

# Preface

Women's political leadership and the equal participation of women in public affairs and decision-making are key elements of democracy and prerequisites for achieving sustainable development. In the last few decades, there has been remarkable progress in this regard with more opportunities for women in leadership roles and significant steps being taken towards achieving gender equality. The world average of women in parliament has increased from 15.7% in 2004 to 22.1% in 2015 to 25.1% in 2020. Nonetheless, we have still not reached the target of 30% of women in decision-making positions set by the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995.

As we marked the 25-year anniversary of this platform in 2020, we also witnessed the importance and impact of diverse leadership and the role of women leaders in high-stakes situations against the backdrop of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Countries with female leaders were hailed to be more successful in fighting the pandemic. A study published by the Centre for Economic Policy Research and the World Economic Forum, which analysed 194 countries, suggests that the difference is real and "may be explained by the proactive and coordinated policy responses" adopted by female leaders.<sup>2</sup>

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) has always recognised and stressed the importance of women in political leadership and the crucial roles they can play. In order to promote female political leadership training and empowerment in Asia, KAS's Political Dialogue Asia office in Singapore has always been committed to pursuing programmes to narrow the political gender gap by organising conferences and thematic meetings on issues pertaining to women's empowerment in Asia.

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<sup>1</sup> Accurate as of 28 December 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Garikipati, Supriya and Kambhampati, Uma, Leading the Fight Against the Pandemic: Does Gender 'Really' Matter? (3 June 2020). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3617953> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3617953>.

Since 2011, we have been bringing together a network of around 40 parliamentarians to promote, strengthen and develop female political leadership in their respective countries through policy discussions and capacity-building programmes. Since its inception, the Asian Women Parliamentarian Caucus (AWPC) has built on existing strategic knowledge and solidarity systems, especially for countries that lack adequate representation of women in politics. Through the Asian Women Parliamentarian Caucus initiative, KAS hopes to address the role of parliamentarians in forging the women leadership agenda and pushing it forward through best practices and shared experiences. AWPC has also helped to unite women across party lines, offer opportunities to discuss mainstream gender issues and provide oversight of government action in the work of parliament. AWPC has also been a platform to inform and encourage parliamentarians to discuss pertinent issues facing the region and to look towards the best policy approach.

It is our hope at KAS that through stronger regional cooperation, we can support women parliamentarians across the region to consolidate best practices, and to influence policy-agenda in bills passing in their respective national parliaments. As our network members take leadership roles in their countries, like Hon. Minister of Defence of Australia Senator Linda Reynolds and Hon. Minister of Education of Bangladesh Dr Dipu Moni, we hope we can support them in their efforts to bring forward a more gender-sensitive and inclusive agenda in their countries and in the region as a whole.

We are pleased to present the second edition of our book *Women, Policy and Political Leadership: Regional Perspectives*. The papers of the first edition have been updated by prominent authors from around the world to include the latest regional insights into the situation of female political leadership and prospects as well as challenges. We also present an updated overview with a) a fact sheet containing comparative data on the percentage of women in national parliaments; b) the Global Gender Gap rankings, introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006 to assess the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities within and across states, using economic, political, education and health as criterion; c) a world map illustrating the proportion of seats held by women in the upper house and lower house in 30 different countries around the world and d) a retrospective timeline on milestones in global female political leadership.

We hope the material compiled by our authors prove useful for politically active women. We have always believed that knowledge management is an integral part of regional network building and we hope that the contents of this book can help influence perspectives and narratives around the region.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'C. Echle', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

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