

Women in Politics

Report of the 1st Electoral Forum

ECB and International IDEA

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1. Executive Summary

Partnership between the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) began in 2012, with the latter assisting the ECB in development and enhancement of capacity, steered towards delivering civic and electoral education and training services in Bhutan. Within the ECB, the Electoral Education and Training Division, which would soon transform into a full-fledged Electoral Training and Resource Centre (ETRC), would serve as the nodal agency for this task. As stimulated by the ETRC Development Action Plan, which was endorsed by the ECB and recommended during the Political Parties' and the Stakeholders' Consultation Workshop of March 2014, the Electoral Forum (EF) would provide the platform to discuss electoral reforms, organize post-election review processes and consultations, to effectively gather views on challenges that need to be addressed. It would further explore alternatives for change and promote reform among key decision makers, thus strengthening and nurturing democratic culture in Bhutan. Meeting twice annually, the forum would deliberate chosen thematic areas.

In what could be heralded as a milestone in this new development and partnership, the first Electoral Forum was held on December 18, 2015 at Thimphu, on the theme "Women in Politics." The theme has been chosen based on findings of the "Study of the Determinants of Voter's Choice and Women's Participation in Elective Offices in the Kingdom of Bhutan" which was conducted by the ECB in 2014. The study is an assessment and evaluation of challenges faced by Women in Politics." The theme has been chosen based on findings of the "Study of the Determinants of Voter's Choice and Women's Participation in Elective Offices in the Kingdom of Bhutan" which was conducted by the ECB in 2014 with support from Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD) and United Nation's (UN) WOMEN. The study is a comprehensive assessment and evaluation of the situation of women and challenges faced by Women within the frame or context of the first set of Elections conducted so far, namely the first and secondary Parliamentary Elections of 2008 and 2013 as well as the 1st LG Elections of 2011.

The objectives of the 1st EF were:

1. Recognise the importance of supporting women's participation in elective offices;
2. To examine the problem and to go over the study findings, address constraints and find solutions to promote women in elective offices by Political Parties;
3. The sharing of best practices, lesson learned by international presenters, and national presenters, on the topics;
4. Review the recommendations provided on the topic and suggest ways to implement those recommendations; and
5. Adopt solutions, alternative strategies or reform to increase the proportion of women in Parliament/Elective Offices.

Participants of the Forum comprised representatives from Bhutan's main political parties - the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (the opposition), and other parties, such as the Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT). The Executive Director (ED) of Bhutan's National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC); Head of Bhutanese Network for Empowering Women (BNEW); serving Eminent members of the National Council and female elected women of the National Assembly. A team from the print and broadcast media participated actively in the discussions and deliberations.

Four key presentations were made; two by international participants, Lucky Sherpa, Former MP of Nepal, Central Committee Member UCPNM and by Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, Senior Programme Manager (Democracy and Gender), International IDEA. The other two were made by the Head, NCWC and an Election Officer from the ECB.

In his Key note address, the Chief Election Commission (CEC) highlighted the importance of having more women in politics and expressed concerns about current status of a very poor representation in the Parliament. He said it's clear from the ECB's own study on "Determinants of Voter's Choice and Women's Participation in Elective Offices in the Kingdom of Bhutan" that women continue to face many more challenges compared to their male counterparts, and unless a "Leap-Frog" mechanism to improve women's representation is found, situation may not change as quickly as desired by all stakeholders. CEC encouraged political parties, in particular, to set a certain target for themselves in terms of women's representation (eg.30%) and consider ways and means of expanding the pool of women candidate nominees in working towards the target to be achieved.

After the formal opening of the EF by the CEC, the tone was set by the presentation from the ECB representative on key findings of "Study of the Determinants of Voter's Choice and Women's Participation in Elective Offices in the Kingdom of Bhutan". It was followed by a presentation titled "Democracy and Women's empowerment" from the International Resource person from International IDEA – Ms. Rubimbidzai pointed out that while "quotas" can help to get the 'number right' much more is needed to support women in politics and said 'male champions' too are needed for the cause. Given that the women's machinery of Bhutan – the NCWC has been doing a lot of work in the area of WIP, the Executive Director of the NCWC – Ms. Kunzang Lhamu was invited to also share their experiences. She presented briefly on "Women in Politics – Status, Challenges & Opportunities" in which she summarized the findings of various studies that NCWC had carried out as well as the Recommendations from two National Conferences that NCWC had been party to on the same topic of WIP in 2013 and 2014. Lastly, the second International speaker – Ms. Lucky Sherpa from Nepal presented on "Challenges for Women Representation Beyond Quotas" in which she highlighted how on one hand Nepal is doing well with a significant number of women in elected posts due to the adoption of a Reserved seats policy, yet owing to slower pace of change in mind sets women continue to be challenged

Within the limited time due to Four presentations followed by brief discussions, which were also necessary to set the tone of the 1st EF, the last session of the Forum was made participatory involving small groups of like-minded people and organisations to distill the learnings, take-aways which were further processed by a single group with representatives from all sub-groups to synthesize and propose final recommendations/ way forward.

2. Key note address – Chief Election Commissioner, ECB

Mandated to strengthen Bhutan's infant democracy, the ECB is confronted with challenges, a primary one being the number of women contesting in the political parties and getting represented in the parliament, as well as the local government. This is a paradox, as 51 percent of the voters are women. Thus, encouraging, educating and instilling confidence in women to stand for elections is paramount for Bhutan's democratic process and progress.

The above formed the crux of the CEC's address, which highlighted the importance of the EF and the "aptly" chosen theme, "Women in Politics." Despite being the forerunner of the EF, the CEC underlined that women and politics has been an issue that the ECB has discussed at length, even by inviting experts and professionals from beyond Bhutan. The roles played by CSOs like Bhutan Network for Empowering Women (BNEW) in educating and empowering women in all nooks and corners of the country were acknowledged. Reflecting on the presence of stakeholders from different streams of Bhutanese polity, the CEC said that it showcased the strong support that all institutions have for the ECB and democracy in Bhutan.

Changing the current opinion of women, as unearthed by ECB's study on "Determinants of Voter's Choice and Women's Participation in Elective Offices in the Kingdom of Bhutan" was stated. The need for support from political parties, such as bringing in more women candidates by stipulating a certain percentage of seats for women within the party's structure was outlined as a move that could bring more Bhutanese women into the political sphere. While it is not very easy for the ECB to change its Act, political parties could easily include a provision within their party policy stating that 30 percent seats would be given to women. This would ensure more women's participation and representation.

Drawing an example from past elections, the CEC mentioned that in many constituencies candidates from both political parties were men, which did not give a choice to voters and left no room for women's participation or representation. Hence, he felt that political parties have a very important role to play to enhance WIP in Bhutan.

In ECB's efforts to strengthen and enhance women's participation, the CEC acknowledged the contributions made by the Royal Government's Non Formal Education (NFE) program which has facilitated a great majority of our women to become NFE literate which is the qualifying educational criteria to stand for LG elections. The CEC said that most people without education were women, who (over 74%) availed services of the NFE and could easily sit and pass the Functional Literacy Test. The CEC also informed and reminded the floor that conducting the test (FLT) was not meant to discourage or impede women's participation, but to facilitate their entry into local elections. The test is simple and just checked basic writing and reading skills which are necessary as local leaders once elected.

CEC also acknowledged and appreciated the role played by BNEW in motivating, mobilising and building capacity of women at the grass roots level across the country to take part in the upcoming 2nd LG Elections.

Expressing that the ECB hopes to see more women candidates in the forthcoming LG elections, the CEC pointed out the need for a "Leap-Frog" mechanism in bringing more women into the electoral process as candidates, who can then get elected. More needs to be done in addition to measures that the ECB tried to put in place in order to facilitate women's participation such as taking polling stations nearer to the homes, holding common forums at the gewog/chiwog levels and making the minimum requirements as women friendly as possible.

Drawing an example, wherein both candidates were men, the CEC said that such incidences provided no room for women's participation. Political parties could thus play a very important role.

The role played by BNEW and the Non Formal Education (NFE) program was also acknowledged. The CEC said that most people without education were women, who availed services of the NFE and could easily sit and get through the Functional Literacy Test. In the last LG elections only 1 percent of the women could not make it through the test. However, the floor was informed that conducting the test was not to discourage or impede women's participation. The test is simple and just checked basic writing and reading skills.

Expressing that the ECB hopes to see more women candidates in the forthcoming LG elections, the CEC called for a "Leap-Frog" in bringing women into the electoral process as candidates, who get elected. Measures taken by the ECB to facilitate women participation as candidates, such as taking polling stations nearer to the grass roots; holding common forums at the gewog and chiwog levels and making the minimum requirements women friendly were shared at the Forum.

The CEC summed up by saying that "the Electoral Forum is an opportunity for increasing women participation and representation" and that, as a new democracy Bhutan is at a stage where changes can be made.

3. Key Findings of the Study on Voter's Choice – Kibu Zangpo Election Officer, ECB

The ECB's comprehensive study on "Determinants of Voter's Choice and Women's Participation in Elective Offices in the Kingdom of Bhutan", was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Tools included, Field Questionnaire Survey (FQS), Focus Group Discussions (FGD), Social Media Survey (SMS) and Literature Review. The objectives were to unveil the main reasons behind less nomination and election of women; assess and identify the impeding factors; develop strategies and procedures and support the nomination and participation of women.

Within SAARC, Bhutan has only 8.3 percent women in National Politics, the fifth in the region. This comes against the background that Bhutan is gender neutral, leading to other

queries as to why women's participation is not encouraging, despite the law. This called for exploring, synthesising and understanding the Determinants of Voter's Choice in Elections; identifying factors and common problems and bringing out measures to facilitate women's political participation.

Candidate choice

This study shows that in terms of candidate choice, sex is not an issue (they say), with people looking for credible, competent, qualified and better candidates irrespective of their gender. Voters are more educated in urban areas than in rural areas but the perception that men are better and capable leaders than women still exists everywhere. On an average 66.9 percent of women believe that men are better as leaders.

The effect of gender discriminatory social beliefs such as "women are inferior to men by 9 births" appear to diminish with education, but more predominant in the Eastern region than elsewhere in Bhutan

Similarly, gender and social beliefs, which are negative or discriminatory about women diminishes with education. For instance, the belief in *Ke-Rub-Gu*¹, predominates in eastern Bhutan, where more people are illiterate. Further, women are still perceived as being not suitable to be leaders or politicians, with the study illustrating that 32.1 percent feel women are best suited to be teachers. Only 6.4 percent said women could be Parliamentarians, while those supporting women as local leaders were only 2.7 percent.

Effectiveness of Election Campaigns

The ECB study found out that in general, election campaigns are considered as an important means in creating and spreading information related to the candidates and the political parties. Effective and timely conduct of election campaigns increases the likelihood of electoral success. Not only do campaigns affect how people vote, but they can also affect the reasons people choose to vote in a certain way. In the study, majority of respondents said the conduct of Common Forum (49%) is more effective, followed by media (17.6%), TV public debate (15.1%) and that the least effectiveness is through poster/banner/leaflets at 3%.

¹ A belief that a woman will be born as a man only after nine life times

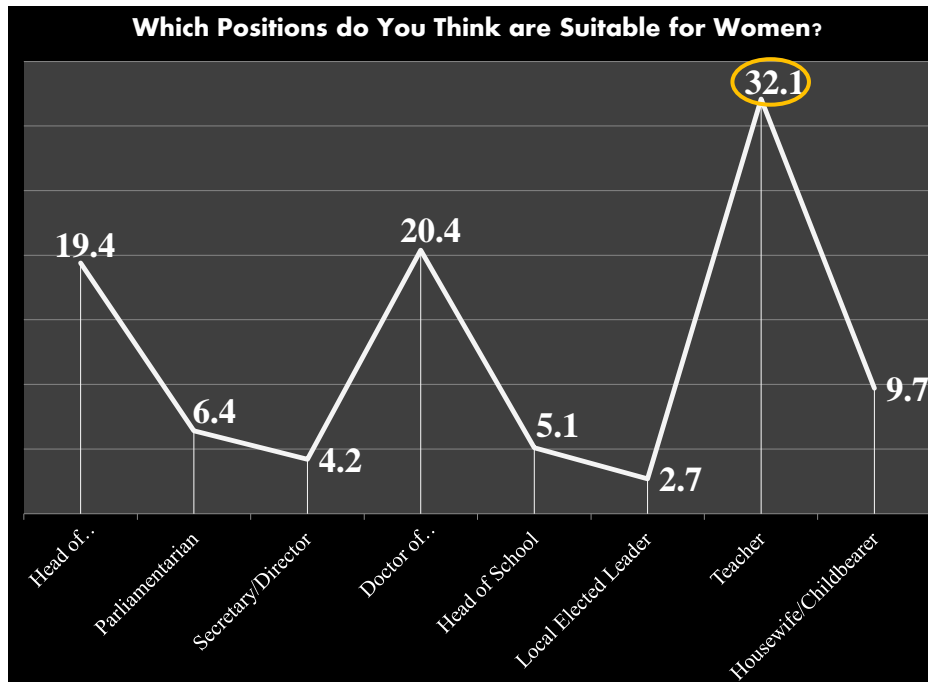


Figure 1

Women and politics

Women's involvement in politics is restricted as observers (39.4 %). Nonetheless, 28.3 percent believe that they participate and make a difference. In what was called as an encouraging trend, the study has found that belief and trust in women leadership increases with more education and experience. Education plays a vital role, as women possessing higher education were found to be more interested to become candidates than others.

According to the study's presentation, 35.7 percent of the women are not interested at all, while 50 percent attribute the inability to meet education qualification criteria as the reason. 71.2 percent feel the need of elected female candidates, with 54.2 percent saying that there will be more female candidates in the future. Meanwhile, 56 percent say that education and experience will be the factors determining if they would vote for a female candidate. 45.9 percent called for a reform in the current electoral practices.

Social and economic security is a crucial factor, with most women expressing that they cannot take the risks of leaving their jobs and participate in the elections, as there is no guarantee that they would win.

Way Forward

Based on the findings, the way forward was also presented, which comprises the following:

1. Socio-cultural belief systems and traditions that supposedly undermine women's social and cultural status need to be tackled through concerted education and information dissemination efforts.
2. Efforts to inform, educate and sensitize voters through civic and voter education to

encourage and support women's participation, including dissipating the notion and image that politics is dirty and to be engaged in by men only.

3. There needs to be systematic education to transform the mindset to encourage and foster greater acceptance of women's equal social, economic and political status.
4. Socio-economic situations and conditions need to be tackled through integration of their issues and needs in development plans and programmes through the grass-root to the national levels.
5. Political indifferences and inequalities will and can only be addressed by taking care of social, economic and cultural factors that undermine women's position in the society.
6. Major mindset changes should be brought about to view and to acknowledge women's equal political rights as being important.
7. Electoral processes such as the conduct of Functional Literacy Test for Local Government Elections will have to be made more accessible to women, by having the Test Centers in every *Gewog*² in future.
8. Interested women candidates should be encouraged to stand as candidates in elections through guidance, mentoring, and trainings for competency and skills development to enable them to contest in elections on equal terms as male candidates.
9. Civic and voter education and information dissemination will have to be undertaken on a continuous basis, with specific and through targeted approach, to ensure that not only women are well informed but also sensitize the men.

3.1 Discussions

Following the presentation, several queries were raised from the floor, with participants seeking answers on the relation between choice of candidates and their presentation in terms of oratory skills, attires and the way candidates carried themselves. The relevance of the study was also questioned with a participant noting that people do not give the right views. The perception of political parties towards women and value of sex in terms of representation were others areas that emerged as discussion points. As the study showcases that voters looked for better candidates, the definition or characteristics of a better leader were also sought. Defining the political state in Bhutan as a "desperate situation," where women's representation is concerned, some enquired about measures that the ECB would or have consider/ed to bring women into the political domain.

It was highlighted that competency was what voters looked for, though a candidates' presentation did matter, but without major influence. On the methodology of the study, the floor was informed that the study was conducted as per standards set by the

²Block

National Statistical Bureau (NSB) of Bhutan. Proportional presentation to size (PPS) was adopted and different tools used to find answers. The relevance and validity of the study was reflected by the correlation that was found between different questions asked during the study. It was reported that voters also emphasised on the need of political parties to understand the need of women in political positions.

Apart from activities like voter education and sensitization, the formation of Bhutan Children's Parliament and establishment of democracy clubs in all schools throughout Bhutan were highlighted as major activities conducted by the ECB to encourage more women to join politics.

Concerning better leaders, the floor was informed that voters considered competent, credible and qualified candidates better leaders.

4. Democracy and Women's Participation: Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu

Senior Programme Manager (Democracy and Gender)

The Electoral Cycle, factors that make gender intrinsic to democracy and the importance of numbers in further strengthening women participation in the democratic process as representatives, was some of the core elements of the presentation.

Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu also lauded the ECB's study, stating that not many electoral bodies would invest in such a comprehensive research, adding that networking is a crucial and critical aspect of IDEA's programs. The statement was made against the number of participants from different organizations present in the Forum, which was called a positive and encouraging trend.

The need to demystify democracy, which has now become a cliché, was underlined and the forum informed of the key values and principles of democracy, such as inclusiveness, transparency, representation, participation, accountability, responsiveness, justice, equality, development and peace. Correlation between these key values and democracy was drawn. For instance, without inclusiveness due to factors like gender, literacy, caste and creed, a nation cannot be called a democratic one. Similarly, the lack of accountability, wherein leaders are taken into account and the voices of people heard and accepted was spelled out as integral to democracy.

Moving to gender, it was highlighted that "it is one thing to participate and one thing to have a voice." The need for meaningful participation was raised.

Referring to the ECB's study, which has projected comprehensively measures to get "the numbers," the presenter mentioned that though numbers are important, getting beyond the numbers was more important. The floor was informed that IDEA has worked on a study called "Beyond the numbers." Nonetheless, to get beyond the numbers, there was the requirement to get numbers first.

Touching on policies, it was reported that existence of gender neutral laws does not mean that there is a level playing field. Another important component of the presentation was the role of political parties, who are challenged to bring about these changes and also men, who are equally important in bringing more women into politics.

An insight of women at the international level was provided. Women constitute 22 percent of parliamentarians across the world. However, only 41 countries have managed to attain the 30 per cent threshold of a "critical mass"³ of women in national parliaments. 73 countries still have less than 15 per cent or fewer women in their parliaments. Bhutan is one of the 73.

Sl. No.	Countries	Percentage of women Parliamentarians
1	Nordic countries	41
2	Americas	27
3	Europe (excluding Nordic countries)	24
4	Sub-Saharan Africa	23
5	Asia	19
6	Pacific	19
7	Arab	13

Figure 2

While Americas come second with 27 percent, it is due to the influence of Latin American countries like Bolivia, where their electoral laws spell out that the composition of men and women should not be less than 30 percent.

Speaking on Gender Equality in political parties' policies and intra party democratic process, the challenges political parties face was underlined, especially when political parties were themselves weak. Acceptance that political parties are central to representative democracy and to the process of democratization, even though they are also perceived to be increasingly weak and have numerous imperfections in performing the functions that are essential to a healthy democracy was highlighted. The imperfections include institutional, structural and ideological values and cultures which can cause parties to act in ways contrary to democracy.

It was mentioned that specifically, political parties are challenged with regard to their performance on representative functions pertaining to the equal participation and representation of women and men in positions of power and decision making at all levels. Political party systems are often defined as 'democratic' even when the female half of the population is substantially under-represented, which is an obvious contradiction.

In this context, few measures that could be taken were articulated, such as:

1. Commitments to gender equality and women's political empowerment in political parties' constitutions/policy documents

³Critical mass refers to those groups who can influence decision making.

2. Intra-party democracy processes-selection, identification and nomination of candidates(internal rules and regulations)
3. Systematic gender awareness and analysis capacity development that targets both men and women at all levels and structures of political parties;
4. Institutionalizing gender equality measures such as gender quotas and gender policies

However, the need for a multidimensional intervention at the policy level by governments, civil societies, media and others to work in conjunction for the cause was heralded as a very significant element of the entire process.

Presenting the Electoral Cycle, participants were informed that elections are not an event, but a process, where several tenets come together. The importance of the legal framework, within the Election Cycle in shaping outcomes was underscored. Legal frameworks have an impact in shaping participation and representation, not just in politics but also in other areas. Reference was made to Namibia, where the electoral laws specify that at least two of the five commissioners should be a woman.

The need to understand that electoral bodies are not gender equality champions and advocates, but bodies that can bring about change was also articulated.

Stating that Bhutan is in the post election phase, it was communicated that there are several issues to be focused on; such as the identification of strategic entry points that will allow and facilitate women empowerment. The fact that participation and representation differ was reiterated.

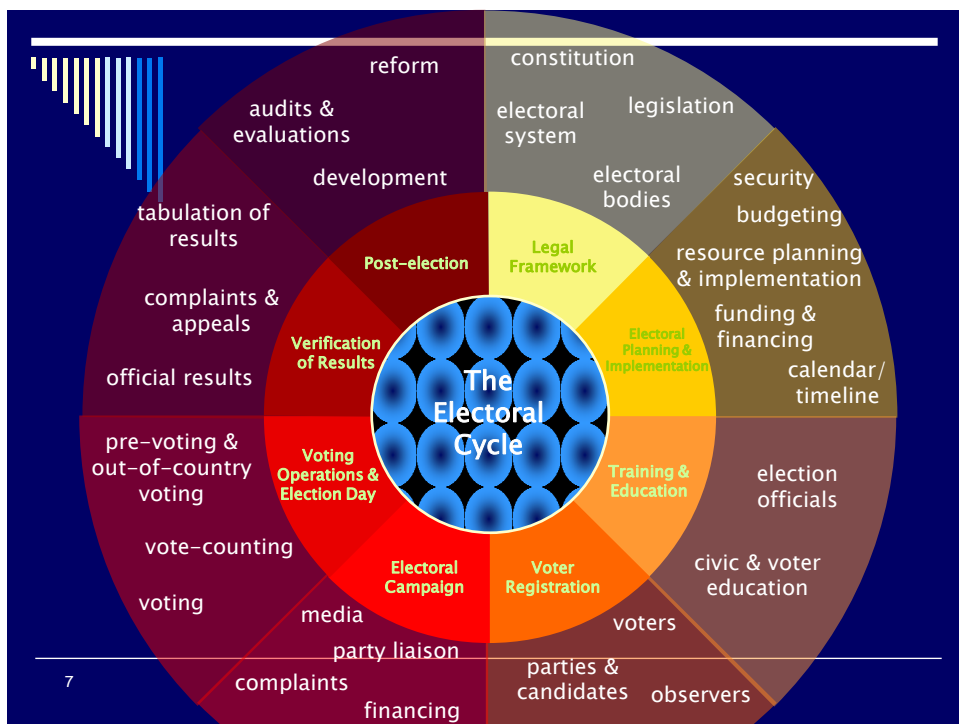


Figure 3

4.1 Discussions

Applauding the presentation, especially the election cycle, and calling it enlightening, a participant expressed that the cycle shows that there are actually many strategic entry points for women and to facilitate women's participation.

A question on the percentage of women representatives presented was asked, with a participant expressing concern that as 73 countries around the world have not yet achieved the "critical mass" of women in politics, and only 41 countries got the 'numbers right' with use of quota, critics and skeptics of quota in Bhutan could easily say that for a new democracy like Bhutan, there is no hurry! However, the facilitator reminded the participants about the article in a recent issue of the national paper – Kuensel (16 Dec'15) "Bhutan is one of the worst in South Asia in terms of gender disparity" which she said should/would alert our people particularly decision makers that we need to do something!

International resource person Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu noted that in the last three to four years a Forum like the one held that day might have been impossible to hold. However, the very fact that the ECB itself is engaging in such Forums and chosen the first theme to on WIP reflects the changing status in Bhutan which gives hope. Hence, the need to be active and not complacent was underlined by her.

5. Women in Politics – Status, Challenges & Opportunities – Kunzang Lhamu Executive Director (ED), National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC)

At the onset of her presentation, the ED mentioned that in addition to the efforts of NCWC, several other agencies have also been carrying out different activities to promote and strengthen the area of women in politics in Bhutan. However, since the activities were more of piecemeal nature, not well coordinated and collaborative, the achievements and outcomes too were "nothing big." Hence she hoped that the EF such as this would be an entry point for greater collaborations that can result in bigger and more concrete outcomes. Acknowledging the ECB's study, the floor was informed that the findings converge with those from earlier studies conducted by the NCWC too and hence it makes the Commission confident too in view of activities lined up to follow up.

Global scenario

Speaking about women at the global level, it was reported that 13 women served as Heads of State and 12 as Heads of Government. 17% of government ministers were women, with majority overseeing social sectors, such as education and the family. Rwanda had the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide (63.8% of seats in the lower house).

Elaborating that only 22 % of all national parliamentarians were female as of August 2015, a slow increase from 11.3 % in 1995, the need to accelerate women's representation was echoed. Gender stereotype was also mentioned, with the argument that women leaders held

posts as ministers of the social sectors and not in important seats such as technology, science and others.

Elucidating the global trend, it was presented that globally, there are 37 States in which women account for less than 10% of parliamentarians, though 30% is an important benchmark for women's representation. It was further mentioned that 41 single or lower houses are composed of more than 30% women, including 11 in Africa and 9 in Latin America. Measures adopted were also presented. Out of the 41 countries, 34 applied some form of quotas opening space for women's political participation, while others went for seat reservations, legislated party quotas, voluntary party quotas and proportional representation systems.

Reference was also made to global frameworks that called for gender equality such as:

1. Article 21 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) & Article 25 of International Covenant of Civil & Political Rights (1966) – *underscore not only the right to vote but to be elected through free & fair elections*
2. Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952) – *states to ensure that women are eligible for election on par with men without any discrimination*
3. Article 7 of CEDAW – *state parties to eliminate all discrimination against women in being eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies.....*
4. BPFA (20 year's review 2014) – *reaffirmed & recommitted to implement measures for improved women's participation in politics & decision making.*

Bhutanese Scenario

Coming to the Bhutanese context, the Royal Decree in 1998, which underlined the importance of women's participation in politics, was stated. Results of the 1st parliamentary elections in 2008, where 14 percent women won was mentioned, followed by the 1st LG elections in 2011.

In what was called a dismal result, the 2nd parliamentary elections in 2013 saw just 8 percent of the women elected; though a female Cabinet Minister was elected and appointed for the first time.

Bhutan's stress on gender equality is also part of the 11th Five Year Plan, with the 13th National Key Result Area calling for gender friendly environment for women's participation (Legislation on quota for women in elected offices including the parliament and local government bodies). The floor was also informed that in the 7th Periodic Report, UN CEDAW CC has called to "implement, sustained policies aimed at the promotion of women's full, active & equal participation in decision making and all areas of public and political life." It also recommended the use of Special Temporary Measures.

A comprehensive report was made on the National Plan of Action (NPA) to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office (NPAGEEO), with specific references to different programs and activities held, such as the first National Consultations on GEEEO, held in Nov 2013, followed

by the second National Conference on Women in Politics, held in April 2014, together with BNEW to consult, take stock of opportunities and challenges which resulted in the 15 point Terma Linca Statement (*Annex 1*). These were followed by the third National workshop to finalize the NPAPGEEEO and the sixth Commission Meeting in March 2015 after which the National Plan of Action (NPA) has been submitted to the Cabinet in October 2015 and NCWC awaits directives from the government.

The ED underlined that the NPA comprises two parts; one to address demand and the other supply of women participants. The demand side identifies and prescribes ways and means of creating a demand for women's participation (at the nomination level) in the Local Government, National Council and National Assembly elections. The supply part focuses on a variety of interventions to ensure that a consistent and adequate number of women contest the different elections. The interventions include creating awareness and providing the required support to create a level playing field by eliminating inequalities resulting from gender differences. As 33% is the internationally accepted critical mass of women representation required to ensure responsive discourses and resolutions, ***the NPA has highlighted that 33% criteria should be incorporated in the Election Act (scheduled to be tabled for review in the next Parliament session).***

Similar to the findings of the ECB, challenges confronted included education and training; functional language skills; decision making; self image and self esteem; double or triple burden; attitudes and stereotypes; socio-economic barriers; patriarchal values; environment for women's empowerment and the election system and processes.

The need to review the electoral system and processes to enhance women's participation, while strengthening and sustaining support mechanisms, including grooming potential women candidates was cited as an opportunity. Enhancing female education and graduation rates, promoting a gender sensitive and supportive media in portraying female leaders positively and adopting appropriate affirmative action to enhance women's participation in politics were other opportunities.

Mention was also made of the need to draft a Gender Equality Policy to ensure and institutionalize integration of gender considerations.

The presentation concluded with the quote: "Equal consideration for all may demand very unequal treatment in favor of the disadvantaged."

5.1 Discussion

Following the presentation participants submitted their views, while some sought clarifications. Stating that a missing link stands between the supply of women candidates and their demand, a participant suggested that neutral agencies like BNEW could act as a "broker" for identifying potential women candidates, as people, irrespective of their sex were not very comfortable to approach political parties, though they were interested and competent.

The floor was informed that BNEW is thinking and working towards it, especially to create some sort of a data base of such women aspiring politicians. Political parties could then check the data base and accordingly select the candidate of their choice.

Concerning the road taken so far by NCWC since the Termalinca Declaration in April 2014, the ED stated that many steps were taken to build on it and the outcome being a NPA for women in elected office which has been submitted to the Cabinet and that NCWC is awaiting a response for further follow up.

6. Challenges for Women Representation Beyond Quotas – Lucky Sherpa

Former MP, Central Committee Member

Presenting on the current scenario of Nepal politics, the presenter spoke about the peace process, women's movement, diversity, issues of discrimination against indigenous people, dalit and madhesi women, which are triggered by the patriarchal norms and values, including nepotism.

Citing that Nepal is filled with challenges, with issues of marginalized groups emerging, the fact that the National Speaker is a women is not a recipe for respite. Diversity and a single caste dominating in all areas were underlined, which arose mainly because of religious beliefs. The conservative feeling that women should not involve in politics is still prevalent in the Nepalese society.

Though the new Constitution guarantees 33 percent of women representation in Legislative parliament, representation at the local level has not been addressed. Political parties have also not adopted the 33 % reservation seats for women in their manifestos, leading to negligible nomination or representation of women found in constitutional bodies, task forces, and organizations.

Despite the challenges, women leaders have served and are serving the nation, with some having established their capabilities. Similarly, women's political, social, cultural and economic awareness levels have been gradually developing, which is a good indicator for overall development of women.

The issue of citizenship was presented. Though the clause that a person can be Nepali only if both the parents are Nepali has been removed, Nepali mothers, especially single, are still discriminated. A single Nepali mother has to prove that the father is not a foreigner and that the child was born in Nepal before she can confer citizenship to her child.

In case of a Nepali woman married to a foreign man, she can confer only naturalised citizenship to her child, whereas a Nepali father can confer citizenship by descent. The floor was informed that the problem with citizenship by naturalisation is not a matter of right in Nepal; it is the discretion of the state. Furthermore, the constitution is silent on whether the foreign man married to a Nepali woman can acquire naturalised citizenship, whereas foreign women married to Nepali men can get citizenship immediately. The new constitution has failed to ensure equality to women as equal and independent citizens of this country.

Touching on the gaps and concerns, it was presented that although the constitution agrees to proportional representation of women in all state structures, it is silent when it comes to specific institutions. For example, the articles on the formation of federal or state cabinets only say that inclusion shall be ensured, without mentioning anything about women. Moreover, there is no provision to ensure participation of women in the judiciary.

Additionally, only four out of 15 members in a village council and five out of 15 members in the municipal executive committee can be women. There is no provision requiring that either the chairpersons or vice chairpersons in the village or municipal executive committees are women, which would affect the representation of women in district assemblies.

Apart from challenges mentioned earlier, Nepalese women, even leaders have no control over the state mechanism, impeding opportunities, access and control over resources.

Women cannot find time for political participation and many needs to be apprised of human rights, inclusive democracy and women empowerment issues including international treaties, and provisions. Challenges arising from cultural values and practices that are firmly entrenched in the society's structures make life for women difficult. The patriarchal structure of society hinders women's social, cultural, economic and political participation.

Challenges on the social front include upgrading and raising the illiteracy rate of women in Nepal, which severely limits women's participation in politics. Poverty, illiteracy, ill health, gender, caste discrimination, political conflict and religious fundamentalism impede women's political participation. Violence against women limits interest and active involvement in political activities. Meanwhile, families regard female members as weak and in need of protection throughout their lives and women who interact outside prescribed relations are viewed with suspicion.

On the need for quotas, the floor was informed that quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of the political seats. Quotas support women's right as citizens to equal representation and enable women to experience political life.

It was further reiterated that men cannot represent the interest of women and that quotas do not discriminate against individual men. Concerning voters and quotas, it was elucidated that the opportunities for voters are expanded. Nonetheless, the dangers of introducing quotas, such as conflicts were underlined, though it was mentioned that the conflicts would be "temporary".

Ending the presentation with challenges faced by the country's new constitution, issues of women, indigenous peoples, minorities and federalism were highlighted.

7. Group Presentations

The afternoon session saw participants divided into four groups to discuss, analyse and synthesise measures that would lead to more women participation and representation. Apart

from the Termalinca Declaration with its 15 points, the way forward, synthesised from the NCWC's Conference in Paro, which was presented in the morning presentation and the recommendations from the ECB's study were used as guidelines. Copies each of the three were provided to all the groups to review, confirm or discard any irrelevant points proposed. The Groups were asked to come out of their own set of recommendations. A group leader from each group presented their recommendations.

Media Group

1. Equal coverage of all candidates including women

It was reported that male political aspirants and participants were friendlier with the media, while most women were "nervous" in facing the camera and media. Thus, the need of a policy recommendation mandating equal coverage of all candidates was highlighted.

2. Interview role models (women leaders).

A recommendation from the ECB's study was the need to portray women holding important posts in the government as role models, which could encourage participation and representation of more women. Thus, the media group recommended that programs with women leaders should be hosted and aired by the broadcast media, while the print media could conduct Q&A's with women leaders.

3. Work in partnership with stakeholders to create not only news but other forms of educational materials.

Participants pointed out that the media can play a very important role in promoting positive images and gender sensitive media reporting. An example cited was a story on quotas, where the media had spun from a negative angle. The need for media to be a core partner has been reinforced several times.

Acknowledging the role that the media can play, it was recommended that partnerships should not be restricted to just reporting. Media houses should have a special unit working closely with the ECB, BNEW and International IDEA exclusively, to promote women's awareness, participation and representation. It was also underlined that currently, access to information and in timely manner was their biggest challenge. Establishment of a special unit as recommended would lead to prioritisation and dissemination of gender sensitive information.

4. Capacity development of current media houses.

In the current scenario, the Bhutanese media consist of young reporters who are either ignorant or unaware of women's issues. Those who do know are not trained in bringing women's issues to the notice of the nation and leaders. Thus, it was recommended that the media should be assisted in capacity development by the ECB and other stakeholders in reporting on women empowerment.

5. Use of local dialects for effective communication during campaigns and common forums.

This was also a challenge reflected in the ECB's study. Reporting that media houses currently conduct common forums and even interviews in the national language and English, it was proposed that the ECB should facilitate conduction of common forums in the local dialects.

Political Parties

1. Keep gender equality dialogue alive and vital
The above point was raised against the background that there are instances and examples where many important issues just fizzle out. The need to keep the gender dialogue alive and progressive was recommended.
2. Representation – 50 percent.
The political party's group recommended that this could be done by adopting the quota and reserved seats mechanisms. It was further recommended that other means apart from quotas should also be explored.
3. Well targeted and time bound initiatives
Despite very noble and encouraging activities, lack of vision and consistency could make the initiatives a failure. Thus, the need for evaluation after setting time bound initiatives was highlighted.
4. Need to legislate political parties
In order to ensure representation of women, it was recommended that political parties should be legislated to reserve some seats for women. The ECB could bring forth such legislations and political parties that do not adhere to the legislation could be disqualified.

Parliamentarians

1. Voter Education

This was highlighted as the ECB's study underlined the importance of educating voters, especially women, who still believe that men are more competent. Women should be exposed to the value of women leaders in decision making. At the same time there is a need to dispel myths, such as the *Ke rub gu*.

2. Special needs of women politicians

Addressing the security of women politicians and provision of facilities, such as care services for children are required to bring in more women, as domestic obligations are impediments of gender disparity.

3. Encouraging more women

The need for incumbent women MP's to encourage other women was also recommended.

4. Networking

The significance of networking, at the regional and international level amongst women leaders could benefit women as one can learn from the other's experience.

5. Mentoring

The need for party members, such as ministers to mentor newly elected women was highlighted.

6. Networking about Bhutanese women MPs

Underlining the need for Bhutanese women MPs, it was suggested that MPs could meet informally over a Potluck or other means. The need for International IDEA to support such measures was expressed.

Mixed Group

1. Create and institutionalize support system to enable participation of potential female candidates in politics (pre and post elections) including the assurance of job and physical security.
2. Political parties to commit to recruiting more women candidates.
3. Promote gender sensitive and gender aware media that would help portrayal of a positive image of women leaders.

8. Way Forward

With a participant each from the four groups who had put forth their set of recommendations, the Electoral Forum's recommendations were further revisited and distilled. These further captured the essence of the one day proceeding. Presenting the recommendations, the floor was informed that gender equality was about ensuring equal representation of both sexes or genders and not just a woman's issue. Calling it a society's issue, the importance of stakeholders from different areas of a society to come together to address the issue was underlined.

The main recommendations were:

1. Advocacy

Though advocacy appears to be a redundant tool for bringing more women into the electoral process given the situation in Bhutan where candidates 'show up' at the last minute only, the need of advocacy to strengthen emphasis on gender equality was elaborated. The importance for voters to know and understand the value of gender equality and women's representation was emphasised.

2. Women networking to keep the Gender equality dialogue vibrant

Reiterating the importance of networking that echoed in all the discussions, the significance of keeping the gender equality dialogue alive and on-going and bringing forth results was underlined. It was stated that the dialogues on gender equality should progress and advance in every meeting. The need of funds for such meetings, especially from International IDEA was mentioned.

3. Make politics more desirable for women

Making reference to media reports that despite provision of equal opportunities, women do not come out to participate in the elections the need for measures to encourage more women to come forward was elucidated. Mentioning that if women has so far not come forward, perhaps it is because politics, election rules and regulations have not been too favourable for women and there needs to be in place certain special interventions such as child care, job security (eg.allowing women to re-join the civil service after resigning to join politics incase of failure to get elected) etc.

4. Review and frame rules for proportional gender parity

There are several ways for increasing women's participation and representation. All such measures should be implemented. However, gender quotas should always be at the back of the mind. If other interventions fail, quotas would remain as the saving grace.

5. Capacity building and mentoring

Emphasising that the above has also resonated in all the presentations and discussions, the need of capacity building and mentoring at all levels and agencies, such as the media, women and political aspirants was pointed out. Calling for proper engagement with the media, the need for the media to project gender equality in a positive light and building trust was echoed.

6. Engagement of men to support/promote women in politics

As mentioned earlier gender equality is a society's issue, which calls for participation from all sections of the society, including men. Thus, engaging men is very vital.

Annexure I

AGENDA FOR THE 1ST ELECTORAL FORUM ON WOMEN IN POLITICS

Date	Schedule		Notes
18 th of Dec	08:30 – 09:00	Participants arrive	
	09:00 – 09:15	Welcome address	Chhimi Dorji, Offtg. Director, Dept. of Electoral Education and Training, ECB
	09:15 – 09:30	Key Note Address	Hon'ble CEC
	09:30 – 10:00	Tea Break and Group Photo	
	10:00 – 10:20	Presentation on the topic 'Key Findings of the Study on Voter's Choice'.	Kibu Zangpo, Election Officer, ECB
	10:20 - 10:30	Q & A	
	10:30 – 10:50	Presentation on the topic 'Democracy and Women's Empowerment'	Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu from Int.IDEA
	10:50 - 11:00	Q & A	
	11:00 - 11:20	Presentation on the topic 'Challenges for Women in Politics'	Aum Kunzang Lhamu, ED, NCWC
	11:20 -11:30	Q &A	
	11:30 – 11:50	Challenges for Women's Representation-beyond Quotas"	Lucky Sherpa, Former Member of Parliament of Nepal
	11:50-12:00	Q &A	
	12:00 – 13:00	Group work /Recommendations and Way Forward	Plenary to be chaired by Chhimi Dorji and Aum Phuntshok Chhoden
	13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH	
	14:00 – 14:30	Presentation by Groups	Plenary to be chaired by Chhimi Dorji and Aum Phuntshok Chhoden
	14:30 – 15:15	Synthesis of Group Work by Task Group	
	15:15 – 16:00	Closing Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation on the Way Forward by Task Group • Vote of Thanks 	Vote of Thanks by Chimi Yuden/Chencho Lhamo Dorjee, ECB
	16:00 – 16:30	Refreshment	

Annexure II

Participants Lists

Sl.No	Name	Designation	Organisation	Phone number
1	Kesang Chuki Dorjee	MP,NCB	NCB	17111567
2	Nirmala Pokhrel	reporter	kuensel	17538998
3	Pema Gyamtsho	NA/OZ	NA	
4	Sangay Duba	SG/NA	NAB	17616369
5	Chandrika Pradhan	Coordinator for women	PDP	17915864
6	Karma Jamtsho		NCB	17762253
7	Kinley Om	MP	NAB	17777777
8	Tashi Wangmo	MP	NCB	17603853
9	Wangdi Gyeltshen	officiating Director	DLG	17504184
10	Rumbidzai Candawasvika-Nhundu	Int.Speaker	Int.IDEA	
11	Kunzang Lhamu	Director of NCWC		17602650
12	Dechen Zangmo	MP	NAB	17114767
13	Karma Lhamo	DPT	DPT	17611061
14	Sonam Jatso	PDP	PDP	17163636
15	Chimmi Yuden	Asst.FO	ECB	17618294
16	Sangay Choden	HRO	BBS	17197979
17	Deki Choden	reporter	BBS	323071
18	Kibu Zangpo	Election officer	ECB	17777048
19	Ugyen Tshering	Secretary General	DCT	17657777
20	Damchoe Pem	reporter	The Bhutanese	17348710
21	Tshering Tashi	reporter	The Bhutanese	17290026
22	Deki Lhaden	reporter	Bhutan Times	17923706
23	Tshewang Lhamo	Programme	BCMD	17613422
24	Nima Wangdi	Assign Editor	kuensel	
25	Ugyen Tenzin	IDEA Rapporteur	Freelance	17975242
26	Phuntsho Chhoden G	intern	BCMD	77698429
27	Karma Dema	Programme Coordinator	Int.IDEA	
28	Pema Yangzome	Finance and Adm.	Int.IDEA	17111752
29	Nidup wangmo	Assistant Adm.	Int.IDEA	17985901
30	Sangay Zam		DNT	
31	Phuntshok Choden	Facilitator	BNEW	17111094
32	Dorji Tshering		BBS	17461629
33	Tshering Zam		BBS	17376091
34	Chimmi Dorji	officiating Director	ECB	17451810
35	Gem Tshewang	Training Coordinator	ECB	17749100
36	Lucky Sherpa		UCPNM	9851039226

Annexure III

The Termalinca Declaration on Women in politics, Bhutan

This statement is a result of the two day long, National Consultation Conference on Women in Politics, organized by BNEW in April 14, 2014 at Thimphu. The Conference expects to work towards developing a framework that advocates increasing the participation of women in politics in Bhutan. The statement offers a list of goals and measures that are aimed at creating an impact towards enhancing participation of women in the 2016 local elections and the 2018 national elections.

The Termalinca Statement identifies the following goals and measures.

Goals:

1. 2016 local government elections: Increase the number of elected women through reserved seats by 20-50 percent.
2. 2018 parliament elections: Increase the number of elected women through reserved seats by 20-50 percent.

Measures

1. Ensure and provide job and physical security
2. Review school curriculum and environment to make it more gender sensitive.
3. Review electoral laws and policies, civil service rules and others to mainstream gender support.
4. Review and mainstream gender into existing plans and policies and laws and regulations of the government.
5. Carry out serious advocacy at all levels on this issue.
6. Facilitate change, and create and institutionalize support systems to enable participation of women in politics.
7. Create a system whereby women MPs in Office are mentored.
8. Work towards ensuring inclusive democracy by the relevant agencies.
9. Develop a sustained financial support before elections to aspiring women candidates.
10. Enable better pre-election environment including increased time for campaigns and common forums.
11. Relevant authorities to put in place measures to discourage negative gender-biased campaigns.
12. Political parties to commit to mainstream gender in their charter and manifesto.
13. Political parties to commit to recruiting women candidates.
14. Create institutions to train aspiring candidates.
15. Media to ensure gender sensitive coverage.
