



Regional Workshop on The Implementation of Quotas: Asian Experiences

Quotas in Pakistan: A Case Study¹

Dr. Socorro L. Reyes
Senior Gender Adviser
UNDP, Pakistan

Paper prepared for workshop hosted by
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
(IDEA) on 25 September 2002 in Jakarta, Indonesia

Introduction

Pakistan's efforts to fulfil its commitments in international treaties and conventions to promote women's free, equal and full political participation are summed up in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women (August 1997), the National Plan for Action (September 1998) and the National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women (NPA) (March 2002). The Commission Report and the NPA recommend 33 per cent reserved seats for women for local as well as national elective bodies through direct elections and joint electorate. They also suggest the simplification of rules and the adoption of measures to ensure that women can exercise their right to vote. The National Policy, on the other hand, mandates the adoption of "affirmative action to ensure a desirable level of representation of women in the Senate and the National and Provincial Assemblies".

Quotas are not new to Pakistan. Popularly known as "reservations", the 1956, 1962, 1970, 1973 and 1985 constitutions all provided for reserved seats for women at both the provincial and national assemblies, but of small magnitude, mostly 5 per cent to 10 per cent and through indirect elections by the members of the assemblies themselves. Reservations lapsed in 1988 after three general elections as provided for in the 1985 constitution. In the last general elections of 1997, women's representation hovered between 4 per cent in the provincial assemblies (2 out of 460) to 2 per cent in the Senate (2 out of 87) and 4 per cent in the National Assembly (7 out of 217).² At the local government level, where 5 per cent to 12 per cent of the seats were reserved for women through indirect elections by the councils themselves, women constituted only 10 per cent of the membership in 1993 (8,246 out of 75,556).³

Local Level Quotas in Pakistan

As part of the democratization process, in March 2000 the military government adopted a Devolution of Power Plan, of which the important feature was the provision of a 33 per cent quota for women in the district, tehsil and union councils, the local legislative bodies mandated to approve by-laws, taxes, long-term and short-term development plans and annual budgets. The union councils, in addition, facilitate the formation and functioning of citizen community boards and cooperatives to reduce poverty, the overriding development goal of Pakistan.

The *union council* is composed of 21 members: the Union Nazim, the Naib Nazim, one member elected from the minority communities, 12 Muslim representatives elected to general seats and 6 elected for peasants and workers. The one-third reservation is applied to the 12 Muslim seats (4 women) and the 6 seats for peasants and workers (2 for women). Each union council has thus 6 seats for women.

The middle tier, the *tehsil council* is composed of the Naib Nazims of all union councils and representatives elected from reserved seats for women (1/3 of the number of unions), peasants and workers (5 per cent of the total number of unions), and minority communities (5 per cent).

At the top tier, the *zila council* consists of all Union Nazims in the district and, like the tehsil council, by members elected through quotas: 33 per cent women, 5 per cent peasants and workers and 5 per cent from the minority communities.

The numbers of seats reserved for women in the different councils are as follows.

Table 1: Seats Reserved for Women

Type of Council	Seats Reserved for Women
Union Councils (6,022)	36,132
Tehsil Councils (305)	1,749
Town Councils (30)	161
District Councils (96)	1,988
Total	40,028

Except for the union councils, the members of all the other councils are indirectly elected. The elected councillors at the union level form the electoral college for all elections for the tehsil/town and district councils.

Election Results

The women contested not only the reserved seats but the open seats as well in the union, tehsil and district councils and the posts of Nazims and Naib Nazims. However, in some areas of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP)⁴ women were prevented from either voting or running for office or both by religious groups and political parties resulting in a loss of approximately 650 seats.

Overall, women got elected in 36,187 out of 40,049 reserved seats for women in the local councils, 11 were elected as Union Council Nazims, one as Naib Nazim and two as District Nazims.⁵

Table 2: Election Results for Reserved Seats

Province	Union Councils (6,022)	Tehsil Councils (305)	Town Councils (30)	District Councils (103)	Total (6,460)
Punjab	20,718	1,074	50	1,115	22,246
Sindh	5,878	297	59	360	6,594
NWFP	3,963	175	30	278	4,446
Balochistan	2,374	215	22	152	2,763
TOTAL	32,222	1,761	161	1,905	36,049

Difficulties and Challenges

The unprecedented number of women⁶ elected to district, tehsil and union councils in the recent elections following the adoption of a 33 per cent quota by government opened up not only an enormous political space but a strategic opportunity for women to make a difference in setting and implementing the agenda of local governments. With the devolution process, this level of government is expected to have the most impact on people's lives and offers the greatest hope for social change. But the basic question is how women can use their critical mass to affect public policy particularly those related to poverty reduction, the biggest challenge in Pakistan.

To determine their readiness and competence in playing the role of movers and shakers in the local councils, it is important to examine where the women are coming from: their age, education, socio-economic status, and political background. While there is very limited information on this subject, existing studies show that most are less than 45 years old (57 per cent); more than half are illiterate (53 per cent); the majority are housewives (73.7 per cent); very few own land; and an overwhelming majority have never contested elections (79 per cent); neither have their families (64 per cent).⁷

What are the implications of the socio-economic, political and demographic profile of the women councillors? First, it shows that the quota system has opened doors for socially disadvantaged and marginalized groups that otherwise stand no chance in winning positions of formal political authority traditionally obtained through the politics of money, family influence and party patronage. Second, the relative youth of the women councillors indicates that young women have placed enormous faith in the ability of the political system to address existing social ills and institute reforms. Being young, they are expected to be more open to innovation and creative change. Third, that housewives contested and won electoral seats reflect their willingness to go beyond their reproductive roles as bearers and nurturers of life and assume the task of community leadership as active social change agents. But this also has serious implications on gender-based assignment of household roles and responsibilities as well as the way local councils will schedule the conduct of their business. Men have to share in household work to provide women the time to perform their legislative duties and council schedules have to be adjusted to allow women to combine their multiple roles. Fourth, that the majority of women councillors are illiterate mirrors the general female deprivation of education opportunities and should be a major factor to consider in designing not only the curriculum but in the choice of mentoring approaches as well. Hands-on, participatory popular education methods certainly are most appropriate under these circumstances. Finally, their newness to politics is both an asset and a liability. On the one hand, their freshness brings the

insights, vision and perspective that political veterans may have lost through time. On the other hand, their being neophytes means that training must start from ground zero. Their capacity to learn, however, can never be underestimated and the skill with which they can use their lived realities in setting their agenda and using their life experiences in developing pragmatic, workable solutions to concrete socio-economic problems might far exceed ordinary expectations.

To ascertain their training needs, several organizations⁸ conducted surveys, dialogues and interviews with women councillors. In all these consultations, the women disclosed their total lack of awareness of their rights, roles and responsibilities. The women councillors also complained about being ignored by their male counterparts and the Nazims. In addition, they do not have any office, tables and chairs. Neither do they have stipends to cover their meals and transportation. The women were not given the opportunity to participate in council deliberations. Nor were their projects allocated budgetary resources.

National and Provincial Level Quotas

While the government was supportive of reserving one-third of the seats in local councils for women, the same did not hold true for its policy towards women's representation at the Senate and the national and provincial assemblies. After much speculation and debate about what percentage government will come up with, the National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) announced that 17 of the 100 seats in the Senate or 17 per cent will be reserved for women and in the National Assembly, 60 of the 342 seats (18 per cent)⁹ distributed to the four provinces as follows.

Table 3: Women's Representation in the National Assembly

Province/Territory	General Seats	Reserved Seats for Women	Reserved Seats for Non-Muslims (Nation-Wide)	Total
Punjab	148	35	--	183
Sindh	61	14	--	75
NWFP	35	8	--	43
Baluchistan	14	3	--	17
Federally-Administered Territory (FATA)	12	--	--	12
Islamabad	2	--	--	2
Non-Muslims	--	--	10	10
TOTAL	272	60	10	342

In the provincial assemblies, 22 per cent were reserved for women. Like the National Assembly, there are seats to be contested in open, general elections.

Table 4: Women’s Representation in Provincial Assemblies

Province	General	Women	Non-Muslims	Total
Punjab	297	66	8	363
Sindh	130	29	9	159
NWFP	99	22	3	121
Baluchistan	51	11	3	62
Total	577	128	23	728

Women’s groups argued that NRB ignored the collective voice of women for 30 per cent reservation expressed in the national consultation conducted by the Ministry of Women and Development (MOWD) in May 2001 and the National Campaign for Restoration of Women's Reserved Seats in 1998. It also failed to reflect the same recommendation of the “Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women” and the National Plan for Action. Eleven political parties endorsed the 30 per cent quota for women in the provincial and national assemblies.¹⁰

Quotas and the Electoral System

The issues raised on women’s political participation have focused not only on the 33 per cent quota for women but on the electoral system as well. According to the present policy on reservations, the 60 seats for women will be filled through proportional representation, that is, based on the number of popular votes received by political parties in the elections.

While proportional representation is considered the most woman-friendly of all electoral systems and used by all 10 countries in the world with the highest number of women’s seats in parliament, there was vigorous opposition to this method by women activists in Pakistan. They contended that women will be beholden to political parties whose structures, processes and agenda are generally patriarchal. Those who are directly elected will most likely treat women in reserved seats in the provincial and national assemblies as second class members. With their own constituencies as mass base, they will be able to respond more effectively to their needs.

The women demand direct election by a joint electorate of women and men in enlarged constituencies created through the fusion of two normal-sized constituencies. For the general seats, the normal-size constituency will be operable. All eligible voters will have two votes: one for the reserved seat in the enlarged constituency and another for the general seat in their normal constituency.¹¹

Conclusions

For women’s full and equal participation in decision-making structures and processes at all levels of governance to be attained, a strategic framework is needed which explores ways of overcoming the cultural and structural barriers to gender balance in political representation. Three strategic methods are suggested to address the cultural barriers in the full exercise of women’s citizenship: awareness-raising, capacity-building and research and documentation. Advocacy for policy reform in political parties, electoral systems and campaign finance, on the other hand, is recommended as the best possible way to overcome structural obstacles.

Awareness-Raising: A nation-wide information campaign, which will highlight the importance of women’s representation and participation in decision-making; the transformational politics that women bring; and women’s political participation as a human right.

Capacity-Building: A three-phase training, this will encompass the whole range of women's citizenship as voters, candidates and elected officials. It will include voters' rights awareness; young women's leadership training; how to run and win; and skills-building for women who got elected in the local councils, and the provincial and national assemblies. These skills include developing a policy agenda; articulation and negotiation; influencing and shaping policy decisions, and allocation of resources.

Research and Documentation: To show that women make a difference, their work in engendering the institution's rules, practices, and norms as well as policy decisions should be documented.

Policy Analysis and Advocacy: Three important areas for policy advocacy to enhance women's political participation are democratization of political parties; quotas as temporary special measures to achieve gender balance; and campaign finance reform.

In conclusion, women's political participation is not only about increasing their numbers but about effectiveness and impact. Women should be able to participate in open, transparent, accountable decision-making processes of policy-making institutions and mechanisms, not as beneficiaries/objects of development programmes but as agents/subjects of developmental change. Their effectiveness is indicated by the extent to which they are able to influence institutional rules, norms and practices and consequently shape the policy agenda and decisions about the use and allocation of resources. Their impact on the other hand will be seen in the entitlements, capabilities and rights they are able to secure for women to redress gender disparities and change their lives, especially the poor women's lives.

Notes and References

1. Discussion paper read at the "Workshop on the Implementation of Quotas: Asian Experiences," organized by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in Jakarta, Indonesia, 25 September 2002.
2. "History of Women's Reserved Seats in Legislatures in Pakistan". *Legislative Watch*, November to December 2001.
3. *Citizens' Campaign for Women's Representation in Local Government*. Aurat Publications and Information Service Foundation.
4. Women were not allowed to run in 21 union councils of districts Swabi and Mardan and in 34 union councils of district Dir, *ibid.* (note 3).
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.
6. A total of 36,049 women were elected to the Councils.
7. "Local Government Elections, Phase 1,2,3,4,5", a series of studies conducted by Pattan Development Corporation, 2001. The authors are Farzana Bari, Sarwar Bari, and Bilal Hassan Khan.
8. The Ministry of Women and Development (MOWD) commissioned Sarwar Bari of PATTAN to conduct a Training Needs Assessment for its Women's Political Participation Project.
9. Legal Framework Order, 22 August 2002.
10. Farzana, Bari, 2002. "Women's Representation in Legislatures: The Way Forward". January 2002, p. 11
11. "Possible Election Modalities". *Legislative Watch*. Issue No. 15 and 16, November–December 2001.