

## Chapter 5

# Conclusion: The Impact of Women as Transformative Leaders

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In recent years there has been a growing recognition of the need to evaluate the impact of women on democracy and development. It is evident that with at least a 30 per cent majority of women involved in decision-making, a society's overall performance improves. For example, Global Gender Index reports have shown a correlation between the increased participation of women and the development of societies in the areas of health, education, family care, social welfare, the environment etc. By contrast, countries with a low participation of women have seen a fall in the quality of social-related services. Consequently, more efforts are still required to ensure that a critical mass of women are elected into positions of authority and at all levels of decision-making.

Much literature has focused on increasing the numbers of women represented in national and local governance. In order to have effective and competent women holding positions of leadership, the political space has to be opened up for more women to participate in politics. Hence it is crucial to deal with the systematic and endemic barriers that hinder the effective participation of women in politics. The case studies of selected countries presented in this book reveal that the introduction of quotas, reserved seats and affirmative action policies, through constitutional, legislative, electoral and party reforms, have resulted in an incremental rise in the participation of women in decision-making roles.

In New Zealand, the first woman elected into parliament was in 1931, even though women gained the vote in 1893. The number of female MPs remained at 10 per cent until electoral reform was introduced in the 1990s, which saw a steady rise of women in parliament. Dramatic changes in the laws that now favour different social groupings in New Zealand were realised from the 1980s, when more women joined parliament. Such transformative changes included the adoption of a women's policy, legal reforms to address women's human rights, public sector reform to strengthen women's leadership, ratification of international resolutions such as CEDAW, strengthening of women's leadership in politics to include Māori women, and mentoring women in the private sector for future appointment.

The South African liberal constitution laid the foundation for a *new* democratic society. The ruling party, the African National Congress, enabled the participation of women by institutionalising affirmative action policies within the party and its electoral manifestos. As a result, there has been a steady rise in the participation of women within political party structures, in parliament and cabinet. The impact of women's participation has been realised through

changes in policies and laws to attain gender equality for the empowerment of women, advancement of women's rights, recognition of customary marriage and inheritance for widows, and liberal abortion laws. In 2012, the Ministry of Gender championed the Gender Equity Bill to strengthen women's empowerment and achieve gender mainstreaming across sectors including corporate boards, the public sector, civil society and in local governance.

Constitutional amendments in India and Bangladesh to reserve a third of all local government seats for women have proved positive for women. This has made women more visible in local politics, strengthened healthy competition, built capacity and impacted on social policies, while at the same time the women also serve as role models for political aspirants. Wide sensitisation on gender issues has contributed to the steady elimination of patriarchal norms and cultures. At least 13 provinces in Bangladesh and 14 provinces in India have adopted the 30 per cent quota for women, while the remit of financial rewards to political parties who have achieved the quota has encouraged the increase of women to 50 per cent in some local government councils in India. Reflecting on the political architecture in local governance, the political space open for women is limited and the pace of change is slow and gradual, while politics is also heavily monetised with incidents of election-related violence. More efforts are needed to combat corruption, crime and provide security for women. Nonetheless, the women are gradually changing the political environment positively.

## 5.1 Positive attributes of the impact of women's leadership

Women are particularly adaptable to change and their approaches are distinct from their male counterparts. Their negotiation styles are more encompassing to include all the issues that affect men, women, girls and boys. Women have taken due advantage of political spaces to progress the interests of women and girls for political empowerment and socio-economic development. The following are some of the positive impacts of women's participation on democracy and development:

1. Women leaders tend to pressurise for amendments and the initiation of national laws and local policies for improved infrastructure, constitutional and legislative reforms to abrogate repugnant laws, and ratification of international resolutions for women's rights. They also mobilise for electoral and party reforms for women's active participation in leadership and decision-making roles.
2. The leading presence of women has seen changes to the political environment in terms of language and user-friendly approaches that are inclusive and gender neutral.
3. Women's involvement results in improved consultation and participation with key stakeholders to develop a culture of co-operation and collaboration.
4. Strengthened capacity of women and men for competent leadership.

5. Increased development through funding of projects and programmes, e.g. urban economic programmes to attract investors for national and community infrastructure, environmental conservation, and provision of facilities and services.
6. Women decision-makers sensitise on the effective allocation of budgetary resources to include social development, the green economy, security, the environment, sanitation, capacity building, human rights and legal protection for victims of gender-based violence.
7. Heightened awareness on social, cultural and traditional practices offensive to women and girls such as genital mutilation/cutting, forced and unlawful marriages, child pornography, child sex abuse, domestic abuse, human trafficking and sexual violence.

## 5.2 Way forward

Overwhelming, there is support for women in politics in the case study countries, but for women to fully maximise these opportunities certain changes have to be achieved. The Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, first woman Speaker of the Ugandan Parliament, also agrees that there is a need to focus beyond increasing the number of women in government to increasing their effectiveness in political positions and their impact on decision-making at all levels. The following are some strategies that have proved successful at increasing women's representation in decision-making across the Commonwealth.

1. *Endorsement of political parties* – After studying the political processes in the selected countries, the incremental rise of women in these countries can be directly attributed to the political parties – especially the ruling party – taking a firm decision to institutionalise mechanisms favourable to women's access into power and positions of authority in party and governance structures at all levels of decision-making. This serves as a key lesson for Commonwealth countries, indicating that despite constitutional, legislative and/or electoral reforms, political parties have to endorse these reforms and implement the required changes before women can actively participate in politics, leadership and decision-making roles. Recognising the resistance to change in specific political architectures has resulted in the imposition of fines and rewards by legislation on political parties to ensure implementation.
2. *Capacity building initiatives* – Gender awareness training programmes should be established within educational and political institutions, and provided to women candidates to connect political aspirants to opportunities for leadership. Further, MPs should expand their skills to strengthen functions in political office.
3. *Representation of women by male relatives* – The representation of women in reserved seats is important and should not be eroded by their spouses

or male relatives. Even though the representation of male relatives in local government meetings signals a sign of acceptability by the family, it does not necessarily strengthen the voice of women in decision-making. The election of women into reserved seats is for women to build capacity and become competent to hold higher levels of political authority at the provincial and national levels. Moreover, reserve seats on local councils should have the same status as general seats, with clear mandates and roles gazetted for all decision-makers and with equal access to resources and funding.

4. *Financial resources* – Many women are limited by financial resources, which further inhibit their effective participation in politics. A dedicated fund should be set aside through state or party mandates to support women's advocacy and political campaigns. Women entrepreneurs can also serve as donors to support women's electoral campaigns.
5. *Strategise to increase the number of women in decision-making* – Apart from legal or electoral reforms, a mass mobilisation of women can lobby political parties to mainstream women in party manifestos and electoral campaigns. Women are known to be the highest number of voters in any election, and can exchange their votes for positive action. Further, civil society can target accomplished, competent and qualified women leaders and groom them for political leadership. These women have established families with reduced family responsibilities, wide experience, a loyal constituency and are financially stable. These women can also be mentored by other women in political authority. Appointing women leaders into positions of authority has proved effective in many Commonwealth countries.
6. *Redrawing of voting districts* – Research has shown women win more open seats (new constituencies) than well-established constituencies. The creation of new districts or local councils can be drawn based on increased population.
7. *Involving male champions* – Practically, it is important to partner with men who have long-standing control of power, and sensitise them to understand gender equity, equality and mainstreaming. In this way male champions can serve as agents for change for the inclusion and effective participation of women at all levels, and across all sectors including the home.
8. *Regional support networks* – Regional and international initiatives on women's empowerment can lead to a drive for change in member countries, such as observing regional targets and compliance with regional obligations. International NGOs such as the National Democratic Institute and The Carter Center, to name a few, have established precedents in advocating for women's issues on government agendas and cementing change. International and regional conferences, workshops, seminars and

networks have provided opportunities for learning, exchange of good practices, and sharing of comparative research to develop new ideas, strategies and tools to effect change. Furthermore, consistent changes in the region can have a substantial impact on member countries, thereby encouraging similar patterns to avoid being isolated in their obligations to women's empowerment. For example, it is not coincidental that in 2013, Bangladesh appointed its first woman Speaker of the *Jatiyo Sangsad*, following trends of the first woman Speaker appointed in India's *Lok Sabha* in 2009, and the first woman Speaker in Pakistan's National Assembly in 2002.

9. ***Timeframe for Affirmative Action*** – Top performers in terms of women's representation in the Commonwealth can be attributed to the adoption and practice of a variety of affirmative action policies. Article 78(1) of the Ugandan Constitution reserved one woman representative for every district, totalling 112 districts out of 378 seats in parliament. The current Speaker of the Uganda Parliament, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, joined parliament through reserved constituencies introduced by the Museveni government in 1995. She serves as a credible example of women's effective and competent leadership. However, there are mixed views and negative perceptions on the implementation of reserved seats and quotas from well-developed democracies. In specific contexts, women are seen as tokens and 'ornamental' representation without the required skills for leadership. Yet the study of Australia indicates that without a variation of affirmative action policy, specific leadership positions would not be occupied by women. Some political architectures have mobilised the participation of women with the support of civil society organisations, without institutionalising affirmative action policies – for example, in Trinidad and Tobago. Alternatively, Ugandan parliamentarians renegotiate the reservation of constituencies every five years: this serves as a credible practice than can be emulated across member countries.

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