The Struggle for
Equal Political Representation
of Women in Sri Lanka

A Stock Taking Report for
the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment
and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Chulani Kodikara

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Message from the Secretary, Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment

I am pleased to send this message on the launch of the stocktaking report which was carried out by the UNDP project on "Enhanced Women's Political Representation and Participation in Decision Making" implemented by the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment.

I wish to thank Ms. Chulani Kodikara who was engaged by the project to conduct research on the issue of low political representation of women in this country and to write the report based on her findings. This report is invaluable as it reflects the work on this subject carried out by the Government, Non Governmental Organizations, the Media, Community-based Organizations as well as political parties and individuals committed to this cause. The report also identifies gaps in the work done so far and puts forward proposals and ideas for future action. Based on this report, the Ministry has also developed a Multi Year Action Plan.

I am confident that the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment will be able to implement the Multi Year Action Plan and integrate these ideas and proposals into policy and legislation so that they make positive impacts on the lives of all Sri Lankans, especially those women from all parts of the island who want to pursue a career in politics.

M. Sumanadasa
Secretary
Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment and
Director of the Women's Empowerment Project

Message from UNDP

It gives me great pleasure to issue this message on the occasion of the publication of the report, "The Struggle for Equal Political Representation of Women in Sri Lanka".

At the year 2000 UN Millennium Summit in New York, the largest ever gathering of world leaders, all 189 member states of the UN General Assembly signed up to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Under the third goal, on gender equality, a specific indicator on the proportion of seats held by women in national Parliament is included. The inclusion of the indicator was in recognition of the mounting evidence from across the world suggesting that raising the number of women in Parliaments is a strategic means to removing the structural causes of inequality between men and women.

While women in Sri Lanka constitute a substantial part of the labour force and enjoy relatively equal outcomes in terms of education and health, in other areas large disparities remain. In terms of accessing and controlling productive resources, for example, inequalities remain and certain personal laws include discriminatory provisions. With more women in political decision-making positions at the national, provincial and local levels in Sri Lanka, evidence suggests that there is a greater chance of reform in these areas. Similarly, in countries affected by natural disaster and conflict, women have historically played an important role in ensuring the recovery initiatives reach out to address the special needs of women and children and they have also taken on vital roles as leaders in building consensus and cohesion within their communities.

It is UNDP's belief that for women to have a voice in Sri Lanka's recovery and development processes, they need to be represented not only in economic and social spheres, but also at the political level. I hope that this report serves as a successful advocacy tool and, most importantly, inspires concrete action leading to a real and visible increase in the number of women elected by the people of Sri Lanka.

Douglas Keh

Resident Representative

Acknowledgement

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AWAW	Association for War Affected Women
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CENWOR	Centre for Women's Research
COWAN	Country Women Association of Nigeria
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
EDP	Eelavar Democratic Front
EPDP	Eelam People's Democratic Party
EU	European Union
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stifung
FPTP	First-Past-the-Post system
GOSL	Government of Sri Lanka
ICES	International Centre for Ethnic Studies
IWRAW	International Women's Rights Action Watch
JHU	Jathika Hela Urumaya
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
KKS	Kantha Karya Samaja
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDGS	Millennium Development Goals
MWRAF	Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum
MEP	Mahajana Eksath Peramuna
NCW	National Committee for Women
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation
NDF	National Development Front
NPP	National People's Party
NPC	National Peace Council
PA	People's Alliance
PAFFREL	People's Action for Free and Fair Elections
PR	Proportional Representation
RJP	Ruhunu Janatha Pakshaya
SAP	South Asia Partnership
SL	Sri Lanka
SLBC	Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation
SLMC	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
SLPF	Sri Lanka Progressive Front
SLWNGOF	Sri Lanka Women's Non-Governmental Organizations Forum
SSA	Social Scientists' Association
STRWN	The Sinhala Tamil Rural Women's Network
TMVP	Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNP	United National Party
UNF	United National Front
UPFA	United People's Freedom Alliance
WEDO	Women's Environment & Development Organization
WISH	Women in the Senate and House
WOPOPADEF	Women's Political Participation and Development Fund
YATV	Young Asia Television

Executive Summary

1. Representation of women in political institutions in Sri Lanka has been minimal in the 60 years since independence. This is despite Sri Lanka's favourable human development indicators for women, the constitutional guarantee of equality, policy statements making a commitment to equal representation, international commitments under the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and sustained activism and advocacy on this issue by civil society organizations as well the National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Women's Rights in the last decade. Furthermore, of the small number of women represented in political institutions in Sri Lanka, the great majority of them come from political families and from the Sinhala community.

2. The obstacles to women's equal representation in political institutions in Sri Lanka are now well documented. These obstacles operate at three fundamental levels:
    - At a personal level, where fewer women than men self select themselves for a career in politics due to socio-cultural, economic and psychological barriers;
    - At the level of political parties, where they are mostly ignored as candidates for elections, and
    - At the level of the electorate, when voters have to vote for candidates.

    Political parties, as the major body bringing people into political processes and mediating their participation and involvement in politics, have a crucial role to play in either advancing or inhibiting women's representation in politics. In Sri Lanka, the major political parties which win elections have shown only limited commitment to enhancing women's political representation. While nominations for women have been increasing over the years, this is mainly from smaller parties and independent groups which have proliferated under the system of proportional representation (PR) introduced in 1989. Nominations for women by the major parties which win elections have remained stagnant over the years.

3. Women's equitable representation in elected political bodies is important for several reasons. Given that women constitute half the population in most countries but have been historically marginalized from such bodies, ensuring equitable representations is important to deepen democratic governance and ensure more equitable development outcomes. Equitable representation is also important given that women may have different views, experiences and interests from men.

4. Ever since the under representation of women in political institutions was identified as a critical issue of concern for women in Sri Lanka in the late 1970s, women's organizations, individually and collectively, have undertaken initiatives to address this issue. This study identifies eight key strategies employed by women's organizations

to increase women's participation and representation in political bodies:
- Research/publications
- Training and capacity building for political leadership
- Awareness raising on under-representation
- Experiments with independent lists
- Advocacy for a quota
- Interventions at the level of political culture
- Networking, and
- International advocacy before the CEDAW Committee

5. Research

There is a huge body of research and publications on this issue, covering both qualitative studies as well as quantitative surveys, which have inspired and provided impetus to much of the activism to increase women's representation in Sri Lanka. The bulk of the research/scholarly work on this issue is however in English. While very little original research in Sinhala and Tamil has been done, only a few of the English publications have been translated into Sinhala and Tamil. This is a gap which must be addressed. There is a need to identify key articles and publications in English for translation into Sinhala and Tamil and disseminate amongst the public as well as policy makers and political parties.

6. Training and capacity building

A major focus of civil society activism as well as government intervention in relation to increasing women's representation in political bodies has been on training and capacity building of women for political leadership. Over 5,000 women appear to have been trained by different organizations in the period 2000 -2008. These training programmes have fulfilled an important need in relation to not only building the capacity and confidence of women, but also in relation to inspiring and motivating them to pursue a career in politics which otherwise they might not have wanted to do. However, many of the training programmes suffer from a number of shortcomings:

- Participants are not selected on the basis of proper criteria or further to a selection process to identify candidates who are really serious and who also have the potential to run for political office. Liyanage (2004) in an evaluation of selected training programmes says that:
  - Many women seem to have participated in multiple training programmes covering the same topics, resulting in an inefficient use of time and resources, and
  - Most training programmes had no follow up to ensure that the women trained did receive nominations and if and when they did, that they received further support to conduct a successful election campaign.

- Most training programmes have been for Sinhala women in the South with very

few programmes targeting Tamil and Muslim women particularly in the North and East.

- The impact of training programmes in actually catapulting women into a career in politics is not clear. No organization surveyed was able to clearly say how many women trained by them have received nominations, contested elections and have been elected as a direct result of the training. None of the organizations surveyed had conducted an evaluation of their own training programmes.

- There also appears to be a gap between what women's organizations and institutions think are the training requirements for political leadership and the reality of what is needed to compete in the rough and tumble of party political competition in the country today. Interviews with the beneficiaries of training programmes suggested that the curriculum need to move beyond simply raising awareness on issues such as gender, good governance, human rights and local government laws to more specifically address key issues such as how to mobilise grass roots support and campaign financing.

The conclusion in relation to training programmes is that they have not been a magic bullet to increasing women's representation. There is a need for an evaluation of at least some training programmes to understand and asses their impact. It may also be useful to compile a consolidated short list of women who are serious about purusing a political career for targeted support in the future. Subsequent to such an evaluation, capacity building programmes for women in the North and East could be considered, given that most training programmes have been for women in the South. Such programmes need however to be designed taking into account the socio-economic and political context of the North and East and the specific needs of and challenges facing women in those areas.

7. **Awareness raising**

Women activists and organizations have used any and every opportunity to raise awareness on the issue of women and politics and particularly the low levels of representation of women in political bodies among different constituencies and target groups through different means. These have included workshops, mainstream print and electronic media, alternative media as well as poster and sticker campaigns.

The impact of these efforts appears to be minimal. At the level of party officials, politicians, and policy makers, there is still insufficient understanding and appreciation of the obstacles faced by women in accessing political office, as well as the need for affirmative action that can meaningfully address those obstacles. At the level of the general public, it is more difficult to say. A recent survey among ordinary men and women conducted by '"We Women",' a coalition of women's organisations revealed that over 75% of the survey sample was unaware of the number of women

in parliament and in local government in Sri Lanka, and that under representation of women in political bodies is yet to be recognised as a critical issue of concern for women.

Given that there is a wealth of experience amongst a number of different groups in relation to raising awareness about the issue of women's political participation and representation, it might be useful to share these experiences to understand which strategies work best with which constituency, as a first step towards developing awareness raising strategies which target specific constituencies such as policy makers, party officials, women and voters.

8. **Experiments with independent lists**

Several women's organizations have experimented with independent women's lists at every level of politics in Sri Lanka. While these experiments have provided women with valuable experience of running for elections, hitherto denied to many women within the current political culture in Sri Lanka, independent groups have very little or no opportunity to succeed. The conclusion made by many candidates within these groups is that women's efforts to independently contest elections even at the local level are hampered by a political culture which does not recognize the legitimacy of such groups over established political parties (if you vote for anybody else other than one of the major parties, it is equivalent to wasting a vote!). Furthermore, as long as national level issues dominate local level politics, women candidates whether contesting through independent lists or through political parties will find it difficult to appeal to the electorate.

9. **Advocacy for a quota**

Women's organizations as well as the National Institutions for Women, particularly the National Committee for Women (NCW) have been lobbying for a legal reservation/quota for women as a crucial remedy to address the under representation of women in political institutions in Sri Lanka since the late 1990s, directly with political parties as well as before the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reform (PSCER). As a result, the two major political parties in Sri Lanka (the UNP and the SLFP) have made a policy commitment to a quota/reservation for women in nomination lists. The political will to implement a quota however remains weak. This is reflected in the weak recommendations that were made by the PSCER and the absence of a quota for women in the legislation which was drafted to give effect to the recommendations of the Select Committee in November 2008. The two bills, the Local Authorities (Special Provisions) Bill and the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Bill, which sought to change the electoral system at local level have not recently moved forward, pending authorization from all Provincial Councils. This provides women's organizations with another opportunity to put pressure on the PSCER for a quota during committee stage discussions of these bills, where amendments are possible. Given the potential resistance to reservations/quotas, there is a need to mobilize a broad front in support of quotas

through a sustained campaign which can put pressure on political parties and policy makers. One to one meetings with key actors within political parties and policy makers to increase their understanding and awareness about the need for quotas should be seriously considered. A South Asian study tour for officials from the major political parties in Sri Lanka could also be considered to provide these officials an opportunity to see and study the manner in which quotas have been implemented in other parts of South Asia.

Since 2003, women's demand for a quota at local government level has become closely linked with the electoral reform process at local level. There is a risk therefore that if advocates for a quota are not successful at the committee stage of discussions, or the two bills do not move forward in the near future, the momentum gained during the last few years would be lost, requiring quota advocates to re-strategize on how to take forward the demand for a quota for women at local government. This is a matter of concern which should be anticipated and addressed by those working to obtain a quota for women in local government.

10. **Interventions at the level of political culture**

A few women's organizations have attempted or are attempting to take a more bottom up approach to the problem of under representation by addressing and tackling the political culture itself which acts as an obstacle to women's participation and representation in politics in Sri Lanka. These initiatives are however few and far between. Transformation of the current political culture is crucial to create an environment in which women can equally run for political office in Sri Lanka in the long run. There is a need for more focused and thoughtful work in this area.

Interventions to transform the political culture necessarily involve working with political parties as well as voters. It is a task that has to be undertaken by both men and women within political parties with support from civil society organizations. Initiatives that could be explored include:

- Working towards democratizing political parties and ensuring greater decision making power for women within political parties.

- Challenging the male model of politics. Women within political parties need to create a space where they can address and explore their discomfort with the way party politics is conducted and challenge the male model of politics from within.

- Identifying role models for women's leadership within parties and in communities, who in turn can provide mentoring for political activism that includes support for women's leadership and political skills development.

- Initiating activities which encourage a political culture where politics is based on policies.

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- Raising awareness among the general public about the low levels of representation of women in politics in Sri Lanka and their consequences, and the urgent need to address this problem.

11. International advocacy with the CEDAW Committee
Women's groups raised the issue of under representation of women in political institutions in Sri Lanka before the CEDAW Committee in 2002 and the Committee in its concluding comments urged the state to take all necessary measures to increase the representation of women in politics and public life at local, provincial and national levels, including through the implementation of temporary special measures.

Sri Lanka's 6th, 7th and 8th combined report under CEDAW is now overdue. Once this report is submitted, it will provide another opportunity to raise the issue of women's representation in political bodies in Sri Lanka at the international level as well as to review the implementation of the concluding comments of the CEDAW Committee in the seven years since the last report was submitted.

12. Networking
While a number of networks working to increase women's participation and representation in political institutions do exist, networking among these different organizations seems weak. It might be useful to bring together all the different organizations which have worked on this issue over the years to share experiences and strategies and to build a consensus and one voice for the need for affirmative action in Sri Lanka.

13. Advocacy with the two major political parties to increase nominations for women
Parallel to advocacy for a legal quota, there is a need to encourage the two major political parties in Sri Lanka to increase the number of nominations given to women. A good place to start would be the local government elections to be held in 2010.

14. Financial support for women candidates
Lack of adequate financial and material resources is a huge obstacle that women face in contemplating a career in politics and in conducting successful election campaigns. There is a need to initiate a discussion with women within the major political parties about the possibility of establishing a political fund along the lines of EMILY's List and the WISH List. Given also that one of the largest grassroots membership-based women's organizations, Kantha Karya Samaja (KKS) is being facilitated by the Women's Bureau, the possibility of a grassroots political fund for women managed by the KKS and disbursed by them could be explored.

15. Mobilizing the women voters
Women who form half the voting population in any country, and sometimes a little more than half the population, can have a huge influence on the outcome of elections. In some countries such as the USA, women voters are specifically targeted

and mobilized to vote for women candidates. In Sri Lanka, where female voter turnout is extremely high, ways in which the female voter population can be mobilized to vote for women should be explored.

16. **National Commission for Women**

While discrimination on the basis of sex is prohibited by Article 12 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka, a shortcoming of this Article is that its applicability is limited to executive or administrative action. This means that discrimination on the basis of sex by private individuals, and non state actors including political parties is not covered by article 12. A woman who feels discriminated by a political party on the basis of her sex cannot therefore make a complaint to the Supreme Court or any other forum. Draft legislation to convert the National Committee of Women to a National Commission which sought to address this gap by investing the Commission with the power to carry out investigations and make determinations in relation to discrimination on the basis of sex by any actor which was initiated in 1990s was put on hold in 2004 as some provisions of this bill were considered unconstitutional by the Attorney General's Department, and is now once again being revised by the Legal Draftsman's Department. The speedy finalization of the Women's Commission Bill will strengthen efforts to promote and protect women's rights in Sri Lanka, including efforts to enhance women's participation and representation in politics.

17. **Gender dis-aggregated data from the Department of Elections**

Gender dis-aggregated data is crucial to the analysis of any gender issue and for the purpose of informing policy. In Sri Lanka it has always been a challenge to obtain gender dis-aggregated data in relation to nominations. Nomination forms have a column to specify the sex of each candidate, but when nominations statistics are published in the gazette this information is omitted. This makes it extremely difficult to compile statistics of the numbers of women who receive nominations from parties at different elections. It is recommended that the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment engage with the Department of Elections to put in place a system whereby gender dis-aggregated data relating to nominations and elections is compiled and made easily available to the public.

18. **Reaching out to men and boys**

If we are to make progress towards gender equality there is now growing international recognition of the need to work with men and boys. On the question of increasing women's representation in political institutions in Sri Lanka, there is certainly a need to work with men at different levels —men in political institutions and particularly those elected to parliament, men within political parties as well as fathers, husbands and brothers of women who are interested in entering politics. In developing programmes to work with men, organizations can draw from the experiences of other countries in this regard.

Introduction

In 1931 Sri Lanka became one of the first countries in South Asia to give women the right to vote. In the post independence period, Sri Lankan women also made rapid progress in relation to health, education and employment. Today, Sri Lanka's human development indicators for women are considered a model for South Asia (See Table 1).

Table 1: Physical Quality of Life of Men and Women in Sri Lanka, 2007

	Women	Men
Literacy	89.9 %	93.2%
Life Expectancy	76.4 yrs	71.7yrs
Sex Ratio (males to females)		99.1
Age of Marriage	23.8 yrs	27.6 yrs
Primary School enrolment	95.6%	97.1%
Secondary School enrolment	96.4%	93.5%
Labour Force Participation*	35.7	68.1
Maternal Mortality**	17.8	--

Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2007).
* No. of persons employed as a % of population which is 10 years and above.
**No. of maternal deaths in a given year per 100,000 live births in the same year.

The rapid advances made in the socio-economic spheres held great promise for women's participation and representation in decision making in general and also in the sphere of politics. This promise was further enhanced when in 1960 Sri Lanka became the first country in the world to appoint a woman head of state. In terms of the Constitution of Sri Lanka, equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex is guaranteed and women have an equal right to be elected to political office as men (Article 12 of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka). In October 1981, Sri Lanka also ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and in 1991 formulated our own Women's Charter based on CEDAW, keeping in mind the contextual situation of Sri Lanka. The Charter very clearly states that:

> "The state shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the public and private sectors, in the political and public life of the country and ensure to women on equal terms with men the right to equitable representation in the nomination process at the national, provincial and local government elections" [Art. 2 (ii)].

In 1995 at the 4th World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making was in fact recognized as one of the critical issues of concern for women and world leaders very specifically committed to

a target of one third of seats for women in political institutions. Again, at the largest ever gathering of world leaders, at the UN Millennium Summit held in New York in 2000, countries including Sri Lanka signed up to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. The third goal on gender equality includes a specific indicator on the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.

Women's equitable representation in political institutions is important for several reasons. Given that women constitute half the population in most countries but have been historically marginalized from political institutions, it is important to deepen democratic governance and ensure more equitable development outcomes. Equitable representation is also important given that women may have different views, experiences and interests from men.

Unfortunately in Sri Lanka, the favourable human development indicators, the constitutional guarantee of equality, policy statements making a commitment to equal representation, international commitments and sustained activism and advocacy by civil society organizations as well as the National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Women's Rights in the last decade, have not translated into real political empowerment for women Political participation and representation of women in political institutions have remained stagnant in the 60 years since Sri Lanka achieved independence. In this context, the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been working to address the issue of women's participation and representation in Sri Lanka since January 2008. The UNDP and the United Nations (UN) system as a whole, has expressed a commitment to equality of opportunity in politics first as a human right, and also because of the conviction that participation of women in decision-making roles will lead to more equitable development outcomes. There is indeed an international consensus that increasing the numbers of women political leaders will help achieve gender equality faster, and will also have positive development impacts.

This study commissioned by the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment and UNDP has sought to briefly trace the history of women's representation politics, map the work that has been done by women's organizations and the National Institutions for Women in order to increase women's participation and representation in political institutions in Sri Lanka, and finally propose recommendations for future activism. This report covers:
- The period from the early 1990s to date;

- Interventions both by civil society organizations as well as the National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Women's Rights (i.e. Ministry of Women's Empowerment, Women's Bureau and the National Committee for Women);

- Initiatives mainly at the national level, although some at the grassroots level have also been referred to.

The primary aim of this study was to assess the impact of activities and strategies undertaken by women's organizations and the National Institutions for Women, identify significant gaps in the scope and nature of this work, and document lessons learned from previous national/grassroots level initiatives to increase women's participation through structural, legislative, institutional and other initiatives. Based on the analysis of the information obtained, the study will put forward some ideas/proposals to overcome barriers faced by women interested in pursuing a career in politics, taking into account the experiences of other countries and international best practices.

The methodology followed in compiling this stocktaking report included a literature survey, a questionnaire survey among women's organizations and INGOs who are working/have worked to increase women's participation and representation in politics in Sri Lanka (See Annex 4 for questionnaire used), a questionnaire survey among selected women interested in pursuing a career in politics but who have been unable to enter politics (See Annex 5 for questionnaire) as well as interviews with a few key informants. I have also drawn extensively from my own experience of working on this issue for the past 10 years.

This study is divided into six sections:
Following a brief introductory chapter, part 1 summarizes the history of women's participation and representation in politics in Sri Lanka, including the current statistics of women in political institutions in Sri Lanka. Part 2 analyses the obstacles to women's participation and representation in politics. Part 3 takes a critical look at the activities and strategies employed by women's oganizations, as well as the National Institutions for Women to increase women's representation. Part 4 outlines some ideas and proposals for activism in the future. Part 5 is a bibliography of writings on the issue of women's participation and representation in politics in English. Part 6 comprises annexes to this report.

1. Brief History

1.1 Introduction

Women's struggles for political empowerment in Sri Lanka and their involvement in the struggle for universal adult franchise can be traced back to the early 20th century. As early as 1919, Dr. Nallamma Murugesu passed a resolution in the Ceylon National Congress in favour of female suffrage. This was followed by another passed in 1925, sponsored by Agnes de Silva and Asline Thomas that a limited suffrage be immediately extended to the women of this county. The Ceylon Women's Franchise Union was formed in December 1927, following the arrival of the Donoughmore Commission. This group gave evidence before the Commission in January 1928 and demanded for the right of franchise for all women across class, caste and ethnic boundaries. As Agnes De Silva recounts, "'. . . we went in the spirit of crusaders and answered the questions in an inspired manner. Lord Donoughmore asked if we wanted Indian Tamil women labourers on the estates to have the vote. I replied certainly they are women too. We want all women to have the vote."' (Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003, de Alwis and Jayawardena 2001).

As de Alwis and Jayawardena notes the issue led to lively debates within society and the media. There was support as well as resistance to the idea. The *Searchlight* in December 1930 referred to women as the Fifth Estate in our democracy and that women have shot into power and prominence with meteoric rapidity. There was also much hostility. Sir P. Ramanathan for instance in his evidence before the Donoughmore Commission stated, "Do not throw pearls before swine, for they turn and rend you . . . what suits European women will not suit us." Once the Commission granted women the franchise, *The Independent* went on to declare that, "The vote has been too easily won . . . by women who have used it more to advance their ambitions . . . than for the benefit of the country (2001: 40 —41).

At the first elections held in June 1931 following the granting of universal suffrage, no women contested the elections. However, by-elections held in two electorates later that same year and in the next year provided an opportunity for two women to contest and win. Adeline Molamure contested the Ruwanwella seat and won against a well known male politician. The second woman to win a seat in the Legislative Council was Naysum Saranavanamuttu at a by-election held in Colombo North in May 1932 (De Alwis and Jayawardena 2001).[1]

1.2 Current status of women in political institutions

Despite this promising start, and despite the fact that women in Sri Lanka have now enjoyed more than 70 years of universal franchise, women's representation in parliament, in

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[1] For a detailed account of the women's suffrage movement in Sri Lanka see Casting Pearls: The Women's Franchise Movement in Sri Lanka by Malathi de Alwis and Kumari Jayawardena, SSA 2001.

provincial councils and even in local government has been minimal. The tables below provide statistics relating to the latest elections, at national, provincial and local levels. Where available, statistics from past elections are also given, sometimes compiled from multiple sources. It should be noted that elections to local government bodies in Batticaloa were held after a lapse of 14 years on 10th March 2008, following the 'liberation' of LTTE controlled areas by the GoSL earlier in the year. Eastern Provincial Council elections followed on 10th May 2008. These elections held no surprises as far as women's representation was concerned.

Table 2: Sri Lanka - Women's Representation in Parliament, 2004

	Total	Women	%
Members of Parliament	225	13	5.7
Cabinet Ministers (2007)	52	3	5.7
Deputy Minister (2007)	20	0	0.0
Non Cabinet Ministers (2007)	35	0	0.0

Table 3: Women elected to the National Legislature / Parliament 1947 – 2004

Year	Total Elected	No. of Women Elected	% of Women
1947	101	3	**3.0**
1952	101	2	**2.0**
1956	101	4	**4.0**
1960 (Mar)	157	3	**1.9**
1960 (Jul)	157	3	**1.9**
1965	157	6	**3.8**
1970	157	6	**3.8**
1977	168	11	**6.5**
1989	225	13	**5.8**
1994	225	12	**5.3**
2000	225	9	**4.0**
2001	225	10	**4.4**
2004	225	13	**5.8**

Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2007) and Kiribamune (1994:.91)

Table 4: Women's Representation in Provincial Councils 1993 - 2008/9

Province	1993			1999			2004			2008/ 2009[2]		
	Total	Wom	%	Total	Wom	%	Total	Wom	%	Total	Wom	%
Western	104	7	**6.7**	104	2	**1.9**	104	6	**5.7**	104	6	**5.7**
North Central	33	4	**12.1**	33	1	**2.9**	33	1	**3.0**	33	1	**3.0**
North Western	52	3	**5.7**	52	3	**5.8**	52	4	**7.6**	52	***2	**3.8**
Uva	34	0	**0.0**	34	1	**2.9**	34	1	**2.9**	34	1	**2.9**
Central	58	1	**1.7**	58	3	**5.1**	58	5	**8.6**	58	4	**6.8**
Southern	55	2	**3.6**	55	1	**1.8**	55	1	**1.8**	55	1	**1.8**
Sabaragamuwa	44	1	**2.3**	44	1	**2.3**	44	1	**2.3**	44	1	**2.3**
North[3]	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	**	**	**
Eastern										37	1	**2.7**
Total	380	18	**4.7**	380	12	**3.2**	380	19	**5.0**	417	17	**4.1**

Source: Adapted from Department of Census and Statistics (2007). Statistics for 2008/2009 personally compiled with assistance of officials at Department of Elections.

 * Elections not held.

 ** Elections to be held

** Three women were elected when elections were held, however one woman Councillor passed away in September 2009 and was replaced by a male candidate

Table 5: Women in Local Government 1991 – 2006

Province	1991			1997			2006		
	Total	Wom	%	Total	Wom	%	Total	Wom	%
Municipal Councils	201	6	2.9	252	9	3.4	330	10	**3.0**
Urban Councils	235	6	2.4	331	9	2.6	379	13	**3.4**
Pradeshiya Sabhas	2632	42	1.6	3137	55	1.7	3243	51	**1.6**
Total	**3068**	**54**	1.7	**3720**	**73**	1.9	**3952**	**74**	1.8

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, 2007

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[2] Although the normal practice is to hold Provincial Council Elections for all provinces on the same day, these elections were staggered over several months.

[3] The North and East were merged following the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord to form one administrative unit, having one provincial council, subject to the holding of a referendum in the Eastern Province on or before 1988 to decide whether the East should remain linked to the North. The referendum was never held, but the merger was challenged in the Supreme Court In October 2006, in a case filed by the JVP, where it was ruled that the merger of the North and East was unconstitutional. Following this decision, elections to the de-merged Eastern Provincial Council was held in May 2008.

Table 6: Women's Representation in Local Government from 1966

	Municipal Councils	Urban Councils	Pradeshiya Sabhas
1966	1.1	*1.9	**
1970	2.9	*1.4	**
1979	2.8	2.3	**
1982	1.3	1.7	**
1991	2.9	2.5	1.6
1997	3.4	2.6	1.7
2006	3.0	3.4	1.6

Source: Kearney (1981:742), Leiten (2000: 122) and Ministry of Women's Empowerment and UNDP (2008:14).
* Statistics under Urban Councils in 1966 and 1970 include Urban and Town Councils which existed at that time.
**. Elections not held

Table 7: Batticaloa Local Government Elections, 2008

	Total	Women	%
Municipal Council	19	1	**5.2**
Urban Councils	9	0	**0.0**
Pradeshiya Sabhas	105	1	**0.9**
Total	**133**	**2**	**1.5**

Source: Personal communication with Elections Department Office, Batticaloa, October 2008

What is noteworthy about these statistics is the fact is that there has been no substantial change in women's representation over the years, despite socio and political upheavals as well as transformation in gender roles. The shift to a system of elections based on proportional representation (PR) in 1989 which is deemed to be more favourable to the election of women than the first-past-the-post system (FPTP) which was in place prior to that has also had no significant impact on increasing the numbers of women in political bodies (see below).

1.3 Profile of women in political institutions

It is important to note for the purpose of this study, that of the small number of women represented in political institutions in Sri Lanka, the great majority of them come from political families. Several studies/case studies of individual women politicians at the national, provincial and local levels confirm this finding. There is also another minority within the minority of elected women. Women politicians belong mostly to the Sinhalese community with very few women from the minority Tamil and Muslim communities and even less from the Indian Tamil community being able to access formal political bodies.

The widows, wives and daughters syndrome
Several case studies of women elected to political office in Sri Lanka confirm that most of the women who have been able to secure political office come from political families, as a result of the assassination or death of a husband or father who had been a politician. This is a trend which can be traced right back to the first two women ever to be elected to political office in Sri Lanka. Adeline Molamure was the daughter of J. H. Meedeniya Adigar who had been a nominated member of the Legislative Council. She contested his seat on his death. Naysum Saravanamutte was the wife of Dr. Ratnajoti Saravanamuttu who had won the Colombo North seat but who was later disqualified (de Alwis and Jayawardena 2001).

This trend has continued to dominate women's access to politics in Sri Lanka. Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike became the first woman head of state in the world in 1960, on the assassination of her husband, marking the start of a South Asian phenomenon of women becoming heads of state over the dead bodies of their husbands. Her daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga Bandaranaike became Sri Lanka's first female President in 1994. While her own personal charisma was unquestionable, she was also able to capitalize on her status both as the daughter of an assassinated political leader as well as the widow of a murdered husband who was emerging as a political leader in his own right.

In Sri Lanka it should be noted that this manner of women's entry into politics has not been confined to women from elite families. Escalating violence and increasing political killings and assassinations have had the effect of bringing in a widow or bereaved daughter on to the centre stage at all levels of politics and from varying class/ethnic backgrounds (Jayawardena, and Kodikara 2003: 24). A study by South Asia Partnership (SAP) Sri Lanka found that out of a randomly selected sample of nine women politicians, eight had family connections to politics (n.d). Madahapola also notes that of the 50 women who have held office in the Parliament of Sri Lanka, only eight women had no family connections to politics. i.e. 82% of women came from a political family while only 8% entered independent of such connections (2004).[4]

Jayawardena and Kodikara however make a distinction between the pioneering women legislators of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s and more recent political wives, daughters and widows. In the case of the former, their political careers were more or less independent of their husbands' and many of them had a history of political activism long before marriage (2003:25). Veteran leftist politician Vivienne Gunawardene, has been described as a woman fired with political passion and imbued with an equally strong commitment to women's rights, trade unions, peace and international issues (Jayawardena 1997). Many women candidates in current politics in contrast often stand in for their husbands with little or no political will of their own (Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003: 26). The phenomenon of the proxy woman candidate appears to be getting stronger in Sri Lanka and not weaker.

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[4] For full list of women parliamentarians since 1947, see Annex 6.

The ethnic composition of women in politics
The other trend which becomes apparent on a closer look at the profiles of women in politics in Sri Lanka is the virtual absence of Tamil and Muslim women. Even in areas where Tamils and Muslims form a majority of the population, representation of women from these ethnic communities has been minimal. Only five Tamil women and two Muslim women have been elected as members of the Sri Lanka Parliament in the period 1948-2004, although currently Tamil and Muslim women have a strong presence relative to the total number of women in parliament.

Table 8: Women's Representation in Parliament by Ethnicity, 2004

Ethnicity	No. of Women	%
Sinhala	9	69.2
Tamil	2	15.4
Muslim	2	15.4
Total	**13**	**100.0**

Tamil and Muslim women in politics Even while the political representation of Tamil women had a promising start with the election of Naysum Saravanamuttu to the State Council in 1932, there was not a single Tamil woman politician elected for almost another half a century until Ranganayaki Padmanathan was appointed to parliament in 1980 on the death of her brother. Since then Rasa Manohari Pulendran was nominated to fill the seat of her assassinated husband and was re-elected in 1994. She was a member of parliament until 2000. Currently there are two Tamil women Members of Parliament (MPs), both elected in 2004 from Jaffna and Batticaloa respectively with no family connections to politics. Padmani Sithamparanathan, is a former graduate teacher at Chundikuli Girls' High School and the wife of Jaffna University lecturer and dramatist Sithamparanathan. Thangeswary Kathiraman is an archaeologist and social worker.

Wellamma Sellasamy has been the only Tamil woman to be elected to a Provincial Council. She was elected to the Western Provincial Council in 1993. At local government level, there have been some Tamil women, but these numbers are not significant. Sarojini Yogeswaran was elected to the Jaffna Municipal Council in 1997 when elections were held after a lapse of time, but was assassinated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) a few months later. She was the widow of V. Yogeswaran, a Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) MP from Jaffna who was also assassinated by the LTTE in 1989. At the local government elections held in March 2008, Sivageetha Prabharakaran (alias Padmini) contested for a seat in the Batticaloa Municipal Council from the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP). She was appointed the Mayor of Batticaloa by virtue of garnering the highest number of preferential votes. She is the daughter of Rajan Sathyamoorthy, who was assassinated allegedly by the LTTE in the run up to the general elections of 2004.

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Historically, representation of Muslim women has been even less than Tamil women. Ayesha Rauf is the first Muslim woman in politics. She was elected to the Colombo Municipal Council in 1949 and went on to become the Deputy Mayor in 1952. Anjan Umma was the first Muslim woman to be elected to a Provincial Council in 1999 and then parliament in October 2000 from the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) national list. Ferial Ashraff entered parliament in January 2001 following the assassination of her husband, the charismatic leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and became the second Muslim woman in parliament. Thus, even in the case of the small number of minority women who have been elected, family links appear to be a strong factor for political leadership, with a few exceptions of course.

2. The Obstacles to Women's Political Representation

The obstacles to women's equal representation in political institutions in Sri Lanka are now well documented (Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003, Gomez and Gomez 2001, Kiribamune 1999, De Silva 1995). This study employs a framework developed by Richard Matland to analyze obstacles to women's political representation which points out that the legislative recruitment process necessarily consists of three steps. First, women need to select themselves or decide to stand for elections; second, they have to be selected as candidates by their political parties or come forward as independent candidates. Third, they have to be elected by voters (2005: 93 —98). Below, these three stages on a woman's road to political office in Sri Lanka are more closely examined to better understand the obstacles that operate at each of these levels.

2.1 Are women selecting themselves?

The first step in the road to taking up political office is for women to select themselves or make the decision to contest elections. This decision is based on personal interest and ambition, resources and opportunities to stand as well support from their family, political party, etc. Matland states that in most cases, already at this first stage there are more men than women due to both ideological /psychological barriers as well as social and economic factors (2005:94). These barriers apply almost universally with few exceptions, and based on our existing knowledge of the socio-political and economic context in Sri Lanka, one can safely state that less women than men self select themselves for a career in politics, even in Sri Lanka. These barriers can be elaborated as follows:

1) As in most other cultures and contexts, men and women in Sri Lanka are socialised to see politics both ideologically and practically as the legitimate sphere of men rather than women. While the public political sphere is for men, women's primary and proper role is considered to be as good wives, good mothers and good housekeepers. This process of gender stereotyping and indeed the construction of the good woman generally begins at home, is cemented in school and then perpetuated through the popular media. This leads to men having a greater knowledge of and interest in politics as well as greater political ambitions. Most women not only display a lack of interest and, confidence as well as feelings of inadequacy to do politics but indeed do not consider politics as a legitimate activity for themselves (Matland 2005: 93-94, Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003, Thiruchandran 1998).

In Sri Lanka, the strengths of these ideological and psychological barriers vary from community to community. Indeed within the Muslim and Tamil communities this ideological bias will be much stronger than even within the Sinhalese community. Tamil and Muslim women as well as women from the plantation community, occupy different realities which impact on their ability to equally participate in the political sphere.
Women have to overcome these ideological /psychological barriers if they are to self select

themselves. There has been very little challenge of these constructions/attitudes and perceptions over the years even though the reality of women's lives have undergone considerable change.

2) Due to the popular public perception that politics is a male domain and that a woman entering this domain is transgressing her proper role in society or seen as incapable of doing a good job, women often don't receive support from their family members and community to do politics. In a survey conducted by the National Peace Council (NPC), most of the respondents stated they would not encourage a female family member to get involved in politics as it would lead to neglect of children and housework. In focus group discussions on the same issue, one respondent had gone so far as to state that it would mark the end of the family. Another had stated, '"I don't want to come home from work only to find the kids gone wild, the house not clean and tidy and no wife to attend to me. I don't like my wife to ignore her duties" (National Peace Council 2004: 51).

3) There is also the reality of many women's lives which provides little time and space for politics even given the inclination. Despite the valorization of motherhood and their role in preserving family harmony, the reality of women's lives in Sri Lanka is that they have to juggle double/triple burdens. Although the official labour force participation rates for women is 35.7%, almost half the participation rate of men, a much higher number of women are involved in subsistence agriculture, informal income generating activities or working as hired labour that are not accounted for in the statistics. At the same time the gender division of labour within the home has not changed. Women are still primarily responsible for cooking, cleaning and looking after children while also taking responsibility for some community level work. Women's double/ triple burden of work is therefore a real obstacle to women's participation in the public sphere as there is no time nor space to get involved in politics.

4) Women may also not self select themselves for a political career as it involves negotiating with a masculine model of politics where politics and political parties are organized according to male norms, values and even lifestyle, characterized by late hours, informal decision-making processes, drinking and gambling, etc. From the interviews conducted for this study, it also appears that political parties are becoming more fluid, less structured, less interested in mobilizing on the basis of membership and more dependent on male dominated networks. Women therefore find it extremely difficult to participate in political party processes outside of campaigning programmes and will also increasingly find it difficult to fit into the new ways in which parties are operating, unless they begin to challenge these practices from within. Male dominated working patterns of political parties are in fact carried over to the work schedules of legislative institutions characterized by lack of supportive structures for working mothers and women politicians in general, which will again make women think twice about pursuing a career in politics (Shvedova 2005:36).

5) Given that women are also occupying jobs that tend to have a lower status and low pay, they may be less inclined to set aside scarce resources for a career in politics. Studies in other

countries as well as interviews with women in Sri Lanka show that women are more reluctant to invest family resources which they do not feel they individually own, depend on credit and risk family capital, pay for domestic/caring work they will not be able to do and leave their jobs to become more involved in politics (Women's Environment and Development Organization 2007).

6) Across the world, countries face the challenge that politics, especially around the time of elections, can often be associated with an increase in violence. Women in Sri Lanka may also be affected by a violent political culture sometimes characterized by thuggery and voter intimidation as well as assaults against candidates and supporters. Some elections have witnessed gender specific and sexualized forms of violence. Such incidents can heighten women's vulnerability and discourage political activity which necessarily entails working late at night and traveling alone. For the vast majority of ordinary women and even for many men, violence may act as an inhibiting factor in considering a political career for themselves.

In fact several quantitative surveys which have attempted to determine women's interest as well as level of participation in politics relative to men in Sri Lanka tend to support the assertion that fewer women than men are interested in politics. One barometer of interest in politics in a democracy is to look at membership of political parties as they are the major agency which brings people into political processes and facilitates/mediates their political participation and involvement. It is the training ground for a career in politics and a key institution which can encourage both men and women to take up politics.

Quantitative surveys done by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Kandy (in 1995) and ICES, Colombo (in 1998) indicate that there is a male/female difference in membership of political parties. Fewer women hold membership in political parties than men. In the ICES, Kandy survey while 33% of men claimed to hold membership in a political party, only 25% of women claimed to do so (Kiribamune:1999). According to the ICES, Colombo survey, 35.2% of men as against 15.4% of women held membership in a political party (Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003). These two surveys and other surveys also indicate a decline in women's membership in political parties from 34.6% in 1994 to 15.4% by 1998 and 13.8% by 2004 (see Table 9).

Table 9: Membership of a Political Party

Year survey was done	Organization /Author/ year of publication	Female membership in a political party	Male membership in a political party
1994/1995	CENWOR	34.6%	-
1995	ICES Kandy /Kiribamune 1999	25.0%	33.0%
1998	ICES Colombo / Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003	15.4%	35.2%
2002	SAP Sri Lanka	15.3%	-
2004	National Peace Council 2004	13.8%	-

These surveys also reveal considerable variation across ethnicity and region in relation to women's membership in a political party. The CENWOR study (1994) found considerable location-wise differences. While 23%-40% urban low income, rural remote and village-based plantation women held membership in a political party, as much as 96% of resident plantation women, 88% of Puttalam Muslim women and 80% of Puttalam Tamil women claimed to be members of a political party. In contrast only 5% of urban affluent women, 6% of urban middle class women, 9.4% of Eastern Province Muslim women and 5.6% of Eastern Province Tamil women held membership in a political party.

According to the ICES, Kandy survey, 38% of Sinhalese women held membership while only 3% of Tamil women and 5% of Muslim women held membership of a political party (Kiribamune 1999).

Table 10: Membership of a Political Party According to Ethnicity

	Sinhalese	Tamils	Muslims
Women	38%	3%	5%
Men	39%	22%	32%

Source: Kiribamune (1999).

According to ethnic breakdown in the NPC survey, 23.3% of Sinhalese women were members of political parties while only 4% of Tamil women were members. The survey did not include Muslim women. The highest percentage of women having membership in a political party was in Kurunegala with 56% of women stating that they were members, whereas in every other district surveyed, membership did not exceed 18% (2004).

The NPC study also explored the reasons why women were not becoming members of political parties. 41.3% of women had stated that they disliked politics, 19.3% stated that they had no time for politics, and 14.5% stated that the area is not conducive to party politics (2004).

There is also a significant male/female gap in involvement in party activities. Quite apart from membership in a political party, the numbers of women actually working for political parties and supporting election campaigns were far less than men. In one of the earliest quantitative surveys to be done on the issue of women and political participation in 1995, Kiribamune found that fewer women than men addressed political meetings, worked as polling agents, or canvassed for a candidate (See Table 11).

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Table 11: Political Activism During Elections

	Men	Women
Addressed national level meetings	3.0%	0%
Addressed local pocket meetings	8.5%	1%
Worked as a polling agent	7.0%	6%
Canvassed for candidates	28.0%	6%
Distributed party literature	25.0%	5%

Source: Kiribamune (1999)

According to the NPC survey, 88.4% claimed to not have worked for a political party during the last election (in this case the 2001 general election) (National Peace Council 2004). The European Union election observation mission to the 2004 parliamentary elections in its final report also states that women's participation in political rallies remained low (20%) with the exception of the Jathika Hela Uramaya (JHU) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) (2004: 30).

Some of the surveys also sought to explore women's willingness to contest an election given an opportunity. 61.9% of women according to the CENWOR survey and 72.4% of women according ICES survey stated that even if they had an opportunity to contest an election they would not do so. Dislike of politics (20.8%), interference with family responsibilities (19.2%), feelings of lack of ability or non worthiness (17.1%) and insufficient education (9.6%) were the reasons given for not wanting to contest in the ICES survey. In the NPC survey, only 29.2% of women stated that they were enthusiastic to get involved in politics. 40.5% of women stated that they would not contest an election even if given an opportunity, 11.8% were neither enthusiastic nor unenthusiastic, 7% stated that they do not know or were not sure, and 11.6% did not respond (2004).

Thus there is sufficient evidence in Sri Lanka which establishes that less women than men are actively involved in politics. While recognizing this reality, it is however difficult to accept the frequent assertion of political parties that there are no women candidates to nominate for elections. Despite the male/female difference in political participation, there are still enough women out there who have selected themselves to do politics, but who are simply not getting the support needed from their political parties to pursue a career in politics.

2.2 Political parties

In democracies political party systems are critical in either advancing or inhibiting women's representation in politics. As many writers point out, it is difficult to overstate the importance of party systems in any analysis of women's political representation as they act as gatekeepers in the election process by setting the criteria and selecting candidates (Lovenduski 2002, Matland 2005).

In Sri Lanka, political parties have not done as much as they could have to advance women's representation in politics. Their lack of internal democracy, the absence of women in the higher echelons of party decision making, the lack of support for women candidates and well established male dominated networks which exist from the national to local levels are among the major barriers. While most political parties in Sri Lanka have a women's wing, these wings do not function to increase women's representation. They exist mainly to mobilize the female constituency during election times and support the men in their parties. In between elections, women's wings engage in welfare work, income generation and provision of benefits for women members. For women who are genuinely interested in politics, membership in women's wings does not pave the way to mainstream politics and political leadership (Kodikara 2008, de Silva 1995).

Interviews for this study, with a number of women from political parties across the board provided insights into nomination processes through which candidates are selected to run for elections and the hurdles that women face in obtaining nominations. On paper the nomination process is clear cut and straightforward. Most political parties place advertisements in newspapers calling for applications from suitable persons as candidates prior to an election. Any person whether male or female interested in contesting an election can submit his/her application to the party. Suitable persons are then short-listed by a nominations committee and called for a further face to face interview. One study points out that any of the following criteria or a combination of them will be taken into account in selecting candidates. i.e Leadership qualities, education, economic capacity, service to the community, designation within party hierarchy, loyalty, family background, etc., but party political patronage and the capacity to spend a substantial amount of money for the election campaign could be the most important criteria. The JVP is the exception to this procedure. There is no application procedure and selection of candidates for elections is at the complete discretion of the politburo of the party (Kodikara 2008, NPC 2005:35).

Women's experience of this process is that it is not independent and free of interference from the party hierarchy. Even after selection by the nominations committee many women find that their names are not on the final list or that it is included and subsequently taken off and given to a male candidate. To be considered a 'winnable' candidate, money and muscle are important as is the active involvement in maintaining and supporting the chains of dependency between the party and the constituency. Most women lack both money and muscle and are passive 'clients in the margins of these networks (except if you are a wife, widow or daughter of a politician of course) (Kodikara 2008).

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that the number of women receiving nominations has been increasing over the years. At the level of parliamentary elections, from 1994 to 2004, the percentage of female candidates more than doubled. Also while the number of nominations for men increased by approximately three and half times (3½) times, the number of female candidates increased by more than six and a half (6½) times.

Table 12: Nominations at Parliamentary Elections from 1947 – 2004

Year	Total No. of Candidates	Total No. of Women	%
1947	361	3	0.8
1952	303	9	3.0
1956	249	5	2.0
1960 (Mar)	899	16	1.8
1960 (Jul)	393	5	1.3
1965	492	14	2.8
1970	440	14	3.2
1977	756	14	1.8
1989	1688	52	3.1
1994	1492	52	3.5
2000	5048	117	2.3
2001*	4610	52	1.1
2004	6060	375	6.2

Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2007).

* 2001 statistics are from my own personal notes. The drastic reduction in nominations for women at these elections may be attributed to the fact many small parties did not contest these elections as they were held only one year after parliamentary elections held in 2000.

Nominations for women at the provincial level from 1989 to 2008/2009 are given in Table 13.

Table 13: No. of Candidates at Provincial Council Elections

Year	Total No. of Candidates	No. of Women	% of Women
1989	1327	38	2.8
1993	2351	12	0.5
1999	3677	198	5.4
2004	4863	373	7.7
2008 / 2009	9356	711	7.5

Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2007), Leiten (2000), De Silva (1995: 233). 2008/2009 statistics were personally compiled with assistance from Department of Elections officials for eight provincial council elections held in 2008/2009.

Table 14 gives a breakdown of the nominations received by women by province at elections in 2004 as well as in the eight provincial council elections held in 2008 and up to October 2009. Some provinces record a dramatic increase in nominations for women. For instance, in the North Central Province, nominations rose from 4.4% in 2004 to 9.7% in 2008. In Sabaragamuwa, nominations for women rose from 6.6% to 12.0%. In the East, nominations for women were predictably low given that elections were held after a lapse of 20 years in a militarized environment following the liberation of the East from the LTTE.

Table 14: No. of Candidates at Provincial Council Elections Held in 2004 and 2008/2009

Province	2004			2008 /2009		
	Total	No. of Women	% of Women	Total	No. of Women	% of Women
Western	1324	103	**7.8**	2378	206	**8.6%**
North Central	368	16	**4.4**	690	67	**9.5%**
North Western	729	41	**5.6**	937	80	**8.5%**
Uva	318	36	**11.3**	600	43	**7.2%**
Central	708	74	**10.4**	1310	127	**9.7%**
Southern	588	48	**8.2**	1091	56	**5.5%**
Sabaragamuwa	828	55	**6.6**	1008	121	**12.0%**
Eastern	*	*	*	1342	11	**0.8%**
Northern				**	**	**
Total	**4863**	**373**	**7.7**	**9356**	**711**	**7.5**

Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2007). 2008/2009 statistics were personally compiled with assistance from Department of Elections officials.
* Elections not held
** Elections to be held.

Nominations at Local Government Elections

Information on nominations given to women at local level is not as readily available as in the case of nominations given to women at the parliamentary and provincial council level. De Silva provides the following information for elections held in 1987 and 1991.

Table 15: No. of Candidates at Local Government Elections of 1987 and 1991

	Municipal Councils			Urban Councils			Pradeshiya Sabhas		
	Total	Nominations for women	% of Nominations for women	Total	Nominations for women	% of Nominations for women	Total	Nominations for women	% of Nominations for women
1987	641	22	**3.4**	984	31	**3.1**	7198	133	**1.8**
1991	1152	44	**3.8**	1453	40	**2.7**	13,385	325	**2.4**

Source: Elections Department cited by De Silva (1995: 233).

Nominations for women at the Batticaloa Local Government Elections 2008. At the recently concluded local government elections in Batticaloa, held after a period of 17 years, it was reported that 97 women received nominations out of a total of 831 candidates. Women thus accounted for more than 10% of nominees. The TMVP is reported to have nominated seven women candidates, the National Development Front (NDF), 44 women candidates and the Eelavar Democratic Front (EDF) 30 women candidates.[65]

When one analyses nominations statistics by political parties both at the parliamentary and provincial council elections, it becomes clear that the increase in nominations for women is mainly from smaller political parties and independent groups which proliferated following the introduction of PR and not from the major political parties which win the majority of seats. Due to this reason increase in nominations has not translated into electoral gains for women (This issue is discussed in more detail below).

Are there any alternative pathways to politics?
A question which is relevant to this discussion is whether there are any alternative pathways to political office other than through mainstream political parties, or are political parties the only avenue to politics? What are the possibilities for women building independent leadership through other community-based organizations and institutions, to enter politics?

Several studies have established that women's participation in civil society organizations at the community level is in fact weak. According to the ICES survey, women's participation in community level organizations is mostly limited to traditional welfare oriented organizations and credit societies. Only 39.5% were members of any community level organization and from among this number, nearly half of them were members of maranadara samithis (Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003: 82 —83). This data however dates back to 1998 and women's participation in community organizations may have undergone changes particularly in the Eastern and Southern provinces following the tsunami and the proliferation of

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[6] 'Afraid even to say the word': Elections in Batticaloa District, Report of a joint civil society visit to Batticaloa, 16-18 February 2008, (Citizens' Committee for Forcible Eviction of People, Commission for Justice, Peace, Human Rights and Human Development, Secretariat, Community Trust Fund, International Movement Against Discrimination and Racism, Justice and Peace for Integration of Creation, Law & Society Trust, Rights Now —Collective for Democracy and two others). 26 February 2008.

community-based organizations since then.

Even in institutions where the membership of women predominate, women may still be absent from decision making positions, e.g. nurses' unions, cooperative societies, trade unions in the plantation sector, etc. Plantation sector trade unions are in fact a good example where membership is dominated by women, but with the exception of one trade union, the leadership is dominated by men. In that context, it is in fact premature to talk about political representation of plantation women and there is a lot of work to be done to begin to address the question of leadership and representation of women within the trade union movement prior to addressing the question of women's political participation.

Even when/where women do demonstrate leadership qualities in alternative spaces such as community-based organizations, such leadership does not automatically translate to political leadership. The failure of experiments with independent women's lists exemplifies the difficulties in converting community level leadership to political leadership (see below for discussion on experiments with independent lists).

2.3 Getting elected
The next hurdle on the road to political office is to get elected, which depends on the candidate's own popularity and track record in politics, ability to campaign extensively among the community and level of support given by the party.

Table 16: Nominations at Parliamentary elections from 1947 – 2004 and Elected

Year	Total No. of Candidates	Total No. of Women	% of women	Total Elected	No. of Women Elected	% of Women
1947	361	3	**0.8**	101	3	**3.0**
1952	303	9	**3.0**	101	2	**2.0**
1956	249	5	**2.0**	101	4	**4.0**
1960 (Mar)	899	16	**1.8**	157	3	**1.9**
1960 (Jul)	393	5	**1.3**	157	3	**1.9**
1965	492	14	**2.8**	157	6	**3.8**
1970	440	14	**3.2**	157	6	**3.8**
1977	756	14	**1.8**	168	11*	**6.5**
1989	1688	52	**3.1**	225	13	**5.8**
1994	1492	52	**3.5**	225	12	**5.3**
2000	5048	117	**2.3**	225	9	**4.0**

| 2001** | 4610 | 52 | **1.1** | 225 | 10 | **4.4** |
| 2004 | 6060 | 375 | **6.2** | 225 | 13 | **5.8** |

At the level of parliamentary elections, historically women in Sri Lanka have an extremely favourable record in relation to getting elected under both the FPTP system as well as under PR, with the percentage of women who get elected being much higher than the percentage of women receiving nominations. For instance at the first elections held in 1947, while only 0.8% of nominees were women, women accounted for 3% of those elected. In 1994, while only 3.5% of those nominated were women, women accounted for 5.3% of those elected. In 2001, despite only 1.1% of nominations given to women, 4.4% of those elected were women. This pattern of more women getting elected in comparison to the percentage of women receiving nominations, however, for the first time suffered a slight setback at the last parliamentary elections held in 2004. At these elections, while 6.5% of those nominated were women, women accounted for only 5.8% of those elected (See Table 16).

At the provincial level, generally the gap between the number of nominations for women and the numbers of women elected have not been in favour of women, except in 1993 where despite women receiving only 0.5% of nominations, 4.7% of those elected were women.

Table 17: Nominations at Provincial Council Elections and Numbers of Women Elected 1989 – 2008/2009

Year	Nominated			Elected		
	Total No. of Candidates	Total No. of Women	%	Total Elected	No. of Women Elected	% of Women
1989	1327	38	**2.8**	*	*	*
1993	2351	12	**0.5**	380	18	**4.7**
1999	3677	198	**5.4**	380	12	**3.2**
2004	4863	373	**7.7**	380	19	**5.0**
2008/9	9356	711	**7.5**	417	17	**4.1**

The breakdown of these statistics by province for elections held in 2004 and 2008/2009 is given in Table 18 and Table 19 respectively.

Table 18: Provincial Council Elections 2004 - No. of Nominations for Women and No. of women Elected

Province	Nominated			Elected		
	No. of Nominations	Nominations for women	%	Total Elected	No. of Women elected	% of women elected
Western	1324	103	**7.8**	104	6	**5.7**
North Central	368	16	**4.4**	33	1	**3.0**
North Western	729	41	**5.6**	52	4	**7.6**
Uva	318	36	**11.3**	34	1	**3.0**
Central	708	74	**10.4**	58	5	**8.6**
Southern	588	48	**8.2**	55	1	**1.9**
Sabaragamuwa	828	55	**6.6**	44	1	**2.3**
North -Eastern*	*	*	*	52	2**	**3.8**
Total	**4863**	**373**	**7.7**	**380**	**19**	**5.0**

Source: Adapted from Department of Census and Statistics (2007).   * Elections not held.

Table 19: Provincial Council Elections 2008/2009 - Nominations for Women and No. of Women Elected

Province	Nominated			Elected		
	No. of Nominations	Nominations for women	%	Total Elected	No. of Women elected	% of women elected
Western	2378	206	**8.6%**	104	6	**5.7%**
North Central	690	67	**9.5%**	33	1	**3.0%**
North Western	937	80	**8.5%**	52	3	**5.8%**
Uva	600	43	**7,2**	34	1	**2.9%**
Central	1310	127	**9.7%**	58	4	**6.8%**
Southern	1091	56	**5.5%**	55	1	**1.8%**
Sabaragamuwa	1008	121	**12.0%**	44	1	**2.3%**
Northern	*	*	*	*	*	*
Eastern	1342	11	**0.8%**	37	1	**2.7%**
Total	**9356**	**711**	**7.5%**	**417**	**17**	**4.1%**

Source: Information obtained through personal communication with Elections Department, and elections reports of People's Actions for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL). Not official statistics.

*   Elections to be held.

** Three women were elected when elections were held, however Soma Kumari Tennekoon passed away in September 2009 and was replaced by a male candidate.

While these statistics indicate an increase in the percentage of nominations for women, this increase is misleading as it is mainly due to smaller political parties and independent groups which proliferated following the introduction of PR nominating women (there are currently 58 registered parties and numerous other independent groups). Some of these parties [for instance the National People's Party (NPP) and the National Development Front (NDF)], fill their lists with names of women, but do not win any seats at all. The major political parties/alliances such as the SLFP/PA/UPFA and the UNP/UNF, on the other hand, which win the most number of seats at elections, give far fewer nominations to women. At the 2004 parliamentary elections, the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and the United National Front (UNF) gave nominations to 15 and 11 women respectively, out of a total of 375 nominations given by them. In contrast the NDF fielded 40 women in total. The NPP which contested in Colombo and Matale also fielded many women. In Colombo, the NPP fielded an all women's list comprising 23 women (Madahapola 2004:31). Neither the NDF nor the NPP however generally win any seats in Parliament.

According to the final report of the EU Election Observation Mission to Sri Lanka in 2004, of the total nominations given by the UNF and UPFA, those given to women amounted to only 5.2% and 4% of the total number of nominations given by them (whereas 74% of NPP's nominations went to women) (EU Election Observer Mission, Sri Lanka 2004).
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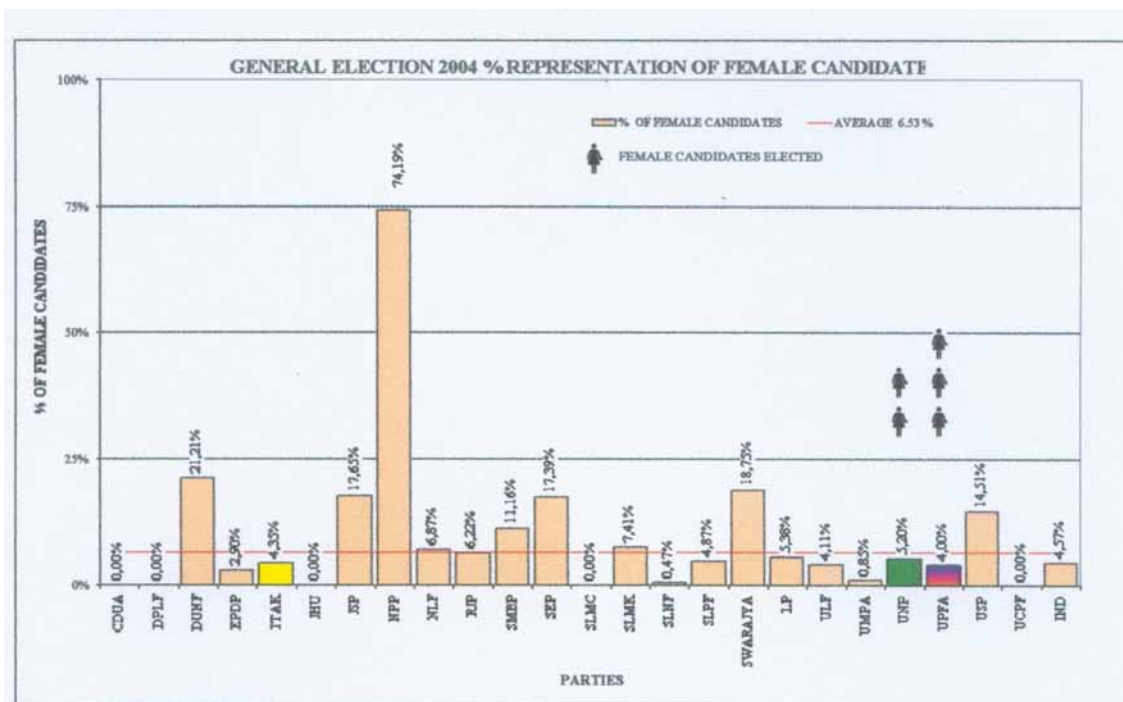
Source: Final Report on the Parliamentary Elections: EU Election Observation Mission Sri Lanka 2004, p. 58.

Table 20: Percentage of Nominations Given to Women from Total Nominations Given by Political Parties - Parliamentary Elections 2004

Name of Political Party	% of female candidates nominated
Ceylon Democratic Unity Alliance	0.00
Democratic People's Liberation Front	0.00
Democratic United National Front	21.21
Eelam People's Democratic Party	2.50
Tamil National Alliance /ITAK	4.35
Jathika Hela Urumaya	0.00
Eksath Peramuna	17.65
National People's Party	74.19
New Left Front	6.87
Ruhunu Jathika Pakshaya	6.22
SMEP	11.16
National Development Front	17.39
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress	0.00
Sri Lanka Muslim Katchi	7.41
Sri Lanka National Front	0.47
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	4.87
SWARAJYA	18.75
Left Front	5.38
United Left Front	4.11
United Muslim People's Alliance	0.85
United National Front	5.20
United People's Freedom Alliance	4.00
United Socialist Party	14.51
Up Country People's Front	0.00
Independent groups	4.57

Source: Adapted from Final Report on the Parliamentary Elections: EU Election Observation Mission Sri Lanka 2004, p. 58.

Table 21: Provincial Council Elections 2008/ 2009 − Party-wise breakdown of nominations for women

Name of Party	Sabaragamuwa	North Central	North Western	Western	Eastern	Central	Uva	Southern	Total
United People's Freedom Alliance	1	2	3	5	1	3	1	2	18
United National Party	1	2	2	5	0	4	0	0	14
United National Alliance	8	2	0	4	0	0	0	1	15
Democratic Unity Alliance	*	*	*	3	*	*	5	0	8
Eksath Lanka Podujana Pakshaya	*	*	*	5	*	3	*	7	15
Eksath Lanka Maha Sabha	3	*	0	0	*	2	1	4	10
United Socialist Party	11	8	1	22	4	17	9	13	85
Upcountry People's Front	3	*	*	*	*	*	1	*	4
People's Liberation Front (JVP)	2	1	2	8	*	2	0	1	16
Janasetha Peramuna	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	5	5
National Congress	*	0	*	*	*	*	*	*	0
National People's Party	*	*	0	9	*	2	*	1	12
National Development Front	47	7	14	16	0	12	9	4	109
Liberal Party	*	*	*	*	0	1	*	*	1
Muslim Liberation Front	*	1	*	*	0	*	*	*	1
Patriotic National Front	*	*	9	9	*	8	0	1	27
Nawa Sihala Urumaya	*	*	*	17	0	*	*	*	17
Democratic United National Front	*	*	*	0	*	*	*	*	0
Ruhunu Janatha Party	2	4	2	4	0	2	*	0	14
Ceylon Workers' Congress	3	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	3
Left Front	6	9	*	2	*	6	*	1	24
People's Front of Liberation Tigers	*	*	*	*	3	*	*	*	3
Sri Lanka National Front	*	*		*	2	*	*	*	2
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	1	0	1	4	0	3	3	4	16
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress	*	*	*	0	*	*	3	0	3
Socialist Equality Party	*	*	2	6	*	2	*	4	14
Sinhalaye Mahasammatha Bhoomiputra Pakshaya	*	0	2	2	1	4	1	4	14
Ealam People's Democratic Party	*	*	*	*	0	*	*	*	0
Akila Ilankai Tamil United Front	*	*	*	*	0	*	*	*	0

Ealavar Democratic Front	*	*	*	*	**0**	*	*	^	0
Tamizh Democratic National Alliance	*	*	*	*	**0**	*	*	*	0
Independent groups collectively	**33**	**31**	**42**	**85**	*	**56**	10	4	261
Total	121	67	80	206	11	127	**43**	**56**	**711**

Source: Statistics personally compiled with assistance from officials at the Department of Elections.
* Did not contest in these Districts.

At the Provincial Council Elections held in 2008/ 2009, this pattern continued with smaller parties responsible for the bulk of nominations given to women, but not winning any seats at all. Table 21 gives a party wise breakdown of the number of nominations given to women at these elections. The percentage of nominations given to women from the total number of nominations given by a few selected parties is given in Table 22. Nominations for women by the UPFA, the UNP and the JVP did not exceed 5% of the total number of nominations given by them.

Table 22: Selected Party wise Nominations for Women in Provincial Council Elections 2008/ 2009

	Total Number of Nominations Given*	Nominations for women	% of Nominations for women
National Development Front	275	109	39.6
Nawa Sihala Urumaya	46	17	36.9
United Socialist Party	380	85	22.4
Left Front	189	24	12.7
Patriotic National Front	249	27	10.8
United National Alliance	271	15	5.5
Ruhunu Janatha Pakshaya	248	14	5.6
UPFA	417	18	4.3
JVP	417	16	3.8
UNP	417	14	3.3

*the difference in nomination statistics between parties is due to the fact that all these parties did not contest in every district.

Where the two major parties do nominate, women generally do well. For instance, at the North Western Provincial Council election held in 2004, the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and United National Party (UNP) between them, fielded five women out of a total of 112 candidates fielded by these two parties, and all five won. The UPFA's Indrani Dassanayake in fact topped the list in Puttalam district with the highest number of preferential votes (32,508).[7] At the 2004 parliamentary elections, of the 15 and 11 women nominated by the UPFA and UNF respectively, five women from each party/alliance were

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[7] Wayamba, all women lists and all that . . .' by Lasanda Kurukulasuriya, Sunday Observer, 2 May 2004.

elected. Cumulatively at the Eastern, North Central, Sabaragamuwa, Central, North Western and Western, Uva and Southern Provincial Council elections held in 2008 and 2009, the UNP and UPFA fielded 31 women out of a total 711 nominations for women,[8] All 17 women elected were from these two parties. 10 of the 29 nominees were fielded at the Western provincial council elections and six of them won. Rosy Senanayake of the UNP obtained the highest number of preferential votes from the UNP list.

These statistics suggest that although the two major parties carry elections manifestos (see discussion on quotas below for commitments made in recent manifestos) stating support for increasing nominations, there is more that can be done to increase the number of nominates for women. On top of the fact that the two major parties have not to date given a significant number of nominations to women, women's historical marginalization from political institutions, the incumbency advantage held by male politicians, and a political culture dominated by men, as well as patriarchal norms and values, don't make it easy for women to compete equally with men. The type of electoral system that is operating in Sri Lanka has not helped either.

The electoral system
The type of electoral system that is in place in any given country can also either help or hinder the election of women and here I want to focus at some length on the system of elections in Sri Lanka, as it has preoccupied activists working to increase women's representation in recent years. Electoral systems are also much more malleable than the socio-economic and political context within which women have to compete for political office, and understanding such systems can equip activists to pressure for electoral reform as a way to increase numerical representation.

Comparative research on election systems has established that a critical factor for women's representation is whether the electoral system has single member constituencies where only one candidate is elected from an electoral unit or multi member constituencies where several candidates are elected per electoral unit. This distinction corresponds quite well although not perfectly with the distinction between FPTP/simple majority systems of elections and PR systems. Briefly, in FPTP/simple majority systems the winner is the candidate or party with the most votes and typically there is only a single winner in each electoral unit. In proportional systems the electoral unit is generally larger and the system is designed to ensure that the overall votes for a party or coalition are translated into a corresponding

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[8] Party wise breakdown of seats —Eastern provincial council, 2008 —UPFA —20, UNP - 15, People's Liberation Front - 1, the
    Tamizh National Democratic Alliance —1, North Central Province —UPFA -20, UNP —12, JVP -1, Sabaragamuwa - UPFA —25,
    UNP —17, JVP —2. Central Province: UPFA - 36, UNP —22, North Western Province: UPFA —37, UNP —14, JVP —1,
    Western Province: UPFA: - 68, UNP —30, JVP —3, SLMC —1, DUA —1.

proportion of seats in the legislature. If a party wins 20% of votes, it should get approx 20% of the seats in that electoral unit. All PR systems use multi member districts (Matland 2005: 99).

According to worldwide data women have a slightly greater advantage under PR systems rather than under FPTP/simple majority systems. A cross comparative study of 24 established democracies conducted by International IDEA shows that there has been substantial and consistent divergence in women's representation across electoral systems since the 1970s. According to this study, by 2004, the percentage of women in national legislatures in countries using a simple majority system was 18.24%, whereas in countries using a PR system it was 27.49% (Matland 2005: 100).

Indeed, in countries such as Germany and Australia, three to four times more women have been elected to political office following the switch to PR from a simple majority system of elections. Some PR systems are however more advantageous to women than others and it is important to understand the factors which impact on women's representation. They have been identified as follows:

Higher district magnitude/higher party magnitude: Where parties have a chance to compete for and win several seats within an electoral unit, the chances are greater that more women will be elected. This is because when a party is able to win several seats, it can go deeper into its electoral lists and will also be more willing to balance its tickets. As Matland point out "Gatekeepers will divide winning slots on the party list among various internal party interests, including possibly women's interests. Matland therefore suggests that women's groups should be more supportive of moves to increase total numbers of elected members in political institutions as well as moves to reduce the number of electoral units (2005: 101).

High electoral thresholds: Having a high electoral threshold which is the minimum percentage of the vote that a party must have in order to win a seat in the legislature is important to increase women's chances. When there are high electoral thresholds smaller parties are eliminated, but generally more women are elected from the largest parties in the country.

Level of choice given to the voter: Another factor which differentiates PR systems is the level of choice that a voter is given not just between parties but between candidates within a party as well. The debate is between open list systems (where the voter is able to influence which candidates are selected through a system of preferential voting) and closed list systems (where the party determines the rank ordering of candidates and appoints candidates accordingly). It appears that the impact of closed lists and open lists on women's representation varies from country to country. In developed countries open lists have favoured the election of women candidates, but in developing countries the findings are ambivalent (Jayawardena 2003). Much depends on how supportive the party is of women's representation. Closed lists where women occupy every second, third or fourth position in the list can however clearly guarantee that a certain percentage of women are elected.

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The electoral system in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has experienced both electoral systems. From the achievement of universal franchise in 1931 up to 1978 elections were based the simple majority or First Past the Post system. During this period representation of women varied between a low of 1.3% in parliament to 4.1% in 1977.

Elections based on a system of proportional representation were introduced in place of the simple majority system of elections in Sri Lanka by the 1978 Constitution (the first elections under the new system was held in 1989). Sunil Bastian argues that the initial motivation for introducing PR was to create a stable government and stop individual MPs from crossing over; increasing representation for minorities or for women was not part of the agenda of electoral reform (2003). In its implementation, PR did however result in increasing minority representation within political bodies but had no impact on the representation of women. This could be attributed to the particular system of PR that was adopted in Sri Lanka:

- While the number of seats per district increased under PR, the electoral unit became larger, coinciding with the district constructed for administrative and development purposes. This meant that candidates have to canvass for votes within a much larger electoral unit. Women have found this more cumbersome and expensive.

- The electoral threshold which was originally fixed at a minimum of 12.5% or one eighth of the total number of valid votes received by a party was later reduced to 5% due to concerns expressed by minority parties. While the 5% cut off point opened the door for a number of smaller parties to get elected, it has not encouraged either the bigger parties or the smaller parties to promote women's representation. On the other hand, even 5% has proved too high for independent women's groups seeking to win at least a few seats at local government level.

- Under the open list PR system adopted in Sri Lanka, the voter has the ability to influence which of the candidates on the party list should be elected, by first voting for the party and then casting three preferences for three candidates on the list. While the party hierarchy still has a big say in who gets on the list, candidates can canvass support for themselves. On the one hand, this has added a new level of intense electoral competition between members of the same party in addition to competition between parties (Bastian 2003: 214). Women have found that they are unable to compete equally even with male members within their party. On the other hand, voters also continue to disregard women candidates as suitable politicians. From the statistics above, one can safely draw the conclusion that even women voters do not necessarily vote for women candidates. As Jayawardena and Kodikara assert, it is as voters exercising their right to vote that most women in Sri Lanka traditionally exert the greatest influence on the course of politics and governance in Sri Lanka. Female voter participation in Sri Lanka is very high. According to the ICES survey 67.3% of

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the women and 68.5% of men had voted at the election held immediately prior to the survey (2003). According to the ICES Kandy Survey, 90% of women as opposed to 85% of men had voted at the 1994 general election, the election held just before this survey was conducted (Kiribamune 1999). But women voters in Sri Lanka don't feel a natural affiliation to women candidates. These features in the PR system in Sri Lanka which make it disadvantageous for women have been further compounded by other factors; an increase in violence at election time, election campaigns which require massive spending, and a lack of support and profiling of women candidates by their own parties.

Violence in politics
Across the world, countries face the challenge that politics, especially around the time of elections, can often be associated with an increase in violence. Political thuggery in mainstream political processes has spanned vote rigging, and voter intimidation, threats of violence and actual violence against opponents, threats, intimidation and assault of polling agents aimed at preventing them from being present in polling booths, snatching of polling cards, as well as capturing of booths by armed party workers, for the purpose of ballot stuffing, etc. (Saravanamuttu: 2008, Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003). The manape system (preferential voting system) has also created vicious infighting within the party itself, in addition to competition with other parties. Many women candidates interviewed for this study complained about their own fellow candidates from within the party stealing their preference votes and denying them a seat in political office.

Some elections have also seen very gender specific forms of violence. The Wayamba provincial council elections of 1999 has gone down in history as one of the most violent, particularly for its targeting of women candidates. In one incident, B.M. Chandrawathie, a 50 year old grandmother, was beaten with iron bars and rifle butts and asked to remove her clothes This is however not to essentialize all women as less violent. In fact the ICES study shows that women from political families who enter politics are capable of holding their own in the world of violent and corrupt politics. Many female politicians may inherit from their male relatives certain structures of power, influence and even violence. They are also familiar with the levels of violence making it easier for them to negotiate their way in political life. But for other women trying to make their way in politics without such a family background, it may be much more difficult to deal with and overcome the levels of violence (Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003).

High cost of elections
Election campaigns in Sri Lanka necessarily entail massive spending for posters, banners, transport, as well as advertising in the print and electronic media. Furthermore campaigners will often spend generously on lunch/dinner packets and bottles of alcohol for potential supporters. Male candidates who are recognized as 'winnable' candidates are able to mobilize funds from private contributions and the cooperate sector. Women on the other hand find it extremely difficult to raise large sums of money. Of the women interviewed for this study, one had pawned a piece of land, and two had pawned their jewelry to raise money for their

election campaigns and still lost.

Lack of support for women candidates from their political parties, the media, etc.
Women candidates also lack other resources which are essential to win elections such as political party support and media exposure. During campaigning for the 2004 parliamentary elections, the presence of female candidates in the electronic media only reached 0.23% whereas male candidates secured 99.77% of media time (EU Election Observers Mission to Sri Lanka 2004: 31).

In the final analysis, institutions function within their own socio-economic and political context. The success or failure of institutional reform to deliver on certain outcomes depends on the informal norms, values and traditions within which such institutions are embedded. The unfavourable outcome of the current PR system on the representation of women in Sri Lanka can therefore be explained by the particular system of PR adopted in Sri Lanka but also the socio-economic and political context in which it operates. While electoral reform is very much an issue on the political agenda today, whether reform will address these structural impediments to women's equal participation and representation in politics remains a question.

3. Strategies Adopted by Women's Organizations

Ever since the under representation of women in political institutions was identified as a critical issue of concern for women in Sri Lanka in the late 1970s, women's organizations individually and collectively have undertaken initiatives to address this issue. At least 20 national level organizations and numerous other organizations at the district level have worked on this issue over the years. Several national level seminars and conferences have brought together activists, academics, government officials as well as political party representatives to discuss this issue (see Annex 7). Individual women activists have also had the opportunity to participate in international conferences to learn from the experiences of other countries. Much of this activity was possible due to support of donor organizations such as CIDA, FES, NORAD, Ford Foundation and the UNDP. Despite these efforts, very little progress has been made in relation to increasing women's representation in Sri Lanka. This study identifies eight key strategies employed by women's organizations to increase women's participation and representation in political institutions over the years and critically examines each of these below:

- Research/publications
- Training and capacity building for political leadership
- Awareness raising
- Advocacy for a quota
- Experiments with independent lists
- Interventions at the level of political culture
- Networking
- International advocacy before the CEDAW Committee

3.1 Research/publications

One of the earliest articles to explore the issue of women and politics in Sri Lanka and the obstacles faced by women in entering politics was by Wimala De Silva. Her chapter on "Political Participation and Decision Making"' appeared in a seminal publication called "The Status of Women" initiated by a group of university women and published by the University of Colombo in 1979. This was followed by Robert Kearney's article in the Asian Survey in 1981. Both articles provided a rich and nuanced analysis of the problem of women in politics.

Since then, there has been an explosion in research studies and publications on this issue, thanks to the work of women's organizations as well as independent research scholars. This rich and extensive body of literature covers both qualitative studies as well as quantitative surveys. The attached bibliography is testimony to the range of issues covered by these studies. The qualitative studies on women and politics cover a wide range of issues including:

- The history of the struggle for women's franchise;

- The role and status of women within political parties;
- Profiles /political biographies of women politicians;
- Women's pathways to politics in Sri Lanka;
- Analysis of obstacles to women's political participation and representation;
- Perceptions on women and politics; and
- Implementation of quotas for women within different electoral systems.

Several quantitative surveys have also sought to explore the issue of women and politics commencing with a survey done by CENWOR in 1994. These surveys have sought to ascertain levels of political participation, obstacles to such participation and perceptions about women's participation and representation in politics.

Table 23: Quantitative Surveys on Women and Politics

Year survey was done	Author /organization	Sample size	Areas covered
1994/1995	Cenwor /Micro Survey on Women, Political Empowerment and Decision Making	451 women	Urban low income, middle class and affluent women in Colombo, rural women in Anuradhapura and in remote villages in Moneragala, Tamil and Muslim Women in the Eastern province and in Puttalam, resident plantation women in Nuwara Eliya and non resident village based plantation women in Kegalle
1995	Kiribamune / ICES Kandy Women and Politics: A Field Survey	606 (453 women and 153 men)	Kandy, Moneragala, Batticaloa, Puttalam, Colombo
1998	Women in Rural Politics, Tressie Leitan/Swinitha Gunasekara	150 women	5 districts of Hambantota, Moneragala, Kurunegala, Gampaha Ja-ela, Katana, Hambantota, Ambalantota, Moneragala, Buttala, Wariyapola, Hettipola, Pollonaruwa, and Tamankaduwa
1998	Women and Governance, ICES Colombo	500 (450 women and 50 men)	
2002	The Baseline Survey Report for the South Asia People and Policy Programme, South Asia Partnership Sri Lanka	389 Sinhala and Tamil women	6 districts of Anuradhapura, Matale, Vavuniya, Nuwara Eliya, Puttalama, Ratnapura
2004	Women's Participation in Politics, the Peace Process and Public Life: A Benchmark study for assessing Prabodhini's impact, National Peace Council/ Social Indicator	501 Sinhala and Tamil women	10 Districs of Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Matara, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Moneragala, Batticaloa, Vavuniya, Ampara and Jaffna

The research studies on the topic of women's political participation and representation have inspired and provided impetus to much of the activism to increase women's representation in Sri Lanka. The bulk of the research/scholarly work on this issue is however in English. While very little original research in Sinhala and Tamil has been done, only a few of the English publications have been translated into Sinhala and Tamil. This is a gap which must be addressed.

In terms of research gaps, we still know very little about the way political parties operate in this country, their decision making structures, mobilization strategies, etc. There is anecdotal evidence which suggests that political parties are becoming less formal, less structured and more fluid. If this is so, women may find it harder, not easier, to participate in politics.

3.2 Training and capacity building

A major focus of civil society activism as well as government intervention in relation to increasing women's representation in political institutions has been on training and capacity building of women to take on political leadership. This has been partly to respond to the assertion of political parties that there are not enough women who are interested or capable of running for elections within parties and partly to address women's own lack of confidence to run for elections. It was not always easy to obtain accurate statistics on the numbers of women trained by each organization as proper documentation of training programmes was not always maintained or it was too far back to trace accurate statistics. According to information gathered through the questionnaire survey that was conducted for this study, annual reports of organizations, and individual interviews, more than 5,000 women appear to have been trained between 1994 —2008 (See Table 24). It is however not clear to what extent the same women participated in multiple training programmes. In a number of interviews, interviewees expressed the view that sometimes the same women attended different training programmes organized by different organizations. Therefore while the actual cadre of women who have been trained may be a smaller number, some women may in fact be 'overdosed' on such training programmes.

Table 24: Organizations which are/were involved in training women for political leadership

Name of Organization	Year	No. of Women trained (approx)
Sinhala Kanthabivurdhi	1994 – 2000	600
Sinhala Kanthabivurdhi / Agromart	2000 – 2005	1,000
Sri Lanka Foundation Institute	2000 – 2004	130
National Committee for Women	2000 – 2006	500
Women's Bureau	2002 – 2007	1,700
National Peace Council	2003 – 2007	500
South Asia Partnership Sri Lanka	2004	200

National Democratic Institute	2006 – 2008	60
Association for War Affected Women	2008	90
Viluthu	2008	300
Ministry of Women's Empowerment/UNDP	2008	288

Different organizations targeted different constituencies of women in their training programmes. The Sri Lanka Foundation Institute (SLFI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) programmes were specifically targeted for women from political parties, which included elected women. The Women's Bureau and the NCW programmes called for applications from women interested in contesting elections through a newspaper advertisement and then selected those who were considered the most suitable for training.

Training programmes conducted by women's organizations were mainly for women activists at the grassroots level interested in pursuing a career in politics. For example, Viluthu's programme was for women selected from Women's Rural Development Societies (WRDS) in 12 Divisional Secretariat divisions in the Batticaloa District. In 2008, the Association for War Affected Women (AWAW) conducted a training of trainers (TOT) programme where 25 women leaders, each one from a different district, were trained to further train 50 other women in their own districts for political leadership. On completion of this programme, AWAW and its partners would have trained a total of 1,250 women from around Sri Lanka.

Depending on the organization conducting the training, the content and duration of these programmes differed considerably. Most programmes ranged from one to five days and covered a range of issues such as personality development, gender training, good governance, human rights, the role and powers of local government, history and present status of women's representation in politics, and communication and oratory skills.

A few programmes comprised several modules on different subject areas, conducted over several months. For example, the NDI programme which was conducted between 2006 - 2008 comprised several 1-3 day modules covering a diversity of topics including political leadership development, effective communication and public relations skills, policy formulation and analysis, multi-ethnic harmony and reconciliation, women's participation in politics, elections processes and conflict resolution and transformation.

The AWAW training programme comprised five modules, each five days long, on the following topics:
- Advocacy and lobbying;
- Knowing your governance structures, who is who, and 13th Amendment to the Constitution;
- Media and campaigning;
- Proposal writing and budget preparations; and

- Coalition building and networking.

Some training programmes also included familiarization visits to local councils or provincial councils and meetings with party general secretaries and the leadership. The NDI, on the conclusion of its programme, organized for the trainees to meet with the party leadership, so that the leadership is aware that there is a trained cadre of women within the party.

South Asia Partnership Sri Lanka

Training Programmes for Women

In 2004, South Asia Partnership, Sri Lanka, implemented a training programme for women leaders at the village level in a number of areas including Dambulla, Mihintale, Vilachchiya, Tirappane and Attangalle.

These training programmes were three days long, mainly focusing on personality development, leadership development, image building and public speaking skills in addition to providing information on campaigning, networking and the role and responsibilities of a people's representative. The trainings were conducted in an interactive manner so that both the trainer as well as the trainee will play an active role during the training programme.

At the initial stage the participants are made aware of the prevalent situation in the country regarding women's representation in politics and are motivated to promote the participation of women in local governance. Next, they are made aware of the challenges which women in governance have to face so that they have a comprehensive understanding as to why women do not enter politics. Introducing methods of overcoming these challenges with the help of a few successful councillors and the examination of several case studies is the next step of the training programme which is followed by the skills development session. As the final step of the training, the participants are made aware of what comprises democratic governance and what the roles and responsibilities of local government representatives and officers are. Methods utilized during the training programmes include lectures, brainstorming sessions, small group discussions, presentations, large group discussions, group work and role plays. Approximately 200 women were trained.

These training programmes have undoubtedly fulfilled an important need in relation to not only building the capacity and confidence of women but also in relation to inspiring and motivating them to pursue a career in politics which otherwise they might not have wanted to do. A number of women who had followed training programmes stated that they had not

contemplated contesting elections until following one or other of these programmes and being inspired to do so.

However, the impact of these programmes in actually catapulting women into a career in politics is not clear. No organization was able to clearly say how many women trained by them have received nominations, contested elections and been elected as a direct result of the training. Moreover, none of the organizations surveyed had conducted an evaluation of their own training programmes. Prof. Kamala Liyanage recognizing that no research study had been conducted on the strategy of training for political leadership, did a limited study of some training programmes in 2004. She identified the following limitations of most training programmes for political leadership:

- Selection criteria: Selection of the participants was not based on specified criteria and many young women who did not have any interest in politics had participated in training programmes with the objective of obtaining a certificate.

- Lack of follow up measures. She states that, "the usual practice of NGOs is once they get funds they organize training workshops and once the funds are over they do not have an opportunity to concentrate on any follow-up programmes. Also, some NGOs just conduct training programmes without having any needs assessments or systematic preparation of curriculum" (Liyanage 2004: 11 -12).

Liyanage goes on to identify 21 women who had attended training programmes and who had contested an election at provincial or local levels. Three of them had got elected (2004:12). However even these statistics don't reveal much about the numbers of women who are able to obtain nominations and then go on to get elected relative to the numbers of women trained so far.

From anecdotal evidence gathered from my own interviews with women who have participated in training programmes, a number of women have been successful in getting nominations; most were however unsuccessful in winning elections.

Training programmes so far have therefore not been a magic bullet to increasing representation of women. The new knowledge and skills that are acquired by women through these programmes are not necessarily the knowledge and skills that political parties are looking for in potential candidates. There is therefore a considerable gap between what women's organizations and institutions think are the training requirements for political leadership and the reality of what is needed to compete in party politics. Political leadership in Sri Lanka is not solely dependent on awareness and knowledge of issues such as gender, good governance, human rights, local government laws, etc., that are the focus of training programmes that are currently being undertaken. Men who receive nominations from political parties often do not have any significant knowledge of any of these issues. In fact, an activist from Kurunegala reported of an incident where all political parties in her district were at one time wooing a drug peddler and a human trafficker to join their ranks! As

already mentioned above it is very clear that nominations are also influenced by factors such as networks within the party and availability of funds for expensive campaigns. Unless women's organizations are willing to address this reality, training programmes will simply keep producing women with great expectations and leadership potential but who are still unable to get nominations or even if they do, who are unable to win elections.

Training programmes were also overwhelmingly for the Sinhala community with only a few programmes targeting Tamil and Muslim women who face added challenges when it comes to participating in politics. Subsequent to an evaluation of training programmes conducted in the South, capacity building programmes for women in the North and East could be considered. Such programmes need however to be designed taking into account the socio-economic and political context of the North and East and the specific needs of and challenges facing women in those areas.

3.3 Awareness raising on the issue of under representation

Women activists and organizations have used any and every opportunity to raise awareness on the issue of women and politics and particularly the abysmally low levels of representation of women in political institutions among different constituencies and target groups through different means. These have included workshops, mainstream print and electronic media, alternative media, as well as poster and sticker campaigns.

Workshops both at the national and district level with different stakeholders —women activists, members of community-based organizations (CBOs) at the grassroots level, government officials, elected members, academics, researchers, policy makers, media personnel, political party officials, etc., have been held to raise awareness on women and politics.

Magazines and journals published by women's organization have always provided a useful and easy to access platform to raise the issue of women and politics. Journals such as Voice of Women, Options, and Pravahini in English, Kantha Handa, Pravahini, Eya in Sinhala and Sol, Pravahini and Thalaivi in Tamil have often featured articles on women and political representation (See bibliography for full list). Some editions of these journals have been exclusively dedicated to the issue of women and politics. For instance Options, Vol. 29, 1st Quarter (2002) and Vol. 33, 1st Quarter (2004) published by the Women and Media Collective features a series of articles on women's political participation and representation in Sri Lanka as well as interviews with women politicians and candidates. The April 2002 edition of Voice of Women published in Sinhala, Tamil and English (Vol.6, Issue 3) took up the need for quotas in Sri Lanka.

Activists and organizations have also written to the newspapers in all three media on the issue of women and political participation from time to time. The Cat's Eye column in the English edition of the Island newspaper at one time provided a regular space once a week to

raise issues of concern to women in general, and the issue of women's participation and representation in politics in particular. Between 1995 - 2003, the column written by a collective of feminist writers tackled this issue at least 15 times.[9] Cat's Eye was discontinued in 2003, but has been revived since August 2009. There is a pressing need for such a column in the vernacular press.

Apart from articles, paid newspaper campaigns launched by women's organizations have sought to raise awareness about this issue amongst the general public. Some notable campaigns are those launched by the Sri Lanka Women's Non-Governmental Organizations Forum (SLWNGOF) in 1998/1999, the Women and Media Collective in 2002, the Women's Political Forum convened by the Gender Unit of the Social Scientists''Association in 2004 and 2005 and the Prabodhini Programme of the NPC in 2005 (See Annex 8).

Between June 1998 and May 2000, the SLWNGOF initiated a media campaign on the theme of women's participation in decision making and political processes, which was the first of its kind in Sri Lanka. The launch of the campaign in June 1998 was marked by two press conferences where several prominent women's rights activists spoke about the issue (see article below) and gave television and radio interviews on the issue. The campaign comprised a number of slogans which were developed in collaboration with representatives of SLWNGOF partners accompanied by very attractive artwork. Some of these were:'
- "As we celebrate 50 years of independence we ask . . . Where are women in the decision making process? Where are women in the political arena?"

- "A Challenge to all Political Parties! How many of us are on your lists as candidates? How far are our concerns addressed in your manifestos?"

SLWNGOF also held a series of meetings with all the main political parties during the period of this campaign. Representatives of SLWNGOF partner organizations met with representatives of the SLFP, UNP, MEP, SLMC and the JVP. At these meetings, the SLWNGOF appealed to the parties to create an environment conducive for women to enter politics. Most political leaders with whom discussions were held had noticed the media campaign.

Parallel to this campaign, SLWNGOF also engaged with a number of grassroots organizations to raise this issue within their constituencies in a manner suitable to their own areas ranging from seminars/workshops to distributing handbills and putting up posters.

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[9] A collection of Cat's Eye articles has been published in De Alwis, Malathi (2000) Cat's Eye: A Feminist Gaze on Current Issues, Cat's Eye Publications, Colombo.

Women's Forum calls for more women candidates at elections

Sunday Observer 21-06-98

The Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum is to ask the political parties in the country to include more women as candidates in future elections beginning from the Provincial Council Elections due to be held this year.

Addressing a press conference at the Hotel Ceylon Intercontinental recently, Prof. Wimala de Silva, Chairperson National Committee on Women, said that from the time women won franchise, in women's participation in active politics was low and their representation in parliament and other local bodies were insignificant.

She pointed out that women should show their capabilities in every other field earlier dominated by man and said that the time has come to ask for the representation of women at the highest decision-making levels.

Forum sources said that although Sri Lanka takes pride in having the first woman prime minister and now a woman president together with the premier, her mother, the number of women representation in parliament in terms of percentage is the lowest since 1948. The situation remains worse at the level of local government bodies.

The promotion of women's active participation in political and decision-making processes is a critical area of action identified by the Forum, Joint Co-ordinator, Women and Media Collective Ms. Sunila Abeysekera said.

The Forum has launched a campaign in view of the forthcoming provincial council elections.

"We will appeal to all political parties to include more women candidates in their lists and to address women concerns in their election campaign including their manifesto, appeal to women exercise their vote freely and independently, and appeal to all citizens to ensure that this election be a violence-free election", Ms. Abeysekera said.

Ms. Jezima Ismail, Ms. Rohini Weerasinghe and Kamani Vitharana also spoke.

Sunday Observer, 21st June 1998

In 2001, The Women's Political Forum, a collective of 12 women's organizations, came up with the idea of drafting a women's manifesto prior to the parliamentary elections scheduled that year to highlight a number of critical areas of concern to women in Sri Lanka, including the issue of women's political participation. The Manifesto which was published in English, Sinhala and Tamil was sent to all major political parties. It has since been revised and reprinted several times, and widely distributed again prior to the parliamentary elections of 2004 and the presidential elections of 2005 and given publicity through advertisements in all three languages in selected newspapers. Women's organizations have also obtained access to TV programmes (such as Nuga Sevana, Good Morning Sri Lanka!) and radio programmes (Subharati on SLBC, Lakhanda) to raise awareness about this issue. International Women's Day in particular has provided opportunities for women's rights activists to raise women's issues in the mainstream electronic media, including on the issue of women and politics. Given the dearth of programmes which critically and seriously discuss women's issues,

women's organizations have initiated and produced television discussion programmes such as Kedapatha (Mirror) and more recently Point of View (English), Allapa Sallapa (Sinhala) and Aalumei (Tamil) to raise awareness on women's concerns through television. All these programmes had dedicated programmes which explored the issue of women and political representation in Sri Lanka. Several television documentaries on the issue have also been produced. They are:

- Heta Aluth Dawasak (Tomorrow is a New Day) directed by Anoma Rajakaruna, a feminist filmmaker and produced by the NCW (55 minutes).

- Right Now: Women's Political Representation at Provincial and Local Levels, produced by YATV.

As part of a much broader media campaign, the Prabodhini programme of the National Peace Council (see Box below) published a total of 27 press advertisements in Sinhala, Tamil and English in state and private newspapers in March 2005 carrying the following messages:

- What democracy can there be when half the population is not represented?
- The right to vote and equal representation are two basic human rights!
- Give women a voice when formulating national policies!

The Women and Media Collective also used press advertisements in all three languages prior to the General Elections of 2002 which appealed to voters to cast their vote for a woman candidate.

Although the high costs of TV advertising prevents women's groups from using television advertising in a sustained manner, two paid TV campaigns have been done so far. TV spots were part of the media campaign launched by the Prabodhini programme of the NPC in March 2005. More recently, in September 2008, a loose network of women's organizations and individuals who called themselves, '"We Women"' launched a TV campaign demanding a quota for women in political institutions in Derana TV and Shakthi TV. As part of the campaign, two TV spots were produced on the following themes:-

- Spot No. 1: Conveys statistics on the representation of women in local government in other countries in South Asia, (33% in India, 20% in Pakistan, 33% in Bangladesh, 10% in Nepal) and compares them with the abysmally low representation of women in local government in Sri Lanka (1.8%) through a catchy jingle and in a visually attractive manner. The spot ends with the tagline: Give Women a Quota in Local Government!

- TV Spot No. 2: Depicts a march to parliament where at the entrance women get pushed and shoved aside and finally left behind, etc. The spot ends with the tagline: Give Women a Quota in Political Institutions!

Prabodhini Programme of the National Peace Council

Awareness Raising through Social Advertising

In March 2005, Prabodhini launched an extensive media campaign which commenced with a press campaign and leading up to a television line up of advocacy messages in Sinhala, Tamil and English, which focused on the role that women can and should be playing as decision makers in public life. A total of 279 TV messages were telecast in Sinhala, Tamil and English State and private media during primetime and a total of 27 press advertisements in Sinhala, Tamil and English in State and private newspapers.

The project also conducted a series of six live TV interviews in Sinhala on Rupavahini's Nuga Sevana programme and six live interviews on Eye Channel's Udaya Dharisanam programme highlighting issues that affect women both at home and in the workplace. These two programmes were selected mainly because of the large target audience of men and women who are either employed in the domestic sphere or in the informal sector. "Can only political widows hope to enter mainstream politics in South Asia?" was one of the topics covered during these discussion programmes.

Radio programmes developed by the partner organizations in consultation with Prabodhini activists were broadcast in Sinhala and Tamil and aired frequently over State and private media channels through radio spots, 'live' on air discussions with listener participation, and radio interviews. These radio programmes had an extensive reach in many districts in the island as they were developed and broadcast by regional radio stations — Rajarata Sevaya (Anurdhapura) and Kandurata Sevaya (Kandy) of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation. Resource persons on these programmes comprised local government officials, professionals, and local and international NGO personnel.

As part of the multi-dimensional effort to raise awareness, educate and mobilize rural women to participate in public life, the campaign included the displaying of billboards, posters and banners in key towns and at strategic events.

In a more ambitious attempt to use television, the issue of political participation and representation of women was the sole focus of a programme named Sammuthiya (Consensus) aired every Monday from 10 to 12 p.m between November 2008 and April 2009 over the Swarnavahini TV channel. The series which was conceptualized and

financially supported by the Women Defining Peace (WDP) Project,[10] [9] sought to discuss and debate a wide range of issues impacting on women's political participation and representation, as well as perceptions and misperceptions surrounding this issue. Facilitated by a young TV personality, the series made use of different formats such as documentary footage, mini tele-dramas and discussions with experts and ordinary citizens to raise issues and create a debate within the programme. The programme also invited members of parliament, provincial councilors, academics, journalists, public servants and others to participate in these debates.

According to Swarnavahini, Sammuthiya received the highest viewer rating during the time slot that it was aired, and in the Southern province alone, it is reported that over 48% of the viewers turned to Sammuthiya reflecting the fact that most of the shows were taped on location in the Southern Province.

What has been the cumulative impact of awareness and consciousness raising work over the years? At the level of party officials, politicians, and policy makers, there is still more that needs to be done to deepen understanding and appreciation of the obstacles faced by women in accessing political office, as well as the need for affirmative action that can meaningfully address those obstacles.

At the level of the general public, it is more difficult to say. A recent survey among ordinary men and women conducted by "We Women", a coalition of women's organizations revealed that over 75% of the survey sample was unaware of the number of women in parliament and in local government in Sri Lanka, and that under representation of women in political bodies is yet to be recognized as a critical issue of concern for women.

3.4 Activism around and advocacy for a quota for women

Women's organizations as well as the National Institutions for Women, particularly the NCW, has been lobbying for a legal reservation/quota for women as a crucial remedy to address the under representation of women in political institutions in Sri Lanka since the late 1990s. A provision to reserve 25% of seats at local government for women was in fact included in the draft constitution of 1997 (See para. 42 of the regional list). Unfortunately, when this draft was taken up for debate in August 2000, this provision was dropped, apparently on the request of the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), who felt he might not be able to find suitable female candidates (Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003, Gomez and Gomez 2001). In August 2000, the Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum made a strong appeal that a 25% quota for women should be included in the 2000 draft constitution

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[10] Women Defining Peace (WDP) is Sri Lanka based and led project that focuses on preventing and responding to gender based violence and increasing women's voice and influence in peace-building processes. WDP is supported financially by CIDA and implemented by a consortium consisting of WUSC, Cowater International and Match International.

which was signed by over 20 prominent women activists. But as constitutional reform became unlikely, women's groups have focused their energies on legal reform. This advocacy has happened at two levels, with political parties and with the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reform. Parallel to this advocacy, the NCW and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment have also lobbied political parties. In fact in October 2004, the Ministry submitted for approval to cabinet, a paper on the issue of increasing women's representation in politics. Cabinet approval was granted to the proposal and a Cabinet Sub Committee was appointed to find out how a quota could be worked out, although no formal recommendations were made by this Committee. To fill this gap, the NCW, subsequently prepared a memorandum on how a quota could be implemented but this has not to date been submitted to Cabinet.

Advocacy with political parties
Over the last decade or so, numerous women's groups have lobbied political parties to address the under representation of women in political institutions in Sri Lanka through media campaigns, press conferences, one to one to meetings and direct correspondence with political party leaders. A few of these advocacy initiatives are discussed below.

ICES Project. Following up on an earlier research project on women and governance, ICES in 2000 initiated a dialogue and discussion among grassroots women activists on women's political participation and representation in Sri Lanka, and particularly on the implementation of a quota as a strategy to increase representation of women in local government institutions. A key objective of the project was to disseminate information about 'quotas' or 'reservations' for women. As part of the project, extensive research was undertaken on the different ways in which quotas/reservations have been implemented elsewhere, particularly within electoral systems based on proportional representation. On the conclusion of the provincial consultations with grassroots activists, ICES organized a national level consultation bringing together grassroots and national level activists. During the morning session participants discussed the different systems of quotas operating in different countries and their experiences, the youth commission and the youth quota, and electoral reform at local government and finalized a set of recommendations which could be presented to political parties that afternoon. The discussion focused on: reserved seats versus a percentage in the nomination list, open lists versus closed lists, and the question of abolishing of the system of preferential voting at least at local level. At the time the overwhelming majority of women preferred a return to a ward system at the local level and the reservation of 1/3rd of wards for women on a rotating basis during elections (as in India).

This demand was informed by the understanding that a mere 30% in the nomination list under the present proportional representation and preferential voting system cannot ensure that 30% of women will in fact be elected. In the afternoon session, the recommendations were formally presented to Hon. Amara Piyaseeli Ratnayake, Minister of Women's Affairs by Dr. Radhika Coomaraswmay, Director of ICES (See Annex 9). Although ICES had invited representatives from all the major political parties, only Mr. Senerath Kapukotuwa, General Secretary of the UNP, and one representative each from the SLMC and EPDP attended the

national consultation. A striking feature of the afternoon session was that activists from the provinces read out particular sections of the recommendations followed by a discussion with the Minister and other representatives of political parties who were present. The Minister who spoke at the event stated that the Ministry will take steps to increase women's representation in politics by 25% within the next three years.[11]

JUNE 22, 2002   NEWS

Women in politics up by 25 p.c. in next three years
- Women's Affairs Minister Ratnayake

by Nadira Gunatilleke

The total number of members in the Local Government bodies are 3,720 and 12 percent of the total number of candidates who contested the 2002 Local Government Elections were women. But only 2.1 per cent of them were elected. Now the Women's Affairs Ministry has made arrangements to increase women's representation in politics by 25 percent within next three years, Women's Affairs Minister Amara Piyaseeli Ratnayake said.

She was speaking at the workshop on increasing women's participation in politics organised by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) held at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute (SLFI), Colombo 7 recently. The Minis-

ter said that a lot of youths came into politics after former President Ranasinghe Premadasa allocated 40 percent of nominations for them in 1988. "Following the same procedure I will make arrangements to allocate 50 percent of this quota for young girls", she added.

The Minister pointed out that even though Sri Lankan women were interested in politics since 1931, there is no significant increase in their participation in active politics and decision making.

There are several reasons for this situation. Lack of interest, inability of getting away from household chores, traditional family responsibilities and election related violence are some of the major reasons. There are a lot of talented urban and rural women in the country but they

do not like to come into politics for the above reasons, she added. About 200 representa-

tives from various Women's Organisations were present at this workshop. General Secre-

tary, United National Party Senarath Kapukotuwa answered the questions posed by women

Women's Affairs Minister Amara Piyaseeli Ratnayake addressing the workshop. From left Chulani Kodikara, ICES, Kishali Pinto Jayawardena, ICES, Kumuduni Samuel, Women's Media Collective, Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Director, ICES, and A.M.Shaheed, SLMC.
- Picture by S.Chithrananda

Sunday Times, 22 June 2002

While the ICES project was particularly instrumental in bringing clarity to the demand for a quota in Sri Lanka, it could not however influence policy change at the time

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[11] The UNF regime which was in power at that time was ousted in April 2004.

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Grow Project. Between 2002 - 2004, The Northern Illinois University (NIU) based in the U.S.A., in partnership with four local NGOs, i.e. MWRAF, Agromart, CENWOR and Sarvodaya Women's Movement implemented a programme on 'Capacity Building and Advocacy for Women's Participation in Grassroots Democracy in Sri Lanka' (known as GROW I). The culmination of the programme was a national level symposium held on 8th June 2004 where a declaration on women's political participation was presented to Hon. Mahinda Rajapakse, who was Prime Minister at the time and Hon. Sumedha Jayasena, Minister for Women's Empowerment and Social Welfare (See Annex 10). The declaration was also sent to secretaries of all major political parties in October 2005.

NCW Campaign prior to 2006 local government elections. In the run-up to the local government elections held in 2006, the NCW implemented an extremely focused campaign to increase women's political participation. The programme concurrently raised awareness, trained women, used the media and engaged in advocacy with political parties. Following a meeting with Secretaries of political parties to discuss women's political participation, on 11th October 2005, lists of trained women candidates were made available to political parties.

From Pots and Pans to Politics: Campaign launched by Viluthu to increase representation of Tamil Women in Parliament. Following the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) in 2002 by the GoSL and the LTTE, Viluthu embarked on a campaign to lobby Tamil political parties as well as the LTTE to include more women in politics in the North and East at local government as well parliamentary elections. The campaign was titled "Aduppadiyilirunthu Arasiyalvarai Amimbathukku Aimbathu"' (50:50 - From Pots and Pans to Politics). Viluthu intensified its campaign prior to the 2004 parliamentary elections at the same time encouraging women in the North and East to vote for women. Viluthu takes the view that it was no coincidence that two women obtained nominations from the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) for the 2004 parliamentary elections, i.e Padmini Sidambaranathan from Jaffna and Thangeswari Kathiraman from Batticaloa, and that they were both able to win their seats.

Campaigns spearheaded by the Association for War Affected Women (AWAW). The AWAW which is based in Kandy, has spearheaded several advocacy campaigns demanding for a 33% quota for women in political institutions. Parallel to the training programme conducted by AWAW for 25 women leaders from 25 districts in Sri Lanka, AWAW mobilized these women to form an advocacy group called TEAM 1325 which launched an advocacy campaign for a 33% quota in July 2008 and also took the following action:
- Wrote to all leading NGOs appreciating their tireless work on this regard and sought their support;
- Wrote to all members of parliament from the 25 districts through women leaders at the district level;
- Mobilized the Central Province Women's Voice, a network of women from political parties in the Central Province to collect signatures from political and administrative heads throughout the Central Province in support of a quota;
- Visited Sri Lanka's parliament on the 10th of July and met with 22 elected members as

well as the Hon. Speaker and Hon. Dinesh Gunewardena, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reforms.

Following this discussion, TEAM 1325 also met with several Cabinet Ministers and MPs. In all, the team handed letters to 22 Ministers and MPs from across the political spectrum outlining their demands (See Annex 11).

The AWAW has also been working together with the 'Central Province Women's Voice, a network of women from political parties based in the Central Province to demand for affirmative action for women. The network visited parliament on 9th October 2008, met with parliamentarians and handed over yet another petition emphasizing the need for a quota (see Annex 12). The network also held a press conference on this issue in Kandy on 28th October 2008. AWAW together with CARE International and the American Solidarity Movement has also made further representations to the Parliamentary Women's Caucus (See Annex 13).

Impact at the level of political parties. One impact of this advocacy is that a few political parties, and particularly the two major parties, the UNP and the SLFP, have publicly recognized the need to implement a quota for women in politics. The UNP was the first to include a promise to implement a quota in its Women's Manifesto prior to the December 2001 parliamentary elections. The manifesto clearly articulated a commitment to increase women's representation at local government level through a 25% reservation in nomination lists within five years. However, as the UNF regime was ousted in 2004, this promise could not be tested. The election manifestos of both Mahinda Rajapakse and Ranil Wickramasinghe at the presidential elections held in 2005 again pledged to implement a reservation for women. Wickramasinghe's People's Agenda under the section "Empowerment of Women"' stated that he will take action to systematically remove all social and economic obstacles which hinder the implementation of the Women's Charter which explicitly commits to increasing nominations for women [Art. 2 (i) b] while also ensuring 30% minimum representation of women in the central decision making committees of all political parties within three years of coming to power.

Mahinda Chinthanaya of President Rajapakse under the section titled "Diriya Kantha Programme" for women also states that:
> "I will arrange to increase the number of nominations of women to a minimum of 25% of the total number of candidates in respect of provincial councils and local government authorities (p. 14)."

Engagement with the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reform
Parallel to above activities, following the appointment of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reform (PSCER) in 2003 (as reconstituted in 2006), women's organizations have also engaged with the Select Committee to ensure that a quota for women will be assured at least at local government level in the event of local government electoral reform.

When the Committee called for representations from the public, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, the Women and Media Collective, the Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum, the Sri Lanka Federation of University Women and the Mothers and Daughters of Lanka (a network of women's groups) as well as the NCW made written submissions making a series of recommendations which addressed the problem of women in politics. (See Annex 14, Annex 15, and Annex 16) Some of these organizations also gave oral evidence before the Committee and made further written submissions in person in October 2003 (Annex 17). When this Committee was reconstituted in 2006, The Mothers and Daughters of Lanka sent another memorandum and again gave oral evidence before the Committee (see Annex 18).

The Interim report of the Select Committee dated 5th June 2007, has recognized the need to increase women's representation in politics, but makes a relatively weak recommendation that:

(i)   Political parties should include provisions in their policies to ensure nominations of women candidates in order to guarantee better representation of women in Parliament, Provincial Councils, and Local Government bodies, and

(2)   Necessary legal provisions be formulated to make it mandatory that every third candidate nominated by a party secretary from the national list shall be a woman candidate.

The committee also recommended that the 'ward system' should be re-introduced for local government elections.

The first recommendation allows parties the discretion to adopt policies that will increase nominations, without making a mandatory direction about how nominations for and representation of women should be increased at each level of government. Furthermore, given that no party is bound by any list when it comes to the appointment of national list MPs, a legal $1/3^{rd}$ reservation in the national list would not guarantee increased female leadership, unless it is also made mandatory that the party is bound to adhere to a closed list submitted prior to the elections. If that is so, according to votes polled at the last elections, the UPFA would have been forced to appoint four women, and the UNP three women, respectively, from the national list. Not an insignificant number given the current statistics of women in parliament. None of the other parties however would have been obliged to do so as no other party obtained more than two national list seats (Kodikara 2008).

Follow-up on the Select Committee Proposals. Following this report, the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils drafted two bills i.e. The Local Authorities (Special Provisions) Bill to amend the Municipal Councils Ordinance, the Urban Councils Ordinance and Pradeshiya Sabhas Act No. 15 of 1987 and the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Bill to amend the Local Authorities Elections Ordinance to give effect to the recommendations of the Select Committee. The two bills envisage the return to a ward

system in respect of 70% of seats in local government institutions where candidates will be elected on a first-past-the-post basis. The remaining 30% of seats will be elected on the basis of proportional representation. It should also be noted that while the 40% youth quota and preferential voting is abolished under the new system of elections being proposed, there is also no mention of a quota for women. Women's groups have since then made inquiries about the 'missing' quota for women given the recommendations of the Select Committee and the sustained advocacy for a quota before the Committee since 2003. The response has been that since the new system envisages a return to a ward system and a mixed system of elections, there is no need for a special quota for women as women will find it easier to obtain nominations and win election under the proposed system in contrast to the present PR system. Women activists have strongly objected to this assumption on the ground that prior to the introduction of elections based on PR in 1989, women did not fare any better at local level, and that there is no evidence to support the conclusion that a return to a ward system will automatically increase women's representation at local level. As Table 9 clearly shows, there is no substantial difference in the statistics relating to representation of women under a ward-based first-past-the-post system of elections and following the introduction of PR. Indeed as already mentioned, research from other contexts around the world clearly show that elections based on the first-past-the-post system are more, not less disadvantageous to women.

These two bills were published in the Gazette in November 2008 and placed on the order paper of parliament in December 2008. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) subsequently challenged the Local Authorities (Special Provisions) bill in the Supreme Court which ruled that the Bill should be first approved by all Provincial Councils before it is taken up in parliament, as local government is a devolved subject. Since then the Eastern Provincial Council has objected to some provisions of this bill as impacting negatively on the representation of minorities, and it appears that both bills have been put on hold for the moment giving women's organisations another opportunity to put pressure on political parties for a quota during committee stage discussions of these bills, when amendments are possible. This is assuming that all provincial councils will give the go ahead for the proposed reforms and the two bills will be taken up in parliament again at a future date

3.5 Experiments with independent lists

Another strategy tried by women to access political power has been through experimenting with all women independent lists. The Sinhala Tamil Rural Women's Network (STRWN) based in Nuwara Eliya was among the first independent women's group to contest for provincial council elections in 1999. A community-based organization working on issues of poverty alleviation, micro credit, health, education, environment and peace, with a membership of approx. 29,000 members, STRWN decided to contest elections mainly to address the marginalization and pauperization of vegetable cultivators in the area, but failed to win a single a seat.

Rural women network aims to ensure violence free polls

by Ranga Kalansooriya

Daily News 15-07-98 (handwritten annotation)

The main aim to contest the forthcoming elections as an independent group was to call upon all citizens to ensure a violence free election, Vimali Karunaratne of the Sinhala Tamil Rural Women Network (STRWN) said.

The Nuwara Eliya based STRWN, the first NGO to face polls, has forwarded its nomination list comprising 18 females and four men to contest the Central Provincial Council from the Nuwara Eliya District. Ms. Karunaratne is the group leader.

They also aim to call upon all political parties to include more women candidates on their lists and also call upon all voters to give preference to candidates who address women's issues, she said.

Responding to a question she said that they do not need much funds to campaign for the polls. "More funds will be needed if we were new to the community. But during the past ten years we were engaged in a series of community development and social welfare activities. We are not a new group to the people of the Central Province especially of the Nuwara Eliya District. We will campaign house to house," she said.

When asked about the reason to include four men in an independent women's list she said that it was done with the objective of winning male votes. "Not only that, these male youths were from under-privileged classes". We wanted them to be represented too", Ms. Karunaratne added.

Postponement of PC polls would be a violation of fundamental rights, she said. "We will campaign for early elections".

. Dr. Sepali Kottegoda of the Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum said that they are engaged in a dialogue with other political parties, especially to educate them over the main issues of the STRWN. "The STRWN will urge the voters to cast their votes only to the party. We will not ask for preference votes", Dr. Kottegoda said.

Daily News 15th July 1998

This was also the fate of two other independent women's groups which contested the Colombo Municipal Council elections in 2002 and the Kurunegala Pradeshiya Sabha in 2006, respectively.

The independent group of women which contested the Colombo Municipal Council elections in 2002 consisted of 59 women from various backgrounds and professions — migrant workers, clerks, lawyers, computer operators, as well as a dressmaker, a housewife and a cricketer. They were led by Nimalka Fernando, a human rights and women's rights activist and lawyer by profession. Given that many in the group had no prior experience in politics and they had no celebrities on their list, the biggest challenge was to create awareness about their candidacy. Because of the diversity of background and culture within the group, each candidate steered her own campaign. The group's campaign was based on practical proposals and pointing out the campaign flaws of major political parties. Some of the promises made by the group were: establishment of a railway service within Colombo to supplement the public transport system, increasing the amount of 'thriposha' for women, creating disability-friendly buildings and cleaning the poorest and most neglected areas of Colombo (Applewatte, Stacewatte) where living conditions are extremely unsanitary. The group counted on women's votes, and particularly targeted low-income groups for support, but was able to only obtain around 1200 votes. They needed at least 2000 votes to win one seat within the Municipal Council (Senanayake, 2002).

Women contest as an Independent Group

by Uditha Kumarasinghe

Fifty nine women candidates have joined hands as an independent group to contest the Colombo Municipality under the *Orange* symbol at the forthcoming Local Government Election. This would be the first time that a large number of women will be contesting a local government institution as an independent group.

Addressing a news conference Wednesday, Group Leader Attorney at Law Mrs. Nimalka Fernando said the objective of their campaign is to bring women's problems to the political stage and compel the authorities to prepare policies beneficial to women.

She said their candidate list comprises those who have actively engaged in politics and some newcomers. This independent group No.1 represents all segments of women including professionals, women activists, housemaids, unemployed girls and employees in the garment industry ·

sector. Several Tamil candidates are also included in this list.

Mrs. Fernando said: "We have no intention to gain power. This is only a pioneering effort to increase the participation of women in elections. Therefore, this is a symbolic gesture and the political parties will also pay much attention towards this effort. We want to promote this campaign and create a dialogue among society".

She said that the Colombo Municipality is the hub of the country. In this situation, an effective awareness can be made among public to increase women participation in politics by bringing this issue to the national level.

Among the national level suggestions made by this independent group are to provide an opportunity to Sri Lankan women employees in Middle East countries to cast their vote and urge the authorities to appoint a commission to safeguard the rights of the

women who presently work as migrant employees in these countries.

In addition, they will take measures to prevent the amendment of the existing labour laws and intervene to provide a sufficient salary to the Free Trade Zone employees.

"According to statistics, 51 per cent of the total population are women. But at present Parliament is represented only by 10 women. In 1997, women representation in Municipal Councils was only 3.4 per cent, Urban Councils 2.6 per cent and Pradeshiya Sabhas 1.7 per cent."

Attorney at Law Sharmila Daluwatte said women representation should be increased to bring women's problems to the parliament. At present, women politics in Sri Lanka has been restricted to a traditional political framework. If a relation is not engaged in politics, there is no possibility for a woman to contest an election.

Daily News, 1st March 2002

Again in 2006, an independent group of women contested the Kurunegala Pradeshiya Sabha. The group comprised 26 Sinhalese women and one Muslim woman, many of whom held

leadership positions within community-based organizations and who were involved in community work at the village level. L. P. Malini, the leader of the group, a war widow, was a member of the UNP and had actively worked for the party since 1989, including during the JVP troubles. She had requested for nominations to contest for elections for the 2002 local government elections. The party had first agreed to give her nominations, but later rejected her request. Disillusioned with party politics, she led this group which developed its own vision for the Kurunegala Pradeshiya Sabha and a comprehensive manifesto which focused on:

- The need for women's representation in political institutions and in political decision making processes to change the political culture of this country, including the levels of violence, excessive inter party and intra party competition and corruption;
- The need to focus on local issues and priorities which women have an understanding of, such as water and sanitation, health clinics, crèches, public toilets, parks, sports grounds, roads and lighting (within the power and authority of the local council rather than abstract national level issues which tend to dominate local level election campaigns as well);
- The need for employment generation in the area; and
- Management of funds and efficient administration.

Kurunegala Independent Women's Group, Campaign Leaflet, 2006

The Group's campaign received the support of two national level organizations, the Women and Media Collective (WM) and the National Peace Council as well as the Women's Resource Centre based in Kurunegala. WMC provided financial support, facilitated media coverage, and provided valuable input into developing the campaign, while several women of this group had also received training and financial assistance from the National Peace Council. The group which conducted a house to house campaign appealed for at least one vote from each household to be given to a woman in their group, but was unable to win a single seat.

An all women group affiliated to the National People's Party (NPP) is the only independent women's group to contest at the parliamentary level. The NPP, a relatively new party at the time, decided to support the group's intention to contest the 2004 parliamentary elections as

a women's group with a list of 23 candidates for the Colombo district. The group polled 1,273 votes, coming in sixth among 28 parties. Although this was insufficient to win them a single seat, it was considered a symbolic victory by the group.

All female party to the fore in Colombo

A group of women wanting to give credence to the old adage "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" have come together to become the first all female set of candidates to submit nominations to contest a parliamentary election in Sri Lanka's electoral history.

The women, led by attorney-at-law Sharmila Daluwatte, will contest under the National People's Party banner in the Colombo district.

The 23 candidates include four lawyers, five university students, one retired teacher, three housewives, an architect and a Middle East returnee. The motivating factor behind their election aspiration is to draw attention to the problems faced by women who make up around 50 per cent of the voting population but are sorely under-represented in elected bodies at both local and national level.

"We are using this election as a platform to speak out on problems that are faced by women but are totally ignored," Ms. Daluwatte said in an interview with The Sunday Times.

Among the issues will be a call to repeal outdated pieces of legislation that are discriminatory towards women and the enactment of new laws that will benefit and protect women who make up the backbone of the country's working in the estate and garment sectors and also make up the bulk of the migrant workers.

One area to which they attach specific importance is the voting right for migrant workers. "There are around 800,000 local women working overseas and they are faced with many problems. If they had voting rights, they at least will have some bargaining power, which will force the rulers to address their problems", Ms. Daluwatte said.

The pioneering women also want to pave the way for more females to enter the political mainstream and not be intimidated by the prospects of being in public life. "Almost all the women in Sri Lankan politics today either have a dead husband, brother or father behind them. We want to bring in women who can come in their own right and speak up for the women of the country," she said.

She added that unfortunately today women are used by political parties only as sidekicks for political propaganda and the few who are elected do not exercise enough clout to introduce women friendly legislation or speak out on women's issues.

Although Sri Lankan women have enjoyed universal franchise since 1931, before many of their compatriots in the South Asian region, and even before many in the western world, the number of women elected to local bodies is the lowest for the region.

Sri Lankan women make up less than two per cent of the elected members in local bodies as against over 30 per cent in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and 20 per cent in Nepal. The situation is equally bad at both the provincial council level as well as at a national level even though literacy among females is as high as among men.

"Although Sri Lankans boast of having the world's first woman Prime Minister and now a woman President as well, no women can walk on the street after eight in the night, they can't go in a bus without being harassed and now they are not even safe in their own homes. Widowed and divorced women are looked down upon despite the fact that many thousands have been widowed because of the war and they have become the sole breadwinners of the family. We have to change this and allow women to live in dignity", Ms. Daluwatte said.

The four lawyers. From left: Sharmila Daluwatte, Renuka Priyadarshani, Sandya Ramanayake and Saumya Amaratunge. Pics by Athula Devapriya

Sunday Times, 23rd February 2004.

Independent women's lists in Sri Lanka, have therefore not been successful. The conclusion made by many candidates within these groups is that women's efforts to independently contest elections even at the local level are hampered by a political culture which does not recognize the legitimacy of such groups over established political parties (if you vote for anybody else other than one of the major parties, it is equivalent to throwing your vote away). Furthermore, as long as national level issues dominate local level politics, women candidates whether contesting through independent lists or through political parties will find it difficult to appeal to the electorate. There is also the fact that women voters themselves do

not necessarily vote for women candidates.

3.6 Interventions at the level of political culture

A few women's organizations have attempted or are attempting to take a more bottom up approach to the problem of under representation by addressing and tackling the political culture itself. Below, three initiatives which fall into this category are discussed.

The GROW Project. The GROW project implemented by CENWOR, MWRAF, AGROMART and Sarvodaya between 2002 and 2004 in partnership with the Northern Illinois University (NIU) based in the USA sought to develop a learning community in four villages chosen by each organization, which could share ideas and resources with grassroots women to stimulate and build their leadership capacities and strengthen women's active participation in grassroots democracy. Each village was conceived as a model village linked to the four partner NGOs and as field laboratories of grassroots democracy. The idea was to field test and implement major concepts, important principles, characteristics, and processes associated with strengthening grassroots democracy. The four model villages selected by the four organizations were: (1)- Karanwila Model Village, Akmeemana, Agromart Foundation (2) Pompakele Model Village, Ratnapura District, Sarvodaya Women's Movement (3) Atara Model Village, Monaragala District Centre for Women's Research (4) Udayapuram Model village, Sammanthurai, MWRAF (Campbell 2004).

At the outset of the project, the implementing partners identified 30 characteristics of a democracy that should be visible at the village level. This was an outcome of a visioning exercise/needs assessment activity that was carried out at the very beginning stage of the GROW project. It was agreed that at the end of the project period, the model villages should demonstrate as many characteristics as possible from this list of 30 characteristics. These characteristics were closely linked to the enhancement of rural women's capacities to make decisions that are critical to improve their quality of life in the communities they live (see Annex 19). These were later prioritized to the following five major characteristics or goals: [12]

- Community members are mobilized and are able to participate in community life and make joint decisions, including playing a major role in securing basic services such as water, roads, sanitation, and proper nutrition.
- ·Women are taking leadership positions in grassroots societies such as Gramodaya, DDS, Sanasa, ultimately leading to political positions in Pradeshiya Sabhas.
- ·Community members are involved in income generating activities, have access to needed information to start such enterprises, are economically empowered and have improved the quality of life of their families.
- ·Communities have established watch groups to monitor violence against women, alcoholism in the community, children's access to education, prevalence of bribery and corruption and similar issues.
- ·Community members live in a harmonious civil society enabling the government

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[12] The results of these interventions have not been assessed by this exercise.

and people to be accountable and transparent in their work (Campbell 2004).

Women and Media Collective. Women and Media Collective is currently working in three districts with locally based women's organizations to build women's capacity to contest local government elections through an innovative approach. The programme's immediate focus is on good governance at the local level. Under this programme, women's groups are involved in observing and assessing the work of selected local government bodies, establishing a dialogue between local government representatives and local communities, especially women, and increasing women's knowledge of local government through practical and hands on initiatives. The programme is in its 2nd year with 25 women involved in the observation of 14 local councils. Initially, the councillors were extremely hostile to these women, but gradually the presence of women as silent observers of local government proceedings are being accepted. The women are gaining in confidence and are keen to continue the observation activities. How far this approach can translate to increased representation is yet to be seen.

Viluthu, Center for Human Resource Development. Viluthu is working to empower women as citizens who are aware of their rights and who are able to claim their rights within their communities. Viluthu facilitates the forming of study circles comprising 5-10 women at the community level. They are conceived as safe and serious forums where women within their own localities can meet once a week to read and discuss any issue of concern to them. In addition to reading books/articles of their own choice, these groups are also provided with simple publications by Viluthu.

It was not possible to assess the effectiveness of the initiatives described above as part of this stocktaking exercise. To be effective, initiatives such as those discussed above would have to be sustained in the long term; otherwise any gains they make may be easily reversed.

3.7 Networking
Increasing women's political participation and representation is the objective of several women's network that exists today. Mothers and Daughters of Lanka, one of the oldest women's networks functioning in Sri Lanka has 28 organizations and six individual women. The Central Province Women's Voice is a network of civic, political and economic women leaders from the Central Province, which is working together to create their own power bases by connecting women leaders in the Central Province. TEAM 1325 is a group of women from 25 districts who are taking the lead to implement UNSC Resolution 1325 in Sri Lanka, including increasing the representation of women in politics.

3.8 International advocacy before the CEDAW Committee
Women's groups have also raised the issue of under representation of women in political bodies in Sri Lanka before the CEDAW Committee. In 2001, women's organizations led by

CENWOR, with technical assistance from IWRAW Asia Pacific prepared an alternative NGO report prior to the consideration of Sri Lanka's third and fourth combined reports under CEDAW. Although Articles 7 and 8 which refer to non-discrimination in public and political life was not dealt with in the shadow report, representatives of NGOs who gave oral evidence before the Committee when Sri Lanka's report was being considered in February 2002, did take up this issue. As a result, the CEDAW Committee in its concluding comments urged the state to take all necessary measures to increase the representation of women in politics and public life at local, provincial and national levels including through the implementation of temporary special measures. While the NCW and Women's organizations have been lobbying for a quota in the years since then, CEDAW is often not used in these lobbying efforts.

4. Ideas/Proposals for Future Activism

On the basis of the documentation and analysis that was undertaken as part of this study, this section of the study, will put forward an inventory of ideas/proposals that may be considered to address the barriers faced by women interested in pursuing a career in politics. Earlier in this study the barriers and obstacles to women's political participation and representation were recognized as operating at three different levels —at the personal level, at the political party level and at the level of the electorate. While strategies to increase women's representation need to necessarily address the barriers at all these three different levels, the ideas and proposals discussed below are more focused at the level of the political party and at the level of the electorate. Some of these proposals draw on the experiences of other countries and international best practices.

In considering ideas, proposals and strategies to increase women's representation in political institutions in Sri Lanka, it must be recognized that there is only so much that civil society, women's organizations and even the National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Women's Rights can do. Some of the work that is necessary —has to happen from within political parties and this requires party women and men to mobilize themselves and advocate from within.

4.1 Advocacy on a quota

Since 2003, the demand for a quota for women in Sri Lanka has been linked to the electoral reforms process, particularly at local government level. In a situation where the proposed legislation to amend the system of elections is silent on a quota, but has been put on hold pending authorization from all provincial councils, women's organizations have another opportunity to put pressure for a quota during committee stage discussions of the legislation, when amendments are possible, if and when this legislation is taken up for debate in parliament in the future. There appears to be a consensus emerging among a number of activists that what is feasible to demand under the proposed ward system is at least one nomination for a woman out of every five wards in a given local government institution.

However, given the enormous resistance to reservations/quotas, there is a need to mobilize a broad front in support of quotas through a sustained campaign which can put pressure on political parties and policy makers long before these bills are again taken up for debate in Parliament. One to one meetings with key actors within political parties and policy makers to increase their understanding and awareness about the need for quotas should be seriously considered.

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal have taken enormous strides in the recent past to increase women's representation at local level. A South Asian study tour for officials from the major political parties in Sri Lanka could also be considered to provide these officials an

opportunity to see and study the manner in which quotas have been implemented in other parts of South Asia, the political commitment to implement those mechanisms and how these mechanisms contribute to deepening democracy in those contexts. These advocacy efforts need to keep emphasizing and highlighting the fact that the Mahinda Chinthanaya of President Rajapakse clearly makes a commitment to increase the number of nominations of women to a minimum of 25% of the total number of candidates in respect of provincial councils and local government authorities' (p. 14).

There is also a need to strategize on how to take forward the demand for a quota for women at local government level in case advocates for a quota are not successful in incorporating a quota during committee stage discussions or electoral reform is indefinitely postponed by the government. This is a matter of concern which should be anticipated and addressed by those working to obtain a quota for women in local government.

One factor to bear in mind in future is that the way in which the demand for greater representation for women and quotas in political institutions is framed can have a significant bearing on bringing about changes within political institutions and persuading people of its legitimacy. The current discussions on women's representation in political institutions reveal that there is still a lack of understanding about structural impediments to women's equal representation and that appealing to values of substantive equality, democracy, and fundamental rights have had little impact in changing party attitudes towards nominations even at the local level. Appeal to international best practices and to the fact that over 80 countries around the world now implement quotas have also failed to convince policy makers. Civil society as well as the National Institutions for Women may thus need to re-frame their discourse on quotas/reservations in a different language that for example relates them to home grown solutions in order to educate people and gain broader public support for the cause of greater representation for women in the future.

4.2 Advocacy with the two major political parties

According to the findings of this study, there is a huge gap between the public statements of the two major political parties, the UNP and the SLFP, about increasing nominations for women and the number of actual nominations given to women during elections. If these two parties give nominations to more women in areas where they traditionally win, and support the candidacies of those women, more women are likely to be elected to political office in Sri Lanka. Thus parallel to advocacy for a legal quota and until a legal quota becomes a reality, there is a need for sustained lobbying with the two major parties to increase nominations for women in future elections. The strategy adopted by the UK Labour Party in 1997 to give nominations to women in seats where there were retiring male politicians is one way to replace male candidates with female candidates without displacing incumbent male politicians. Both women's organizations and the National Institutions for Women need to maintain a sustained dialogue on this issue with the leadership of the major parties as well as with the women's wings of these parties.

4.3 Evaluation of training programmes and consolidated list of trained women

Training programmes for political leadership have produced a large cadre of women with capacity, confidence, motivation and expectations of getting elected to political office at least at local government level. There is however no proper analyses/reports on the impact of these training programmes. While a few women who have attended programmes may have been elected, even in those cases the causal linkages are not clear. In light of this finding, this study recommends that an evaluation of a few selected training programmes is conducted to obtain a better understanding of the impact of these programmes and the trajectories of the political careers of the women who followed these programmes.

Most of these training programmes have also been limited to the South and women from the Sinhalese community. Women from the other ethnic communities in Sri Lanka face further obstacles in participating in politics. For instance, the socio-cultural barriers to participating in politics are far more entrenched in the Muslim community than within the Sinhala community. More targeted training programmes which take into account the specific challenges of the women from other ethnic communities in Sri Lanka may be necessary. Following a proper evaluation, replication of these training programmes in the North and East should also be considered, given that democratic institutions are now being revived in the East as well as the North. Such programmes should however take into account the specific socio-economic as well as militarized context of the North and East, and the particular challenges facing women in participating in democratic processes.

Furthermore, given that a large cadre of women have already been trained by both government and non government organizations, it would be useful to compile a consolidated database of women who have followed training and capacity building programmes, with the cooperation of all organizations that have been involved in training and capacity building work. Such a database can include personal information, political party affiliations, willingness to contest elections at which level and in which electoral division, etc. It could form the basis for a shortlist of potential women candidates from every district who are serious about pursuing a political career. This list could be used for targeted support of those women and for focused lobbying with political parties to get more women included in nominations lists in the future, particularly at the forthcoming local government elections scheduled for 2010.

4.4 Financial support for women candidates

Access to and availability of resources is critical for women in their own decision to run for elections, in getting nominations and also in getting elected. In all of the interviews with women from political parties the enormous costs of contesting elections, the lack of adequate funds and the problems women have in raising money for elections emerged as a huge obstacle. If we are serious about addressing the under representation of women in political institutions, financial support for potential women candidates has to become a priority. However, the modalities of such a fund will have to be discussed at length.

In developed countries of the west, membership based women's networks such as the EMILYs [13] List, and the WISH List in the USA as well as the EMILY's List in Australia have mobilized campaign funds for women candidates of particular parties, provided they satisfy certain criteria. EMILY's List founded in 1984 in the USA is a network to raise money for pro-choice democratic female candidates. The network has over 100,000 members across the country and is designed to provide its members with information about candidates and encourage them to write cheques directly to the candidates. It has raised over 100s of millions of dollars and helped to elect hundreds of pro-choice Democratic women to federal office, state legislatures, state constitutional offices, and other key local offices. The WISH List, which stands for Women in the Senate and House, raises money to identify, train, support and elect more Republican women leaders who are pro-choice to public office at all levels of government. The way it works is that WISH identifies promising pro-choice Republican women candidates, examines each candidate, campaign organization and race, and introduces viable contenders to its members through profiles and urges WISH members to contribute to at least two WISH-endorsed candidates per election cycle. WISH holds events from small 'living room groups' to large receptions throughout the U.S. to benefit the WISH List and its candidates. EMILY's List in Australia which works in a similar way is a political network formed to increase the number of women Labor parliamentarians who are willing to support the crucial issues of childcare, equal pay, and pro choice.

The above examples are all partisan funds linked to political parties which raise funds among the public and available only to party women on the basis of the policies that they promise to pursue if elected. What possibility is there of setting up such a fund in Sri Lanka? Can women linked to the two major political parties in Sri Lanka take the initiative to set up such funds? How would funds be raised? How would they be administered?

Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN) provides a different kind of example of raising money in a poor developing country for political empowerment. COWAN is one of the largest civil-society organizations in Nigeria covering approximately 32 states in the country with at least 260,000 registered members based largely in the Southwest of the country. The organization focuses on economic empowerment, reproductive health and social empowerment, sustainable agriculture and increasing political participation. COWAN's mobilization strategy for political empowerment revolves around a home grown political awareness model tagged "The One Hundred Women Working Group". In each local government area which comprises ten electoral wards, COWAN ensures that a member from each ward is involved in co-coordinating ten other members. The "One Hundred Women Working Group" so identified becomes the arrowheads for reaching out to others in tens. The scheme which started in 1997 in Ondo state has 1,300 active members. Each member contributes a token sum of 10.00 Naira per day into a trust fund for economic

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[13] The name EMILY's List is an acronym for "Early Money Is Like Yeast," from the common political saying, "Early money is like yeast, because it helps to raise the dough."

empowerment and political activities. The financial commitment of these grassroots women provide a pool of 13,000 Naira daily, 390,000 Naira monthly and 4,680,000 Naira in a year. The Fund called the "Women's Political Participation and Development Fund" (WOPOPADEF) is set aside to fund any woman political aspirant for elective office. Every member has equal access to credit from the fund. This is to enable financially handicapped aspirants to pay statutory election registration fees, printing of posters, handbills and associated logistics support for door-to-door campaigns. In 1999 and 2003 elections, the loan ceiling was 50,000.00 and 150,000.00 Naira respectively (Ogunleye n.d).

Is there a possibility of duplicating the COWAN model in Sri Lanka? The Women's Bureau is in fact involved in mobilizing grassroots women for economic and political empowerment through its Kantha Karya Samaja network. As at November 2007, there were approximately 6,693 such registered associations with a membership exceeding 120,000 women members. Can the Bureau explore the possibility of a non-partisan political fund along the lines of WOPOPADEF where funds are mobilized through the membership and also disbursed to its own members?

4.5 Mobilizing women voters

Women form half the voting population in any country, and sometimes a little more than half the population, and can have a huge influence on the outcome of elections. In some countries women voters are specifically targeted and mobilized to vote for women candidates. The WOMEN VOTE! strategy used by EMILY's List in the United States tries to mobilize women and minimize the gender gap on the basis of:

- ·Targeting. Through an exhaustive examination of voter rolls and polling data, EMILY's List identifies the best opportunities to mobilize women who are receptive to the Democratic message, particularly those with sporadic voting histories.
- Research. EMILY's List uses sophisticated survey and market research techniques to identify key segments of the female electorate and develop messages that will resonate with them. EMILY's List's national Women's Monitor research, which tracks   the female electorate, is an invaluable resource for the entire Democratic   community for understanding women voters.
- Voter contact. In the weeks leading up to election day, EMILY's List uses phone, mail, broadcast media, email, the Web, instant messaging, and face-to-face campaigning to motivate women voters on behalf of pro-choice Democratic women and Democrats up and down the ticket.

Along with micro-targeting, WOMEN VOTE! uses a proven formula for voter contact called "sandwiching"'. It appears that people remember messages better when they receive phone calls before and after receiving a mail piece. Post-election research showed that women who received "sandwiches"', voted in higher numbers, held sharper perceptions of the candidates for governor, and reported higher support for female candidates.[14]

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[14] http://www.emilyslist.org/candidates/women_vote/

In Sri Lanka, female voter turnout is extremely high. While the female vote may not always be autonomous, at least half the female voting population is voting according to their own free will, without any outside influence (see ICES Kandy Survey, Kiribamune 1999). Can we target this segment of the female voter population to vote for women? While women's groups have undertaken campaigns which appeal to women's vote in the past, these campaigns were limited to a few advertisements running for a few days in the newspapers. This is not sufficient. There is a need for a sustained campaign over months, perhaps even years, to create awareness and change attitudes.

4.6 Interventions to transform the political culture

A major barrier to equal representation of women in political institutions in Sri Lanka is the current political culture, the male model of politics and the lack of internal democracy within political parties. It is necessary to challenge these ideological and practical obstacles to women's representation and claim politics as a domain where both men and women can equally participate. This is a huge challenge, which involves working with political parties as well as voter education and is a task that has to be undertaken by both men and women within political parties with support from civil society organizations. This would involve work at many levels:

- Initiatives to democratize political parties and ensure greater decision making power for women within political parties
- Challenging the male model of politics. Women within political parties need to create a space where they can challenge the male model of politics from within.
- Identifying role models for women's leadership within parties and in communities, who in turn can provide mentoring for political activism that includes support for women's leadership and political skills development.
- Initiating activities which promote a culture of politics based on policies.
- Raising awareness among the general public about the abysmally low levels of representation of women in the country, its development consequences and therefore the need to address this problem as well as the need for more democracy within political parties in Sri Lanka.

4.7 International level advocacy

The Ministry of Women's Empowerment is currently in the process of finalizing Sri Lanka's 5th, 6th and 7th combined report under CEDAW. Parallel to this process independent women's organizations are also preparing a shadow report to be submitted to the CEDAW Committee. The consideration of these reports before the CEDAW Committee will provide another opportunity to raise this issue at the international level and review progress in relation to implementation of concluding comments made by the CEDAW Committee following consideration of Sri Lanka's last report under CEDAW in 2002.

There is also a need to explore other regional/international forums such as SAARC,

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting etc., where this issue can be raised as a critical issue of concern for women in Sri Lanka.

4.8 National Commission for Women

While discrimination on the basis of sex is prohibited by Article 12 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka, a glaring shortcoming of this Article is that its applicability is limited to executive or administrative action. This means that discrimination on the basis of sex by private individuals, and non-State actors including political parties is not covered. Women who feel that they are discriminated against by political parties are therefore unable to make complaints under Article 12.

There has been a discussion in Sri Lanka for over a decade now of the need to convert the National Committee of Women to a National Commission for Women with greater powers including quasi-judicial responsibilities which will allow it to carry out investigations, call for reports, or intervene in any proceedings regarding the infringement or imminent infringement of women's rights; to conduct public inquiries in relation to women's rights, etc. Such a commission will also address the gap in the fundamental rights jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. Draft legislation to establish such a commission was for the first time formulated in 1994 but was not taken forward. The matter was again taken up in February 2004 with the Ministry of Women's Affairs publishing a document titled, '"The Draft Bill on Women's Rights (Sri Lanka)". Once the draft was published, the Ministry called for views on the document from women's organizations and the public. A consultation was also held with women's groups to discuss the Bill further. The general consensus coming out of these consultations was that the Bill was not well conceptualized both in terms of its objectives and the institutional framework it outlined and should therefore be revised. As a result, a small Technical Committee was created to review the Bill and prepare a new draft that could then be finalized for presentation to Parliament. The Draft Bill prepared by the Technical Committee was submitted to the National Committee on Women and the Ministry of Women's Affairs in October 2004. The Bill was approved in November 2004 subject to a few changes, but was again put on hold when some provisions of the bill were deemed to be unconstitutional by the Attorney General's Department. It is learnt that the Legal Draftsman's Department is again in the process of reviewing and revising this bill. The speedy finalization of the Women's Commission Bill will strengthen the efforts to promote and protect women's rights in Sri Lanka, including the efforts to enhance women's participation and representation in politics.

4.9 Gender dis-aggregated data from the Department of Elections

Gender dis-aggregated data is crucial to the analysis of any gender issue and for the purpose of informing policy. In Sri Lanka it has always been a challenge to obtain gender dis-aggregated data in relation to nominations. While nomination forms in Sri Lanka do have a column to specify the sex of the candidate, the Gazette notification of accepted nomination lists at any given election do not generally mention whether the candidates are men or women. This makes it extremely difficult to compile statistics of the numbers of women

who receive nominations. This information is also not on the Elections Department website which post elections results quite efficiently. It is recommended that the Ministry of Women's Empowerment engage with the Department of Elections to put in place a system whereby gender disaggregated data relating to nominations and elections can be easily accessed. [15][14]

4.10 Reaching out to men

If we are to make progress towards gender equality including equal representation for women in political institutions, there is now growing international recognition of the need to work with men and boys. However in practical terms, programming in this area is relatively new and much of the work has focused on prevention of violence against women and health issues. Based on his experience of working with men for gender equality in South Africa, Peacock gives the following advice about working with men:

- Reach out to men as part of the solution rather than as part of the problem;
- Identify men who are allies and engage with them on the issues;
- Highlight and celebrate stories of men who defy gender stereotypes and who demonstrate commitment to gender equality;
- Develop programmes and strategies that are rooted in local communities and build upon cultural strengths;
- Forge alliances and partnerships with organizations and institutions that can influence the attitudes and practices of large numbers of men; and
- Highlight the costs of gender inequality, as well as the benefits of gender equality both for men as individuals, and as members of families and communities (2004).

On the question of increasing women's representation in political institutions in Sri Lanka, there is a crying need to work with men at different levels —the men in political institutions and particularly those elected to parliament, men within political parties as well as fathers, husbands and brothers of women who are interested in doing politics.

4.11 Translations of selected articles and texts into the vernacular languages

Given that that the vast majority of publications on the issue of women and politics are in English there is a need to consider translating into Sinhala and Tamil some significant publications/articles, particularly on the obstacles that women face doing politics and the argument in favour of quotas.

4.12 Networking

While a few networks do exist, networking among the different organizations working to increase women's participation and representation in political institutions seems weak. It

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[15] Nimalka Fernando who contested the local government elections of 2002 also noted that the receipts issued by the Elections Commissioner on payment of the deposit did not have either Miss or Mrs. and that the clerk on receiving their group's elections deposit had to cut off Mr. and write Mrs. by hand! I am not aware whether these receipts have been since modified.

might be useful to bring together all the different organizations which have worked on this issue over the years to share experiences and strategies and to build a consensus voice for the need for affirmative action in Sri Lanka.

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