

Plan of Action on Promoting Women's Political Participation and Leadership (WPPL) 2024-2030

Background

There are more women leaders in the ASEAN region today than they were two decades ago. Yet, the gender gap in political empowerment continues to persist and remains one of the toughest challenges across the ASEAN region and globally. According to the 2023 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap, although the share of women in parliament for the past decade has increased from 18.7% in 2013 to 22.9% in 2022, it is marginally small and still below the global mass threshold of 30%. At the current rate of progress over the 2006 – 2023 span, it will take 162 years to close the political empowerment gender gap.¹ The progress on this front has been slow and there is a strong need to do more to accelerate it. Thus, it is vital to promote greater understanding of the significance of women in political participation and inclusion, as national parliaments play a critical role in setting policy direction and budget allocation for sustainable development.

Women's political participation in policy and decision-making process is fundamental for gender equality, as it is where women politicians can push for the introduction of inclusive legislation, benefiting not only women but the whole society. It is also a means of ensuring better accountability towards women. However, in Southeast Asia, the increased number of women in parliaments and leadership positions does not automatically lead to stronger attention to women's issues and/or gender-responsive policy decision making. ASEAN Member States have made significant progress towards enhancing women's representation in parliaments (from 12 per cent of seats held by women in 2000, to 22 per cent in 2022), but the regional average still falls below the global average of 26%.² Nevertheless, more efforts are required to enhance substantive representation of women and the connection with policy decision making processes.

Both gender equality and women's empowerment are standalone goals as well as cross-cutting priorities set in the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development and the

¹ Global Gender Gap Report 2023, World Economic Forum, available at <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>

² Cambodia Chair of ASEAN and UN Women, Data snapshot on Women's Leadership in ASEAN, launched at the ASEAN Women Leaders Summit, October 2022, available at <https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/ASEAN/ASEAN%20leadership-factsheet.pdf>

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. Both are also key to fostering a more sustainable and inclusive ASEAN Community. Providing women with equal access to decision-making processes and leadership positions will not only support their well-being, but will also enable their contribution towards regional progress and inclusiveness. Ultimately, development will only be sustainable if it benefits for all and not an option but a reality.

While all women leaders are motivated to be agents of change, how they participate and contribute to political changes varies in different country contexts within ASEAN. The Regional Plan of Action on Women Political Participation and Leadership (RPA-WPPL) highlights the importance of women's leadership and political participation with aim to enhance their meaningful participation and leadership in the region. In view of this, RPA-WPPL focuses on increasing more concrete actions for women to take political leadership, with a more supportive environment within the broader political systems and societies, in order to increase women's political participation and their active role in their leadership positions. Their decision to embark on political leadership is a choice which is shaped by the economic, cultural, social and political context they are embedded in. Hence, promoting gender mainstreaming in policy decision making as well as cross-sectoral collaboration across multi stakeholder groups are seen as key to advancing women's substantive representation and political participation in the region.

By addressing challenges faced by women, creating opportunities for them and increasing the effectiveness of women's political participation, the development of a **Regional Plan of Action on Women's Political Participation and Leadership (RPA-WPPL)** is based on the existing regional frameworks and initiatives in addressing women political participation, and is one of the key recommendations from the Women Parliamentarians of AIPA (WAIPA) resolutions in the 44th AIPA General Assembly. The RPA-WPPL will be divided into three key parts. The first section offers an overview of relevant context and challenges related to pathways for women to participate in politics and become political leaders. Section 2 identifies the rationale and objectives to amplify the impact of increasing women's political participation. Section 3 recognizes the gender gaps in political participation and pushes for an urgent need to promote gender-responsive parliaments and policy decision making. Under this Plan of Action, the AIPA Member Parliaments will pursue cooperation in conformity with their respective Member States' obligations in accordance with their respective domestic laws, regulations and policies in the following areas. It will also work with relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies and institutions in realizing these objectives.

PILLAR 1: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT AND SAFE SPACE

Establishment of an Enabling Environment for Women to Participate and Lead in Their Political Systems

Objectives:

- (a) Regional normative and policy frameworks shall be developed to enhance and empower women with diverse backgrounds³ in leadership and political participation as well as enhance protection of women against violence in politics.
- (b) Political bodies and institutions (e.g. political parties, parliaments) are encouraged to promote measures to create conducive political environments that are free from all forms of violence against women in politics, including legal protection and advice for women candidates and parliamentarians experiencing violence in politics.
- (c) National governments and political parties are encouraged to promote legislative/policy frameworks and electoral arrangements to strengthen gender balance in elections and decision-making bodies, including potential consideration and use of affirmative action measures or policies such as but not limited to voluntary or mandatory gender quotas to increase the number of women sitting in the national parliaments.
- (d) Political parties are encouraged to develop increased capacity and awareness to ensure gender balance, including adoption of policies to allocate funds/resources for capacity building development among women candidates, enhance women's participation in decision-making within political parties and eliminate constraints including direct and indirect gender discrimination.
- (e) AIPA Member Parliaments are encouraged to support women and youth to engage with elected representatives and leaders in legislative bodies and political parties to create opportunities to promote and inspire career progression in the political field both at national and regional level.
- (f) Public outreach and advocacy shall be increased among media and key opinion makers and leaders at the national and regional levels to raise awareness and enhance a healthy political environment for Women's Political Participation and Leadership (WPPL) through Information, Communications, and Technology (ICTs).

³ This term is broadly used to cover a range of women whose views and experiences may not be regularly be represented in parliamentary forums, such as women with disabilities, indigenous women, ethnic minorities, young women, rural women, etc. When activities are designed to engage "women with diverse backgrounds", the AIPA Secretariat will work closely with AIPA Member Parliaments to ensure a good cross-section of representation of these different groups of women.

PILLAR 2: EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Increase in Women's Participation in their Political Systems, and the Exercise of Their Voice, Agency, and Leadership

Objectives:

- (a) Women parliamentarians to be supported to develop increased capacity, skills, knowledge and supporting instruments to meaningfully participate in the policy decision making, including cooperation on capacity and leadership development programs, to support AIPA's effort in promoting Women's Political Participation and Leadership (WPPL).
- (b) Women parliamentary caucuses to be supported to strengthen their networks through WAIPA to promote regional dialogue, exchange of views, data, experiences, and best practices to expand the network of women beyond those sitting in parliaments to connect with civil society and community-based organizations.
- (c) Networks of support for various backgrounds of women political leaders shall be created and sustained at the regional and national levels.
- (d) AIPA Member Parliaments to be supported to increase their capacities to engage and collaborate with the AIPA Secretariat to establish mentorship and traineeship programs at the national and regional levels between prominent women leaders and aspiring women in politics.
- (e) Women-led civil society, women's groups and networks to be empowered and supported to systematically and constructively engage with AIPA Member Parliaments, including through dedicated committee mechanisms and processes, where possible.
- (f) Political bodies and institutions are encouraged to support the implementation of equitable and meaningful participation of women in the political, peace and security, and socio-economic spheres at both national and regional levels identified in the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021-2025.
- (g) Promote community values within ASEAN identity as a pathway towards greater women's involvement in political leadership.

PILLAR 3: GENDER-RESPONSIVE PARLIAMENT AND DECISION MAKING

Promotion of Gender-Responsive Parliaments and Gender-Responsive Policy Decision Making

(i) *Promoting Gender-Responsive Parliaments*

Objectives:

- a) AIPA Member Parliaments be supported to advocate for and raise awareness of the value of gender sensitive parliaments, including providing budget allocation for training and capacity building of all parliamentary staff to enhance their understanding of gender issues.
- b) Members of Parliament within AIPA Member Parliaments to have increased awareness, capacity, and resources on gender-sensitive parliaments and policy-decision making
- c) AIPA Member Parliaments supported to promote gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) in the policy-, decision-making and budget processes, including analysis of budget allocation where possible.

(ii) *Promoting Gender-Responsive Policy and Decision Making*

Objectives:

- a) Regional exchange of knowledge and good practice shall be established to promote gender-responsive approach to policy and decision making in different multi-sectoral priorities in ASEAN, including development of gender-sensitive AIPA Resolutions on political, economic, social, environmental and other matters.
- b) Regional knowledge products, guidelines, tools, and KPI for developing and implementing gender-responsive policy and legislations shall be developed and/or shared, and such sharing shall be encouraged.
- c) Robust and sustained data collection and engagement with partners shall be established to form evidence-based policy making and advocacy to enhance gender-responsive policy decision making for sustainable development, including gender data and analysis on key obstacles and enablers of Women Political Participation and Leadership (WPPL) and Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP).
- d) Options to establish a regional knowledge hub on women's political participation shall be considered to promote evidence-based country and regional programming, knowledge-based policy guidance and thematic coherence.