

Tenth Meeting

13th December 2017, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Iveagh House

Minutes: Thematic Meeting

**Presentation by Dr. Punam Yadav – UNSCR 1325 in the Nepalese Context
(See attached slides)**

Dr. Yadav provided the group with an insight into the background of the adoption of a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in the Nepalese context and also examined changes in the level of women's political participation in post-conflict Nepal.

Nepal is a gendered context which has traditionally been characterised by high levels of patriarchy, gender discriminatory practices, and women's social, political and economic marginalization. In addition, as a caste based society, gender discriminations are often intersected with other identity markers. However, despite continued discriminations, particularly in rural areas and among excluded castes/ethnic groups, the post-conflict context has seen significant changes in gender discriminatory laws and has brought many more women into the public sphere.

Increasing women's political participation in Nepal

The People's War in Nepal, led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), took place between 1996 and 2006. There were high levels of female recruits in the Maoist insurgency, with figures ranging from 33% to 50% depending on the source. Many women joined the movement due to the Maoists providing a platform for addressing gender discriminations through their Marxist ideology, but others joined due to state threats or coercion. Yet, despite the high levels of women serving in the Maoists, there were no women present in the peace negotiations.

There is a very strong women's civil society network in Nepal, particularly after the war. Women's networks, were notably instrumental in lobbying for assurances on greater female political participation to be included in the interim constitution and the new constitution adopted in 2015. This has resulted in a 33% quota for women at the national level, and 40% at the local level. Although the recent elections have shown that women tend to gain elected office in lower status positions than their male counterparts, this has brought in a critical mass of women that has changed the political demographic substantially.

During the first Constitutional Assembly an influential women's caucus was established. However, with the election of the second Constitutional Assembly in 2012, the parties would not allow a women's caucus to be established.

National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325

The first NAP on UNSCR 1325 was adopted with great enthusiasm and international support in 2011. The process of adoption was largely led by civil society and supported by international donors. The consultation process was perceived as very inclusive with 52 district level workshops that engaged around 3000 women and raised 1500 actions.

However, although civil society was heavily involved in the consultation process, it was understood as a national agenda that should be implemented through the government. The implementing agencies became the: Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, National Women Commission, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Home Affairs. As a result, civil society ownership was reduced during the implementation process leading to disconnect between the supposed implementers and those whom the policies were supposed to be impacting upon.

This disconnect between civil society and the government approach is also representative of the programmes that were established through the NAP. Although funding was \$7.9 million, only ten programmes were implemented. The majority of funding (61%) went to the armed forces in order to establish facilities for women in army barracks and also for gender training. However it was noted that gender training is normally only for 3 days before going on overseas missions. This large proportion of funding dedicated to the security sector is compared to only 5% of the budget being allocated to National Women's Commission. Moreover, very little funding was provided for victims of the war. This remains a particularly politicised issue as both sides to the conflict are responsible for sexual violence¹ and therefore political parties reluctant to address this issue with any great vigour.

Although the evaluation process was inefficient due to funding and lack of political will, Nepal is now the early stages of negotiations for a second National Action Plan. This is ostensibly intended to focus more on UNSCR 1820 and therefore should have a greater focus on sexual violence. However, compared to the 1st, NAP, which was fully funded by international donors, there is a lack of earmarked funding for the second NAP as other issues have become prioritized over WPS.

Dr. Yadav noted that due to other 'trendy' agendas becoming more salient, WPS issues have become less prioritized, with funding diverted to other areas. For example, since the earthquake the issue of resilience has become a high priority issue. However as the discussion highlighted, it is important for agencies to mainstream WPS into newly emerging agendas, rather than overshadowing them. This highlights the dangers of a short-sighted approach to WPS.

¹ The majority of sexual violence was carried out by the state forces but there is also evidence that some was also carried out by the Maoists.

Presentation by Elena Secas and Kemi Adenekan on migrant women's political participation in Ireland.

- Elena Secas was elected as a Labour Councillor with Limerick City and County Council in 2014. She also stood for election in 2009 but did not quite reach enough votes.
- Kemi Adenekan, stood for the Labour party in 2014 but was not elected. She continues to be very involved in community work in Tallaght and therefore does not intend to stand for election in 2019 due to her current workload.

Shifting Demographics and Political Representation from the Migrant Community

It was noted that the number of immigrant individuals standing for election in local elections has reduced between 2004 to 2014. Moreover, although there has been substantial candidates (mainly male) very few get elected. For example in 2009 when 44 candidates stood but only 4 were elected. In 2014, 29 non-Irish individuals (8 women) stood for election and only 2 were elected.

It was noted that this is not representative of modern Ireland, which now includes 17.3% of its population as non-Irish.

Challenges specific to being a migrant standing for election.

- Both speakers spoke of the substantial personal efforts they put into their campaign. Not having a large family support network in the area was a particular challenge, which is particularly relevant to migrant women.
- Kemi, highlighted that in door-to-door canvassing, she experienced abuse due to her ethnicity, particularly by the older generation. She had insults thrown at her, such as 'go back to your own country' and other racist abuse.
- As a 'white' woman, with a foreign accent, Elena found that she did not experience the same level of contention from constituents than what Kemi had experienced.

Other Challenges

- **Financial Resources**

Another issue that was raised was around financial resources. Although both candidates highlighted that they got some funding from the party for materials, this had to be substantially substituted by themselves. For example, even where a candidate organizes a meeting with a constituent there is the added cost of buying a tea or coffee if they go to a café. Also with regard to travel they felt that they were out of pocket.

- **Training**

Both candidates highlighted the importance of training. Elena noted that she had previously had Jan O'Sullivan T.D. as a mentor as she was involved in her election campaign. She also noted that the benefit of being part of a party was that they would provide her training. However, Kemi's experience was different as she did not receive any training as part of her campaign, which was partly due to the fact that she was a late entrant. She instead received training through Women for Election, after the campaign was over.

Discussion and Points to Draw from the Presentations

- It was noted that the political parties are actually encouraging of migrant members but there is, in some cases, the underlying party rationale that seeks an 'immigrant vote'. However, both candidates noted there is no such thing as an 'immigrant community' as immigrants are such a diverse group that there is no such thing as an immigrant 'community' to specifically draw votes from.
- It was noted that many migrants do not vote. Some do not know they are eligible to vote in the local elections but others do not vote even where they are entitled to. As Kemi highlighted, she even took people to register to vote but then on the day they did not turn out to vote.
- Kemi noted that in Tallaght most people are not integrated and that people find it difficult to connect.
- It was noted that many immigrants within Kemi's constituency stated that they would be more likely to vote for her if she was running as an independent candidate.
- It was noted that the change in demographic needs to be digested by the indigenous population in order for long-term change to come about. However, intercultural dialogue and integration programmes are also hugely important in raising confidence in immigrant candidates.
- Integration needs to also be addressed from a youth perspective as the youth are more likely to be open to change or shifting alliances.
- Both candidates were supportive of quotas as they see the visibility of a critical mass of women to have a transformative effect.
- It was noted that many of the issues experienced by these women, apart from the racist abuse, are the same issues experienced by other women standing for election. For example, lack of resources, difficulties around childcare and a lack of confidence in them from within certain sectors of the electorate.
- The Chair noted the importance of immigrant women standing for election. These women can act as role models to other women, which may encourage more immigrant women to enter into politics.