feminist struggles for equal opportunities at the workplace, maternity and child care benefits, and equal pay for work of equal value.
- d) In attempting to strengthen women's political participation, women's movements must remain sensitive to the politics of difference and the diverse structures of oppression within which women are located.
- e) Women's movements must guard against the twin dangers of tokenism and defeminisation of women in public roles. They must ensure that women's presence in political structures leads to effective mainstreaming of gender concerns in politics, that ALL women are represented, and that efforts are made to open up democratic spaces and challenge non-democratic institutions and practices

- f) Women's movements and groups should invest in building women's leadership at grassroots level, especially among marginalised communities, to make use of the political opportunities opening up at these levels.
- g) Innovative strategies for building women's leadership at grassroots levels should be shared across groups and networks. These include collecting and disseminating data on the quality and quantity of women's political participation, developing women's manifestos, women's electoral agendas and national plans for action, developing and popularising case studies of exemplary women in politics and governance, and forming rainbow coalitions of vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- h) Enhance co-operation, exchanges, networks and lesson learning between countries and regions.

And finally, a recommendation to the AEPF Organising Committee to set up processes to implement its agreed gender and disability commitments and to eliminate bias in participation, selection of panellists, speakers, chairpersons and discussants.



Winners of the Bayi Citation Award 2007. The Award is given biannually to ten champions of women's rights and good governance, Philippines.

Annex 1

The Final Declaration of the seventh Asia-Europe People's Forum Beijing, October 2008

We, over 500 women and men, representing people's organisations and citizens from Asia and Europe joined together between 13th and 15th October 2008 in Beijing at the seventh Asia Europe People's Forum to work 'For Social and Ecological Justice.' We focussed on developing strategies and recommendations to our elected representatives, and to ourselves, as active citizens, for 'Peace and Security,' 'Social and Economic Rights, and Environmental Justice' and 'Participatory Democracy and Human Rights.'



“We are here to understand how the world can be remade in another image and how current crises can lead to opportunities with the renewal and regeneration of demands for social justice.”

Charles Santiago
Member of Parliament, Malaysia

We met at a moment of major historical importance that has brought into sharp focus the drastic inequalities, injustice and poverty experienced by people across Asia and Europe. What is currently being presented as a 'financial crisis' is in reality the latest in a series of interlinked crises – food, energy, climate, human security and environmental degradation – that are already devastating the lives, and compounding the poverty and exclusion faced on a daily basis by billions of women, men and children.

There is a strong consensus across Asia and Europe that the dominant approach over the last decades – based around deregulation of markets, increasing power of multinational corporations, unaccountable multilateral institutions and trade liberalisation – has failed in its aims to meet the needs and rights of all citizens. We need to go beyond an analysis and response that focuses solely on short term measures benefiting a few financial institutions.

Our governments and the citizens of Asia and Europe have a unique and historic opportunity to transform our social, economic and political futures so that all can live in peace, security and dignity. We all need to take responsibilities to work together to create and implement the radical and creative solutions needed for people-centered recovery, change and a harmonious world – we will not have this opportunity again.

We therefore call upon the ASEM and its member governments to implement people-centered responses to the current financial crisis, in an effective and responsible manner. Urgent need must be given to poor, excluded and marginalised people and governments must work with citizens to develop and implement policies that will lead to a just, equal and sustainable world, and more accountable and democratic institutions – based on respect for gender equality, our environment and fundamental human rights.

“This is a people's forum – state leaders at ASEM should listen to our messages. We need a new type of regulation – markets don't solve problems and we need social and economic justice.”

Heidi Hautala
Member of Parliament, Finland

The seventh Asia Europe People's Forum urges the asean and its member governments to take action to recognise the following issues, priorities and recommendations:

1. Peace and Security

- Develop long term solutions to promote peace, human security and sustainable development that prioritise non-violent means of conflict resolution, people-to-people interactions, use of international conventions and regional co-operation.
- Recognise and address security threats both multilaterally and multi-dimensionally through the United Nations, and adhere to principles of international law.
- Establish an inter-regional conflict resolution mechanism to develop common visions on foreign policy and security, based on respect for national sovereignty and human rights.
- Fully implement UNSC Resolution 1325 that recognises women are both disproportionately affected by conflict and key actors in promoting peace, reconstruction and reconciliation.
- Abolish the anti-terrorist laws that have been developed as a response to the 'war on terror' and that are being used on a daily basis to impose restrictions on citizens, and to criminalise peaceful organisations and minorities. Ensure any additional security measures – whether national, regional or international – are subject to democratic scrutiny by citizens, parliaments and respect internationally agreed legislation.

- In tackling religious extremism give special emphasis to the role of education and inter- and intra-convictional/faith dialogues at all levels. Ensure full freedom of expression and information to enable rational debate and understanding.
- Enact national legislation to guarantee full and public disclosure of governments' defence, arms exports and security budgets.
- Cut military expenditure that is being funded at the expense of health and education programmes.
- Democratise the security sector and its policies, programmes and decision making.
- Implement existing national constitutions that safeguard human security, peace and dialogue.
- Take concrete steps to strengthen the International Criminal Court.
- Use the Non-Proliferation Treaty as the basis of regional co-operation and take steps to denuclearise Europe and Asia while striving for a nuclear free world. Strengthen global mobilisation towards a participatory review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2010.
- Take primary responsibility to control the trade and proliferation of arms. Develop and agree transparent and binding mechanisms, overseen by the UN, to control arms imports and exports.
- Support civil society in their role and capacity to participate in arms control.
- Sign and ratify the Cluster Munitions Convention in Oslo in December 2008.
- Introduce legislation to make the European Code of Conduct on Arms Exports legally binding (with respect to European Union member states) and take steps to negotiate a Code of Conduct (with respect to states in Asia).
- Include the reduction of armed violence as one of the Millennium Development Goals.

- Support and protect survivors of the use and effects of weapons of mass destruction. Hold companies responsible for the production of weapons of mass destruction and toxic chemicals to account so that victims are compensated.
- Undertake legislation to remove US bases from their soil.
- Ensure the phased withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq and Afghanistan within an agreed timetable.

2. Social and Economic Rights, and Environmental Justice

- Use the opportunity of the current financial and political crisis to put in place an alternative financial architecture and infrastructure that will promote and enable a more equitable, carbon neutral and just global economic system, reclaiming national development policy rights and empowering working people. Financial institutions and financial decision-making must become truly accountable and transparent.
- Implement social protection policies that have been shown to be affordable and essential in alleviating poverty. Acknowledge that social security for all without discrimination is a universal right (employment guarantee schemes, living pensions, disability benefit, carer support etc).
- Responding to Climate Change – Develop decentralised, renewable energy sources to combat climate change and contribute to sustainable development. Implement legislation that will support all citizens in reducing their energy consumption.

- Whilst fulfilling the Kyoto Protocol work together to ensure far reaching and binding agreements in Copenhagen in December 2009 including the firm and binding commitment by OECD countries to reduce emissions by at least 80% within an agreed time period.
- Substantially cut global emissions based on common yet differentiated responsibilities and support and finance adaptation and mitigation initiatives across the world.
- Stop financing projects that contribute to hunger, poverty, social and political injustice, and climate change.
- Ensure that decisions about adaptation funding are inclusive of civil society and reflect the needs, solutions and rights of poor women and men. Transfer the control of Climate Investment Funds and other climate programs to the UN and to stop loan-financing of climate programs.
- Trade – Renegotiate existing and end current negotiations on all unjust and unfair free trade agreements (bilateral and multilateral).
- Debt – Cancel or stop payment of all illegitimate debt and end the use of loans and debt relief to impose conditionalities. Conduct a comprehensive and participatory debt review/audit to help establish who owes who.
- Provide reparation for the ecological and historical debts owed to the South.
- Debt cancellation is a major requisite for aid effectiveness and aid should not exacerbate the burden of debt. Return stolen assets kept in banks in the G8 and other Northern countries and take steps to prevent tax evasion by transnational corporations and capital flight from South to North.
- Aid – Ensure that aid is free from imposed trade and procurement conditionalities. Abolish tied aid.

- Respect and fulfil the right and obligation of all countries and peoples to reverse the harmful policies that have led to the debt, food, and climate crises, such as Structural Adjustment Programmes, unjust Trade Agreements, Investment Protection Treaties and Infrastructure Integration Initiatives. Recognise that people's organizations, social movements, trade unions, NGOs and other citizens' groups as independent development actors, contributing to democratic processes.
- Food Security – Food safety, sovereignty and access should be at the centre of agricultural and trade policies in order to achieve food security for all and to address the current food crisis.
- Governments should realise that there are increasing numbers of people living in hunger. Causes include the speculation on grains for agro fuel, grain futures and increased oil prices. Current privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation policies are marginalizing small food producers and grabbing land for the purpose of profit and speculation. The UN Comprehensive Framework for action on the food crisis was developed without consultation with civil society organisation and therefore lacks legitimacy.
- Responses to the food crisis must take into account the greater impact on women and girls. In the longer term attention must be placed on supporting women small holder farmers and enabling their access and control to land.

- Respect the right to food and healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods-protecting biodiversity. Food producers and fisherfolk should have access to and control over the means of production (e.g. land, seeds, water, appropriate technology). There must be full recognition of the rights and roles of women in food production.
- To implement agrarian reform programmes, strengthening local food production and consumption, diversification, controls on agribusiness and decreasing dependence on international markets.
- Implement a moratorium on agro-fuel production.
- Take immediate action to curb speculation on food stocks and prices.
- Ensure that research, science and technology are publicly accountable and address the pressing issues of food security, safety and sovereignty.
- In the context of stabilizing national food efforts, it is essential that in taking action to secure their own food security, countries do not undermine the human right to food in other countries.
- Labour rights – Ensure decent working conditions for all workers and respect for core labour standards. Develop and implement legislation to recognise, protect and promote informal workers, migrant, domestic and homeworkers.
- Ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of Rights and Well Being of migrant workers and members of their families and other relevant conventions as a minimum requirement for protecting the rights, decent work and well being of migrant workers. Recognise and protect the rights of migrant domestic workers and provide for the protection of their labour and human rights – in consultation with

civil society and trade unions. Develop one standard for all countries in relation to recognising the skills and training of workers.

- Remove all legislation that criminalises migrants and detainees, undocumented migrants including minors up to 18 years (e.g. the EU Return Directive) and regulate recruiters and recruitment agencies.
- To take the responsibility and take remedial steps against the negative social and environmental impacts of foreign investments.
- Implement binding international legislation to ensure corporate social responsibility.
- Prevent the future privatisation of public resources such as water, health and education and, where possible, reverse current privatisation policies to ensure greater public control and public financing.
- Reaffirm that access to safe water and sanitation is a fundamental human right and to implement this right for all citizens. Market based solutions cannot solve the issue of governments irresponsible water policies, such as letting water resources be damaged by industrialisation or intensive agriculture. Transparency, accountability and good governance of water management, ensuring public participation are key to effective and democratic water delivery. All forms of water service delivery must be based on principles of affordable access, provision of quality water and based on consultation and participation.
- Take steps to finance and develop community disaster preparedness plans.

3. Participatory Democracy and Human Rights

- Eliminate the stigma, discrimination and human rights violations experienced by millions of people due to their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, caste, HIV status and ethnicity.
- Recognise that meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is dependent on the realisation of women's and girls' rights. Ensure that gender equality and women's rights concerns are central to the proposed 2010 review process for the MDGs.
- Provide accountable timetables and budgeted commitments to fulfil promises made to contribute 0.7% of Gross National Income in official assistance to help to address the financing gap for the MDGs.
- Ensure that donor governments enable the policy space needed to adapt the MDGs and develop country specific implementation plans by an immediate end to harmful economic conditionalities. It is also essential that poor women and men fully participate in policymaking.
- Ensure that existing consultations and mechanisms mandated by governments for consultation with their citizens are truly representative and inclusive. People who are recipients of development aid should define what they need and participate in development of their projects.
- Establish an international solidarity fund to support women entering politics.
- We need more women at more levels – to support the development of campaigns, learning networks and supportive mentorship links to ensure more women can gain entry and maintain their full participation in all levels of public life.

- Implement quotas for women candidates and elected representatives at all levels (including within political parties) with sanctions for non-adherence.
- Include indicators and strategies for increasing women's political participation in all national economic and social development plans.
- Take concrete steps to tackle the violence that is a major barrier preventing women from participating in political life – enact legislation to make it illegal for men to hold office if they have been convicted of violence against women.
- Participatory democracy is more than free elections, all stakeholders should be involved in democratic processes. There should be positive and constructive engagement on regional issues including promotion of ceasefires and the ending of internal conflicts.
- Protect and ensure optimum expression and freedom to information and transparency.
- Support initiatives that promote local participatory democracy, in addition to strengthening accountability within local governance.
- Develop, resource and effectively implement decentralisation policies. Introduce legislation to ensure free and fair local elections where there is not already in place.
- Ratify and fully implement UN Conventions on the Rights of Disabled People. Realise that this will not happen without the meaningful participation of disabled people at all levels.
- Call on all countries to mainstream disability concerns into local and national economic and social development
- Urge governments to take proactive positive measures to further eradicate disability discrimination and create accessible and inclusive environment for people living with disabilities
- To empower people with disabilities and their organisations for their equal participation and full inclusion in all respects of life, through partnerships amongst stakeholders including civil society and government.
- Support national programmes to train disabled people to become experts on disabled issues.
- Recognise the leadership of people living with HIV in reducing the impact of HIV, and to meaningfully involve people living with HIV in policy and programme development. Recognise and address the gender dynamics of the pandemic.
- Implement and adequately finance the International GIPA Declaration (Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV).
- Ensure those responsible and complicit are brought to justice for those missing and disappeared and that there is legally agreed compensation for their families.
- Protect the rights of people living with HIV from stigma, exclusion, discrimination and human rights violations, and to ensure access to free treatment, care and support – exempting lifesaving medications from global trade agreements. To give special support to children who have lost their parents to HIV.
- Release all political prisoners and asylum seekers in Europe and Asia.
- Over 260 million people worldwide continue to suffer from exclusion, segregation and human rights violations on the basis of caste discrimination. Take urgent action to implement international and national legislation and initiatives to ensure its elimination.

- Develop multi-pronged and adequately financed regional anti-human trafficking policies.
- To establish an Asian wide regional human rights mechanism. AEPF welcomes the ASEAN Charter that could protect and promote human rights and the establishment of a regional human rights body. To ensure that the terms of reference of this body guarantee its independence and effectiveness. AEPF calls on ASEM to explore the possibility of expanding the ASEAN human rights mechanism to other Asian countries in the region and strengthen closer inter-regional cooperation of regional human rights mechanism between Asia and Europe.

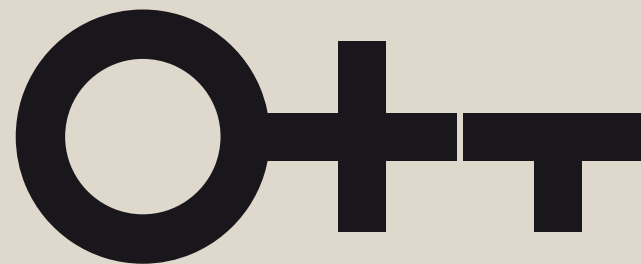
“It has taken a huge amount of commitment and dedication from Asia and European participants to make the AEPF happen and to develop joint partnerships and common goals. The fact we can sit together, exchange and treat each other as equals is a remarkable thing. We will suffer and fail if we don’t work together to tackle the global challenges facing humankind.”

Zhang Zhijun
President, China NGO Network
for International Exchanges

For the ‘AEPF People’s Agenda for Parliamentarians’
go to www.oneworldaction.org

Annex 2

The Just Politics agenda for more women in politics



We recommend that national and donor governments along with southern and northern civil society work together to enable, support and strengthen the political participation of women by:

1

Addressing barriers to the political participation of women

- Re-defining politics with women in the centre and changing the political culture
- Developing policies and programmes that improve women's economic status
- Ending all forms of violence against women, but in particular gender-based political violence
- Challenging attitudes and power relations which associate women disproportionately with responsibility for domestic work and caring responsibilities
- Implementing policies that promote gender equity
- Promoting women from different backgrounds as leaders

2

Enabling women to participate in political life

- Supporting women to become aware of their rights and of their role in politics
- Encouraging women to become involved in political activities at the local, national, regional and international levels
- Supporting women to develop the tools needed to make their voices heard
- Maintaining robust and diverse women's and feminist groups to lead the way
- Developing, maintaining and adequately funding government and civil society's local, national, regional and international women's organisations and institutes

3

Increasing women's representation in formal politics

- Promoting the notion of 50+ (half or more) representation of women in politics
- Reforming internal party legislation and national electoral legislation to promote women's candidatures and enforcing sanctions for non-compliance
- Promoting affirmative actions such as proportional representation systems and electoral gender quotas and enforcing sanctions for non-compliance
- Initiating advocacy to maintain pressure on government and political parties to democratise and support the role of women in politics

4

Supporting women to be effective political actors

- Training and mentoring new women representatives
- Creating alliances and networks of women and men representatives, both within and between parties, to unite around gender issues and to share information
- Identifying and supporting progressive women and men gender champions who are in politics to engage more with women's and feminist organisations
- Contesting negative or stereotypical portrayals of women and women politicians in the media
- Supporting local women's groups to lobby and support elected women once they are in power to keep the focus on the women's agenda

5

Maximising accountability to women

- Women's and feminist organisations ensuring accountability by monitoring progress on gender equity targets and holding governments accountable to international human rights and gender equity agreements
- Using voters' or women's manifestos and the media to hold parties accountable for election promises
- 'Naming and shaming' to highlight the issue of corruption which seriously hinders women's political participation
- Lobbying for increased transparency, wider consultation, greater accountability and more effective gender analysis in all decision-making especially in trade and aid
- Developing and using appropriate indicators to measure progress on gender equity goals



Participants of the AEPF-7 workshop 'Strengthening Women's Political Participation and Influence', Beijing, October 2008

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