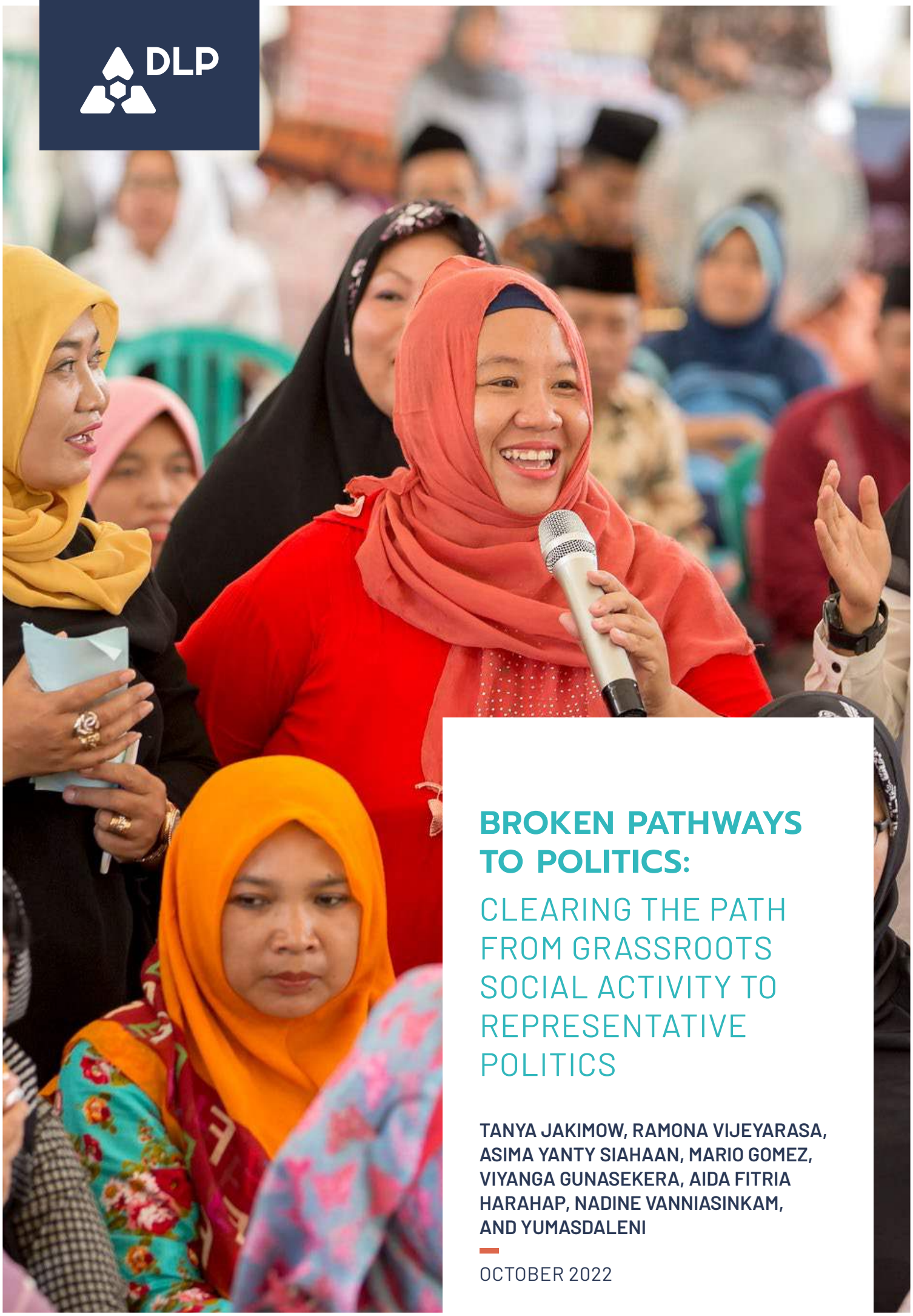

BROKEN PATHWAYS TO POLITICS:

CLEARING THE PATH FROM GRASSROOTS SOCIAL ACTIVITY TO REPRESENTATIVE POLITICS

TANYA JAKIMOW, RAMONA VIJEYARASA, ASIMA YANTY SIAHAAN, MARIO GOMEZ, VIYANGA GUNASEKERA, AIDA FITRIA HARAHAP, NADINE VANNIASINKAM, AND YUMASDALENI

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UN Women, Flickr, Ryan Brown – Community discussion on how women contribute to peace in their communities, East Java.

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INTRODUCTION

Women are underrepresented in elected office globally. Where women hold seats, they are often from an elite background, with low socioeconomic and minority women less able to climb the ladder of political recruitment (Lovenduski 2016). At the same time, women from diverse backgrounds are highly active in grassroots social and political activities outside of party politics, and are more likely to volunteer their time in community welfare (Tadros 2013).

What explains the disconnect between the large numbers of women who are active socially and politically at the grassroots and the small number contesting or winning elections? What resources do grassroots women have, and what do they need to become a credible candidate? What actions can women's organisations and development agencies take to increase the number of non-elite women elected representatives?

KEY FINDINGS

- To become a credible candidate, women need personal qualities (skills and knowledge), political capital (moral standing and 'presence'), infrastructure (social networks, constituency and money) and a sense that politics is a 'fit' with who they are.
- Women politically and socially active at the grassroots develop these resources, yet are deterred due to a perceived shortfall or mismatch between the resources they have, and what is required to win an election.
- To mend the pathway from grassroots activity to representative politics requires four operations:
    - *Transference* of skills, knowledge and experiences, so that they are recognised and valued in the political field;
    - *Amplification* of political capital and the impression women make (her presence) among a larger constituency;
    - *Extension* of infrastructure so that women's political constituencies map onto electoral boundaries, their social networks have the requisite resources, and shortfalls in financial capital can be overcome;
    - *Translation* of the values, meanings and 'feel' of the social field into the political field so that women see it as a fit with who they are and their ambitions.
- These four operations can help women's organisations, feminist groups and development agencies design long-term strategies and short-term tactical measures to encourage more 'grassroots' women candidates to stand for election.

Women are underrepresented in elected office globally. Where women hold seats, they are often from an elite background, with low socioeconomic and minority women less able to climb the ladder of political recruitment (Lovenduski 2016). At the same time, women from diverse backgrounds are highly active in grassroots social and political activities outside of party politics, and are more likely to volunteer their time in community welfare (Tadros 2013).

What explains the disconnect between the large numbers of women who are active socially and politically at the grassroots and the small number contesting or winning elections? What resources do grassroots women have, and what do they need to become a credible candidate? What actions can women's organisations and development agencies take to increase the number of non-elite women elected representatives?

In instances where women have secured a seat, they are often from an elite background, with low socioeconomic and minority women less likely to contest or win elections. Yet women from diverse backgrounds are highly active in grassroots social and political activities outside of party politics. Women are more likely than men to volunteer their time in community welfare and activism, with many leading initiatives for political change.

Our research seeks to answer why women who would make viable political candidates and quality elected representatives do not build upon their political apprenticeship (Cornwall and Goetz 2005) in grassroots political activities to enter the formal political arena. We interrogate the *broken* pathway from grassroots social and political activity to formally standing as a candidate, identifying strategies to remodel political careers at the grassroots level to increase the possibility that they become a route to election.

Our study finds a middle ground between two broad approaches to studying women's political representation. The first approach identifies the barriers to women's participation at different stages of political recruitment, identifying supply and demand factors (Norris and Lovenduski 1993). It shows that time-pressures, familial responsibilities, social norms pertaining to women's role, a lack of confidence and unavailability of resources, among others *circumscribe* women's political ambition (Devika and Thampi 2012; Iwanaga 2008; Prihatini 2019). Discrimination and prejudices within party systems and the voting public *frustrate* women's political ambition (Bjarnegård 2013; White and Aspinall 2019).

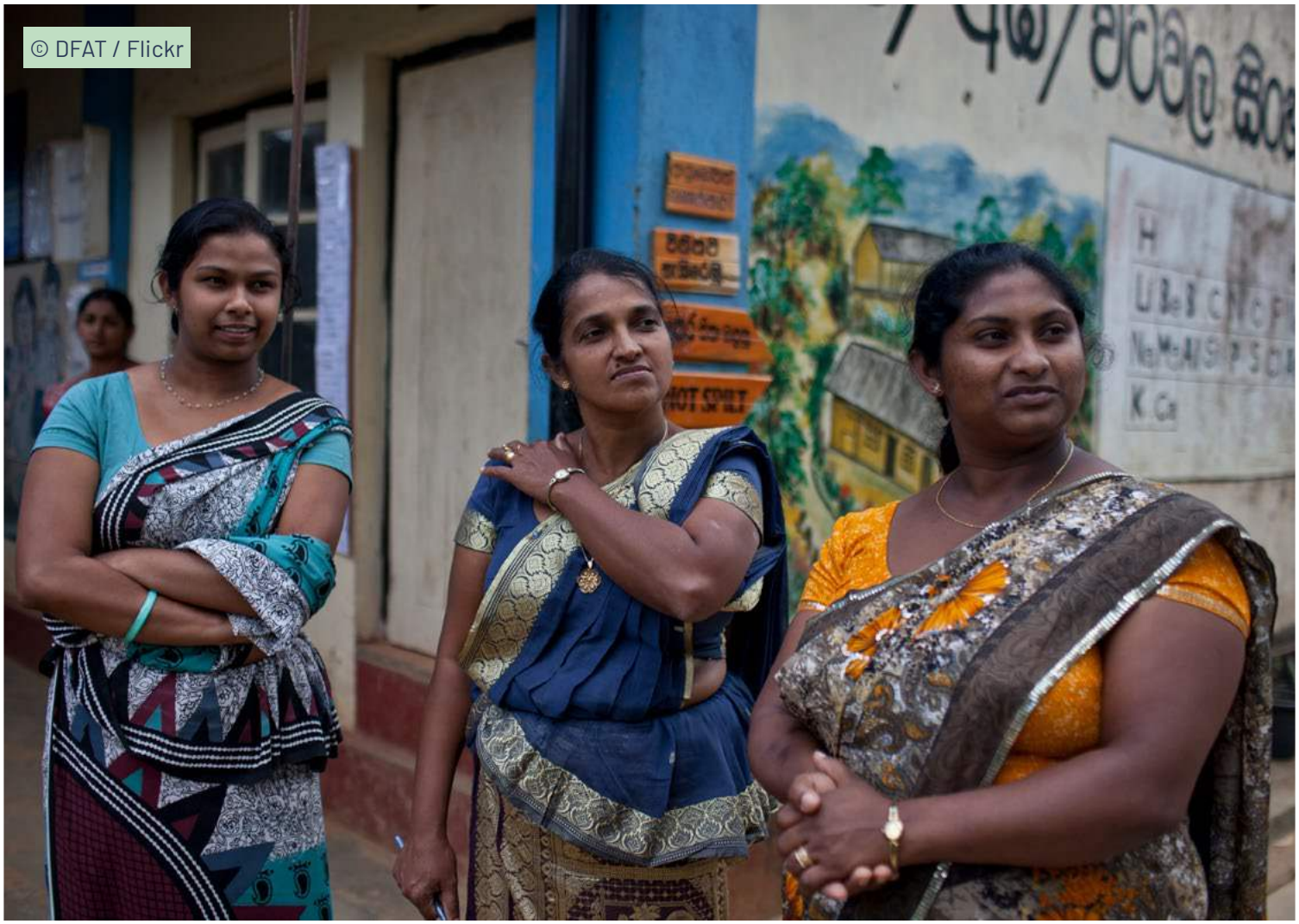
Second, a 'pathways' approach is a 'methodological choice' (Hawkesworth 2012) that starts by identifying strengths and opportunities for women to enter politics. Such studies draw lessons from success to help more women pursue a political career (Choi 2019; Dewi 2015; Spark et al. 2019). For example, Spark et al.'s (2019) analysis of the pathways of senior women leaders in the Pacific reveals the practices of accruing, converting and redeploying political capital to win elections. In this sense, it moves beyond the methodological in adopting an enabling vision of how women get from where they are to where they want to be. Our particular interest is the pathway to politics for women from 'grassroots', non-elite backgrounds. For many women, 'political apprenticeship' occurs in non-party settings, including civil society organisations, feminist activist groups, community welfare groups and so on (Tadros 2014). These routes influence women's effectiveness as advocates for women's rights once in parliament (Cornwall and Goetz 2005).

Where we differ from a 'pathways' approach is to focus not only on successful routes to representative politics, but also the experiences of the larger number of women who either do not pursue, or are unable to continue the journey to formal political leadership. In identifying the broader preconditions needed to journey from grassroots to representative politics, we reveal the difficulties women face in traversing the two.

We seek to understand not only the political apprenticeship that elected representatives undertook, but also identify why long periods of time spent accumulating the skills, knowledges, experiences and resources necessary to become an effective elected representative are insufficient to become a credible candidate.

Our contribution is the identification of a common set of operations required to transform the circumstances of women active at the grassroots into the preconditions necessary to contest elections. Our analytical framework builds understanding as to why so few grassroots women step forward as candidates, and identifies strategies that would enable more women to turn a career in grassroots social action and activism into a political career.

Our contribution is the identification of a common set of operations required to transform the circumstances of women active at the grassroots into the preconditions necessary to contest elections.



THE STUDY

We developed our analytical model through comparative research in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Comparison enabled us to go beyond a single specific case study to reveal operations central to, or frustrated in, the move from grassroots to representative politics in both national contexts. Dialogues, including with women who have been successful and those who have been unsuccessful or chosen not to contest, as well as key stakeholders from the feminist, women's rights, grassroots and youth movements, enabled us to refine our conceptualisations of these operations into useful lenses that go beyond either country. While imperfect, this higher-level extraction is for the development of a mid-range theory that can operate beyond the grasroots.

Indonesia and Sri Lanka were selected because both countries have a significant number of women highly active in grassroots social and political activity, alongside stark female underrepresentation in parliaments and legislatures. We wanted to see whether the reasons grassroots women candidates did not contest or win elections were the same in each country, and what we could learn from comparing the two.

In recognition of the problem of women's underrepresentation, the Government of Indonesia has passed laws that every third position on a party's ballot paper needs to be held by a woman. The effect has been positive, but has not achieved the impact feminist advocates desired. Women are consistently placed in positions 3, 6, 9 on the ballot paper/party list, from which it is harder to get elected (Prihatini 2019a), and are often nominated solely in order to open more positions to men.

Indonesian female parliamentarians continue to be disproportionately 'elite', that is, rich, with familial connections or 'celebrity status'. Of the 118 women legislators elected in 2019, 44 per cent had dynastic connections (Wardani and Subekti 2021), leading to commentary that quotas had exacerbated the tendency to nominate 'well-known' women rather than grassroots women candidates. In general, quotas guaranteeing thirty per cent of candidates are women have not been able to significantly lift the percentage of women voted into legislatures in Indonesia, nor achieve substantive representation through a diverse politician cohort (Prihatini 2019b). The percentage of women elected into the National Parliament (DPR) remains below thirty per cent, increasing from 17.3 per cent in 2014 to 20.5 per cent in 2019.

Only 5.4 per cent of Members of Sri Lanka's Parliament are women as of elections in 2019, significantly lower than other countries in South Asia (IPU 2022). Such poor performance is despite allowing women to stand for elections as early as 1932, and having the world's first elected female Prime Minister (i.e. Sirimavo Bandaranaike) in 1960. Female leaders have mostly, however, followed the South Asian phenomenon of widows, wives and daughters coming into politics after the death of a male relative (Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003), although the limits to this framing have been contested in recent times (Vijeyarasa, 2022). Of the 12 women parliamentarians currently

in office, seven women's entry to parliament began with the demise of a male relative (Hannan 2020). In a partial effort to address the low presence of women in politics, Sri Lanka introduced a quota for women at the local government level (legislative amendments 2012, 2016 and 2017). Quotas increased the percentage of women elected in local authorities from 1.9 in 2016 to 29 per cent in 2020 (Vijeyarasa, 2020). Whether experience at the local level provides opportunities at higher level of governments is still to be seen.

Research was undertaken between October 2020 and June 2021, and was, at various points, modified because of the Covid pandemic. Due to restrictions on travel, our findings are limited to North Sumatera in Indonesia, and 14 out of 25 districts in Sri Lanka. The research methods were the same in both countries, but with variations in sample size and population characteristics to suit local conditions e.g. ensuring ethnic and linguistic diversity as much as possible.

Sequencing of research stages: Four research stages were designed and sequenced so that we built upon research findings, while providing opportunities to share and modify these with key stakeholders. Interviews first generated in-depth, rich data on women's pathways to politics (current or former elected representatives) (stage 1), then compared their experiences with women active at the grassroots but who had never stood for election (stage 2). Interviews captured how the respondents perceive their social worlds, their sense of self within these social worlds, and the opportunities afforded to them within it. The FGDs allowed us to finetune our understanding of these shared social worlds and test the validity of themes (stage 3). Stage 4 entails Research Driven Dialogues with key stakeholders to further refine and disseminate findings. This innovative research process is outlined in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: SEQUENCING OF RESEARCH STAGES

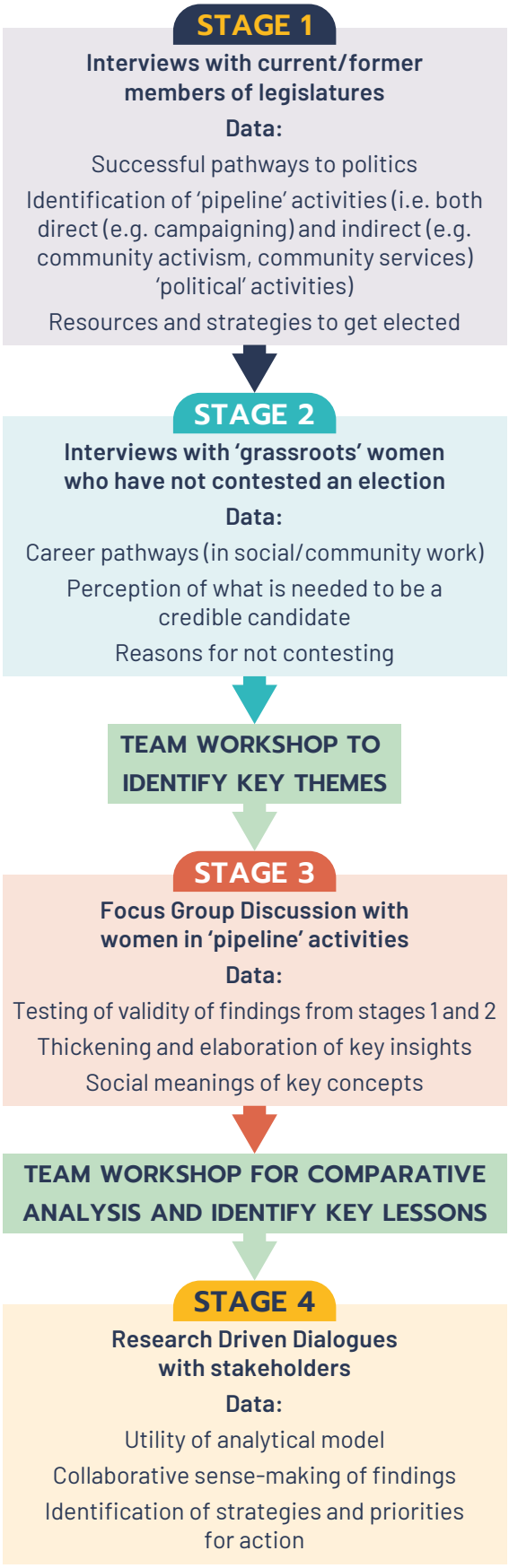


TABLE 1: RESEARCH STAGES AND PARTICIPANTS

Stage	Indonesia	Sri Lanka
Stage 1: Interviews with current/ former women politicians	7 current members of the Local People's Representative Council (DPRD) at the City and Provincial level (Medan and North Sumatera)	7 current or former elected representatives at the local, provincial, and national level (nation-wide)
Stage 2: Interviews with leaders of organizations with community connections and a record of social and political activity, but who have never contested an election	9 participants from religious (Islam, Hindu, Buddhist, Parmalim/indigenous Batak and Christian) organizations	6 participants representing Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Up-country Tamil and Burgher ethnic groups, and religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam
Stage 3: FGDs with women participating in 'pipeline' activities (3-12 participants in each)	5 FGDs with student activists; leaders of non-Muslim religious organizations; leaders of Muslim prayer groups; leaders of NGOs or community organizations, and; party cadre (men and women)	6 FGDs with community activists, local NGO representatives, women in office, former local representatives, and former female youth parliamentarians
Stage 4: Research driven dialogues with stakeholders	1st RDD in Medan 2nd RDD in Jakarta	3rd RDD in Sri Lanka

BOX 1: HOW DO WE IDENTIFY CREDIBLE GRASSROOTS WOMEN CANDIDATES

A 'grassroots' candidate refers to a woman who is in touch with and responsive to 'ordinary' citizens, driven by motivations to serve and be an effective representative. A woman must also, however, have a credible chance of being elected. White and Aspinall capture both aspects when they (2019: 3) "refer to candidates who have political experience..., and/ or who have a strong base of community support through leadership in organisations of various sorts, and who are motivated to serve their communities through political participation". We identified women who had a long record of social and/or political activity at the grassroots level and who were driven to seek positive change.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

WHAT DO WOMEN NEED TO BECOME A 'CREDIBLE' POLITICAL CANDIDATE?

According to the research participants, four sets of conditions are required for women to want to contest an election, and to believe that they have a realistic chance of success.

1. **Human capital:** running for election and being an effective representative requires relevant knowledges, skills and experiences. These included: leadership skills, decision-making, mobilizing people, problem solving and public speaking; knowledge on social issues, laws, and political structures; project implementation and management of finances; and an ability to connect with a wide range of people, from informal workers to high-ranking officials.
2. **Political capital:** the impression that women make on the voting public, their reputation, how well-known they are, and their perceived legitimacy to lead. Women build political capital through their family name, moral standing and community work. An important source of symbolic capital in Spark et al.'s (2019) study is family connections. Familial name can provide political legitimacy and 'legacy advantage' for women in politics (Baker and Palmieri 2021; Spark et al. 2019). However, symbolic capital is a resource that the women in our study, by selection, have accrued. Yet they find it difficult to make an impression with a broader constituency, due to the limited 'noise' their actions make.
3. **Infrastructure:** what needs to be in place before women consider running for election, referring not to the individual, but rather the supporting conditions. Three elements are crucial: political constituency, financial capital, and a network of supporters.
4. **Sense of self:** whether women see themselves as being an actor within the political field, and the political field as a space within which they can comfortably occupy and achieve their ambitions.

Women have the skills, knowledge and experience to be excellent elected representatives, yet party elites, and to a lesser extent the voting public, undervalue or do not recognise their human capital.

WHAT DETERS WOMEN FROM STANDING FOR ELECTION?

Women who were active at the grassroots and engaged in social and community work had acquired many of the preconditions necessary to contest an election, yet felt that they were insufficient or mismatched with what they needed.

- Women have the requisite skills, knowledge and experience to be excellent elected representatives, yet **party elites, and to a lesser extent the voting public, undervalue or do not recognise their human capital**, or see it as unrelated to what is needed in politics.
- Women's positive actions and high moral standing in the community mean that they are highly regarded, yet **often news of their good work does not travel beyond their local area**. Women are well-known, but not 'famous' (prominent) enough to have a large following.
- Women have built a social network and political constituency through their social activities, yet often these **lack the solidarity or requisite skills to contest an election, or are mismatched with electoral boundaries**. Critically, women felt that without a large amount of money, they would not be competitive in an election.
- Many women perceive politics to be a 'dirty realm' for self-interested action, **incompatible with their values of enacting positive change and who they are as a person**. Women are also made to feel uncomfortable when engaged in party politics, through the masculine feel of politics and explicit threats of violence. Familial approval is key. In Sri Lanka, where such sentiments were particularly strong, none of the respondents spoke about a lack of familial support or active discouragement as hindering their involvement in social work, yet they all needed familial approval to enter the realm of politics.

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What is needed to be a credible candidate	Barriers women face	How to clear the pathway	Practical measures
Human capital: Relevant knowledge, skills and experiences.	Women had the skills, knowledge, and experience to be excellent elected representatives, yet **their human capital was not recognised**, undervalued, posed a threat to, or was seen as unrelated to the needs of party elites and the voting public.	**Transference** of skills, knowledge and experiences, so that they are recognised and valued in the political field.	1: Work with party elites so that they can appreciate and value what women bring to politics 2: Training for women in negotiation skills and in making demands
Political capital: Perceptions of the voting public incl. reputation, visibility and legitimacy to lead.	News of work **does not travel beyond their local area**, despite their positive actions and high moral standing in the community. Women are well-known, but not 'famous' enough to have a large following.	**Amplification** of political capital and the impression women make among a larger constituency.	1: Work with media organisations to promote the good work of women 2: Provide media training to women, including social media 3: Events training and management 4: Regulation of social media
Infrastructure: Supporting conditions that need to be in place, particularly political constituency, financial capital, and a network of supporters.	Women lacked the solidarity or requisite skills to contest an election, or were mismatched with electoral boundaries. Women felt that **without a large amount of money, they would not be competitive**.	**Extension** of infrastructure so that women's political constituencies map onto electoral boundaries, social networks have the requisite resources, and shortfalls in financial capital can be overcome.	1: Encourage women to undertake grassroots activities aligned with electoral maps 2: Build networks of solidarity 3: Team capacity building 4: Promote narratives of successful candidates with cheap campaigns
Sense of self: Women's perceptions of themselves as a political actor, and the political field as a space they can comfortably occupy and achieve their ambitions.	Women perceived politics as a 'dirty realm' for self-interested action, **incompatible with enacting positive change and who they were as a person**. Women were also made to feel uncomfortable through the masculine feel of politics and explicit threats of violence.	**Translation** of the values, meanings and 'feel' of the social field into the political field so that women see it as a fit with who they are and their ambitions.	1: Early and ongoing socialisation 2: Emphasize compatibilities between social and political field 3: Look for opportunities through religion and ethnic based assoc. 4: Challenge perception politics is 'dirty'

CLEARING THE PATHWAY TO GET FROM 'A' TO 'B'?

Four common set of operations are required to transform the circumstances of women active at the grassroots into the preconditions necessary to contest elections.

1. *Transference:* Making human capital count in the political field

Transference describes the operation required to convey (make count) women's skills, knowledges and experiences gained in grassroots social and political activity to formal politics. The women in our study did not suffer from knowledge or skill gaps, but a lack of recognition, by themselves and others of the diversity and quality of what they bring to the table. Political parties seem (perhaps wilfully) ignorant of the qualities that women offer from their decades of community-based social work and activism.

Political knowledge, leadership skills and experience count for little when nominations are handed out. Party elites turn down nominations for excellent women leaders in favour of installing close family members and allies. Where there is arguably a skills gap, it is navigating party systems to demand recognition and reward. The very skills that some women demonstrate at times intimidate (mostly male) party elites who suppress rather than value these skill-sets. To be upwardly mobile in political terms, the skills women need are those that ensure the political apprenticeship served in grassroots politics has relevance and value in the upper echelons of party politics.

Parties "keep women as foot-soldiers instead of giving them leadership roles or decision-making roles"

(Sri Lanka FGD1).

"In the future, if we are to be recruited by parties as candidates, we must be brave and bargain with them.... We should not just be included as a number"

(woman grassroots leader, Indonesia).

We describe these operations as transference, in which the skills, knowledges and experiences acquired through grassroots activity retain their value when transferred to formal politics. There are two elements. The first is convincing party elites of the value of their skills, knowledges and experiences, so that what they have acquired through grassroots activism and social work is recognised as valuable. The second element is for women to negotiate with party elites to demand that parties reward women for the contributions they make, by denying parties their labour or name (in the case of quotas) unless it comes with real political opportunities. Capacity building that equips women with skills and knowledge in a more generic sense is less important than helping women to get the recognition and reward for what they already know and do.

2. *Amplification:* Strengthening the positive impression women make

Our respondents had devoted significant time generating positive sentiments in the community, yet were unable to make a strong enough impression to be successful. *Amplification* refers to strengthening women's political capital so that it extends over a larger area (mapping onto an electorate), and generates strong positive feelings among voters.

While familial name and the legacy advantage (Baker and Palmieri 2021; Spark et al. 2019) may enable a small number of (mostly 'elite') women to succeed in politics, the bigger question for our study participants was how to overcome the disadvantage of not having such capital. An alternative is the symbolic capital of a good moral standing. Across our sample, the women displayed humility, honesty, community spirit and service orientation.

There are two challenges in converting positive sentiments generated through social acts and moral standing into political opportunity. The first is the time required to accrue it; building a record of social work over a long period is time-consuming and gendered norms require women to be more responsive to community demands than men. The second is the 'inaudibility' of women's symbolic capital in a noisy political field. In other words, while women may engage in social activities that demonstrate their moral standing, few people know about them, and hence it does not accrue as capital.

The media has an as yet unrealised role in amplifying the positive impression women have in the electorate by promoting their social activities (Vijeyarasa et al., forthcoming). Unfortunately, the media are more likely to play a negative role, rarely promoting grassroots level women's activism or leadership, and quick to publicize women's faults and outward appearances. The media coverage women receive is mostly under limited conditions. For example, it would be due to a cancellation of another politician, or the broadcast would be at a time when people do not usually watch television (FGD 2 2021). Money, or the lack of it, also influences women's access to publicity on both mainstream and social media.

Some women had had success in gaining publicity for women candidates by inviting local newspapers to publish articles and photos; the majority struggled and sought capacity building on navigating the media. In recognition of the online abuse women face, steps need to be taken to regulate social media to allow women to use it as a platform to build a following safely.

In Indonesia, some candidates had successfully amplified their work by holding events—such as health camps and concerts—that attracted large numbers of voters and some media attention. Initiatives to get more women elected could focus on promotion of the work they do through these innovative strategies.

BOX 2: AMPLIFICATION

Sherry is a female legislator in Indonesia. She has built a large support base by connecting to people at the 'grassroots', promoting herself, and the work she has done in the community. She uses social media to grab people's attention, and then organizes well-attended events. In her early days, she would sing at these events so that the voters remembered her.

3. *Extension:* Strategies to overcome shortfalls in infrastructure

Three elements in an infrastructure are crucial: political constituency, financial capital, and a network of supporters. Women had built such infrastructures through their grassroots political and social activities, yet for many, it was insufficient, or alternatively, did not precisely match with what was needed. There is a need to *extend* women's existing infrastructure to meet the conditions required for a viable campaign.

Women were purposefully selected in this study who had a history of community service, and hence their 'constituency' was part of what makes them a viable candidate. For many women, however, pre-existing community relations is insufficient; connections to the community may traverse multiple electoral divisions, diluting how well they were known in any one constituency; or are concentrated in a smaller area, mismatched with the larger population of voters. A long-term approach to getting more grassroots women in politics would gently nudge their social activities to be congruent with electoral boundaries from the beginning of their careers. For women who are already social workers and activists, they need support to extend their political constituencies.

Building the capacity of candidates to run a successful campaign is better thought of as extending her network of support and the capacities of the broader team.

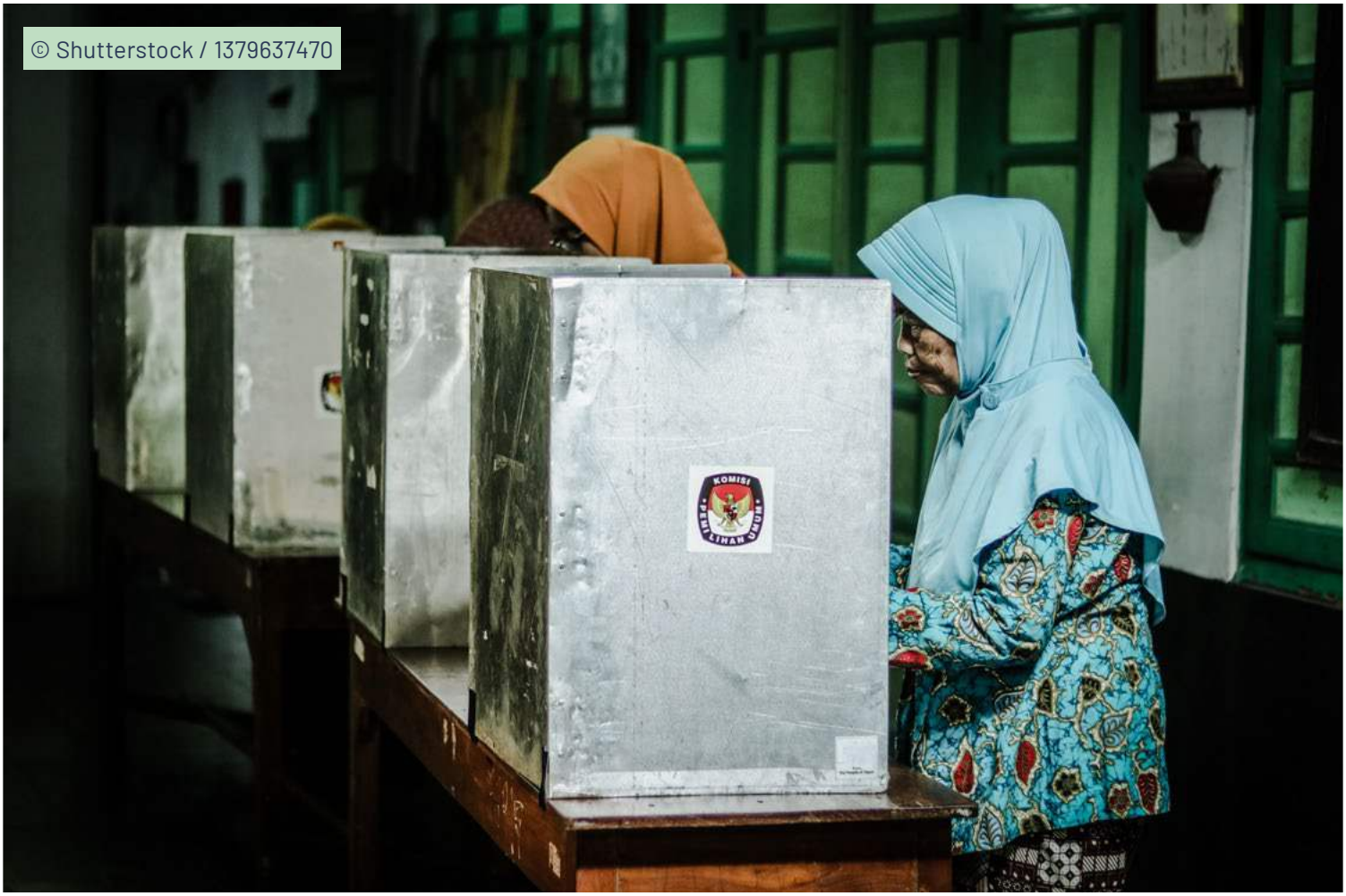
A network of committed supporters is both an important element of one's electoral infrastructure in its own right, while also helping to extend a candidate's political constituency. They provide labour during a campaign, mobilize voters, amplify campaign events, and draw upon their own relationships with the community to extend goodwill and trust. A network of support is important for women to fall back on for advice and encouragement, while meeting the needs for professional skills, such as media engagement, campaign management, budgeting and so on, valuable in any campaign.

The women in our study all had strong networks, yet they faced two challenges. The solidarity so evident among women engaged in community work does not seem to be present in formal politics, where competition among women is more common. There is a need to extend the women's networks of solidarity to include politicians who are willing to be allies, mentors and provide assurance to grassroots women. Women's networks had a large capacity to mobilise and organise the community, yet were less equipped in dealing with campaign finance, media engagement, and large-scale event management. Building the capacity of candidates to run a successful campaign is better thought of as extending her network of support and the capacities of the broader team.

> "if we talk about practical politics, it's not enough just to be well-known, it's not enough to just be smart, right. You need money too. Money, money, I don't have any money at all, let alone 200 million" [Indonesian rupiah](Hanum, Indonesia).

Many women had sufficient infrastructure in respect to a political constituency and support network, yet lacked the third element deemed crucial to contest elections: financial capital. A lack of money, or an understandable reluctance to bear financial risk, was considered the biggest impediment to becoming a candidate. Yet, our study goes beyond the dominant interpretation of the need for money to bring visibility to the social capital and social norms that underpin party financing. Elections are very expensive due to practices such as vote-buying, or the provision of club goods, and campaign costs such as payments to volunteers, promotional material, souvenirs for voters, travel, refreshments, and so on. In Indonesia, fundraising among the community is impossible in a context where people expect politicians to pay voters; in Sri Lanka, there is unfair distribution of party campaign funds for men and women.

Yet women with a large enough political constituency and support network (alongside the amplification of political capital) are able to extend their financial resources to reduce overall campaign investment. Rather than consider large sums of cash as being a necessary precondition to run for election, it is more useful to see it as a short-cut when one has not built the political constituency or support networks required to win elections (that is, the other two pillars of one's infrastructure) (Mahsun et al. 2021; Harahap et al. 2022). A strength-based approach helps an aspiring woman to recognise the power of her relationships with the community and her support network to help her overcome a lack of financial capital.



4. *Translation:* A sense of self that fits the political field

We find that women who satisfy the other preconditions for being a candidate experience a dissonance between the idea of being a politician and their sense of self. There are two elements here. First, the gendered cultural and social resources for self-making that influence one's sense of who one is, and who one can become (Ortner 2006). The second element is the reproduction of the 'political field', understood as a terrain in which bodies are differentially at ease, and differentially 'befitting' (Puwar 2004).

We argue that encouraging more women to envisage a sense of self as elected representative requires operations of translation between these two elements. By translation, we mean the process of becoming 'appropriate with' (*sesuai dengan* in Bahasa Indonesian) or fitting the political field.

> "We have been involved in a lot in social activities, and through these we have come to realise the many problems women have to deal with, and by dealing with these problems, our own desires arise, our interest to pursue practical politics" (Indonesian Youth Leader).

> "there is no room in society for those who are really willing to make such a commitment…people in our country today have turned politics into a source of income. Such people have blocked space for those who wish to make a voluntary sacrifice" (Sri Lanka FGD6).

> "I think being a DPRD member [of the People's Representative Council] is like swimming in mud. Every time you swim, some mud is drunk" (Indonesia CS14).

Social work for many women in our study is a calling intimately tied to their sense of self. For some, politics is a strategy to help them overcome the powerlessness they face in their social activities. Others see the compatibility in more pragmatic terms; they cultivate connections in the community through their social activities, which they later reap in terms of electoral support.

A greater number of respondents did not, however, see their social activities as compatible with 'practical' politics, nor harbour ambitions to enter the political realm. Some rejected the idea that the two realms were oriented towards effecting positive change. Politics is considered a sphere of self-interest incompatible with community work. Other women felt that they could achieve more outside of politics than in it. Political parties limit the activities that members can do, so some choose to remain outside them so that they can pursue what is most meaningful for them. When social change is the primary ambition, politics is not seen as an effective route in either Indonesia or Sri Lanka.

Women who satisfy the other preconditions for being a candidate experience a dissonance between the idea of being a politician and their sense of self.

The public perception that 'politics is dirty' also deters women from seeing it as an appropriate place for them. As 'practical politics' is perceived as corrupt and dirty, women at the grassroots look down on political parties, and rebuff their invitations to join their tickets. Such rejections help parties maintain the line they are unable to fulfil quotas as women are unwilling to stand as candidates.

Even when women are willing to 'get dirty' by entering politics and have the money and skills to be competitive, families will often not give their approval. In Sri Lanka, where such sentiments were particularly strong, all the women needed familial involvement to enter politics due to potential stigma, yet none noted a lack of familial support or active discouragement as hindering their involvement in social work. The reproduction of politics as a masculine sphere creates further incompatibilities with social models of womanhood. Present day politics is referred to as professionalised, 'a popular art of making money', a space for men, not women (Jakimow et al., forthcoming).

BOX 3: TRANSLATION

Eva from Medan is politically active and tries to recruit as many women as she can to join her. She describes her recruitment strategy: "If we approach a woman asking her to join a movement based on politics or the struggle for power, in our experience she will back away. [But if we say] "Let's go into politics, let's join the party, because within the party there is a religious activity, social activity, other activities" she will join."

The problems of incongruence between a sense of self and the political realm are not insurmountable, yet require a long-term approach to both expanding the possibilities of self for women, and challenging the discursive reproduction of the political field as 'dirty' and masculine. Several female politicians spoke of the importance of early socialisation for seeing politics as a space open to women. Other strategies include emphasizing the compatibilities between what women do, what is important to them, and how they see themselves, within the political field.

For some women, the increasing role of Islam in Indonesian politics has created opportunities. Religion is perceived as being compatible with politics, and hence women's activities, including religious leadership and acts of piety, are congruent with practical politics. In Sri Lanka, ethno-religious identity, particularly for minorities, motivates many women to enter politics.

Acts of translation are required to show the compatibilities between different realms—social, religious, ethno-religious and politic—not only to the women, but also to their families and supporters. Processes of self-making and the production anew of the political field as 'dirty' and masculine are interconnected. While we need to broaden the possibilities of personhood for women, perhaps of greater import is challenging the general perception of politics. The task for agencies seeking more women, more 'grassroots' activists, and better democratic practices, is to facilitate translation between the realms of social work and politics.

TAKEAWAYS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our research findings offer hope for feminist / women's organisations, government departments and development agencies seeking ways to increase the diversity of women's representation in politics. There is a large pool of women who have the capacities, motivation and broader infrastructure to become a credible candidate, and most importantly, an effective voice for a diversity of women in parliament. The task is to help women find the starting line on their journey to politics, and clear the path towards election. We recommend the following:

USE A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH TO IDENTIFYING AND SUPPORTING WOMEN TO CONTEST ELECTIONS

Too often, initiatives to enable women to contest elections start (and end) with capacity building. Providers of training need to begin by recognising what women bring to the table, and help them to *build* upon their current resources and strengths. One-size fits all training that starts with assumptions as to what is needed to win an election and assumptions about women's capacity gaps will be less effective than bespoke training that begins with an inventory of what women have, and their own perceptions as to how they could run an effective campaign.

Reaching out to women working in the grassroots early in the electoral cycle is critical.

Women's organisations and development agencies also have a role in identifying women who may not yet appreciate how their skills, knowledges, networks and so on, forged through social and community work, can be resources in successful political campaigns. Research demonstrates that women often need to be approached several times before they consider contesting elections. Reaching out to women working in the grassroots early in the electoral cycle is critical. We also agree with Tadros (2014: 10) as to the value of "political empowerment programmes to help women unearth the full scale of the community relations that they have forged, but which they have yet to tap into in their political campaigns" (Tadros 2014: 10).

BUILD THE TEAM, NOT THE INDIVIDUAL

Initiatives to increase women's representation, quite understandably, focus on the individual candidate: her motivations and capacities. Elections are, however, team efforts, with women in particular desiring and needing a support network. There is a role for women's organisations to foster the solidarity and informal networking that would enable candidates to build teams around them. These should include former and current women politicians who can provide mentoring and build solidarity. Training in election specific skills should be pitched to these larger support networks, recognising that the candidate cannot be expected to cover all bases themselves. An effective approach could be for feminist and women's rights organisations to provide tailored support, such as consultancy services, to candidates and their teams, to develop an effective campaign strategy, identify any capacity gaps, and help locate relevant expertise to fill these gaps. Building teams and their combined capacity can also be a starting point of collective formation for institutional change within, and beyond, the political arena (see Nazneen 2019).

TAKE A LONG-TERM APPROACH THROUGHOUT THE LIFECYCLE OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

Organisations and agencies need to take a long-term approach that starts years or decades in advance to provide women opportunities to develop all the preconditions necessary throughout her life, so that when the time is right, she is confident she can contest. The possibilities for personhood are shaped from early childhood. Whether or not women can see themselves becoming a politician as an adult depends on their exposure early in life. Several women spoke about the need to socialise girls in school as to their political possibilities, and to train teachers to encourage girls to speak up, and reward them for doing so. Donors working with NGOs and community organisations can take a proactive approach to ensure that the female leaders they partner with have opportunities to develop their skills and undertake training not only to implement the project at hand, but with the longer-term objective of training the next generation of political candidates.

A long-term approach is required to work with women to shape the trajectory of their grassroots social activity from the start so that it is compatible with entering representative politics at a later stage. Several women in our study would have chosen to enter politics, but had not 'sown the seeds' early enough in their career. Agencies need to encourage women to be strategic, to see the complementarities of their grassroots activities to political participation, and nudge them to develop their career in ways that helps build the preconditions to contest elections, should they wish to at a later stage. Examples of this include encouraging women to undertake social work in ways that overlap with electoral boundaries and to be proactive in promoting the good work they are doing. The aim need not be to get women to think like politicians from the start of their career, but to show them the compatibilities between social and political work, and leave open the possibility of becoming a candidate later in life.

INVEST IN PRODUCING A COHORT OF POSSIBLE FEMALE CANDIDATES, NOT INDIVIDUALS

Ensuring that women active at the grassroots have the *possibility* of entering politics at a later stage, means that the majority will not move into politics, despite the investment. The approach is more like 'scatter sowing', casting a wide net with the aim of producing a cohort of women able to enter politics, knowing only a fraction will. Donor agencies need to appreciate that such investment will reap overall better returns than simply putting resources into women candidates who are most likely to contest the election as it nears. The aim should be (equally if not more so) to increase the 'supply' of women who would potentially consider entering politics, rather than simply helping those who have already stepped forward. The number of women in the latter category are too small to overcome the extent of female underrepresentation.

Taking a long-term approach requires funding agencies to invest in building a cohort of potential women candidates that may not be realised within a usual project lifecycle. Funding models that demand demonstrable and quantifiable impact at project completion will be counter to the more important goal of building generations of women who will enter politics in the future. Short-term initiatives to train women in the lead-up to elections or even early in election cycles, while useful, will have a relatively limited impact in the more fundamental transformations required to reach gender parity in politics (see also Jakimow and Pragati 2021). Ongoing and long-term financial support to women's and student organisations will contribute to increasing the number of quality women candidates with the *potential* to enter politics.

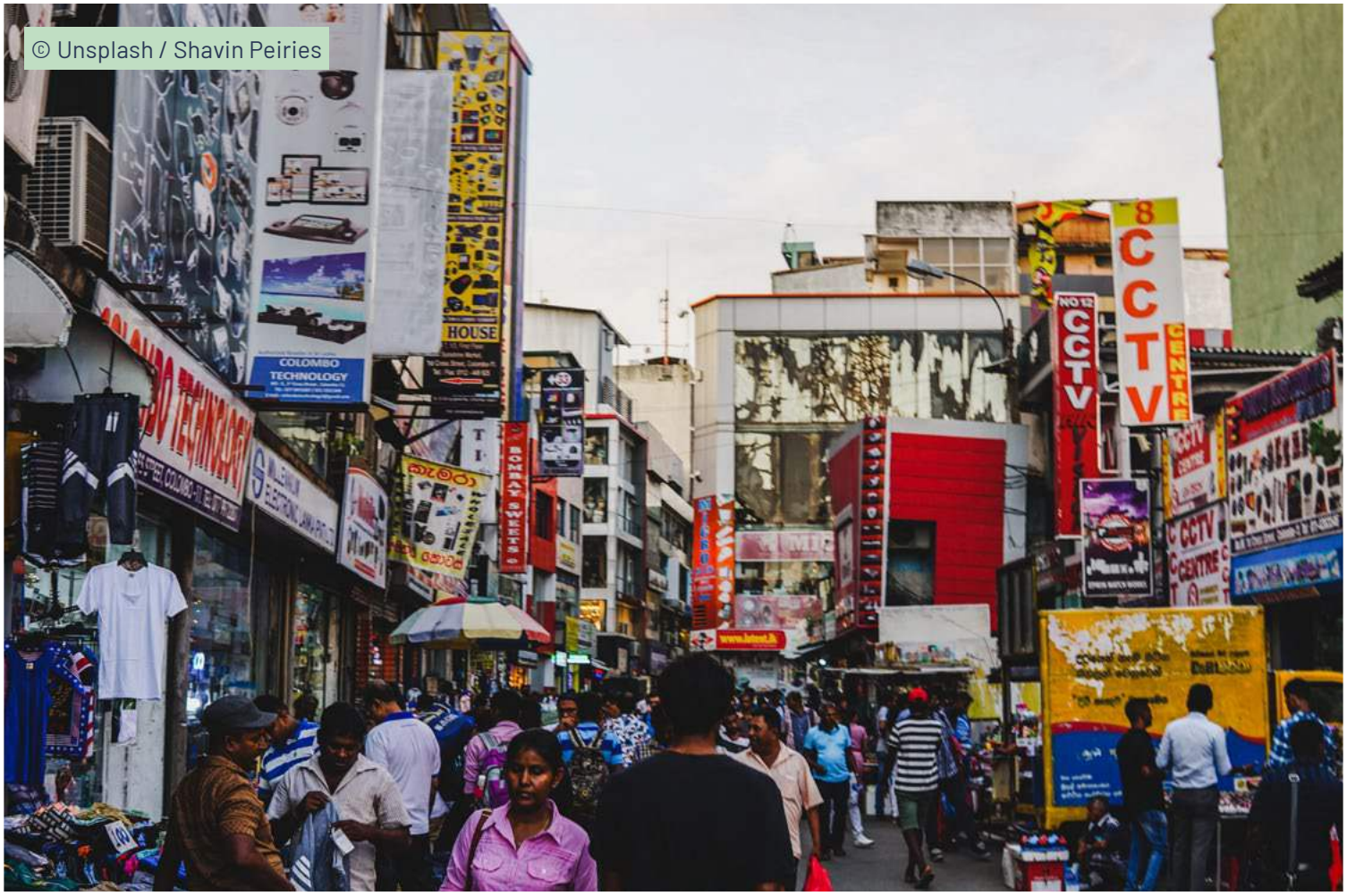
CHANGE POLITICAL CULTURE AND DOMINANT POLITICAL NARRATIVES

Female aspirants face a challenging, and in some cases hostile political environment. Political cultures can and does change, however. They are not inevitably masculine, 'dirty' or characterised by 'money politics', for example. Concrete initiatives that can be taken in this regard include the promotion of narratives of men and women who have been successfully elected without requiring expensive campaigns. Journalists have a role to play in producing media content that gives a more well-rounded view of what politicians do and who they are, countering the common sense that politics is 'dirty' and all politicians are self-interested. Building a group of media outlets committed to giving space to promote women's social work and campaigns could be a complementary action. Policy makers need to consider regulations on social media to ensure that women are safe to use this medium in the promotion of their work and campaigns.

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS FOR CONTEXT SPECIFIC APPROACHES (NEXT STEPS)

The four operations—transference, extension, amplification and translation—are a heuristic to identify practical measures to increase the number and diversity of women in politics. Our final recommendation overlaps with the next stage in the authors' research process: a series of Research Driven Dialogues (RDDs) with the organisations working to increase women's participation and representation, including feminist organisations, political parties, community-based organisations and so on in Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

In these RDDs, we present our analytical frame and engage in a collective process of sense-making. Rather than provide participants with a list of recommendations, we encourage them to reflect on the findings and what they mean for their own practice. Discussion and brainstorming allow participants to learn from each other, and importantly, collaborate in broader efforts towards collective aims. This approach is important to ensure that initiatives are suitable to local conditions, and have the greatest potential to be effective.



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IMAGES

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p.11 DFAT, Flickr, Josh Estey – Women at workshop, West Lombok.

p.15 Shutterstock, Damar Aji – Vote counting process at TPS, Indonesian elections 2019 in Yogyakarta City.

p.21 Unsplash, Shavin Peiries – City life, Sri Lanka

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