

Cries of Women in Politics

Quest for Justice

South Asian Regional Unconference
14-15 August 2006
Colombo, Sri Lanka

**Violence against
Women in Politics**

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Foreword

Why women are less represented in politics in South Asia? Are they not interested to participate in or they ignore the prominence of politics and the impact that they can make through the power esteem they attain from it? Is it because politics is a dirty game or leg-pulling, corruption, misconduct are rampant in it. Are other avenues more open to them than politics? Is criminalization of politics or hold of criminal attitude/mafia in politics the cause? Or women are traditionally/socially dominated, so they are passive in political sphere.

Is it because domestic as well as farm works for subsistence are more important for them than politics? Literacy rate and education status of women are very low in South Asia, so they are unaware of the “power” of politics, is it true? Why there are more women involved in student politics, than in the later stage?

These are the questions we presume we know the answers for, but in fact we do not? Nor the answers are so simple. The issues of women’s political participation are yet to become the area of concern for Civil Society including academic researchers, media and professional organizations in this region.

Violence Against Women in Politics Program (VAWIP) has been initiated by SAP I in the year 2006, in a quest of finding answers to these questions following the outcomes of the research study on Women’s Participation in Governance in South Asia conducted under the South Asia Regional People and Policy Program (SARPPP) in 2003. The research revealed that there is discrimination, exploitation, oppression and violence against women in political sectors.

SAP I, as an international organization much concerned on regional issues, has initiated VAWIP based on the premise of addressing the issues of women’s participation in politics and governance. It directly influences the national governments of the SAARC countries particularly in - Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Political system of all South Asian countries is influenced by traditional socio-political norms and discriminatory gender practices and policies. VAWIP program aims

to contribute in creating an enabling environment for establishing democratic practices, for inclusion of women in political decision-making process in South Asia.

The Unconference, *Cries of Women in Politics: Quest for Justice*, was organized under the purview of VAWIP in Colombo on 15-16 August.

Experience and incidences of violence against women in politics are not commonly expressed by politicians due to unavailability of specific forums to address such issues. Academic glimpses, experience sharing and the open dialogue on the incidents of VAWIP by the victim/survivors are essential for building regional perspective on combating VAWIP and bringing people together for solidarity in addressing the issue.

VAWIP program can benefit political women, academics, development workers (working for betterment of the women politicians of South Asia) and women in general. Thus, with the objective of finding out various obstacles faced by the women in politics, the different kinds of violence experienced by them and the best practices they employ to combat such violence and obstacles, the Unconference was organized.

The Unconference also aimed to bring the issues of the women politicians to public and create an environment to enable them to share their experiences with all stakeholders. This report is an outcome of this effort to bring the voices of women in politics to the people. It recounts the experiences shared by women politicians, paper presented by academics, and sharing by other participants.

My heartfelt thanks goes to the entire Unconference participants including leading women politicians from the region, VAWIP team of SAP I, International Board Members of SAP I, Executive Directors and Program Officers of SAP National and partner organizations without whose efforts and dedication this report would not have come out.

Rohit Kumar Nepali, PhD
Executive Director

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Executive Summary

Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP) is a South Asia based regional program executed by South Asia Partnership – International (SAP-International) in collaboration with SAP-Nationals/partner¹. SAP-Bangladesh, SAP-Nepal, SAP-Pakistan, SAP-Sri Lanka, SAP-Canada and Youth for Action-India are the collaborative partners for executing the program within the national territories. VAWIP is supported by Oxfam Novib.

Across South Asian region democracy has been weakened, corruption increased and basic citizens' rights denied. Liberalization/globalization has contributed to increased income inequalities where more privileged groups have been enjoying the fruits of development by controlling the limited resources. The rule of law in South Asia has been widely disregarded and undermined in terms of economic rights and equality to all. Lawlessness plays a dominant role in promoting bad governance in most of South Asian countries. As a result the common people have been deprived of civil liberties, security and economic, social and cultural rights.

Genuine women representation and the participation of under-privileged, religious and ethnic minorities remain abysmally low in the electoral and representative systems. While greater representation of women has been ensured through an indirect party-list system of proportional representation in Pakistan, efforts at bringing gender balance in the representative system have yet to succeed in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. No doubt measures have been taken to reduce the role of money in elections, in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the electoral contests are generally won with money and the coercive power of local elites.

Violence against women (VAW) surpasses class, cultural, geographic, ethnic, national and religious divisions. In other words, this is all-pervading phenomenon that creates a situation where women are devoid of their basic right of living with dignity and self-esteem. In some cases, violence against women may not be quite tangible or perceived easily but is reflected in the state policies and values to justify the mistreatment as a normal feature of everyday life.

¹ In the execution of VAWIP Project, Youth for Action, India is working mutually with the SAP System in Indian perspective, so it is called as partner of SAP System.

Violence against women can also be widely perceived in political spheres. The South Asian countries especially India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh are testimonies to the atrocities women have to bear during elections and the entire electoral process. Sometimes, women are just used as pawns in the hands of the men during the electoral process as it is mandatory, in many of the South Asian countries, that at least 5 per cent women representation should be sought by any political parties to enter into the elections. Rape, misconduct and physical abuses are rampant for women participating in elections. Moreover, her community also considers the woman of a bad character if she participates in politics and stand for elections. This also counts for deplorable level of women participation in politics and the higher echelons of decision-making.

Gender and political participation is still the issue of discussion and of endeavor for greater participation in south Asian context in this 21st century. Though in all countries' constitution have ensured the equal status of all citizens without discrimination of gender in every level of governance, representation of women in political governance at entire level of policy, decision-making remains deplorably low in relation to the counter gender in these countries.

Violence is one of the strong causes that hinder the entire development of women. Women's participation in politics is discouraged due to the repeated incidents of violence either domestic or outdoor. Moreover, even the national governments are reluctant to introduce the mechanism for increasing diverse women's participation in governance.

In this backdrop, Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP) program strives to contribute on creating an enabling environment for establishing democratic practices through inclusion of women in political decision-making process in South Asia.

Overall objective of the VAWIP program is to contribute in creating an enabling environment for increasing women's participation in each and every political position.

The regional Unconference on *Cries of Women in Politics: Quest for Justice* (hereafter referred as Unconference) was organized by SAP-International in collaboration with SAP Sri Lanka at Hotel Mount Lavinia, Colombo, Sri Lanka on 14-15 August 2006 under the purview of the VAWIP Project.

Objectives of the Unconference were following:

- Building regional perspective to combat violence against women in politics (VAWIP)
- Bringing together people for solidarity in addressing the issues of VAWIP

Members of national and provincial level politics, women activists, academics, representatives of CSOs, media and SAP Nationals as well as partners from among the South Asian countries including Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan including Afghanistan and Canada had participated in the Unconference (Detail of all participants is provided in Annex-3).

Women politicians, from diverse levels of politics, from different countries shared their experience of violence and the strategic approaches they had adopted to overcome such violence during their political career. As a result of the Unconference, six strategic methods have been identified as the future direction to combat Violence Against Women in Politics. These directions have been prioritized based on South Asian political context.

1. Overview

1.1 Status of Women in Politics in South Asia

Democracy envisages that legitimacy of the power to make decisions about people's lives, society and their country should be derived from a choice by those who will be affected. Although women share half apportion of the global population, they are excluded from making decisions of their choice. As a result, women at every socio-political level are underrepresented and far removed from the decision-making process, holding merely about 16 percent of the parliamentary seats in the world. Increasing women's participation in politics and securing their access to politics are of particular importance for development and sustainability of any democratic nation. While the debate about enfranchise and participation of women in decision making often focuses on issues of justice, equity and human rights, the representation of women and inclusion of their perspective and experience into the decision making process will inevitably lead to solutions that are more viable and satisfy a broader range of society. There are many challenges for women to attain the decision making positions.

Socio-religious, cultural and economic impediments create difficulties for women to exercise their right to participate in the decision making process in the countries of South Asia. For women, various obstacles remain intact even after they win elections in comparison to their male counterparts. They are disregarded, dominated and excluded while making major decisions in various level of government bodies despite their ability to take up any responsibility.

After more than a decade of declaration of the women's human rights, it is miserable that violation of women's human rights is widespread. Inability of women to come to the forefront and the denial of her basic human rights are the consequence of women's low participation in the decision

making process at both the local and national levels. Even in this 21 century, gender and political participation is still a major concern in South Asia. Although, constitutions of all countries have ensured equal status to all its citizens at all level of governance, equal political participation is still a far fetched vision. Some countries have made provision of 33% reservation for women in the governmental institutions and their local political organizations, yet actual representation of women in politics is low at the national level. Some countries have a little higher degree of local representation; in other it is still even worse. The level of equal political participation without gender based discrimination is only an ideal, the reality of which remains deplorably low at all levels of political participation in comparison to their male counterparts.

Representation of women at national level ranges between 21.64% in Pakistan to 2% in Bangladesh in 2004 (after curtailment of reservation in 2001); at state/province level from 16.9% in Pakistan, to 3.2% in Sri Lanka; and at the local level, the representation of women in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan is 23.31%, 25.97% (over 40% in some of the states in India) and 30.12% respectively, while the representation in Nepal and Sri Lanka is 8.5 and 1.97% respectively. Representation of women in Nepal's House of Representatives was 5.089% in 1999. In Sri Lanka, women member of parliament constitute only 4.44% of the total number of representatives¹ in 2004 and 5.78% in 2006.² Research Section, [Sri Lanka] Parliament Library [November 2006] Original data given in Sinhala Women's representation in parliament of South Asian nations was 8.43% in 2004. There are many reasons behind why women are less represented in the political governance sphere in South Asia.

Violence against women politicians is a general phenomenon in the South Asian context. More so, gender based violence is very prominent in this region and is one of the strong causes that hinder the entire development of women. Although, the South Asian culture reveres women, as the symbol of power and inner strength, the ground reality is a far cry from this belief. Many forms of tortures and trauma are inflicted on women each day. The reason, South Asia being predominantly a patriarchal society, suppression of women and their identity, their confinement to household

¹ Reviving Democracy; the Emerging Roles of Women in Decision Making, A study report conducted by SAP-I, 2003

² Research Section, [Sri Lanka] Parliament Library [November 2006] Original data given in Sinhala

work and their exclusion from decision making at household, local and national levels are all basis of exclusionary practices. Women thus inclined to participate in politics and decision making are threatened using various means of coercive actions. Violence Against Women in Politics encompasses not only physical violence and also mental trauma but also any other acts of offense inflicted upon women, by any person, society or organizations, to discourage them from entering or continuing in politics. It may be at home, at the societal level, within the political party or outside the party.

Despite such widespread acts of violence against women inclined towards politics, the national governments are reluctant to introduce a mechanism to reduce such violence and increase women's participation in governance. Hence, the civil society organizations' initiative on this crucial issue has been imperative.

SAP International has a special place in South Asia vis-à-vis its regional cooperation. It has held regional events, which facilitated the coalition of progressive South Asian CSOs working on a range of development issues. SAP International considers good governance and participative democracy at all levels, local, national and global as the most important factors in responding to the needs of the people, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Effective participation of the poor and marginalized, especially women, in the local government and devolution of the powers and resources are at the central point in its area of intervention. To create an enabling environment and increase women's political participation in the South Asian region, SAP international has initiated a program on "Violence Against Women in Politics" which is focused on identifying the challenges faced by women prior to and during their political participation. To spread the voices of the women politicians to the masses and to make all aware, "Cries of Women in Politics: Quest for Justice", an unconference was held. The unconference also aimed to bring the issues of the women politicians to public and create an environment to enable them to share their experiences with all stakeholders. This report is an effort to bring the voices of the women in politics to the people. It recounts the experiences shared by women politicians, paper presented by academics, and sharing by other participants.

1.2 Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP) Program

Across South Asian region democracy has been weakened, corruption increased and citizens' basic rights denied. Liberalization/globalisation has contributed to increase income inequalities where more privileged groups have been enjoying the fruits of development by controlling the limited resources. Rule of law in South Asia has been widely disregarded and undermined in terms of economic rights and equality to all. Lawlessness plays a dominant role in promoting bad governance in most of South Asian countries. As a result the common people have been deprived of civil liberties, security and economic, social and cultural rights.

Inadequacy of the governance process constitutes a major threat to the development of South Asia. The common causes of this crisis of governance are the decay of political parties and democratic institutions; venality of the ruling elite and their indifference to the common will; resistance to devolution and devolution of powers to the people; suppression of minorities; pervasive electoral process; and the nexus between criminals and corrupt bureaucrats, politicians and businessmen. This is a crisis of governance in all the South Asian countries: the disparity among the people of various social strata is not only of scale, but it has also resulted in deterioration of the administrative systems in the States and human development in the entire region.

Women's equitable representation and the participation of underprivileged, religious and ethnic minorities remain abysmally low in the electoral and representative systems. While greater representation of women has been ensured through an indirect party-list system of proportional representation in Pakistan, efforts at bringing gender balance in the representative system have yet to succeed in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. No doubt measures have been taken to reduce the role of money in elections, in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the electoral contests are generally won with money and the coercive power of local elites.

Violence against women (VAW) surpasses class, cultural, geographic, ethnic, national and religious divisions. In other words, this is all-pervading phenomenon that creates a situation where women are devoid of their basic right of living with dignity and self-esteem. In some cases, violence against women may not be quite tangible or perceived easily but is reflected in the state policies and values to justify the mistreatment as a normal feature of everyday life.

Violence against women can also be widely perceived in political spheres. The South Asian countries especially India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh are testimonies to the atrocities women have to bear during elections and the entire electoral process. Sometimes, women are just used as pawns in the hands of men during electoral process as it is mandatory, in many of the South Asian countries, that at least 5 per cent women representation should be sought by any political parties to enter into the elections. Rape, misconduct and physical abuses are rampant for women participating in elections. Moreover, her community also considers the woman of a bad character if she participates in politics and stands for elections. This also accounts for deplorable levels of women participation in politics and at the higher echelons of decision-making.

Gender and political participation is still the issue of discussion and of endeavor for greater participation in South Asian context in this 21 century. Though, in all countries, constitutions have ensured the equal status of all citizens without discrimination of gender in every level of governance, the representation of women in political governance at all levels of polity remains deplorably low in comparison to males in these countries.

Violence is one of the strong causes that hinder the entire development of women. Women's participation in politics is discouraged due to repeated incidents of violence either domestic or outdoor. Moreover even the national governments are reluctant to introduce the mechanism for increasing diverse women's participation in governance.

Following means or causes of violence to the women participating in politics have been identified:

- Character assassination, slander and violence discourages women entering into the politics and more continuing the entrance;
- Lack of political awareness on women's rights among the women is major aspect that hinders them to be in politics;
- Social and cultural norms within patriarchal system prescribes subordinate role for women in every decision-making;
- Inferior economic status and unequal access to education creates stumpy access to independent financial resources to women whereas, the education is essential to bring confidence and to subsist as the part of politics;
- Identification of politics as a dirty game and home of bribery as well as leg pulling practice among the politicians prevent women to participate because the women are regarded as the symbol of gentleness and love.

1.2.1 Rationale of VAWIP

VAWIP program is based on the premise of addressing the regional issue of women's participation in politics and governance. It directly influences the national governments of the SAARC countries; Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Political system of all the South Asian countries is influenced by the traditional socio-political norms and discriminatory gender practices and policies. WAVIP program aims to contribute to creating an enabling environment for establishing democratic practices, for inclusion of marginalized women in political decision-making process, in South Asia.

It is understandable that experience of violence against women in politics is not commonly expressed by the politicians due to unavailability of specific forums like this one to address such issues. Academic glimpses, experience sharing and the open dialogue on the incidents of VAWIP by the victim/survivors are essential for building regional perspective on combating VAWIP and bringing people together for solidarity in addressing the issue.

The VAWIP program can benefit political women, academics, development workers (working for betterment of the women politicians of South Asia) and women in general. Thus, with the objective to find out the various obstacles faced by the women in politics, the different kinds of violence experienced by them and the best practices they employ to combat such violence and obstacles, the Unconference was organized.

1.2.2 Objectives of VAWIP

In this scenario, VAWIP project strives to contribute in creating an enabling environment for establishing democratic practices through inclusion of diverse groups of women in political decision-making process in South Asia.

Specifically, promotion of quantitative as well as effective participation of diverse groups of women in politics and accountability and transparency among political parties in South Asia are the issues identified as the major thrust of the project.

1.2.3 Expected Results of the Unconference:

- Formation of platforms to share experiences and combat violence against women in politics at community, national as well as the regional levels,
- Development of a common agenda for initiation of collaborative efforts for increasing women's effective participation in all political positions and dealing with VAWIP, and
- Creation of a strong network among people and organizations working on the issues of VAWIP within South Asian nations including Afghanistan.

2. Unconference

The regional Unconference on *Cries of Women in Politics: Quest for Justice* (hereafter referred as Unconference) was organized by SAP-International in collaboration with SAP Sri Lanka at Hotel Mount Lavinia, Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 14-15 August 2006 within the purview of the VAWIP Project.

2.1 Objectives of the Unconference

Two major objectives of the Unconference were:

- To build regional perspective for combating Violence against Women in Politics (VAWIP)
- To bring together people for solidarity towards addressing issues of VAWIP

Expected results of the Unconference were:

- Formation of platforms to share experiences and combat violence against women in politics at community, national as well as the regional levels,
- Development of a common agenda for the initiation of collaborative efforts for increasing women's effective participation in all political positions and dealing with VAWIP, and
- Creation of a strong network among people and organizations working on the issues of VAWIP within the South Asian nations including Afghanistan.

2.2 Inaugural Session

The Unconference was formally inaugurated collectively by all respected participants of the program by lighting the oil lamp. Ms. Bushra Gohar, Dr. Padma Ratnayake, Hon. Chitra Lekha Yadav, Mr. Nasreen Awan, Hon. S. Swarna Lata Sudhakar Reddy, Ms. Vasanthi Rajendran, Ms. Indrani Sugathadasa and Ms. Upulangani Malagam were the persons to light the inaugural lamp.

Hon. Swarna Sudhakar, Member of Legislative Assembly, India; Hon. Chitra Lekha Yadav, Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, Nepal and Ms. Indrani Sugathadasa, Secretary, Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Social Welfare, Sri Lanka; Bushra Gohar, Chairperson of SAP I and Dr. Rohit Kumar Nepali, Executive Director of SAP I; addressed the inaugural session.

Bushra Gohar, Chairperson of SAP I, highlighted on recent initiatives of SAP I including various challenges faced during the process while Dr. Rohit Kumar Nepali, Executive Director of SAP I, highlighted the objectives of the program.

Common issues and concerns raised during the inaugural session include; reservation of seats for women at the local, provincial and national level elections to encourage women's participation in decision making in South Asian countries. For this, a regional task force could be



created among the politicians, women's rights activists, lawyers, journalists, law enforcing authorities and civil society members for pressurizing the national governments continuously until the provisions are guaranteed in national laws. During elections, competent women should be encouraged to stand for the free seats and others should be privileged in the reserved seats.

Entire South Asian political system is victimized by the feudal culture of decision-making process. For example; in Sri Lanka tenants, house workers and close relatives of the politicians (male) in power previously were forcefully co-opted in most of the reserved seats. That resulted in no any changes in decision making process and the decisions as well. Those women were pressurized to speak voice of the feudalistic politicians and similar decisions were made. Such reservation practice doesn't make any sense. This trend should be minimized by the same strategy of encouraging the strong and competent women to stand in elections and other encouraged through the reservation.

Regarding violence against women in politics, South Asian social and cultural practice holds back them to spell out on and about the violence and fear of re-victimization hinders them take any legal actions against the perpetrators. Therefore, right based regional awareness and capacity building programs should be launched by Civil Society organizations. Further, they expressed their hope that SAP International will certainly initiate the work in this issue with the present or any other donor support.

Different capacity building programs to the women in politics are anticipated as it is difficult to come across with the qualitative women politicians in the very beginning. Long term and short term based capacity building programs could produce qualitative strong and dynamic women leaders. An extensive education policy should be formed to avoid this social evil. In addition, not only in university but also in school level education, the issue of VAWIP should be included in the syllabus.



Ms. Bushra Gohar gave the vote of thanks to the entire Unconference participants. She further expressed her heartfelt thanks to the leading women politicians, Hon. Indrani Sugathadasa, Secretary, Ministry of Women's Empowerment, Sri Lanka; Hon. Chitra Lekha Yadav, Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, Nepal; Hon. Swarna Sudhakar, Member of Legislative Assembly, India and Ms. Nasreen Awan, Member District Council, Pakistan. She closed the inaugural session wishing every success for the Unconference in achieving its targeted results.

2.3 Participants's

Members of national and provincial level politics, women activists, academics, representatives of CSOs, media persons and the representatives of SAP Nationals as well as partners from among the South Asian countries - Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan including Canada had participated in the Unconference (Detail of all participants is provided in Annex-3).

Women politicians, from diverse levels of politics, from different countries shared their experiences of violence and the strategies they had adopted during their political career. Similarly, the women activists, academics and representatives of different institutions shared the experience of various women politicians and the incidents of violence in their area of operation.



Other participants also shared lots of incidents of VAWIP and almost all participants voiced their observations at the open dialogue session.

2.4 Prioritized Directions

Six strategic methods have been identified as the future direction to combat Violence Against Women in Politics in the Unconference. These guiding principles have been prioritized based on South Asian political context. The prioritized directions are as below;

1. Collection and dissemination of information on violence against women in politics at national and regional level,
2. Trainings, exposure visits, interaction programs to build the capacity of women in politics and to carry out research works,
3. Empowerment through financial boost up to compete in the elections including building their capacity,
4. Creation of a platform to establish linkages among international, national, and local level organizations for pressurizing and lobbying for formulation of legal provisions for bringing women into local and national level politics in a significant number (minimum of 33%),
5. Develop a coordinating system of cooperation within the civil society organizations.

2.5 Methodology

Open space technology was applied as the methodology to conduct the Unconference. Basic principle of open space technology is “a sum of the expertise of the people in the audience is greater than the sum of expertise of the people on the stage.” Emergence of Unconference has started with the belief that audiences are also key experts than the smart people on the stage and they should be valued.

In terms of participation, hall setting and other external preparation of the program it was like most of other conference. However it was called Unconference because in the traditional methodology of conducting conference it is more based on the different presentations before the participants, more formal mechanisms adopted and the presenter always treated as an expert whereas the participants treated as listener/learners. This is in fact hard for the participants and sometimes difficult to get the real feedback from them. The participants are not treated as the contributor only but considered as the expert in their respective field.

No one is the expert and no one is the learner. All persons are of equal value and importance and every one is the expert in her/his area and in the ideas created and expressed. Further, every one is learner before the other's idea. This Open Space Technology is basically concerned to materialize this thought into a leaving reality.

In this Open Space methodology, first of all the facilitator puts a question regarding the issues concerned. Each and every participant is allowed to post an idea in a meta-card and place it in a market place.¹ Then the idea initiator starts to create the market just like a producer intends to create higher selling value of his products. Different ideas posted in the market place are kept in different time slots.



After that, different discussions start based on the ideas posted in the wall/market place at the same time. Idea initiator is responsible to encourage his group to contribute in the discussion however there will be a facilitator in each discussion group from the logistic team. Maximum 20 minutes is the time allotted for the discussion to each group.

¹ The market place was created on the wall of the conference hall. A graphic table was made on wall by the help of colorful tapes to post each idea separately in the allotted time frame.

3. Voices to Stop Violence Against Women in Politics

3.1 Regional Reflections on the Issue

Common concerns highlighted during the interaction by participants¹ from South Asia including Afghanistan and Canada focused on the provision for reservation of seats for women at the local, provincial and national elections to encourage women's participation in decision making in South Asian countries. For this, a regional task force could be created among the politicians, women's rights activists, lawyers, journalists, law enforcing authorities and civil society members for pressurizing the national governments continuously, until and unless the provisions are guaranteed in national laws. During elections, competent women should be encouraged to stand for the free seats and others should be privileged in the reserved seats.

Entire South Asian political system is victimized by the feudal culture of decision making. For example; in Sri Lanka tenants, domestic laborers and close relatives of the former male politicians in power were co-opted in most of the reserved seats. That resulted in no changes in decisions making process and decisions as well. The women were pressurized to speak the voice of the feudalistic politicians and similar decisions were made. Such reservation practice doesn't make any sense. This trend should be minimized by the same strategy of encouraging the strong and competent women to contest elections and other women should partake through the reservation.

The recent violence Deputy Speaker of House of Representatives of Nepal Hon. Chitra Lekha Yadav has undergone came as an example, which can be signified as a

1 Hon. Swarna Sudhakar, Member of Legislative Assembly, India; Hon. Chitra Lekha Yadav, Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, Nepal and Hon. Indrani Sugathadasa, Secretary, Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Social Welfare, Sri Lanka.....

psychological violence against her. While the democratic government was thrown to the street by King Gyanendra and the parliament was running on the open street, she was accepted as the speaker of the house by all the major seven political parties in coalition and further they had announced that she will be nominated as speaker of the house as and when the reinstatement of parliament will be announced. However, after the reinstatement of parliament when the time came for reinstatement she was deprived of that position and a male counterpart was nominated with the argument that at the transitional phase of governance it will be very hard to control over the situation by a woman.



Regarding the violence against women in politics, South Asian social and cultural practice holds them back to spell out on and about the violence. The fear of re-victimization hinders them to take any legal actions against the perpetrators. Therefore, right based regional awareness and capacity-building programs should be launched by the Civil Society organizations. Further, they expressed their hope that SAP International will certainly initiate work in this issue with the present or any other donor support.

Different capacity building programs are crucially needed to the women in politics as it is difficult to come across with the qualitative women politicians in this very beginning. Long term and short term based capacity building programs could produce qualitative strong and dynamic women leaders. Women politicians are spectator cum victims of the different types of superstitions within South Asia. An extensive education policy should be formed to avoid this social evil. In addition, not only in university but also in the school level education, the issue of VAWIP should be included in the syllabus.

First and foremost a regional level study on VAWIP should be conducted to identify major problems hindering women's involvement in political governance and at the decision making levels. Therefore, a strong database system could be created.

Acceleration of armed violence in Sri Lanka after infiltration of arms from the North has been the concern of all, especially the Sri Lankan participants². Urgency to solve the problems created from easy access to arms on the streets like grocery has been highlighted. This has affected the elections increasingly especially against women in politics. Some exemplary cases of violence experienced by Sri Lankan women politicians that included throwing acid on the face of a woman of an opposition party during election campaign were shared at the conference³. Therefore, if people sincerely wish to encourage women to join politics, a conducive environment should be created. Yet, the obstacles like social problems exist, which will take quite a long time to be changed.

However, the idea of quota system for women in politics was opposed⁴, arguing that 99% of women politicians are from political background. It was said, "if we issue a quota system, the quotas will be influenced by their previous political background that will further hinder the representation of qualitative women from non-political background". It was thus recommended the civil society organizations to lobby the political parties for nominating qualitative women candidates.

Many fellow women politicians have been experiencing similar problems of violence as discussed by the participants in the region. They strongly advocated⁵ for women to join politics, as they are better human beings serving the society as a whole. They can thus provide real service to the people if they join politics. Women are used to work with people. Moreover, they can perform equally as well as males in case of critical conditions. In fact, people feel more comfortable sharing their problems with women politicians than with men.

Women politicians normally share their problems with the family members when confronted with career problems, which means that they need to have someone to whom she can rely on. Women should thus create

2 C Nirupa Karunaratne Chief Organizer United National Party, Nawalapitiya, Sri Lanka

3 Nirupa Karunaratne

4 Ms. Karunaratne

5 Upulangani Malagani Provincial Council, Northwestern Province, Sri Lanka

coalition to encourage more women to join politics and also because there are lots of evidences where women themselves have used violence against other women. Many of them had faced such type of violence from women as well as men.

It had been stressed that it is now time for us to come together and join hands to encourage all women involved in politics in the South Asian Region. The women in politics from Sri Lanka are keen to join hands and work together with other women politicians from the region⁶.

South Asian scenario regarding violence against women in politics and the political environment is more or less common in all the countries. Unless monopolized decision making process with super role played by male counterparts is broken down, women cannot achieve tiny in politics⁷.

Democracy is more about process of decision making than the power or the decision itself; however there seems no fair democratic process being adopted by the political parties. The process lies in the hands of chairpersons of the political parties, and his views and working patterns are regarded as the process of the decision making. It is important to develop the culture of a democratic process within the political parties.

It was shared that as a women politician in Nepal they live in a male hegemony, due to which there is prevalence of violence against women in politics. Men leaders often speak in favor of women in public, however in private or in practice they always deny the women in politics and their right to participation. All the women politicians know the difference between right and wrong but are still very reluctant to leave the wrong things behind and follow the right ones. A lot of women do not have the courage to speak against male leaders. Unless women politicians can overcome this hesitation, a peaceful South Asia cannot be created through participation of women in politics. The South Asian Region is the least gender sensitive region in the world in this regard. Yet, if all the women politicians make a commitment to work collectively on this issue, possibilities of positive changes are not far from reach.

The difference in the nature of men and women highlighted with a proverb⁸ that says, “if you want the things only to be promised, ask a man; but if you want things to happen, ask a women”.

⁶ Upulangani Malagam

⁷ Honorable Chitra Lekha Yadav

⁸ Ms. Yadav

It was shared that men perceive politics only as a power game, while for women it is more about using the power and to work for public welfare. Ample proof of discrimination against women politicians can be seen in public forums where there are only men in the decision making instead of including women as well. There is a wrong perception among men that women cannot adopt the political process and make policy decisions. However, presence of capable women politicians seems to threaten their male counterparts. In this context an example of Alexander The Great was cited, i.e. once when Alexander The Great was passing through a gathering, women did not pay any attention to him. Amazed, he asked them why so to him, after all he was such a great conqueror. The group of women answered that one needs to have victory over self and not only over other countries to be a leader? The only quality a person needs, to be a great leader, is to know oneself, be it a man or a woman.



It was opined⁹ that crime against women have been increasing in India, which is certainly reflected on women in politics as well. Progressively, greater numbers of women are becoming victims of different kinds of violence. If one takes into account the unregistered cases, the rate becomes significantly higher and higher. The female literacy rate in India is also very low. The cultural and religious practices enhance the vulnerabilities of women which encourage the violators to commit the violence. Highlighting the current political, social and economic status of women in South Asia, deep concerns and challenges were shared.

Violence against women in politics at the grassroots level is also prevalent. “No confidence” motions are being used by vice chairperson primarily a man to overthrow women chairpersons who assert their control over local body e.g. *panchayats*. Lack of political experience and public skills

⁹ Ms. Vasanti Rajendran

have fettered women's potential. Women have to constantly struggle against conspiracy by men colleagues. Women's participation is hampered by their dependence on their wages, and the fact that they have to carry the burden of household work and survival tasks.

Though women constitute half of the population, they are in minority in the three dimensions of inequality; in class/economic status, in social position and in political power which is purely the injustice. Women's ability to introduce and produce important political processes and decisions has been neglected. Both the political parties and women organizations are paying inadequate attention on political education to women and for their mobilization. Politics and decision making have been closely guarded as men's privileged area, with the male dominated party structure and their insensitivity towards importance of women's involvement in political processes. Owing to a small numerical strength in the legislative assembly and the parliament, women are in a disadvantaged position.

Socio-economic, cultural and political factors hinder woman to entry into politics. Political participation of women is largely interpreted as only the voting right of the women. Majority of women who are actively engaged in politics have come from economically well to do families. A majority of these women have found to have at least one of their close relatives involved in politics.

It was stated¹⁰ that in the local governance of Pakistan, majority of the poor, uneducated women have been enrolled into politics through reservation and quotas which in itself is a great challenge. Further, they belong to the very poor class and are financially dependent on their men. Their economic, social and political development had been neglected. They were given the least opportunities in terms of access to education and livelihood facilities. To make such a cadre of women politically aware and get them actively involved into politics is really a big challenge.

The Pakistani society has a feudal and patriarchal structure, which is embedded at every level of social strata. This is also reflected in almost all social institutions like family, community, religion, media, market and the state as well. The political structures are also feudal since the feudal families are the ruling political elites who also promote patriarchal norms in the society.

10 Ms. Nasreen Awan, Member; District Assembly, Sahiwal, South Punjab, Pakistan

It was emphasized¹¹ that women have to face many hurdles when they enter the political process. Few of the common hurdles they encounter in politics are; not being treated as equal members of the house or the council, highly restricted mobility, humiliation etc. Lack of budget allocation for the development of these women is another major challenge. Similarly, lack of higher education is another problem that especially hinders to lead during trainings and seminars. Apart from these social drawbacks, women in politics also have been subjected to domestic violence by their husbands, brothers and sons increasingly.

Women's participation in Bangladeshi politics has been more stable in the last two decades. The quota system has ensured women's presence in the local government and the National Parliament. Despite many odds and ominous challenges, there is a gradual growing trend of women's political participation. Influence of money and muscle power is the same as in other countries of the region. Although there are only a few women in powerful positions, the total numbers of female members have increased remarkably over the last two decades. Women have a strong potential to be a positive role model for women of all ages in Bangladesh. However, the election manifestos and statutes of different political parties show that there is little emphasis on gender equity in party platforms. Except for some extremist religious parties, all other political parties have women wings. Whenever expected, women politicians are supposed to make remarkable space to give support to general women who face violence, but the sad truth is that most of these women politicians themselves have to face violence at their work place.

It has also been said that the change in general in the status of Women in Politics has been revolutionary. Novel political women are increasing within the every society day to day. Legal development is the next part of affirmative actions by which women rights are guaranteed and equal rights between men and women are enjoyed. Violence against women is treated from an anti-human rights perspective. Such kind of violence is regarded as "the violation of human rights" and a strong mechanism has been developed to prevent it. Cases of physical violence against women have since then been dramatically reduced. Yet, psychological and mental violence somehow still exists within the society. The mandatory provision of at least 13% women representatives in the national parliament is not an affirmative action for their political participation.

¹¹ Ms. Awan

The South Asian perspective is very different than northern perspective and pathetic regarding these issues, which had plagued in these countries. The present movement of NGO/INGOs can be regarded as milestones in the struggle for combating violence against women in politics. Gender inequality is a major drawback in this region. Now the governments of South Asian countries are considering the issues lobbied and advocated by NGO/INGOs positively which is pleasant for these organizations.



Lack of equal status between men and women legally, socially, and culturally are the major impediments in women's political participation in the South Asian Region. Strong advocacy and lobbying should be initiated from the grassroots to the national level to eliminate such kind of unjust practices. For this, regional networking and alliance building will help us to step forward in an organized way to combat the problem of VAWIP.

Participants discussed about general characteristics of VAWIP in South Asian nations. The Unconference discussion specifically centered on and around the three major issues – 1) Pro-poor reforms in the policies of governments pedestal for a prosperous and developed region, 2) Need to materialize social and economic potential and its use for the benefits and collective interests of the people, and 3) Need for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in respective countries of the region to play a crucial role in facilitating the women involved in politics.

The other issues raised in the Unconference included relation between politics and people, women in political governance and platform for collective actions. Participants expressed the opinion that politics determines

the way people live. Hierarchical structure of the society and traditional value led mindset of the people steer the political process. Despite some policy and legal arrangements, women's participation in politics is behind the shadow.

There is a great need to create a regional platform for sharing experiences of violence as well as the coping mechanisms to deal with violence in politics against women. Likewise, enhancing collective actions for change through policy influencing in the South Asian national governments is also needed. Therefore, this Unconference organized by SAP International with the cooperation of SAP Nationals and its partner is certainly meaningful.

3.2 National Voices to stop VAWIP

3.2.1 SRI LANKA

Increased rate and types of violence against women in politics in each and every election

Nirupa Karunaratne¹², while briefing on the background of violence shared about acceleration of armed violence in Sri Lanka after infiltration of arms from the North. Highlighting the emergency of the problem, she said, "Now people can buy arms on the streets like grocery. And each and every election has experienced increased rate and different types of violence against women in politics". She also explained about some exemplary cases of violence experienced by Sri Lankan women politicians.

She further stated, if we can encourage women to join politics, a conducive environment would be created. Yet, the obstacles like social problems exist, which will take quite a long time to be changed.

While Ms. Karunaratne also opposed the idea of the quota system for women in politics, arguing that 99% of women politicians are from political background. So she said, "if we issue a quota system, the quotas will be influenced by their previous political background that will further hinder the representation of qualitative women from non-political background". She thus recommended the civil society organizations to lobby the political parties for nominating qualitative women candidates.-

12 Chief Organizer United National Party, Nawalapitiyab, Sri Lanka



Upulangani Malagam¹³ shared that she too was experiencing similar problems of violence as discussed by other fellow politicians in the region. She strongly advocated for women to join politics, saying “Women have always been doing good for the people, children, family and the society as a whole. They can thus provide real service to the people if they join politics. Women are used to work with people. Moreover, they can perform equally as well as males in case of critical conditions. In fact, people feel more comfortable sharing their problems with women politicians than with men”.

She further added that women politicians like herself normally share their problems with the family members when confronted with career problems, which means that they need to have someone to whom she can rely on. Women should thus create coalition to encourage more women to join politics and also because there are lots of evidences where women themselves have used violence against other women. She herself had faced such type of violence from women as well as men.

She concluded saying, “It is now time for us to come together and join hands to encourage all women involved in politics in the South Asian region. The women in politics from Sri Lanka are keen to join hands and work together with other women politicians from the region”.

13 Provincial Council, Northwestern Province, Sri Lanka

3.2.2 PAKISTAN

Hurdle at the entry into politics

Ms. Nasreen Awan¹⁴ shared experiences as only 17% of the seat is filled by women in the provincial and national assemblies in Pakistan even after more than 58 years of independence of the country and despite the encouraging announcement of 33% women's participation in the local governance. In the local governance, majority of the poor, uneducated women have been enrolled into politics through reservation and quotas which in itself is a great challenge. Further, they belong to the very poor class and are financially dependent on their men. Their economic, social and political development had been neglected. They were given the least opportunities in terms of access to education and livelihood facilities. To make such a cadre of women politically aware and get them actively involved into politics is really a big challenge.

The Pakistani society has a feudal and patriarchal structure, which is embedded at every level of social strata. This is also reflected in almost all social institutions like family, community, religion, media, market and the state as well. The political structures are also feudal since the feudal families are the ruling political elites who also promote patriarchal norms in the society.



¹⁴ Member; District Assembly, Sahiwal, South Punjab, Pakistan

When the announcement for 33% reservation for women candidate was made, all feudal as well as strong women who need not stand over the reserved seats tried to control over. They prepared their housemaids to contest the elections. The other women who contested for these elections were of course doing so because their husbands or brothers were previously involved and wanted to control the decisions through them. In the second round of elections, the situation was better due to mobilization of the civil society organizations.

Ms. Awan emphasized that women have to face many hurdles when they enter the political process. Few of the common hurdles they encounter in politics are; not being treated as equal members of the house or the council, highly restricted mobility, humiliation etc. Lack of budget allocation for the development of these women is another major challenge. Lack of higher education is another problem that especially hinders to lead during trainings and seminars. Apart from these social drawbacks, women in politics also have been increasingly subjected to domestic violence by their husbands, brothers and sons.

3.2.3 NEPAL

Ask a man for things only to be promised, but ask a women same to happen

According to Honorable Chitra Lekha Yadav¹⁵, South Asian scenario regarding violence against women in politics and the political environment is more or less common in all the countries. Without discouraging the women we should accept the truth that it is hard to find out what subject plays a vital role in politics. Male counterpart's role is unseen most of the time. Unless we break down the monopolized decision making process, women cannot achieve tiny in politics.

Democracy is more about process of decision making than the power or the decision itself; however there seems no fair democratic process being adopted by the political parties. The process lies in the hands of chairpersons of the political parties, and his views and working patterns are regarded as the process of decision making. It is important to develop the culture of a democratic process within the political parties.

¹⁵ Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, Nepal



Sharing her experience as a women politician in Nepal, Ms. Yadav said, “We live in a male hegemony, due to which there is prevalence of violence against women in politics. Men leaders often speak in favor of women in public, however in private or in practice they always deny women in politics and their right to participation. All of us know the difference between right and wrong but we still are very reluctant to leave the wrong things behind and follow the right ones. A lot of women do not have the courage to speak against male leaders. Unless we can overcome this hesitation, we will not have a peaceful South Asia created through participation of women in politics. The South Asian Region is the least gender sensitive region in the world. Yet, if we all make a commitment to work collectively on this issue, the possibilities of positive changes are not far from reach.

Ms. Yadav highlighted the difference in the nature of men and women, with a proverb that says, “if you want the things only to be promised, ask a man; but if you want things to happen, ask a women”.

She shared that men perceive politics only as a power game, while for women it is more about using the power and to work for public welfare. Ample proof of discrimination against women politicians can be seen in public forums where there are only men in the decision-making instead of including women as well. There is a wrong perception among men that women cannot adopt the political process and make policy decisions.

However, presence of capable women politicians seems to threaten their male counterparts. Ms. Yadav, in this context cited an example of Alexander The Great, i.e. once when Alexander The Great was passing through a gathering, women did not pay any attention to him. Amazed, he asked them why so to him, after all he was such a great conqueror. The group of women answered that one needs to have victory over self and not only over other countries to be a leader? The only quality a person needs, to be a great leader, is to know oneself, be it a man or a woman.

In the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990, there is a provision that each political party must have a minimum of 5% of women nominees in every parliamentary election. Ironically, almost all elections had no more than 5% of women nominees.

Unless we have a meaningful representation of women in politics, we cannot have a real democratic process. If a woman politician comes to power, men around her/or in her parties always exercise their power to exploit her, whereas women are less likely to get involved in such type of exploitative activities against men. The South Asian political practice proves that women politicians stand for peoples' welfare, whereas most of the men are motivated by the power and benefits attached to politics.

South Asia being one of the least gender sensitive regions, a broader alliance is necessary between the political parties, people and organizations to root out all the problems and come up with a realistic and practical solution. If we can speak heart-to-heart, we can collectively make South Asia a gender sensitive, peaceful and secure region.

3.2.4 INDIA

Crime against women reflected into VAWIP

According to Ms. Vasanti Rajendran on her academic insights crimes against women have been increasing in India, which is certainly reflected on women in politics as well. Progressively, greater numbers of women are becoming victims of different kinds of violence. If we take into account the unregistered cases, the rate becomes significantly higher and higher. The female literacy rate in India is also very low. The cultural and religious practices enhance the vulnerabilities of women which encourage the violators to inflict violence. Highlighting the current political, social and economic status of women in South Asia, she shared the deep concerns and challenges it has brought about;



- This region has one of the highest incidences of violence against women in the world.
- 44% of the world's illiterate women are in South Asia.
- Women's life expectancy is lower than that of men.

She focused on the current VAWIP trend, stating that crimes against women (CAW) have been increasing over the years. Every day, 337 cases of CAW are reported where 42 women are rape victims. Every hour, 5 women face cruelty at home and cases of sexual harassment are being increasingly recorded in the recent years in India.

With 4.4% of women's representation in 1952, in 2004 it had increased to 8.1% in India.

Table 1.1

Year	Seats	Women MPs	%
1952	499	22	4.4
1957	500	27	5.4
1971	521	22	4.2
1991	544	39	7.2
1998	543	43	7.9
2004	545	44	8.1

Likewise there were only 4 women in the Central Council of Ministers in 1985 which increased to 8 in 1999.

She emphasized on violence against women in politics at the grassroots level. “No confidence” motions are being used to overthrow women chairpersons who assert their control over panchayats. The vice-chairperson, who is invariably a man, then takes over the chair. Women members are also vulnerable to violence, which is used as a means to restrict their participation. Lack of political experience and public skills have fettered women’s potential. Women have to constantly struggle against conspiracy by men colleagues. Women’s participation is hampered by their dependence on their wages, and the fact that they have to carry the burden of household work and survival tasks.

Root causes of VAWIP are discrimination against women which can be traced back to the ancient Hindu civilization. Although some studies point to an equal status and rights women enjoyed in the Vedic period (2500 B.C. to 1500 B.C), patriarchy seems to have been the norm throughout history. The root causes of violence against women lie in the religious and cultural practices of India. A final obstacle to women’s political participation is the intensely competitive nature of politics itself. In the countries of South Asia, politics is a lucrative source of income and power which men attempt to control. Data for India suggest that the reluctance of political parties to put up women candidates is a crucial factor, barring women from participating in governance. Women elected under the new quotas found themselves at a disadvantage not only because of traditional cultural and social barriers, but also due to simple lack of experience and resentment among the male political leaders for forcing them to accept women’s participation in politics.

Some suggested measures to end VAWIP are as follows;

1. Alternate forums for resolving cases of VAW
2. Advocacy effort against VAW
3. Public hearings on support service for survivors of violence and media based interventions

Key policy interventions suggested to end violence against women would be:

1. To introduce data collection system in VAWIP.
2. Capacity building and providing extensive training to service providers and law enforcement officials to handle cases of violence

against women in politics.

3. Increase in budgetary allocations for support services to victims of violence (such as women-friendly short stay homes, counseling centers and shelters).
4. Strengthening policies and programs aimed at improving women's economic status.
5. One of the most significant strategies to reduce VAW is challenge the community norms that endorse the subordination of women. The state has a very significant role in setting and changing these community norms through adequate legislation and policy.
6. Accept violence against women as a grave and life threatening offence and display 'zero' tolerance towards any form of violence against women.

Likewise, it was also shared that community interventions should be initiated on awareness campaigns for women's rights at the community level; monthly meetings of community and local leaders; neighborhood (*Moholla*) committee meetings to motivate the community to act as watchdogs for cases of violence in their midst; training of police personnel focusing on sensitizing them to gender issues; involving male members of the community in such programs and intercession with legal aid and counseling in specific cases of violence.

3.2.5 BANGLADESH

Quota system in itself is not an option to end VAWIP

In the history of Bangladesh, as it emerged as an independent nation in 1971 through a long history of political evolution, it still is considered as poorest and the most backward country with feeble democracy. Despite constitutional provisions, there have been no significant changes in the political status of women and their representation as said by Prof. Ishrat Shamim¹⁶.

Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equality of men and women. There is no legal barrier to women contesting or voting for any elected office, including for the head of the State. It promotes the special representation of women in the local government bodies.

¹⁶ President, Centre for Women and Children Studies

In recent years, constant pressure from the academia, civil society and women's groups to provide an adequate gender representation has led to the Union *Parishad* Act (Amendment), 1997 which is a remarkable initiative to provide adequate representation of women at the local level.



Women leaders in South Asia are occupying the highest positions in their respective governments, from Indira Gandhi to Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia and Benazir Bhutto to Sirimao Bandaranaike and Chandrika Kumaratunga. And yet, the statistics tell a different story. The vast majorities of South Asian women are illiterate, in poor health, invisible in the system of national accounts, and suffer legal, political, economic and social discrimination in all walks of life. They have the lowest rate of participation in their governance structures.

Women's participation in politics has been more stable in the last two decades. The quota system has ensured women's presence in the local government and the National Parliament. The old generation entered into politics through social work, while the new generation has emerged from student politics. Despite many odds and ominous challenges, there is a gradual growing trend of women's political participation. Influence of money and muscle power is the same as in other countries of the region. Actual number of women members in different political parties cannot be determined, since gender-specific records are not maintained. Although there are only a few women in powerful positions, the total number of female members has increased remarkably over the last two decades. Women became leaders during crisis and have been successful in gathering momentum and as the unifying factors of their respective parties.

Once placed in the position of leadership, they were able to generate their own dynamism and momentum to lead their parties during difficult times. As leaders, they contributed in liberalizing the values in a Muslim culture where traditionally men had the exclusive prerogative in politics. Women have a strong potential to be a positive role model for women of all ages in Bangladesh. However, the election manifestos and statutes of different political parties show that there is little emphasis on gender equity in party platforms. Except for some extremist religious parties, all other political parties have women wings. Whenever expected, women politicians are supposed to make remarkable space to give support to general women who face violence, but the sad truth is most of these women politicians themselves have to face violence at their work place.

3.2.6 AFGHANISTAN

Immense frustration to people as counterpart of expectation

“Population growth rate in Afghanistan in the last 3 to 4 years has been very high. Poverty is now being rapidly urbanized with peoples from rural areas migrating to the cities. Education ratio is worst while 85% of total youth population is illiterate” as said by Said Zabihullah Sawayz.

The international Taliban problem has further worsened the country’s political situation. Local and inclusive governance is a major question in Afghanistan. The Government of Afghanistan is not strong enough to make new policies in favor of women, while civil institutions are donor driven.

Resources including human resource management are a big problem in Afghanistan. Existence of immense frustration at the grassroots level because of their high expectation and unfulfilled



demands make the situation even worst. The common problems of the South Asian region, more specifically those of Pakistan, are the problems confronting Afghanistan as well.

3.3 Cases of Violence Against Women in Politics

3.3.1 Overthrown from position¹⁷

While Sahama was in power, she ceased the supply of water tanker from local hotels due to humanitarian reasons behind that. As a result, Sahama was overthrown by her male colleagues because they had their vested interest in the deal with that hotel.

Sandhya was dragged out of her house, and almost stripped because she had refused to release the fund which would be misused in the name of development work.

The participant from India shared about both of the above cases as occurred in India.

3.3.2 Lower participation of women in politics is injustice¹⁸

Till date political participation of women in India has never exceeded 8% in the parliament and 15% in the state assembly. The current statistics reveal that, participation of women in politics in South Asia is low, with 18.07% in the national assembly and 18% in the senate in Pakistan, 8% in Nepal, and less than 5% in Sri Lanka, while developing and developed countries of other regions have higher at more than 20% in China, more than 40% in Sweden, more than 39% in Norway and 33% in Finland.

Though women constitute half of the population, they are felt to be in minority in the three dimensions of inequality; in class/economic status, in social position and in political power which is purely an injustice. Women's ability to introduce potential plans and take important political decisions has been totally neglected. Both the political parties and women organizations are paying inadequate attention on political education to women and for their mobilization. Politics and decision making have been closely guarded as men's privileged area, with the male dominated party structure and their insensitivity towards importance of women's involvement in political processes. Owing to a small numerical strength in the legislative assembly and the parliament, women are in a disadvantaged position.

¹⁷ Case from India

¹⁸ Case study from India presented by Chhaya Kunwar

It is essential to understand why women's participation in politics is significant. It is because women constitute half of the population in most countries of the world. Women's participation in politics must be increased to articulate women's issues and concerns at the decision making level. There will be no real democracy, no true peoples' participation in governance and development without equal participation of both men and women in politics. As Ms. Chhaya Kunwar expressed that greater participation of women, would help them enhance the political modalities and its outcome. Equal participation is an essential condition for the proper functioning of democracy. It contributes to redefining political priorities; and helps creating space for women's as well as gender-specific issues and concerns. Increased numbers of women in politics and decision making process will certainly help reduce corruption and criminalization of politics.

Socio-economic, cultural and political factors hinder woman to entry into politics. Political participation of women is largely interpreted as only the voting right of the women. Majority of women who are actively engaged in politics have come from economically well to do families. A majority of these women have at least one of their close relatives involved in politics?

3.3.3. Threats to councilor¹⁹

Once there was an issue of the budget in a district assembly, where she (Nasreen Awan) took an initiative and invited her councilor colleagues to out carry signatory campaign. She was supported by her colleague Ms. Kulsoom who was also a lady councilor. Another member from her union council Mr. Nazim threatened Ms. Kusloom not to take stance against him in the issue. She was threatened so much that Kulsoom stopped attending the council meetings then onward.

3.3.4. Death due to suspicion²⁰

Another friend Shagufta an activist, well educated, pretty lady councilor was murdered by her husband by throwing acid on her body, due to suspicion of misconduct after she joined politics. Another women politician Ms. Rani was abused by her opposition political party members and then murdered during political conflict between the two parties.

¹⁹ A case from Pakistan

²⁰ A case from Pakistan

3.3.5. A woman representative of the local government assaulted²¹

The police officer (PO) of Siyalle, Ghat Bhog camp arrested some men from fishermen family. He kept them locked without any charges against them. Binodini Pal, a woman representative of the local government of the same Union, rushed to the police camp and demanded the reasons behind the arrest of the innocent. The PO said that it was only for money, if she could manage to get money out from the arrested persons, they would soon be released. When she refused to meet his demand, the PO physically attacked, assaulted and verbally abused her. Her husband, who was present with her, was also injured. They were pushed out of the police camp leaving behind the detainees. Next morning they went to the police station to file complaint, but they were refused. They even met the Police Superintendent who didn't show any cooperation. After several failed attempts for justice, she called a press conference, with the help of SAP Bangladesh. She informed the press about the incident and requested the journalists to make the incident public. She then filed a case under Women and Children Repression Prevention Act. The court ordered suspension of the PO from his duty; authorities were bound to withdraw the PO from the station. However, the PO was released on bail. Who, then started threatening and harassing her with the indirect support of the administration.

Initially Binodhini was assaulted by a single police officer, but when she tried to seek justice, she found the whole administration and its invisible allies turned against her. The accused PO is putting pressure from higher authorities of the police department to harass not only Binodini but even her colleagues who are also being victimized by the police administration.

3.3.6. Character assassination of a woman union Parishad Member²²

Aparna Rani was a Woman Union Parishad member of Moulvibazar. Her husband, a Primary School Teacher, encouraged her to contest in the Union Parishad election. She was elected to the reserved seat. She was an extrovert and often had discussions with the chairman unlike her other colleagues. The chairman did not like her active participation and tried to violate her. During this period a friendly male colleague helped her, after which the chairman started her character assassination spreading rumors of her affair with her male colleague, which shattered her married life. She was almost ostracized by the society. Finally she had to leave the Union Parishad.

²¹ A case from Bangladesh

²² A case from Bangladesh

3.3.7 Harassed by husband on contesting election²³

Sakhina won the election after a relentless struggle. She used to work in the Village Saving Office of CARE, where she was paid only Tk.22 (US\$ 0.05) per day. She faced problems during the election campaign as her husband did not like her involvement politics and tried to regularly oppress her. Once, he even burned all her saris, in an attempt to stop her from going for election campaigns. Despite, such harsh conditions, she won the election.

In some parts of the country, women are being deprived of their free voting rights and are coerced to use it by others in their interests. She shared that many cases of violence occur during the election and pre-election period, where some are critically injured and sometimes even killed. Many contesting women politicians even receive life threats to discourage them from contesting in the elections.

Likely to South Asian countries others are also suffering by the same socio-economic and political problems. Cries of women in politics in South Asian countries have been echoed for a long time, but access to justice is still far away and there is still a need to cry for justice. She said “it is impossible to completely eradicate VAWIP overnight, but if we go forward with collective efforts and positive mechanisms to address the issue, we will be able to mitigate the agony of women in politics”.

3.3.8. Stopped from being Speaker of House of Representatives²⁴

While democratic government was thrown to the street by King Gyanendra and the parliament was running on the open street, Hon. Chitra Lekha Yadav was accepted as the speaker of the house by all the major seven parties’ of coalition government. As per the consent of the parties she actively took part in the protests, *Dharana* (sit in programs) and rallies and was arrested. Further the political parties announced that she will be nominated as the speaker of the house as and when the reinstatement of parliament will be announced. They further appreciated her contribution to the nation even in the transitional phase. But later on, after the reinstatement of the parliament when the time came she was deprived of that position and a male counterpart was nominated on the post with the argument that at the transitional phase of governance it will be very hard to control over the situation by a woman. She had been a victim of manipulated violence, which can be signified as a psychological violence against her.

²³ A case from Bangladesh

²⁴ A case from Nepal

4. Best Practices to Combat VAWIP

In all five countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) governments as well as NGO/INGOs are coming up gradually with inventiveness and gender sensitization in this regard. However proper implementation of provisions, and far sight vision and result oriented actions are still to be instigated to deal with the issues of violence against women in politics. Some patterns of best practices of those countries could be presented as below¹.



4.1 Bangladesh

4.1.1 Plan and policies

National plan/policies as mentioned below can be considered as the best policies adopted to combat violence against women by Bangladeshi government.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper also addresses the economic empowerment of women which could support women to stand in a bit strong position even during the elections. National Action Plan for Women Development is next milestone to strengthen the women's status in all sectors.

¹ To view the actual country wise discussion on best practice report please go to annex 2

Similarly, in all ministries Gender Focal Point are established to deal with the women's issue. And National Women Development Policy can be taken as the government's seriousness to resolve women's problem.

4.1.2 Mechanisms

Constitution has provided equal rights to men and women along with the constitutional guarantee on equal treatment before law. Parliament has ratified CEDAW with two reservations with the objective of eliminating all forms of violence against women. National/international non-government organizations and community based organizations are working to combat violence against women in broader sense.

4.1.3 Programs and actions

Police reform programs were funded by UNDP and DFID for women politicians, one-stop crisis center established in Dhaka in order to pool grievances through one door. Medical college started to deal with victims of violence and women friendly hospitals were opened. Likewise, UNFPA supported to Gender Sensitization Program for law enforcement agencies.

Interestingly, 45 seats are reserved for women in national parliament and within the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Parliamentarian Standing Committee is formed.

4.2 INDIA

4.2.1 Policies and law

Constitutional guarantee through article 14, 15 (3), 16 in equality before the law and equal protection of law. Government adopted National Women Policy in 2001. Supreme Court passed a precedent declaring that women deserve equal right on ancestral property and parental property as of men. Certain electoral reforms were made in favor of women contestant. As a landmark history of parliamentary election, women contested only for one third positions of parliament in 1996.

4.2.2 Mechanisms

CEDAW and Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) was ratified by parliament with no any reservation. National Women's Commission established as statutory body. Anti Rape Legislation was promulgated. Women Police Stations were establishment in most of the cities. At the national level, gender sensitive budget was allocated even in a smaller amount.

4.2.3 Programs

Mahila Samata program was implemented by government in all levels. The legal provision guarantying the one-third representation of women at local government bodies is being implemented. Right to Information Act, 2005 enacted and implemented. Moreover capacity building trainings to elected representatives including men and women is being provided at every level by governmental organization collaboratively with non-governmental organizations.

4.3 NEPAL

4.3.1 Plan and policies

The 7th 5-year's National Plan incorporated the issues of gender justice for the first time in Nepal. The government of Nepal, after restoration of democracy ratified the CEDAW and CRC in 1991 and recently it is in the process of ratifying the optional protocol two of CEDAW.

The Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal, 1990 for the first time has affirmed that the government may enact the laws on positive discrimination for the development of women. Similarly, it also stated that all the political parties should nominate 5% women candidates in the parliamentary elections.

Supreme Court of Nepal has also laid down some landmark decisions regarding women's issue i.e. women can't be deprived of the right to inherit ancestral property until and unless her parents do not arrange for her marriage according to the social values; marital rape is regarded as the criminal offence against women (wife) etc. Likewise, after the reinstatement of parliament in 2006, the coalition government made a declaration that all the children will get citizenship by the name of their mother along with the next decision that at the every level of government institutions 33% seats will be reserved to the women candidates.

4.3.2 Mechanism

National Women Commission established as the statutory body for the overall development of women. Ministry of Women, Child and Social Affairs established. Women cells are established under security administration in city areas of the country whereas unequal employment opportunity for women in Army force have been ensured and women are now eligible to be appointed in army force.

4.3.3 Programs and activities

Rastriya Swabalamban (National Self Reliance) program empowered the women of grassroots level. Ama Samuha, that constituted at every community made responsible to speak against the wrong tradition/culture within the society and to fight against male hegemony. At the NGO/INGO level they created Rajnitik Mahila Sangharsha Samitee (Struggle Committee of Political Women), pressurized the state to pass 33% reservation for women at all levels of government bodies/institutions including political parties/organizations, pressurized the state to include women lawyers in the committee formed for drafting of Interim Constitution, created a common platform of District Level Women's Empowerment Committee, pressurized the State to amend the discriminatory laws including the laws on property inheritance and property rights of daughter, pressurized the state to enact the new laws to combat VAW including VAWIP, provided leadership skill training to the local level political leaders.

4.4. SRI LANKA

In 1994: Women's Charter approved by the Parliament however it was felt difficult to be implemented as a legal document. Sexual Harassment Act, 1995 enacted by the government. After 2000 Women's Desk established at every police station around the country. Likewise, Domestic Violence Act 2005 was passed and declared that the act of domestic violence is regarded as the violence against women which is a significant step to combat the violence against women.

Equally important is government announcement on the Work Place Policies to fight against the sexual harassment cases in work place.

Major political parties recognize the importance of women's participation in politics and gender equity, but women politicians themselves differ in their opinions regarding the quota system.

4.5 PAKISTAN

The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees women equal rights and empowers the government to take action to protect those rights. Over the years, however, parallel Islamic legal systems have been encouraged which undermine those rights.

The controversial *Hudood* Ordinances were introduced in 1979 when General Zia modified the country's legal system in accordance with Islamic scriptures. It stripped women of the legal protection and rights previously available to them.

Rape laws were dramatically changed. No longer part of the Penal Code, rape was included in the *Zina* Ordinance (a sub category of the *Hudood* Ordinance). It blurred the line between rape and adultery and strengthened the possibility that a woman can be convicted of adultery if she cannot prove rape.

The Government ratified Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996 with a reservation on Clause 29 pertaining to disputes and a clarification that the Constitution of Pakistan would hold supremacy over the provisions of CEDAW. Implementation or the filtering down of the laws to the administration and the judiciary has not as yet happened.

The Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan has recently endorsed that killing in the name of honor would be treated as intentional murder. Positive legislation has come in the form of Women and Distress Fund Act, 1966, that provides relief to victims of violence; amendments in Section 167 of the Criminal Procedure Code provides that a magistrate cannot detain a female in police custody, except in cases of dacoit and murder; and made death penalty mandatory in case of gang rape.



5. PROMOTING WOMEN IN POLITICS: Issues, Challenges and Recommendations from National Level

Lots of issues identified ultimately to promote women's effective participation in politics and in political decision making process were as mentioned underneath.¹

5.1 Issues of VAWIP

The Unconference specifically centered on the following three major issues;

1. Pro-poor reforms in the policies of governments pedestal for a prosperous and developed region,
2. Need to explore social and economic potentials and use it for the benefits and collective interests of the people,
3. Need for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in respective countries of the region to play a crucial role in facilitating the women involved in politics.

The other issues raised in the Unconference include:

Relation between Politics and People

Politics determines the way people live. The socio-cultural factors and peoples' mindset steer the political process. Hierarchical structure of the society and traditional value led practices impose the patriarchal way of life in the region. These all are the causes for low representation of women in governance and violence against women is outcome of such socio-cultural presumptions in South Asia.

Women in Political Governance

Pro-poor policy reforms for inclusion of women in political governance are the common agenda of this region. Despite

¹ please see ANNEX 1 for the feather group discussion report during Unconference.

some policy and legal arrangements, women's participation in politics is behind the shadow. Different natures of violence - trauma, torture, harassment etc. hinders the development of women's political career.

Platform for Collective Actions

There is a great need to create a regional platform for sharing experiences of violence as well as the coping mechanisms to deal with violence in politics against women. Likewise, enhancing collective actions for change through policy influencing in the South Asian national governments is also needed. Therefore, SAP International with the cooperation of SAP National and its partner has organized this Unconference.



5.2 Challenges

5.2.1 Qualitative participation of women in politics

Although, human beings of both the sexes are born equal, lots of inequalities and discrimination prevail from the childhood upbringing to the every stage of development. It is universal that women are victimized by this unequal treatment deliberately. Eventually, it hampers the overall development of women. On the one hand, women's quantitative participation in politics is hampered due to this very reason and there is absence of qualitative participation of women in politics on the other.

Always, there has been men's hegemony in politics. Therefore, it is challenging for women in politics to get opportunities for their political development. Lack of alternative political education provisions has created a gap among the women politicians.

Lack of gender sensitive budgetary provisions, government priority in different area while allocating the budget, patriarchal practice of political institutions are the challenges over capacity building initiatives within all of the South Asian countries.

5.2.2 Marginalized status of women

Women are marginalized socially, politically, economically and culturally in this region. All these produce ultimately the violence to them. Marginalized status of women itself, and the prevailing social, political, economic hindrances and stereotype mobility with restriction, which in itself is a challenge to the women. Women must stand above this marginalized status.

5.2.3 Character assassination of women in politics

Character assassination of women politician is a serious type of violence. Restrictive social and cultural norms, social stigmatization, threatening from male political leadership/election contestants, patriarchal value system are the major issue to boost-up character assassination of women politicians.

Major challenges to stop the character assassination are orthodox attitudes towards women's participation in politics, religious extremism, lower ration of increasing the numbers of women politician and ineffective and poor implementation of laws all above in the South Asian countries.

5.2.4 Government or party policies to protect and safeguard women politicians

The entire issue of violence against women in politics is regarded as women's issue till date. In true sense it is a serious issue to be dealt by national governments and political parties themselves. No government or party policies are apathetic to protect and safeguard women politicians, this indifference has promoted violence against women in politics in real sense.

In particular, all the South Asian national governments are not committed to implement the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other regional treaties

genuinely. Beside this, internal democratic process and capacity of the political parties and state institutions create problem in addressing the issue. Centralized plan and policies, public administration, lack in allocation of gender sensitive budget are major challenges to combat violence against women politicians.

Issue based advocacy and community mobilization to increase demand for implementation of CEDAW and other international treaties, amendment on discriminatory laws and policies mostly in Pakistan and Afghanistan, capacity building of political parties and state institutions, newly elected councilors/parliamentarians' involvement in pro-poor and gender sensitive budget and planning, promotion of strong partnership with media, civil society, state and the political parties and implementation of some code of ethics, to protect women's right to political participation in order to induce significant policy decisions have been instrumental in accelerating progress of women of South Asian nations.

5.2.5 Glass ceiling of women in politics

It is universal that women's quantitative and qualitative participation in political process and political decision making has now been sizzling issue even in northern politics. Moreover, southern are not far behind of this wind, however the essence to where the South Asian sentiment is ceiling any forms of glasses that hinders the women's participation in politics that is only for seeing the world from women's eyeball.

Unequal opportunities and gender based roles and responsibilities; males' attitude; lack of leadership and awareness among women about their own rights; wide spread male hegemony and social, cultural, economic and religious barriers required to be penetrated for increasing women's participation in politics and for women's self motivation en route for involving in politics. Meanwhile democratization in political parties' decision making process and mass awareness in promoting and protecting women's human rights is to be initiated regionally.

5.2.6 Data collection of violence on women politicians

It is particularly important to create and maintain a demographic database on women's political participation, including the issues and incidences of VAWIP. Only then, the community level advocacy/campaigning and national level lobbying based on these data would be meaningful and effective. A regional level reporting mechanism with strong surveillance

system also needs to be established and activated. This would instigate women politicians also to reveal their experience of violence or discrimination they face. Subsequently, the strategies and coping mechanisms can be developed to resist such violence.

As we are concerned that political crimes/violence are not reported and registered by the police administration, women politicians tolerate and hide the violence they face due to the non-supportive government mechanism with orthodox social values at present. Developing mechanisms and/or alliances from the grassroots to the national/regional levels to extract the factual data has been a big challenge. Incidents of violation of economic, social and cultural rights are not reported and recorded in comparison to the cases against political rights i.e. murder, rape, burning alive etc. All these facts should be considered strategically during planning of data collection and maintenance of data-base on VAWIP.

Establishment of a strong networks and alliances for monitoring documentation and development of a responsive system, sensitization package for strengthening judicial mechanism, police administration along with armed forces, creating social work groups within community and sensitize crime reporters in media will be strategic direction to cope with the challenges.



5.2.7 Unity for strength

Synergy created through organized efforts at various levels would be an asset for minimizing the VAWIP for encouraging women's participation in politics in South Asia. Isolated efforts of different organizations in this regard has not been effective so far. Up to this stage, women are individually fighting against the violence they face. Even in the development of political carrier women are not seen united and in many cases they are guided by male political leaders.

Regional endeavor to make an environment for women to be united for coming into politics, for creating common platforms for all women leaders of different political sectors, for developing linkages with local level women leaders and central level has been imperative. Capacity of women politicians should be enhanced in order to enable them to assert for their right to political participation as well as combat violence against women in politics.

5.3 Recommendations

Women's participation in politics must be increased to articulate women's issues and concerns at the decision making level. There will be no real democracy, no true peoples' participation in governance and development without equal participation of both men and women in politics. Equal participation is an essential condition for the proper functioning of democracy. Following are the recommendations made during the Unconference:

- 1. Create alternate forums for resolving cases of VAW**
- 2. Increase advocacy effort against VAW**
- 3. Public hearings and support service for survivors of violence and media based interventions**
- 4. Key policy interventions necessary to end violence against women would be:**
 - To introduce data collection system in VAWIP
 - Capacity building with extensive training to service providers and law enforcement officials to handle cases of violence against women in politics
 - Increase in budgetary allocations for support services to victims of violence (such as women-friendly short stay homes, counseling centers and shelters)

- Strengthening policies and programs aimed at improving women's economic status
- One of the most significant strategies to reduce VAW is challenge the community norms that endorse subordination of women. The state has a very significant role in setting and changing these community norms through adequate legislation and policies.
- Accept violence against women as a grave and life threatening offence and display 'zero' tolerance towards any form of violence against women

5. Community Interventions:

Community interventions should be initiated through awareness campaigns for women's rights at the community level; monthly meetings of community and local leaders; neighborhood (Moholla) committee meetings to motivate the community to act as watchdogs for cases of violence; training of police personnel focusing on sensitizing them to gender issues; involving male members of the community in such programs and intercession with legal aid and counseling in specific cases of violence.

6. Regional Task Force:

A regional task force could be created among the politicians, women's rights activists, lawyers, journalists, law enforcing authorities and civil society members for pressurizing the national governments continuously, until and unless the provisions are guaranteed in national laws. During elections, competent women should be encouraged to stand for the free seats and the others should be privileged in the reserved seats.

7. Encourage Competent Women:

The women were pressurized to speak the voice of feudalistic politicians and similar decisions were made. Such reservation practice doesn't make any sense. This trend should be minimized by the same strategy of encouraging the strong and competent women to stand in elections and others encouraged through reservation.

8. Capacity Building and Right Based Awareness:

Awareness and capacity building programs at the regional level should be launched by the civil society organizations incorporating right-based approach. Different capacity building programs are strongly needed to the women in politics. Long term and short term capacity building programs should be launched to produce qualitative, strong

and dynamic women leaders. Right based regional awareness and capacity building programs should be launched by the Civil Society organizations. Different capacity building programs are needed as it is difficult to come across qualitative women politicians in South Asia. Long term and short term capacity building programs could produce the qualitative strong and dynamic women leaders.

9. Education Policy:

An extensive education policy should be formed to avoid this social evil. In addition, not only in university but also in the school level education, the issue of VAWIP should be included in the syllabus.

10. Data Base:

A regional level study on VAWIP should be conducted to identify major problems hindering women's involvement in political governance and at the decision making levels. A strong database system needs to be created on the information related to the cases of Violence Against Women in Politics.

11. Conducive Environment to be Created:

If people sincerely wish to encourage women to join politics, a conducive environment should be created. Yet, the obstacles like social problems exist, which will take quite a long time to be changed. Lack of higher education is another problem that especially hinders during training and seminars. Apart from these social drawbacks, women in politics also have been increasingly subjected to domestic violence by their husbands, brothers and sons. Until these issues are addressed it is difficult for women to be actively participating in politics.

12. Nomination of Qualitative Women Candidates:

A quota system can be influenced by previous political background of the candidates that will further hinder the representation of qualitative women from non-political background. It was thus recommended the civil society organizations to lobby the political parties for nominating qualitative women candidates.

13. Promote Culture of Democratic Process Within Political Parties:

Democracy is more about process of decision making than the power or the decision itself; however there seems to be no fair democratic

process adopted by the political parties in South Asian countries. The process lies in the hands of chairpersons of the political parties, and his views and working patterns are regarded as the process of the decision making. It is important to develop the culture of a democratic process within the political parties.

However, the election manifestos and statutes of different political parties show that there is little emphasis on gender equity in party platforms. Except for some extremist religious parties, all other political parties have women wings. Whenever expected, women politicians are supposed to make remarkable space to give support to general women who face violence, but the sad truth is most of these women politicians themselves have to face violence at their work place.

14. Allocation of Budget for Women Candidates:

Lack of budget allocation for the development of these women is a major challenge. Therefore, the government or political parties make provision to allocate fund for women candidates to fight elections so that they will have not to follow the malpractice that is prevalent in South Asian politics to win elections.

15. Creation of Regional Platform:

There is a great need to create a regional platform for sharing experiences of violence as well as the coping mechanisms to deal with violence against women in politics. Likewise, enhancing collective actions for change through policy influencing in the South Asian national governments is also needed.

16. Strong Legal Framework:

Strong legal framework to address character assassination of women along with the effective implementation mechanism, assertion of minimum of 33% of women contesting elections by each political party, media advocacy to address issue of character assassination along with the execution of code of conduct for media personnel would certainly decrease the ratio of character assassination of women politician.

17. Other Measures to Improve the Situation of VAWIP:

- Economic empowerment of women through micro credit programs,

- Parallel and continuous process of gender trainings be initiated for men and women councilors,
- A councilors' alliance linked to the provincial and national alliance should be formed in each district to safeguard victim/survivors of violence against women in politics,
- Enhance leadership skills through trainings and exposure visits,
- Incorporate women's political participation as an integral part of the School Curriculum.

18. Actions at Various Levels:

Policy Level: Amendment in legal provisions, political training to both men and women, restructuring of existing political institutions to promote women friendly political culture, ensure clean and green politics and eliminate use of money and muscle power in politics.

Civil Society Level: Coalition building of elected women representatives from *gram panchayat* to parliament; monitoring at local regional, national and international level; increase women's capacity to participate in decision making and leadership; men groups mobilizing against gender violence; building leadership and knowledge of women; developing support groups for enabling women's participation and fight against violence; coalition and network building of organization working on women in politics and violence against women; coordination among multi stake holders; documentation and sharing of best practices etc.

International Level: Monitor upon implementation of international instruments for political empowerment of women and elimination of violence against women; network building at international level; creating platforms for women in politics for sharing and learning; creating watch groups at various level; bilateral/multilateral donors' and UN agencies support projects for political empowerment and violence against women, etc.

6. FUTURE DIRECTIONS: National and Regional Perspective

Best practices dealt in the chapter 4 were just the beginning steps to deal with the problems in all the countries. For a better solution to address such an issue there are specific requirements which can be presented as future directions to cope with the problems of VAWIP. Country-wise future directions and regional perspective were presented in the Unconference in the following manner¹.

6.1 Action Needed at National Level

6.1.1 INDIA

An alliance of Friends of Women in Politics (FWIP) should be formed to deal with the violence against women in politics collectively among the human right activists, media persons and lawyers.

Collection of the data of VAWIP by national rapporteur with more flush during local and provincial elections in every country and disseminate the information at both national and South Asian level.

Establishment of crisis management fund (CMF) to be spent as and when the victim/survivor need to raise the issue in national and regional level and to enhance the overall status of political women. Capacity building programs and training should be provided to major stakeholders for combating VAWIP.

6.1.2 NEPAL

The following provisions should be indorsed as soon as possible by the government of Nepal at national level.

¹ Country-wise presentation on future direction is provided in Annex 3.

At least 33% women representation at every decision making level including political parties and in the cabinet; amend all discriminatory laws against women; positive discrimination for women in all the state programs as stated in CEDAW; allocation of separate budget to empower women politicians; activate National Women Commission; strengthen women's organization and civil society organizations to support women political leaders; create a mechanism to lobby and advocate for women's political issues; higher education, and scholarship programs to enhance capacity of women politician from local to the national level; strong capacity building and leadership development programs; formation of watch groups that can monitor violence against women in politics at all level; create a platform to establish linkages at national, local, community and international levels to create pressure groups.

6.1.3 SRI LANKA

Following are the issues essential to be addressed to combat violence against women in politics.

Building leadership of women politician at the grassroots level; establishment of a close network specially with media; women's desk at every police stations within the nation; national committee of women in existence; encourage women at grassroots level to enter into politics; sensitizing programs for general public to stand in favor of women's participation in politics; initiatives to lobby with the political parties to protect women in politics and prospective women candidate's participation in competitive elections with men; introduce a law to bring in a significant number (33%) of women into politics at all levels and pressurize party leaders to become gender sensitive.

6.1.4 Bangladesh

Future direction to combat violence against women in politics in Bangladesh are formation of Women's Rights Committee in each district; programs to provide legal assistance to the survivors of VAWIP; organize workshops, seminars and initiate dialogue at the union, upajilla, districts and national level to sensitize politicians as well as the public; empower women in politics through capacity building and supporting/uplifting them financially to enable them to stand in the elections alongside the men and involve politicians especially the elected parliament members in the workshop and seminars and pressurize them for raising issues of VAWIP in their regular meetings.

6.1.5 PAKISTAN

Within political parties at least 33 percent women member should be enrolled from community to the national level; indirect elections of women candidates to be repealed as it devalues her position and parties should strongly support their women candidates to contest elections.

Through the regulations of election commission, political parties agreeing to restrict women's right to cast vote be banned, such elections be declared null and void. When parties agree to restrict women from voting a separate policy to protect women candidates and voters be developed.

Within the civil society organizations, election monitoring missions should be conducted; facilitation bench should be established for women candidates during elections; advocate against VAWIP issues and provide legal counseling and media support to women politicians; watch for human rights violations from the local to the national level and a holistic program be launched with essential components like: research, training, seminars/dialogues, legal and counseling services, liaison and joint ventures with the media etc.

6.2 Recognized Future Directions

A total of 24 regional directions were suggested by the participants during this session. A unanimous decision was made that only 5 directions will be prioritized to start the process. Therefore, a voting system was adopted to prioritize the directions. The voting result² revealed the following five regional directions to be initiated to combat VAWIP initially.

1. Collection and dissemination of information on VAWIP at both the national and regional levels.
2. Conduction of training, research, exposure visits, and interaction programs to build capacity of women in politics.
3. Empowerment of women in politics, through capacity building and financial support to them.
 - a. Enactment of a law to bring in significant number (33%) of women into local as well as national politics.
 - b. Establishment of a coordinating system within the civil society.
4. Creation of a platform to establish linkages among national, local, community and the international groups to form pressure groups.

² Please refer Annex 4 for the details of the voting result on regional directions.

Annexes

Feather Group Discussion Report

Dr. Rohit briefed the objectives of the Unconference and how this will be reflected throughout the program applying the open space methodology¹. Then he floored a question, “What are issues/challenges regarding violence against women in politics?” among the participants and requested all the participants to express their ideas in meta-cards and read out their ideas before all the participants.

First of all circle of the Open Space Technology was opened. It is simply the introduction of the technology. Then after the leading question of session as mentioned earlier was floored among the participants. As instructed earlier, all the contributors individually posted their ideas in the market place. Various ideas from the market place were categorized into different groups and time slots. Then the feather group discussions (4 groups in 3 different time slots) took place. As and when the group leader finished his/her presentation to the mass a participant from each group was requested to post the information in wiki.

Altogether there were 45 ideas posted over the market place. Those were;

1. Glass ceiling for women in politics
2. Capacity building for women in politics and advocacy
3. Women in politics need to increase vanity to create critical mass of women opposing violence and promoting peace
4. Unity is strength
5. Use of muscle and money
6. Marginalized status and crisis management
7. To combat traditional attitude of society against women
8. Character assassination can destroy the career of women in politics
9. Discriminatory practices against women
10. Change male mindset to accept women’s role.
11. Socio-economic dependency
12. Patriarchy, male domination, customs, traditions and wrong practice of religion.

¹ Please refer ANNEX 6 for more details

13. No government or party politics motivated to protect and safeguard women politicians
14. Political environment and exclusion on decision making process
15. Family background and stereotype role of women
16. Increase effective participation of women at local government level
17. Women's empowered by capacity and confidence buildup of women leaders
18. Promote women politician leaders as peace builders
19. Lack of resources/commitment from government to strengthen women in politics
20. Policy development and its practice at all level of governance
21. Accept violence against women in politics as heinous crime
22. Political education and empowerment of women
23. Violent nature of political practice
24. Low economic status
25. Unequal power sharing between men and women
26. Lack of inclusion and good governance at all level
27. Non democratic decision making practice in political parties
28. Breakdown/overcome male hegemony
29. Bringing more women in the party decision making
30. Increasing women's equity into mainstream politics
31. Society and culture value patriarchy
32. Party must ensure minimum 33% of women contesting election from their platform
33. Women's participation in the party should not be confused to women's wing
34. Legal framework to address character assassination of women
35. Supportive spouses "HOUSE-HUSBANDS OR WIVES"
36. Media advocacy to address character assassination
37. Code of conduct of media should restrict character assassination of women in politics
38. Threatening the male political leadership
39. Social stigmatization
40. Restrictive social cultural norms
41. Ineffective and poor implementation of laws
42. Breakup of families
43. Socialization to change the patriarchal norms in society
44. Increasing the number of women in political sphere and process
45. Educating women, sensitizing them to accept fundamental changes are required in the structure of society

Capacity Building of Women Political Leaders and Advocacy

Name of Participants:

Uzma Zarrin (Facilitator), Sama Shrestha, Pam Pieris, Mahabooba, Narul Alam and Sawayz.

Issues:

Capacity building of women political leaders and advocacy

Challenges:

- Lack of gender sensitive budgetary provisions
- Budget government priority differs
- Lack of self recognition and awareness
- Patriarchal practice of political institutions

Recommendations

- Build leadership qualities of women and promote them as peace activists
- Form and strengthen alliance of women in politics
- Advocate the issue at all levels
- Develop coordinated support system for victimized women including representatives from media, legal expert, politicians, academicians, NGOs, INGOs and other citizens

Unity is Strength

List of the Participants

Tirth P. Gyawali, Arnna Welnesinghe, Madhusa Gunantu, Ruwani Ranasinghe, Shanta Thapaliya, Rajani Tiwari (Facilitator)

Issue

Women are not united and are guided by the male political leaders

Challenges

Tradition, culture and wrong practices of religion

Recommendations

- Provide access to equal opportunities and information
- Participating in the decision making process should begin within the family to political parties,
- Exposure in the society to build confidence,
- Proper and quality education,
- Making an environment for women to unite and come into politics,
- Create common platforms for all women leaders from different political parties to unite and discuss,
- Making linkages with local level women leaders and community,
- Capacity building programs at all levels and
- Raise awareness about importance of unity to strengthen their political rights to combat violence against women in politics.

Marginalized Status of Women

Name of the Participants:

Farooq Ahmad Khan, Nasreen Awan, S. Swarnalatha, Vasanti Rajendran, Nasir Uddin and E. R. Venket

Issues:

- Violence in broader sense
- Social
- Political
- Economic
- Cultural

Challenges:

- Marginalized status of women
- Social, political, economic hindrances and stereotype mobility restriction to women

Recommendations:

- Friends of women politics
- Crisis management in Group
- Crisis fund
- Information and communication

Character Assassination of Women in Politics

Name of the Participants:

Bushra Gohar, Apurba Saha, Vipula, Ismat Shamin, Prilviva Perera and Rita Thapa

Issues:

- Restrictive Social and Cultural Norms
- Social stigmatization
- Threatening from male political leadership
- Patriarchal system

Challenges:

- Change of attitudes towards women's participation in politics
- Religious extremism
- Increasing the members of women in the political spheres and process
- Socialization to change the patriarchal norms in society
- Ineffective and poor implementation of laws

Recommendations:

- Legal framework to address character assassination of women
- Party must ensure minimum 33% of women contesting elections from their platform
- Women's participation in the party should not be confined to women's will, media advocacy to address character assassination
- Include media code of conduct.

No Government or Party Policies to Protect and Safeguard Women Politicians

Name of Participants:

Uzma Zarrin, Vasanthi Rajendran, E. R. Venkat , Tirth P. Gyawali, Padma Ratnayake and S. Swarnalatha

Issue:

No government or party policies to protect and safeguard women politicians

Challenges:

- Lack of government's commitment to implement CEDAW of UDHR.
- Internal democratic process and capacity of the political parties and state institutions.
- Centralized rules/policies.
- Lack of gender sensitive budget planning.
- Patriarchal and feudal political structures.

Recommendations:

- Issue based advocacy and community mobilization, to increase demand for implementation of CEDAW and UDHR and repeal the discriminatory laws like in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- Capacitate political parties and state institutions, newly elected councilors/parliamentarians in pro-poor and gender sensitive budget and planning.
- Promote strong partnership with media, civil society, state and the political parties.
- Some codes of ethics, to protect the dignity and self respect of women in politics, must be formed and implemented.

Glass Ceiling of Women in Politics

Name of the Participants:

Bushra Gohar, Shanta Thapalia, Chitralkha Yadav, Rita Thapa, Vipuls Pallegama, Ishrat Shamian and Apurba Saha

Issues:

- Discrimination
- Attitude problem
- Social and cultural values

Challenges:

- Bringing more women in the party decision making
- Increasing women's entry into mainstream politics
- Breakdown male hegemony

Recommendations:

- Democratize the party decision making process
- Increase the ratio of women to men in the party
- Reverse the present political system

Unequal Opportunities and Gender Based Roles and Responsibilities

Name of the Participants:

Sawayz, Chhaya Kunwar, Mahbooba Mahmood, Farooq Mahmud Khan, Narul Uddin, Nasreen Awan and Geeta Pradhan

Issues:

- Male dominated structure of the society
- Lack of leadership and awareness among women about their own rights
- Lack of human rights protection and leadership

Challenges:

- To change the mind set of men and women
- Lack of coordinated interventions by different players
- Lack of human and financial capacity

Recommendations:

- Sensitization for gender mainstreaming in the family, school, community, media and government institutions
- Long term strategy through education
- Short term strategy through legislation

Legal and Political Education of Women in Politics

Name of the Participants:

Nasreen Awan, Farooq Ahmad, Sama Shrestha, Venket, Padma Ratnayake, Uzma, Pam and Swarnalatha.

Issues:

Legal and political education of women in politics.

Challenges:

- No process of political education within the parties and government institutions
- The education system do not speak of legal and political rights of men and women
- Politics is not taken/considered good for women and so the political education is not considered good for them

Recommendations:

- Budget allocation for trainings
- Political leaders be trained, thus setting up *inclusive governance institutes* at all levels
- Political women wings/sections
- Alternate political schools be set up.
- Strong partnership with education, research and institutions be developed.
- Success cases of women politicians be advocated for mobilizing other women
- Prompt support groups at village level

Violence against Women in Politics

Name of the Participants:

Sawayz, Shanta Thapaliya, Farooq Ahmad Khan and Mahbooba Mahmood

Issue:

Violence against women in politics

Challenges:

- Customs
- Traditions
- Wrong practices of religion
- Culture

Recommendations:

- Human rights awareness and right based advocacy from family level upward
- Special measurement to minimize the generation gap and bring positive change
- Socio-economic empowerment initiative at the village level and upward till the national level
- Focus on women entrepreneurship development
- Reinterpretation of religious texts and research to combat the wrong practices against women

Short term Measures:

- Quota system
- Pro-women policy change advocacy at all level

Long term measures:

- Plan to change of policies and strategies
- Change in legal arrangement
- Promote space at village/community level for women to come together, discuss and share experiences
- Create support mechanism at higher level to support the village level interventions

Lack of Data on VAWIP***Name of the Participants:***

Nasreen Awan, Farooq Ahmad, Sama Shrestha, Venket, Padma Ratnayake, Uzma, Pam and Swarnalatha

Issue:

Lack of Data on VAWIP

Challenges:

- The political crimes are not reported and registered as a distinct case by the police.
- Women in politics tolerate and hide the violence they face in their lives and do not communicate it to concerned authorities.
- Lack of alliances from the grassroots to the national and international instruments/systems.
- Human rights violations are not reported and only the severe cases like those of murder, rape, acid burn etc are reported.

Recommendations:

- Establish strong networks and alliances.
- Establish monitoring, documentation and response systems.
- Sensitization of police, armed forces and judges.
- Create social work groups in community
- Sensitize crime reporters, string reporters, area reporters to raise the issue in media.

Capacity Building for Women in Politics

Name of the Participants

Apurba Shah, Subhange Herath, Ishrat Shami, S. Swarnalatha, Puillivic, Rita Thapa, Vipula, Rane, Mahinda, Chitra Lekha Yadav and Nasir Uddin

Issues

Lack of access for capacity building.

- Non-conducive environment.
- Religious norms and cultural practices.
- Lack of control over resources (financial resources).

Challenges

- Opportunities for more education process.
- Reforms/improvement of laws and policies.
- Proper interpretation of religion.
- Financial/economic independence.

Recommendations

- Reform in education system which is gender sensitive
- More training to women in grassroots level by the politicians

Best Practices to combat violence against women in politics; Country-wise discussion and Presentation Report

In this session, participants were asked to discuss within the country groups on VAWIP and best practices to combat it, if adopted any. To guide the discussion, a question was floored as: “*Are there any polices, mechanisms, programs and actions that need to be introduced to combat Violence against women in politics?*”

There was a country-wise discussion on best practices adopted by the governments or NGO/INGOS to combat violence against women in politics. Following are the nation wise presentation.

I. Bangladesh

I.A. Policies

- Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)
- National Action Plan for Women Development
- Gender Focal Point – Ministry-wise
- National Women Development Policy

I.B. Mechanisms

- National, international and grassroots NGOs are working on this issue
- Constitution has provided equality before the law
- Bangladesh ratified CEDAW with two reservations

I.C. Programs

- Police reform program funded by UNDP and DFID for women politicians
- One-stop crisis center in Dhaka
- Medical college dealing with victims of violence
- Women friendly hospitals
- Gender sensitization program for law enforcement agencies by UNFPA.

I.D. Actions

- 45 seats are reserved for women in national parliament
- Parliamentarian Standing Committee for the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs formed

II. India and Afghanistan

India and Afghanistan made a common discussion and presentation.

II.A Policies

- Constitutional guarantee through article 14, 15 (3), 16
- National Women Policy, 2001
- 73 and 74th amendment of the Constitution in 1993
- 1/3 representation of women in parliament, 1996
- Women's right to parental property- Supreme Court Decision
- Women's right to ancestral property- Supreme Court Decision
- Electoral reforms

II.B Mechanisms

- National Women's Commission
- Ratification on CEDAW
- CRC Act
- Election Commission
- Anti Rape Law
- Establishment of Women Police Station
- Gender budgeting at national level

II.C Programs

- Mahila Samata
- Women's finance commission
- Implementation of 1/3 representation at local government level
- Implementation of Right to Information Act, 2005
- Training of elected representatives at local level

III. Nepal

Activities carried out by civil Society organisations

- Created Pressure Group
- Created Political Women's Sangharsha Samitee.
- Pressurized the state to pass 33% reservation for women at all levels of government institutions including political parties/ organizations.
- Pressurized the state to include women lawyers in the committee of the Interim Constitution.

- Created a common platform of District Level Women's Empowerment Committee
- Empowered women leaders from the minor communities like Muslim, Tharu etc.
- Pressurized the State to amend the discriminatory laws including inheritance laws and property rights of a daughter.
- Pressurized the state to enact the new laws to combat VAW including VAWIP.
- Provided leadership skill training to the local level political leaders.
- Conducted a gender sensitization program for males and females.
- Nepalese NGOs are working closely with political parties/leaders.
- Declaration of the issues to be incorporated in New Constitution Assembly by the local women political leaders.
- Created a watch group to monitor VAW.
- Established the Centre for Legal Aid and also mediation centres in different districts of Nepal.
- Promoting local women leaders as Peace Keepers and Peace Builders.
- Build a platform to create a link between women leaders from the National, local and the community levels.

IV. Sri Lanka

- 1994: Women's Charter approved by the Parliament but not implemented as a legal document.
- 1995 Act: Sexual Harassment
- 1998: Revision of the 1995 Act: increase in punishment
- 2000 : Women's Desk at every police station
- 2005 : Domestic Violence Act [A significant step]
- Work place policies on sexual harassment

Major political parties recognize the importance of women's participation in politics and gender equity, but no quota system for women in place and women politicians differ in their opinions regarding quota system.

Future Directions to Combat VAWIP

Contributors were requested to find out the future direction to cope with the problems of VAWIP in group of their respective countries. Each country presented national as well as regional perspective as future direction in following manner.

I. Actions Needed

I.A. India and Afghanistan

- 1) Friends of Women in Politics (FWIP) to be formed
- 2) Collection and dissemination of information at both national and South Asian level
- 3) Establishment of crisis management fund (CMF)
- 4) Capacity building and training of major stakeholders

I.B. Nepal

1. 33% women representation at every decision making level (including political parties and the cabinet)
2. Amend all discriminatory laws against women
3. Positive discrimination for women in all the state programs
4. Provision for separate budget to empower women in politics
5. Activate National Women Commission
6. Strengthen women's organization and civil society organizations to support women political leaders
7. Create a mechanism to lobby and advocate for women's political issues
8. Higher education, and scholarship programs to enhance capacity of women in politics
9. Strong capacity building and leadership development programs
10. Formalization of watch groups that can monitor violence against women in politics
11. Program to educate women on their human and political rights
12. Create a platform to establish linkages at national, local, community level and international levels to create pressure groups

13. Promote local women leaders as peace builders
14. Training, research, exposure visits and interaction programs to build capacity of women in politics

I.C. Sri Lanka

- 1) Building leadership at the grassroots level
- 2) Close network specially with media
- 3) Lobbying and advocacy
- 4) Women's desk at police stations
- 5) National committee of women in existence
- 6) Prepare women at grassroots level to enter into politics
- 7) Sensitizing programs for the general public
- 8) Programs to lobby for increased participation of women in politics
- 9) Initiatives to lobby with the political parties to protect women in politics and prospective women candidates
- 10) Introduce a law to bring in a significant number (33%) of women into politics at all levels
- 11) Pressurize party leaders to become gender sensitive.

I.D Bangladesh

- 1) Form Women Rights Committee at the district level.
- 2) Develop programs to provide legal assistance to the survivors of VAWIP.
- 3) Organize workshops, seminars and initiate dialogue at the union, upajilla, districts and national level to sensitize the politician as well as the public
- 4) Empower women in politics, through capacity building and financially supporting/uplifting them, to enable them to stand in the elections alongside the men.
- 5) Involve politicians, especially the elected parliament members, in the workshop and seminars and pressurize them to raise the issues of VAWIP in their regular meetings.

I.E. Pakistan

Within Political Parties

- At least 33 percentage women member to be enrolled in political parties at every stage.
- Indirect election of women to be repealed, as it devalues her position
- Parties should strongly support their women candidates

Within Election Commission

- Political parties which make some kind of agreements to restrict “women’s right to cast vote” be banned
- Such elections be declared “null and void” when parties agree to restrict women from voting.
- A separate policy, to safeguard women candidates and voters, to be developed

Within Civil Society Organizations

- Election monitoring missions be held
- Facilitation bench for women candidates during elections
- Advocate for VAWIP issues and provide women politicians, the legal, counseling and media support
- Watch for Human Rights Violations from the District to the National level;
- A holistic program be launched with essential components like: research, training, seminars/dialogues, legal and counseling services, liaison and joint ventures with the media etc.

Voting Report on Regional Future Directions

Representatives of the respective countries proposed their directions for increasing women's involvement in politics in the region and participants from all the countries voted on the proposed directions. The voting was carried out for setting priorities on the directions and the results were as presented below:

I. Nepal

Proposed Directions

- Create a platform to establish linkages among national, local, community and the international groups to form pressure groups **(7 votes, V position)**
- Promote local women leaders as peace builders **(2 votes)**
- Training, research, exposure visits, and interaction programs to build capacity of women in politics **(10 votes, II position)**
- Establish centre for legal aid and mediation centres in different districts of the country

II. Sri Lanka

Proposed Directions

- Lobby for the parties to protect their prospective women candidates **(3 votes,)**
- Introduce a law to bring in significant number (33%) of women politicians at both local and national politics **(8 votes, IV position)**
- Pressurize party leaders to become gender sensitive **(5 votes,)**
- Prepare women at all levels from grassroots to national level for political leadership
- Sensitization programs for the general public
- Respond to victim/survivors of VAWIP and help them to stay in politics, instead of dropping out of the politics through confidence building, leadership development and counseling

III. Pakistan

Proposed Directions

- Develop a coordinating system within the civil society **(8 votes, IV position)**
- Develop a data base/knowledge base system of women in politics/VAWIP Create alliance among (NGOs, GOs, media, lawyers, political workers, trade unionist, teacher, students) **(4 votes)**
- Develop a coordination system within the civil society organizations
- Develop and disseminate charter of demand for the improvement of politics **(3 votes)**

IV. India and Afghanistan

Proposed Directions

- Friends of Women in Politics (FWIP) to be formed **(3 votes)**
- Collection and dissemination of information at both national and South Asian level **(14 votes, I position)**
- Collection of information and dissemination at national and regional level
- Establishment of crisis management fund (CMF) **(2 votes)**
- Capacity building and training of major stakeholders **(4 votes)**

V. Bangladesh

Proposed Directions

- 1) Form Women Rights Committee at the district level
- 2) Develop programs to provide legal assistance to the survivors of VAWIP
- 3) Organize workshops, seminars and initiate dialogue at the union, upajilla, districts and national level to sensitize the politician as well as the public
- 4) Empower women in politics, through capacity building and financially supporting/uplifting them and enable them to stand in the elections alongside the men. **(9 votes, III position)**
- 5) Empower women through capacity building and financial upliftment to complete at the election

Procedure of the Unconference

I. Inauguration Session

I.a. Igniting the Lamp

The Unconference was formally inaugurated collectively by all the respected participants of the program by lighting the oil lamps. Ms. Bushra Gohar, Dr. Padma Ratnayake, Hon. Chitra Lekha Yadav, Mr. Nasreen Awan, Hon. S. Swarna Lata Sudhakar Reddy, Ms. Vasanthi Rajendran, Ms. Indrani Sugataraj, and Ms. Upulangani Malagam were the persons to light the inaugural lamp.

I.b. Closing Remarks

Ms. Bushra Gohar gave the vote of thanks to the entire Unconference participants. She further expressed her heartfelt thanks to the leading women politicians, Hon. Indrani Sugathadasa, Secretary, Ministry of Women's Empowerment, Sri Lanka; Hon. Chitra Lekha Yadav, Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, Nepal; Hon. Swarna Sudhakar, Member of Legislative Assembly, India and Ms. Nasreen Awan, Member District Council, Pakistan. She closed the inaugural session wishing every success for the Unconference in achieving its targeted results.

II. Open Discussion on Nation-wise Presentation

After national presentations the floor was opened for discussion to all the participants. Participants were encouraged to express their views and any queries upon the presentations made earlier. Main highlights of the discussion are mentioned below:

1. Papers were good enough to understand the common situation of VAWIP in South Asian region that almost all the issues of VAWIP and the current legal and socio-economic provision are incorporated thereon.
2. If we have a joint regional program, we could be achieving a lot to reduce the VAWIP. Changes should be started from the family.

In Bangladesh, activists are reforming police administration to tackle the different aspects of violence against women including VAWIP. In the name of ordinances discriminatory laws prevail in Pakistan in the name of good governance.

3. In Pakistan, different tactics and strategies are applied to create a liaison with the media by SAP-Pakistan. However it is very difficult to work with the media as in other South Asian countries because they don't hail discussions regarding the prominent issues like politics.
4. SAP International should form a coalition of different stakeholders like media, CSOs, academics, politicians, etc. to work together on the issue of violence against women.
5. Sri Lanka has a different electoral system. It is difficult for women to come to campaign within a very large geographical area due to the low mobility. Quota system would help to enhance women's participation in politics.
6. Before saying quota system is not important we need to think over how to build the capacity of the women politician who came out through the reservation. We should lobby to bring women in politics any way at this stage, that is why reservation is a way to encourage them.
7. In Nepal, women politicians are still crushed in-between the state and the rebels. NGO's and INGO's have a role to play in encouraging participation of women in politics. Regarding monitoring and documentation, an important relief providing to the victims is response to their problems.
8. Broader alliance is necessary to reduce the VAWIP from grassroots to national and regional level. Muscle and money related violence is affecting women.
9. In Nepalese perspective, LACC, an NGO, is providing skill development trainings to the women who are interested in joining politics.
10. Violence is a regular phenomenon. An example that has occurred in Nepal: a women used to be beaten every night by her husband and in the morning deprived of eating any thing at her home. As and when her colleagues knew the matter they united together with leaving their political ideologies far behind. They warned the husband. Then the victimized women was released from the violence of every day and was allowed to eat and live in the house. This is an example how the alliance formed among the women themselves was able to mobilize the society itself to cope with the problem.

Regarding violence by manipulation the current incident of Nepal was shared, that is the story of present Deputy Speaker, Ms. Chitra Lekha Yadav.¹ It was also stated that the family and society also obstruct women's involvement in politics.

III. Reflection of the Previous Day

Mr. Rohit Nepali requested to participants to reflect the activities of the previous day. He made an announcement to come out in the stage voluntarily. Dr. Pamela Pieris wished to reflect the first day of the Unconference which was as following:

The data base information, case studies, personal stories the panelists presented on the first day of the Unconference as well as informal discussions among and between participants have provided us a context for constructive collaborative initiation to respond the Violence against Women in Politics in individual and in regional basis.

The definition of violence in these discussions were elaborated mostly on women leaders at the grassroots levels, with the exception of one occasion involving a participant's example of Nepal's Hon. Deputy Speaker being a victim of 'manipulated violence'. We also shared issues related to 'women' and 'politics' general expectations of women that are based on certain role, definitions and women's struggle to participate in the 'political processes.' The discussions touched upon the role of media, issues of domestic violence, and how certain women are responding and coping violence. It seemed to me, we are addressing 'violence against women' from a broader perspective, showing us that politics encompasses the entire life span of women in 21st Century.

The need for establishing 'structures' for women to get together and work together is identified as the strategy. This has existed in our Asian cultures from the early periods. Since the establishment of the 'year of the women' and the 'women's decade', women are involved in various initiatives, mainly providing resources for economic development. These women have become skilled leaders but we need find out to what extent have their leadership been effective and why are they still victimized? Similarly, we need to find out where have we failed then?

¹ Please refer the story explained in executive summary of this publication

When we are talking on the violence against women in politics we need to identify the concise definition of ‘violence’ of this type not the common type of violence against women. A lot of things are interrelated with the VAWIP issues. So how the decisions taken by political leaders adversely impact ‘women leaders’ and in what ways, we should educate children (girls and boys), women and men for ensuring participatory democratic processes of governance? Male leaders/politicians should learn to work with women leaders and politicians.

Likely the immediate responsibilities of I/NGOS GOs and other right organizations have to be identified to combat violence against women leaders/politicians?

She floored the aforesaid queries to the participants and requested to all for stumbling on the answer of these queries and finally focused to make a consensus on what ways can participants of this Unconference work with personnel at various government structures and professionals and representatives of I/NGOs (international and community based) to uphold the role of women in politics?

And finally she thanked the organizers of this Unconference for raising this issue in a regional forum.

IV. Closing Session

A. Northern Perspective

Mr. Richard Harmston offered the northern perspective especially based on Canadian practice. According to him, the change in general status of Women in Politics has been revolutionary. Novel political women are increasing within every society day to day. Legal development is the next part of affirmative actions by which women rights are guaranteed and equal rights between men and women are enjoyed. Violence against women is treated from an anti-human rights perspective. Such kind of violence is regarded as “the violation of human rights” and a strong mechanism has been developed to prevent it. Cases of physical violence against women have since then been dramatically reduced. Yet, psychological and mental violence somehow still exists within the society. The mandatory provision of at least 13% women representatives in the national parliament is not an affirmative action for their political participation.

If we look at the educational data profiles, women constitute a major portion of the students in Canadian Universities, thus even the faculties have been developed to be gender sensitive.

Canadian students are quite aware and interested with the South Asia political issues, like-India is a largest democratic country, Nepal's people's recent victory etc. That is plus point to initiate the supporting system from north to South Asian countries.

Gender equality is an importance issue in the Canadian policies and we can find many books published by the government itself and by the CSO's to promote the gender equality. Government provides financial support for advocacy and capacity building of women. These resources could support current regional initiative.

Nevertheless, the South Asian perspective is very different and pathetic regarding these issues, which had plagued in these countries. The present movement of NGO/INGOs can be regarded as milestones in the struggle for combating violence against women in politics. Gender inequality is a major drawback in this region. Now the governments of South Asian countries are considering the issues lobbied and advocated by NGO/INGOs positively which is pleasant for these organizations.

Lack of equal status between men and women legally, socially, and culturally are the major impediments in women's political participation in the South Asian Region. Strong advocacy and lobbying should be initiated from the grassroots to the national level to eliminate such kind of unjust practices. For this, regional networking and alliance building will help us to step forward in an organized way to combat the problem of VAWIP. The North, especially Canada is always interested to support in any form to the South Asian Countries to fight against VAWIP.

B. Closing Remarks

Ms. Bushra Gohar concluded the Unconference with a note that South Asia Partnership International is facilitating the process of political participation of women in South Asia. She reminded the identity of women should not be negotiated during the processes. To achieve it into leaving reality we, the SAP system and all the participants, are key players, hence SAP International including SAP Nationals/partner request your attention and for your joined hands to each other to combat VAWIP. She shared the example of Afghanistan, of growing tolerance among women

and appeal to awake all the concerned against the VAWIP and finally focused to end the culture of tolerating.

Regional solidarity is essential to cope with problems like violence against women in politics and women's participation in political decision making. At present, moving together with a national perspective and identification of the common strategies will be the initial phase

This Unconference was conducted with motives like building a regional perspective for combating violence against women in politics; and bringing together people from South Asia for creating solidarity to address the issues of VAWIP. We are now practically able to build a regional perspective and bring solidarity. This Unconference has identified five kinds of future directions of regional level. SAP System will employ all these directions while shaping the future route of VAWIP program and during other necessary initiations with your genuine support.

C. Vote of Thanks

Dr. Padma Ratnayake ended the Unconference furnishing the vote of thanks to all the participants and SAP members, saying that it was indeed the pleasure of SAP Sri Lanka including all the SAP Systems to have all participants in Sri Lanka for 2 days. She expressed SAP Sri Lanka felt proud to arrange this program in Colombo and apologized for any shortcomings in their local support.

Methodology applied during the Unconference

Dr. Rohit Kumar Nepali, chief facilitator of the Unconference shared the Open Space Technology applied to conduct the program.

He expressed that no one here is the expert and no one is the learner. All persons are of equal value and importance and every one is the expert in her/his area and the ideas created and expressed. Further, every one is learner before the other's idea. This Open Space Technology is basically concerned to materialize this thought into a leaving reality.

He informed that, adopting this Open Space methodology, first of all the facilitator puts a question regarding the issues. Each and every participant is allowed to post their idea in a meta card and place it in a market place.¹ Then the idea initiator starts to create the market just like a producer intends to create higher selling value of his products. Different ideas posted in the market place are kept in different time slots. After that, different discussions start based on the ideas posted in the wall/market place at the same time. Idea initiator is responsible to encourage his group to contribute in the discussion however there will be a facilitator in each discussion group from the logistic team. Maximum 20 minutes is the time allotted for the discussion to each group.

Wiki Station

It is a new tool developed under the information and communication technology for the collective authorization of any deed. Inside the Unconference hall a wiki station was created in order to post the discussion reports. It was developed basically to insert each and every activity of the event, narrative for the preparation of the event report. Each participant is eligible to insert the information and likely to edit the posted information to produce it in a better way.

Better utilization of WIKI and posting of any information systematically could finally produce a good event report of the Unconference. Since it is very new technology and almost all the participants were applying this system for the first time, the contribution of the participants was not sufficient as expected.

¹ The market place was created on the wall of the conference hall. It was a graphic table made on wall by the help of colorful tapes to post each idea separately in the allotted time frame.

Program Schedule South Asian Regional Consultation on Cries of Women in Politics: Quest for Justice 14-15 August 2006

Day I

0930-1000 Registration

1000-1200 **Inauguration**

- Welcome Note: Dr. Padma Ratnayake, ED, SAP Sri Lanka (10:00-10:10)
- Lighting the lamp: National representatives (10:10-10:25)
- Objective Highlights: Dr. R.K. Nepali, ED, SAP International (10:25-10:40)
- Speeches:
 1. Hon. Swarna Sudhakar, Member of Legislative Assembly, India (10:40-10:55)
 2. Hon. Chitra Lekha Yadav, Deputy Speaker, House of Representative, Nepal (10:55-11:10)
 3. Key Note Speaker: Hon. Ferial Ashraff, Minister of Housing and Construction Industry and Eastern Province Education and Irrigation Development, Sri Lanka (11:10-11:30)
 4. Chief Guest; Hon. Sumedha G. Jayasena, Minister of Women's Empowerment and Social Welfare, Sri Lanka (11:30-11:45)
- Concluding Remarks: Ms. Bushra Gohar, Chairperson, SAP International (11:45-12:00)

1200-1300 Lunch

1300- 1530 **Voices to Stop Violence against Women in politics:
National Presentation and Discussion**

- Bangladesh:13:00-13:30
- India: 13:30-14:00
- Nepal :14:00-14:30

Discussion: 14:30-15:00

1500-1530	Break
1530-1630	Voices to Stop Violence against Women in Politics: National Presentation and Discussion Violence against Women in Politics: National Experiences (contd.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pakistan: 15:30-16:00 • Sri Lanka: 16:00-16:30 Discussion: 16:30-17:00
1700-1715	Evening News

Day II

0900-0930	Reflections on Day 1
0930-1200	Promoting women in Politics: Issues, Challenges and Recommendations (Open Space Technology). Opening the circle: 0930-1030 Feather Group Discussions:1030-12:00
1200-1300	Lunch
1300-1400	Speed Sharing: Best Practices to combat VAWIP
1400-1430	Sharing Open Space Finding
1430-1530	Future Directions: What next?
1530-1600	Break

Closing:

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| 1530-1600 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern perspective on VAWIP: Richard Harmston • Overview on the workshop: Dr. R.K. Nepali, ED, SAP International • Closing Remarks: Ms. Bushra Gohar, Chairperson, SAP International • Vote of thanks: Dr. Padma Ratnayake, ED, SAP Sri Lanka |
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