

Womanifesto - Women's Agenda for Change

Context

Most of the governments in Asia Pacific describe themselves as democratic; and the region is has four of the seven 'largest' democracies in the world. The quality of democracies, however, remains in question with evidences of military interference in governance, ongoing conflicts, corporate capture of political agenda and growing fundamentalisms indicating that democracy is in peril. .

As of December 2017, only 19.7 percent women hold seats in the lower house of parliaments across Asia. In the Pacific Islands this number, at 15.5 percent, is the lowest in the world. These appallingly low numbers, even as they improve from even lower numbers few years back, only reflect the condition women within these 'democracies'. Asia Pacific is home to the world's largest number of women living in poverty who experience the largest gender pay gap and some of the highest rates of violence against women outside conflict zones. And the indicators are only worsening as the nexus between global neoliberal capital, military institutions, fundamentalisms and patriarchy becomes stronger, thereby weakening democratic institutions. Across the region we are seeing widening inequality, routine violations of women's rights and systemic threats to peace and security. The restoration of democratic and accountable governance has never been more urgent.

Currently, the inherently patriarchal political systems in the region have led to a proliferation of political dynasties and alliances, and intensified attacks on civic and democratic spaces preventing any challenge to the prevailing narrative of what politics is. Elections are rarely contested (or won) on the basis of policy agenda and debates related to human rights. While it is important for women to be represented in parliaments, the slow upward trajectory of women in parliaments of the region, has not translated into advancement of women's rights. There is often a disconnect between the few women elected into the parliaments and the broader women's movement. Further, the fourth pillar of democracy, the media also does not give adequate space to women aspiring for political candidacy as it does their male counterparts.

A functioning democracy takes into account the electorate's aspiration and must be accountable to citizens. Empowering women and other marginalised peoples to be part of free, prior and informed decision making in all stages of democratic processes at the local, national, regional and international levels is necessary to ensure the rights of people to determine their development and livelihood priorities. Accountable, participatory democracy can only be realised when women have voice and power to make decisions over their bodies, lives and their community's future.

Our response: Womanifesto

The dire situation of democracy in our region has made us question the value of increasing the number of women in parliaments. We need to reshape our ideas around participatory

democracy allowing bottom-up processes where women define their political agenda and assert their democratic demands collectively. Inspired by the work of our members and feminist movements who have developed a feminist agenda or a 'womanifesto' to influence electoral policy debates, we prioritise supporting our members or other groups to hold community consultations in their electorates to allow women to build their agenda and influence policies and decision-making at multiple levels.

APWLD will support eight to ten organisations with a small grant between USD 12,000-USD 15,000 to employ a dedicated community organiser to carry out community consultations, shape womanifesto and advocate with the electorate.

APWLD will support the community organisers to participate in capacity building workshops and provide advocacy or networking opportunities. They will access training and skills shared in community organising, drafting, public mobilising, media advocacy, political campaigning and other methods to help elaborate a womanifesto.

We envision this process as **feminist** and **participatory**. Feminist, because it is rooted in an understanding of the structural oppressions that have excluded women from shaping the political processes and how to change these power structures. It is also participatory because we want the marginalised and excluded voices to come together, organise and make themselves be heard in the corridors of power.

Overall Objective:

To advance women's democratic rights and civic engagement in Asia Pacific by increasing their capacity to author and claim womanifestos

Specific objectives

- Develop the capacity of women, their organisations and communities to elaborate women's political agenda or womanifestos and thereby, engage in broader political processes and policy debates at local and national levels, in at least 8 countries in Asia Pacific;
- Foster knowledge and resources on women's human rights, particularly democracy methods and community organising tools;
- Establish electoral advocacy plans to share and support women's political manifestos; and
- Strengthen institutional development of partner organisations through leadership development and movement building.

Participants

- Training participants will be a group of 16-20 women working with grassroots communities to create women's political agenda or 'womanifesto'.

- Two participants from each organisation/country will form a team to establish womanifestos using the skills they learn from APWLD's regional trainings
- The team should consist of one (young) woman community organiser and one from the same organisation
- Organisations/participants should have prior experience in organising and advocacy for women's human rights and commitment to women's movement.

Project Activities

Timeline	Activities	Description
February and March 2018	Call for Application and Selection of Participants	Selected Participants will be Intimated by mid-March.
April 2018	1st Regional Training on Women's Human Rights and Democracy Methods	The first training will orient participants towards a better understanding of gender and politics through a human rights based approach. The training will also refine the participants' skills in organising and bringing together women from their community.
August 2018	2nd Regional Training on Drafting Womanifestos and Advocacy Skills	The second training will prepare participants to go back and start drafting the womanifestos through participatory approach with the community. It will also help them formulate advocacy plans of how to engage with the political leadership and elected representatives of the government with the womanifestos.
January 2019	3rd Regional Training on Learnings, Reflections and the Way Forward	All the trainers and participants come together and reflect on the journey so far and the learnings from the successes and failures. It will also be a space to plan and extend support to participants with their continued advocacy.

