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

A Report on study in Chhattisgarh

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Knowledge is Power

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Executive Summary

1. Coverage in Chhattisgarh:

- In district of Rajnandgaon five Gram Panchayats of Ambagarh Chowki block – Korchatola, Chilhati, Semarbandha, Bihirikala and Joratarai and two Urban localities- Rajnandgaon Municipality and Dongargaon were covered in the study.

- Forty Women Elected Representatives- Five women elected representatives from Rajnandgaon municipality and Dongargaon nagar panchayat each and six women elected representatives from each of the five gram panchayats were interviewed.

- Sixty other key stakeholders- Male elected representatives, Panchayat Secretaries/ Chief Executive Officer, school/college teachers, anganwadi worker/RCVs, Self-help group members/citizen leaders, Gram Sabha members, male/female family members, Government officials, Civil Society Organisations from these areas were also interviewed.

2. The story behind the profile

Socio-Economic Profile

o 75% of respondents (30 out of 40) were more than 35 years of age…mature, mothers/mother-in laws with young women at home to take care of the families.

o 25% were illiterates and the other 40% were barely literates - could just sign their names (20%) or had attended primary school (20%).

o About two thirds contributed to the household economy through gainful employment majority working as agricultural labourers (30%). Five percent were also self-employed but they had to compromise with their income to participate in the activities of the Panchayats/Municipalities. The two women who had attained education above degree level had salaried income.

Political Profile:

o 27.5% women belonged to families with a political history – had family members as elected representatives

o 37.5% women ERs – 50% in urban areas and 33.3% women in rural – belonged to families with traditional/ social leaders at village/caste level.

o One-third reservation translating into a glass ceiling or the 'outer limit'-

- All respondents were elected on reserved seats… Only two out of 40 had contested from reserved for (2nd timers) SC/ST/OBC category (not women from this category)

- 45% (18 out of 40) of these women won uncontested.

- Of those who won uncontested, 89% (16 women) had contested from seats reserved for SC/ST/OBC Women.

- The general understanding of reservation is that women can contest only on those seats that are reserved for women. The general seats are referred to as seats reserved for men.

o 85% WERs were first timers- only one out of 10 women ERs in urban areas and 4 out of 30 in rural areas were serving for the second term.

o For most of these women (55.3%) primary motivation for contesting the election was development of the ward/ community but the key factors influencing their decision to contest were community members/caste groups (33.9%), husband (16.1%), and Women Groups (12.9%). Only some

contested because of their own motivation (24.2%), which was a result of seeing other WERs in power in the previous terms.

3. How women ERs perform?

Areas of concern and agenda proposed

o   Major areas of concern for most of the women ERs were infrastructure development (82.2%). Health (8.9%) and education (6.7%) were lower in their priority lists.

o   95.7% women had proposed some or the other developmental agenda in their tenure of service, that is road, electricity or water for their ward. Only 4.3% had not proposed any agenda so far.

o   The key agenda proposed by women ERs included road (23.9%), water (25%) and electricity (12%)

o   The issues lower in priority were women and child development (8.6%), and education (5.4%).

Perception of Other Key Stakeholders:

o   There is a divided opinion on the effectiveness of their leadership- they're perceived effective as facilitators and monitors but not as initiators or decision-makers.

o   Their capabilities fare questioned due to lack of required capabilities (same standards that are set for and by male ERs).

o   The main actors of decision-making are the Sachiv (secretary), Male ERs and the husband/son of the woman ER. WERs' presence is seen only in numbers with minimum involvement.

o   Their contribution is recognized in two main areas-
   -   Service delivery and monitoring- pulse polio, sanitation etc.
   -   Promoting associational groups- Mahila Mandals / SHGs

o   There is appreciation of extended role of WERs as animators in generating awareness about the government schemes, school dropouts.

o   The difference that the other stakeholders see in agenda proposed by women is their focus on dealing with social evils like alcohol selling, gambling and infrastructure not only for men but specifically for women like pond for women, mahila ghats, toilets etc. This achievement, however, is not identified by the WERs themselves.

4. Constraints faced by Women ERS

What Women ERs perceive and how they've overcome:

o   At personal level for 56.3% women ERs low/no education was the main factor that affected their performance as an ER. Only 12.5% were able to overcome this constraint, that too with the help of other family members, especially husband, who read out things for them and raised their awareness level, or who participated in the activities of the Panchayat on their behalf or helped them in decision-making.

o   Balancing between the household chores and Panchayat work/meetings (50%) was the major constraint at family level, which was solved only with the support of the husband and other family members.

o   At community level caste discrimination (18.2%) and traditions and customs (27.3) were perceived as constraints. This was more acute in urban areas. Other issues included safety issues, abusive language and political conflict (9.1% each). Using the 'safety net' of women's groups/SHGs has helped some of these women (12.5%) overcome these constraints.

o At policy level, issues of honorarium (56.25%), rotation of seats (12.5%), political factionalism and no confidence motion (6.25% each) were the major perceived constraints. Only 2.5% said that they could manage their finances as their family was economically well off.

o As far as colleagues are concerned, their individual interests (45.5%), indifference (18.2%) and lack of support from male colleagues (9.1%) and female colleagues (9/1%) were perceived as factors affecting performance. Only 10% have been able to overcome the constraints faced at this level through use of their negotiation skills and use of womanpower- the collective voices of the SHGs and women's groups.

o Corruption and Indifference (28.6% each) were perceived as the main problems faced with government officials, which these women have not been able to overcome.

Perception of other key stakeholders:

o The main constraints that other key stakeholders perceive in these women are
  - Low mobility
  - Capabilities that are questioned in terms of education, political awareness, public speaking/dealings, lack of information etc.
  - Male ERs who are perceived as coercive and non-cooperative, mostly from opposition parties.
  - Balancing their productive and reproductive roles and official responsibilities- the opportunity cost for participating in PRI/ULB activities

o Majority of the other stakeholders category think that women can maintain a balance between home and work in Panchayats/Municipalities. However, they've set some preconditions for such balancing of roles-
  - Redistribution of roles between husband and wife
  - Support from other family members

o The apprehensions that they shared against their performances were-
  - Young mothers/mothers with responsibility at home will not make good ERs
  - Husband's interference and misuse of the authority of the women ERs will not let them perform well.

5. Relationship between women ERs and other stakeholders

o Women's leadership in local self-governance is largely welcome by all other key stakeholders
o They perceive women leaders effective in engendering equitable distribution
o The potency of women as efficient and capable leaders is recognized but the precondition for this efficiency is identified as education, awareness, association with groups and ability to speak in public.

Perception of women ERs:

o Most of the women ERs shared that their colleagues (77.5%) and government officials (67.5%) were supportive. This support however, was in the form of guidance in official dealings and showing consensus on issues raised by them. Husband's role in such dealings was, however, another factor identified as a support.

o Those who shared that they did not receive any support from colleagues (22.5%) and government officials (32.5%) said that all the work is done by Secretary and Sarpanch and they were not informed about any scheme, programme or activities of the Panchayat. Fear of dealing with the government officials and the complex administrative procedures was another factor identified by these women.

Other stakeholders:

o Paternalistic attitude of the Panchayat Secretaries was more acute than the male elected representatives. This revealed one-way information channel between the secretaries and woman Sarpanch not only for awareness of roles but also in decision-making.

o Support from male ERs was in form of cooperation in agenda proposed, support in travel etc.

6. Suggestions for improving performance at three levels:

o **Cognitive level**- Capacity building and their raising awareness and understanding

o **Perception level**- Enhancing self-image of WERs and change in attitude of others

o **Relational aspect**- Improving relationships with male ERs/equation between husband-wife, Colleagues, SHGs, Community.

7. Key Action Points

For Women Elected Representatives

o Is 33% reservation translating into a glass ceiling or the 'outer limit'? How do we develop an understanding amongst the community members, the WERs that the unreserved seats are not reserved for men? How do we also sensitise the political parties for not limiting the nomination of women candidates only from the reserved seats?

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

o How to inculcate 'the dream of my Panchayat/ULB' - Need for more proactive and imaginative vision? How do we translate the decentralisation of the planning and implementation at the lowest level of governance into a reality? How do we proactively and imaginatively develop a vision of the "Gram Swarajya" and not the rajya of the centralised top-down bureaucracy or the political agendas?

o How do we addressing issue of individual performance at the ward level in comparison to the aggregate developmental agenda? How do we fill in the gaps resulting from the tussle between individual interests and the larger community interests?

Other Stakeholders

o How to deal with the attitude of indifference at different levels, especially government officials, who discount WERs' areas of concern, disregard their presence? How do we make the bureaucracy more responsive – both horizontally and vertically?

o How do 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 WERs?

o How appropriate and useful are the evaluations of WERs' 'effective performance' on 'visible indicators' such as roads, electricity, etc? How do we develop value for other factors of societal structures and mores (caste discrimination, untouchability) that confine and inhibit the political functioning of WERs in particular as it is a cause for double discrimination?

o How do we influence and sensitise the family members and enhance support and sharing of responsibilities (reproductive roles) at home? This does not only refer to the relationships

with the other female members but also balancing the equations with male members for creating a more supporting environment for the WERs.

o   Last but not the least is addressing the issue of compensation for attending meetings in lieu of loss of pay/opportunity cost. Although the provision of TA for the WERs in the local self-governance institutions exists, most of them do not have access to them. It is not only the travel cost that is incurred by the WERs but also the loss of wages / opportunity for wage as a result of participation in Panchayat activities. How do we ensure that such losses are compensated for?

1   Introduction

1.1   The Context:

The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Indian Constitution have given women the much-needed opportunity to actively participate in the decision-making processes of their locality. One-third of all seats in the total membership and chairpersonship in the newly constituted Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban local bodies (ULBs) have been reserved for women.

The reason for one-third reservation for women and Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) is based on the assumption that a critical mass of 30-33 per cent can actually influence the institutions. As Indian women by and large experience marginalisation, deprivation and oppression vis-s-vis the existing power structures, it is assumed that affirmative action for political representation would help in building a critical mass of women leadership to participate actively in the strategic decision-making process at local level governance institutions. They could change initial preferences and help in formulating democratic policies. The constitutionally mandated panchayats & municipalities and constitutionally mandated participation of women were the step towards mainstreaming women in leadership roles and changing the power concentration.

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 values that set restrictive conditions on women, however, was not prepared for such transformative opportunities.

Large number of women got elected to the political seat for the first time with no precedence or role models. "Governance" was new to them. As women elected representatives lacked skills and capacities to govern, the family members, male members in particular, provided guidance on governance related matters. As a result, women behaved as mere token representatives (dummy candidates).

Training barely existed on matters relating to roles of elected representatives or functions of PRIs & ULBs, many CSOs including PRIA and its partners undertook responsibilities to scale up its interventions and orient people across the country. PRIA, for instance, adopted campaign mode to address the needs for awareness generation in short and quick orientation programs for PRIs within stipulated time period. It launched Pre-Election Voter Awareness Campaign (PEVAC) to facilitate women to access their basic Political Rights - to contest (represent) and vote in governance. Campaign mode proved cost effective in terms of addressing awareness needs of larger number of elected representatives in short time with limited resources. It also organized *Knowledge building* and *Capacity building* programs to disseminate information on system of Panchayats and imparted skills on developing leadership, communication and problem-solving skills. Such Programs were organized for both men and women as well as exclusively for women to develop skills and confidence.

In the second term, the community by and large had accepted the fact of women in leadership roles. NGOs and 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 and directing their work towards constituencies.

PRIA and its partners have successfully mobilized women elected representatives. The results indicate that women's participation in grassroots local bodies have indeed transformed them. They have gained

a sense of empowerment by asserting control over resources on many occasions. Despite their low level of literacy they have become articulate and conscious of their power. They 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, hygiene and health, quality of health care and village development such as concrete (*pucca)* road and electricity in 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 has also made it apparent that there has been discrimination against women in these institutions. 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. Their male colleagues in the meetings treat them with indifference. The bureaucracy does not act towards them with dignity. Male family members use them as proxy. Many a times they have faced violence if they dare to come out alone to attend meetings. 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.

At this juncture, when the third term of women's participation in local self-governance institutions: *the PRIs & ULBs* is about to begin, it is important to keep in mind that "critical" increases in political forum does not just refer to the sufficient numerical presence of women in leadership positions. It also refers to their active and legitimate stake in decision-making. We see that opportunities for leadership and participation in public forum have not provided the women elected representatives a base to effectively facilitate participatory democracy at the local level. We need to address seriously the crucial gaps in the mainstreaming of women in leadership roles. The study findings, by highlighting the gaps, would contribute towards advocating the need for a gender sensitive working environment. Mayaram (2002) suggested recognition of the barriers to women's participation, thorough review of institution of governance looking at rules, norms, and practices from gendered perspective and sex-disaggregated data on such participation to prevent, or mitigate, a backlash against women who have begun to move into the public sphere through their participation in local self-governing bodies.

While gender mainstreaming in governance institutions would need to acknowledge the structural, political, cultural constraints that women in public position face, it would also need to develop strategies for making the governance structures more gender equitable and gender sensitive. This would be possible by not only ensuring gender equality in numbers but also in terms of their control over resources, role in decision making and assertion of their authority and power. However, what remains of crucial importance is the attitude of the institution to accept the leadership of women without discrimination or comparison value, value their contributions rather than tolerate their presence and support them in their efforts and initiatives. The broader purpose of the study, therefore, would be to 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.

The Gender Mainstreaming Unit of PRIA initiated this research study with an aim to create a ground in the institution of governance where women's leadership is seen as legitimate and valued. The research aimed to study women in leadership roles and evaluate the experiences in gender mainstreaming at an institutional level in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar anchal, and Uttar Pradesh.

This report presents the findings of the study conducted in the state of Chhattisgarh during October-November 2004.

1.2 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 analyzed:

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' others' viz., male elected representatives, govt officials, community based organizations, gram sabha members and family members;

The key areas of concerns for meaningful mainstreaming of women in governance.

1.3 The Research Questions

The study tried to explore the following questions:

1. What are the facilitating / inhibiting factors for women in performance of their leadership roles within and outside the institution of governance?
   - The constraints within the system- the structure, the peers; the constraints of mobility, safety, personality etc that influence their performance as effective leaders.
   - The spaces available, awareness and utilisation of those spaces, e.g., the nature of the agenda put forward by women and the perception of others- issues of development in general and those exclusively for women?

2. What are the factors, which enable 'men/women/community' to accept 'women as leaders'?
   - How do women see themselves in governance and 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?
   - 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?

3. How do we use the spaces created by women towards strengthening their roles as effective leaders in governance and how do we take these issue up at an advocacy level?
   - What are some areas that women side step or ignore or find too difficult to handle?
   - What are the tactics used by the women in performing their roles effectively?
   - How do these women meet the expectations that women and men from the community/male and female colleagues/ government officials have from them?

2   The Methodology

2.1   Sampling

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 criteria for selection of the district/Gram Panchayats (GPs) / Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and the respondents are as follows:

2.1.1   Selection of Districts/Blocks-

One of the two districts and one block from the particular district were selected for the study from each State.

2.1.2   Selection of Gram Panchayats /ULBs -

Five GPs were selected from each block, which were woman headed. Two small or medium towns (ULBs) were selected for representation from the ULBs. However in the latter case the criterion was not restricted to woman headed ULBs, as there are only a few women mayors who head ULBs in PRIA intervention areas.

2.1.3   Selection of Women elected representatives at GP/ULB level-

Six women elected representatives from each from five GPs and five women elected representatives each from the two ULBs were selected as respondents for the study. Since the number of women elected representatives in power in the GPs and the ULBs did not constitute the required number in all the selected sites of data collection, the researcher was given the option to include women who had earlier held position in GPs & ULBs but are no more in power. This number, however, was not to be more than two in each of the GPs or ULBs. Besides this, out of the women elected representatives in the GPs and ULBs, at least one each was to be from dalits/scheduled caste/scheduled tribe community.

2.1.4   Selection of Significant Others:

As already discussed, the study does not only aim to study the perceptions of the women elected representatives but also the perceptions of other significant people within the institutions of governance and the larger community where these institutions operate, various categories of other people were also interviewed towards identifying the scope for gender mainstreaming in the local self-governance institutions. The category of the 'significant others', included:

(i)   GP level/ULB level –

 From this category four respondents were selected for interview from the each GPs/ULBs. This included one male elected representative, one Panchayat Secretary, an anganwadi worker/ICDS worker and one schoolteacher from the same Panchayat office. In case of ULBs, one male elected representative, the executive officer, an ICDS worker and a school/college teacher were interviewed.

(ii)   Gram Sabha/ward sabha/family members-

This category of the 'significant others' included two family members of one of the women elected representatives (one woman and one man), one SHG members or citizen leader, and one of the village committee/ward committee members. In the urban localities where ward committees did not exist, residential committee members or any other similar committee members were interviewed. In absence

of any such committee, an option of interviewing a senior citizen from the locality was given. The selection was such that the respondents had significant representation of both women and men.

(iii)   Block level interviews-

Three block level interviews were to be conducted in the study. One of the respondents from this category was an elected representative, the chairperson of the Panchayat Samiti. The other two respondents were government officials at block level, that is, the Panchayat officer and the Block Development Officer.

(iv)   Others-

One person from an NGO or a CSO was also interviewed from the area to get representation from the voluntary sector also.

The area coverage is shown in the chart below:

Figure 2.1: Area Coverage
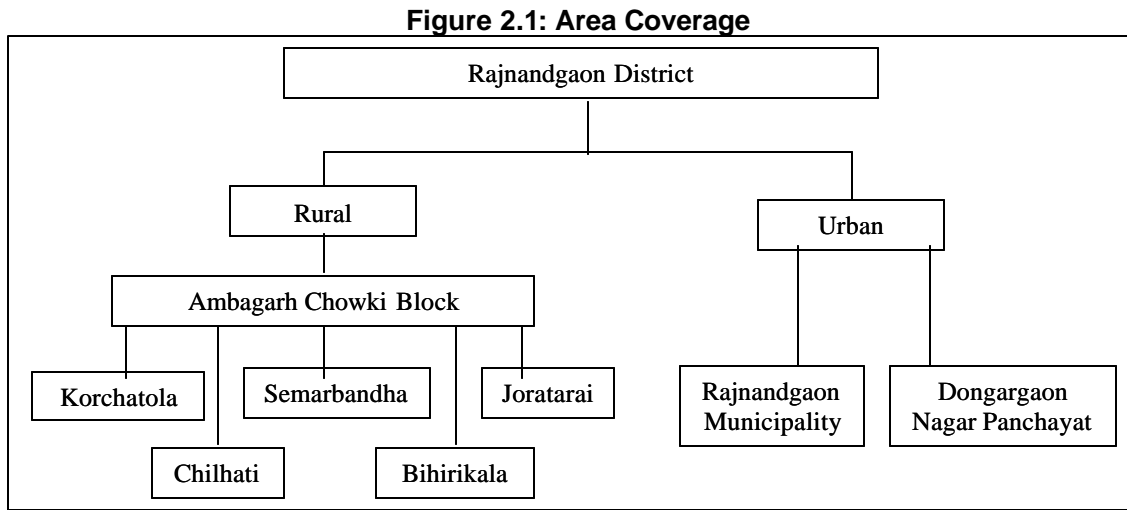
The number of respondents from the categories discussed is illustrated in the table below:

Table 2.1: The respondents

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**

2.2   Tools of Enquiry

This is a purposive empirical study with an actor-centered approach. It tried to explore the issues from the vantage point of the women elected representatives as well as the 'significant others' to provide a holistic picture of the realities of women elected representatives within these institutions.

Tools of enquiry included schedule for documenting the functioning of GPs and ULBs, semi-structured interview schedule for women elected representatives; checklist of questions for recording views of male elected representatives, officials, functionaries at the block & village level, some members from the community and family and the compilation of case studies. Details of the tools for data collection are elucidated as below.

2.2.1   Secondary review:

To document the functioning of GPs and ULBs certain parameters were identified. The information on these parameters was ascertained from secondary sources such as panchayat records.

- Basic Information on GPs/ULBs:

Particulars	GP/ULBs
Area (Sq.km) Density (per Sq.km) No of Households Population Sex ratio Literacy level No of voters Infrastructure	

- Gender wise and caste wise composition of member of GPs and ULBs:

Particulars	Female	Male	Total
General OBC SC ST			

- Number of committees: Their functions, No. Of meetings, Issues resolved, membership
- Income from various sources (2003-04)
- Infrastructure development during tenure of this Gram Panchayats/ULB
- No. Of proposals submitted during 2004-05
- Scheme sanction and implemented during the tenure
- No. Of beneficiaries under various schemes during the tenure (male/female)

2.2.2   Semi-structured interview schedule for women elected representatives

This interview schedule had four sections.

(i)   <u>*Section I:*</u>

The information sought under this section included socio-economic profile/personal information of the elected representatives- name, sex, age, caste, educational qualification, marital status, means of livelihood of the family, primary occupation etc.

(ii)   Section II:

Information related to the role of the women leaders in local self-governance institutions- name of village/gram panchayat/ municipality; district and State; Post held, duration, elected on reserved/unreserved seat; reason for contesting election, number of opponents against whom she won (some information related to that), political status and training status history of family in local governance institutions, previous experience in governance institutions, etc were included in this section.

(iii)   Section III:

This section sought information on facilitating and constraining factors in local self-governance institutions - constraints faced in performing her role as a woman elected representative, examples of such instances, if any, whether these obstacles were overcome, if yes, how; the facilitating factors- family, personal characteristics, peers/colleagues, affiliation with CBOs/political parties/other civil society organisation, etc and examples of these.

(iv)   Section IV:

Questions on the ideal governance institutions that they would like to see; the characteristics of such institutions; what could be done to create such institutions; support required for improving effectiveness in their roles as women leaders etc were focus of this section.

2.2.3   Checklist of questions for recording views of significant others

Different checklists were prepared for different category of other stakeholders. These questions basically related to their perceptions of women elected representatives, their performance, balancing of roles as ERs and home management, the difference between women and male ERs, the constraints the women ERs face etc. Some questions were also included to gauge their expectations from these women and suggestions on how their effectiveness could be improved.

2.2.4   Observation Schedule

Observation of at least one gramsabha or gram panchayat meeting was also included in the tools of enquiry to see women elected representatives performing actually. One such meeting was observed in one of the GPs in the survey area with the following factors in mind:

- Attendance: ER: Male & Female
                Community: Male & Female
- Sitting arrangement: ER: Male & Female
                    Community: Male & Female
- Agenda: who proposes?
- Conduct: who heads the meeting?
- Decision making process
- Interaction: Male/female, among ER/ community

2.2.5   Case Studies

Compilation of some case studies narrating either successes or constraints women face in local self-governance institutions in performing their roles as elected leaders was also a part of the data collection agenda.

2.3   Data collection, interpretation and conclusions

Data collection was done over a period of one month in October-November 2004. A team of one principle researcher and two research interns did the data collection. The data collected from the interview schedules for women elected representatives was analysed using SPSS package. The statistics used, was however, limited to percentages and cross tabulations on some variables only. Content analysis of the responses from other stakeholders was done. The case studies collected and the observation of the gram panchayat meeting have been presented in boxes within the data analysis chapter. The suggestions provided by the women elected representatives and other stakeholders formed the basis of the recommendations towards the end of the report.

3   Situational Analysis

3.1   Profile of the State

The district of Chhattisgarh was carved out of the State of Madhya Pradesh on November 2000 as the 26th State of India. Surrounded by the southern Jharkhand and Orissa in the east, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra in the west, Uttar Pradesh and western Jharkhand in the north and Andhra Pradesh in the south, Chhattisgarh is the ninth largest state comprising of 16 districts- Bilaspur, Bastar, Dantewara, Dhamtari, Durg, Janjgir, Champa, Jashpur, Kanker, Kawardha, Korba, Koriya, Mahasamund, Raigarh, Raipur, Rajnandgaon and Sarguja. One third of Chhattisgarh's population is of Scheduled Tribes that are concentrated in the southern, the northern and the north-eastern districts. The highest concentration is in the erstwhile Bastar district. The district of Dantewara has 79 percent tribals followed by Bastar (67 percent) Jashpur (65 percent), Surguja (57 percent) and Kanker (56 percent).

The name Chhattisgarh, or "thirty six forts", was formerly applied to the territories of the Haihaivansi dynasty of Ratanpur, which comprised the greater part of the then districts of Durg, Raipur and Bilaspur. The 'Chhattisgarhi' dialect resembles the form of Hindi spoken in Oudh. This mineral rich state, with substantial deposits of limestone, iron ore, copper ore, rock phosphate, manganese or bauxite, coal (87% of India), tin, gold and mica, is economically very poor. Deobogh in Raipur district contains deposits of diamonds. The state also accounts for more than 70 percent of India's total production of tendu leaves that are used for making bidi. Its Aluminium, Iron and steel industries, including the biggest Iron and Steel plant, Bhilai steel plant are famous enough in the world.

Agriculture and allied activities account for nearly 80% of the work force in the state with rice as the predominant crop. The central plains of Chhattisgarh are known as the "Rice Bowl" of Central India. However, backwardness in method of agriculture and a more primitive habit of life than the neighbouring states characterise the lives in the state. Besides, perennial drought situation resulting in out-migration from rural arisen search of employment is a major concern in the state.

Forests occupy 45 percent of the total geographical area (12% of India's forests) and the state has constituted three national parks and ten wild life sanctuaries to conserve wild life in general and endangered species in particular. It has been identified as one of the richest bio-diversity habitats with the densest forests in India, rich wildlife, and above all, over 200 non-timber forest products, with tremendous potential for value addition.

As far the indicators of human development are concerned, some positive trends emerge in the state. Female literacy has doubled in the last decade, and male literacy is higher than India's average. The total literacy of the state is also very close to the national average. On sex ratio also the state occupies the third rank in the country amongst all the states and union territories and has increased from 985 (1991) to 990 per thousand males in 2001. Although the Child sex ratio in Chhattisgarh is 2nd highest amongst all states and union territories in India, it has shown a steep decline to 975 in 2001 from 984 in 1991. These figures have been given in the table below:

Table 3.1: Literacy and sex ratio in Chhattisgarh

Description	Place	Total	Male	Female
Literacy rate	Chhattisgarh	65.18%	77.86%	52.4%
	India	*65.38%*	*75.85%*	*54.16%*
Sex Ratio	Chhattisgarh	990 females per thousand males		
	India	*933 females per thousand males*		
Child Sex Ratio (0-6 years age)	Chhattisgarh	975 females per thousand males		
	India	*927 females per thousand males*		

3.2   Rajnandgaon at a glance

The district of Rajnandgaon is situated in the western part of the state of Chhattisgarh. Bounded by Durg in the east and Kanker in the south-east, the district is centrally connected by road and rail. The state of Maharashtra forms the western boundary of the district. The nearest airport to the district is at Mana (Raipur), about 80 km. away.

With its district headquarter at Rajnandgaon, the district is divided into four sub-divisions, 8 tehsils and 9 development blocks as shown in the table below:

Table 3.2: : Subdivisions in Rajnandgaon

Sub division	Tehsil	Block	Municipal Corporation
Rajnandgaon	Rajnandgaon	Rajnandgaon	Rajnandgaon (Nagar Nigam)
		Churria	--
	Dongargaron	Dongargaon	Dongargaon (Nagar Panchyat)
Dongargarh	Dongargarh	Dongargarh	Dongargarh (Nagar Pallika)
Khairagarh	Khairagarh	Khairagarh	Khairagarh (Nagar Panchyat)
	Chhuikhadan	Chhuikhadan	Chhuikhadan (Nagar Panchyat) Gandai (Nagar Panchyat)
Mohla	Chowki	Chowki	Chowki (Nagar Panchyat)
	Mohla	Mohla	
	Manpur	Manpur	

The three blocks of the district Mohla, Manpur & Chowki are tribal. The main tribes of the district are Gond, Kanwar, Halba & Baiga. The tribal population of the district is around 25.16% of the total population. These tribal areas are adjoining to Gadchiroli district of Maharastra and Baster district of Madhya Pradesh. The economic and social conditions of these tribes are similar to that of tribals of Baster. They mostly live in far-flung areas and dense forests. The economic activities of these tribes are focussed on tendu leaf collection and minor forest products.

Figure 3.1: Population by locality and sex
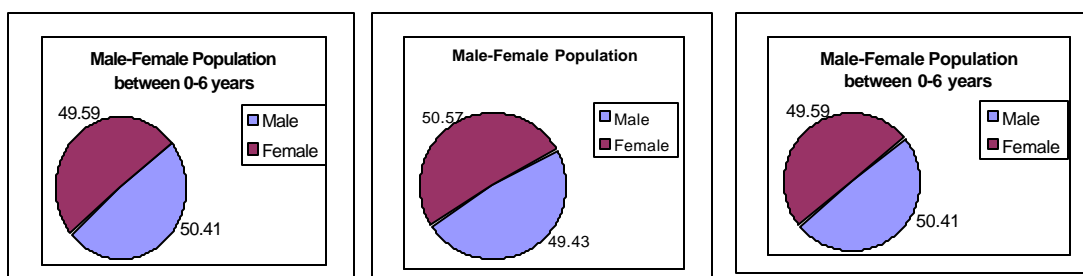
The above figures show that 81.95 percent of the total population of the district stays in rural areas. The male female ratio of the district is in the favour of women with more number of women than men. However, there is a declining trend visible in the child population. This trend is also visible from the child sex ratio, which is 984 girls per thousand boys within the age group of 0 to 6 years population. This is lower in the urban areas at 940 girls per thousand boys of this age group. The total sex ratio of the district is 1023 females per thousand males, which is on a decline, especially in the urban areas. The sex ratio in rural areas in both these categories is higher than the average and much lower in the urban areas as shown in the following table:

Table 3.3 : Sex ratio in Rajnandgaon

Area	Number of females per thousand males			Number of females per thousand males in 0-6 years age group population		
	Total	**Rural**	**Urban**	**Total**	**Rural**	**Urban**
Rajnandgaon	1023	1034	976	984	991	940
Rajnandgaon	1011	1031	971	972	986	935
Dongargaon	1031	1040	958	975	985	877
Ambagarh Chouki	1067	1071	1027	999	1000	981

Figure 3.2: Sex Ratio

3.2.1 : Comparison between sex ratio and child sex ratio

3.2.2 : Comparison between sex ratio in Surveyed areas

3.2.3 : Comparison between rural and urban child sex ratio in surveyed areas
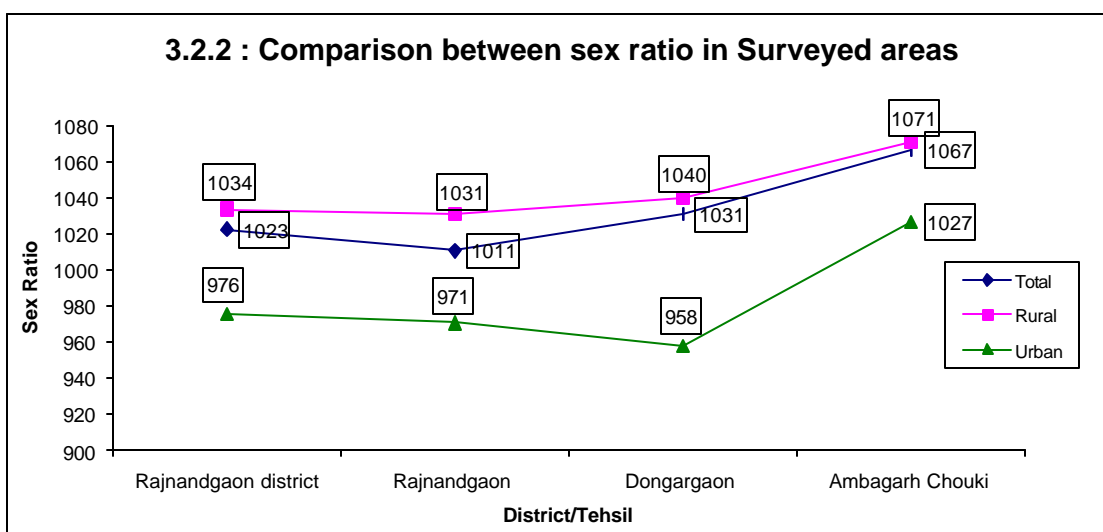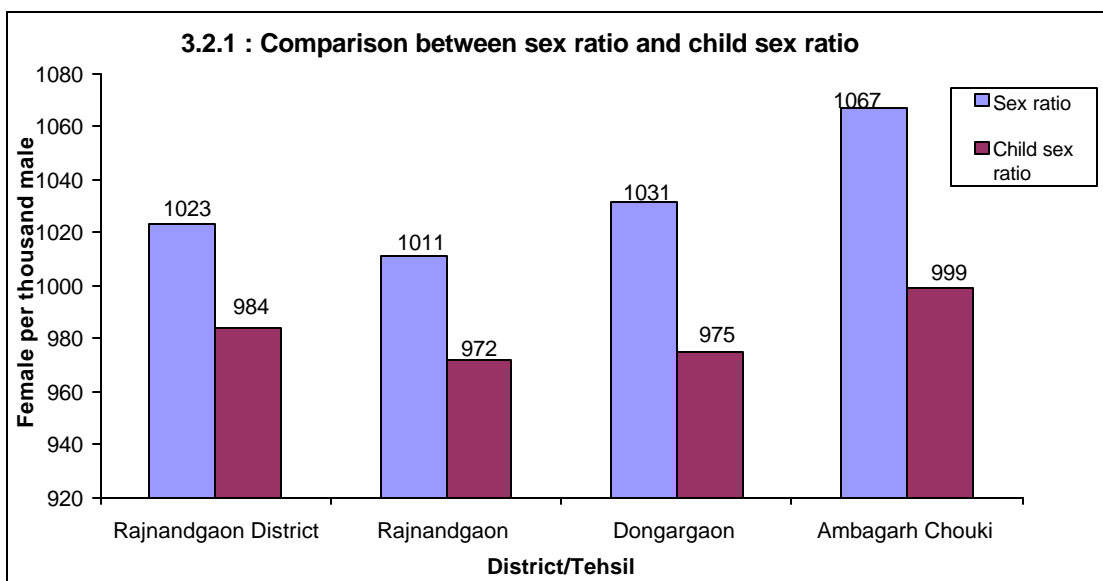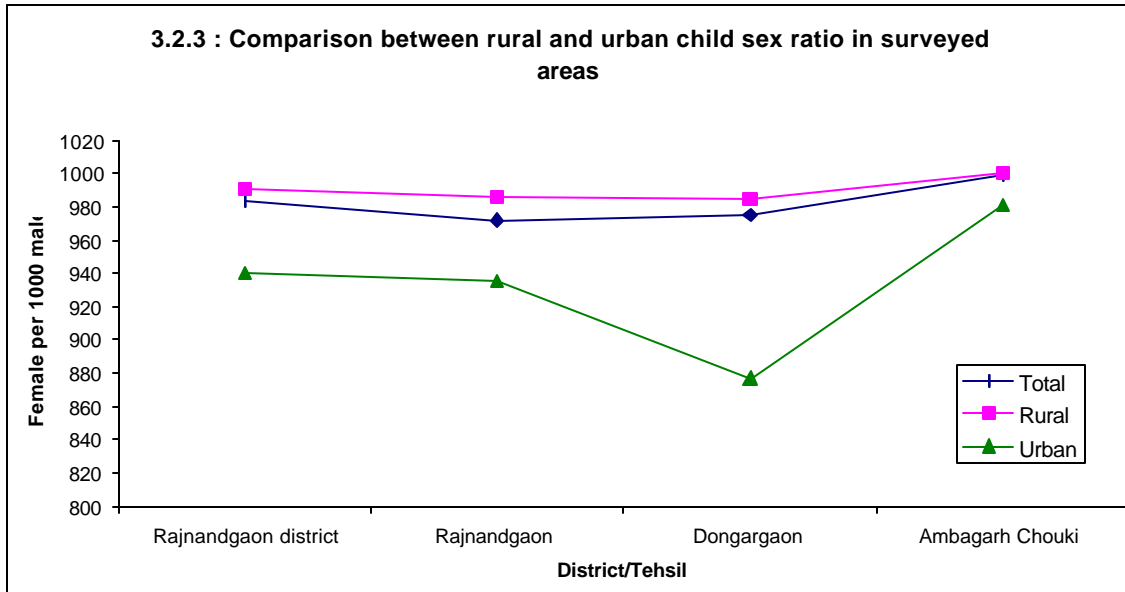
An analysis of the above figures shows an alarming trend of declining sex ratio in urban areas, especially in the context of child sex ratio. The Ambagarh chowki, however, shows lesser impact of urbanisation in both the cases when compared to other areas covered in this study. This may be due to the backwardness of this tribal dominated area. The same result is evident in the rural areas in cases of total sex ratio as well as the child sex ratio. Although the ratio of females per thousand males in both the cases in rural areas is better than the urban and the average, there is a trend of decline even in the rural areas.

3.2.4 : Comparison between sex ratio in Chhattisgarh and Rajnandgaon
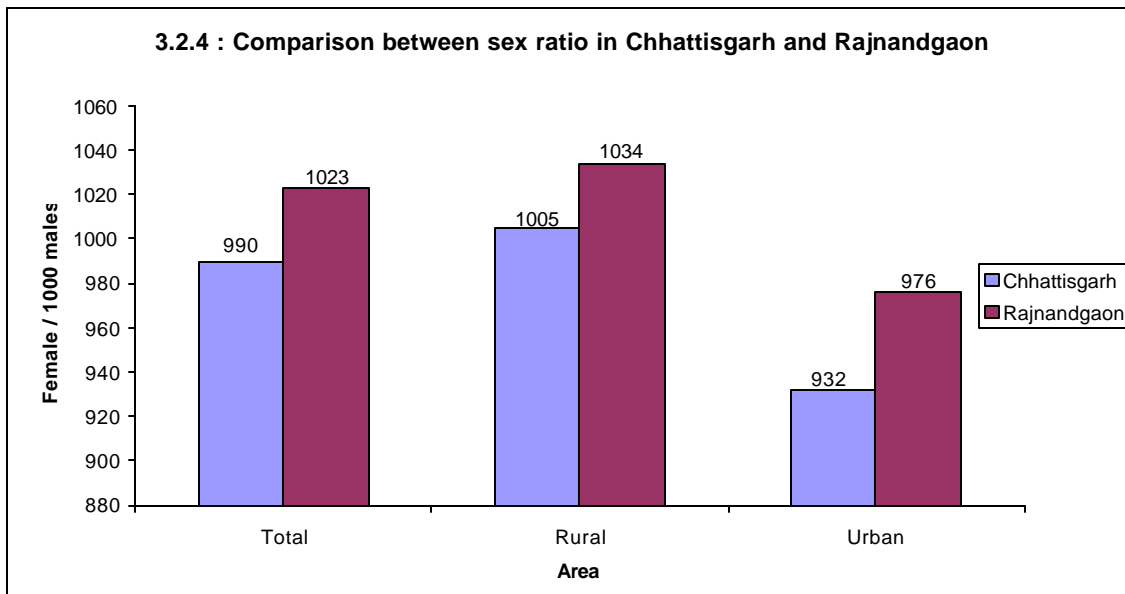
The above graph shows the total, rural and urban sex ratio in Rajnandgaon in comparison with the state of Chhattisgarh. It is evident from the graph that in both rural and urban areas, the sex ratio in Rajnandgaon is much better than the state average.

The literacy rates of the district are also better than the State average as shown in the following table:

Table 3.4: Literacy Rate

District/Tehsil	Area	Total	Male	Female
Rajnandgaon District	Rural	76.0	86.3	66.2
	Urban	82.4	90.9	73.7
	Total	**77.2**	**87.2**	**67.6**
Dongargaon	Rural	80.2	90.0	70.8
	Urban	82.8	91.3	74.1
	Total	**80.5**	**90.2**	**71.2**
Rajnandgaon	Rural	78.6	88.6	69.1
	Urban	82.9	91.2	74.3
	Total	**80.0**	**89.4**	**70.7**
Ambagarh Chowki	Rural	78.8	88.4	70.0
	Urban	89.7	94.6	85.0
	Total	**79.8**	**89.0**	**71.4**

The following graphs show comparison between the male-female and rural-urban literacy rates in different areas covered in the study. These figures clearly show that the literacy in all these areas is much better than the State average.

Figure 3.3: Literacy Rates

3.3.1 : Comparison between Male-Female Literacy rates in Rajnandgaon

3.3.2 : Comparison between Rural-Urban Literacy rates in Rajnandgaon

3.3.3 : Comparison between literacy rate of Chhattisgarh and Rajnandgaon by sex
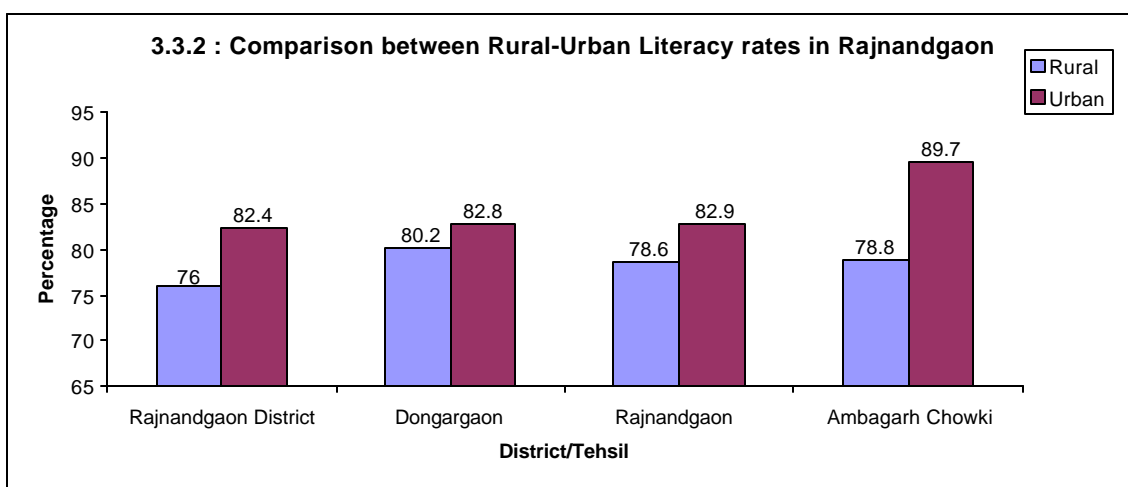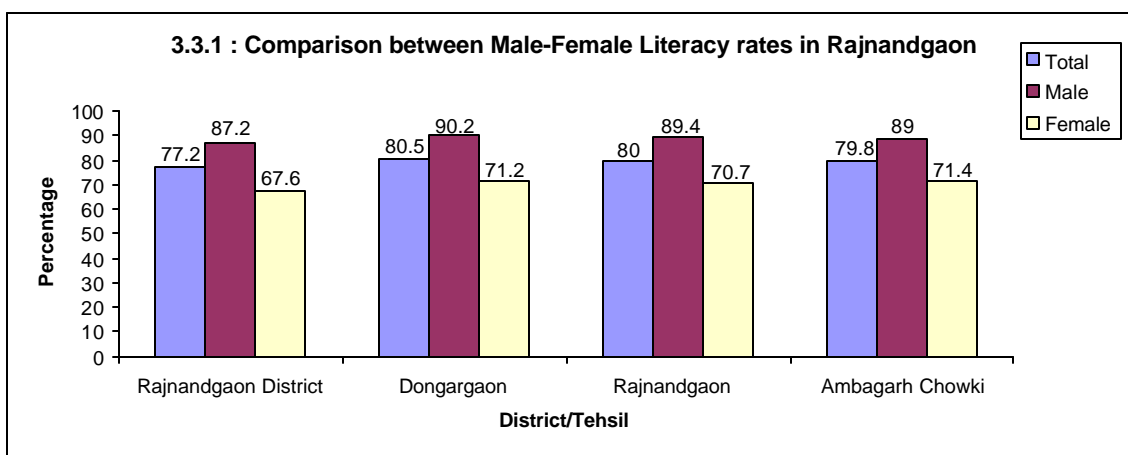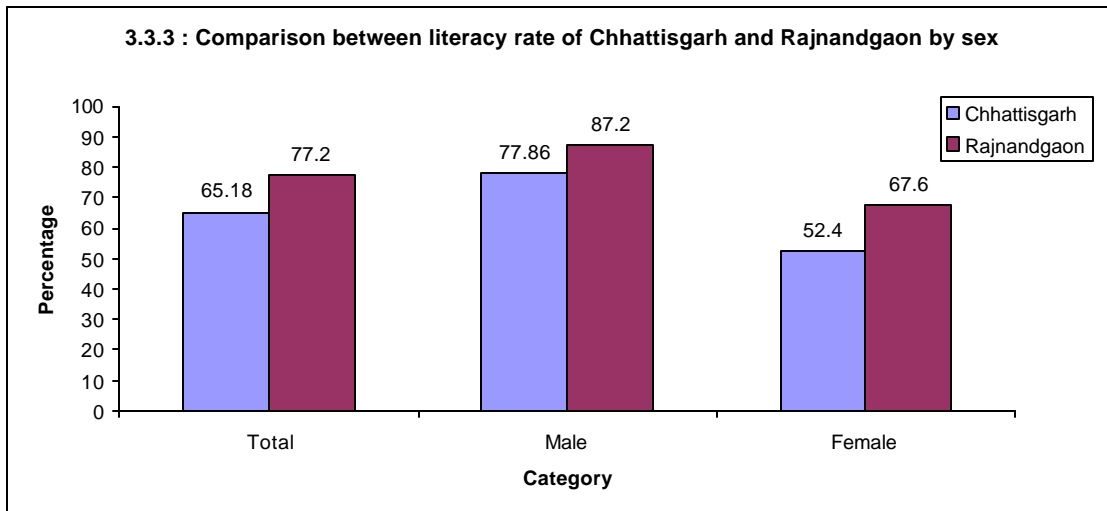
The above graphs show clearly shows how Rajnandgaon district fares better than the State on the development indicator of literacy rate also. It is in the category of both male and female sex ratio. The female sex ratio in Rajnandgaon is more than the total literacy rate of the State.

The above analysis shows that Rajnandgaon in particular and Chhattisgarh in general have shown positive trends on some of the human development indicators. Decentralized governance has been firmly established in Chhattisgarh with strong local governments in both urban and rural areas into their third term after elections under the 73rd and 74th amendments in 1994 and 1999. The Gram Panchayats and urban bodies run most social sector programmes. Some information on the membership in the rural and urban bodies in the State is given in the following table. Although the provision of one-third reservation exists, the official figures on some positions show a different reality. As per the figures available from the Directorate of Economics the representation of women ERs in the Sarpanch level and the Nagar Palika Parishad nowhere near one third. It is unbelievable that the representation of women Sarpanchs is just 3.79% and in Nagar Palika Parishad is just 21.12% despite the Constitutional obligation of one-third reservation for women. (TO BE CHECKED)

Table 3.5: Membership in Rural and Urban Local Bodies[1]

Description	Chhattisgarh State (2002)		
	Total	Women	Percentage
Members in Zila Panchayat	294	95	32.31
Members in Janpad Panchayat	2649	906	34.20
Number of Sarpanch in Gram Panchayats	9139	346	3.79
Total number of Panch in GPs	131838	41913	31.79
Total members in Nagar Palika Nig am	261	92	35.25
Total members in Nagar Palika Parishad	663	140	21.12
Total members in Nagar Panchayat	760	253	33.29

3.3   Panchayati Raj Act in Chhattisgarh

The 73rd constitutional amendment gave the Panchayat Raj Institutions, the local authority, the responsibility of economic development and social change in their own domain, especially by involving the people at all levels. It established Panchayat at three different levels namely-

• At village level - Gram Panchayat

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[1] Source: Chhattisgarh at a glance, 2002, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Chhattisgarh.

- At block level - Janpad Panchayat
- At district level - Zila Panchayat

The State act was reinforced through the formation of guiding principle for decentralization and subsequent orders by various departments for transfer of some of their powers to the Panchayats. Through this Act, people got the opportunity to make their own plans based on their own needs/ difficulties, prioritise their own total developmental agenda, and support the execution of those plans. This was possible through the provision of Gram Sabha, which has been given a Constitutional status by both the State Act and the Central Act. All villages, thus, have a gram sabha (Village Assembly). The members of a Gram Sabha comprise of persons registered in the electoral rolls related to a 'village'. Residents of a habitation of villages in Schedule Area constitute a separate Gram Sabha and thus there is more than one Gram Sabha in a village.

Norms For Gram Sabha In General Villages And Schedule Area Villages In Chhattisgarh

General Villages	Scheduled Area Villages
Revenue or forest village or group of villages	Habitation or a group of habitations or group of hamlets
Persons registered in the electoral rolls of the village within the area of Gram Sabha	There can be more than one Gram Sabha in a village consisting of a habitation group, hamlet group or group of hamlets having same culture

3.3.1   Salient Features of CGPR Act (1993) and Gram Sabha

The State Government has followed the basic structure of the constitutional provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act and has used the discretionary provisions to provide membership to MPs and MLAs to the Panchayats at the intermediate and district levels. Reservations to Other Backward Classes have also been provided to different levels in the Panchayat within the confines of the discretionary provisions of the Amendment Act. The salient features of the **CGPR Act, 1993**[2] with respect to structure of Panchayats are:

Gram Panchayat is divided into wards that elect a Panch. A ward ordinarily comprises of a population of 100. The total numbers of wards in a Gram Panchayat are not being more than 20.

On an average a Gram Panchayat has a population of 1000. Sarpanch is directly elected in a Gram Panchayat

Janpad Panchayat has a population of 50000 with minimum of 10 and a maximum of 25 constituencies.

In addition to directly elected members Janpad Panchayat also includes membership of Sarpanch and MLA.

Janpad President are elected from and among the members elected for Janpad.

Zila Panchayat has a minimum of 10 directly elected members and a maximum of 35 members.

MP (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha), MLAs and Janpad Chairpersons are ex-officio members of the Zila Panchayat.

Reservation of seats for SC, ST and OBC has been provided for at all levels of the Panchayat. Reservation for SC and ST is in their proportion to the population in the respective tier of Panchayat. Reservation for OBC is conditional, which is if total seat reserved for SC and ST jointly are more then 50 percent then no set for OBC would be reserved. It the total seats reserved for SC and ST jointly, in a Panchayat, are either 50 percent or less then 50 percent then one-fourth of the total seat would be reserved for OBC category. It is also true in the case of chairpersons of these Panchayats.

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[2] *Compendium on Panchayati Raj_Chhattisgarh By Manojma Panda, PRIA, 2004*

Reservation to women has been provided for at all levels of the Panchayat.

Reservation of seats for Chairpersons at all levels of Panchayat for women and SC, ST and OBC has been provided for in the Act.

The Sarpanch/Up-Sarpanch at the Gram Panchayat level and the President/VicePresident at the intermediate and district level can be removed through a no confidence motion The office bearers can be suspended and/or removed under conditions specified in the Act Sarpanch and Panch at the Gram Panchayat level can be recalled by the Gram Sabha.

Number of Local Bodies at each tier of PRIs in the State is given below [3]:

- Zila Panchayat   16
- Janpad Panchayat   146
- Gram Panchayat   9139

Key features of **Gram Sabhas** are as follows:

- The quorum for a Gram Sabha meeting remains one tenth, but after the Amendment of Article 6 of the Act, it is essential to have one-third of the quorum as women members.

- The Gram Sabha will work as a supervisory body, and audit and regulate the functioning of Gram Panchayats.

- Recommendations of the Gram Sabha will be binding on the Gram Panchayat.

- The Gram Sabha can approve as well as audit expenditure up to Rs 3 lakhs.

- The Panchayat Karmi (Panchayat Secretary appointed by the Panchayats but drawing salary from the state government) can be removed from his/her post only if the Gram Sabha approves it.

- All the villages within a Gram Panchayat can have separate Gram Sabhas.

- The Gram Sabha will have the right to recall the Sarpanch after two and a half years of commencement of his/her tenure.

3.3.2   Reservation of Seats in Panchayats

If the ward has been reserved for SC, only candidates from SC community can fight elections from that ward.

If the ward has been reserved for ST, only candidates from ST community can fight elections from that ward.

If the ward has been reserved for OBC only candidates from OBC community can fight elections from that ward.

If the ward has been reserved for Women, only candidates from Women candidates can fight elections from that ward.

The Reservation for women is one third of the seats for each category i.e. General, SC, ST and OBC.

3.3.3   Functions of Gram Sabha

The Gram Sabhas under the CGPR Act, 1993 have been empowered to undertake the functions of planning, selection of beneficiaries, manage natural resources, exercise control over institutions and functionaries and undertake audit and monitoring of the activities of the Gram Panchayat. The powers described below are common for scheduled and non-scheduled area. These provisions are as follows:

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[3] Source: Chhattisgarh at a Glance, 2002, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Chhattisgarh

(i)   Planning

The Gram Sabha has the powers and functions to-

> Lay down the principles for identification of schemes.

> Define the priority of schemes for the economic development of the village.

> Approve all plans, programmes and projects, including Annual Plans, for the social and economic development before they are taken up for implementation by the Gram Panchayat.

> Consider and make recommendations on the Annual Budget of the Gram Panchayat.

> Advise the Gram Panchayat in the regulation and use of minor water bodies.

> Ensure active participation of people in implementation, maintenance and equitable distribution of benefits of development schemes.

> Promote general awareness and mobilize people for community welfare programmes

(ii)   Selection Of Beneficiaries

The Gram Sabha will identify and select beneficiaries under the poverty alleviation and other programmes that are implemented in the villages.

(iii)   Manage Natural Resources

The Gram Sabha has been empowered under the Act to manage natural resources, including land, water and forests. The Act further provides that in the exercise of this function the Gram Sabha will take cognisance of the provisions of the Constitution and existing laws in the country.

(iv)   Control

The power of Gram Sabha extends to control over institutions and over plans and resources. According to the Act the Gram Sabha has the power to:

> Control institutions and finctionaries in the social sector that have been transferred to Gram Panchayats.

> Control functionaries appointed by the Gram Panchayat.

> Control local plans, resources and expenditures for such plans.

(v)   Audit and Monitoring

The Gram Sabha has the power to:

> Consider the report of audit and accounts of the Gram Panchayat.

> Ascertain and certify the proper utilization of funds for plans, projects and programmes that have been taken up for social and economic development by the Gram Panchayat.

> Ensure proper utilization and disbursement of funds and assets to the beneficiaries.

3.3.4   Specific Powers Of Gram Sabha In Scheduled Areas

Act pertaining to the schedule area has given some specific powers to the Gram Sabha. These are:

(i)   Constitution Of Gram Sabha

In the scheduled area of the state, separate Gram Sabha can be constituted for the hamlets or a group of hamlets within the village (As defined by the CGPR Act 1993). Hence there could be more than one Gram Sabha within one revenue or forest village.

(ii)   Powers To Protect Customs And Traditions

Apart   from general powers to given to the Gram Sabha, the Gram Sabha in schedule area has power to protect its customs, traditions and customary mode of dispute resolution.

(iii)   Powers Pertaining To Management And Control

The Gram Sabha in schedule area has power to manage the natural resources according to their custom and traditions. The natural resources would include Land, forest and water. The Gram Sabha can control local plans including tribal sub-plan, resources and expenditures for such plans.

PESA provides that the tribal Gram Sabha so defined would be empowered to approve all development plans, control all functionaries and institutions of all social sectors as well as control all minor water bodies, minor minerals and non-timber forest resources. It would also have the authority to control land alienation, impose prohibition, manage village markets and resolve internal conflicts by traditional modes.It is necessary that the gram sabhas of all concerned villages which are affected by the proposal of acquisition of land and whose inhabitants are being considered for re-settlement / rehabilitation and the places where they are going to be resettled must be consulted in the matter. The competent authority as per the Act should take a decision in consonance with the wishes of the concerned Gram Sabhas.

3.3.5   Relation Between Gram Panchayat And Gram Sabha

The functions of Gram Panchayat under the CGPR Act, 1993 with respect to Gram Sabha are mandatory in nature. The Gram Panchayats are required to place before the annual meeting of the Gram Sabha the following:

- The annual statement of accounts

- Report of administration of the preceding financial year

- Last audit note and replies if any

- The development and other programme of works proposed for the next financial year

- The Annual Budget and Annual Plan for the next financial year

In addition, the Gram Panchayats are also bound to place before the Gram Sabha any matter that has been asked by the Janpad and Zila Panchayat and by the Collector or any other officer authorized by him, that such matter be placed before the Gram Sabha.

The state Act also makes it obligatory for the Gram Panchayat to carry out the recommendations of the Gram Sabha that have been made under the mandatory provisions of the Act.

3.3.6   Annual Meeting Of Gram Sabha

According to the CGPR Act, 1993 every Gram Sabha in the state of Chhattisgarh has to hold its annual meeting 3 months prior to the end of the financial year, which starts from the 1st of April of the one year till the 31st of March of the next year. Hence the Gram Sabha should ideally have its annual meeting in the month of December the agenda of which should include the following:

Annual accounts of the Gram Panchayat

Administrative report of the previous year

The proposed development activities for the coming financial year

Evaluation of the last audit report of the Gram Panchayat of the last financial year

Discussions on the annual budget of the Gram Panchayat and the programmes for the next (coming) financial year

Further any other issue, which has been sent, by the Janpad Panchayat or Gram Panchayat or the Collector which on which the Gram Sabha needs to take a decision will also be discussed in this meeting.

Special Meeting

Besides these four meetings, meeting can be called for additional reasons-

o   If the Gram Panchayat feels it necessary to convene a meeting on particular issue

o   If the Zila or Janpad Panchayat orders the Gram Panchayat to do so

o   If the Collector as representative of the State Government to discuss on certain matter

In case the villagers intend to have a meeting then-

o   One third of the voters give in writing to call for a meeting.

o   The written application is to be given to the Panchayat Secretary.

o   It is necessary to call a meeting within 30 days of such written application.

The meeting of Gram Sabha shall be held at the Headquarters of the Gram Sabha. Gram Sabha meeting can be called by giving a notice in seven days in advance, and in exceptional circumstances with three days notice. Notice of every meeting of the Gram Sabha shall specify date, time, place and business to be transacted. The notice of the meeting (Form 1) shall be published- By affixing a copy of notice at conspicuous places in the Gram Sabha area; and by making an announcement by beat of drum in the Gram Sabha area.

4   Data analysis and Interpretation

This chapter primarily highlights the findings of the study based on the information collected from the women elected representatives and the other key stakeholders. The section has been divided into socio-economic profile, political profile, facilitating factors, constraining factors, and suggestions for improving effectiveness. These findings are discussed below:

4.1   Socio-economic profile

This section of the findings relate to the socio-economic status of the women elected representatives covered in the study. One of the surveys done by Anandhi (2002) revealed that most elected women members of panchayats come from situations of acute economic deprivation and lack of social entitlements (Anandhi S 2002). In other words, Anandhi finds that while state intervention has ensured women's formal political entitlement in panchayat institutions, there is an imbalance between political and socio-economic entitlements that has made women's participation in the public sphere ineffectual. These women are not necessarily handicapped by illiteracy, but have only minimal educational qualifications and most members are married and have a status of dependence within their families. It is in this context that an analysis of these socio-economic (age, marital status, educational qualification, professional qualification, occupation, family structure, means of livelihood etc) is discussed below for identifying the spaces for mainstreaming in a holistic manner.

4.1.1   Age

As shown in the table below, out of the total WERs covered in the study in both rural and urban areas, most of the women were above 30 years of age, majority more than 35 years. This trend was similar both in rural as well as in urban areas. One possible reason for such a participation in the local self-governance institutions could be that these women are mostly free from their child rearing and bearing responsibilities and have other women at home to take care of the family (daughters, daughter-in-laws). Only two out of the 30 WERs in the rural areas were between 20-30years of age.

Other key stakeholders also shared their perception that women who have smaller children at home cannot perform well as elected representatives. Only those women can perform well who have other women at home to take care of their household chores in their absence. Also single/widowed/deserted women also receive support from the community and do better because of less restriction on their mobility.

Table 4.1: Table showing Age of the WER in GPs and ULBs

Age	Type of local governance				Total	
	Urban		Rural			
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
20-30	-	-	2	6.7	2	5.0
30-35	2	20.0	6	20.0	8	20.0
35+	8	80.0	22	73.3	30	75.0
Total	**10**	**100.0**	**30**	**100.0**	**40**	**100.0**

4.1.2   Marital Status

Marital status with increasing age and maturity proves beneficial for the women, especially in rural areas, as maturity and marriage gives them legitimacy to move around more freely in the community. Most of the WERs were married (85%) within the age group of 30 years and above. Another factor that facilitates women's participation in local-self governance is their widowhood. 10% of the WERs

both in rural and urban areas were widows. One of the WERs was unmarried, while one more was deserted.

Table 4.2: Marital Status of the WERs in Rural and Urban areas

Age	Type of local governance				Total	
	Urban		Rural			
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Unmarried	1	10.0	-	-	1	2.5
Married	8	80.0	26	86.7	34	85.0
Widowed	1	10.0	3	10.0	4	10.0
Single/ divorced/ deserted	-	-	1	3.0	1	2.5
Total	**10**	**100.0**	**30**	**100.0**	**40**	**100.0**

4.1.3   Educational Qualification

Low educational attainment is often used as justification for discrimination against women in all aspects of life. It is one of the important factors that negatively influence the performance of the elected representatives, especially women elected representatives. It further adds to the inequalities between women and their male counterparts within all the institutions by keeping them away from the decision-making processes, be it marriage, family or the local self-governance. Illiteracy and lack of education is an important barrier to women's success in local governance because "poor levels of literacy often leads women to devalue themselves and therefore compromise their capacity for decisive interventions both within and outside the family" (Tambia 2003). When women are illiterate or uneducated, and they often are relative to men, they are subject to ridicule and are not respected by the other male members of the panchayats (ibid.). Nussbaum (2003) also finds that illiterate women are less likely to seek a role in government and less likely to have influence if they do attain one. Illiteracy is also a major drawback when it comes to dealings with officials and others above the village level and it tends to necessitate a dependence on more literate males (Niranjana 2002).

Out of the total women elected representatives, about one-fourth were illiterates and another 40% were barely literates (20% could only sign their names and another 20% had attended primary school). The analysis of the rural urban literacy amongst women also reveals that most of the WERs in the urban areas were educated except one WER. One third had attended high school while another 30% were atleast graduates. In the rural areas, none of the WERs had attended college. Only one WER in rural areas had attended high school. About one third were illiterates, another 26.67% could just sign their names and 20% had attended primary school and could barely read and write.

Table 4.3: Educational qualification of the WERs by type of local governance

Educational Qualification	Type of local governance				Total	
	Urban		Rural			
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Illiterate	1	10.00	9	30.00	10	25.00
Signature Only	0	0.00	8	26.67	8	20.00
Primary	2	20.00	6	20.00	8	20.00
Mid School	1	10.00	6	20.00	7	17.50
High School	3	30.00	1	3.33	4	10.00
Degree and above	3	30.00		0.00	3	7.50
Total	**10**	**100.00**	**30**	**100.00**	**40**	**100.00**

This low educational attainment amongst the WERs also reflects on the need for a basic level of education amongst them as a part of the training curricula designed for these representatives. It is only through their education and awareness and not just through their mere presence that their participation can become meaningful within the institution of local self-governance.

Figure 4.1: Educational Qualification of WERs in rural and urban areas
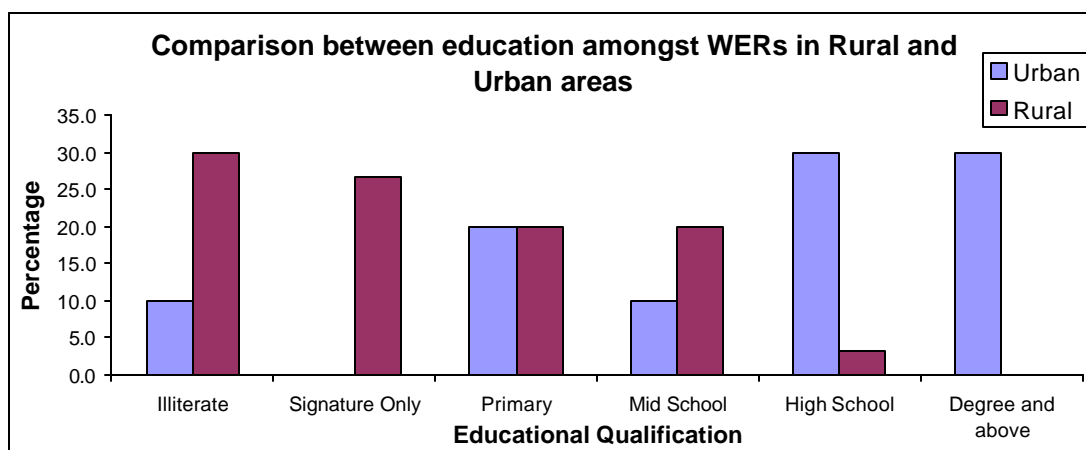
4.1.4 Household Characteristics

The household characteristics (type of household, caste/class, means of livelihood, income etc) are important in determining the socio-economic entitlements of the individuals. It is worth noting that majority of the respondents in the urban areas came from joint families while in rural areas most of them belonged to nuclear families. Our assumption in this context was that women from joint families join politics more because there are other women at home to take care of the household chores. However, an analysis on this factor shows that women from nuclear families also come forward to contest elections, especially from the lower socio-economic strata, when the seats are reserved for women candidates.

Table 4.4: Type of Family in rural and urban local bodies.

| Type of Family | Type of local governance | | | | Total | |
| | Urban | | Rural | | | |
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Joint	6	60.0	13	43.3	19	47.5
Nuclear	4	40.0	17	56.7	21	52.5
Total	**10**	**100.0**	**30**	**100.0**	**40**	**100.0**

An analysis of the means of livelihood in the survey area shows that majority of the families of the WERs were dependent on agriculture (70% in rural and 20% in urban). The dependence on agriculture in urban areas has been found in Dongargaon Nagar Panchayat region where the source of livelihood for people is predominantly agriculture despite the area being included in the urban locality. The following table shows the household occupation in the rural and the urban areas.

Table 4.5: Household Occupation of the WERs in the rural and the urban local bodies

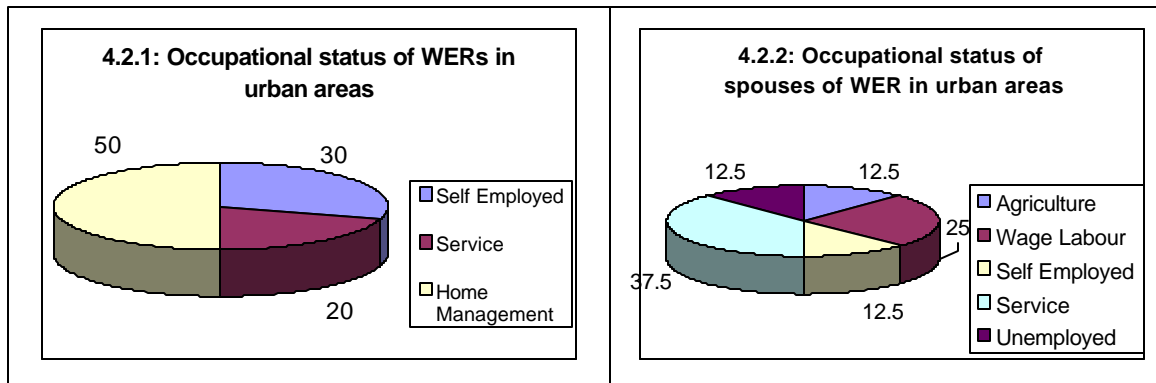| Household Occupation | Type of local governance | | | | Total | |
| | Urban | | Rural | | | |
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Agriculture	2	20.0	21	70.0	23	57.5
Agricultural Labour	-	-	7	23.3	7	17.5
Wage Labour	2	20.0	-	-	2	5.0
Self-Employed	2	20.0	2	6.7	4	10.0
Services - Govt./Private	4	40.0	-	-	4	10.0
Total	**10**	**100.00**	**30**	**100.00**	**40**	**100.00**

4.1.5   Occupational Profile

This section deals with the occupational profile of the WERs. The table below shows a comparison between the occupations of the WERs and their spouses, which reveal very interesting facts. Although half of the WERs in urban areas were not employed and were home managers, a significant number contributed to the household economy through gainful employment. Thirty percent were running some small business or enterprise of an informal nature while two of them were engaged in salaried jobs. In the rural setting also majority of the WERs were engaged in income generating activities ranging from work in their own agricultural fields (20%), agricultural labourer (40%), waged labour (3.3%) and own business (10%). These women were making a significant contribution to their family income. This sometimes also acts as a barrier in participation in Panchayat activities as there are implications of loss wages / income also. Only 26.7% WERs were not engaged in any economic activity but were home managers.

Amongst the spouses of the WERs, a similar trend was observed. In rural areas, majority were involved in agricultural activities in their own fields (65.4%) or as agricultural labourers (19.2%). Only two persons were earning salaried income while the other two were self-employed. Only one person was unemployed due to his physical handicap and was bed ridden.

Table 4.6: Occupational profile of WERs and their spouses in rural and urban areas

Occupation	Type of local governance				Total	
	Urban		Rural			
	Self	Husband	Self	Husband	Self	Husband
Agriculture	-	1 (12.5)	6 (20.0)	17 (65.4)	6 (15.0)	18 (52.9)
Agricultural Labour	-		12 (40.0)	5 (19.2)	12 (30.0)	5 (14.7)
Wage Labour	-	2 (25.0)	1 (3.3)		1 (2.5)	2 (5.9)
Self Employed	3 (30.0)	1 (12.5)	3 (10.0)	2 (7.7)	6 (15.0)	3 (8.8)
Service	2 (20.0)	3 (37.5)	-	2 (7.7)	2 (5.0)	5 (14.7)
Home Management/ unemployed	5 (50.0)	1 (12.5)	8 (26.7)		13 (32.5)	1 (2.9)
Total	10 (100.0)	8 (100.0)	30 (100.0)	26 (100.0)	40 (100.0)	34 (100.0)

Figure 4.2: Comparison between occupational status of WER and their spouses

4.2.3: Occupational status of WER in rural areas

- Agriculture
- Agricultural Labour
- Wage Labour
- Self Employed
- Home Management

20, 40, 3.3, 10, 26.7

4.2.4: Occupational status of spouses of WER in rural areas

19.2, 7.7, 7.7, 65.4

- Agriculture
- Agricultural Labour
- Self Employed
- Service
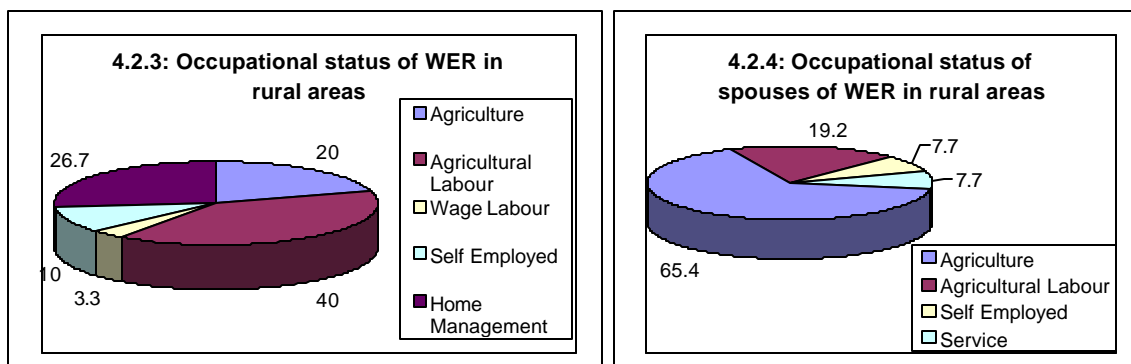
The above four charts show a comparison between the occupations of WERs and their spouses in rural and urban areas.

Table 4.7: Occupational status by Educational Qualification

Occupation	Education						Total
	Illiterate	Signature Only	Primary	Mid School	High School	Above Degree	
Agriculture	1 (10.0)	2 (25.0)	1 (12.5)	2 (28.6)			6 (15.0)
Agricultural Labour	4 (40.0)	3 (37.5)	3 (37.5)	2 (28.6)			12 (30.0)
Wage Labour	1 (10.0)						1 (2.5)
Self Employed	2 (20.0)		1 (12.5)	2 (28.6)	1 (25.0)		6 (15.0)
Service						2 (66.7)	2 (5.0)
Home Management	2 (20.0)	3 (37.5)	3 (37.5)	1 (14.3)	3 (75.0)	1 (33.3)	13 (32.5)
Total	10 (100.0)	8 (100.0)	8 (100.0)	7 (100.0)	4 (100.0)	3 (100.0)	40 (100.0)

An analysis of the occupational status by educational qualification shows that out of the WERs engaged in agriculture or agricultural labourers, most were illiterates or mere signatories. Others had attended primary or middle school. None of these women had attended high school or college. Out of the three women who had graduated from college one was not involved in income generation activities while the other two were engaged in salaried jobs. Most of the WERs having qualification above high school belonged to urban areas. Most of the illiterates were from rural areas and were engaged either as agricultural labourers or waged labourers. Educational qualification not only worked in their advantage in contesting the elections but also in understanding their roles and responsibilities.

4.2 Political Profile

The political profile of the WERs includes information regarding the political background of the family of the WERs, their positions in the local self-governance institutions, the tenure of service, the nature of seats on which they contested (reserved/unreserved), motivation for contesting election, the decision for contesting election etc. These factors are important to understand the factors that motivate women to contest elections and participate in the lowest level of governance. An analysis of these

factors also reveals the influence of other stakeholders on the decisions these WERs take in their political career.

4.2.1 Political history of family

As shown in the table given below, 37.5% women belonged to families, which had involvement in socio-political activities. These involvements were in the form of membership in caste panchayats, welfare activities of the community etc. 27.5% women belonged to families with some of the family members as elected representatives. These ERs were mostly the father-in-laws (45.45%) or brother in laws (18.18%). The posts held by these people were mostly Sarpanch (36.36%) and Panch (27.27%). 90% families of the WERs in the urban area had some or the other party affiliation while the same figure for the families party affiliation in rural areas is 36.7%. On the whole half of the WERs covered in the survey belonged to families with party affiliation.

Table 4.8 : Political History of Family

Description	Area		Total
	Urban	**Rural**	**Number / Percent**
Family's involvement in socio-political activities	5 (50.0)	10 (33.3)	15 (37.5)
Elected Representative in Family	2 (20.0)	9 (30.0)	11 (27.5)
Party affiliation of Family with ERs	9 (90.0)	11 (36.7)	20 (50.0)
Total	**10 (100.0)**	**30 (100.0)**	**40 (100.0)**

Figure 4.3: Elected Representatives in Family
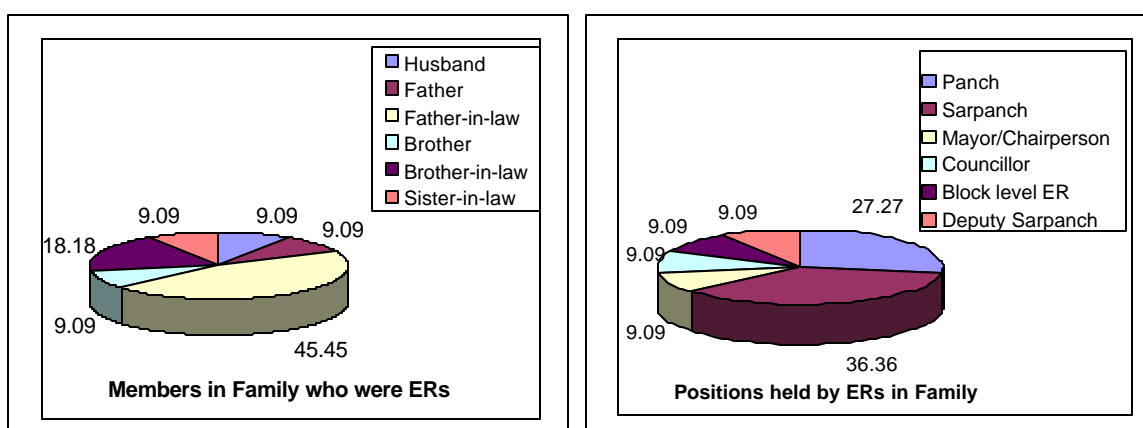
4.2.2 Political Profile of WERs

In the rural areas out of the 30 WERs 86.7% were Panches and 13.3% were Sarpanchs. Although the study covered five women headed Panchayats, one of the Sarpanch was not available during the data collection process. Therefore, in her place, one of the Panches was interviewed. All the WERs covered in the urban areas were Councillors. On the whole, therefore, 65% were Panch, 10% were Sarpanch and the remaining 25% were Councillors.

Table 4.9: Positions held by WERs

Position Held	Rural		Urban		Total	
	1st Term	2nd Term	1st Term	2nd Term	1st Term	2nd Term
Sarpanch	6.67	6.67	0.00	0.00	50.00	50.00
Panch	76.67	10.00	0.00	0.00	88.46	11.54
Councillor	0.00	0.00	90.00	10.00	90.00	10.00
Total	**83.33**	**16.67**	**90.00**	**10.00**	**85.00**	**15.00**

Majority WERs (85%) were first timers and only one out of 10 women ERs in urban areas and 5 out of 30 WERs in rural areas were serving for the second term. Of the four Sarpanches, two were serving for the first time and the other two were serving for the second term.

Table 4.10: Number of contestants by category of reservation and rural urban area.

Seat	No. of Contestants	Rural	Urban	Total
Women	Uncontested	50.00	-	20.00
	1 to 2	50.00	33.33	40.00
	3 to 4	-	33.33	20.00
	5 to 6	-	33.33	20.00
	Total	**6.67**	**30.00**	**12.50**
SC/ST/OBC	Uncontested	50	-	50
	1 to 2	50	-	50
	3 to 4	-	-	-
	5 to 6	-	-	-
	Total	**6.67**	**-**	**5.00**
SC/ST/OBC Women	Uncontested	61.54	-	48.48
	1 to 2	30.77	42.86	33.33
	3 to 4	3.85	28.57	9.09
	5 to 6	3.85	28.57	9.09
	Total	**86.67**	**70.00**	**82.50**
Total	Uncontested	60.00	-	45.00
	1 to 2	33.33	40.00	35.00
	3 to 4	3.33	30.00	10.00
	5 to 6	3.33	30.00	10.00
	Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

All the respondents were elected on reserved seats, majority (82.5%) contesting from seats reserved for women from SC/ST/OBC category (86.7% in rural areas and 70% in urban areas). Only two out of 40 WERs had contested from seat reserved for (2nd timers) SC/ST/OBC category (women or men). Out of the five women who had contested on seat reserved for women from general castes, three were in ULBs. 70% in ULBs and 86.7% in GPs had contested from seats reserved for women from SC/ST/OBC castes.

Forty five percent WERs (18 out of 40) won uncontested and that too only in rural areas. Of those who won uncontested, 89% (16 women) had contested from seats reserved for SC/ST/OBC Women. Another 35% WERs won against one or two candidates. This shows the nature of nomination on the reserved seats for women especially in rural local bodies.

The general understanding of reservation is that women can contest only on those seats that are reserved for women. The general seats are referred to as seats reserved for men. Even the political parties do not nominate women candidates from seats that are not reserved for women. Of the very few WERs who were aware that they could contest from unreserved seats also, very few showed willingness to contest from unreserved seats. The reasons quoted for this choice included family and political interference. They said that if the seats were not reserved for women, their male family members would contest in their place. Some WERs who were serving for the second time said that

their political parties would not nominate them from their own constituency next time as the seat would not be reserved for women. An interesting case study has been given in the box narrating a similar story.

One Third Reservation: A glass ceiling?

Sharada Tiwari, a Councilor in Rajnandgaon Municipality has served in the Municipality for two terms. With a family background in politics, (her father and her brother were Mayor in the same Municipality earlier) she got elected as a councilor for the first time on an unreserved seat. However, because of her affiliation with Congress Party, for her second term she had to contest election on a reserved seat for general caste women. During the third term also she is being nominated from a reserved seat because the people and the party perceive her as an effective leader who can get elected from any adjoining constituency and nominating her from her constituency, an unreserved seat this time, would block a seat for male candidate. She would, therefore, be contesting from a different constituency again like previous elections.

She was a practicing lawyer before she came into politics. She joined politics because of her own interest since her childhood and has successfully served for two terms now. She is respected a lot in the Community for her honest dedicated work. She is the President of the Lioness Club in the town and the Secretary of Kasturba Mahila Mandal. The Prinicipal of the Women's College in town was appreciative of her work and her active participation in the "*Jan Bhagidari Samiti*" for the development of the college. Her education and confidence due to family background in politics is observed as the main facilitating factor for her good performance. Amongst the successes of her work, optimal utilization of funds for development of women and gender justice were the most important ones.

In the view of her husband, Sharada is a homemaker and a good social worker at the same time and she balances both the roles effectively. For Sharada, the reputation of her family and her husband's support are the main facilitating factors. In absence of these she would not have been able to reach this position. The major constraints for elected woman representatives, according to her, are lack of education and responsibility within the household. *"No woman compromises on her family responsibilities to be effective in her role as an elected representative. Unless there is full support from the family members, she cannot perform well."* She believes that women deal with household problems everyday in their lives and if they are in power and are given the scope to work for the community, they understand the problems of both women and men better and can deal with them more effectively than men.

Sharada Tiwari, at the age of 53 is free from her household responsibilities and is looking forward to the next elections. Although she has the confidence to contest and win from her own constituency, which is an unreserved seat this time, she will contest from another constituency that is reserved for women. What a strategy for keeping the representation of women in Local Self-Governance at 33% only and not more….

4.2.3   Contesting the election- Decision and Motivation

For most of these women the reserved seat for women was an opportunity to work for the development of the ward or community. The primary motivations for contesting elections for most of these women have been development of the ward or community, social service and individual interest in politics. The decision to contest election, however, for most of them was pressure from other members in community, family and associational groups as shown in the table and the chart below:

Table 4.11 Decision for Contesting Elections

Who decided	Percent
Self	24.19
Husband	16.13
Other Family members	4.84
Women's Groups	12.90
Previous ERs	3.23
Political Parties	4.84
Community Members	33.87
Total	**100.00**

Figure 4. 4: Decision for contesting election
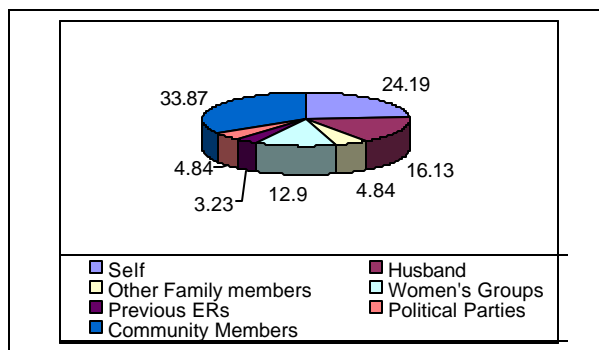
Key factors influencing their decision to contest were community members (33.9%), self-motivation (24.2%), husband (16.1%), and Women Groups (12.9%). The table above and the chart show clearly that for most of the WERs other people decided that they should contest the election. Only in 24.19 percent cases the women themselves decided that they would contest the election.

4.3 The role and functions of Women as Elected Representatives

Women's empowerment is important for all people as "the greater empowerment of women tends to reduce child neglect and mortality, cut down on fertility and overcrowding, and more generally, broaden social concern and care" (Sen 2001). Women's participation in local governance has, in many cases, led to improvements for women, their families, and their communities. For example, women panchayat members have often raised issues pertaining to the well-being of the community and families by striving to increase literacy rates, improve preventive health care, strengthen pension schemes, maintain roads, and by engaging in forest conservation (Basu 2003). Many similar findings are quoted based on research studies conducted on the performance of women elected representatives. To understand the performance of WERs in the areas covered under this study, questions related to areas of concern for the WERs, the agenda proposed by them, acceptance or rejection of their proposals, their reactions etc were studied. Another aspect of their performance, their self image, which is an important factor contributing to their active participation in the governance process was also studied.

4.3.1 Areas of Concern

Although WER have raised issues of well being of the community and families on various occasions, the study reveals that most of these WERs have not been able to transcend the narrow agenda of infrastructure development, a visible indicator of development. Major area of concern for most of the WERs (82.2%) was infrastructure development. Health (8.9%) and education (6.7%) emerged on lower priority for most of the WERs. The table below shows the areas of concern for most the WERs covered in this study.

Table 4.12: Areas of concern

Areas of Concern	Urban	Rural	Total
Education	16.67	3.03	6.67
Infrastructure	66.67	87.88	82.22
Health	8.33	9.09	8.89
Women	8.33	0.00	2.22
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Figure 4.5: Areas of Concern in rural and Urban areas
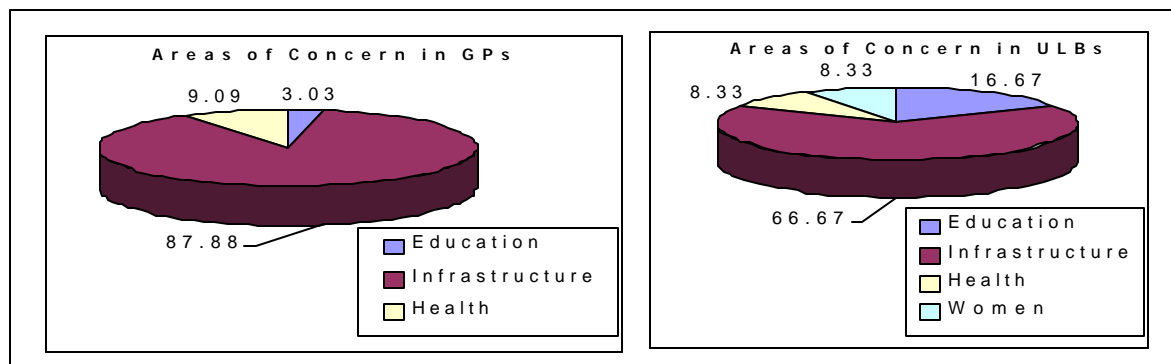
4.3.2   Agenda Proposed

Almost all (95.7%) the WERs had proposed some or the other developmental agenda in their tenure of service. Only 4.3% WERs had not proposed any agenda so far. Like the area of concern, the key agenda proposed by WERs included basic infrastructure (road and electricity). Water and Sanitation form the second area of interest for these WERs that includes water, drain, and toilets. The issues lower in priority were women and child development and education. While some WERs proposed construction of civic facilities that included community centre and temples, others focussed on access to government schemes for social security (pensions, employment generation etc). The only difference observed in the agenda proposed is on priority to education in urban areas and health in rural areas.

Table 4.13: Agenda Proposed

Sl. No	Agenda	Urban	Rural	Total
1	Water and Sanitation	34.48	32.20	32.95
2	Basic Infrastructure	37.93	37.29	37.50
3	Civic Facilities	3.45	5.08	4.55
4	Health (women & child)	3.45	11.86	9.09
5	Education	10.34	3.39	5.68
6	Govt. Schemes	10.34	10.17	10.23
	Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Figure 4.6: Agenda Proposed in Rural and Urban areas
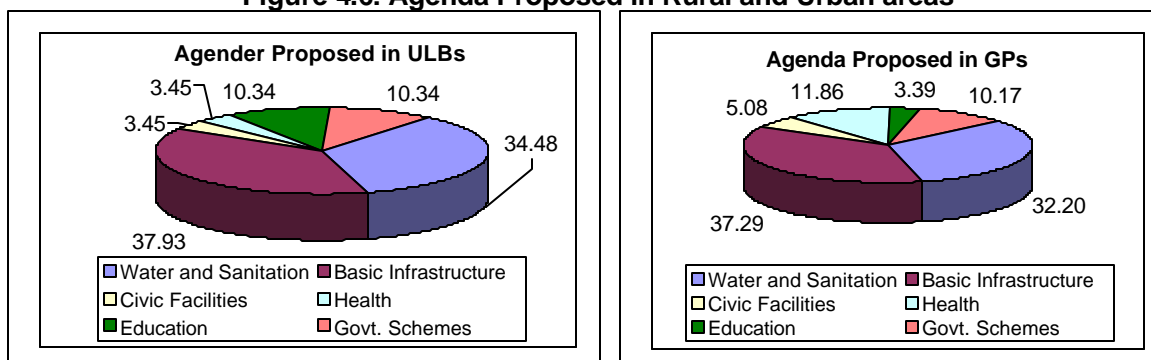
4.3.3   Other stakeholder's perceptions of WER's Performance

The interview of the other key stakeholders reveals that there is a divided opinion on the effectiveness of WER's leadership. Most of the WERs are perceived effective as facilitators and monitors but not as initiators or decision-makers. Their capabilities are questioned on grounds of lack of required capabilities. These capabilities, however, are based on the standards set for and by male ERs.

Most of the other stakeholders believe that although reservation has led to presence of WERs in local self-governance institution, they are not involved in the activities and decisions taken, especially in Panchayats. The main actors in these institutions are the Sachiv (secretary), the Male elected representatives, and the husband/the son of the WER.

The other key stakeholders recognise the contribution of WERs in two-main areas:

(i)   Service delivery and monitoring especially in cases of delivery of government programmes related to family welfare. WERs take personal interest in awareness generation during campaigns on pulse polio, sanitation, vaccination etc. These other stakeholders also appreciated the extended role of WERs as animators in generating awareness. The personal touch that is given by the WERs is missing in MERs and that is why the way in which the WERs can reach the households and families in generating awareness on government schemes, in monitoring school dropouts and motivating the parents to send their children to school.

(ii) Promoting associational groups like Mahila Mandals / SHGs, which not only increase women's income generating capacity but also provides strength to cause of women. These groups not only help the WERs in putting up their demands in Panchayats but also help in implementation of activities and awareness generation.

The difference that the other stakeholders see in agenda proposed by women is their focus on dealing with social evils like alcohol selling, gambling and infrastructure not only for men but also specifically for women like pond for women (mahila ghats), toilets etc. None of the WERs, however, mentioned these areas of concern or their achievements in fighting these social evils. It is therefore, for them, to see that these achievements also have value and it is not always necessary to evaluate their performance only on the visible indicators of development.

4.4 The Process and Institutions which facilitate their participation in governance

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment provided legitimate representation of the women in the local self-governance institutions. But this Constitutional provision has not been found enough for actual participation of women in the decision-making processes of the institution. The study tried to find out the factors that facilitated their participation in the Panchayats and the Municipalities, which have been discussed in this section.

4.4.1 Personal Traits

Amongst the various factors that facilitated women's participation in the Panchayats and Municipalities, personal characteristics, the basic attributes associated with women's effective leadership were self-confidence and ability to speak in public. These are the basic attributes of leadership associated both with women as well as men. The other institutions of the larger society, however, have influences on these, which sometimes become constraining in actual application of these traits into practice.

Table 4.14: Personal traits that facilitate performance in LSG

Sl No.	Quality	Area		Total
		Urban	**Rural**	
1	Self Confidence	30.43	28.21	29.03
2	Ability to speak in public	21.74	30.77	27.42
3	Education	4.35	2.56	3.23
4	Mobilising resources	17.39	12.82	14.52
5	Awareness/Experience	4.35	5.13	4.84
6	Good Behaviour	21.74	20.51	20.97
	Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

The above table shows that in urban areas the main characteristic that facilitates their performance is self-confidence (30.43%) followed by ability to speak in public and good behaviour (21.74% each). In rural areas, however, more emphasis is given to ability to speak in public (30.77%) followed by self-confidence (28.21%) and good behaviour (20.51%). The other factors like mobilising resources, awareness/experience and education also facilitated their performance. It is clear from the table that education was a facilitating factor for very few women in both rural and urban areas. Lack of education was more acute in rural areas. Education as an attribute was given importance by other key stakeholders also. They shared that education and awareness of the roles and responsibilities was one of the preconditions for meaningful participation of women as elected representatives.

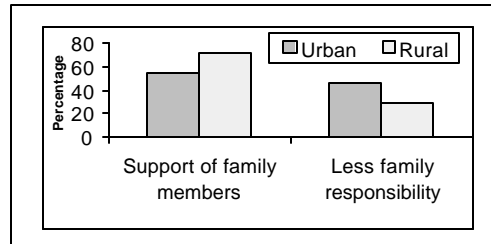### 4.4.2 Facilitating factors at family level

Most of the WERs reported that their families were very supportive as far as their participation in the governance was concerned. This support was majorly seen in two areas- the support of the members in

sharing the household chores, especially for women who were middle-aged and had other younger women at home to take care of the household responsibilities and the support of the male members was seen in helping the WERs get their tasks done, help in decision making, playing active role in Panchayats in their place etc. None of the WERs perceived the support of male members in Panchayat activities as interference. They thought that their male counterparts were supporting them by doing all that was required of the WERs as they were more educated, aware and had a better understanding of the systems and procedures.

Table 4.15: Facilitating factors at family level

Description of Factors at family level	Area		Total
	Urban	Rural	
Support of family members	54.55	71.88	67.44
Less family responsibility	45.45	28.13	32.56
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

**Figure 4.7: Facilitating factors in family**

4.4.3 Facilitating factors at community level

The institutions of governance exist within the larger society and do not remain uninfluenced by the societal factors. There are different factors within the society / community that also influence the functioning of the WERs. The table below shows the factors identified by the WERs as those that facilitated their participation in the Panchayats or Municipalities. These majorly included their affiliation with different groups within the community.

Table 4.16: Facilitating factors in community

Description of factors within community	Area		Total
	Urban	Rural	
Affiliation with political parties	33.33	38.89	37.04
Affiliation with CBOs/NGOs	22.22	38.89	33.33
Caste associations	44.44	22.22	29.63
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Figure 4.8: Facilitating factors in Community
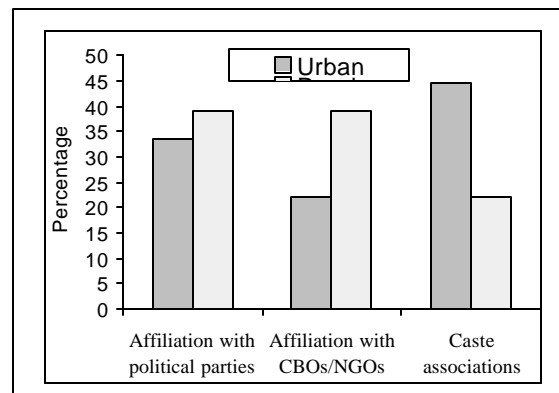
Several examples were quoted of the use of the women's power / SHGs by both the WERs and the other key stakeholders in showing the strength of the WERs' voices. These have been effectively used in awareness generation, fighting evils like alcohol selling etc.

For most of the WERs, Caste associations have given them support in working in their wards and sometimes the background of the family in caste groups has helped them contest the elections with support from these people. The caste groups stood by their side in all the decisions made, in all the critical times when support was required. This was more obvious in urban areas (44.44%) than in rural areas (22.22%). Other factors in community in the urban areas were affiliation with political parties and affiliation with CBOs/NGOs. For the WERs in rural areas, the most important factors were affiliation with political parties and CBOs/NGOs (38.89% each). Affiliation with NGOs helped them in getting training on their roles and responsibilities or awareness on different issues. Association with CBOs like SHGs, as discussed helped them show women's power. Caste associations, although important was not rated as high as the rating received in urban areas. In totality, however, affiliation with political parties was considered the most important factor that helped them gain support of the community members. Power for these women was derived from the political party. This facilitating factor on the one hand supported the WERs (and the MERs) in performing their roles and on the other hand constrained the performance of the other ERs from the opposition parties. This also divided the community on party lines, which is not a major concern for the ERs in power.

4.4.4   Facilitating factors at policy level

As far as other factors that facilitated women's participation in governance are concerned the most important factor identified was the one-third reservation for women on both general seats and seats reserved for scheduled castes/tribes. Both the WERs themselves and the other key stakeholders interviewed in the study were of the opinion that women's participation in the governance institutions at the local level was possible only because of the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional amendments wherein one-third seats were reserved for women as a category. Most of the WERs, as revealed in the seats on which the WERs got elected, contested elections because the seats were reserved for women. They received support from their caste groups, community, and family only because of this factor. Their individual interest to contest elections was also a result of the inspiration drawn from WERs in power in the earlier terms. However, this factor has also been restrictive in the sense that most of the WERs interviewed were not sure whether they would contest the next election. This decision according to them would be based on the reservation of the seat for women. They shared that their decision to contest depends on the reserved seats because of several reasons. First, if the seat is reserved for women, the family would support their candidature (as their male counterparts derive power from them). Second, the community would also support a woman only when the seat is reserved for women. Otherwise, their male counterparts would be considered as better choices. Last but not the least, the political parties would also nominate them only from the seat that is reserved for women.

4.5   The Process and Institutions which inhibit their participation in governance

Many studies reveal that the number of constraints that women face is far greater than the number of their successes as WERs. These constraints are not only limited to their individual incapacities but are also a result of other institutions within the society and may be termed as cultural, structural and political barriers to women's participation in local self-governance institutions. It must be noted though that these barriers are not exclusive and instead act to reinforce the strength of the others. For example, the cultural constraints, the customs and traditions that bind women within their households act as barriers to women's participation in public spheres also serve to reinforce political and structural barriers. For example, the cultural norm of *purdah* or *restrictions to her mobility* or *speech in public, her role within her household* reinforces structural barriers such as when meetings are organised in public places where other men are present, when their other household chores are due, women by default either do not participate or even if they do participate, their voices remain unheard and they remain silent. Likewise, the structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions and way meetings are held (venue, timing etc) reinforce cultural norms about women's inability to participate in politics and the public sphere. These constraints have been divided under four main categories for the purpose of analysis in this study- individual constraints, family level constraints, institutional level constraints and policy level constraints.

4.5.1   Personal constraints

Individual constraints relate to the characteristics of the WERs that limit their participation in local self-governance institutions. Although there is a clear difference in the constraints identified in rural and urban areas, one common constraint, which was perceived to be the most important constraint both rural and urban by the WERs in, both rural and urban is lack of education or low level of education amongst the WERs. This constraint was felt by maximum number of WERs in both rural and urban areas, more evident in rural areas though. 68.18% WERs mentioned lack of education or low education as their constraints in participating in Panchayat activities and decisions. This constraint was also identified more in rural areas because majority of the WERs in rural areas were illiterates. It was because of this that they were dependent on the Panchayat Secretaries and other male members.

Table 4.17: Individual Level Constraints

Sl. No	Constraints	Type of local governance		Total
		Urban	Rural	
1	Lack of self confidence	0.00	4.55	3.13
2	Lack of initiative	10.00	0.00	3.13
3	Inability to speak in public	0.00	4.55	3.13
4	Low/No education	30.00	68.18	56.25
5	Lack of leadership qualities	0.00	9.09	6.25
6	Inability to resolve conflicts	10.00	0.00	3.13
7	Low level of awareness	30.00	0.00	9.38
8	No training	0.00	9.09	6.25
9	Inexperience	20.00	0.00	6.25
10	Belonging to lower caste	0.00	4.55	3.13
Total		**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Other constraints identified in urban areas are low level of awareness, inexperience, inability to resolve conflict and lack of initiative. None of these factors were identified by the WERs in the rural areas. The constraints at individual level added to the low education amongst the WERs in rural areas were lack of leadership qualities, no training, lack of self confidence, inability to speak in public and belonging to lower caste. This was identified as an important constraint more in the rural areas. One noticeable feature of the factors identified at individual level by the WERs themselves is that in rural areas these factors relate to the low self-esteem, which for most of the WERs was a result of low level of education. These factors have been given in the table and the chart.

Figure 4.9: Individual Constraints in rural and urban areas
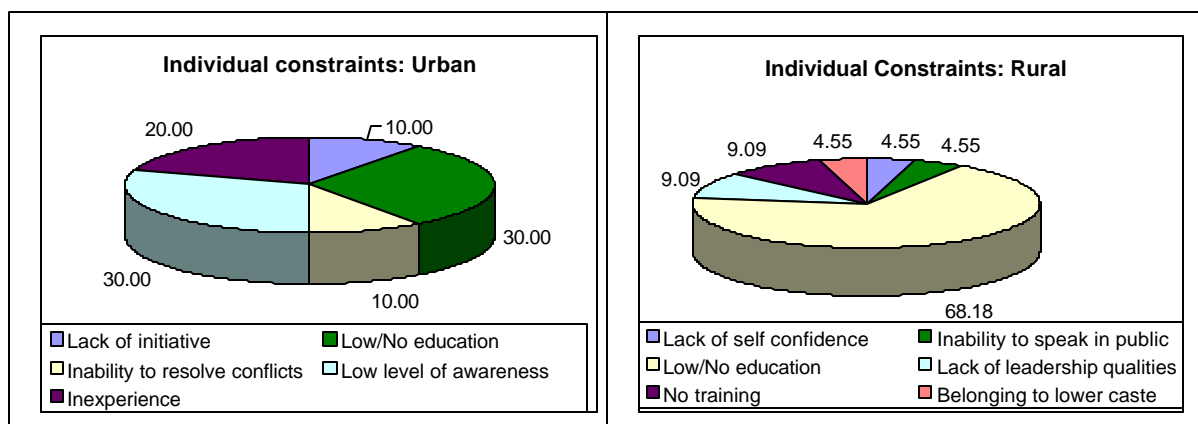
When asked whether they were able to overcome these constraints, none of the women in rural areas responded positively. However, 50% of the respondents in urban areas shared that they were able to overcome the constraints faced at individual level with support from other family members, especially husband, who helped in raising their awareness level. For some, this support also meant that their family members read out the official documents to them and made them understand the complexities.

4.5.2 Relational Constraints

Another set of constraints that were identified by the WERs in performing their roles as ERs were factors related to their relationships with other key stakeholders within and outside the institution of governance. This section reveals the findings of the study on such constraints as reported by the WERs themselves and other key stakeholders that include Colleagues (Female and Male ERs), Family Members, other people from the villages and Government officials including Panchayat Secretaries.

(i)   Family Level

Most of the WERs received support from family members in performing their role as WER. However, amongst the constraining factors at family level identified by some of the WERs, one was household chores and responsibilities within the household. Women said that they could not participate in the Panchayat activities all the time because of their household responsibilities. They could be present in the Panchayat office only in the afternoons, when the household tasks were completed. One of the active WERs of the Rajnandgaon Municipality had not participated in any of the meetings for the last one and a half year because of her working daughter's complicated pregnancy and delivery. However, now that her grandchild was old enough and could stay with the maid at home, she intends to play an active role again. The other WERs shared that they were able to overcome this constraint by either adjusting their timing (waking up early and completing the work early) or through support from other family members - mother in-laws or other women in the family in the household responsibilities.

An important aspect of the constraints as identified by other key stakeholders was interference of the male family members in the working of the WERs. An example to quote would be the husband of the woman Sarpanch who handles dealing with all the contractors. The people were of the view that the Sarpanch is an honest woman, but her husband is involved in manipulating the accounts because of which the village people, sometimes, have their grievances against the Sarpanch. During this discussion, however, some other people, including the Secretary stopped the two people from sharing this opinion and said that they were from the opposition party that is why they were against the Sarpanch's husband. But it is worth noting here that this husband of the woman Sarpanch is the same person who got old age pension in front of the researcher team (although the family is not BPL by any standards).

(ii)   Community Level

Another level of cultural barriers to the WERs in their participation in the local self-governance is rooted in the community. These factors, as discussed, reinforce the societal customs, norms and traditions that influence women's participation in the public spheres. The table below shows a comparison between the community level constraints identified by the WERs in the rural and urban areas. Out of the community level constraints identified by the WERs in rural and urban areas, in rural areas WERs identified only traditions and customs as a constraint. In urban areas however, a number of factors like caste discrimination, traditions and customs, safety issues, abusive language of people, and individual interests of people and political conflict. None of the WERs in the rural areas had been able to overcome the constraint. However, in the urban areas, using the 'safety net' of women's groups/SHGs has helped these women in overcome these constraints.

The other key stakeholders also reported a similar opinion as far as the traditions and customs and caste discriminations are concerned. On other aspects, there was not much reporting by the other key stakeholders.

(iii)   Colleagues

In their relationship with the other male and female colleagues, the WERs reported that in most of the cases the colleagues were supportive, especially if they were from the same political party. However, in the cases where the WERs did not find the colleagues supportive, the factors identified were somewhat same in rural and urban areas but the weightage given to each was different. The following table shows a comparison between the constraining factors in their relationship with their colleagues.

In urban areas, individual interest was identified as the most important factor that affected their relationships followed by lack of support from male colleagues and female colleagues respectively. In rural areas, the most important factor identified was indifference of the colleagues towards the WERs

followed by individual interest and lack of support from male colleagues. None of the WERs identified non-cooperation from the WERs. It is worth noting that indifference of colleagues was not identified in urban areas while non-cooperation from women colleagues was missing in rural areas. Is it because of the illiteracy and lack of awareness of the WERs in the rural areas that the other colleagues do not give due recognition to their voices? Does cooperation from the WERs mean understanding and strong bonding between the WERs or is it their non-participation?

Table 4.18: Constraints faced with colleagues in rural and urban areas

Sl. No.	Description	Type of local governance		Total
		Urban	Rural	
1.	Individual interest	57.14	25.00	45.45
2.	Indifference	0.00	50.00	18.18
3.	Lack of support from male colleagues	28.57	25.00	27.27
4.	Lack of support from female colleagues	14.29	0.00	9.09
	Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

The discussion with other key stakeholders brought out the fact that illiteracy and lack of awareness of the WERs and resulting interference of the male members of their families in the Panchayat affairs was the main reason for non-cooperation from the male ERs or their indifference. Lack of support from the female colleagues was mentioned due to affiliation from different political parties in the urban areas. WERs from different political parties had different agendas and hence, some responses showed lack of cooperation from the WERs.

(iv) Government officials

Most of the WERs interviewed in the survey did not have any interaction with the government officials. However, those who did get an opportunity to interact with the officials stated that the attitude of indifference and disregard towards the WERs and corruption in the government offices were some of the constraints that affected their interaction with the government officials. None of these women, however, shared that they had overcome this constraint.

As far as their relationship with the Panchayat Secretaries is concerned, an acute paternalistic attitude of the Panchayat Secretaries was very obvious. This was not perceived as a constraint for the WERs as for them that was the only source of information and awareness, a one-way information channel, not only for awareness of roles but also in decision making through awareness of the bureaucratic norms for compliance. This limits their roles as ERs as whatever they do is as per the instructions from the Secretary to meet the administrative requirements, which sometimes may be manipulation also. This does raise a question whether the decision makers are the Secretaries or the ERs?

4.5.3   Institutional Level

These factors in this section would deal with the structural constraint at the Panchayat level. This would include the mechanisms set in the institution for effective participation of WERs other than the one-third-reservation policy. This is important because the although the reservation creates legitimate spaces for women to participate in the local self-governance institutions absence of mechanisms to ensure such participation, a gender sensitive atmosphere to make both women and men feel a mutual sense of comfort, respect for each other within the institution, which is a part of the larger institution of society, a feudal hierarchical system with the deep-rooted values of patriarchy. To assess the institutional level constraints discussion with the WERs were also held on trainings, meeting timing, venue etc. Experiences of the WERs and the perceptions of the other stakeholders reveals that although women are there within the institution due to the reservation of seats, most of them have not attended any trainings (as also discussed in the individual level constraints). Most of the meetings are organised during the morning hours when the WERs are not able to attend. Lack of mobility also

constrains WERs participation in meetings held in block and district levels. It is in this context that we conclude that an institution that looks gender sensitive with the allocation of resources for women in different programmes, one-third compulsory election of women in the institution actually is blind to the other roles and responsibilities of women within and outside their households. It does not ensure translation of the provisions on paper in reality through sensitive planning and implementation of the programmes where women could effectively participate. Wouldn't creating mechanisms for their participation in the activities of the institution and a more comfortable work environment ensure their participation in a real sense also?

4.5.4   Policy Level

The role of the state also becomes important in terms of structural and political barriers to women's participation in local governance. One problem that panchayats in general face is that the "the resources and planning capabilities of the panchayats are relatively limited by state legislatures who determine how much power and authority panchayats will yield" (Basu 2003). As Mayaram (2002) points out, the panchayats have received inadequate delegation of powers and financial resources from the state and the empowerment of both female and male representatives is conditional upon the empowerment of panchayats. So, even if women representatives have overcome cultural and structural barriers to participation in local governance, they may not be able to accomplish tasks and be successful because the state has not provided enough resources or support. The state plays a role as well in the continuation of the exclusion of women from participation in local self-governance because it reproduces patriarchal ideologies and government members who are linked to panchayats are usually male and are not always supportive of women's development or women panchayat representatives.

In other words, "the state bureaucracy with which the elected members of the panchayats have to constantly interact to get development work done, does not respond to the women members adequately…the overarching presence of a patriarchal outlook in both state and non-state domains conspires against the translation of women's political entitlements into active participation in the public sphere" (Anandhi S 2002). Anandhi S (2002) also points out that the state has failed to endow women with economic and social entitlements making it difficult for women to actively participate in local governance.

Political constraints, like party memberships, can also hamper female elected representatives. With the increasing power of political parties in India, women's reserved seats are used as a way to gain an edge over a competing political party. The women representatives themselves are powerless and are intimidated or forced by parties to contest elections and then are caught in the crossfire between parties (Niranjana 2002).

Out of the total number of respondents in the study 45% shared their grievances against the institutional policies of the Panchayats. Of these, the main constraints mentioned were lack of honorarium and rotation of seats in both rural and urban areas. The third constraint mentioned was political factionalism. This reason was very clearly spelt out in discussions with other key stakeholders and the WERs themselves in response to other questions. However, the reason for including this constraint in this section is the lack of controlling mechanisms on the part of the policy makers and ensuring non-politicizing of the lowest level of the governance system for a more decentralized planning and development. Elections at higher levels are held with contestants being nominated from different political parties. At this level, although there are no nominations or direct membership to the political parties, their indirect support to the individual contestants results in division of the larger interest of the community into smaller segments on party lines. This not only affects the socio-political relationships amongst the individuals in the community but also influences the development process negatively.

One another factors identified by WERs and other stakeholders in rural areas was no confidence motion against the WERs. Though none of the WERs had faced a no-confidence motion themselves, the fear of no-confidence motion is there in their minds. They've heard of stories of such actions

against WERs and this sometimes makes them agree to the pressures put in by the other ERs or the Panchayat Secretaries.

Table 4.19: Policy level constraints faced by WERs in rural and urban areas.

Sl. No	Description	Type of local governance		Total
		Urban	Rural	
1.	Rotation of seats	33.33	20.00	25.00
2.	No confidence motion	0.00	10.00	6.25
3.	Honorarium	50.00	60.00	56.25
4.	Political factionalism	16.67	10.00	12.50
	Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

The issue of no honourarium for ERs in rural areas and low honourarium in urban areas was a common area of concern for the WERs in rural and in urban areas. The ERs (both women and men) stated that in absence of fixed honourarium the WERs, especially from economically backward families could not participate in the activities of the Panchayats. A panchayat secretary stated that since the ERs do not receive any honourarium, a small share from the development programme undertaken at the village or the ward level would be important. This was so because the family of the ER would not appreciate her wasting of time without any return, especially when she used to work as a waged labour earlier and was contributing to the family income earlier. After getting elected she participates in all the activities of the panchayat and visits office everyday. For her time she needs to be paid some amount otherwise the family would not allow her to participate.

Similar was the response for rotation of seats. Most of the WERs in the rural and in the urban areas were not aware that they could contest elections from the unreserved seats also. For them the unreserved seats were reserved for men. They called those seats *"Purush Arakshit Seat"* (seat reserved for men). They did not see their role in the Panchayat beyond the present term unless the seat was again reserved for women. They said that since the seat on which they contested would not be reserved for women in the next election, their political party would not nominate them in the next elections. Even those, like Ms. Sharda Tiwari in the Rajnandgaon Municipality, shared that rotation of seat was a major constraint. To give an example, she stated that all the people of her ward were aware of the work that she had done for the ward and if she contested from the same ward, she would definitely win. However, since in the next elections the seat would not be reserved for women, her party would nominate her from another ward, which would be reserved for general caste women. For the women who get elected for the first time, by the time they become aware of their roles and responsibilities and are prepared to perform their role effectively, their tenure is over and in the next elections, they have no future unless they decide to compete with men from their ward without any political party support. As already discussed in previous sections, affiliation to political party plays a very important role in the elections at the local level also. And political parties also do not support women from unreserved seats as that would block male candidate's seats.

5   Conclusion

This chapter summarises the findings and conclusions towards strengthening women's leadership in the local self-governance institutions and mainstreaming gender in these institutions for realisation of the gender equality principles. It also raises the concerns that would need to be addressed by appropriate authorities if women's participation in the panchayats and the municipalities is to be made effective. It also defines the preconditions for achieving the goal of gender equality within the institutions of local self-governance. Unless these are addressed, WERs' rights would continue to be violated, they would continue to be used as a proxy leader, treated with an attitude of indifference and their struggle for a legitimate space within the institutions would become a never ending process.

If the opportunities for their leadership and participation in public forums are to be utilised properly, the crucial gaps in the mainstreaming of women in leadership roles have to be addressed for a gender sensitive working environment. These would need to acknowledge the different levels of constraints that women elected representatives face such as the structural, the political and the cultural constraints. Efforts would need to be made for developing strategies for making the governance structures more gender equitable and gender sensitive and ensuring that their legitimate presence in numbers, which is a result of the Constitutional Provisions, also fetches them legitimate acceptance and respect within and outside the institution without discrimination or comparison value.

The study has identified several barriers of effective participation of women in local self-governance institutions. These have also been supported with the findings of similar other studies which agree to cultural, structural and political barriers, and advocate for creating legitimate spaces for gender equality in the governance institutions not only in the form of increased participation of women in governance in terms of numbers and decision making but also in terms of restructuring of gender and power relations. The key findings of the study are:

5.1   Who are the WERs?

Most of the WERs interviewed in the study (almost all the WERs of the Panchayats/Municipalities were covered in the study) were middle aged, mature by age standards, mothers/mother-in laws who had other younger women at home to take care of their families.

Illiteracy and low literacy was common amongst these women.

Most of them (about two thirds) contributed to the household economy through gainful employment. Only two women, who had attained education above degree level, had salaried income. Some others who were self employed and were active in the Panchayats and Municipalities had to compromise on their income to participate in the local-self governance institutions.

More than one fourth of the WERs belonged to families with a political history, that is, they had some family members as elected representatives earlier. About one third to a half of these women belonged to families with traditional/ social leaders at village/caste level.

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

All respondents were elected on reserved seats, majority as first timers. Only two out of the total respondents contested from reserved seat for SC/ST/OBC category (not women from this category). These women, however, were the second timers. The general understanding of reservation is that women can contest only on those seats that are reserved for women. The general seats are referred to as seats reserved for men.

About half of these women won uncontested. All of these women who won uncontested were from SC/ST/OBC category and the key factors influencing their decision to contest were community members (caste groups), husband, or Women Groups. This shows the nature of elections that are contested at the lowest level with seats reserved for women, especially from lower castes. It is not surprising to see that out of these women who won uncontested, about three fourth had some or the other person in the family working as an elected representative earlier. It would not be wrong to conclude that since, in the seats were reserved for women, they contested to preserve the seat of their male counterparts for the next elections. This conclusion is strengthened with the fact that the key factors influencing their decision to contest for majority of the WERs were community members (caste groups), husband and women groups.

5.3   How women ERs perform?

There is a divided opinion on the effectiveness of the leadership of the WERs. They're perceived effective as facilitators and monitors but not as initiators or decision-makers. Their capabilities are questioned on two grounds – one due to lack of required capabilities (education, mobility, ability to speak in public etc.), the same standards that are set for men and in most cases by the male ERs; and second due to their presence without involvement, where the Sachiv (secretary), male ERs and the husband/son of the woman ER become the main actors by default.

Their contribution is recognized in two main areas- service delivery and monitoring (pulse polio, sanitation etc) and promoting associational groups (Mahila Mandals / SHGs). Most of the other key stakeholders interviewed during the study appreciated the extended role of women ERs as animators in generating awareness on government schemes, enrolment of school dropouts etc. that is missed out by the male ERs. The difference that the other stakeholders see in agenda proposed by women is their focus on dealing with social evils like alcohol selling, gambling and infrastructure not only for men but specifically for women like pond for women, *mahila ghats*, toilets etc. They consider the personal touch in these developmental programmes as one of the major achievements of the WERs.

As far as the areas of concern and agenda proposed by WERs is concerned, the WERs themselves did not consider these minor agendas as their achievements. They also evaluated their performance on the standards of more visible outcomes like infrastructure development (road, water and electricity). Women and child development, health and education were much lower in their priority as far as achievement was concerned.

5.4   Relationship between women ERs and other stakeholders

Women's leadership in local self-governance is largely welcome by all other key stakeholders. The Constitutional Amendments and the resulting one-third reservation for women in the local self-governance institutions has been stated to have a very positive impact on the development of women's leaderships in the local areas. However, the potency of women as efficient and capable leaders is recognized with some preconditions identified for their efficiency in terms of education, awareness, association with groups and ability to speak in public. They perceive women leaders effective in engendering equitable distribution of the resources and benefits.

Another aspect of the relationship between the WERs and the other stakeholders was clearly visible in the 'paternalistic attitude' of the Panchayat Secretaries, which was more acute than the male ERs. This, in most of the cases revealed one way information channel between the secretaries and the woman Sarpanch not only for awareness of roles but also in decision-making. Support from male ERs was in form of cooperation in agenda proposed, support in travel etc.

Perception of women ERs does not state a different story. Most of the women ERs shared that their colleagues and government officials were supportive. This support however, was in the form of guidance in official dealings and showing consensus on issues raised by them. Husband's role in such dealings was, however, another factor identified as a support. Those who shared that they did not receive any support from colleagues and government officials shared that all the work is done by Secretary and Sarpanch and they were not informed about any scheme, programme or activities of the Panchayat. Fear of dealing with the complex administrative procedures doubled with their own incapacities of lack of awareness and low education was another factor that influenced their relationship with the government officials within and outside the Panchayats.

5.5   Constraints faced by Women ERS

At *personal level* for majority of the WERs low/no education was the main factor that affected their performance as an ER. The only ways in which they could overcome this constraint was the help of other family members, especially husband, who would read out things for them, raise their awareness level and help them in decision-making. Low mobility and lack of capabilities in terms of education, political awareness, public speaking/dealings, lack of information etc were the factors perceived by other stakeholders that constrain the WERs' performance.

Balancing between the household chores and Panchayat work/meetings was the major constraint at *family level*, with which most of the WERs were struggling. Some of the WERs, however, shared that their family members, especially their husbands helped them solve this problem, either by sharing the household responsibility or by helping in the work at Panchayats. As far as the perception of other key stakeholders is concerned, they shared that at family level it becomes very difficult for the WERs who contribute to the household economy to balance their productive roles and official requirements. There are no mechanisms in place to compensate for the losses incurred in terms of opportunity cost in participating in Panchayat activities. They shared that family's requirements are more important and hence, most of the WERs do not participate in Panchayat activities, if it involves loss of an opportunity for wage.

Majority of the other stakeholders think that women can maintain a balance between home and work in Panchayats/Municipalities. However, they've set some preconditions for such balancing of roles-

Redistribution of roles between husband and wife

Support from other family members in sharing household responsibilities

Honorarium for their work at Panchayats.

They shared two main apprehensions against their performances – first, young mothers/mothers with responsibility at home will not make good ERs and second, the husband's interference and misuse of the authority of the women ERs will not let them perform well.

At *community level* caste discrimination and traditions and customs were perceived as barriers to their participation in the Panchayat activities, which they could deal with only by conforming to the norms of the society. Other concerns were related to their safety, abusive language used by people in community and rivalry with people of opposite parties. It was only through the 'safety net' of women's groups/SHGs that some of the WERs could overcome these constraints. Membership and affiliation to the SHGs/women's groups helped them in increasing their mobility and providing a collective voice on issues of concern like alcohol selling.

At *policy level*, issues of honorarium, rotation of seats, political factionalism and no confidence motion were the major perceived constraints. The only constraint that one or two WERs could deal with amongst these was political factionalism through their own negotiation skills and use of collective voice of the women's groups.

At *institutional level* the major barriers were the individual interests of the colleagues, the attitude of indifference amongst the MERs and lack of support from both male and female colleagues. Here also the only safety net out was the use of womanpower and their own negotiation skills that too only on rare occasions. At government office level, corruption and indifference were perceived as the main problems which none of the WERs were able to overcome. The only way out was to withdraw from these transactions and let the male colleagues take care of them. Some of the other key stakeholders, including the male elected representatives shared that coercive and non-cooperative behaviour of male colleagues in Panchayats was one of the factors that compels women to stay away from Panchayat activities.

5.6 Suggestions for improving performance at three levels:

The study also brought out some suggestions by both WERs and the other key stakeholders interviewed. These suggestions can be categorised into three levels of suggestions-

- **Cognitive level**- Most of the WERs and the other stakeholders suggested that some capacity building initiatives could be undertaken for raising the awareness level of the WERs. Clear understanding of the roles would help them undertake their responsibilities in a better way.

- **Perception level**- Enhancing the self-image of the WERs and change in attitude of others was a common suggestion given by both WERs and the other stakeholders. Lack of awareness and low education/illiteracy would need to be tackled for raising their self-image. Some short duration capsule literacy courses could be run for these ERs with the capacity building trainings organised for them immediately after the elections.

- **Relational aspect**- Improving relationships with male ERs/equation between husband-wife, Colleagues, SHGs, Community was another level of suggestions received by the respondents of the study. In several cases, the strength of the SHGs proved to be beneficial for the WERs in putting their agenda forward with the collective voice of the womanpower. Such linkages could be built up more strongly and some mechanisms need to be put in place for balancing the equations with the male members, both in the Panchayats and the households.

5.7 Key Action Points / Challenges

Some key areas of concern, however, remain unanswered and strategies need to be worked out to deal with these:

Is one-third reservation translating into a glass ceiling or the 'outer limit'? How do we develop an understanding amongst the community members, the WERs that the unreserved seats are not reserved for men? How do we also sensitise the political parties for not limiting the nomination of women candidates only from the reserved seats? This is indeed a difficult task but how do we ensure that women's participation is not restricted to just the one-third reservation.

How to transcend the narrow agenda of infrastructure development? This is not to undermine the importance of infrastructure development but recognising the importance of these without missing out the focus on the "big" picture of all the facets of governance, the interrelationships etc. This would involve efforts to achieve gender equality also in allocation of resources and not just using an insignificant part of it for catering to women's needs. This also means giving value to the other invisible developmental issues like women and child, health, education, etc and not just evaluating their performance through the visible outputs like roads and community centres.

How to inculcate 'the dream of my panchayat/ULB'? The findings of the study state that the narrow agenda of the political parties define the developmental activities of the Panchayats. How do we translate the decentralisation of the planning and implementation at the lowest level of governance into a reality? How do we proactively and imaginatively develop a vision of the "Gram Swarajya" and not the rajya of the centralised top-down bureaucracy or the political agendas?

How do we address issue of individual performance at the ward level in comparison to the aggregate developmental agenda? This is related to the previous point in the sense that most of the times, the larger interest of the community gets defeated in the tussle for individual achievements. How do we fill in the gaps resulting from such individual interests?

How to deal with the attitude of indifference at different levels, especially government officials, which discounts WERs' areas of concern, disregards their presence? How do we make the bureaucracy more responsive – both horizontally and vertically?

How do 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 WERs?

How appropriate and useful are the evaluations of WERs' 'effective performance' on 'visible indicators' such as roads, electricity, etc? How do we develop value for other factors of societal structures and mores (caste discrimination, untouchability) that confine and inhibit the political functioning of WERs in particular as it is a cause for double discrimination?

How do we influence and sensitise the family members and enhance support and sharing of responsibilities (reproductive roles) at home? This does not only refer to the relationships with the other female members but also balancing the equations with male members for creating a more supporting environment for the WERs.

Last but not the least is addressing the issue of compensation for attending meetings in lieu of loss of pay/opportunity cost. Although the provision of TA for the WERs in the local self-governance institutions exists, most of them do not have access to them. It is not only the travel cost that is incurred by the WERs but also the loss of wages / opportunity for wage as a result of participation in Panchayat activities. How do we ensure that such losses are compensated for?

The various factors mentioned above and many more remain in way of women's effective participation in the Panchayats and Municipalities. Effective strategies would be required to address these concerns and create a more gender equitable environment within the institution. This would not only mean provisions for their participation in numbers but also allocation of resources for a total human development of which women form a significant part. This would also mean working towards the vision of a society that is free from all forms of discrimination that leads of double discrimination against women (being from a marginalized section as well as being a woman, a marginalized group in itself) and attaining gender justice in the institution of governance towards a gender just society.

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