"Women's Leadership: Towards Gender Mainstreaming in Local Self-Governance"

I. Introduction

Gender inequality is institutionally constructed. Rules, norms and practices of gender relations create and reproduce systemic differences in the positioning of women and men in the society. Such relationships determine and influence the ways resources, roles and responsibilities are allocated; values are assigned and power is mobilised. (Kabeer: 1999) Inequality, reproduced across the range of inter-related institutions as household, community, market and state, generally mediate the construction of gender identities and synergetically determine the capacities to exercise independent agency. Lack of access to critical resources such as income, information, education, skills; and the denial of opportunities and choices due the gendered roles and responsibilities disempower women. Without any sense of power whatsoever, their participation in decision-making is minimal, at home, within the community and in political decision-making.

Women's empowerment is an important tool for combating gender inequality. Definition of empowerment ranges from increasing choices available to and capacities of women to transforming the power structures of society. It involves increasing their choices, capacities, decision-making power so that women's right and gender equity can be realized at all levels of decision-making. Gender equality in governance would ensure that women have equal access to economic, social and political opportunities.

Gender mainstreaming is a way to bring about institutional transformation towards gender equality. This involves ensuring that gender perspectives and the goal of gender equality are central to all activities at all levels: in research, legislation, policy and activities in the ground and to ensure that both women and men influence, participate and benefit from development efforts. There is need, however, to complement gender mainstreaming strategy to promote gender equality with targeted interventions on women's empowerment, particularly when we have glaring instances of persistent discrimination against women and inequality between women and men. (UN: 2005)

Gender mainstreaming in governance involves putting into place- a basic gender sensitive policy, equal distribution of power, resources, responsibilities and opportunities, and increased participation of women in decisions that shapes their choices and life chances at both the personal and collective level. Governance here is defined as a joint responsibility of the state, market and citizens to mobilise public resources and promote public decision making towards the advancement of common public good. Good governance, therefore, entails not only reform of the public services, efficiency and cost effectiveness of public agencies but also ensures participation of the poor, the marginalized and the under represented (Tandon and Mohanty, 2002). Since women constitute a major section of this marginalized citizenry, gender mainstreaming in governance focuses on promoting gender equality within the institutions of governance.

Mainstreaming of gender equality goals in governance is clearly mandated in the Beijing platform for Action (1995). It mentions that without the active participation

of women and incorporation of the perspectives of women in all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. Gender equality is necessary for the improvement of women and men's well being, for social justice and for the achievement of development goals.

It is now generally accepted that unless women constitute a critical mass of at least one third of those in the decision-making, their presence would make little difference to the outcomes of decision-making. Affirmative action will build a mass of local leadership who will actively participate in strategic decision-making processes. Increased participation in governance and decision-making in turn will restructure gender and power relations. (Panda:)

Governments across the world have committed to address gender inequities in their various programmes and operations. The Indian experiment with the institutions of Local self-Governance (LSGIs) is a unique example of political restructuring and social transformation. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 enabled 33 percent representation of women in Panchayats and Municipalities and ensured their entry in the domain of politics. The local self-governance institutions viz., the *Panchayati Raj Institutions (the rural Local bodies)* and the *Municipalities (the urban local bodies)* are constitutionally authorized institutions of governance at the grassroots level since the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts (CAAs) in 1992. The new and essential features of local self-governance institutions consist of a mandatory Gram Sabha (village assembly) for each village or a group of villages comprising all the adult members registered as voters; reservation of seats and offices of the chairpersons for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in proportion to their population (in this one-third should be women); specific responsibilities to prepare plans for economic development and social justice in respect of the subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule and Twelfth Schedule; constitution of state finance commissions and elections commissions to ensure financial devolution and elections respectively. The term of the panchayats and the municipalities is five years.

Affirmative action for participation in governance, however, has not automatically translated into qualitative gains for WERs. Success of their leadership is contingent on many factors across multiple institutional locations. It is important to understand how such factors impact their performance and in turn affect the quality of governance.

Addressing issues of gender justice is at the core of PRIA's programmes. The framework of *Reforming Governance Institutions* is to be particularly accomplished through a gendered perspective. PRIA is committed towards the broader objectives of gender equity, women's empowerment and social justice within the Constitutional agenda of local self-governance.

This paper draws upon the findings of PRIA's study on *Women's leadership: Towards Gender Mainstreaming in Governance.* The study has explored the intersecting factors across multiple institutional locations, which caused their powerlessness within PRIs and Municipalities and in turn has affected the quality of governance. A snapshot analysis of practices (social relations) within the intersecting institutions has given insight into the roots of powerlessness of WERs

II. Women's leadership in local Self Governance: A Situational Analysis

Women's nature of political participation in PRIs & ULBs across two terms reveals a distinct difference. In the first term, the community was suddenly exposed to conflicting sets of expectations. Participation in local level decision-making bodies was an enabling mechanism to empower women. Society embedded in patriarchal, traditional value s that set restrictive conditions for women, however, was not prepared for such transformative opportunities.

Large numbers of women got elected to the political seat for the first time ever with no precedence or role models. "Governance" was new to them. As elected representatives, women lacked knowledge, skills and capacities to govern. The family members, especially the male members, took over and provided guidance on governance related matters. As a result, women stepped back and behaved as mere token representatives (dummy candidates) not finding the space or opportunity to make their voices and opinions heard (PRIA, 1999).

PRIA and its partners, during the first term, adopted a campaign mode to address the needs for awareness generation. It launched Pre-Election Voter Awareness Campaign (PEVAC) to facilitate women to access their basic *Political Rights* - to contest (represent) and vote in governance. The campaign mode proved cost effective in terms of addressing awareness needs of larger numbers of elected representatives in a shorter time span with limited resources.

Knowledge building and *Capacity building* programs were organized to disseminate information on systems of governance and imparted skills on developing leadership, communication and problem-solving skills. Such programmes were organized for both men and women as well as exclusively for women to develop requisite skills and confidence to fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

In the second term, the community by and large had accepted the fact of women in leadership roles. NGOs and the government were more prepared with training programmes for women elected representatives on the functioning of the PRIs from day one. Women were redefining the very essence of leadership in terms of openness about the available resources, decision-making and implementation of schemes in their own constituencies/wards.

PRIA and its partners have successfully mobilized WERs. The results indicate that women's participation in grassroots local bodies have indeed transformed them. Opportunities of participation did indeed transform WERs in a positive sense. They have gained a sense of empowerment by asserting control over resources and most of all by challenging men's domination. Despite their low level of literacy many of them have become articulate and conscious of their powers. Women have reported regular attendance at panchayat meetings. They have used their elected authority to address critical issues such as children's' education, drinking water facilities, family planning facilities, quality of hygiene/ health care and village development including pucca road and electricity to their panchayat areas. They have also brought alcohol abuse and domestic violence on to the agenda of political campaigns.

PRIA's association with women leaders in local-self governance and its involvement with strengthening women's leadership in governance programme have also made it apparent that there has been backlash against them. Elected women representatives have often faced serious problems in performing their duties. There are stories of the violations of their rights, exploitation, violence and harassment. Many a times they have become the subjects of moral judgements and faced violence when they dared to come out alone to attend meetings. There are evidences of women elected representatives becoming the targets of character assassination. They are accused of sexual immorality (Sharma Kumud: 1998). Their male colleagues in the meetings treat them with indifference. The bureaucracy does not act towards them with dignity. Mayaram points out that government officials, linked to panchayats, are usually male and do not always support women representatives. (Mayaram: 2002) Male family members use them as proxy. They act as *de facto* panchayat members and take all decisions on behalf of their wives (Anandhi S: 2002). Basu (2003) finds that "more often women join panchayats without a prior history of activism…[and] these women often become tokens, or mere figure-heads who are silenced, marginalized, and, in extreme situations, subject to harassment and violence." (West: 2004) The rotational characteristic of the reserved seats has led to the understanding amongst most of the elected women members, other male members of the local bodies and the community that these women do not have spaces beyond one term of election. This also results in low morale and support to these women leaders. Studies have also shown that women from low caste groups, despite reservations, seldom wield any real political power due to the strongly entrenched notions of caste and gender hierarchy. (Anandhi S: 2002), Niranjana: 2002). Many women representatives are poor and lack economic entitlements. Therefore, they are often under the control of those who own and control resources (usually males). Consequently, this dependency curbs their independent decision-making powers. (Niranjana: 2002)

It is clear that many WERs have been unable to play their roles meaningfully. Although opportunities for leadership and participation in public decision-making provided them a base to actively facilitate participatory democracy at the local level, most of the WERs have not been able to make effective use of it. It is essential that institutions accept women's leadership, value their contribution and support their efforts and initiatives. Gender mainstreaming in governance recognizes the constraints women face and lack of equal opportunities to women leaders, which influence their ability to define their own goals and exercise their agency. It aims at developing strategies for making the governance structures gender equitable and gender sensitive. This implies not only ensuring gender equality in numbers but also in terms of access and control over resources, roles in decision-making and assertion of authority & power.

PRIA's own experience of mainstreaming gender at an institutional level and its close association with women in governance roles over the last two decades has led to the understanding that strengthening women leadership alone would not lead to gender equality, has led to widening of its scope to look for the strategies for mainstreaming the local self governance institutions. The Gender mainstreaming unit of PRIA initiated a research on *Women's leadership: Towards Gender Mainstreaming in Governance* to explore the intersecting factors across multiple institutional locations, which cause women's powerlessness and in turn affect the quality of governance. The study by describing the gaps aimed to identify spaces for gender equality within

institutions of governance where women's leadership is seen as legitimate and is valued; where both women and men feel a mutual sense of comfort in working together and depict mutual respect for each other. An awareness of the underlying causes of women leaders' powerlessness would also enable designing of gender transformative empowerment strategies both for women and men.

The study purposively selected States/ Districts/ Blocks/Gram Panchayats/Municipalities, women elected representatives and the significant 'others' from PRIA and its partners' intervention areas where intensive work is being carried out on issues of reforming local self-governance. The category of *significant others* include male elected representatives, other functionaries, govt officials, community based organizations, and family members. The states covered are Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttaranchal (Study design in appendix 1)

Personal Profile of the Women Elected Representatives (WERs):

The age and marital status profile of women ERs across the five states reveals that the majority are married and are above 35 years of age. The age factor is important as it implies that women have matured; may have less household responsibilities; therefore, are able to devote more time to governance related public activities.

Occupational status

The household work such as the maintenance of household, working in the field or engaging in income generating activities that benefit the household influences the extent of their political engagements. Women ERs felt that their work burden was incompatible with public role performance. Daily pressures of occupation as well as household often prevented them to undertake additional governance related responsibilities.

Majority of ERs (Andhra Pradesh 30 percent, Chattisgarh 32.5 percent, Rajasthan 20 percent and Uttaranchal 38.7 percent & Haryana 100 percent) are home managers. A substantial section of them are also engaged in other occupation, which are mostly in unorganized sector of economy. For instance, in the states of Rajasthan (about 67 percent), Uttaranchal (about 42 percent) Andhra Pradesh (25 percent) and Chattisgarh (15 percent) they are also engaged in agriculture in their own field. In Chhattisgarh 30 percent, in Andhra Pradesh more than 22 per cent, in Uttaranchal 16 percent are working as agricultural workers. In Andhra Pradesh (22.5 percent) and in Chattisgarh about 15 percent of respondents were self-employed.
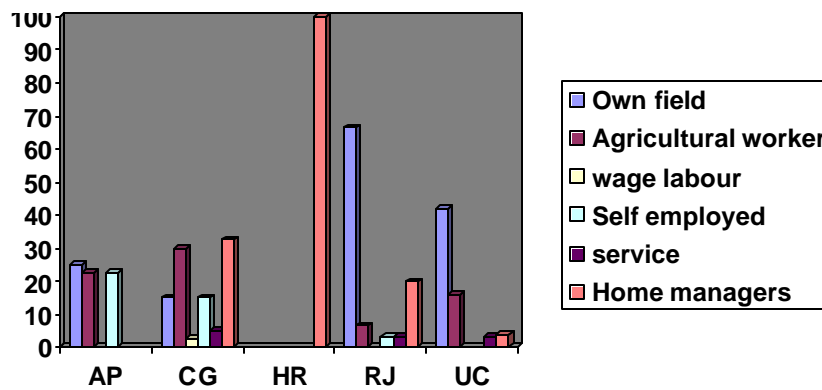
Educational status

There are a few higher educated women elected representatives. The society in villages well as in small town is by and large male dominated. Education for women does not appear to be a matter of great concern. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh nearly 50 percent of them are illiterate. In Rajasthan, more than 60 percent, in Chhattisgarh about 40 percent and in Uttaranchal more than 30 percent can only sign their names. During our fieldwork in the above states we found that elected representatives did not really understa nd any official documents. They signed when their husband/children asked them to sign or read out the document to them. Often they signed out of trust. Poor educational qualifications by and large lead to poor quality of performance. Domestication pressurizes women to eschew any knowledge outside the realm of household. Haryana shows positive trend in literacy status of women elected representatives. About 40 percent of them have qualified secondary education.
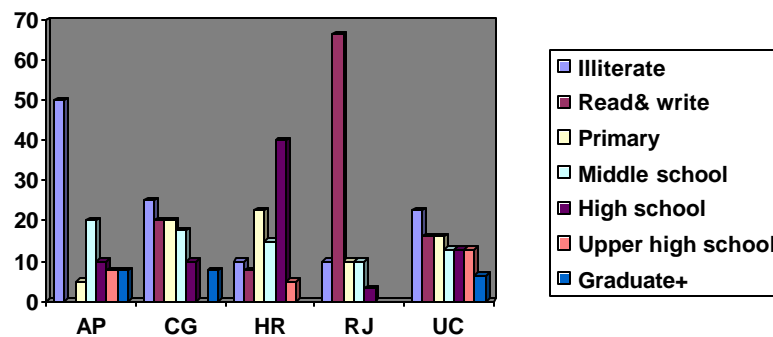

Individual capacities and vulnerabilities

The WERs felt that some of their personal capabilities that facilitated their performance as elected representatives were Self-confidence, Ability to speak, Education, Organizing skills and good behaviour as shown in graph below

Strengths of WERs
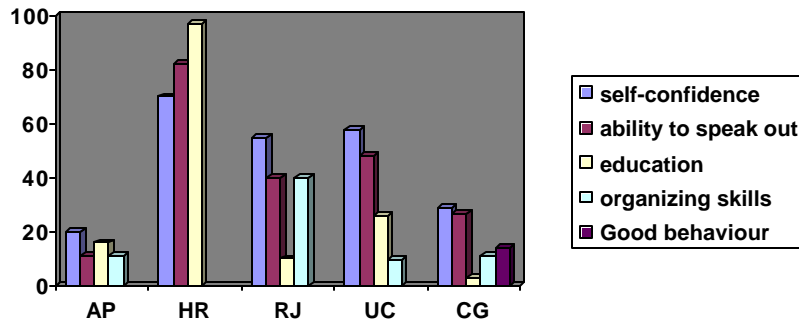
Vulnerabilities of WERs

For most of the WERs absence of the above capabilities hindered their performance. WERs felt that lack of training, low level of awareness, inability to speak in public, low education, inability to resolve conflicts, and Lack of mobility, hindered their ability to perform. These constraints are largely due to cultural and gender influences and the WERs have not been able to overcome these. However, they mention that proper training is most important if the government is serious in giving "women" a chance to come out public spheres. Better training can help in overcoming the constraints related to low education, low levels of awareness, and inability to speak in public.
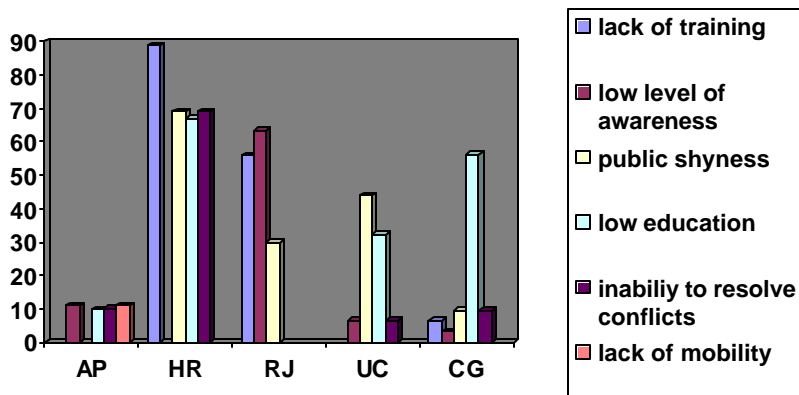
Political Profile of the Women Elected Representatives

Term and Tenure -

Though most of the elected representatives were serving for the first time, we found that in Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh 15 percent, Uttaranchal 6.5 percent and in Rajasthan 3.3 of them were serving the second term. Tenure in office for the majority was more than one year.

Reserved/Unreserved seats -

Majority of the WERs have contested from the reserved seats. In Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Uttaranchal all respondents were elected on reserved seats. In Haryana more than one fourth and in Andhra Pradesh less than one tenth of them contested from general seats.

Training

A substantial section of WERs in the study in Haryana and Rajasthan did not receive any training related to the roles and responsibilities of ERs. In Chhattisgarh one fourth of the WERs were by and large trained by govt agencies while in Uttaranchal nearly half of the WERs received training from NGOs. PRIA and its Partners trained them. In Andhra Pradesh 65 percent of the WERs attended trainings organized by PRIA as well as by the political parties and the government of Andhra Pradesh.

Decision for Contesting Election

Findings show that husband and other family members such as father in law; brother in law by and large decided the candidature of women elected representatives. We also find that political parties, previous elected representatives and NGOs also the determined the candidature of women ERs. For instance, the candidature of 43.13 percent women ERs in Andhra Pradesh were determined by political parties, previous elected representatives and NGOs, in Uttaranchal the candidature of less than one fourth WERs and in Rajasthan one-tenth of them was decided by political parties. Community members decided for one third of the WERs in Chhattisgarh. It is interesting to note that the decision taken by women's groups on the candidature of women ERs is low (8.8 per cent in Andhra Pradesh and 6.5 in Uttaranchal)

Decisions   on   the   Candidature
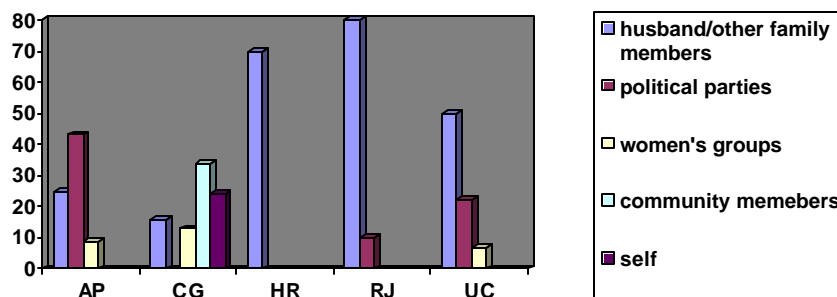
A Substantial section of WERs in the study reported that it was the family's wish and reputation, which was primarily the main reason for them to contest elections. Nearly three fourth of the WERs in Haryana, one third in Rajasthan and one fourth in Andhra Pradesh and Uttaranchal each were influenced by family wish and reputation. An interesting trend in Andhra Pradesh can be seen. Out of the total respondents, 20 per cent women ERs have been nominated by the Vice-Sarpanch to take his place officially but would in reality continue in power and make her just a figurehead. The situation of significant others viz., family members, family prestige, Vice-sarpanch being the reasons for contesting elections implies that the role as ERs is decided by the others. Women are merely dependents and this dependency has a tremendous impact on their roles and functions as ERs.

III. Gender Relations from Private to Public Realm

Gender relations determine the nature and extent of participation of WERs in governance. The facilitating gender relations help in building the capacities of women. Constraints weaken the ability to perform, they make women vulnerable and susceptible to pressures. In this section the focus is on the gender relations located in multiple institutional sites within society viz., formal political structures in the public sphere such as PRIs& ULBs; informal private realms such as households and the community. A gender analysis of the *actual practices* (relations) within these three institutional locations is crucial to understand the facilitating and constraining factors. This is primarily because the roles of women and men in all of these have great differences. The social capacities and vulnerabilities build/weaken the WERs' ability to define and articulate needs and priorities and to act upon them. These, in turn, influence their attitudes, which are crucial for developing a sense of agency.

Household

The study of the practices within household is important because it unveils the power base, and the actual nature of their representation. It also indicates whether or not women will ever be capable of exercising their agency.

The *public and private* divide is constituted and operated in gendered terms. The household is the private realm while politics is located within the public domain. The call for women to participate in decision making in the public domain, traditionally a male bastion, is a crucial step towards restructuring gendered power relations. Even though there is increased visibility of women in local decision making bodies, the terms on which they enter this public domain of politics affects the quality of their performance. The nature of their participation varies as a result of following the factors in intra-household situations.

Household type is a crucial factor affecting the terms of women's participation. *Joint family background* has facilitated their participation in local bodies. Majority have a joint family background. This implies that household responsibilities are shared and fewer household responsibilities give women more time for leadership roles. In the study 20 percent of WERs in Rajasthan, 27.5 percent in Andhra Pradesh 25.8 percent in Uttaranchal have identified that less family responsibilities /grown up children are factors that have enabled them to take on additional roles of public leadership.

Socio-Political Affiliations of the Household has a direct impact on women's capacity for public engagement. The presence and involvement of family members eased their entry into local decision-making bodies. Findings reveal that households of WERs were affiliated to political parties, village/ community based groups, caste group and cultural groups working on the issues of education, health, sanitation, caste & entertainment. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh 63 percent of the respondents' family members had involvement with political parties. 25 percent of them were working with village/ community based groups. In Haryana, about 60 percent of family of ERs was involved in community based groups. 30 percent of them were engaged in caste group activities while 10 percent of them were dealing with issues of marginalised sections. In Chhattisgarh about 18 percent were engaged in village

related activities. In Uttaranchal about 26 percent were engaged in a variety of activities related to cultural groups.

Socio-Political Affiliations of the households
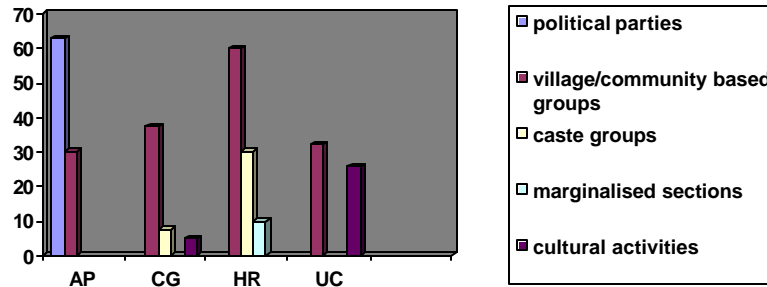
Family Members as Elected Representatives

Findings also reveal the involvement of family members in governance as elected representatives largely sarpanches, panches and councillors. In Chhattisgarh about 28 percent of them were elected representatives. In Haryana those elected (about 65 percent) included husband, father in law, and brother-in-law. In Uttaranchal about 39 percent of them were elected representatives, which included husband, brother, and father-in-law. In Andhra Pradesh nearly 63 percent reported that their family members were elected representatives. Involvement of family members in socio-political activities and in governance has made their entry and participation rather easy considering the fact that they were by and large first timers who were not very highly educated and trained.
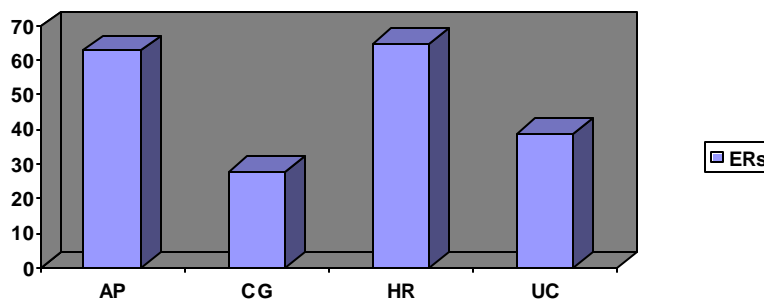
Family Prestige

The study findings reveal that WERs have identified **Family prestige** (Haryana 68 per cent, Rajasthan 30 percent Andhra Pradesh 25 percent, Uttaranchal 22.6 percent) as factors which have made easier their entry and participation in governance.

The provision of mandatory participation of women in governance has prompted the households with a strong socio-political involvement to promote their wives/women members of their households in the sphere politics. Findings show that the husband and other family members such as father in law; brother in law largely decided the

candidature of women elected representatives. One of the reasons behind this is the inherent interest of the household in politics. The male members/husband could not contest as the seat was reserved for women. Such ERs merely acted as 'rubber stamps' while their families took decisions on their behalf.

Family Support: Facilitating Factor

Gender relations within households affect the perceptions of WERs. They have identified **Family support** as a factor facilitating their performance as ER (Rajasthan 100 percent, Uttaranchal 90.3 percent, Haryana 89 percent, and Andhra Pradesh 32.5 percent). Interviews with women on the issue of family support, however reveals that most of the women see nothing wrong in the ways their husbands or adult family members taking interest in their activities and acting on their behalf.

Lack of Mobility

Mobility is an essential factor for participating effectively in governance. Elected representatives need to interact with agents of the administration or state institutions, all of which are located outside the private spaces of their home. The capacity for mobility plays a key role in determining women's location in politics because it determines their access to resources and opportunities and the actual ability to engage in mobilization. For women, the meanings and valences assigned to mobility are linked with the perimeters of domestication. (Tambiah: 2003)

The WERs faced constraints in terms of household chores, economic constraints, family interference and No social standing. All these constraints restricted their mobility.

Lack of Mobility
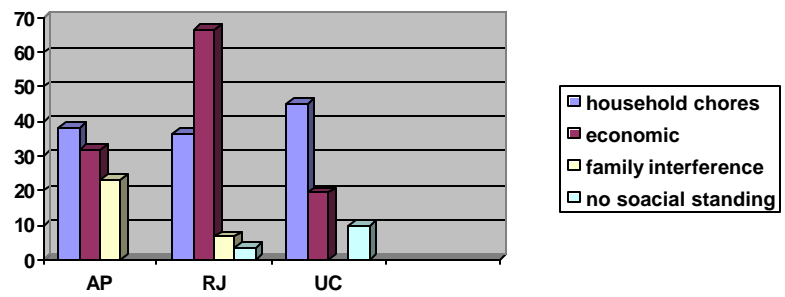
The significant others such as MERs, other functionaries of PRIs, ULBs, CBOs also identify illiteracy, household responsibilities, lack of mobility, and dependency on male relatives as factors responsible that have constrained their performance as ERs. As the family and traditional roles demanded a lot of their time, they ended up becoming a namesake/figurehead ER.

Challenges as identified by other key stakeholders

A majority of the other key stakeholders think that women can strike a balance between home and work in panchayats and municipalities. However, they set some pre conditions for balancing of such roles such as the redistribution of role between

husband and wife and support from other family members. Their apprehensions about their performance as ERs were mainly on the issues relating to young mothers with responsibility at home and husbands' interference and misuse of their authority. They felt that these factors would let the WERs perform well.

The Institutions of Local Self-Governance: PRIs and ULBs

The 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendment Act enabled women's representation in local self-governance bodies. Their participation is full of challenges and obstructions. Being undereducated and inexperienced the WERs are often not allowed to carry out their mandate. Their efficacy is always under scrutiny; their views are not considered, and they are not included in the meetings. Support from some male colleagues and other functionaries have facilitated their performance while the indifference and non-cooperation of others made them vulnerable.

Interviews with other key stakeholders across the five states revealed that they had reservations about the potentials of WERs to govern as in their opinion they were ignorant of administrative proceedings. They felt that illiteracy, lack of communication skills and dependency on male relatives inhibited their regular participation and as a consequence development in their area suffered. They, however, recognised the contribution of WERs in two main areas viz., service delivery monitoring such as pulse polio programme and promoting associational groups like Mahila Mandals and SHGs.

Relations with Male Elected Representatives (MERs)

The study revealed that MERs encouraged the WERs to carry out their function, although in a patronising manner. WERs indicated that they received Support & encouragement (Uttaranchal 87.1 percent, Andhra Pradesh 77.5 percent) from their colleagues. This was evident by their colleagues showing interest in their ideas, discussing the same with them, informing them about the various rules/clauses and by making their ideas more lucid to the villages by open discussion. They reported that their colleagues also informed them about various upcoming schemes and new government grants.

Male colleagues motivated WERs to take up issues independently and cooperated with them to implement the programmes. For instance, MERs in Andhra Pradesh informed women about their roles and duties. MERs in Uttaranchal gave them moral support. They guided and supported WERs when they raised issues in the meetings. In the state of Chhattisgarh also, the support from MERs was seen in getting the tasks done, travel support etc.

On the other hand, in States of Haryana and Rajasthan, a significant number of WERs quoted that indifference, vested interests and non-cooperation of MERs constrained their ability to perform better. WERs also enumerated lack of support, indifference, individual interests, and abusive language of MERs as hindering factors. These constraints have led to their being less informed on the issues related to governance. Due to these factors, they deliberately did not attend various meeting.

Constraining Behaviour of MERs
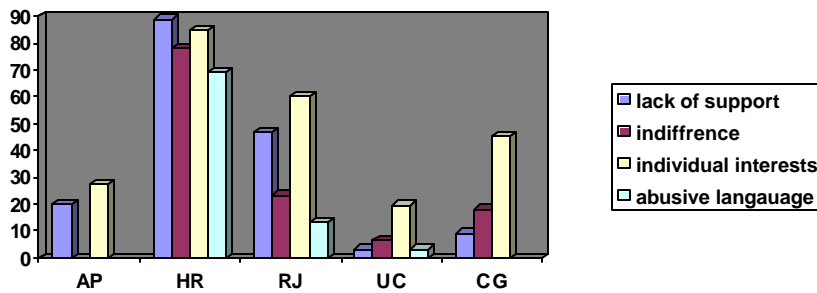
Women ERs have tried to overcome the indifferent and un-supportive attitude of their colleagues by trying to build a better rapport with them and asking them for help as and when needed. They also mentioned that there is a need to bring about a desirable change in the attitudes of male colleagues, which implied removing biases towards female colleagues. They felt that training on the process and procedures of local self-governance could help them to work confidently and in collaboration with their colleagues. Women awareness programmes could help them to know more about their rights. Women collectives could give them moral support and a sense of solidarity as and when required. Hence it is important that formation of women collectives be encouraged and strengthened.

Relations with other functionaries / state bureaucracy

Interviews with Panchayat Secretary/ Executive Officers revealed that they explained issues in the agenda to WERs. They updated them of Government schemes. They have even given them priority by forwarding their proposals.

A substantial section of WERs in the study (Haryana 87 percent, Rajasthan 60 percent, Andhra Pradesh 47.5 percent, Uttaranchal 58.1 percent) found them Supportive & encouraging. Forms of support-included action on the proposals bringing projects and grants, solving/listening to the problems. Lack of experience and awareness made the WERs fully dependent on the Panchayat Secretaries. This also sometimes constrained their performance to act independently.

The attitudes of indifference, and disregard for women in the government offices have led WERs move away from them. As a result there is hardly any interaction between them.

**Constraining Behaviour of Bureaucracy/ government Officials**
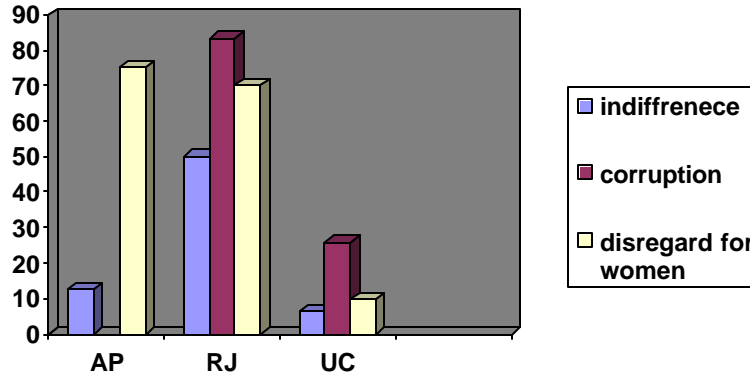
While suggesting changes in making functionaries/ state officials respond more positively, the WERs laid emphasis on appointment of women functionaries/officials. This would encourage WERs to actively participate in programmes, events and meetings. They also suggested training for attitudinal change in the male functionaries/officials in order to sensitise them to their specific problems.

Institutions of Civil Society: Community

Community support is essential for a woman to function ably as ER. The responses across the states reveal that affiliation with CBOs/NGOs- (Uttaranchal 32.3 percent, Rajasthan 20 percent), political parties- (Andhra Pradesh 47.5 percent, Rajasthan 10 percent, Uttaranchal 16.1 percent) and Caste associations - (Haryana 72 percent, Rajasthan 70 percent, Andhra Pradesh 27.5 percent, Uttaranchal 12.9 percent) facilitated the performance of WERs.

Support of institutions within Community
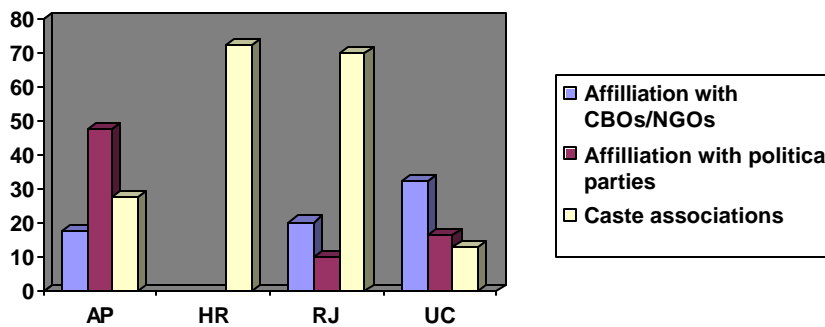
Constraining factors in Community
Multiple answers to the constraints at the community level pointed to traditions and customs (Andhra Pradesh 21 per cent, Uttaranchal 19.4 percent, Chhattisgarh 27.3 percent, Rajasthan 63.33 percent) caste discrimination (Andhra Pradesh 18 per cent, Chhattisgarh 18.2 percent, Uttaranchal 19.4 percent, Rajasthan 23.33 percent), safety issues (Andhra Pradesh 24 percent, Uttaranchal 9.7 percent, Chhattisharh 9.1 percent) and lack of interaction with CBOS / NGOs (Andhra Pradesh 14 per cent, Uttaranchal

3.2 percent) as the primary hindering factors. In Chhattisgarh, WERs also mentioned political conflict and abusive language (9.1 percent each) as hindering factors.

Constraining Factors within Community
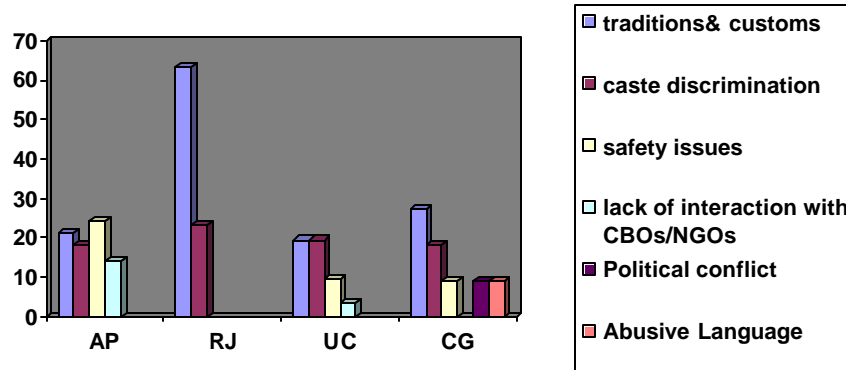
Participation of WERs in Gram Sabha

The women elected representatives attended the gram sabha meetings. They were concerned with the issues of education, infrastructure such as roads, water, electricity, toilets, drain, health and sanitation, and employment. They took action in the areas of their concern by putting up proposals and also by getting these passed. However, most of these women could not transcend the agenda of infrastructure development like other male representatives. Issues that specifically affect women have been missed out.

But many of them did not have adequate knowledge of the proceedings of the Gramsabha. Interviews with significant others (MERs, other functionaries and officials) reveal that WERs, if armed with sufficient knowledge and understanding of governance affairs and given support of CBOs such as SHGs could take up the issues in the gram sabha meetings and be successful in the implementation of several schemes. In Andhra Pradesh for instance, they took initiative in the implementation of the schemes such as Janmabhoomi, Shramdan, old age pensions, financial assistance during child birth and girl child protection schemes. They raised issues relating to the streetlights, DWCRA groups, schools, low-cost sanitation, micro credit, drainage facilities, shopping complexes, flyover bridges etc. WERs in urban areas were relatively more active in taking up special assistance schemes for urban slum women and areas. They also did a follow-up of government schemes sanctioned for the development of their ward / village people.

Inactive WERs did not take initiative in raising issues or in implementing programmes. Officials felt that WERs were not capable of conducting meetings and keeping the records. The absence of interaction and support from women self-help groups made them vulnerable to pressures. Their participation was only confined to attending the meeting.

WERs have not able to overcome these constraints. They have however suggested ways such as awareness in society, improvement in education and interaction with women collectives who could support them in their endeavours.

Policy Constraints

The 33 percent reservation policy has enabled compulsory representation of women in the local self-governance institutions. However, some of the policy imperatives such as rotation of seats and two-child norm constrain their participation. In our study the WERs have identified lack of honorarium, rotation of seats, no confidence motion and two-child norm as major barriers to their effective participation. Politic al factionalism was also mentioned as a constraining factor in Chhattisgarh. WERs have not able to overcome such policy related constraints.

Most of the WERs felt that honorarium for elected representatives in very important as they put in a major amount of time in the work. There needs to be a policy to compensate for the loss of the wages while participating in activities of Panchayats/Municipalities. They also added that this would increase their financial independence, which in turn would increase their status in family.

Rotation policy de-motivated WERs, as by the time they understood their roles and duties the term is over and they are not given a second chance to implement the lessons learnt. Besides, there is also a common understanding amongst WERs that the general seats are reserved for men and that is why they cannot contest from those seats. Political parties also do not nominate women from the unreserved seats.

Policy Constraints
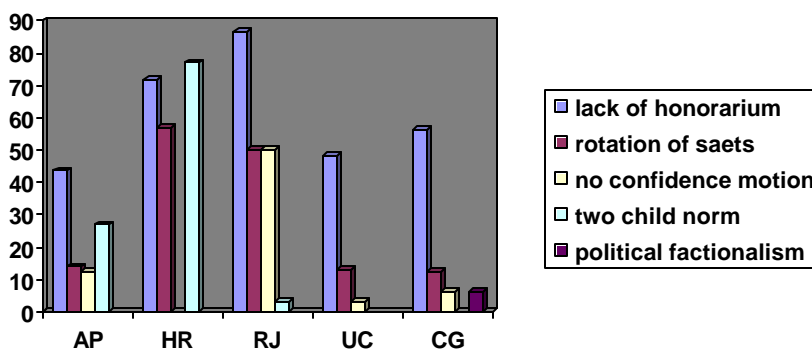
V. Emerging Lessons

Potentials

Formal local democracy offers an opportunity and a forum for women's leadership. It could help counter local gender based discriminations. The reservation of one-third seats for women in PRIs/ULBs is a milestone in the constitutional and political history of India. It has provided women an opportunity to participate in the mainstream of development. Women in Panchayats and ULBs are getting exposed to process of governance and consequently getting a sense of intimacy with and control over governance process. This may be seen as gains in terms of the consolidation of the gender equality; though the gain has not expanded over the years.

Limitations

?? A careful reading of the data, however, alerts us to the limitations of the gender mainstreaming in governance. There is increased presence of women in governance but their voices are silent. The study result shows a most of the women ERs do not have previous experience in politics; have low awareness about rural and urban development/ administration affairs; are dominated by vice-preside nts, husbands, sons and male family members or others for planning and executing the powers of local self governance. These constraints will not develop the women's leadership, on the contrary, it may lead to corruption in local self-government administration.

?? There are neither systems nor powerful actors with political Commitment who can bring women's perspectives and interests to the table.

?? Organizational resources are steered toward quantitative targets that are often only distantly related to institutional change for gender equality. It has become 'add women' process without questioning the basic assumptions, strategic objectives, or ways of working.

?? Public-private divide perpetuated by the organizations prevent women from being full participants in those organizations as they continue to bear the responsibility of household.

?? There is inadequate analysis of issues, context of power dynamics that are perpetuating gender inequalities within the institutions of governance. It has not challenged the institutional norms that maintain women's unequal positions.

Challenges

The constraints faced by WERs at various levels (individual, institutional, societal, cultural) show the way for the initiatives that would need to be undertaken for combating gender inequality that prevails at these levels. For gender mainstreaming in local self-governance in a real sense there is a need for addressing the challenges that are mentioned below:

For Women Elected Representatives

o Is 33% reservation translating into a glass ceiling or the 'outer limit'?

o How do we transcend the narrow agenda of infrastructure development – missing out the focus on the "big" picture – all the facets of governance, the interrelationships etc? How do we achieve gender equality in allocation of resources and not just using an insignificant part of it for catering to women's needs.

o Should performance of WERs be evaluated on the standards set by men? Is there any scope for evaluation of WER's effectiveness on the basis of other developmental agendas prioritised by them?

o How do we inculcate 'the dream of my panchayat/ULB' amongst the WERs through a more proactive and imaginative vision and not only the vision that has been a part of the male dominated system?

Other Stakeholders

o How do we make the bureaucracy more responsive – both horizontally and vertically and bring change in the attitude of government officials that discount WER's areas of concern, disregard their presence?

o In what ways can we overcome the paternalistic attitude of the other 'key influencers'- male elected representatives, panchayat secretaries and male family members – and balance their equations with the women ERs?

o How do we bring about a change in the attitudes at the community level so that women's effectiveness in leadership roles are not evaluated on the standards set by MERs – infrastructure, roads, electricity, etc. How do we ensure that other societal agendas- caste discrimination, untouchability, health issues, violence etc- also get prioritised and are perceived as indicators of effective performance?

o How do we sensitise the family members towards redistribution of roles and responsibilities within the household- reproductive roles – for support.

Institutional and Policy level

?? What could be the changes envisaged at the structural level in the PRIs and ULBs for gender mainstreaming?

?? Is there a scope for setting up of norms, codes of conduct for ensuring safety and security of WERs and creating a gender sensitive work environment within the institution of governance at the lowest level?

?? Does the Supreme Court Guideline on Committee Against Sexual Harassment also apply to the local self-governance institutions? Is there scope for setting up of CASH atleast at district level for Panchayats/ULBs as an institution?

?? What should be the training policy for the newly elected WERs- how many times, on what issues, venue of trainings, time of training etc?

?? Could gender sensitisation of the WER and MER be included as a compulsory module in every training programme organised for them?

?? How do we ensure the goal of Education for all within the institution of local self-governance? Should there be a functional literacy component included in the training of the WERs and MERs?

?? Is there scope for addressing the issue of compensation for attending meetings in lieu of loss of pay/opportunity cost?

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Appendix 1

Study Design
The Objectives
The study *broadly* aimed to understand the conducive factors that create gender sensitive local self-governance institutions- *the PRIs and the ULBs,* where both women and men feel a mutual sense of comfort, and respect for each other. *Specifically* it analysed the nature of women's leadership in local self-governance institutions.

The subsidiary objectives were to study
?? The processes and proceedings of Gram Panchayat (GP) and urban local body (ULB);
?? The profile of women elected representatives;
  ?? Their role and functions as elected representatives;
  ?? The processes and institutions, which inhibit their participation in governance;
  ?? The processes that strengthen their active participation in PRIs and ULBs;
?? The perceptions of 'significant others' viz., male elected representatives, govt officials, community based organizations, and family members; and
?? The key areas of concerns for meaningful participation of women in governance.

The Research Questions
The study explores the following questions:
1. What are the personal characteristics of women elected representatives?
2. How do they perform as elected representatives? How do they see themselves as leaders?
3. What are the inhibiting factors within governance institutions, community and family that affect their leadership roles?

   ?? The constraints within the system- the structure, the peers; the constraints of mobility, safety, personality etc that influence their performance as effective leaders.

   ?? What are the areas that women side step or ignore or find too difficult to handle?

4. What are the facilitating factors within governance institutions, community and family that enhance their leadership roles?

   ?? The spaces available, awareness and utilisation of those spaces, e.g., reservation, the nature of the agenda put forward by women and the perception of others, issues of development in general and those exclusively for women?

   ?? What are the tactics used by the women in performing their roles effectively?

5. What are the factors, which enable 'men/women/community' to accept 'women as leaders'?

   ?? How they are perceived by others- the family, the community and others in the governance institution with specific focus on the political peers and other official bodies?

   ?? How do these women meet the expectations that women and men from the community/male and female colleagues/ government officials have from them?

6. How do we use the spaces created for women to strengthen their roles as effective leaders in governance and how do we take these issue up at an advocacy level?

   ?? What would be the basic minimum that women would need to do/know that would help them in getting a stronger hold in the system or that would be valued?

What would give them positive recognition? What could be the images of women leaders that give positive reinforcement among authorities and also within one's own self?

Methodology:

Nature of Research

This is a descriptive purposive case study research to study and analyse women in leadership roles in the institutions of local self-governance.

Sample

The study purposively selected States/ Districts/ Blocks/Gram Panchayats/Municipalities, women elected representatives and the significant 'others' from PRIA and its partners' intervention areas where they are working intensively on issue of reforming local self-governance.

The States of Rajasthan, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal, and Uttar Pradesh. The coverage has been shown in the chart below:
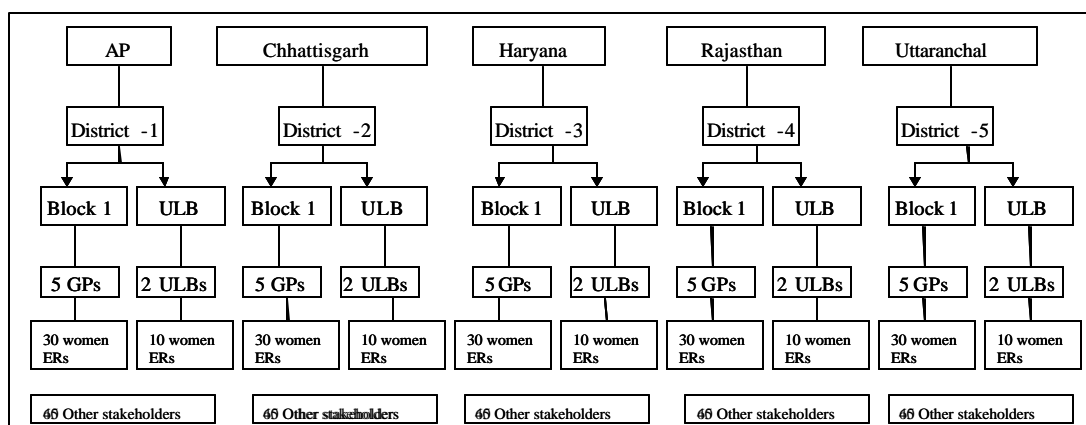
A total of five hundred respondents were surveyed in this study covering 40 women elected representatives and 60 other significant stakeholders in each state. The respondents in each State were selected from the categories given below:

Respondents	GP 1	GP 2	GP 3	GP 4	GP 5	ULB 1	ULB 2	Total
Women ER	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	**40**
Male ER	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
Panchayat Secretary/Executive officer	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
Anganwadi worker/ICDS worker	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
School/College Teacher	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
SHG Member / Citizen Leader	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
Village/ward committee member	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
Female family member	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
Male family member	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
Panchayat Samiti chairperson	1					NA		**1**
BDO	1					NA		**1**
Panchayat Officer	1					NA		**1**
NGO/CSO	1							**1**
Total	**100**							