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The Role of Development Partners to Increase Political Participation of Women in Sri Lanka

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**The Role of Development Partners to Increase Political Participation of
Women in Sri Lanka**

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Acknowledgment

Dedicating and thanking my father, for dreaming big, through my eyes.

Acronyms

APR – Annual Progress Report

CSO – Civil Society Organization

DFAR – Demo Finland Annual Report

DP – Development Partners

ECSL – Electoral Commission Sri Lanka

EU – European Union

IFES - International Foundation for Electoral Systems

IRI – International Republican Institute

Local Council – LC

MOWCA – Ministry of Women and Child Affairs

NCW – National Committee on Women

NDI – National Democratic Institute

Provincial Council - PC

QPR – Quarterly Progress Report

SDGAP – Strengthening Democratic Governance and Accountability Project

SLILG – Sri Lanka Institute of Local Governance

SLWPC /WPC – Sri Lanka Women Parliamentary Caucus

SOCWG – Sectoral Oversight Committee of Women and Gender

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

WFD – Westminster Foundation for Democracy

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Introduction

"South Asia claims to consist of the most powerful women leaders in the world" (Omvedt, 2005).

Sonia Gandhi in India, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh, and Chandrika Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka are some of the female leaders who held significant political positions. Their efforts to strengthen governance in the respective countries are influential to date. Despite the presence of powerful female leaders at the highest levels, the broader political landscape in South Asia remains characterized by firm patriarchal norms and limited female politicians. It focuses on the low representation of female politicians in Sri Lanka and the role of development partners (DP).

This thesis investigates the contribution of development partners to women's political representation in Sri Lanka. Specifically, it seeks to understand how and whether DPs have facilitated the advancement of women's political representation (specifically focusing on those who are currently serving or aspiring to serve as political leaders) in Sri Lanka since 2016.

The research question is as follows: How have development partners facilitated the objective of "increasing women's political participation" in Sri Lanka since 2016?

The objectives of this study are:

1. Understanding the role of development partners in Sri Lanka.
2. Discuss the current situation of the lower representation of female politicians in Sri Lanka (national, provincial, and local levels).
3. Identify and evaluate the facilitations and assistance (technical) practiced by the DPs to increase women's political participation in Sri Lanka.

The significance of this study lies in the potential to contribute to the growing body of literature on DPs and women's political participation. While there is not much literature, there have been case studies that suggest the impact of DPs on women's political representation, while others address these two matters separately. This research aims to

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provide an analysis by considering the development partner projects that facilitated women's involvement in politics at the national, provincial, and local levels in Sri Lanka. By employing a qualitative analysis of reports and primary sources, this research will offer findings about the gap discussed.

The thesis is structured into three chapters. Following the introduction and a detailed background about the Sri Lankan political system and female politicians at the national, provincial, and local levels in Sri Lanka, the existing literature on the DPs' contribution to increasing women's political participation will be analyzed, presenting the research question. The research methodology will be then outlined, detailing the data collection and analysis methods that were used. Chapter 1 reviews political participation of women in Sri Lanka since 2016, highlighting an overview of the role of DPs in this research namely: USAID, Demo Finland, EU, IFES, IRI, WFD, and NDI, providing a groundwork about their interest towards women's political empowerment in Sri Lanka. Chapter 2 presents the qualitative results on how the selected DPs have facilitated in achieving the objective of "increasing women's political participation" in Sri Lanka since 2016. Finally, chapter 3 analyzes the findings, acknowledges the study's limitations, discusses the findings while providing a conclusion, and recommends directions for future research.

By exploring the relationship between DPs and female politicians in Sri Lanka, this study aims to provide a valuable direction seeking to optimize the political participation of women. The findings are expected to contribute to the academic discourse on ongoing work and offer practical recommendations for enhancing the work of DPs in governance.

Background

The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, is a multicultural country with diverse religious and ethnic practices (mainly Sinhala and Tamil communities).

Post-independence in 1948 (colonized by the Portuguese, Dutch, and British respectively), Sri Lanka is now a sovereign republic with a “People–elected” President who has the executive power shared with the Prime Minister. The state operates under a hybrid system that blends elements of presidential and parliamentary structures. Moreover, Sri Lanka has been able to secure its place globally as a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations.

The modern history of Sri Lanka is marked by the effects of the civil war (Sinhala-Tamil conflict) which spanned from 1983 to 2009. Before independence, the Tamil minority advanced economically and educationally due to limited opportunities. Post-independence policies; disenfranchising the minority and the Sinhala Only Act of 1956, and the biased system of standardization to Sinhala students in university admissions in 1971 caused the Tamil youth to “contribute to their radicalization” (Ganguly, 2018). This conflict, mainly against the government led to the formation of a militant organization seeking an independent Tamil state named the Liberation of Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The LTTE had profound impacts on the country’s socioeconomic-political landscape. Today, Sri Lanka is considered a post-conflict society, working to rebuild and reconcile after decades of civil strife.

In 2021, Sri Lanka experienced an economic downturn. The focus of the government was to resolve the issue of mounting debt obligations. Sri Lanka sought assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to formulate strategies for managing its debt burden and stabilizing its economic trajectory. The country embarked on initiatives aimed at restructuring its debt infrastructure and implementing severe measures, such as inflation to mitigate the economic crisis. Currently, the main objective of the governance remains to recover its economy and formulate potential solutions.

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Powers of the Sri Lankan Government

The central government focuses on formulating national policies and legislation and overseeing major infrastructure projects as well as managing security matters, healthcare, and education. Similarly to any democracy, the Sri Lankan Government consists of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

The executive of a country, including the President and the PM, is the Cabinet of Ministers who oversee government sectors and decides on implementations for their respective areas. Legislature is the Parliament that creates laws and is superior to the executive. However, the executive has prominence in their daily involvement.

Parliament of Sri Lanka

The Parliament of Sri Lanka serves as the principal legislative body, by shaping the nation's democratic governance. Currently, this entity consists of 225 members (elected for a five-year term) with 196 members elected in multi-seat constituencies, 29 elected by proportional representation, and overall includes 12 women parliamentarians. Recently, the Parliament has grappled with issues of constitutional reforms, economic development, human rights, and reconciliation efforts post-civil war and civilian protest. During this crucial time, female parliamentarians were actively involved in addressing these issues.

Provincial council (PC)

The Provincial Council is the “intermediate level of government that was established within the existing governmental system: national and local” in 1987 (Paffrel, 2022). These councils derive power from the 1978 Constitution and Acts of Parliament. PCs create a sub-national mandate to identify and oversee local priorities in nine provinces (Western, Central, Eastern, Southern, North-Central, Northwestern, Sabaragamuwa, Northern, and Uva provinces respectively) in Sri Lanka that were previously fulfilled by the Central government ministries, departments, and statutory authorities.

Each province's administrative structure consists of an elected PC, Governor, Chief Minister, and a board of ministers. They “determine whether such provinces should continue to be administered” (Paffrel, 2022). This setup allows the possibility to combine two or three

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provinces into a single administrative unit. If so, the Parliament would determine whether these provinces can be administered as a unified entity.

The thirteenth amendment gradually introduced local authorities into governance that are local-level partners in the PCs.

Local Councils (LC)

The local councils are under the direct purview of the PC. According to the constitution (13th amendment), the LCs have the powers vested in them under existing law, the Municipal Councils Ordinance, and the Urban Councils Ordinance.

According to the local government system with nine provincial councils, there are 341 third-tier local authorities. It is categorized into 24 municipal councils, 41 urban councils, and 276 village councils (CLGF, 2017). The LCs are responsible for taxes and user fees: property rates, rents, and grants. Further, they handle the infrastructure management of the local area.

The 24 municipal councils are led by a mayor and mandate the creation of standing committees for “finance and policy planning, housing and community development, technical services and environment” (CLGF, 2017). Urban councils led by a chairperson consist of a principal ordinance requiring but not legally enforcing to establish committees. Village councils are similar, and with proposed amendments to appoint committees similar to urban councils.

The table below simplifies the distribution of councils and population in 2011 in Sri Lanka, where they categorized the information into provincial councils, 25 districts, and local authorities, according to the census statistics and the estimated population by 2017.

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Table 1*FSLGA Communication with CLGF and 2011 census and population projection*

	THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN SRI LANKA	COUNTRY PROFILE 2017-18
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Table 43.1a Distribution of councils and population

Provincial councils	District	Local authorities			Total	Population (2011 Census)	Population (2017 est)	% rural, including tea estates (2010)
		Municipal councils	Urban councils	Pradeshiya sabhas				
Central	3	4	6	38	48	2,571,557	2,722,000	89.4
North Western	2	1	3	29	34	2,380,861	2,508,000	95.9
North Central	2	2	0	25	27	1,266,663	1,349,000	96.0
Uva	2	2	1	25	28	1,266,463	1,349,000	94.5
Sabaragamuwa	2	1	3	25	29	1,928,655	2,028,000	94.0
Western	3	7	14	27	48	5,851,130	6,081,000	61.2
Southern	3	3	4	42	49	2,477,285	2,611,000	89.4
Northern	5	1	5	28	34	1,061,315	1,119,000	83.3
Eastern	3	3	5	37	45	1,555,510	1,677,000	74.9
TOTAL	9	25	41	276	342	20,359,439	21,444,000	91.8

Source: FSLGA communication with CLGF and 2011 census^{133a} and population projection^{133b}

Sri Lanka's judicial system consists of a Supreme Court, a Court of Appeal, a High Court, and several subordinate courts. The President appoints judges to the three hierarchical courts. A judicial service commission, composed of the Chief Justice and two Supreme Court judges, appoints, transfers, and dismisses lower court judges.

Constitutional Power

The important element above the executive, legislative, and judicial power in a government lies in the Constitution of a state/country. After the Donoughmore Constitution, the Soulbury Constitution was adopted by Sri Lanka in 1948. In 1972, Sri Lanka declared itself a republic and adopted a new constitution that marked the transition from the Parliament of Ceylon to the Parliament of Sri Lanka.

The current constitution known as the Second Republican Constitution was adopted in 1978, which is the establishment of an executive presidency and a unicameral parliamentary system. However, it underwent several amendments until 2022, implying the vulnerability of the constitution to ensure democratic governance. The recent amendments reflected different political ideologies of the governance of Sri Lanka. The Nineteenth Amendment (2015) was a move towards a balanced democratic system due to

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authoritarianism. This established independent commissions, removed the executive presidential powers, and limited the term of the President to five years. In 2020, the Twentieth Amendment repealed the Nineteenth Amendment; to ensure a strong executive to govern and respond swiftly to national issues. The Twentieth was later annulled by the Twenty-first Amendment in 2022 aiming to restore the balance of powers between the government pillars, due to concerns over authoritarianism (CPA Lanka, 2023).

Most provisions of the constitution can be amended by a two-thirds majority in parliament. The amendment of certain basic features such as the clauses on language, religion, and reference to Sri Lanka as a unitary state requires both a two-thirds majority and approval in a nationwide referendum.

Political Parties in Sri Lanka

The Lanka Socialist Party in 1935 marked the beginning of Sri Lanka's party system. To relate to the thesis timeline, looking towards political parties (currently prominent) from the 1970s onwards is essential.

The "United National Party" (UNP) and "Sri Lanka Freedom Party" (SLFP) were two prominent political entities that dominated the electoral politics and party system. Ethnic identity politics running at hand heightened the "inter-party competitions as an important dimension of democratic electoral bargaining" (Shastri and Uyangoda, 2018). Major political parties as aforementioned adopted pluralistic political agendas and reduced reliance on Sinhalese nationalist appeals.

The leftist movement or radical political parties since 1935 positively contributed to the anti-colonial struggle and addressed issues of economic imbalance, social justice, and workers' rights, often positioning themselves against the ruling elites and traditional political structures. However, "The People's Liberation Front party", grappled with these issues violently, causing two unsuccessful armed insurgencies (1971 and 1987) against the state. The North-East Tamil citizens were represented by the "Tamil Federal Party" (ITAK) which re-emerged in 1972 to form a united front under the name "Tamil United Front" (TUF) (Verite Research, 2017). With the inclusion of the above major political parties, currently, there are 84 recognized political parties reported recently by the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (Election Commission, 2024). The UNP, SLFP, Sri Lanka's People's Front, United

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People's Power, National People's Party, and National People's Front are active parties recently in the political field to shape the democratic journey in Sri Lanka.

Female Politicians in Sri Lanka

In 1931, when universal adult suffrage was introduced in Sri Lanka, women were given the right to vote, just as men. Even after following traditional and patriarchal patterns, in 1960, Sri Lanka distinguished itself as the first nation to be led by a female head of government, Mrs. Bandaranaike. Her tenure symbolized a pivotal moment in Sri Lanka's political landscape, challenging entrenched gender biases and nurturing greater inclusivity in governance. Later, her daughter Hon. Chandrika Kumaratunga continued the legacy as a female President from 1994 to 2005. Despite the pioneering leadership of these figures, the representation of women in Sri Lankan politics remains limited. Major political parties have overall estimated that between one-quarter and a third of a smaller fraction of their members are women.

For instance, the UNP formed an "All-Ceylon Women's Union" outside the party that was labeled as the "women's section" in 1949. Later, it was merged and affiliated with the party and its branches. Sixteen SLFP officers selected in 1970 had two women, including the party's Prime Minister. In 1972, the Lanka Socialist Party included one woman among its elected politicians (Kearney, 1981).

It is imperative to engage with the phenomenon of dynastic politics, which is of notable significance, particularly concerning female politicians in Sri Lanka.

Dynastic politics

A common characteristic that can be seen in South Asian politics is the entrance of women into politics through family/relative connections. Kearney mentions that within developing countries like Sri Lanka, where traditional gender roles persist and kinship structures remain strong, wives or daughters may inherit public offices vacated by male relatives (1981). This concept is facilitated by the relatively low institutionalization of politics and the enduring influence of familial ties. Women involved in their husbands' or father's political affairs are often well-positioned to succeed in the legacy (Kearney, 1981).

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Jayawardena and Kodikara refer to this concept as “widows, wives, and daughters’ syndrome” (2003).

Of seventeen women who were elected to Parliament in 1947, more than half elected (or first elected) were replacements for a husband/father who had died or been evicted from contesting for legal violations (Kearney, 1981). It was not considered uncommon for them to assume duties as a member of parliament (MP) within their husband’s/father’s term. They are well acquainted with political affairs in the event of a sudden death or disqualification.

During the 1930s to 1950s, women with familial political ties demonstrated agency and actively contributed to political discourse. The majority of recent female entrants appear to lack independent political motivation. Instead, they are perceived as primarily representing the interests and legacy of their familial lineage in politics. Dynastic politics exerts a discernible influence on the increase of women's political involvement in Sri Lanka up to this date.

Delving into the complexities of female politicians, it is necessary to explore the journey of their contribution within the Parliament, provincial and local councils.

Women Parliamentarians (WP)

The percentage of women in all Parliaments of South Asia has been low and has barely risen over the decades. In 2023, the percentage was as follows: 33.1% in Nepal, 20.5% in Pakistan, 5.3% in Sri Lanka, 14.9% in India, 20.9% in Bangladesh, and 17.4% in Bhutan (OECD, 2024).

In Sri Lanka, women's political representation is as low as 5.4% and is ranked 7th in South Asia (Rajendran and Abeyrathne, 2018). There was a fluctuation of female members of parliament within the past few years and currently, only 12 female members of Parliament in Sri Lanka, out of 225 members.

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Table 2*Members of Parliament by sex and year***Table 5.1 : Members of parliament by sex and year**

Legislature	Year	Both Sexes		Male		Female	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
House of Representatives (1st Parliament)	1947	101	100.0	98	97.0	3	3.0
House of Representatives (2nd Parliament)	1952	101	100.0	99	98.0	2	2.0
House of Representatives (3rd Parliament)	1956	101	100.0	97	96.0	4	4.0
House of Representatives (4th Parliament)	1960 (March)	157	100.0	154	98.1	3	1.9
House of Representatives (5th Parliament)	1960 (July)	157	100.0	154	98.1	3	1.9
House of Representatives (6th Parliament)	1965	157	100.0	151	96.2	6	3.8
House of Representatives (7th Parliament)	1970	157	100.0	151	96.2	6	3.8
2nd National State Assembly (8th Parliament)	1977	168	100.0	157	93.5	11	6.5
2nd Parliament of the D.S.R. of Sri Lanka (9th Parliament)	1989	225	100.0	212	94.2	13	5.8
3rd Parliament of the D.S.R. of Sri Lanka (10th Parliament)	1994	225	100.0	213	94.7	12	5.3
4th Parliament of the D.S.R. of Sri Lanka (11th Parliament)	2000	225	100.0	216	96.0	9	4.0
5th Parliament of the D.S.R. of Sri Lanka (12th Parliament)	2001	225	100.0	215	95.6	10	4.4
6th Parliament of the D.S.R. of Sri Lanka (13th Parliament)	2004	225	100.0	212	94.2	13	5.8
7th Parliament of the D.S.R. of Sri Lanka (14th Parliament)	2010	225	100.0	212	94.2	13	5.8
8th Parliament of the D.S.R. of Sri Lanka (15th Parliament)	2015	225	100.0	213	94.7	12	5.3
9th Parliament of the D.S.R. of Sri Lanka (16th Parliament)	2020	225	100.0	213	94.7	12	5.3

Source : Parliament of Sri Lanka

Table 2 displays the proportion of male and female parliamentarians from 1947 to 2020, as documented by the Parliament of Sri Lanka. While examining recent years, particular attention is warranted toward the representation of female parliamentarians, with observations indicating a consistent percentage since 2015 (5.3%).

To enhance the effectiveness of WP in contributing to the nation's development and addressing gender equality issues, the WPC was established.

Sri Lanka Women Parliamentarians' Caucus (SLWPC/WPC)

The Women Parliamentarians' Caucus of Sri Lanka was established on 6th April 2006 in the sixth Parliament as a platform to carry the agenda on gender issues. This unique parliamentary mechanism disregards political parties, geographical locations, and ethnic and religious groups of the women parliamentarians to work under one objective – “empowerment of women ... and functions as the highest decision-making body on gender while advocating for legal and policy matters for achieving gender equality in Sri Lanka” (slwpc.lk, 2024). The Caucus was later reinstated in the eighth Parliament in 2015 to empower women in political, economic, and social spheres.

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The mandate of the SLWPC includes increasing the participation of women in politics, safeguarding women's rights and gender equality, preventing violations and harassment against women, and other welfare and empowerment initiatives.

The SLWPC operates with the consultation of the Parliament; coordinating activities with women provincial councilors and members of the local government bodies, capacity development programs, and outreach activities at district levels. It has created partnerships with external stakeholders; namely UN Agencies, local and international CSOs, and individual professionals. Currently, the SLWPC is chaired by Hon. Sudarshini Fernandopulle, with two Vice-Chairpersons.

25% Quota

A pivotal development in women's political engagement in Sri Lanka occurred with the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act No.1 in 2016, which introduced a mandatory 25% quota for women's participation in local government. This was an outcome of the advocacy provided by the SLWPC, CSOs, and international bodies that promote gender equality. A new electoral system with a quota for women at the provincial level regarding their role in political participation was gradually introduced.

The legislative amendment led to a significant increase in the number of seats at the local level, from 6,619 to 8,825 creating opportunities for women candidates based on their respective electoral performance. Implementing this quota marked a historic moment, as women's representation in local government had remained below 2% before its introduction. Consequently, in the 2018 elections, over 2,000 women were successfully elected to local councils, resulting in a remarkable surge from 2% to 29% (Rajendran & Abeyrathne, 2018).

Women in Provincial and Local Councils

Shastri and Uyangoda in 2018, provide historical data on the percentage of women provincial councilors. 2.8% in 1989 to 4.7% in 1993, then fluctuating around similar levels in subsequent years (3.2% in 1999, 5% in 2004, and 4.8% in 2008-2009).

Women's prospects for serving in local government bodies are lower compared to the national parliament, particularly in rural areas. Town and village councils exhibit a notable underrepresentation of women compared to municipal and urban councils. For

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instance, in 1970 out of 522 chairmen and vice chairmen of town and village councils, only one was a woman. Similarly, in the 1979 elections for municipal and urban councils, less than 50 out of 2510 candidates were women (Kearney, 1981). These women encounter barriers seeking candidacy for political office due to lower education levels, fewer career opportunities, and limited participation in community organizations.

The scarcity of women in local government limits their direct participation in local affairs which poses a hindrance to access the national political office. This minimal proportion underscores the urgent need for measures to enhance their political representation. Liyanage (2012) provides statistical evidence of the low representation of women in local bodies over the years: 1.9% in 1997, 1.8% in 2006, and 1.9% in 2011. Despite being nominated to contest, women encounter obstacles during the election process, as highlighted by Shastri and Uyangoda (2018).

After 2016, since the last elections, women have held less than 5% of provincial council seats. There is a call for a legislative candidate quota of 50% of proportional representation (PR) seats, 10% of first past the post (FPTP) seats, and a minimum of 25% reserved seats for women in each council if the candidate quotas produce less than 25% representation (Athukorala et al., 2021). However, “the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL) lacks an enforcement mandate on anything beyond the candidate nomination process” (IFES, 2022). The IFES mentions that despite a PR system that provides the outcome of higher representation of traditionally marginalized groups, women’s representation in parliament is very low (5.3%) due to the challenges the PC and LC encountered.

With the aforementioned background, it is relevant to seek out avenues to resolve the lack of women’s political representation in Sri Lanka.

Literature Review

Female political participation is widely recognized as essential for building and sustaining democracy, promoting inclusive governance, and achieving gender equality. Despite the recognition, women continue to be underrepresented in political decision-making processes globally, including Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has made progress in advancing women's rights and political empowerment, yet significant challenges persist, hindering equal participation in politics. When discussing this concern, DPs support increasing women's political participation in governance. However, there is limited literature regarding this topic in Sri Lanka. The review addresses this gap by analyzing the existing literature available to understand the dynamics shaping women's political participation in Sri Lanka and inform future research and policymaking in the scope of DPs. The intended study will then explore to what extent the target of increasing women's political participation with the facilitations provided by DPs is achieved.

The review analyzes the existing literature on this topic by grouping the research question into the subtopics: “women in politics in Sri Lanka”, “women’s parliamentary caucus”, “development partners” and “increasing women's political participation.” These subtopics paint a comprehensive picture of the research allowing for a nuanced analysis of women’s political participation and DP initiatives since 2016.

Firstly, the review defines “increasing women’s political participation”, applicable to this context followed by an analysis of literature discussing women's involvement in politics in South Asia and Sri Lanka. Women in politics in Sri Lanka will be analyzed in the categories of: Women Parliamentarians and women in provincial and local councils. The review highlights the challenges faced by women in actively participating in politics, along with the support provided by the DPs and their contribution to increasing women’s political participation. Each context provides generalized findings and narrows down to Sri Lanka.

The overview will prove that there is limited information available about Sri Lankan female political participation, and their collaboration with DPs since 2016 and before. This gap underscores the topic's relevance to the Sri Lankan context, emphasizing the need for further research.

What is ‘increasing women’s political participation’ in this context?

In terms of defining the term “political participation”, this research refers to the idea of political participation or “women’s proportionate representation in governance” (Kumari, 2012). The research will focus on increasing female representation in governance as politicians at the local, provincial, and parliamentary levels.

A report by the Council of Europe (CoE), mentions that although women’s participation in political and public decision-making has increased in the CoE member states, they still have less access to leadership positions due to many discriminations and lack of recognition. The report implies the necessity of investing in “quotas, training, and mentorship programs” to promote their participation (2021).

The persistence of discriminatory practices within well-developed countries reveals the need to examine similar challenges in post-conflict contexts like Sri Lanka, thereby delivering valuable insights into the potential parallels of gender-based discrimination across diverse socio-political landscapes.

Women's Politics in South Asia (Sri Lanka)

Within the scope of South Asian politics, a paradox unfolds: while the region showcases prominent women leaders, the broader landscape reveals a stark absence of women's political participation.

Omvedt addresses this paradox: the region boasts prominent women leaders while simultaneously experiencing a lack of political participation. Omvedt delves into the complex barriers that impede women's equal engagement in governance within South Asia, emphasizing socio-cultural norms and the competitive nature of politics as primary obstacles. It implies the urgent need for greater representation of women in both bureaucratic institutions and political parties, noting the “constant push from women's organizations and feminist activists” (2005).

The chapter on "*Gender and Politics*" serves to delineate the pertinent issues shaping gender politics in the South Asian context (Kumari, 2012). Kumari explores alternative

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approaches beyond quotas to facilitate the expansion of political opportunities that encompass enhancing the representation of women in local governance bodies, nurturing robust women's political movements, and conducting awareness-raising initiatives to elucidate women's rights and societal positions. Hence, this research will investigate how the initiatives by DPs and current women politicians are instrumental in augmenting political participation within the Sri Lankan context.

WPC, Local, and Provincial Women's political representation.

“Institutional configurations such as women's caucuses and women's power in committee leadership also affect the types of policies women legislators create” (Osborn, 2014). Osborn emphasizes that through legislative variations, scholars can understand more thoroughly the legislative conditions. The article’s gap lies in understanding how legislative changes influence women legislators on public policies. There is a need to analyze the control of the legislative process by political parties, institutional arrangements such as women's caucuses, and women's power in committee leadership to shape the policy-making efforts of women legislators.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union has created a database indicating around 80 women’s caucuses globally (IPU). In WPCs all female parliamentarians engage in “creating partnerships with allies within and outside the parliament, facilitating public discussions, raising awareness of key issues, and learning from experiences in other countries, among others” (ACE Project). According to the Democracy International Report, it verifies that the SLWPC organizes initiatives geared towards guiding women at grassroots level, nurturing their aspirations and involvement in the political arena with external development aids (2021). However, the report highlights the continued marginalization of women within Sri Lanka’s socio-political landscapes. Hence, it necessitates analyzing the ongoing assistance from DPs, and its impact.

The efficacy of WPC in advancing gender equality is often constrained by the limited representation of women in many parliaments diminishing the entity’s purpose. While this is often the case, it's essential to acknowledge that not all male politicians support this perspective, and there are instances where men actively support gender equality initiatives within legislative bodies, contributing to WPCs. Secondly, the establishment of WPCs necessitates organizational efforts, and leadership, which may pose challenges to their

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effectiveness. Thirdly, the cross-party nature of WPC complicates consensus-building and collaborative efforts, hindering their ability to mobilize collective action.

While it has been observed that WPCs are relatively weak institutions in most literature, it is imperative to delve into their role, utilizing them as case studies. Thus, valuable insights can be gleaned to encourage other countries to establish similar platforms.

These case studies serve to clarify the potential impact of WPCs, thereby advocating and promoting their objectives on a global scale. The initiatives of caucuses and DPs will serve as supporting data, offering concrete examples of effective strategies and interventions.

Liyanage mentions that women candidates nominated for provincial council elections was 3.5% in 1993, 3.7% in 2004, and 4.5% in 2008. At the local elections, the left-wing and smaller political parties nominated higher numbers. The objective might have been to merely include the necessary number of candidates on the nomination list (Shastri and Uyangoda, 2018). In support, Kearney adds that the “prospects for service in local government bodies, particularly in the rural areas, are limited for women almost to the point of nonexistence”. Further, he mentions that women seem to have a slightly greater opportunity for local political office in the cities than in rural areas (Kearney, 1981). This reflects the limited sphere of activity for women in rural areas. The research will look in detail at the involvement of women in both local and provincial councils and aim to assess the progress achieved in women's political participation since 2016. Moreover, it will focus on the proactive measures provided for women politicians at local and provincial levels (along with the collaboration of WPC) and its associated DP programs. The approval of policies mandating a 25% quota adds another dimension to the analysis.

Barriers to “increasing women's political participation”

Paxton and Kunovich in 2003, focused on the precise measurement of ideology in understanding the disparities in representation across countries. They argue the ideology that connects to motherhood and marriage in certain contexts shapes a woman’s decision to participate in politics that surpasses the influence of political and structural factors.

Meanwhile, Sawer delves into the complexities surrounding the urge to increase political representation of women, warning against its potential overemphasis on the

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discourse of “making a difference” may inadvertently sideline issues of accountability, particularly by focusing on the embodiment of female politicians rather than their policy agendas (2000).

Kelley and Boutilier propose that modernization would lead women to broader opportunities including a rise in political participation (1978). However, despite advancements in education and literacy, Sri Lankan women’s political involvement remains limited. One significant barrier is the strong patriarchal system. While education is vital, overcoming cultural barriers with the support from DPs is necessary to promote political participation.

Many scholars point out that South Asian women enter politics via family ties. In Sri Lanka, with a few exceptions, many enter national politics through patriarchal social structures as they are connected to political families (Rajendran and Abhayarathna, 2022). In contrast to 1900s, current female politicians seem to be “‘proxy’ women politicians’ with little or no political will of their own” (Wickremasinghe & Kodikara, 2012).

Women who are not directly connected to political families have some connections to male patrons and support bases, reflecting the patriarchal structures within which women need to receive support for election (Jayawardena & Kodikara, 2003) (Rajendran and Abhayarathna, 2022). Indeed, it is a factual observation that most women parliamentarians in the Caucus have ascended to their positions due to familial connections, often as widows, daughters, or wives of male politicians. This research will examine whether their role in encouraging is successful, regardless of their background of lineage.

DPs’ contribution to women’s political participation

Progressing with the years, DPs have recognized the importance of parliaments for democratic governance due to their roles in law-making, executive oversight, and representing citizens and their interests (USAID, 2006). Munyoro and L. Dick acknowledged the contributions made by DPs, specifically the UNDP and the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) in improving communication by disseminating parliamentary information in Zimbabwe (2015). However, they argue that there are obstacles faced by these DPs in achieving their objectives.

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Acknowledging the role of DPs within national, local, and provincial settings, this research recognizes their significance from existing literature. Studying these efforts, the research seeks to elucidate the DP's impact on augmenting women's representation in Sri Lanka.

The article "From Palm Tree to Parliament: Training Women for Political Leadership and Public Life" tackles the persistent challenge the limited representation in political and public leadership spheres. She proposes initiatives that address dismantling entrenched systemic obstacles and cultural norms. Abdela advocates for a shift in traditional paradigms, in gender dynamics within political systems, and necessity of financial investment in nurturing women leaders.

She further questions:

“Who funds the promotion of women's political leadership? ... asked to carry out work on a budget that is far too low for time and resources needed ... to be done properly. Working to develop 'women leaders' is certainly a worthy cause, but does it not deserve proper financial investment, rather than a few crumbs from the global aid budget?” (Abdela, 2000).

The article mentions that “huge sums of money are put into retraining de-mobbed fighters, compared to the small amounts of money made available to train women leaders who equally need to develop stable future democratic societies (personal observation, Kosovo, 1999)”. Requests to assist sensible proposals are received but there are no means to apply for funding.

These concerns will be discussed to an extent in this thesis, as development assistance initiatives have allocated funds emphasizing the importance of enhancing women's political participation (however lower than other development initiatives).

It will delve into the dynamics of training and development initiatives in Sri Lanka, focusing on collaborations by DPs. Specifically, the efficacy of these partnerships will be assessed in fostering women's leadership within the distinctive socio-political milieu of a post-conflict society. The research will endeavor on the effectiveness of training and development programs, particularly in increasing participation.

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To support Abdela's statement, in the scope of democracy support, Carothers addresses the diverse transitional contexts of emerging democracies as a challenge, particularly concerning women's political empowerment efforts, which catalyze broader societal change. He mentions Sri Lanka through conflict-affected scenarios (transitional settings), explaining effective assistance strategies by hinging on comprehending gender dynamics and leveraging women's political empowerment as a path for democratic progress. Women's political empowerment is recognized as an important aspect of both international aid efforts aimed at promoting democracy and broader development initiatives.

A report regarding the "Struggle for Equal Political Representation in Sri Lanka" implies that in the 1970s, women's organizations individually and collectively took initiatives to address the underrepresentation of women in political institutions. The support of "donor organizations such as CIDA, FES, NORAD, Ford Foundation, and the UNDP" was present during this era for women activists to learn from experiences of other countries by participating in international conferences.

The study identifies "research/publications, training, and capacity building for political leadership, awareness raising, advocacy quota" as key strategies that were employed by women's organizations through the experiences they gained from international donors. Yet there is minimal progress in participation and a lack of effort by political parties to consider proposals in this regard (Kodikara, 2009).

In the above report, it is evident that international donors have been supporting achieving women's political participation through external stakeholders who are not entirely engaged within the political scope. However, now these donors have come forth in supporting the political field as DPs for the welfare of Sri Lanka. This engagement does not have an exact timeline. Nevertheless, evidence about the development aid organizations that have facilitated the implementation of initiatives on increasing women's political representation at the national, local, and provincial levels has been present since 2016. Furthermore, the research identifies potential avenues to address the existing gaps.

By analyzing the existing literature, this review lays the groundwork to examine how DPs (USAID, Demo Finland, EU, IRI, IFES, WFD, and NDI) have contributed to women's political participation in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

The literature review provides an understanding of the complex landscape surrounding “increasing women's political participation” in Sri Lanka, particularly an effort to examine the role of DPs. The review highlights the necessity to update scholarly materials, statistics, and reports on women in politics in South Asia and Sri Lanka. By addressing the existing gaps and challenges, it will explore the assistance extended by DPs in augmenting the contributions of women politicians and political participation in recent times.

Methodology

This study investigates the role of DPs in promoting female political participation in Sri Lanka. Narrowing its scope to female politicians in national, provincial, and local councils, the study constructs a case that delves into the collaboration with DPs, from 2016 onwards.

The research question is: How have development partners facilitated the objective of “increasing women’s political participation” in Sri Lanka since 2016?

The preliminary steps and the strategies that were used in the research will be explained with the limitations since the beginning of the research. Subsequently, with many attempts to propose a methodology, the research strategy shifted towards utilizing existing data on programs conducted from 2016 to 2022. This timeline was selected as the mandate of 25% quota marked a significant step towards increasing female political participation. Additionally, the DPs transitioned to a nationally led approach that aligned the role of DPs on Sri Lankan priorities.

The research will focus on specific DPs consisting of a well-established track record of advancing women's political participation worldwide, including in Sri Lanka (since 2016). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Demo Finland, International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the European Union (EU), International Republican Institute (IRI), Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), are the selected DPs that are being analyzed in this thesis. While other DPs like UNDP and UNFPA are involved, the research focuses on the above due to their prominence and availability of data on their programs.

To answer the research question, official reports and sources from the selected DPs were gained. The sources are as follows:

USAID project, titled "Sri Lanka Strengthening Democratic Governance and Accountability Project (SDGAP)," allocated funds aimed at strengthening democratic processes within Sri Lanka for three years. These reports were prepared by the DAI development company who acted as their “implementing partner”. The official USAID website provides the Annual Progress Reports and Quarterly Progress reports spanning from

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2016 to 2019. They detail the implementation of programs directed at increasing women's political participation. It is important to underscore that several initiatives were conducted in collaboration with other DPs such as the NDI and the UN organizations.

Annual reports (2019-2022) from Demo Finland, on initiatives promoting good governance and participation, will be examined.

The research report from the EU that published “EU support for Women’s political participation and Leadership under the EU’s Gender Action Plan: A Case Study on Sri Lanka”, will investigate programs targeting women’s political participation from the year 2016 onwards.

Data by the “She-Leads”, flagship program conducted and collaborated with the IFES to promote equal and active participation of women in politics is reviewed. Selective initiatives from the resources of the IRI, WFD, and NDI will be further included in the analysis.

These data will be categorized into focus areas of 25% quota system, capacity-building and training, international sphere (study/exchange tours), research and analysis, WPC, and other initiatives. The data will be listed chronologically by year in each focus area (2016- 2022) and will critically analyze the effectiveness of these initiatives targeting advancing the political participation of women in Sri Lanka.

During this research there have been several limitations; The first strategy was to conduct online interviews on this topic with the current 12 Women Parliamentarians affiliated with the SLWPC, along with the Secretary-General of the Parliament of Sri Lanka. Due to their unavailability, the progression of this aspect of the research was not achieved. Some DPs, despite likely contributions through various programs, have not made details publicly available. However, there were sufficient accessible DPs to analyze on this research.

This methodology will support exploring the research question within the dimension of the aforementioned sources.

Chapter 1

Outline

This section outlines the political participation of women in Sri Lanka since 2016, focusing on the role of DPs in facilitating and promoting such involvement. Firstly, it explains the women's presence in political spheres for achieving equal representation and societal progress and acknowledging the challenges they face. These challenges include gender bias within party nominations, financial constraints in electoral campaigns, societal perceptions, and hostility towards women candidates. This chapter discusses solutions: the implementation of a reserved quota for women in local government, and concerns regarding the integrity of the selection process. A general overview of the selected DPs is presented with their missions for the political empowerment of women in Sri Lanka. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the impact of these interventions and recommendations for future initiatives.

Increasing women's political participation in Sri Lanka.

Women in political bodies undoubtedly legitimize the representation of equal rights and participation in society. This encompasses their representation in voting, perspectives on political affairs, and as political leaders. This study aims to academically analyze the latter element in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka grapples with a multitude of factors contributing to lower political participation of women.

Gender bias within party nominations limits opportunities for women to participate in politics. Major political parties are attentive in nominating one individual male candidate (winnable candidate) over women, which is a common trait in elections in Sri Lanka. The perception of women not garnering public support leads to marginalize their abilities.

The proportionate rate system of elections has largely reduced women's political participation (Law and Society Trust, 2016). To gain popularity or votes in any government election it is necessary to be able to incur a large expense. Hence there is a notion of the incapability of assembling funds for women to promote themselves in political processes.

In patriarchal societies, women's confidence and interest in politics is undermined. The misconception that politics is primarily a male domain has marginalized women, on

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actively engaging in political processes. Consequently, this discourages women from participating in politics, believing that their contributions are undervalued. This systemic bias hinders the broader goal of achieving gender equality and inclusive governance.

Aggressive election campaigns, corrupt electoral practices, male-dominated decision-making, and hostility towards women candidates are several other disadvantaged positions (Shastri and Uyangoda, 2018).

While the notion of designating a 25% quota is acknowledged to be valid, there exists doubt regarding the integrity of the selection process. Previous practices reveal a pattern of irregular appointments to national lists by political factions, raising uncertainty about the assurance of fair appointments.

Examining these factors, it is essential to underscore the presence of efforts by governmental and external stakeholders aimed at enhancing women's political representation. This thesis identifies the efforts of external stakeholders, often referred to as DPs; involved in strategies to augment women's engagement in Sri Lankan politics.

Development partners

The contemporary notion of international development aid began to emerge in the 1950s when the Global North intended to develop the “Third World” regions (Macekura and Manela, 2018).

In International Relations, “development partner” refers to organizations that collaborate with governments, and essential stakeholders. DPs act as catalysts in developing countries by providing financial aid, technical expertise, and resources to fuel development initiatives. According to the Sri Lankan Development Partners Secretariat, DPs focus on range of avenues to improve the country. These include governance, gender equality, reconciliation, health and nutrition, agriculture, private sector development, social cohesion, and education (erd.gov.lk, 2024). The DPs aim to provide financial and technical assistance to development projects. In addition, they formulate socioeconomic development policies and facilitate consultations with the government.

For instance, the UNDP facilitates inclusive governance and peacebuilding through capacity development initiatives for local government, strengthening the Parliament, and

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improving youth and innovation sectors. During the civil war, the USAID promoted diversity exchange programs, and conflict management training to promote peacebuilding (USAID and UNDP websites).

Focusing on gender, DPs have been actively involved in working towards improving the lives of women in Sri Lanka through many tiers. They have been providing technical assistance to amend discriminatory laws against women, support the Parliament to implement UN resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, enhance business/financial skills of widows and women-headed households, and encourage the livelihoods of small-scale women entrepreneurs through training and mentorship programs. One specific aim of many DPs is to promote inclusive communities and promote women's political leadership across Sri Lanka.

These initiatives have progressed over time as women in Sri Lanka have learnt to stand up for their rights. Therefore, the government and DPs have upgraded into combining their initiatives to the grassroot levels. This is crucial because women in these communities lack awareness of these programs but are eager to obtain these opportunities.

This thesis will concentrate on the political participation of women which was active since the 1900s through the United Nations and the Beijing Platform for Action. Due to the limited scope of the thesis, this analysis will address how DPs have worked towards stimulating political participation of women in Sri Lanka from the year 2016 onwards.

To address the research question, the general overview of DPs and their roles in Sri Lanka is presented. This will now follow a detailed examination of the DPs relevant to this thesis.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

The USAID is an agency of the United States government, established on the 3rd of November 1961 that administers civilian foreign aid and development assistance. It is one of the world's premier international development agencies and catalytic actor driving development results. USAID aims to support international development, assist partners to become capable of leading their "own development journeys" and fund humanitarian efforts to reduce poverty, strengthen democratic governance, and help people progress beyond assistance.

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The United States and Sri Lanka signed a landmark development cooperation agreement five years before the launch of USAID. Currently, USAID commits to providing Sri Lankans with the tools to build institutions and systems that better services for the democratic process.

However, it is necessary to question why USAID has never treated developing countries, like Sri Lanka as equals, but provides aid “as a preacher and savior” in a way of dominating them. Former U.S. President Nixon mentioned that America deals with the rest of the world by measuring all governments through standards of Eurocentrism and democracy - implying that the USAID funds might be the US administration oppressing third-world countries. USAID's irregularity, questionable funding, corruption within, and the lack of monitoring and evaluation in its projects raise concerns about whether their funds have resulted in any improvements (Patwary, 2023). Given Sri Lanka's economic crisis, it is crucial to evaluate the impact on USAID's assistance, focusing on women-related initiatives.

Demo Finland

Established in 2006, Demo Finland is a cooperative organization of Finnish parliamentary parties, that aims to enhance democratic governance by promoting dialogue and cooperation and strengthening the political participation of women, youth, and differently-abled. The programs of this organization include training programs, advocacy work, and multi-party networks aimed at enhancing political importance. Demo Finland operates these projects in Kenya, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Tunisia, Zambia, and Sri Lanka (Demo Finland website, 2024). It has been actively involved with Sri Lanka since 2015 to support on the above objectives.

Nevertheless, Demo Finland's efforts in Sri Lanka have not received much recognition compared to other initiatives. With over 15 years of experience, Demo Finland needs to emphasize their actions toward promoting democracy to gain international recognition and here, draw the government of Sri Lanka's attention on their initiatives.

European Union (EU)

The EU operates through a hybrid system of supranational and intergovernmental decision-making. The mission is to promote peace, and strive for sustainable development, a

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competitive market economy, and social progress. It aims to uphold democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights globally (European Union website, 2024).

The EU supports Sri Lanka in post-war reconstruction, poverty reduction, integrated rural development, democratic governance, and reconciliation efforts (European External Action Service). Moreover, reaffirmed its commitment to support the economic crisis and lead the country towards sustainable growth and prosperity (Daily FT, 2022).

Since 2016, the EU's role as a DP in Sri Lanka has often been that of a donor supporting other DPs. A rather practical approach for the EU is to directly engage in constructive engagement, political dialogue, and capacity building in various sectors including women's political participation.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)

IFES, founded in 1987, supports the right to participate in fair elections. Its vision is to advance good governance by providing technical assistance and support to electoral processes globally.

IFES assists Sri Lanka by providing technical expertise in electoral administration, voter education, and election monitoring. This ensures that elections in Sri Lanka are conducted transparently, fairly, and by international standards. However, Sri Lanka has been allegedly accused of corruption in voting during elections and accused of elected Parliamentarians being associated with the largest frauds in the country's history (Daily Mirror, 2024). Hence it raises the question of IFES's contribution to ensuring fair election monitoring in Sri Lanka. However, one could argue that IFES's work is more necessary than ever, and the situation might deteriorate with it.

IFES intends to enhance the inclusivity of the electoral process by promoting the political participation of women. They incorporate gender-sensitive technical support initiatives to influence political and electoral affairs worldwide. (Electoral System Analysis and Recommendations, 2021). The representation of IFES, however, is recognized mostly during the period of elections. Thus, it reduces the recognition and accountability of women's political advancement.

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International Republican Institute (IRI)

In 1983, the IRI was founded as a core institute of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to advance democracy as its worldwide mission. The IRI works in over 100 countries (Africa, Asia, Eurasia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa) to strengthen civil society, political parties, marginalized communities, and democratic governance. IRI is a professional expert in responsive politics, political processes, polling technology, and party building. Currently, this institute has made an impact on legislators to enhance transparency, empower individuals in political processes, and connect policymakers with their constituencies (iri.org, 2024).

To support Sri Lanka, IRI bolstered “political leadership skills of women and youth”. Further initiatives include supporting elections observation efforts, strengthening political party communications, and assisting the development of responsive public policy (IRI website). They target to facilitate local initiatives in Sri Lanka to increase political participation of women.

However, IRI was repeatedly accused on issues of foreign interference, including the “Democracy building” program in Haiti undermining US Department diplomacy efforts. Critics argue that IRI supporting the 2009 elections in Honduras tried to legitimize a right-wing coup removing a democratically elected government from power (Militarist Monitor, 2012). True democracy is a system that goes beyond electing favored parties and requires people to make their own choices even if they differ from US interests. Therefore, these criticisms imply IRI’s complexities of democracy promotion.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)

The WFD, established in 1992, is a public body of the United Kingdom dedicated to supporting democratic practices in “developing democracies”. WFD works with parliaments, political parties, electoral bodies, and CSOs to achieve in addressing critical policy and governance challenges (European Partnership for Democracy, 2024).

It implements the themes of accountability and transparency, elections, environment democracy, openness and participation, and women’s political leadership. Under this, the WFD works with partners to develop systems for over 30 countries that embed gender

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analysis through the parliament, support women politicians, and end violence against women in politics (WFD Website, 2024).

WFD assists Sri Lanka through the parliament in its legislative and policy oversight functions, with a particular emphasis on the committee system. It provides technical assistance to parliamentary finance committees and the National Audit Office of Sri Lanka to bolster anti-corruption efforts. This assistance includes aiding legislators who act on behalf of the Speaker and facilitating the implementation of new parliamentary procedures, such as the Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct. WFD has initiated programs to prioritize gender-responsive and inclusive approaches, alongside increasing women's political leadership. Nevertheless, the WFD lacks robust impact measurements of these initiatives.

National Democratic Institute (NDI)

NDI, formed in 1983, is a non-governmental organization that partners worldwide to strengthen democracy by promoting effective governance. NDI and the local partners in 156 countries promote accountability in government by building political and civic organizations, safeguarding elections, empowering women, and promoting citizen participation (NDI anniversary report, 2018).

NDI partnered with Sri Lanka in the early 2000s, supporting CSOs and government institutions in election monitoring and advocacy, and developing women's and youth's political engagement skills. The programs initiated by the NDI remove barriers for women in political entities to gain a perceptible political role. It recently expanded its partnership with the Parliament of Sri Lanka to enhance its technical and institutional capacity, thus widening its scope towards assisting women parliamentarians (NDI Asia Pacific Sri Lanka website), yet they remain unacknowledged to the public.

Given the contextual backdrop concerning the political participation of women and the involvement of DPs, the subsequent step analyzes the findings to address the research question.

Chapter 2

Outline

This chapter will concentrate on the measures undertaken by the selected DPs to advance the goal of enhancing the political participation of women in Sri Lanka, from 2016 to 2022. The analytical approach of the findings is as follows: Each project/initiative of the selected DPs is categorized by focus areas that are relevant to women in Sri Lankan politics. They are; 25% Quota awareness initiatives, capacity building and training, international sphere (study and exchange tours), research and analysis, WPC initiatives, and other initiatives that do not belong to a common focus area. The respective initiatives of each DP will be chronologically laid out and critically analyzed by the focus areas.

25% quota awareness initiatives

As mentioned in the literature, the 25% quota system is a turning point in Sri Lankan politics for women. Although the quota was accepted by Sri Lanka, women at the local level were oblivious to this fact. With the support of current female politicians in the higher tier and the facilitations provided by the DPs, quota awareness was promoted. The USAID project known as the “Strengthening Democratic Governance and Accountability Project” took prominence in this initiative.

SDGAP was launched on November 23, 2016, at the Parliament of Sri Lanka. It was a three-year initiative to enhance democratic governance and accountability. The project provides technical assistance, capacity development, policy analysis, and recommendations to various national institutions. One of its objectives includes increasing political participation among women and under-represented groups in democratic governance through a comprehensive approach; integrating advocacy, awareness, and capacity building.

In 2016 SDGAP expanded an awareness session about the quota in seven locations: Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Kegalle, Katana, Monaragala, Batticaloa, and Jaffna for over 1000 women leaders in CSOs including grassroots political leaders. These programs were advocated with expert consultations with the support of the WPC and the Sectoral Oversight Committee on Women and Gender (SOCWG). As a result, a new legislation was drafted, proposing an increased potential quota of 30% for women. This includes a “guaranteed 20%

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allocation under the proportional representation system and an additional maximum of 10% under the first-past-the-post allocation” (SDGAP September 2016 – September 2017 APR). The new legislation however was not promoted further during the next two years of the project and rather led to an underachieving potential quota for women.

A critical mass of nearly 70 leaders as a group of trainers disseminated the project's objectives with focus group discussions across the island. The insights gathered were documented to develop training tools targeting knowledge gaps and promote women's political leadership. To disperse knowledge by expanding the scope, this project in partnership with SLILG, mapped all partner interventions on the women's quota system to rationalize efforts and improve collaboration with DPs by the end of the year (SDGAP September 2016 – September 2017 APR).

SDGAP finalized the “Terms of References” for a consultant to research best practices learned from other countries regarding gender-responsive legislation and quota systems. The consultant began work in early September, submitting an inception report and commencing a desk review. This meeting aimed to help active WPC members and the SOC Chair develop strategies to positively influence the discourse on maintaining women's quotas in parliament (Quarterly report July 2017 – September 2017). Although maintaining women's quotas in parliament has been discussed, up to this date there are only 12 women. This leads to the question of whether the quota issue is prioritized only by the WPC and neglected in discussions due to other prominent issues that affect the country, such as inflation due to the economic crisis.

In August 2017, informational seminars were organized to guide over 400 potential female candidates for local general elections in the Southern, Central, and North-Central regions (highest turnout) with the presence of female politicians from both national and sub-national levels (SDGAP October 2017 – September 2018). Focus group discussions with potential women nominees in Kandy and Galle were also initiated to promote 25% quota awareness. These discussions were expanded to national stakeholders in partnership with the Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Governments (MPCLG) and MOWCA to clarify the quota system. It further supported the WPC by formulating a Strategic Plan for the Action Collective. This was unveiled at an event called "Women for Change," held in November 2017, with over 1000 women leaders from various political parties. The President at this

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event encouraged more women to run in the local government elections in February 2018 (SDGAP October 2017- September 2018 APR).

By August 2018, official figures for the number of elected women leaders were unavailable indicating poor data transparency. Estimates suggest that fifteen local authorities failed to meet the quota, but 95.3% of local authorities met the quota and 30% of candidates in the 2018 election were women (Vijayarasa, 2020). The effort thus implies a positive effect on women's political advancement.

SDGAP hosted a policy dialogue in Parliament and proposed measures to include a 25% quota for female candidates in party nomination lists, a 30% quota for women in the National List, and electoral reforms to enable a 25% women's quota in the general election. Two consultation meetings were facilitated to identify recommendations and an advocacy strategy, with SOCWG advocating for increasing the national list quota for women to 50% (QR July – September 2019).

When analyzing these projects, throughout these years, there has been certain progress in the promotion of the quota system in the local authorities rather than in Parliament. The quota system aims to increase the political participation of women in the Parliament, provincial, and local levels by reducing the promotion gradually with the intention of many women being informed. However, disregarding the February elections in 2018, year by year through these initiatives, it is evident that the quota system has been a work in progress until 2019. With the gradual rise in inflation and, increase in the price of basic commodities in the 2019 economic crisis, other respective DPs assisted in rebuilding the economy by supporting the government and neglected this theme to an extent perhaps due to the well-trodden attempt made by the “powerful” USAID.

Capacity-building and training programs

Capacity-building and training programs are essential facilitation approaches by the DPs to increase the political participation of women. Women political leaders across Sri Lanka were reached by the DPs to ensure necessary training on various competencies. These programs have focused on developing leadership and political skills, improving digital literacy, voter outreach strategies, campaign messaging and planning, security skills, media engagement in politics, and learning the connections between equality and sustainable

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development. In addition, they raised awareness on critical issues such as ending violence against women in politics, gender-sensitive budgeting and auditing, incorporating gender analysis into law reviewing practices, and understanding the impact of gender on policy and decision-making. The majority of the training programs by DPs were conducted on behalf of women councilors and/ or local government-level leaders. The initiatives of the EU, IFES, IRI, WFD, SDGAP (USAID), and Demo Finland will be critically evaluated in this section from the year 2016 chronologically.

The EU-funded projects aimed at both enhancing the political representation of women and addressing gender-based violence in Northern Sri Lanka. The Network Engagement Transform (NET) Project (2016-2018) targeted training 420 women leaders and 60 state officials, benefiting 60,000 people in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts. Similarly, the Building Inclusive Communities and Promoting Women's Leadership project (2017-2021) trained 300 women and 100 men to transform social norms and tackle gender-based discrimination across five districts in Northern Sri Lanka. In collaboration with the UNDP, a Capacity Development for Local Government project (2018-2023), focused on providing targeted capacity development and mentoring for elected women officials, as well as sensitizing male officials, to ensure women's involvement in participatory planning and budgeting (European Democracy Hub, 2021). A common trait that can be analyzed is the prioritization of the EU on educating male political leaders in rural areas about equal opportunities for political representation and gender-based violence.

In the year 2017, IFES's flagship program "She Leads", intended to empower women with competencies to participate and take on leadership roles in political and electoral entities through a series of beginner, intermediate, and advanced training levels. WFD and the IRI conducted training sessions and workshops targeting cross-party candidates and elected council women respectively with a common stakeholder, the Federation of Sri Lankan Government Authorities (FSLGA).

According to the report, "She Leads" has trained over 2600 women in four countries and is expecting to widen its dimensions. The programs are customized according to the cultural and contextual environment in each country. Due to the practical application of competencies through community mobilized assignments, over 100,000 individuals were reached by conducting voter education and increasing their confidence in leadership roles, by assuming positions as elected officials, community organizers, and advocates for women's

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political participation. Through the “We Stand Together” campaign facilitated by the IFES, the participants are offered training modules covering electoral processes, leadership, gender equality, ethical leadership, and advocacy to promote women’s leadership. While cultural and linguistic differences exist between Sinhala and Tamil communities, they are not as significant as their shared vision for a unified country. Training participants from Sri Lanka have mentioned that they “realized that the Tamil-speaking sisters also have similar visions for a better country just like they do. And that they need to work together to make this vision a reality.” (IFES, She Leads, 2017). These programs post-conflict unite women from diverse backgrounds to realize the importance of working towards a common objective.

WFD conducted five workshops targeted at potential cross-party candidates between October 2016 and March 2017. The expectation was to contribute towards establishing a pool of female candidates at the local level to compete in the 2020 general election (wfd.org; Sri Lanka, 2017). Meanwhile IRI, in collaboration with the FSLGA and Women’s Democracy Network (WDN), organized a training session for newly elected local councilwomen in May 2018. The objectives of this session were to focus on agenda development, coalition building, communication, cross-party cooperation skills, and creating action plans (Bruggemann, 2018).

The absence of tracking progress results demotivates the purpose of these initiatives. The IFES, WFD, and IRI could have developed a long-term work plan to continue the sessions. By strategically targeting the elections in 2020, on economically challenged areas, knowledge-sharing sessions between underprivileged communities and women leaders in all three levels could be initiated. Thus, it would encourage women leaders to learn which intervention and policy strategies need to be prioritized to support the economic crisis in rural areas.

After the February 2018 elections, the SDGAP initiated training sessions for 850 newly elected or appointed local women councilors linking women parliamentarians and it provided feedback across the provinces for continuous mentoring and in-depth training (SDGAP October 2017- September 2018). Further, it conducted two of nine planned workshops, focusing on the Eastern and North Central Provinces to educate councilors on effective female leadership and political engagement (SDGAP QR April – June 2018). It continued to roll out soft skills training programs and grantee-targeted initiatives for 1290 women leaders with the WPC and SLILG.

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In August 2018, the fourth Asian Electoral Stakeholders' Forum was conducted to discuss best practices in the political participation of women. SDGAP grantees focused on capacity development for local women councilors only in the Western and Southern Provinces, though Northern Province training was postponed due to political sensitivity. (SDGAP QR July - September 2018). With the NCW, they reviewed the capacity needs of elected female local government representatives after the February Elections. 1,119 women were elected, but only 60% received basic orientation to ensure consistent training. SDGAP was invited to assist in needs assessment and curriculum development, sharing insights from previous training sessions for women (SDGAP QR October –December 2018). The reason to analyze the USAID programs independently is due to the consecutive sessions they facilitated from 2017 to 2018. USAID stands out in comparison to other DPs, as it links with women parliamentarians to improve local women leaders.

In 2019, both USAID and Demo Finland carried out capacity-building and training sessions for female councilors. In March 2019, SDGAP launched a public outreach campaign to reduce prejudice against women leaders by highlighting local female role models. The campaign later expanded to four districts (Galle, Hambantota, Ratnapura, and Jaffna) with regional exhibits and training sessions for local women councilors (SDGAP QR July – September 2019).

Demo Finland started a pilot project that aimed to set up a multiparty network of female councilors where young female politicians from six districts can develop their political skills and cooperate. The project included advocacy work to increase women's share in the electoral lists of the upcoming elections. The local partner in the project was One-Text Initiative (OTI). The activities were to be launched in 2020 (Demo Finland AR, 2019). Due to the 2020 elections, representing the USA and the European region, these DPs seem to have upgraded their roles in capacity building, emphasizing an outcome with the introduction of an outreach campaign and OTI for women councilors respectively.

In 2020 Demo Finland established, a network of 40 women local councilors from diverse political backgrounds across six provinces. The training highlighted the usage of social media, which became critical during the COVID-19 pandemic and resulted in over 80% of participants creating their social media page. Moreover, OTI participated in advocacy activities to promote women's political participation, including a campaign that parallels

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International Women's Day, which united various stakeholders to emphasize the importance of solidarity among female politicians (DFAR, 2020).

IRI launched the Women's Campaign Academy (WCA) in March 2021, to equip grassroots-level women to compete in 2021 provincial and local government elections. It provided candidates with skills to improve their voter outreach strategies, campaign messaging, and planning, security skills, and digital literacy (iri.org, 2021). Within this year, amidst economic difficulties, OTI trained 302 female local councilors from four provinces, seven districts, and 82 councils. The training was a collaboration with SLILG and covered local government laws, responsibilities, budgeting, and constituent needs. The project further advocated for the creation of "Women's Committees" in local councils, leading to the establishment of 25 committees to enhance political leadership and gender equality (DFAR, 2021).

In 2022, the OTI programs increased the trained councilors from 302 to 361. Usage of social media skills for political campaigning led to an increase from 26% to 90% after the training due to their regularity in sharing content and receiving peer feedback (DFAR, 2022). Structurally the establishment of the Women's Committees in local councils grew from 25 to 56 by the end of the year, which created a supportive environment for women councilors. Due to the economic crisis, OTI conducted online training on the economic and food crisis that motivated women councilors to launch local initiatives such as nutrition programs with the support of the Women's Committees (DFAR Report, 2022).

From 2020 to 2022, it is evident that these training programs conducted by the IRI and Demo Finland for local women councilors changed with the strike of the COVID pandemic and the economic crisis. The common trait during this period is that both DPs explored the dimension of virtual technology and a new concept of a WCA that has never occurred in Sri Lanka. Through these measures, the women's political representatives were able to engage themselves with ongoing digital literacy and other marketing skills to increase their impact.

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International Sphere (Study and exchange tours)

USAID and NDI concentrate on bridging Sri Lanka with the international political sphere to increase women's political participation. The programs that are listed below are the international experiences facilitated for the WPC.

In collaboration with UNDP, UN Women, and WDF, the SDGAP project successfully organized a series of events on the 25th and 26th of July 2017. Hosting four UK Members of Parliament (MP) and one of Pakistan's women parliamentarians, the intention was to discuss how to improve the position of women in politics. For the first event, over sixty MPs attended a parliamentary session to discuss women's political engagement. Subsequently, the next program was dedicated to female MPs and SOCWG to address challenges in implementing quotas. The second event was a public forum for CSOs to explore the necessity of women in politics. Further, it educated them about the role of CSO in engaging women in public life, including politics (SDGAP AR Sept. 2016- Sept. 2017). The knowledge shared through these international delegations has supported in the approval of the legal reform of the women's quota by Parliament in August.

The SDGAP project and NDI, USAID organized the following study tours for women politicians: an autonomous institute functioning for the local governments in Kerala, India. It focuses on training, research, and consultancy related to local governance and decentralization. Here's a breakdown of its key aspects:

The study tour to Kerala Institute which focuses on functions of local governance in Kerala (through training and consultancy), was facilitated by the SDGAP (2017 – 2018). It led the national representatives to observe Kerala's governance system which is known for its female presence. Best practices and successful policies in supporting women's political participation were shared through lectures, presentations, field visits, and interactive sessions with officials. According to the participants, the experience enabled them to serve as mentors for emerging female leaders in Sri Lanka.

During this period, the two-day Asian regional conference was organized by PAFFREL, ANFREL, and the Elections Commission of Sri Lanka. This conference concentrated on the political rights of women, where the vice-chairperson of the WPC shared her insights as a female politician. By the end, a consensus was reached to establish a virtual

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community to exchange knowledge regarding the political engagement of women (SDGAP October 2017- September 2018). The establishment of the virtual community was not recorded in the next yearly reports.

Similarly, in 2023, the NDI with the collaboration of USAID organized a tour to New Zealand for the WPC, to note New Zealand's supportive political structures for women that could serve as a model for Sri Lanka. The SLWPC had the opportunity to meet former Prime Ministers Jacinda Ardern and Helen Clark on the 27th of July 2023. The discussion focused on empowering women in leadership and promoting gender diversity in politics. The Prime Minister further shared insights on policies supporting women re-entering the workforce, wage equality paid paternal leave, and reducing child poverty (slwpc. lk, 2024).

Through the inspiration of these tours, the SLWPC produced a recommendation flyer to the ninth parliament in December 2023 and is working towards concentrating on the gender pay gap in 2024 (slwpc. lk/home, 2024). It is evident that the study tours incur significant expenses, and the DPs are willing to allocate the necessary funds. However, the lack of transparency regarding the allocated budget in these respective documents raises concerns.

Research and Analysis

Each report of the SDGAP has contributed to the field of research to examine women's leadership progression partnering up with the Social Scientists Association (SSA), the Diamond Leadership Model (DLM), and the Charney Research firm. The SSA is a research organization in Sri Lanka that focuses on addressing critical issues such as ethnic conflicts, gender equality, and social development. The DLM is a global study that assesses women's political leadership by calculating their "power score" across the pillars of Legislature, Executive, Judiciary, and Security. The Charney Research firm is known for its expertise in international research, conducting surveys and focus groups internationally to understand complex social and political dynamics. The OTI program of Demo Finland has also contributed to research under women's leadership.

In 2017, the SSA submitted the "Participation and Empowerment of Women and Under-Represented Groups in Sri Lanka" report in partnership with the SDGAP project. The feedback was sent to USAID, to examine the barriers to political participation and awareness

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of the 25% quota (notably low) (SDGAP QR July – September 2017). According to the report, a roundtable discussion with experts was planned, but there was no mention of this in the subsequent reports. In 2018, the DLM study assessed the same thematic area by calculating the four government pillars. To identify factors that influence women's leadership progression, the study involved both quantitative assessment and qualitative key informant interviews (KIIs) (QR Oct-Dec 2018). The key findings of these two studies were that there was minimal advancement of women's leadership positions in the legislative and executive branches over the last few decades (PEWU report, 2017) (DLM research report, 2019). Thus, proving that even with the facilitation by the DPs there is yet a gap that needs to be filled regarding women's political leadership.

In 2019, the Charney Research firm guided the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) in Sri Lanka to research on increasing opportunities for women. Despite political unrest due to civilians protesting the economic crisis, preparatory discussions, research guidelines, and questionnaires were drafted through online platforms in March 2019. Fieldwork commenced in April with an orientation workshop for 16 CPA staff members. The study has signaled in researching opportunities for women in the executive sector, and the judiciary (that supposedly follows gender-neutral procedures) (SDGAP QR April – June 2019). Research with potential biases must be encouraged further in third-world countries to grasp views on how countries investigate increasing women's political leadership.

In 2021, OTI provided a study on gender policies within Sri Lankan political parties, that proved that many women enter politics through family connections. Two major parties expressed interest in developing gender policies with OTI's facilitation. Enhancing the representation of female politicians in the media, OTI conducted a study and published articles on the stories of 20 female local councilors, to promote their public image and support. (DFAR, 2021). The actions of the OTI's commitment to address the notion of dynastic politics advocate for greater inclusion of women in the political sphere.

WPC related initiatives

The SDGAP and OTI projects facilitated WPC and the SOCWG to address critical areas related to women's rights and political participation. The implementation of the annual caucus plan and the gradual progress of the SLWPC Action Plan were essential aspects that

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the USAID provided expertise. The action plan includes every activity that needs to be achieved by the SLWPC to achieve its mandate for the welfare of women in Sri Lanka.

Throughout 2017, the SDGAP organized workshops for the Caucus's annual plan and training for the SOCWG. This included seminars across three key provinces to prepare for local government elections and advocate for affirmative action. SDGAP further supported the Caucus on training needs and encouraged male parliamentarians' involvement in gender mainstreaming (SDGAP January – March 2017). Although inter-country/regional workshops and study tours to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore were proposed by the Caucus, they were not brought forth in the future SDGAP reports. These programs would have encouraged parliamentarians to seek different parliamentary proceedings and develop the Caucus plan with broader knowledge.

By 2018, policy dialogues to update the Caucus Action Plan and training for newly elected female politicians were facilitated. The first dialogue in May addressed the lessons learned from the 25% quota implementation and the violence against women in politics, (an instance was when a female MP was criticized for being “too aggressive” for speaking out against sexual harassment in parliament). It resulted in recommending increased awareness and a fair merit-based nomination process (QR April – June 2018).

SDGAP's involvement in SOCWG highlighted the project's impact as it facilitated by conducting 14 events, training, and meetings, including policy dialogues and district-level initiatives by grantees (QR July - September 2018). In October 2018, an initiative to draft a comprehensive action plan for the WPC was launched. The SDGAP provided technical expertise to develop this national action plan for the WPC, which included four interventions with key performance indicators. The first draft was created with 12 consultation meetings for feedback (QR Jan- March 2019). Yet, there was no sign of an official publication of the action plan.

In 2021, the OTI supported the WPC on gender equality advocacy, including compiling electoral reform recommendations for the Parliamentary Selection Committee on Election Reforms.

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DPs like USAID and Demo Finland expect to formally integrate women into governance, economic and political reforms by working with the WPC. However, the WPC must be aware of functioning diplomatically without being a cause of oppression.

Other initiatives by SDGAP

SDGAP maintained a tracker to monitor the progress of selected women appointed in Galle, Batticaloa, and Jaffna. Most women reported that their parties willingly allocated them seats, supporting women's entry into politics to ensure the voices of women are heard at all government levels. Some women faced post-election violence, including death threats, although the overall atmosphere remained peaceful (QR January – March 2018). This initiative could have been improved by expanding the tracker to every female political representative in local areas. Overall, when critically analyzing these initiatives, after 2019 some initiatives are facilitated by USAID through implementing partners but some lack transparency and unavailability raising concerns regarding the funding and management. Hence, the idea of whether men-related initiatives are funded more than women-related initiatives can be questioned. Therefore, the DPs must add budget allocation reports to every initiative related to women's representation.

Since 2016, the 25% quota awareness concept has taken over many initiatives by the DPs. It is suitable to examine alternative action measures such as childcare provisions, and sensitizing men to allow women to be a part of politics.

Demo Finland, IRI, WFD, and IFES are widely recognized DPs. Therefore, they need to focus beyond women councilors and address all levels of governance (like USAID) to represent their roles effectively. Creative collaborations between DPs would be one approach to broaden the vision to increase female politicians. USAID and NDI were able to organize international programs for female parliamentarians. However, the knowledge that is disseminated will be limited to the WPC unless they share it with female politicians at other levels. Therefore, these DPs should look for approaches to promote international opportunities at all levels to further motivate women into politics.

With these data, we now delve into the discussion surrounding these initiatives and ascertain the extent to which the research question and the objectives of the research have been addressed.

Chapter 3

Discussion

This research explores the role of DPs and their efforts to increase women's political representation in Sri Lanka.

Through the findings of the research, the role of several DPs and their initiatives over the years of 2016 to 2022 is critically evaluated through focus areas. USAID has contributed to improving awareness of the 25% quota system, monitoring the progress of women local leaders, and promoting national women's political leadership. USAID and NDI's efforts engaged women parliamentarians to participate in international study/ exchange tours. Along with USAID, Demo Finland, the EU, IRI, WFD, and IFES have supported enhancing the competencies of female political leaders through capacity building and training programs; mainly aimed at local councilors across Sri Lanka. USAID and Demo Finland have contributed to research and analysis of the progress of women in politics while fostering a partnership with the WPC.

Overall, the role of DPs promoting the quota system must be a shared responsibility as the female political situation in Sri Lanka depends on it. Following USAID's project, each DP must initiate at least one awareness program about the quota system annually. Further, international tours conducted by USAID such as the Kerala study tour, are notable initiatives. They exemplify how DPs can effectively fund and facilitate essential programs by drawing inspiration from other political systems.

Demo Finland facilitating the OTI program opens a new aspect of reaching out to women political leaders in the digitized world. The contribution of DPs regarding digital literacy and creating virtual communities can be relevant to today's society. Hence, DPs could promote digital literacy as a capacity-building approaches for female politicians to contribute their abilities at least through a virtual platform.

Overall, training sessions and capacity developments must be continued with fixed objectives by the DPs. They must ensure continuous monitoring and evaluation of their facilitation to analyze whether there is progress political participation of women in the upcoming years.

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As per recommendations, the DPs should consider promoting initiatives to increase women's political representation in a post-conflict society that can foster solidarity among different ethnic and cultural groups in Sri Lanka. Historical tensions between communities can hinder the effectiveness of women's political initiatives facilitated by the DPs. It is necessary to build a rapport between female political leaders from diverse backgrounds. This will help in addressing challenges that women face in politics which could lead to creating impactful policies. The DPs must propose collaborative efforts to view beyond the quota system and explore alternative approaches such as childcare provisions, sensitizing men to invite women into politics, and cultivating strong women's political movements. They must focus on discussion about the ongoing economic crisis which might be a reason for the marginalized representation of women.

Focusing on the limitations of the overall study, there is a lack of transparency on budget allocations, and documented evidence to acknowledge the awareness and impact of initiatives undertaken by other DPs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study addresses the underrepresentation of women in Sri Lankan politics by examining the role of DPs in facilitating increased women's political participation since 2016. The research responded to the objectives outlined in the introduction, providing an analysis of the Sri Lankan political context, historical trends, and the situation of the current female politicians at the national, provincial, and local levels.

Chapter 1 concludes that patriarchal society, funding issues, and gender bias political parties are the reasons for the lower representation of women in politics and the importance of increasing their numbers. It provides a detailed examination of each development partner's (USAID, Demo Finland, EU, IFES, IRI, WFD, and NDI) functions, and links to the development of Sri Lanka. Chapter 2 answers the research question by critically delving into the specific programs implemented by these partners, focusing on initiatives such as 25% quota awareness, capacity-building workshops on empowering political competencies, international study tours, digital literacy initiatives for elections, and prioritizing women's local councilors across Sri Lanka. These selected focus areas entirely revolve around the political dimension of women in Sri Lanka and have contributed to encouraging them further. Chapter 3 discusses the findings on how DPs have focused on raising awareness of the 25%, funded international tours, prioritized training programs, and worked in collaboration with WPC to increase political participation.

The research concludes that the DPs can further expand these focus areas by integrating women in politics to discuss pressing economic issues and post-conflict trauma that has severely affected citizens in Sri Lanka. By facilitating such initiatives, DPs need to acknowledge their role and effectively enhance the political participation of women to the Sri Lankan society.

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