



Women's Political Representation in
Local Government Institutes: 25%
Quota and Way Forward

Report by Law and Society Trust - 2016



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Introduction

Women represented 51.75% of the total population in Sri Lanka by the year 2014 (Trading Economics, 2015).¹ Women are reported as highest Foreign Exchange Earners in Sri Lanka, declaring 6 billion US\$ in the year 2014 through migrating as house maids (Women's Chamber of Industry and Commerce, 2016).² The other highest foreign exchange generating industries are Textile and Garment (44%), Tea (14%), Rubber and Rubber based products (8%) (*PERFORMANCE OF THE EXPORT SECTOR OF SRI LANKA – 2014*, 2015)³. The labour force used in these sectors are mostly female.

Against this background it is clear that women's participation in Sri Lankan economy is considerable and needs to be taken seriously. However, the unfortunate reality is that women's political representation in the country is a negligible proportion reporting 6.5% of parliamentary seats, 6% of seats in provincial councils, and 2% of seats in local government (Ariyaratne, 2015).⁴

The following report is based on a discussion conducted by the Law and Society Trust on 16th February 2016 at which the Hon. Minister of Local Government and Provincial Councils, Mr. Faiszer Mustapha, P.C, Mr. Rohana Hettiratchchi, (Executive Director, PAFFREL), Dr. Nimalka Fernando, (Attorney at Law and President of International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism), Ms. Vishaka Dharmadasa (Chair, Association of War Affected Women), were speakers, and numerous other distinguished guests and activists were attendees. The event was held at Renuka Hotel, Colombo 03, and the discussion was moderated by Mr. Rohana Hettiratchchi.

As stated in the discussion 'Women were proving their quality and quantitative representation in every sphere, so there was a demand for women representation in the politics, legislature, and judiciary' (Jayaratne, 2016)⁵. As mentioned by Mr. Jayaratne, the women's representation is challenged by women's own dis-likeliness towards 'ruled by women'. Although allocating 25% quota for women recently for local government institutes is promising, it is to be discussed how the procedure should be elevated to a level where high quality participation is guaranteed in politics through women.

¹ Trading Economics, *Population - Female (% Of Total) In Sri Lanka*. Tradingeconomics.com. N.p., 2015. Web. 12 Mar. 2016.

² Women's Chamber of Industry and Commerce, (2016), *Women in Sri Lanka*, Wcicsl.lk. N.p., 2016. Web. 12 Mar. 2016.

³ *PERFORMANCE OF THE EXPORT SECTOR OF SRI LANKA – 2014*, (2015), Colombo: Export Development Board of Sri Lanka, 2015.

⁴ Ariyaratne, T., 2015. *Where are the women*. [online] Sunday Observer (online). Available at: <<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2015/05/17/fea10.asp>> [Accessed 12 Mar. 2016].

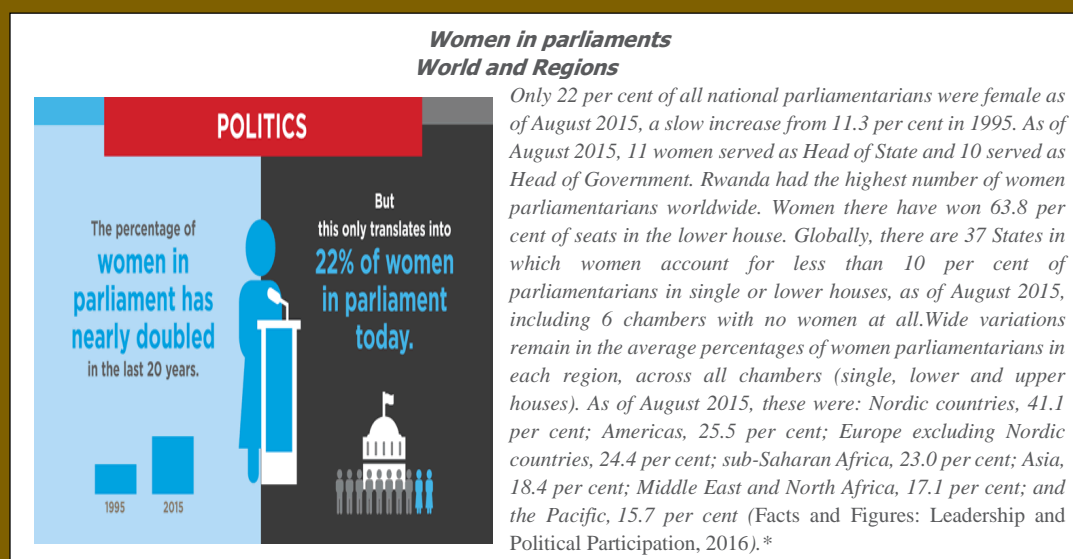
⁵ Jayaratne, C., 2016. *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Introduction). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

In addition to participants from Colombo, special mention must be made of civil society representatives from *Ampara, Monaragala, Badulla, Panama, Puttalam and Batticaloa* who contributed greatly to the discussion.

Women's political representation in the region

As stated at the discussion,

‘Sri Lanka has the least representation of women in the region. Less than 3% provincially and national politics has only about 5%. Even Afghanistan which a country that is new to Democracy has about 28-30%. In India the representation is not much in the national level however, there is active participation in the provincial level’ (Hettiarachchi, 2016).⁶



Women's Participation in the region

(Source; Women Leading Public Services and Political Participation in South Asia, The Women in Public Services Project)

| | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|--------|---------|----------------------|
| Bangladesh | Parliament | 19.83% | 69/279 | January 5, 2014 |
| Sri Lanka | Parliament | 5.78% | 13/225 | April 8 and 20, 2010 |
| Maldives | People's Majlis | 5.88% | 5/85 | March 22, 2014 |
| Nepal | Sansad | 29.91% | 172/575 | November 19, 2013 |
| India* | Lok Sabha (House of the People) | 11.4% | 62/543 | April 2014 |
| | Rajya Sabha (Council of States) | 11.9% | 29/243 | February 2014 |
| Pakistan** | National Assembly | 20.74% | 67/323 | May 11, 2013 |
| | Senate | 16.35% | 17/104 | March 2, 2012 |

⁶Hettiarachchi, R. (2016). *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Introduction). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

- UN WOMEN, (2016), *Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#notes>> [Accessed 12 Mar. 2016].

Clarifying 25% quota for women in local government institutions

The recent amendments to the Local Government Act increased women's participation by 25%. The amendment was an effort to ensure a quota of representation for women to be formed similar to the method of appointment in the national list of parliament. Unlike in the National List which appoints members to the Parliament without a particular order, this list will follow the order of the list in making appointments (Mustapha, 2016).⁷

Why women's participation is important in politics

1. Women do have a different perspective than men and this vision is essential to push the country forward (Dharmadasa, 2016).⁸ For an example, 'the Scandinavian countries have the highest per-capita income; these countries not only have high representation of women in politics but also in other fields' (Dharmadasa, 2016).⁹
2. Citizen of Sri Lanka not only comprise of men but also women and therefore women's representation is important in politics (Fernando, 2016).¹⁰

Reasons for low women's participation in politics in Sri Lanka

There are many reasons for the low participation of women in politics in Sri Lanka. Among them, the following were identified at the discussion:-

1. The proportionate rate system of elections have largely reduced the women's participation in politics (Mustapha, 2016).¹¹ To have popularity in a district, a large expense has to be incurred. Women are incapable of accumulating that much money from sponsors as women have not seen as competent competitors in the elections.
2. Social media and extensive speed of spreading rumors which damage the dignity and respectfulness of people. Social media is filled with slander at the politicians and new entrants especially women will be discouraged through these forms of insults. People who has a political background are used to these forms of insults and aware about the situations that might arise. However, these forms of insults have an adverse effect on women's

⁷*Ibid*

⁸Dharmadasa, V., (2016). *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Speech). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

⁹*ibid*

¹⁰Fernando, N., (2016) *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Speech). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

¹¹Mustapha, F., (2016), *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Speech). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

political representation (Mustapha, 2016).¹² Although Sri Lanka permits and provides freedom to publish news, the country still lacks criminal defamation in a situation of insult. Even for such an action, the offender needs to have financial means to provide compensation, which if they lack, only becomes a mere certificate issued against the perpetrator (Mustapha, 2016).¹³

3. Political culture and violence prevailing in the society is seen as an obstacle for women to enter into the politics (Dharmadasa, 2016).¹⁴
4. Political parties strive to increase the number of seats or representation of their party members in the parliament or local government bodies. The sheer goal of the political parties are to win. Therefore 'popularity' will be a key factor to get appointed to the list. Therefore a difference in considerations between the members in the civil society and political parties will exist (Mustapha, 2016).¹⁵
5. Although locating a list to increase the women's political participation in local government bodies is promising, there is a fear whether the proper appointment would be made to the list. Revisiting the past experiences indicates that there is a trend of irregular appointments to the national list by political parties (Dharmadasa, 2016).¹⁶
6. Political institutions are seen as a male domain geared towards accommodating the male preference. For an example, some of the meetings of political parties are held at the weekends and would end mostly at midnight. Thus, does not allow the women to participate (Fernando, 2016).¹⁷
7. Women's mentality is set by the socio-cultural attitudes to think that man's success is her success. Society too looks at the 'success' as the image of a man. Political culture of Sri Lanka reflects the similar tradition existing in the society (Fernando, 2016).¹⁸

¹²ibid

¹³ibid

¹⁴ Dharmadasa, V., (2016), *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Speech). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

¹⁵Mustapha, F., (2016), *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Speech). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

¹⁶Dharmadasa, V., (2016), *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Speech). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

¹⁷Fernando. N., (2016). *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Speech). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

¹⁸Fernando. N., (2016). *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Speech). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

8. There is a huge gap between political parties and the civil society (Vithanage, 2016)¹⁹

Recommendations

1. To achieve the desired goals through the amendment, women with necessary capabilities to work in politics should be appointed to the list (Mustapha, 2016).²⁰
2. Political parties and civil society activists should be engage in the discussion to increase the quality women participation in politics.
3. In order to build women leaders one should look at the mechanism operating in the grass-root levels (Mustapha, 2016).²¹ Although women are active in leaders in grass root level, they are not willing to participate in politics which is a challenge. This attitude should be changed.
4. The civil society should take responsibility to have a forum to identify leaders who should represent them (Mustapha, 2016).²²
5. Although political culture is seen as a reason which reduces the women's political participation, women should take the challenge and go forward. Politics are associated with defacing the character of the politicians. Thus, women should be capable of accepting this challenge. The problem of mud-slinging is not only limited to Sri Lanka but also to other nations as well (Mustapha, 2016).²³ However, since the quota which is introduced to the local government bodies is similar to the national list, the risks of facing the general challenges are reduced.
6. The women who enter politics should not focus on trying to make a name for them but should try to represent the needs of the country.

¹⁹Vithanage, S., (2016). *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Participant). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

²⁰Mustapha, F., (2016), *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Speech). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

²¹*ibid*

²²*ibid*

²³*ibid*

7. The image of the successful woman in politics is that of a woman who uses criminal force and is wealthy. Women who contest need to find new strategies and have novel ideas in conducting their campaigns (Fernando, 2016).²⁴
8. Beauty and being related to a male politician should not be a criteria to be appointed to the list.
9. Women should especially be capable of represent other women who face many problems such as displacement, access to land (Fernando, 2016)²⁵ and gender based violence.
10. As women have invaluable knowledge in agriculture, women political leaders should actively engage in developing agriculture and uplifting the rural economy and through that the economy of the country (Fernando, 2016).²⁶
11. Women need to actively engage in the political activities in their respective constituencies and make sure that proper list of appointments will made to the list(Fernando, 2016).²⁷
12. Society should be convinced of the value and benefit of having female representation in politics, as women are less corrupt and mostly do not use violence (Hettiaracchi, 2016).²⁸
13. Civil society should demand political parties to include women in the executive committees. One way of achieving this is having a condition for political parties to include women when registering.
14. Rather than enforcing law, attitudes should be changed to elect women as political leaders.
15. The list of nominees should be justified by the respective political party (Hettiaracchi, 2016).²⁹
16. There should be a criteria which is agreed by the civil society in order to locate the list of nominees (Kahandagama, 2016).³⁰

²⁴Fernando. N., (2016). *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Speech). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

²⁵Fernando. N., (2016). *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Speech). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

²⁶*Ibid*

²⁷*Ibid*

²⁸Hettiarachchi, R. ,(2016). *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Introduction). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

²⁹*Ibid*

³⁰Kahandagama. A., (2016). *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (LST- Participant). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

17. Formulating strategies to win the election as women are in a disadvantage position compared with men (Hettiarachchi, 2016)³¹
18. Encourage women to participate in small groups than individuals (Hettiarachchi, 2016).³²Building up a good relationship with media (Hettiarachchi, 2016).³³

³¹Hettiarachchi, R. ,(2016). *Women's Presentation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka* (Introduction). Discussion on 'Women's Representation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka' at Hotel Renuka, Colombo

³² *Ibid*

³³ *Ibid*