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**Women and Politics in Indonesia: A General Overview of Strengthening
Women's Political Participation**
Francisia SSE Seda¹

Context

It is important when discussing the issue of strengthening women's political participation in Indonesia to view it in context of the current transition to a more democratic political system. Democracy must secure political equality for the marginalized and minority groups. Women in Indonesia are marginalized socially, culturally, economically, and also politically even though demographically, they constitute the majority.

Women in Indonesia are the silent majority, marginalized, from the power structure and decision making processes. For example, there is a tendency of decreasing women representation in the National Parliament (DPR) from 12,5% in 1992 to 9% in 1999 (Seda, 2002). The impact of this unfortunate condition is that laws and regulations enacted and implemented as well as the prioritisation of national and local development programs do not reflect principles of political equality and social justice, or the needs and interests of women.

The need to increase the numbers of women and strengthening the women in power was one of the twelve critical issues raised in the U.N. Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The Indonesian government actively participated in and concurred with the results of the Beijing Conference which resulted in possibilities for the Indonesian State Ministry for the Empowerment of Women to hold several workshops, seminars, and conferences for women political party members and women parliamentarians nationally to strengthen their national networking and it also lobbied for the inclusion of gender and quota in the articles of the political package laws debated and legislated in the National Parliament. The increased political participation of women both locally and nationally will enhance the substance of Indonesian democracy, for all citizens both women and men. It is not only women who will benefit from increased women's political participation, but the larger Indonesian society.

The current Indonesian gender discussion concerning strengthening women has not yet reached the same level in the discussion as the well debated topic of increasing the numbers, but public discussions took us a step forward when this issue was raised and highlighted.

Problems Identified

It became apparent in public discussions that there are different problems faced by women from different socio/cultural, economic, geographic groups. And also that representatives from the various levels of government (national, and provincial, and municipal) face obstacles that differ from each other.

¹ Francisia SSE Seda Ph.D., Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Indonesia in Jakarta, Indonesia.

When identifying strategies for increasing and strengthening the political participation of Indonesian women, it was recognised that Indonesian women are not a homogeneous social group, and that each group is facing different problems and obstacles to be identified. For example, women from lower economic classes, the urban and the rural and poor women and women from different regions have specific and different problems and obstacles to overcome.

In discussing issues related to strengthening women's political participation Farida Nurland has identified the following problems and obstacles. First, Indonesian culture is both feudalistic and patriarchal. Second, society has adopted a very conservative understanding and interpretation of various religious teachings. Third, state hegemony is still too dominant and this is reflected by state institutions that support the patriarchal culture at both the national and local levels (Nurland, 2002).

It became clear that at the national and provincial levels, the patriarchal culture and political system did have a negative impact on individual women who try to establish their right to political participation. The dichotomy of public and private domains or spheres was said to still being strongly supported in today's Indonesia. Indonesian women basically face major obstacles at two levels, in their struggle to strengthening their political participation. First, they have to overcome the patriarchal culture and political system which assigns them to the domestic sphere and not in the public sphere. Second, they have to overcome the challenge of legislations and policies relating to electoral systems and political parties which are either discriminatory or gender blind.

It is not surprising that cultural barriers and obstacles was one of the main obstacles brought up in the public discussions and was said to have been internalised and accepted by many Indonesian women. This in turn made them psychologically unprepared for participation in politics. It was also highlighted that many women have internalised a sense of inferiority and believe that political issues are not their issues. This has caused women to adopt a passive approach to politics, including the general perception that politics is negative and has made women unable to develop and identify strategies for increase women's effectiveness within their political work. Political campaigning is viewed as inappropriate for women. Women's hesitancy in pursuing an active political life including leading political organizations have diminished or decreased their political role.

Within the public discussions it was also highlighted the problem of women having "dual roles" as mothers/ housewives and as part of the labour force. This dual burden put a lot of constraints on women, where allocated time for political activities were limited. The perceptions and stereotyping of women created another major obstacle for participation in public life. Women who focus only on their career including developing their political life were not considered to be "normal". They have to succeed in both their roles in order to be perceived as "successful" women.

It was also stressed that political parties and organizations did not tend to be supportive of women's efforts in carrying out their "dual roles" through their structures and activities. For example, important political decisions are usually taken during meetings held from night to dawn when it was said to be almost impossible for women party cadres to attend due to household responsibilities.

In conjunction to these obstacles and pressures on women participating within political institutions these women are also facing and deal with a lack of support mechanisms from other women. The lack of well-developed networks among women was pointed out as one of the greatest obstacles to this and it was clear that the existing network had an unclear structure and the organization among women was poor. There was also stressed that the lack of coordination was not only between different levels (national and provincial), but also between groups operating in the same field of interest, geographic area, and political level, etc. This was said to result in a weakened women's voice for their rights and the lack of mobilization made women already elected or women ready to stand for election become vulnerable.

More specifically, within political parties, there are several obstacles or barriers facing Indonesian women when trying to strengthen themselves and increase the effectiveness of their work. First, the level of the political socialization for women is still low and few women are active within party cadres. Second, the leadership of political parties tends to be male and in turn they tend to nominate male candidates whom they believe have a greater potential to win. Third, there is a tendency to select female candidates who have a close connection with men in power. Fourth, general elections require high costs and funds and few women have independent resources to commit to this. Political parties rarely assist women candidates to raise funds. Fifth and last, women's lack of mobilization and unwillingness/incompetence to support each other puts women in a vulnerable position and disadvantages women when in taking an active stand in asserting and aiming to strengthen women's rights and needs.

Strategies Identified/Action Plans Developed

The strategies identified to enhance the political role of women in politics in Indonesia focus on a combination of governmental action through legislation and civil society activism. These, would impact by increasing and strengthening women's political participation over time. The need for and the importance of including women in politics and increasing the opportunities for women to participate in political institutions was emphasized.

The first strategy was the necessity of increasing the political socialization for Indonesian women both at the local and national levels by providing the public, particularly women, with political understanding through political education. It was also said to be necessary to provide training for women candidates in organizational development, organize women groups to highlight gender issues and strengthen networking between women groups in civil society, political parties, parliament, and the media. Strategies suggested include training is needed to target the MPR/DPR secretariats, Ministry of Women's Empowerment, civil society organizations and political parties.

Second, it was identified as necessary to strengthen women already holding public posts in the political system by giving them political training in lobbying, campaigning and how to in an efficient way participate in political discussions and institutions. There is a need in increasing institutional capacity for staff members, to increase the capacity and support of women elected. This was suggested to be

conducted in cooperation between women parliamentarians, politicians, academics and activists.

The third strategy highlighted the importance of providing assistance for political parties which are committed to promoting gender equality through their political platforms and their internal political structures. This assistance should come in the form of training programs and even financial assistance and incentives through election management bodies. The importance of stressing these issues closer to election was said to be crucial and women preparing for the election stated a lack of human support and financial support that could be overcome by greater cooperation and understanding among members of political institutions and civil society.

In close relation to this, a fourth strategy was developed where the preparation of a database was desirable. The purpose of the database would be to map out legislative candidates from political parties, and from the executive, judicial, and legislative branches and also from the women's political caucuses, Civil Society Organizations (CSO)s, and other social organizations to provide a resource of the key persons who should be drawn into any campaign to strengthen women's political participation. The suggestion was that one or several organizations should undertake this assignment and function as a coordinator for this work.

Fifth, initiate programs to develop political awareness and education for potential female cadres who are not already active in the public sphere must be undertaken. The responsibility of the media was brought up as an important part of educating and spreading the word of gender equality.

Sixth, strategies was therefore to develop and strengthen the network between women members of political parties, women parliamentarians, CSOs, and the media. It was also of importance to involve the media in campaigns to present women as credible political actors through the mass media including the print and electronic media.

The last strategy was related to the overall political structure generally. It stressed the importance of politics being feminized not only through formal political structures such as political parties and electoral exercises, but also through people's movements including womens' movements and the broader civil community.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Along with implementing an action plan designed specifically to increase women's political participation, it is important to secure broad changes in the political system. This could be done through political parties being reformed to be more democratic internally. Only when a high level of transparency, justice and gender equality are reached can political parties be channels to secure democracy more broadly.

This is also an important factor in the independence and autonomy of various political, legal, and social institutions such as political parties, parliament, the Supreme Court, and the mass media. They all must be considered secured from political pressure. First then public trust in these institutions can be secured. These kinds of efforts would increase the public's inherent trust in the political system

including the parliament and the political parties. It is particularly important that women as a constituent group trust the political system to be able for them to participate within the political institutions.

To strengthening women's participation and position in politics, it is also important to establish relations between social movements, especially women movements and the political parties.

As mentioned before it is also important to bear in mind that Indonesian women are not homogeneous, social and cultural factors impacting gender relations must be taken into account when designing strategies to increase women's political participation.

In this context, there are several recommendations to be made how to go beyond numbers to strengthening women's political participation in Indonesia:

First, it is important to put a focus on political parties, to assist them in becoming more gender-sensitive in order to increase the numbers of women within party ranks and to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in decision-making positions and leadership positions within political parties. Concretely, this would include making changes to the schedules for party meetings, to be mindful of the dual roles that women play in the domestic as well as public sphere, provide assistance in campaign finance and develop leadership skills.

Second, there is a need to develop a critical mass of CSOs committed to improving the status of women and help them develop a common cause with women in politics. An important tool within this work is to increase the cooperation between different groups. To strengthen the networking between women CSOs and women in politics and assist them to actively influence government, parliament, and or political parties to take appropriate affirmative action to fast-track women's political empowerment. To strengthening the link between international organizations with CSOs with the purpose to assist CSOs to organize citizenship training both for the female electorate and for female candidates. Women and men should be encouraged to vote for women candidates.

Third, the recommendation is to use existing cultural and religious institutions such as the religious women organizations of Fatayat, Aliyah, etc., to socialize the community, especially among the rural people so that the awareness and consciousness of the importance of women's role in the political life is emphasized.

Fourth, a great focus for increase women's involvement would be on conducting work due to village affairs in order to influence the political decision making processes of the village government in particular and encourage grass-roots pressures on higher levels of government in general. Training of women cadres at the village level increases the prospects of women playing a greater role in the regional representatives councils and later at the national level too.

A fifth recommendation is also to-, organize women's organizations to respond to community needs such as reproductive health, provision of clean water, and sanitation, and link these initiatives as part of a broader strategic effort to increase the political participation of women.

Sixth, there is a need to encourage CSOs to organize public debates, advocacy campaigns to promote women's political participation, and to provide organizational management and campaign training, and avenues for campaign finances for the women who become members of social and political organizations.

To summarise the recommendations; the political participation should not be assessed only in terms of representation in national and local parliaments, participation in political parties and in national and local political campaigns must also be considered. While there are many efforts being made to increase the critical mass of women in politics, the efforts to strengthen the quality of women's political engagement are also significant. These efforts depend on a multi-strategy approach over time that links ministries, parliamentary secretariats, political parties, civil society organizations. In the current transitional period, this is the greatest challenge that has to be faced by Indonesians both women and men who truly believe in democracy and social justice for all.

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