

PublicationDate: 21-06-2001
PAGE: 4
LABEL: ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

PUBLICATION: BANGKOK POST
KEYWORD: women-local administration

HEADLINE: Not enough women in government seats

SUBHEADLINE: Disparity hurts their level of involvement

BYLINE: Wanphen Sreshthaputra

Women in local governments in the Asia-Pacific region are under-represented, according to a report released during the Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors being held in this province.

Statistics show the percentage of women in local government seats range from a high of 33 % of seats in Bangladesh and India to a low of 2% in Sri Lanka.

Women in South Asia (Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh) and East Asia and the Pacific (China, Vietnam, Japan, Australia and New Zealand) have had more electoral success overall than those in Southeast Asia (Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines), according to the report presented by Jean Drage from the School of Political Science and International Relations, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

This disparity is directly related to a quota of seats being allocated for women in many countries of South Asia, and which when introduced instantly changes the level of women's involvement.

In East Asia and the Pacific the higher number of women involved in local government would be "a reflection of the length of time women have been able to vote and stand for election".

Besides, in most countries _ except Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Japan _ there are more women in local government than there are in central government positions.

Factors which explain the higher representation of women in local than in central government include the ability to combine a position in the local government with family responsibilities and employment, the greater accessibility of such positions and less competitiveness, the greater acceptance of women's role in city and government, and in some countries the system of reserved seats for women in local authorities.

With 18.1% of local government seats (urban seats only) occupied by women and 7.8% of central government seats, Thailand ranks eighth out of 12 countries in the region, although statistics about the Pakistani situation were not available.

"Currently there are 8 women mayors (0.53%) and 18.1% of urban local government seats in Thailand filled by women. Thirty percent of city clerks are women as are 40% of executives," the report said.

It continued: "There are 44 women in the National Parliament (7.8%), 22 women in the Senate (10.9%) and 22 in the House of Representatives (6.1%)."