

DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP



Country Reviews

Women's Political Participation in South Asia

Research in Government of India-UN Women Programme, 'Promoting Women's Political Leadership and Governance in India and South Asia'

In 2009, the Royal Norwegian Embassy, India signed an agreement with Unifem, now UN Women, South Asia Regional Office to initiate a three-year programme entitled 'Promoting Women's Political Leadership and Governance in India and South Asia'. The programme aims to empower elected women representatives in local governance to make public policy and resource allocation patterns responsive to women's human rights. The programme covers 5 countries of South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan). In India, the programme is co-owned by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.

The Programme has been designed with the spirit to capture the specific issues and challenges with regard to women's political empowerment that each country experiences. This is a demand driven programme that seeks to understand and address issues of women's participation in local governance from the grassroots perspective. Generation of a body of knowledge on women's political leadership and governance in India and South Asia is one of the key outcomes of the programme.

There are two main purposes of the research component of the programme –

- (a) To build a body of knowledge on women's political leadership and governance in India and South Asia – this is especially significant since no on-going programme on women's political empowerment in the South Asia region is working at the grassroots level – down at the level of the village councils. This being the value addition of the programme in the region, and there being very little existing policy literature which analyses governance at its fundamental grassroots institution; this programme provides an opportunity to develop innovative and unique literature based on experiences from the programme on strengthening village councils – the structure of local governance closest to ordinary citizens – to enable women as equal and fair participants and decision makers at the local level.
- (b) As we build this body of knowledge, the data gathered from field experiences will in turn help to inform programme implementation and fine tune the intervention strategies as the programme progresses. Such a large and complex programme is, by nature, dynamic, and hence useful feedback in terms of baseline data, focused studies such as barriers and promoters of women's political leadership and governance in India and South Asia throughout the course of the programme will be useful for the programme interventions.

UN Women

UN Women is the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their rights worldwide.

UN Women supports United Nations Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. Its stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the United Nations system's work in advancing gender equality.

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

International Centre for Research on Women

The International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) is a global research institute with headquarters in Washington D.C., and regional offices in Nairobi, Kenya, and New Delhi, India. We also have project office in Mumbai. ICRW is comprised of social scientists, economists, public health specialists and demographers, all of whom are experts in gender relations. We are thought leaders driven by passion to alleviate poverty and rectify injustice in the world. And we believe that women and girls – in collaboration with men and boys – are essential to the solutions. We know that when their quality of life improves, families are healthier and economies are stronger. ICRW's mission is to empower women, advance gender equality and fight poverty in the developing world. To accomplish this, ICRW works with partners to conduct empirical research, build capacity and advocate for evidence-based, practical ways to change policies and programs.

COUNTRY REVIEWS

Women's Political Participation in South Asia

(Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka)

ICRW – UN Women Joint Publication



Message

India has witnessed the world's largest experiment in grassroots local democracy, triggered by the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution, which created a third tier of governance – Panchayati Raj Institutions (Village Councils) and urban local bodies. These are elected bodies and cannot be dissolved by administrative order. Since 1995, three rounds of elections have been held; and as one-third of seats (proposed to be increased to 50 per cent) are reserved for women, more than 1.5 million women have been elected to office in each round. It is evident therefore that first generation issues of framing the 'rules of the game' and creating an understanding about them have been addressed.

The UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) aims to address second generation issues of democratic governance under its programme 'Promoting Women's Political Leadership and Governance in South Asia' with focus on Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan. The programme works with women – both elected and aspiring at the local level – to achieve three main outcomes: (1) Strengthened legal frameworks and policies for women's political participation in local governance in India and South Asia by 2015; (2) Elected women and men representatives in local governments have the knowledge and capacity to transform and implement policies, programmes and resource allocations for gender sensitive governance in five states in India by 2015; and (3) Key capacity development and media institutions and structures in India and South Asia are strengthened to mainstream gender into their policies and programmes by 2015.

Research for evidence based advocacy is an integral part of this programme. It plays a very important role in capturing the ground level situation in India and South Asia and informs programme implementation. Research supported under the programme is contributing to the body of knowledge on what enables and/or prevents women's political leadership and governance in India and in South Asia.

The research thus far is presented in a set of four publications. The research conducted by ICRW has provided the programme with a conceptual clarity on 'gender responsive governance'; the effects of economic disempowerment and violence against women on women's political participation; the status of women's political participation and leadership in South Asia; and finally, the determinants of women's political leadership and participation in three districts – Alwar (Rajasthan), Gajapati (Odisha), and Mysore (Karnataka) in India.

I congratulate the ICRW team and the many women and men, elected as well as aspiring representatives who have contributed to further the understanding of issues pertaining to women's political leadership and governance in India and in South Asia.

I hope you find the report useful and insightful for understanding and promoting women's political leadership.



Anne F. Stenhammer

Regional Programme Director

UN Women South Asia Sub-Regional Office

New Delhi

Message

It is with great excitement that we launch this important publication, “Country Reviews: Women’s Political Participation in South Asia.”

As the world’s largest democracy, and one that has taken important steps to open opportunities for marginalised groups, including women, to lead, India is an important case study for global policy dialogues around good governance. This research not only contributes to our understanding of how quotas mandating women’s representation on local governing bodies—the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)—are playing out for the individuals who comprise them and for the policymaking process in the three states studied, but it also shines important light on a matter of increasing international interest: how to achieve gender responsive governance and advance the cause of gender equality and representative democracy?

In this exciting collaboration with UN Women, we have uncovered important lessons. We reaffirm the power of gender roles and social norms to shape behaviour. We find that female elected representatives desire to re-contest but are more likely to do so if they have a supportive husband who is helping with chores at home. Among women who do not re-contest, we see the number one reason for withdrawing from public life being the time burden of home and child care. We see powerful and challenging attitudes among women and men as to what role women can and should play in leadership, and we find that PRIs are not considered to be spaces where gender issues, such as domestic violence, can be raised.

These findings inform key conclusions. We confirm the value of gender quotas as an important tool for moving us toward our goal of gender responsive governance, insofar as the mere presence of women can transform patriarchal frameworks. Yet we find that the simple adage of “add women and stir” is insufficient on its own—women cannot be solely expected to carry the burden of transforming the governing process into a gender responsive ideal. Additional work needs to be done—at the policy and at the individual level—to transform these spaces into truly democratic and gender-equitable realms.

This report makes an important contribution to the discourse on gender responsive governance, and it comes at a critical time. This is the kind of evidence we need to inform our strategies to achieve true equality and democracy and a future where girls will not need a quota system to achieve parity in their local, state and national governing bodies. It is a future well within our reach. Let’s make it happen!



Sarah Degnan Kambou

President, International Center for Research on Women

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We received unflinching and cheerful support from Prakash Mishra, our colleague within ICRW towards data analysis. Prasenjit Banerjee provided unfailing and efficient support to manage the finances of the grant. Ellen Weiss, our Technical Editor kept us on our toes through her meticulous editing and eye for detail. Several colleagues within ICRW have supported us at different stages of the project – we specially thank Pranita Achyut and Kavya Bopanna. We also received support from Ms. Swati Chakraborty and Ms. Mukta Banerjee for specific aspects of the research study.

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Finally, and most importantly, we acknowledge the respondents of our study for sparing their time and sharing their experiences with us, and trusting that their individual contribution will enable the realisation of a gender responsive governance system that has social justice and gender equality as its core principles.

Nandita Bhatla
Sunayana Walia
Tina Khanna
Ravi Verma





English equivalents of some commonly used terms

Gram Sabha	Village Council meetings
Zilla Parishad	Local Government Body at the District Level
Gram Panchayat	Local Self Government
Nyaya Panchayat	System of dispute resolution at the village level
Gram Kachari	Local Judicial Council
Sarpanch	Elected Head of a village level statutory constitution of local self-government, the gram panchayat (village government)
Panchayat Samiti	Local government body at the <i>tehsil or taluka or mandal</i> (administrative division at the village level)

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INTRODUCTION

Governance in all South Asian countries is imbued with a predominantly patriarchal character. This is reflected in the fact that women form a disproportionately small segment of representatives in elected bodies across all levels of governance, and several studies have indicated that even those women who are elected as representatives suffer severe limitations on their participation. In cognizance of this fact, the women's movement in South Asian countries has been gaining strength in the last two decades, and demands for more equitable representation are being voiced across the sub-continent. Although some countries have introduced affirmative legislation to ensure a minimum level of representation of women in governance, such measures alone have been insufficient to make a significant sustainable impact on the participation of women in governance. As a precursor to working towards encouraging the participation of women in terms of numbers and bringing about a qualitative improvement in their participation in governance, it is imperative that research be undertaken into understanding the position of women within the political system they are located in.

This paper presents an overview of the status of women's participation in governance in five South Asian countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, with emphasis on the local level of governance. The review is by no means exhaustive; it presents information in the form of country briefs on specific themes. These include legal provisions and state-led initiatives to ensure greater participation of women, the nature and impact of the participation of women, and the barriers they face, specifically violence against women and economic insecurity, in keeping with the emphasis of the research project.

Information for these country scenarios has been collected from secondary sources, including studies published by international development organisations, reports published by the women's commission/concerned government department of the particular country, national constitutions, journal articles, independent papers presented at conferences, and websites of international organisations working on elections systems, governance and quotas for representation. Existing research focuses mainly on

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What is Gender Responsive Governance?

This study defines **Gender Responsive Governance (GRG)** as 'a process that embodies measures, attitudes and practices of different stakeholders, both men and women, at different levels of governance with a clear purpose to impact issues that foster women's empowerment and promote gender equity and social justice. It is a process that promotes and sustains the ability of women to fully participate in the governance and development process, enhances their ability to raise critical questions about inequity and collectivise without fear and pressure, and ensures gains from services.'



the structural and institutional barriers that constrain the participation of women. Research in the area of women and governance is less extensive, with few studies exploring the nature of women's participation and hardly any information being available regarding the impact that participation of women have on governance. Another significant component that is missing is trend analyses of women at different levels of governance by country over the years. There is little discussion on the impact of violence against women and the economic dependence of women on their political participa-

tion. The correlation of the incidence of such factors with the degree and scope of political participation of women is necessary, as it would provide insight and direction to those designing reformatory action. Although the information available from published secondary sources under specific themes by country is limited, the paper is an attempt to provide an account of issues that women in these countries face, with a view to highlight research gaps and suggest areas of further research in the region, that could inform initiatives for gender-responsive field-level interventions and policy formulation.



BANGLADESH

System of Governance

Bangladesh is a two-tier parliamentary democracy with a unicameral central legislature. The central legislature/Parliament is elected through direct elections based on universal adult franchise for a five-year term. The Prime Minister leads the government and is the head of the party/coalition that forms the majority of the Parliament. The Parliament has 345 seats including 45 reserved seats for women, occupied by members elected from single-member constituencies for a five-year term. The President is the constitutional head of state, but this is mainly a ceremonial post elected by the Parliament.

The country is divided into six Administrative Divisions: Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal and Sylhet. Each Division is placed under a Divisional Commissioner and is further divided into Districts (*Zila*) headed by District Commissioners. The Districts are further divided into *Thanas* or sub-districts, and *Thanas* are divided into Unions or rural micro-areas, which are divided into Grams or villages. Governance at the local level in rural areas is entrusted to *Gram Parishads*, *Union Parishads*, *Thana/Upazila Parishads* and *Zila Parishads*, whereas in urban areas it is entrusted to *Pourashavas*/Municipalities (for which three classifications exist based on size of population) and City Corporations (in four of the largest municipalities which have been given Metropolitan status – Dhaka, Khulna, Chittagong and Rajshahi).

Supportive Legislations and Policies

The Constitution of Bangladesh in 1972 stated that rights of women in all spheres of national life must be ensured. Article 9 states, “the state shall encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned, and in such institutions special representation shall be given as far as possible to peasants, workers and women”.

National

Although quotas for women in the Parliament were introduced in 1972, reserving 15 of the 315 seats in Parliament for women (to be filled through indirect elections by the directly elected 300 members), in 1978 a presidential promulgation extended reservation for women to a total of 30 seats, and the number of seats in Parliament was also increased to 330. This promulgation lapsed in 1987, was reincorporated in 1990, and lapsed again in 2001. In 2004, a constitutional amendment raised the number of seats in Parliament to 345 from 300, and the quota for women was re-introduced, raising the total number of seats reserved for women to 45 from 30.

Local

The **Local Government Ordinance of 1976** was the first ordinance to be issued with a provision for increasing the representation of women in local governance. It established a three-tier local governance system, comprising the *Union Parishad* at the union level, the

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Thana Parishad at the *thana* level and the *Zila Parishad* at the district level, and provided for the reservation of two seats for women members who would be nominated to the 10-member Union Parishad.

The ***Local Government (Union Parishads) Ordinance of 1983*** raised the number of seats reserved for women in the Union Parishad from two to three, although their entry still depended on nomination.

The ***Local Government (Union Parishads) (Amendment) Act of 1993*** introduced a system of indirect election for the three seats exclusively reserved for women members in place of the earlier system of nomination. The women members on reserved seats were now to be elected by the other members of the Parishad.

The ***Local Government (Union Parishads) (Second Amendment) Act of 1997*** increased the number of seats in the Union Parishad to 12 and kept the number of seats reserved for women at three. However, it introduced direct elections for the three reserved seats, along the same lines as the elections to the general category seats. In addition, the Act divides the union into nine wards for the election of the nine general category seats (one seat from each ward). For the three reserved seats, the union is divided into three wards, each of which is formed by grouping together three of the nine wards for general category seats.

Following this, several circulars have been released by the government with the intention to assign more responsibilities to women in committees by including them in large numbers and

giving them the chair of committees on particular issues such as primary education, old age benefits, etc. Committees such as the Village Social Development Committee are also headed by women and deal with issues such as collection of information on births and deaths, education, health awareness, family planning, violence, etc.

Overview of Women's Participation

The most recent elections conducted in Bangladesh in 2008 saw women form 18.55 per cent of the strength of the current Parliament of Bangladesh, that is, 64 of the 345 members are women (IPU, 2011).

Although the reservations for women under the 1976, 1983 and 1993 ordinances increased the representation of women in government bodies at the local level, it did not have much bearing on their participation because their entry depended upon nomination, and later indirect election, because of which they lacked the support base of a constituency. This diminished their legitimacy to govern as compared with those representatives who had been elected by their constituencies. Moreover, the roles and responsibilities of the women on reserved seats were left undefined by all three Acts (Panday, 2008).

Even the 1997 Act did not do much to spell out the specific roles of women, but it provided women on the reserved seats with greater legitimacy by introducing direct elections for them. However, these women were at a disadvantage as they had to cover three times the area to be covered by general category candidates, as three wards

electing one general category seat each were combined to elect one reserved seat. This also limited the role of women elected on reserved seats, as they did not have a dedicated constituency; they functioned merely as additional representatives. In some cases, representatives elected on reserved seats had to obtain permission from those elected on general seats before implementing development plans or policies (Firoz, 2007).

It has been found that the functions of women have by and large remained very limited in the Union *Parishads*, due to resistance from male colleagues and the discrimination emerging from such resistance. Also, knowledge of women regarding financial issues of the *Parishads* was inadequate, and their opinions were often sidelined in decision-making processes (Afroza, 2007).

Impact of Violence Against Women and Economic Insecurity on Women's Political Participation, and Other Barriers

Several structural and gender related barriers hinder women's participation and functioning in governance in Bangladesh, as described below.

Patriarchal structures and attitudes in private and public life work together to reinforce gender inequality in governance by limiting women's access to the resources and means of participating in decision-making (Panda, n.d.). They find themselves disadvantaged as compared with men in social institutions such as the family, schools, re-

ligious institutions, etc. Lack of family support and restrictions on their mobility also stand in the way of their foray into politics.

Political parties and structures often presented an adverse environment to women, making it difficult for them to function. Moreover, the need to conform to strict directives issued by parties impeded the development and expression of independent fresh perspectives, thereby curtailing the extent of their impact on decision-making (Firoz, 2007). Social reluctance to accept their leadership and non-cooperation by other representatives and functionaries also contribute to making the workplace environment difficult for them.

Lack of political linkages and contacts which are of critical importance in being able to secure power, and dependence of women on their male family members in addition to restrictions on their mobility and social interactions diminishes their ability to develop such linkages (Halder, 2004).

Lack of economic resources is another obstacle to their participation, as most women candidates do not have a source of sustainable income, property or other assets and were generally dependent on their husbands or other male relatives for financial support (Shamim and Kumari, 2000).

Lack of education and requisite training for the successful discharge of functions also present important barriers to their political participation (Sultana, 2000). In addition, women are hampered by their lack of political experience, familiarity with formal institutions and their functioning.

They find themselves disadvantaged as compared with men in social institutions such as the family, schools, religious institutions, etc. Lack of family support and restrictions on their mobility also stand in the way of their foray into politics



Security concerns throughout the election process, especially during campaigning and during tenure is another barrier identified to their political participation in Bangladesh. **Violence, sexual harassment/molestation in public, and**

threats from fundamentalist religious and social groups opposed to the participation of women, as well as the fear of the same, compound the problems faced by women who wish to contest elections (Shamim and Kumari, 2000).



BHUTAN

System of Governance

Bhutan, which has traditionally been governed by a monarchy, transformed in 1999 into a constitutional monarchy. Although the King continues to occupy the position of Head of State, the Council of Ministers/Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister, who is the head of the government, exercises executive power. The legislature is bicameral, consisting of an Upper House/National Council and a Lower House/National Assembly. The National Council has 25 members, 20 of whom are directly elected from the districts and 5 are nominated by the King. The National Assembly has 45 members currently, who are elected through general elections.

The country is divided into 20 districts for local administration. At the local level, *Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogu Chathrim(s)*, that is, District Development Committees and *Gewog Yargay Tshochhung Chathrim(s)*, that is, Block Development Committees have been instituted to handle local governance and administration. The larger districts are divided into sub-districts called *Dungkhag(s)*, which had an intermediate level of government between the district government and the village blocks. Urban areas are governed by Municipal Corporations in cities and Municipal Boards in towns.

Supportive Legislations and Policies

There are no quotas or affirmative legislation in Bhutan to ensure a minimum proportion of women in governance (Ghimire, 2006).

Overview of Women's Participation

Six of the 25 members, that is, 24 per cent of the National Council are women, and four of the 47 members, that is, 8.5 per cent of the National Assembly are women (IPU, 2011).

Women in the north of Bhutan enjoy a strong position in family life and society due to the matrilineal form of family in the northern part of the country. In general, it has been found that even though women across the country enjoy considerable economic and decision-making power within the family, they are still grossly under-represented in public life, especially in elected bodies of governance (Ghimire, 2006; Helvetas, 2010).

Impact of Violence against Women and Economic Insecurity on Women's Political Participation, and Other Barriers

Low level of educational attainment of women is a hurdle to their political participation. Their literacy in rural areas is lower than literacy in urban areas, and their participation in tertiary education is particularly low. Their lack of education renders them less likely to contest and win elections as they are perceived as being less capable of functioning efficiently (Helvetas, 2010).

There is a 'culture of silence' surrounding the issue of **violence against**

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women, due to which the scale and incidence of this flagrant violation of their human rights and its larger impact cannot be assessed. However, the fact remains that despite hard data on the matter, domestic violence in the home and other forms of violence and sexual harassment of women and girls at educational institutions, workplaces and in the community restrict their mobility and participation in public life (Helvetas, 2010).

Patriarchal prejudices and stereotypes result in the perception that women are less capable than men, especially in matters involving public decision-making, and economic activities outside the household are inimical to their participation in governance (Helvetas, 2010).

Lack of political connections limits their participation in politics. It is commonly known that political connections make it easier to access systems of governance and positions of power. Because women are less active in public life and dominated by men in decision-making outside the home, they are less likely to develop the required connections (Thesbjerg, 2007).

Economic dependence on men is increasing due to the shift from agriculture to urban occupations. As a result, women, who by and large are less educated than men are forced to take up low paying jobs and find themselves increasingly economically dependent on men. This hampers their ability to develop and control a sufficient resource base, which is a critical factor influencing entry into political participation (Helvetas, 2010).

Lack of political connections limits their participation in politics

NEPAL

System of Governance

Nepal has abolished monarchy and has restored a multi-party constitutional democracy. It is currently governed according to the Interim Constitution of Nepal, which was brought into force in 2007. The Interim Constitution abolished monarchy, and declared Nepal a federal democratic republic. It has provided for the formation of a Constituent Assembly, which acts as a unicameral legislature/Parliament and is charged with preparing the permanent Constitution for the country apart from governance. The Constituent Assembly was established in 2008, with 601 members elected on a mixed electoral system. A total of 335 members were elected through the proportional representation system from a single nation-wise constituency, 240 through the First Past The Post (FPTP) system from single-member constituencies, and 26 were nominated by the Prime Minister from minorities that did not win representation in the elections.

The Interim Constitution provides for the establishment of interim bodies at the district, municipal and village levels, namely District Development Committees (DDCs), Municipalities and Village Development Committees (VDCs), to carry out local governance. The manner in which these bodies are to be constituted, their structures and territorial boundaries are to be as provided for in the law.

Supportive Legislations and Policies

Article 33 of the Interim Constitution, 2007, directs the state “To enable women to participate in all organs of the State on the basis of proportional inclusion”.

Article 63 of the Interim Constitution, 2007, states that “A minimum of one-third of the total number of candidates nominated shall be women, taking together the number of candidates on the basis of proportional representation”.

Article 7(4) of the Election Act, 2007, states that at least 33 per cent of the candidates for the 240 seats filled by the FPTP system shall be women.

Article 7(3) of the Election Act, 2007, states that political parties must ensure proportional representation of women, which has been explained under Schedule 1 of the Act as meaning that 50 per cent of the candidates on party lists should be women.

The **Local Self Governance Act, 1999** (it continues to have some relevance as allowed for under the Interim Constitution), states that each of the nine wards comprising a VDC should have at least one woman on the ward committee.

Overview of Women's Participation

The Constituent Assembly has 601 members, of which 197, that is, 32.77 per cent are women. Of these, 161 were elected through proportional representation list

Article 33 of the Interim Constitution, 2007, directs the state “To enable women to participate in all organs of the State on the basis of proportional inclusion”



election, 30 were elected through the FPTP election, and 6 were nominated and appointed by the Cabinet led by the Prime Minister (Bylesjo, Kandawasvika-Nhudu, and Larserud, 2010).

Information regarding women's participation in local governance could not be found.

Impact of Violence against Women and Economic Insecurity on Women's Political Participation, and Other Barriers

The literature available notes certain specific barriers to women's political participation.

The ***lack of basic education and knowledge of systems of governance*** is a major hurdle to political participation

of women. A lot of elected women representatives in Nepal are illiterate (Andrews, n.d.).

Lack of support from the family, especially from male members, ***as well as from male counterparts in government bodies***, such as in the VDCs, is another factor that hampers their political participation (Andrews, n.d.).

Poverty and economic insecurity often mean that women cannot leave their livelihoods and dedicate their time to politics (Andrews, n.d.).

Patriarchal ideologies are so deeply ingrained in socio-cultural value systems that men commonly look down upon women as being subordinate or inferior. women are further burdened by the fact that they have to combat such attitudes in private and public life (Andrews, n.d.).

PAKISTAN

System of Governance

Pakistan is a democratic republic with a bicameral legislature. The Upper House/Senate and the Lower House/National Assembly have a membership of 100 and 342 respectively. The President, elected by an electoral college, is the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and the Prime Minister is usually the leader of the largest party in the Lower House/National Assembly. The National Assembly is constituted of members elected for a five-year term: 272 elected through direct elections from single-member constituencies spread across the six Provinces – Punjab, Sindh, the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Balochistan, the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and the Federal Capital; 10 from religious minorities, and 60 women through proportional representation among parties with more than 5 per cent of the vote. Every Province has a Provincial Assembly elected in the same manner as the National Assembly, and the leader of the largest party or alliance in the Provincial Assembly becomes the Chief Minister. Although the military has played a major role in the history of politics in Pakistan, the current government is formed by the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) in alliance with the Muslim League.

Local governments in Pakistan exist under the supervision of the various provincial governments, where provincial governments have merely delegated some of their functions and responsibilities to local governments by the

promulgation of ordinances. They are not formally embedded in the Constitution. The Local Government Ordinance of 2001, however, created District Governments, *Tehsil* Governments and Union Governments within the Provinces.

Overview of Women's Participation in Governance

The most recent elections to the National Assembly were conducted in 2008, and women formed 22.2 per cent of the house, that is, 76 of the 342 members were women. Elections to the Senate were conducted in 2009 and resulted in the entry of 17 women into the 100-member house, that is, 17 per cent of the members of the Senate were women (IPU, 2011). The number of women in local governance by province is unavailable.

The rationale for bringing women into politics has been deemed faulty by some women's activists. It seems to be based on the efficiency paradigm of development, wherein the contribution of women is treated as instrumental for efficient development and equity. So, although women are brought into political institutions, no effort is made to transform the patriarchal nature and culture of institutions (NCSW, 2010a). Therefore, even though it helped a small percentage of women enter the government, their participation was constrained because the structures perpetuating inequality were left intact.

women who enter local government bodies through reserved seats reportedly encounter institutional

Although women are brought into political institutions, no effort is made to transform the patriarchal nature and culture of institutions (NCSW, 2010a)



resistance frequently – they are not included in development planning, budget making, monitoring committees, etc.; their participation in the public domain was considered inappropriate, they were discouraged from speaking in meetings, and they were confined to working on only those issues that were considered women-centric, etc (NCSW, 2010a).

Where women received support from their families and/or political parties, it was sometimes conditional, emerging from the expectation of tangible benefits for themselves through the women (NCSW, 2010a).

Until 1977, no special provision existed for representation of women in Pakistan

Supportive Legislations and Policies

Until 1977, no special provision existed for representation of women in Pakistan. During the regime of Zia-ul-Haq from 1977 to 1985, two seats were reserved for women at the Union Council (UC) level, and 10 per cent for other tiers in all provinces except the NWFP. From 1988 to 1990, during the regime of Benazir Bhutto, elections to the local government were not conducted. The reign of Nawaz Sharif between 1990 and 1993 saw the quota for women rise to 10.4 per cent. The period from 1994 to 1996 under Benazir Bhutto again did not witness elections to the local government bodies across the country. During the second stint of Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister, different quotas existed for women in different provinces – 12.7 per cent in Punjab, 25.8 per cent in Balochistan, 2.9 per cent

in the NWFP and 23 per cent in Sindh. In 2001, Pervez Musharraf introduced a sweeping 33 per cent quota across all levels of governance in all the provinces of Pakistan uniformly (McCarthy and Sultana, 2004).

At the national level, 60 out of 342 seats are reserved for women in the National Assembly, and 4 out of 100 seats are reserved for women in the Senate. Those parties that have garnered more than 5 per cent of the total vote nominate women to fill the reserved seats in the National Assembly on the basis of proportional representation. In the Senate, the women who occupy the four reserved seats are elected indirectly by the other 96 members.

Constitutional Provisions

Article 32 stipulates that “The State shall encourage local Government institutions composed of elected representatives of the areas concerned, and in such institutions, special representation will be given to peasants, workers and women.”

Article 37 says “The State shall decentralise the Government administration so as to facilitate expeditious disposal of its business to meet the convenience and requirement of the public”.

Article 140-A states “Local Government – Each Province shall, by law, establish a local government system and devolve political, administrative and financial responsibility and authority to the elected representatives of the local government”.

Acts, Policies and Conventions

The National Policy on Women's Empowerment aims to achieve the goal of gender equality in all social, economic and political spheres.

Convention on the Political Rights to Women, 1952, that ensured the right of women to vote, stand for elected bodies, hold public offices at par with men, etc.

National Plan of Action, 1998 was designed to improve the decision-making power of women within the family and community, and to create social awareness and collective commitment to building their participation in decision-making and sharing of household responsibilities. It also includes measures towards ensuring 40 per cent representation of women in all public sector institutions and planning for training and awareness building campaigns to enhance their participation.

The Gender Reform Action Plans (GRAP), 2000, at the national and provincial level intend to put in place the essential institutional capacity for ensuring participation of women and engendering development planning and practice through interventions at the federal, provincial and district levels.

Local Government Ordinance of 2001 guarantees the participation of marginalised sections of society through 33 per cent reservation of seats for women and 20 per cent for peasants and workers.

Changes at the Local Level Due to Women's Participation

Data for changes that have occurred because of involvement of women in local governance is limited. However, the NCSW (2010b) reports that women representatives at the national level have been found to actively participate in governance on important issues, such as natural resources, imports and exports, employment, foreign policy, etc, in addition to women-specific concerns. Their acceptability and effectiveness has helped change the prevailing self-perceptions of women in local government bodies.

Impact of Violence against Women and Economic Insecurity on Women's Political Participation, and Other Barriers

Several barriers have been discussed, that impact the effective participation of women in public spheres, and as elected representatives:

The ***sex-based division of labour*** delineates the roles of men and women in a manner that relegates women to the private sphere of life, leaving political participation, which falls in the public domain, to men. While contesting elections is a distant dream for many, often women are not even allowed to exercise their vote independently of men.

Internalisation of patriarchal ideologies makes women think of politics as

Women representatives at the national level have been found to actively participate in governance on important issues



Undemocratic and authoritarian structures of political parties which are usually male dominated make it difficult for women to succeed in such spaces

a sphere that is not legitimate for them to participate. The family invests lesser resources into developing the capabilities of women to participate in the public arena, and this limits their self-perception and capability.

Domestic violence and other forms of violence are rampant in families, society and also in the state as a means of controlling women. The legal rights of women are curtailed by the introduction of the *shariat* law and the Muslim family law, which bestow unequal rights upon men and women in matters regarding inheritance, marriage, guardianship of children, etc. Their subordinate social and legal status and domination by men in the family, society and state obstruct their participation in public life (McCarthy and Sultana, 2004).

Undemocratic and authoritarian structures of political parties which are usually male dominated make it difficult for women to succeed in such spaces. They are not given the opportunity to work at decision-making positions within such parties, not given tickets or tickets are frequently given to those with connections to party leaders; they suffer from restricted financial support for campaigning, and their opinions are excluded from party manifestoes and agendas.

The ***patriarchal nature of governance institutions*** that is exhibited by the gender imbalance in local governance in terms of numbers as well as across levels of seniority, lack of gender sensitivity and lack of awareness of gender-responsive governance, as well as male resistance to women representatives, obstructs their participation.

Limited capacity of women for proper functioning due to low levels of education, limited exposure to public and political life, lack of knowledge of the local governance system and little knowledge of their roles and responsibilities curtails their ability to perform. They are often unable to articulate their interests and have a significant impact on decision-making.

Lack of power base and, lack of financial and administrative authority translate into lack of impact on the governance process. At *tehsil* and district levels in Pakistan, women are indirectly elected by the electoral councilors, because of which they do not have a direct constituency. Also, they do not have direct linkages with civil society organisations, because civil society organisations were weak due to an interrupted history of democracy in the country. So they cannot forge alliances and gain support from such organisations to forward their agenda.

The ***reduction of seats at the Union Council level*** in the local government systems proposed in 2009 by each of the provincial governments had a negative impact on participation of women. Such a move reduced the total number of women representatives despite upholding of the 33 per cent reservation clause for them. The ratio of women representatives to the total population as a result of this is estimated to be 1:8000 (NCSW, 2010a).

Rising religious militancy and fundamentalism is another barrier to political participation of women in Pakistan.

Islamic orthodoxy supports a strict demarcation of the spheres of activity for men and women. Conservative religious and tribal groups are flourishing in several pockets of the country, and they

are inimical to political participation of women, barring them from not only contesting elections but also from exercising their right to vote and participate in public life.



SRI LANKA

System of Governance

Sri Lanka is a unitary democratic republic with a multi-party system. The President is elected directly by the people for a six-year term and is the head of state, head of the executive and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The Parliament comprising 225 members is elected for a term of six years as well, with members to 196 seats being elected to represent the electoral districts, and 29 seats being distributed across political parties or independent groups according to the proportion of votes polled by them. These parties or independent groups then nominate persons to occupy the share of seats given to them. The Prime Minister is appointed by the President from amongst the members of the Parliament, based on his/her likelihood to command the confidence of Parliament.

The country is divided into eight provinces and 25 districts. Each province is governed by a Provincial Council, elected for five years. Each Provincial Council comprises a Governor, and a Board of Ministers appointed by him, comprising a Chief Minister and four other Ministers. At the local level, there are three types of authorities – Municipal Councils for cities and large towns, Urban Councils for less urban areas and *Pradeshiya Sabhas* for rural areas – each elected for a four-year term.

Supportive Legislations and Policies

Article 12(4) of the Constitution of Sri Lanka encourages affirmative laws and policies for women.

However, this provision in the Constitution has not been implemented in any form, and there are no quotas for women in Sri Lanka.

The **Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms** appointed by the President in 1998 recommended the creation of forums to foster greater dialogue for groups, including women with elected representatives, compulsory inclusion of representatives of these groups in committees, and the provision of opportunities for them to contest elections freely without restrictions. The Commission also suggested that elected representatives work closely with organisations for women in order to allow for contribution of women to local government. The Commission did not support the creation of quotas to ensure representation of women as it asserted that establishing a fixed proportion would be damaging to democracy, as it believed women as a category of voters should not have a fixed percentage of candidates or representatives, and they should be free to contest in any number they desired (UNESCAP, n.d.).

Women's organisations have been lobbying for the reservation of a 25 per cent to 30 per cent quota for women candidates in elections, but this demand has not been acted upon by the policymakers in Sri Lanka (ADB, 2008).

Overview of Women's Participation

Currently, 12 of the 225 members of Parliament are women; that is, women comprise 5.33 per cent of the total strength of the Sri Lankan Parliament.

Women's organisations have been lobbying for the reservation of a 25 per cent to 30 per cent quota for women candidates in elections

(IPU, 2011). The number of women in local governance is unavailable.

Information regarding the nature of their participation in politics is unavailable.

Changes at the Local Level Due to Women's Involvement

There is a paucity of literature on this theme.

Impact of Violence against Women and Economic Insecurity on Women's Political Participation, and Other Barriers

Gender roles and other gender-related inequities have been noted as barriers to women's involvement and participation in the political sphere.

The **unequal gender division of labour** within the household leaves women with little time to participate in activities outside the home. They are constrained from participating in politics by their various household responsibilities, such as childcare, assisting other members of the household in their work, etc, which are very often also accompanied by the responsibility of income generation (McKenna, M.R., n.d.; UNESCAP, n.d.).

Gender role assumptions and lack of support also operate to bar women from entering politics. Public life and political affairs have traditionally been considered the domain of men, and

women are by and large excluded from these domains, as they are deemed unsuitable for them. They are seen as being unfit to discharge the functions associated with political office. As a result their mobility is restrained and they lack family support as well as community encouragement to participate in politics (UNESCAP, n.d.).

Women's lack of access to and control of economic resources is another factor that hampers their ability to participate in politics. They do not have access to property and typically lack control over income earned (ADB, 2008). This places them at a disadvantage in comparison with men as an economic resource base is very often critical to generating voice and acts a launch pad for political participation. Moreover, economic security also enables women to rise beyond concerns of earning a livelihood and making ends meet to participating in other arenas.

The **abrasive political environment for women and unfair practices in the political arena** are also factors that deter them from participating actively. Women representatives are often treated with arrogance and disdain by their male counterparts. They are also vulnerable to intimidation in the form of threats and counter-propaganda involving character assassination (UNESCAP, n.d.).

Lack of investment by political parties in grooming women for greater participation and better performance is another barrier that women in Sri Lanka face. They are not prepared for contesting elections, for discharging their duties as representatives, and are often sidelined in decision-making for reasons of their so-called ineptitude (ADB, 2008).

Women representatives are often treated with arrogance and disdain by their male counterparts



The ***fear of violence*** has been an especially crucial factor in the case of Sri Lanka (McKenna, n.d.), where political violence has been a reality for more than two decades from 1983 to 2009

due to the civil war against the government by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Eelam* (LTTE). Security concerns discourage women from participating freely in politics.



CONTEXTUAL LINKAGES BETWEEN SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES

Drawing links between ongoing initiatives in India and other South Asian countries can highlight replicable practices and contribute immensely to advocacy initiatives. However, before such analysis is conducted, it is necessary to generate a comprehensive body of reliable information regarding the political participation of women in South Asia. This preliminary review has revealed that such information is lacking, particularly in the countries of Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, some basic similarities and dissimilarities in country contexts have made themselves apparent.

All the five South Asian countries studied, as well as India, present cases where poverty is rampant and economic dependence of women on men is a common truth. The division of labour in the household is such that women are burdened with the responsibility of nurturing and caring for the family and remain restricted to the domain of the home, whereas men are entrusted with the providing for the family and engaging more actively in public and political life. This restricted mobility, coupled with attitudes that see women as inept to handle public office, translates into a lack of investment and interest in developing the capacities of women for successfully contesting elections to public office, performing the required functions and bringing new ideas to the governance agenda. There is a perceptible lack of education and awareness regarding political systems and governance processes, and families, political

parties, the state and other institutions do precious little to educate and train them in order to enhance their ability to govern. In addition, the incidence and fear of violence outside the home create security concerns for women, and this aggravates the restrictions placed on them in terms of mobility. Violence in societies, as well as within the home, is also an important factor having far-reaching consequences for their political participation, as it negatively impacts their health, self-perception and confidence to participate in public life and express their thoughts freely.

Some differences in context are obvious among the countries, primarily stemming from their political trajectories and the history of their participation and affirmative action. Whereas Bhutan has only recently transformed from a monarchy to a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral legislature, Nepal has abolished monarchy completely and adopted a Constitution that declares the country a federal democratic republic. Pakistan has been a democratic republic since independence from British rule in 1947, but its history of democracy has been interrupted in the past by military rule. Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy with a unicameral legislature, whereas Sri Lanka is a unitary democratic republic. An additional factor to be recognised in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh is that orthodox religious groups and institutions play a major role in curtailing the political participation of women, as they promote very conservative views

There is a perceptible lack of education and awareness regarding political systems and governance processes, and families, political parties, the state and other institutions do precious little to educate and train them in order to enhance their ability to govern





Violence in the public arena is particularly responsible for hampering their mobility and public participation in countries such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka

regarding the place of women in society. Violence in the public arena is particularly responsible for hampering their mobility and public participation in countries such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka, due to religious protests and military activity in the former and the long-standing civil war in the latter that ended in 2009. Bhutan presents an interesting case where women have enjoyed a strong position in society, especially in the north, due to the matrilineal form of family, but this has not translated into participation in public life. The fact that the population of Bhutan is now gradually shifting from agriculture to urban occupations is not alleviating the condition of women, as being traditionally less educated than men, they are forced to take up low-skilled and poor-paying jobs, thereby becoming increasingly economically dependent. Any attempt to understand political participation of women in these countries must contextualise the issue in these socio-economic, religious and geo-political particularities if it has to feed into planning for responsive policy formulation.

In terms of affirmative action, Bhutan and Sri Lanka have not had any legal provisions for reservation of seats for women at any level of governance. Although Bangladesh has made provisions for reserving seats for women in local governance as early as in 1976, and at the national level since 1972, the form and nature of such reservation has been legally amended repeatedly in subsequent years. In 2001, Pakistan had made it mandatory for 33 per cent seats to be reserved for women in local government. However, after the end of military rule, there has been a reduction of seats at the Union Council

level in the local government systems proposed by the provincial governments in 2009. Following this, there has been a negative overall impact on their participation despite upholding of the reservation clause. At the national level Pakistan reserves 60 of the 342 seats (17.5%) in the National Assembly, and 4 out of the 100 seats in the Senate (4%) for women. Affirmative action for participation of women in local government in Nepal was taken in 1999 with the reservation of seats for women in the VDCs, whereas at the national level it was introduced in 2007, with the Interim Constitution providing for the reservation of 33 per cent of the seats, through elections and nominations for women, and mandating that 50 per cent of the party candidate lists comprise women. In India, although reservation was introduced only at the local level through the Constitution (73rd Amendment) in 1993, which reserved 33 per cent of seats in *Panchayats* for women, this has been significant in improving the participation of women in formal political processes and decision-making at the local level. The demand for reservation at the national level in India must be recognised and responded to by the legislature. Simultaneously, it is essential that the manner in which reservation has been operationalised in these countries and the results it has generated be evaluated in order to understand if and how suitable changes can be made to make governance more. Focussed studies can identify barriers at the structural, social and individual levels, as well as existing spaces that can be exploited to engender structures and processes to ensure that women are able to participate more effectively in governance, and governance itself becomes responsive to gender.

CONCLUSION

A key point that emerges from this preliminary review of the status of participation of women in governance in the five countries in South Asia is that although affirmative action in democratic countries is more likely to secure the representation of marginalised groups, it is by no means an automatic guarantee of their effective participation. Although equality for men and women might be legally provided for, women are still subordinated to men in all spheres of life due to the fact that discrimination persists unabated within the family and other social institutions. Poor enforcement of legal provisions as well as the lack of effort to strike at the base of institutional frameworks and social norms perpetuating patriarchy and gender inequity contributes to this.

In such indubitably patriarchal social systems, reservation for women in political institutions is a significant but insufficient prerequisite to ensuring a minimum level of political representation for them. In order to make their participation effective and sustainable, a comprehensive gamut of supportive mechanisms must be introduced to address the factors perpetuating gender inequality in public and private life. Critical reviews of structures, operational guidelines and legislations must redefine the framework to be more inclusive and gender responsive. The principle of gender equality needs to be centred in democratic governance. Issues that must be addressed on a priority basis to enable greater participation of women in governance are

- Poverty and economic dependence/insecurity,

- Gender-based division of labour in the household,
- Violence in public and private life,
- Education and lack of awareness regarding political systems and processes,
- Lack of training and capability of women for governance,
- Security concerns,
- Prevailing norms regarding gender stereotypes and their mobility,
- Internalisation of patriarchal values by women and their self-perception,
- The dominant attitudes of social institutions such as the family, political parties, government institutions and the larger community, and
- Gender review of Acts and policies defining the scope and functions of governance bodies,
- Gender sensitisation for representatives and bureaucracy .

Deeper research into these issues is required to investigate them before corrective measures can be designed and implemented. In addition, the manner in which legal measures intended to increase their representation have been operationalised in each country must be analysed to identify counter-productive barriers that they might be creating. Also, there is great need for a comprehensive sex-disaggregated documentation of elected representatives at different levels of local government in all the countries.

Although equality for men and women might be legally provided for, women are still subordinated to men in all spheres of life due to the fact that discrimination persists unabated within the family and other social institutions



Detailed inquiries into experiences of women as elected representatives and into the views held by men of elected women representatives must be conducted in order to understand how governance is impacted by gender relations and role expectations. It is essential to see the political participation of women as a factor of the interaction of these interlinked variables so that gender justice and democracy can be most fruitfully integrated.

Whereas this document presents an overview of the South Asian situation with regard to women and governance, it also illuminates certain directions

for further action. The barriers to participation of women that have been highlighted could be resolved through planned programmatic interventions involving capacity building of women, gender sensitisation of men and women, families, communities, political parties and elected representatives, and lobby and advocacy for legislative reforms to empower women politically and economically. In planning such programmatic interventions and advocacy initiatives, however, local specificities need to be taken into account, so that the action taken is relevant to the lived realities of the men and women that they seek to facilitate and empower.



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