

# REFORM IS FOR US TOO

## Politics for Women & Women for Politics

11-12 May 1999, Jakarta Workshop

Jointly facilitated by International IDEA and YJP (*Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan*)

### Report

#### A. Introduction

The workshop “Reform Is For Us Too” was held in May 1999 – after the end of the Soeharto regime and just before the first free and fair elections was held in Indonesia after more than three decades.

The people of Indonesia had before them a great challenge – to reconstruct a system of government that will pull them out of the present political and economic quagmire. They were also presented with plenty of opportunities as the democratisation process has opened up political space for participation.

The level of political participation is a big factor in determining how democratic a country really is. All sections of society have a right to be represented. One such group are the women of Indonesia.

The facts and figures (see box 1) available on women’s economic, social and political development show that Indonesian women are not well-represented and do not have the same access to resources as their male counterparts.

DESCRIPTION	RANK/Percentage	Box 1
UNDP Gender Development Index	88	
Gender Empowerment Ranking	70	
Female Life Expectancy	65.8%	
Female Adult Literacy	78%	
Combined first, second and third level gross enrolment	59.1%	
Female share of earned income	33%	
Male share of earned income	67%	
Female Professional & Technical Workers	40.8%	
Female Administrators & Managers	6.6%	
Female Parliamentarians (MPR)	8.6%	
Female Parliamentarians (DPR)	8.8%	
Female Cabinet Ministers	4.0%	
Female Sub-Ministerial Officers	1.0%	

Indonesian women received the right to vote and contest elections in 1945. However, this has not led to high political participation levels. In 1997, women made up 50.3 percent of the electorate. (That figure increased to 52.2 percent in the 1999 elections.) Yet, only 8.8 percent of the members of DPR (People's Representative Assembly) and 8.6 percent of MPR (people's Consultative Assembly) are women. Very few women hold office in political parties. Even in the civil service and the judiciary, there are few women in high decision-making positions.

While representation is low, women's organisations are active outside the formal corridors of power. A loose coalition of organisations that had historically participated in "opposing" the New Order, now have the opportunity and even the responsibility to actually do so.

However, many of these non-governmental actors were more familiar with the politics of protest and struggle than in the politics of democratic participation.

A new challenge confronts them. Without a "common enemy" to unite the organisations and produce a focal point for their work, the leaders now need to develop their own programme and political agenda with strategies and a methodology to engage in political reform. Few organisations or individuals had focussed on developing these skills with clarity and coherence as this form of political activism demands another set of skills and policy outlook. In addition, the individuals and groups who came together in loose coalitions in opposition are now in competition for political recognition.

The "rules of the game" in Indonesia are still in flux. Issues of representation, participation, and the boundaries of the democratic agenda not clearly charted. These are issues that all political actors must contend within Indonesia today, but the impact on women political actors is compounded.

As in many other countries, Indonesian women's level of participation in politics is both low and weak. Too few women are actively engaged in politics for many reasons. One of it is perception. Politics was viewed as combative and harsh and few women feel comfortable working in such an environment. In addition, having been excluded from the formal political process for so long, many women feel that they do not know "the rules of the game" to succeed in politics and would rather stay away from it.

Even once women entered the political arena, it has been felt that their participation is weak. There is little support to enable women to contribute to the process and participate actively. Women are poorly trained for politics. Often, women are assigned seats within institutions to serve as gender-tokens rather than as a real political force. There are few institutions and processes that encourage, facilitate or sponsor women's political participation as a necessary feature of public life.

Such an environment was amplified in Indonesia as politics were depoliticised, save for those closely linked to then-President Soeharto, the ruling party Golkar and ABRI, the military. The women who were allowed into politics rode on their husband's influence and careers. Women included in the sectoral lists or the "Sevavanitha" networks were largely regarded as "the rib of ABRI" – they played a supportive role, they were not autonomous political actors.

## **B. Demands for Greater Opportunity to Participate**

Recognising this representational flaw and their own difficulties in making in-roads into the system, many women activists are now making demands for increased participation and representation.

Some political parties are being challenged to ensure that there should be at least one woman serving on the executive board of every party branch. Others demand that there should be a 50% quota for women in every legislative, executive and judicial body. They have expressed the belief that without significant political empowerment, they will be unable to affect the agenda and get the issues of greatest concern to them addressed. These include access to credit, to jobs in the bureaucracy and access to political institutions at both the local and the national level.

## **C. Ways to Participate**

Political participation can take several forms. It could be through advocacy of issues through non-governmental organisations or by direct participation in political institutions at the national or regional level. Participation can be focused on delivering social, economic or political reforms. Both forms of participation are critical in a democratic polity but they require different sets of skills, strategies and tactics.

Active political participation depends on critical awareness of the power dynamics and inter-relationships between the political structures, the political players and the over-arching system. In the case of women, it is vital that women's active political participation and critical political awareness includes a gender-awareness.

Politics is complex and is undergoing changes due to globalisation. There remain old and outstanding issues to resolve but also new issues emerging and the formation of new opportunities for women. Women are making a mark in the formal institutions of government. Many more women are becoming a part of the state and governmental institutions. More women's institutions such as Commissions on the Status of Women have been formed and laws to improve women's political participation have been passed.

There are new opportunities and new risks. These opportunities have created new "publics" and new policies. Women have expanded the meaning of political rights. Political persons no longer mean only men but they include women.

However, there are risks in institutionalising women's political participation. The question arises whether women are merely being institutionalised or they being integrated. Are women's skills being co-opted to serve the interest of others or to serve women? Are we expanding women's rights or are we content to accept existing political rights? Are women satisfied to accept political rights or are they demanding and getting economic rights?

The main concern is to use institutions and institutionalisation to empower women to secure their rights. There are three critical aspects to this. How can the collective rights of women be advanced and move away from the political empowerment and advancement of a few individual women? How can political institutions be transformed even as we use them? How do we ensure that political re-structuring will lead to social development for women?

Politics is a means to address women's basic issues and concerns. It is necessary to identify the issues and problems most affecting women and channel these issues to policy makers. This is important if political relations are to be transformed and women's NGOs have significant roles of play.

## **D. Preparing for Politics**

This workshop<sup>1</sup> was designed to focus on the two strategic entry points for women's political participation:

- Public policy advocacy, and
- Electoral participation.

They are different yet interconnected. While public policy advocacy goes beyond electoral policy, without electoral participation public advocacy to improve women's political participation will not happen.

While look at the various ways to prepare oneself for political participation, critical issues central to widening, improving and strengthening women's political participation were raised. There were:

- Greater gender awareness in politics
- Development of effective electoral campaign skills for activists and politicians
- Development of strategies and tactics to be more effective legislators and activists

### **1. The Meaning of "Politics"**

Perception of politics and of the sort of people who would participate in the process is important as it often makes or breaks the decision to enter the arena. This is the first step in making that crucial decision to be 'active'.

For the Indonesian women present, politics was identified with the following:

- Power
- Democracy
- Reform
- Government
- Parliament
- Constraining

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<sup>1</sup> For this workshop, International IDEA engaged two consultants from the Philippines who have facilitated many workshops on women's political participation. The choice of the facilitators was critical as the participants developed an empathy with them as they came from the region and had gone through similar experiences during the twelve years of martial Law under Marcos.

Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan (YJP) invited to the workshops a total of 65 women participants. 40 women participants were invited from the NGO, academic community and included members of the media and other women's activists and engaged women. 20 women from 16 political parties were invited. 14 women from 11 political parties attended the workshop. 1 man who was a party activist also attended. 1 member from the National Parliament attended the workshop but there were no members representing the district level attended.

- Corruption
- Social Democracy
- Repression
- Justice
- Culture
- Opportunity for political education
- Clean morals
- People
- Intimidation
- Strategy
- Empowerment for men and women
- Fascism

The next step was to look at how politics is viewed and how that affects what the women want to do:

Politics Viewed Positively Is Seen as A Way To:

- Improve the welfare of the people
- Address the issues of women
- Influence decision-making through the system
- Develop a new Indonesia, which represents gender equality and justice
- Develop good government and create good governance
- Develop a gender perspective and fight for women's rights
- Change
- Prove that women can lead and to eliminate the perception that women are weak
- Influence the party elite on issues of women's rights and the environment.

Politics Viewed Negatively Is Seen As:

- A corrupt and violent system that disgusts the participants and needs to be changed
- A political system that sees women as objects and not subjects
- One dominated by men.

In summary, the fundamental desire for **change** could be identified. There was clearly a desire that there had to be a **movement from old politics to new politics** and **women should be agents of this change**. The women expressed the view that they rejected old politics or traditional politics for **new politics that was transformational - transformational politics**.

The participants identified Old Politics as being corrupt, repressive, militaristic, intimidating, and violent. They expressed the optimism that New Politics would bring about changed structures and procedures. They hoped that there would be more women who were gender-sensitive and would work for gender equality and equity; and there would be more women who will use power in a re-defined way.

As politics is often about power, definitions of power and how women see that being used is also important.

- Power OVER is a dominating power.
- Power TO is empowering.
- Power WITH is a co-operative, sharing power.

Using the available concepts of politics and power, a case study illustrated how women would respond to the issue at hand. The case studies dealt with the issues of rape, domestic violence and reproductive health.

The approach encouraged was a “problem-solving” approach, identifying the causes, consequences and solutions to the problems. This would allow an issue to be viewed as part of the larger picture of gender politics, with political overtones and implications, rather than simply as an individual and isolated issue.

The women participants addressed the challenge of HOW they will use their political power to address such issues. They felt that:

- Politics is participation in decision-making at all levels of governance and in all structures – at the level of national, and local parliaments, down to the district and local levels of government.
- All processes should be conducted with full and equal and informed participation.
- A gender perspective should inform public policies, anticipating the effect of such policies on men and women as social and political actors.

The underlying message was that the right to participate in politics is a human right and women’s rights are human rights.

## **2. Preparing to Be a Politician**

Preparation for the road to politics started with a “check-list of self-analysis”. A list of qualities was used to assess strengths and weaknesses and also provide solutions to minimise their vulnerabilities. The questions in the check-list were:

- ***Do people know who YOU are?***

In the past, women did not have to carry their own campaign in any serious manner. They were chosen by party leaders to fill a place on a party list and they did not have to compete on the basis of their own individual merit.

- ***Why do you want to run for office?***

It was important for women to see themselves positively and as having something substantial to offer. Thinking of how to answer this question promotes critical self-assessment and helps women candidates convince the party hierarchy and then the electorate by giving them reasons as to why they want to run for office. Indonesia is shifting electoral systems from proportional representation to a District System. Under this system the party, the qualities of the individual and her political programme will count.

It is important that the question of women’s representation should be a party issue and not simply a woman’s issue. Networking between women in Parliament and women outside Parliament is vital.

- ***Does your family support your participation in politics?***

- ***Is there anything in your past that can be used against you?***

These issues were raised to prepare women candidates for the ruthlessness of political campaigns. While total support and an absolutely clean past is ideal, it is not realistic to expect that of any candidates. What is required then is extra preparation by would-be

women politicians for such public challenges to be made and be prepared to face and address them.

- **Why did you join a political party?**

For many women, it seemed a natural step to move from NGO work into political parties as most parties are derived from such organisations. However, there was concern that once in a different institution, the NGO agenda might be lost as the new politicians forget their NGO roots. This is a danger to avoid.

### **3. Women in Parliament and Women in NGOs: Friends or Foes?**

Questions often raised are:

- What is the difference between women in Parliament and women NGOs?
- How do you develop a good relationship between women in Parliament and women NGOs and share with them?
- How do you transform society through the political process with gender sensitive NGOs?

There is a belief amongst the Indonesian women that women in parliament are privileged and therefore don't share the same experiences or goals as women in NGOs. By and large, women activists do not trust the women in parliament. Some women in parliament are drawn from government-backed NGOs and this has divided the NGO community. There is no solidarity and such suspicion is often divisive and becomes an obstacle for those in power who might have good intentions to contribute to the cause of raising women's political participation levels.

For example, a former "New Order" woman parliamentarian has conceded that she was looked upon with suspicion for her past record of having used the existing mechanisms to obtain a seat in parliament. Her argument was she did so recognising the need for young people to take the initiative.

While the agendas might not all match, NGOs need to acknowledge that there is core of women in parliament and should be willing to work with them. The two parties can complement each other's work. Women parliamentarians enjoy a "position" as parliamentarians and are often not very well informed on social issues, especially those relating to gender relations. Some frankly admitted that previous women members do not feel that they have capabilities to be elected and they let the men get elected for office. She felt that quotas were necessary to get women elected. In addition, while each political party does in fact have a platform for women's issues, it is not well advertised, as it is not among the catchy vote gathering slogans.

Meanwhile, women in NGOs have an activist background and have access to information on social issues but this is then not shared with women parliamentarians.

There is a need to develop a mechanism to build this communication between women parliamentarians and the NGO sector but it is uncertain as to who is going to build the relationship and how it is to be done. It was suggested that Women's Studies Centre could take the initiative in developing mechanisms to bridge the gap between women in parliament and women NGOs.

It was recognised that there is a need for political education. One can get this political education from the family, through formal as well as non-formal education, through legislative training, through development planning and through public relations.

The factors identified as necessary to developing a gender sensitive party platform are:

- Identification of the areas of concern
- Prioritising the list of issues based on concrete realities ensuring that they are gender sensitive
- Definition of strategic objectives
- Identification of the actions to be taken
- Developing an action plan to ensure that the political party you represent will adopt it as part of its platform.

#### **4. Gender Empowerment Must Include Men**

Other arguments<sup>2</sup> brought up in the course of the workshop were:

- Empowerment of women

It was argued that it was important to develop a “political mapping” in order to understand the obstacles to women’s empowerment. Women are represented through the media as inadequate and the media, who adopts stereotypical images to represent women, exploits them. There has been argument that religion has worked against women, but some feel it is not so. Rather, the main factors are culture and civilisation (sic).

- Empowerment beyond politics and elections

The focus should not be on women’s political participation but on women’s empowerment. Politics, like culture, is a barrier to women’s empowerment. Women’s problems are larger than mere politics and go beyond elections. It was also contended that elections are not the best way in which women should fight for their rights. When women come into parliament they do not come as representatives of women but as representatives of political parties. Women were always aware of politics and elections but unfortunately politics and elections are not aware of women. In Europe, extra-parliamentary means were adopted to bring gender issues to the forefront through rallies, protests and demonstrations.

In addition, the economy remains a big issue and no party is commenting on it. The elections are to be held by a tainted government. It is unrealistic to expect it to bring any real solutions to the country’s problems especially those of women. Democracy is more important than other solutions.

- NGOs and the elections

It was also added that NGOs should not participate in elections. They should be outside the government – in the grey area – and continue to monitor and critique government policies. Constitutional government draws its source of reference from the Soeharto constitution. The question is not whether to be in Parliament or not. The important thing is to be politically and democratically engaged.

In response to these points, it was highlighted that in the Philippines too, there was a feeling of pessimism when Marcos called on elections. No one believed that it would bring about change and make a difference. But eventually it did. Elections are not the solution. They are a means. They create opportunities for change and transition.

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<sup>2</sup> Most of these arguments were brought up by a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Indonesia. He declared himself to be a ‘male feminist’.

The comparative experience of the Philippines was countered with the pessimistic view that it was not entirely valid for Indonesia. Women in the Philippines were placed in a different position because their social position and the movements that they organised were more advanced. Women in the Philippines were themselves directly involved in the social movements for change. In comparison, Indonesian women, for over 32 years, had little or almost no space for political participation. There was some social movement in 1998 encouraged by the political transition, but so far it remains in an infant stage.

However, the views raised were strongly challenged by many women participants. They pointed out that women voters are now greater in number than men. This is the chance for women to make policies to improve their lives. Elections are important and women cannot hold rallies all the time. Elections provide the only way to govern constitutionally. Women who have been in NGOs know the limitations that go with it and some are joining political parties to act differently.

The debate ended with a woman declaring that they understood that the elections were one of the means of getting involved in power. Many people are aware of the elections but women are still not sure if there is any party that is aware of the gender issues. Although women's participation in this election may not be successful, if women don't fight for their issues who will?

## **E. Summary and Conclusion**

The workshop was critical in understanding both the levels of commitment and preparedness of a critical group of women political actors in Indonesia. By drawing participation from significant women's networks, International IDEA was able to understand and highlight to a wider group, many of the political issues as well as practical problems associated with limiting women's effective political participation in Indonesia.

Clearly there were historical, cultural and social factors that excluded men as well as women from political participation. But the adverse effects of these conditions on women were disproportionately high.

Women's effective participation in politics was very low. The "rules of the game" in Indonesia are still in flux with issues of representation, participation, and the boundaries of the democratic agenda not clearly charted. They must be re-defined and women must not be left out in this process.

Women's participation is weak. Even where individual women do succeed in securing a place in the political arena, they do not appear to have the supportive networks to draw on to be effective. They are poorly trained and often serve as gender-tokens rather than as real political forces. There are limited institutions and processes that encourage, facilitate or sponsor women's political participation as a necessary feature of public life.

Women's rights must be integrated - not marginalized. Women's rights must be expanded to include political and economic rights. Women's active political participation and critical political awareness must include a gender-awareness.

The participants identified the need to prepare to be politicians. They saw the need to prepare themselves, their parties and constituencies. This required the development of personal skills as well as supportive networks. NGOs were recognized as vital support bases for women

politicians. They have the networks, and can inform the creation of political agendas. It is vital that women politicians are assisted in building bridges with NGOs to work together, and reinforce each other.

Women constitute 50% of a society's population and it is impossible to talk of reforms or democracy if 50% of the population is excluded from the process. Women too are clearly part of the awakened Indonesian electorate demanding change. An agenda for reform must include and integrate women's agenda for effective political representation.

Herein lies the challenge.