



**Regional Workshop on The Implementation of Quotas: Asian Experiences**

## **The Political Representation of Women in Indonesia: How Can It Be Achieved?**

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### **Introduction**

In recent years, the issue of the representation of women and their participation in the political process has become increasingly significant in Indonesia. On at least two occasions, on 22 December 2001 and 21 April 2001, the President addressed speeches to women activists in which she pleaded with them not to press for a quota, on the grounds that the implementation of a quota would have an adverse affect on the standing of women. It is clear that many politicians have a poor understanding of the importance of the representation of women and their participation in the political decision-making process. It remains to be seen how the increasingly expressed demands of women activists in political parties, on non-governmental issues and in academic circles, to raise the level of women's representation in the political process as a fundamental human rights issue, will be addressed.

The demand for a quota system for women is a demand for a policy that achieves a measurable outcome. The mechanism of the quota is considered by those demanding it to be the fastest means of increasing the level of representation of women in the political process. Affirmative action through the imposition of a quota has even been proposed for professional recruitment processes in other areas. A quota is a mechanism for reducing gender injustice. Without a definite quota, gender injustice will continue to occur. The issue relates to the *politics of presence*.

The debate concerning the increased representation of women through the imposition of a quota is an integral part of the debate regarding the development of a democratic political system built on the principal of gender equality. The demands for a quota are an integral part of the demands for women's rights in the political sphere. Why are political issues important for women? Because women form the majority of the citizens of this country, yet their rights as citizens are given insufficient consideration, and they are continually marginalized in the decision-making process. In this short essay, issues related to the quota will be explored, before examining examples of the

implementation of a quota in various other nations in order to determine how a similar quota should be implemented in Indonesia to develop a democratic political culture.

### **What is a 'Quota'?**

Political concepts such as democracy, citizenship and nationalism are often considered neutral. In practice, however, these concepts are extremely gender biased. Political rights for women are basic human rights, and human rights are an integral part of democracy. The involvement of both women and men in the decision-making process is a sine qua non in democracy. The quota is a mechanism for achieving a significant increase in the level of representation of women in the political process and a means for ensuring that women's political interests are represented.

A quota for women is intended to ensure that a specified percentage of positions in political parties, parliament, state committees and government institutions are held by women. The quota system is a mechanism to reduce obstacles in the process of recruitment, not at the individual level but at the level of those who control the recruitment process. It is often said that the problem lies in the availability of women qualified for the positions in question, or that women are not interested in becoming involved in the political arena. This issue relates to the social and cultural context of the nation. In the context of modern political life, a quota system ensures that the recruitment of women into political life is guaranteed to reach the significant level of 30 per cent. The quota is a provisional mechanism to ensure the recruitment of women into the political domain so that political, economic and ideological obstacles in the path of women's progress are minimized. In short, the quota is intended to overcome prejudices that prevent the entrance of women into the political arena.

The quota system can also be implemented in a gender-neutral fashion. For positions usually dominated by women, the quota system can be utilized by men. However, in practice, it should be noted that within sectors in which women predominate, men often control leadership positions. For example, many studies have demonstrated that in the areas of cigarette production and electronics assembly, a majority of workers are women, who are valued for their perceived manual dexterity in repetitive tasks. However, management and supervisory positions are usually held by men. A quota system could become a mechanism for increasing productivity, because with the implementation of a quota, we would not suffer the loss of half of the available human resources in Indonesia.

### **Experiences Abroad**

Over the last decade, a number of nations have achieved significant increases in the proportion of women in national representative institutions. This has been supported by the activities in Beijing in 1995 and the IPU in New Delhi in 1997. A UN Progress Report in 1995, which analysed gender and development in 174 countries, stated:

*While it is true that there is no direct connection between the level of participation of women in political institutions and their contribution to the advance of women, a level of representation of 30% in political institutions can be considered critical to ensuring women have meaningful influence in the political process.*  
(IFES)

There are several different examples of how a quota has been utilized in the political process. Firstly, a quota has been implemented through legislation in Italy to achieve a level of representation of 50 per cent; since 1993, Argentina has imposed a quota of 33 per cent; Brazil has a quota of 20 per cent, and India has a quota in the Lok Sabha. Secondly, a quota has been implemented through electoral legislation requiring political parties to present women candidates. In Argentina, there is a quota in districts of *true believers*, or *winnable seats*. In France, the level is 50 per cent. Thirdly, political parties often have a policy of implementing informal quotas. For example, the African National Congress in

South Africa imposes a quota of 30 per cent. The Labor Party in Australia, the PJ and the UCR in Argentina also impose informal quotas.

In addition, a quota has been imposed through the constitution in a number of nations, including Uganda, where 39 seats are reserved for women. In Argentina, electoral legislation since 1993 has required political parties to select women candidates for at least 30 per cent of winning seats. The proportion of members of parliament in Argentina at present is 33 per cent women. In India in the Lhok Saba (local government), a quota of 30 per cent is enshrined in the constitution. In Bangladesh, 30 seats out of 330 are set aside as reserve seats.

### **What About Indonesia?**

The opinion expressed by President Megawati in various speeches that a quota for women would denigrate the position of women must be considered highly debatable.

Firstly, in the context of the social problems of corruption, collusion and nepotism that have destroyed the economic system and social capital of our nation, this issue must be considered as one related to the dignity of the nation. The crisis of trust between members of the community and the state has resulted in the outbreak of extreme communal violence. State violence and communal violence, even domestic violence, appear to be a common occurrence in our country. Look at the cases of Ambon, Ternate, Sambas, Irian Jaya, Aceh and Poso. Who are the actors in these war-making forces? The question is whether women have been involved in negotiations in Aceh (in fact, after criticisms on this issue, a few have been included) or in Poso? We must ask whether the majority of women citizens of Indonesia are truly regarded as citizens, or stakeholders in this nation. Thus, the contribution of women is required to resolve national problems.

Secondly, in the political sphere, what percentage of members of the DPR (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, House of Representatives) or MPR (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, Consultative People's Assembly) are women? Approximately 9 per cent of members of the DPR, and an even lower percentage in the DPRD I (province) and DPRD II (district) are women. In fact, there are no women members in some DPRD II in several provinces. The percentage of Echelon I civil servants in Indonesia is only 4.3 per cent, while only two members of cabinet are women, in addition to the President. According to an official government report, there are no women *Ulama* (religious scholars) in Indonesia. This is because the concept of the *Ulama* is identified with men, despite the fact that many religious scholars and experts are women. In Indonesia, not one single chairperson of a KUA is a woman, despite the fact that there are 6000 such positions. No woman holds the position of provincial governor, and only 1.5 per cent of regents/mayors, or six individuals, are women.

What is the condition of our political system? At present, Indonesia is displaying its ugliest characteristics. As Peter Merkl has stated, politics has a "good face", when it is involved in the establishment of a just social system. However, politics also has an "ugly face", when it is involved in the search for power and wealth for its own sake. I think that one measure to improve the welfare of members of the community would be to involve both women and men in the decision-making process.

Thirdly, the economic crisis that begun in 1997 has had different effects on men and women. Women's health conditions have declined because, for example, traditionally a housewife eats last at mealtimes. The government has not paid attention to the establishment of policies targeting women. Indonesian women working overseas (TKW) form a significant force in the economy these days. What strategies has the government implemented to protect these women? There have been many cases of these women being exploited, even raped, by their employers overseas. At the same time, macroeconomic policy has not addressed the issue of improving conditions for women. The

problems of domestic economics and unemployment have not become a priority for the government.

Thus, if we are addressing the issue of the standing of women, we should first examine the existing political and social context. Let us examine the means by which the position of women can be improved in the democratic process. Let us learn from the examples of countries that have successfully implemented affirmative action through the imposition of a quota to determine the strengths and weaknesses of these systems. We also need to undertake studies of gender in politics. The male stream theory of politics is still dominant in Indonesia. The development of a new political theory that engages the issue of gender has yet to occur in Indonesia. There are extremely few political scientists who have conducted studies on the deconstruction of male stream political theory. The gender blindness in political science in Indonesia and the male domination of the political process has prevented the achievement of gender justice in the realm of politics. Thus, the demands for a quota system by women activists in political parties, NGOs and in academia are extremely relevant in this context.

Until now, the government and the majority of women's organizations have placed greater emphasis on practical issues affecting women. For example, issues such as women's poverty, poor health, and low levels of education have been addressed through measures intended to generate income for women through the establishment of cooperatives and other means, to improve health by opening mother and child health clinics, and to improve education by opening schools. However, since independence, there have been few strategies directly addressing the issue of why women are impoverished, because this has not been a national priority.

The establishment of a policy to achieve a critical mass of women in the political process is not merely the responsibility of the president. However, the president could become the leader of an initiative to achieve this. This issue must become the responsibility of all elements in the community and the state, including the executive and the legislature, as well as political parties, NGOs, the media and the academic world.

### **Conclusion: Affirmative Action Through Quotas**

We hope that a policy of affirmative action will change the face of politics by bringing attention to the issue of gender justice. This issue should not be considered as a "gift" of positions on state committees to women, but in the context of the need for the state not to lose more than half of the potential leaders required to resolve the nation's problems — a nation in which more than 51 per cent are women. In order not to lose valuable human resources consisting of women, a quota is essential. By involving women in the decision-making process, the process of democratization can begin. Democracy without the involvement of women is not democracy.

Affirmative action is a policy to reduce gender injustice. When the goal of true equality is achieved through education and throughout all sectors of the nation's life, affirmative action will no longer be required. We are still in a society that is highly discriminatory against women. Existing stereotypes of women create prejudice against women. The quota is a provisional mechanism to achieve the goal of accelerating the rise in the level of women involved in the decision-making process. With a quota, we can reduce the level of injustice and discrimination against women. Without a quota, injustice and discrimination against women will continue. Drude Dahlerup's chapter in the *Women in Parliament* handbook provides a complete picture of the necessity for affirmative action and of the experiences of other countries, demonstrating that it is required to improve the situation of the majority of citizens of this nation and showing that justice is a required principle in the development of a nation.