Women’s empowerment for socioeconomic sustainable development in Singapore

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Abstract. Multiple studies essentially state that women’s empowerment and sustainable development are closely interrelated. Empowering women possibly increases women’s political leadership ability, which may have a direct or indirect impact on sustainable development. In the case of Singapore, it finds distinction in defining the linkage between women’s political participation and sustainable development. This paper provides a three-dimensional model of women’s empowerment and limits the data set in 1990-2019 to find how women’s participation in politics contribute to the economic and social development in Singapore. Using a qualitative method, this study finds that women’s participation in parliament has not affected the improvement of health expenditure, labor force participation, and GDP per capita. It is due to restrictions on the rights, responsibilities, activities, access, and control between men and women (gender inequality) who are intentionally constructed through education systems, economic and political systems, legislation, culture, and traditions.

Keywords: women’s empowerment, sustainable development, gender equality, Singapore

1. Introduction
Women act as active agents for the realization of sustainable development. They contribute strongly to sustainable economic growth and the resolution in certain social issues. A nation’s sustainability development success depends on the magnitude of women’s involvement and participation in many sectors. Unfortunately, women have always been in the most vulnerable positions in gaining resources and power in the sustainable development process. UN reports that women are mostly buried from the political realm, often due to discriminatory law, practice, gender attitudes and stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care, and disproportionate poverty [1]. The success of sustainable development goals requires a society that provides sustainability, innovation, and creativity. Society 5.0 represents innovative citizens as the key actors to solve the objective of sustainable development. This paper discusses whether the increasing participation numbers in women’s legislation seats contribute to improving sustainable socioeconomic development in Singapore. Related to the new era, the question is what Singaporean women prepare for Society 5.0.

Singapore’s political accountability for women begins with the increasing number of women in political decision-making. The increasing number of female seats in the Singapore national parliament since the 1990-00s simultaneously causes visible policy changes in health expenditures, labor force, and GDP levels. In 1990, the proportion of seats of women in the national parliament was 4.9% and increased dramatically to 25.3% in 2014. It indicates the highest number compared to the percentage in 2015-2019, which only equaled to more than 23% [2]. For current health expenditure per capita, in 2000, Singapore spent USD 820.7 to USD 2462.4 in 2016 [3]. Labor force participation also continued to soar...
from 47.2% in 1990 to 60.8% in 2015. However, since 2016, it has shown a slight decline [4]. The last improvement is the GDP level. The distinction was clearly seen in current USD, from USD 11861.76 billion in 1990 to USD 64581.94 billion in 2019 [5]. Although the representation of women in the administrative sphere has improved better, women in the political sphere of the government are still under-represented [6].

2. Methods
The data collection in this study is derived from secondary data. The data are statistical data from the OECD, World Bank, and United Nations in 1990-2019. The other resources are government reports and various journals. Using the qualitative method and integration of a three-dimensional model of women’s empowerment, this article finds that the women’s capacity in personal, relation, and society may improve sustainable development, but it is restricted in a certain area. By providing similar opportunities in decision-making and leadership capacity, women and men can take acts in the sustainable development path.

3. Result and discussions
3.1. Women’s empowerment and sustainable development linkage
Empowering women is key to sustainable development. Empowerment is one way to expand one's assets and abilities to participate, negotiate, influence, control, and be accountable for their lives. The difference in this ability affects how to utilize health assets, education, production, and personal skills to increase their prosperity, leadership, dependence, sense of identity, the value of life, and capacity to organize

Conceptually, sustainable each other [7]. In the context of women, empowerment provides more power and control for their life. Development on the pillars of economic development, social development, and environmental protection is to meet current needs without compromising future generations' ability to obtain their needs [8]. The linkage of sustainable development and the empowerment of women lies in the enhancement of women's ability to access development through more equitable distribution of resources and the ability to make choices such as health, education, productive opportunities, rights fulfillment, and political participation [9, 10, 11]. Women have good health care and education. Women's life expectancy was longer than men and tended to increase from 77.6 years to 85.5 years in 1990-2019 [12]. In 1990, women's literacy rate was 83.02%. It continued to increase to 88.65% in 2000 and 95.9% in 2018 [13, 14]. The labor force participation rate also demonstrated a significant increase annually from 42.7% in 1990 to 60.8% in 2015 [15].

Women also have a strong role in educating young generations in teaching concerns and the responsibility to use and protect natural resources. However, women are still underrepresented in a decision-making realm that will affect future generations. The increasing number of women's participation in politics does not necessarily contribute to the process and results of collective policymaking.

3.2. Women’s empowerment in the context of political participation
The three-dimensional model of women's empowerment integrates three distinct dimensions. First, the micro-level dimension or personal empowerment refers to individual personal beliefs and observable individual empowerment. Second, the meso-level dimension or relational empowerment is the beliefs and actions related to the person concerned and the empowerment associated with relational relationships. Third, the macro-level dimension or societal empowerment refers to women's situation in society and community empowerment [16].

3.2.1. Personal empowerment
The micro-level as individual empowerment refers to the psychological aspect of personal beliefs and actions. Using the psychological aspects of personal control beliefs [17] and efficacy or self-esteem [18], this discussion combines the two aspects to find the empowerment of Singaporean women that further
affects women to perform optimally in policymaking as men. Self-esteem is defined as the principle of empowerment policy and becomes a preliminary step before women earn authority.

The norms and beliefs often influence the individual perception and attitude of women. One of the most destructive barriers to the success of a woman in Singapore is low self-perception. The presence of a conflict between fulfilling a family's economic needs requires women to work. The role of women as good mothers and wives encourages women to avoid high-level positions in politics and administration [19]. Singapore has sought to support women's equality ranging from increased educational achievement to girls and policies that help women to balance their families and work commitments. Although education parity is high, women's roles are depressed with the number of women entering the formal work and responsibility of working to obtain higher salaries and increase their economic prospects [20, 21].

Women who want to succeed as politicians face a demanding situation to have tough mental and physical and additional duty loads to meet economic needs after their husbands and families [22]. Women are experienced in the political realm realizing that politics is about men and should act as a male counterpart. Women's triumph in politics in Singapore is not due to the fulfillment of quotas in women's political participation, but women's capacity in representing certain interests [23]. In sum, the low level of female participation in politics is not at all related to the lack of educational qualifications. However, it is the self and general perception of the capacity and role of women in society. The placement of women in the second class should be supported by enrichment of technological innovation ability to maximize women's time effectively, change ways of working, use new communication patterns with partners, and educate children. The ability to innovate and use technology will support the emergence of self-esteem as a more resilient and modern woman.

3.2.2. Relational empowerment
Relational empowerment focuses on aspects related to others, such as partnerships, families, and communities. This empowerment highlights the ability of women in decision-making in relationships with others. The existence of women in different environments with spouses, families, or social networks affects how women should behave according to the prevailing norms (i.e., deductive norms) and obey the social norms (i.e., inductive norms) [24].

The level and opportunity of female representation are strongly influenced by social norms and perceptions regarding women's role in society. Singapore's female mentality is dominated by patriarchy, placing women as responsible parties in their home and family environment. Women are not viewed as groups that directly contribute to the economy, but their homes, children, and husbands. Women should balance the family, work-life, and care of the child. The pattern of the relationship between women and men in the household affects women's identity and active participation in politics. In practical politics, the limitations of women in the boardroom and higher political offices show that they have not overcome all sociocultural barriers to work and participate in politics [25]. Singapore's ethnic minority lawmakers are also constrained by many rules concerning race and religion [26].

3.2.3. Societal empowerment
Women's empowerment in the societal dimension has been assessed by the gender gap approach. This social dimension determines women's positions in the boardroom by analyzing the social conditions or women's status to men [27]. The movement of feminism in female involvement in various social institutions portrays strong roles and positions in society. Women's social awareness is usually related to human trafficking, sexual infringement, sustainable development, education, rehabilitation of victims of violence, and natural disasters. Similarly, with donation and philanthropic activities, it shows how women decide to spend money to cope with a crisis or influence social norms. Women are more capable of taking attitudes and decisions to create their prosperity.

The Internet is a powerful political tool. Electronic communication has opened up extensive opportunities for women to establish relationships with international women groups, disseminate
information, and mobilise support for specific issues [28]. Women should have the capacity in technological innovations to link networking more effectively.

4. Conclusion

The increasing representation of women in Singapore's politics did not contribute to health improvements, labor force, and economics. First, low self-perception on women's primary role in the family has weakened the confidence to take a deeper role in the higher sphere, such as leadership in politics and government administration. Second, the power of social norms, the prevailing beliefs in society, and patriarchy cultures create a pattern of unequal relations between men and women. Third, the ability of women in parliament is stronger when their feminism dominates. They have an agenda to make a social change or act as philanthropy. Personal and relational empowerment views women in a low position in political roles and activities, reducing their active ability to influence political policy. On the other hand, the representation of women in policymaking does not fully affect sustainable development. The institutional challenges, norms, women's economic activities, and political participation are interconnected. Women's political representation can provide aspiration and maintain local commitments on strategic choices, such as health, education, and economic development by providing a successful role model of a woman in policymaking [29, 30]. The enhancement of women's empowerment in the similar knowledge of technological innovations as men creates women sustainable and resilient to face the challenges in achieving sustainable development goals, particularly in political participation and widespread influence on policymaking.

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