

Urban Governance
Occasional Paper No. 2

***Gender Paradigm in
Local Governance :
An Indian Experience***



Preface

The 74th Constitutional Amendment has guaranteed the elections at the local level every five years. Municipalities are now viewed as institutions of Local Self Governance, with autonomous and integrated development responsibility for their jurisdiction and can no longer be viewed as an appendage of the state government. Also, the provision of reservation for women/weaker sections provides an opportunity for strengthening the voice and leadership roles of such groups in urban governance.

Following the Constitutional Amendment Act, PRIA in the year 2000, took keen interest in strengthening Urban Governance in some Municipal areas of five states where it has experience of working with Panchayati Raj Institutions, along with its partners thereby strengthening local governance institutions. PRIA's perspective on strengthening citizen's participation and democratic governance takes into account the new political space created by the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. The accountability of municipalities, the role of elected representatives, participation of women in governance are issues of critical importance in order to assess the impact and efficacy of the Amendment. Our studies aimed to provide an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of various municipal and public offices that help the citizens to articulate their demands better and subsequently lead to a better delivery system from various service providers. Improving demand articulation through citizens meetings in wards and Multistakeholder dialogue for improvement of services to improve supply side response are examples of activities that are taken up.

Our interventions on governance in various states aim to strengthen citizen's participation in local governance in order to ensure transparency and accountability of elected representatives and appointed functionaries in municipal bodies. Our experience suggests that women have been treated as inconsequential players in the decision-making processes thereby perpetuating the vicious cycle of their political exclusion that not only thwarts their overall social and cognitive development but also runs contrary to the basic principles of 74th Constitutional Amendment Act.

The support to active participation of women ought to be seen as a leap towards their mainstreaming in governance. **The Gender Paradigm In Local Governance: An Indian Experience** presents the ground realities from our study in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Kerala about the women in governance. It aims to highlight representation of women at the local level, their capacity to deliver the goods and also the obstacles that preclude them from doing so.

We hope that the lessons emerging from the study provide insights into the contribution of women to the development processes and recognize their role as active players in strengthening governance. We hope the study will prove useful for development practitioners in giving a greater thrust to women empowerment efforts and thereby ensuring social change.

Our sincere thanks to Cordaid, Netherlands and Ford Foundation for their support in the study. Any comments or suggestions towards improvement in content or further enquiry are welcome.

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President, PRIA.
November 2002

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Introduction

The recognition of the right of every citizen to participate in public decision-making is a basic element of democracy. This, to be effective, requires that the needs and the interest of all members of society are respected and represented. This cannot happen if any one group is consistently excluded from taking part in decision making. The fact that others might claim to be speaking for them is no guarantee of social justice, as is evident from the situation of women in most parts of the world and particularly true in developing countries where males have always represented the feelings and views of women for many centuries.

The 74th Constitutional Amendment has guaranteed the elections at the local level every five years. All the Councilors who have been elected have newly entered politics, whether men or women. The reservation of seats for women has given a new bend to the political process at the local level because at the national and the state level the representation of women is still less and it is considered to be the sole domain of the male members. This can be generally attributed to

the fact that the 81st Reservation Bill that talks of the reservation for women at the national level is still pending in the parliament.

As all the elected representatives are new and most of them have fought on the party ticket it has been observed that because they want to please the leaders at the state level they give more priority to the party than the work at the local level. This case has been witnessed in most of the states and to have a regular place in the political party more interest is shown towards the political party's agenda than to the problems at the local level.

WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

There has been very little presence of women in the Lok Sabha and in the assembly election since independence and they haven't had enough opportunity at the central and the state level to participate in the elections. Women, in these elections, have shown an overwhelming response as far as voting is concerned. The results of the various elections show that the winning percentage of women has been high in all these elections. Though India has a low representation of women in the Parliament but at the local level 33% of the representation has been assured due to the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendments. This is a very welcome step, as few of the developed countries have not even taken the decision to increase women's representation even though the level of education is high.

RESERVATION AT LOCAL LEVEL: AN ISSUE

Though the Constitution of India guarantees the right to Indian women there exists a huge gap between the Constitutional guarantees and the realities of women's lives. It is important to acknowledge these gaps, because time has never been more appropriate to make a huge concentrated effort to bridge them- to identify and overthrow the barriers that prevent the realization of freedom and equality for half of the Indian population.

The inequality is very clearly and visibly built into the structure, as in the case of some religious hierarchies or exclusive clubs, where women are debarred from attaining higher designations in office. In both these cases, customs and traditions are quoted as justification for this discrimination. At times the inequality lies not in the structure but in the way it operates. For instance, even though there is no law that prevents women from contesting elections to the Lok Sabha, very few women become members of the Parliament.

CURRENT RESERVATION GUARANTEES TO THE INDIAN WOMEN AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- ◆ **1/3rd reservation for women**
- ◆ **Reserved seats for SC/CT and OBCs**
- ◆ **Reservation based on rotations**

FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Political Party

In spite of the fact that most of the national political parties have stated in their manifestos that they support reservation for women in Parliament, very few women candidates have been given the chance to contest elections. The following data indicates that, so far, there are relatively few political parties which have an established electoral mechanism aimed at increasing the proportion of elected women, in either their internal structures or parliament or other elective bodies.

Political party-wise distribution of Elected Representative

Party support to contest elections at every level is very essential. In a democratic system party provides a platform and an identity to the individual. Again contesting elections is a much more strenuous stake as far as mental, social and financial factors are concerned. The analysis of the party wise distribution of elected representatives show that the winning chance of an independent candidate is very low as compared to the party supported candidate. Therefore, for women candidates it is more desirable to contest the elections as a party candidate. The electoral process includes all activities concerning the elections. i.e., right from the filing of the nomination papers to the declaration of elections results. In between, there are number of activities like canvassing, collection of election funds, arranging and attending

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election meetings, participating in election rallies and finally exercising the franchise. It is a tedious task and requires party support to get elected.

Getting the party nomination and electoral support

However, whenever it has been enquired from the political parties as to why they do not nominate adequate number of women candidates for contesting the elections, they answer that it is difficult to find a woman with both the necessary political status and readiness to accept the nomination. This seems to place the blame on women but in fact it poses the question as to how women can have access to the governing structures of parties because it is a universal fact that parties tend to nominate their elite, who are inevitably concentrated at the top. In most political parties it is very rare to find women in high decision-making spheres.

Family

Family plays a greater role as far as women's participation in public sphere of life is concerned. In common Indian families, women have very little say even in the matters affecting their own lives. For most Indian women, marriage itself is not a matter of choice- only a small minority, even among educated women of well-off families, has any role in deciding when and whom they will get married to. Culturally, marriage denotes the end of childhood, but the reality is that millions of Indian women get married when they are yet children, in both the legal and the biological senses.

Politics requires ample time, which entails sacrifice of part of one's private life. This is true for women as well as for men. However, for a woman household work is primarily supposed to be their function whether she is a housewife, professional, salaried person or a Councilor. During the training program organized by PRIA and its partners many female Councilors came forward with the view that their role in their families is to behave like docile housewives looking after the household chores. However, in public life they are supposed to be active leaders. Both types of activities require different attitudes and ways of life. Hence, once they are women Councilors they are compelled to lead a dual life. At times when it comes to priorities between household and the other work it becomes very hard for a Councilor to justify which is important. Being a woman and the work associated with her it becomes hard to fulfill all the functions effectively.

Apart from this there are several other restrictions by the family on the elected women, which is very clear from our study in the various states. Some of the reasons cited for the restrictions were neglect of home, family pressure and politics is considered as social taboo for women.

Violence

Violence is defined as physical act of aggression of individuals or groups against one another or others. Violence against women means any gender based violence, which results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering. In India the major sources of violence are mainly

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the family, marriage and place of work. Family is the major source of discrimination against the woman or the girl child. For the girl child, the family sets the conditions of gender discrimination- whether it is for food or nutrition, education, work, etc. This continues for the rest of her life and sometimes it creates a situation for physical and emotional violence. Her upbringing in the shadow of fear and violence hinders the process of her personal growth and development and converts her into a passive follower in a patriarchal society.

Generally, it is seen that violence is used as one of the tools to restrict the entry of people into politics. However, it is interesting to note that no cases of violence against women have been witnessed in various states at the urban local bodies election. This can be analyzed in the light of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. The provision of the 33% percent reservation for women at the municipal level has affected the attitude of the male dominant society if not willingly then under compulsion. Now when the seats are reserved, in majority of the cases women are contesting elections mainly on the ground of the family support, which has a political background or linkages. In this case women get their families' support and in turn party backing, which makes the chances of the violence minimal.

Politics as Power

The function of men and women in society has been classified in such a manner that men take all the functions, which are related to power and let the women, do the subordinate functions.

Women hardly get spare time to think about politics, let alone their effective participation in it. Only in some rich families where servants do the household work, a female can contest the elections and find time to participate in politics; the husband and in-laws grant the permission. The greatest fear that exists in the male dominated society is that once the women constitute the majority segment they will have power of legislation that is against the patriarchal society.

Reservation: In Reality

Even after recognition of the fact that women's empowerment (by providing them representation in the legislature) is beneficial for women in particular and society at large, the level of reservation has become a matter of great discussion and debate. Reservation at the local level is being supported on the ground that it will provide a level of basic political learning for them and pave the way for state level and national level representation. Another major reason is that parliamentary sessions take place in the capital city of the state and the nation and involve long and repeated absence from home. This becomes a major limitation in the Indian family.

Performance level

Socio-cultural factors also act as deterrents in many cases. The conflict between women Councilors' role as respectful women and their role as politicians is indeed specially conspicuous when women Councilors have to come out of their houses at night. This makes them vulnerable to two risks: physical danger, since violence is more likely to happen in the dark; and a more abstract, but nevertheless very real danger,

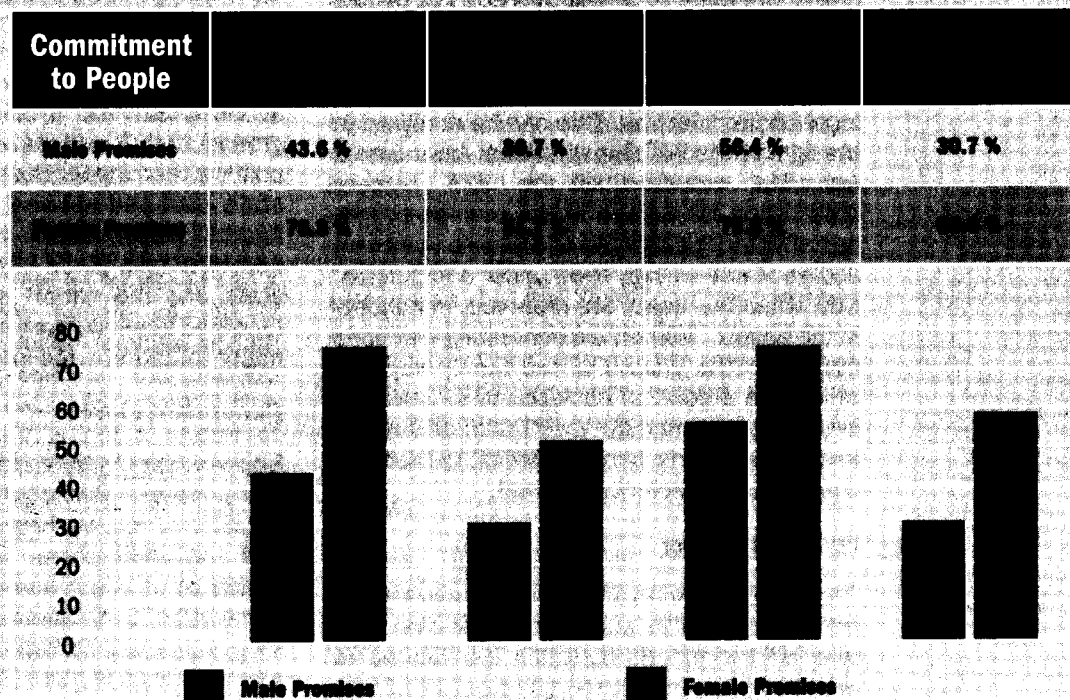
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is putting one's reputation at risk, since respectful women by conviction, are not supposed to be out at night. For example, at night if any emergency arises, women are mostly not allowed to go to the spot and help. Even during the day time many families object to their going out to settle any dispute. Rather, husbands are made to do the job. Apart from attending any official meetings the permission of the parents, in-laws or the husband is necessary to visit any other place. Obviously, this is causing serious constraints on their

mobility and in the discharge of their duties, which ultimately affects their performance level.

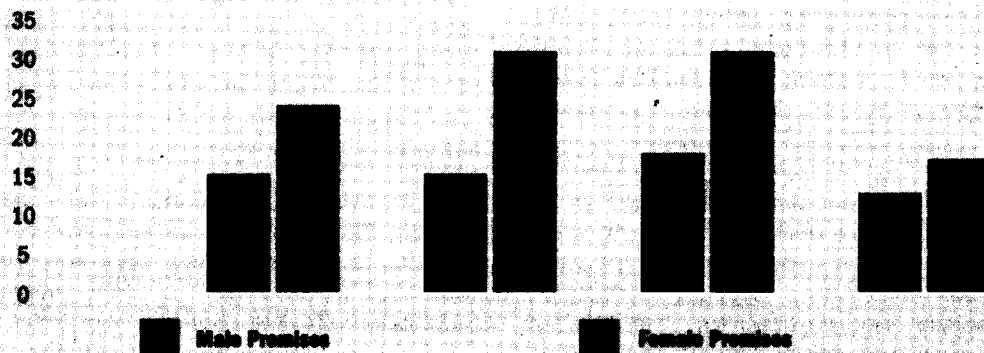
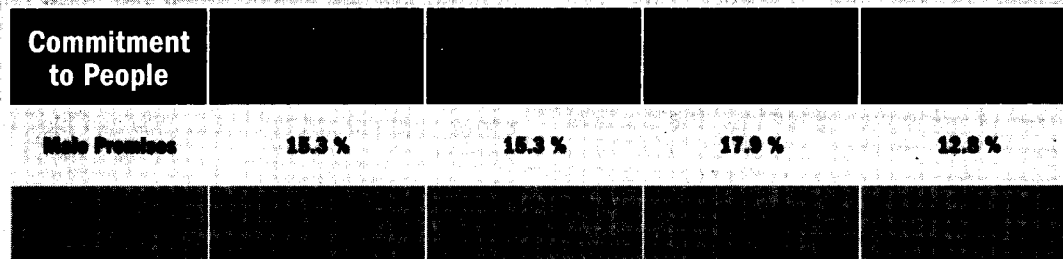
It was observed from the field experience that in spite of the hindrances, the overall performance of women is better than their male counterparts. This is very much apparent from our field study where women have proved themselves accountable when it comes to making promises and fulfilling them.

Promises Made



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Promises Fulfilled



SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN & ITS IMPACT ON THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

Bibi-Bahu-Beti-Syndrome (wife, daughter-in-law, daughter syndrome)

One of the outcomes of the constitutional empowerment is the nomination of Bibi-Bahu-Beti (Lugai, Benani, beti) in the electoral process. At the first instance one can understand that it is the attitude of the patriarchal society to be in political power but in the long run it has paved the way for other women of society to enter into the political process. Bibi-bahu-beti is just the first time address, from the second time onwards women will have their own identity and will emerge as empowered political leaders of society.

Even while nominating women contestants, due to the constitutional provision of 33% reservation for women Bibi-Bahu-Beti (wives, daughters-in-law and daughter of prominent politicians) syndrome plays a vital role. In spite of considering a suitable candidate, the strength of the candidate and strength of the rival candidate are taken into account. In the 1995 elections in various states, the proxy battle for ballot was evident as there was a noteworthy reservation for the women candidates and many fielded their wives, daughter-in-laws, daughters, nieces, etc. to fulfill their own political ambitions. (The Hindustan Times 1995:3).

All women candidates were not necessarily formal members of the political parties. So different parties identified female relations of male members and nominated them. The

families' perception and role influences the woman's constant decision to participate in the electoral process. The women candidates have to take the approval from their husbands and/or in-laws. The cases of single members were no exception either, in the sense that the approval had to come, in their case, from their parents, even brothers and uncles. Women who have willingly plunged into the fray are mostly those who have had exposure to the political activity within their own families. These are the women who have started with a sure footing and are quite clear about what constructive role they can play, as women in a given setup. True it is difficult to carry out without men's support but women also have a wider role in the total development of the area of their operation.

However, there are large numbers of members who have been literally pushed into the scene. Many are finding the responsibilities very demanding, some are thoroughly engaged in domestic responsibilities, some do not maintain good health.

The intervention in selected municipalities reveals that many housewives have come in the election fray after reservation was given to women. Majority of the housewives hail from families which have a political background.

Their Strength As Leaders

Politics is associated with specific systems of values and practices that women find so alienating and daunting that they feel either excluded or reluctant to engage in it. This makes women either adjusts to the milieu and act the man's way, or assume and impose their different identity. In addition, the current

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political system is more than often labelled as corrupt and this renders it most unattractive for women. For them, these are probably among the most difficult barriers to overcome.

On the other hand, women benefit from a positive prejudice on the part of the electorate, which tends to place hope in them and to believe that they are not only serious about the job but also honest and can bring fresh values to the world of politics. While this prejudice can be burdensome it certainly acts a catalyst for women to take office and as an incentive to parties to present female candidates.

The major task of the women of the country in general is to help the new set-up to function properly. This has sown the seeds for women to emerge as the carriers of power and as equal partners in the political process and in coming to power and exercising it. Yet another prospect of the constitutional guarantee of women getting elected to the local bodies is that it will eliminate the dependence of conscious and able women for support and sympathy of the upper caste and the upper class leadership as a part of the politics of co-option. Women now feel that it is their constitutional right to contest for and continue in leadership positions. The reservation will act as a catalyst for higher participation of women in the electoral process at the local level and in the longer run at the state and the national level.

The responses from the field level revealed that majority of the stakeholders were of the view that women work more for women related issues.

PRIA's intervention with various municipalities showed the following results
Women elected representatives' relationship with municipal staff

State											
Municipality	Ratia	Chandabadi	Charthala	Kalpatti	Sahana	Ichhawar	Chonu	Ellara	Gadpur	Kharajha	Saidpur
Public interference							✓	✓		✓	
Difficult to attend the meeting with the males			✓				✓	✓		✓	

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In many states the second round of municipal elections has been held and the presence of women has been felt at the election processes in the way of voting for many years now but even then women are not getting the right response at every place. The presence of chairman pati is still there and this stops women from voicing their feelings in the municipality. The other problem, which was noted at the municipal level, was the problem of mobility as the women had to depend on the men folk of the houses for doing their ward work and moving out. Women find it hard in the

smaller nagar panchyats to attend the meetings as they say it is still male dominated and their voices are not heard. Even in the reserved seats and constituencies women Councilors had to work in accordance with the wish of their husbands and other male members of the party.

Case Study: Ittaunjha Nagar Panchayat, Uttar Pradesh

Experience from our own intervention

In Ittaunjha Nagar Panchayat the Councilors are divided on all the development issues because of the presence of Chairman pati. The present chairman is a lady but her husband looks after the work. Her husband was the previous chairman and because the constituency was declared reserved for women his wife contested the election. The husband chairman is even present in the monthly meetings and no one is allowed to meet the wife. We also met the husband chairman only as he is known as the

chairman. The chairman (Husband) prefers to do the work of those wards, which is supposed to be his vote bank because he is said to be the Congress candidate for the coming state elections. Because of this reason the work in the municipality is not going on smoothly and the monthly meeting is not yielding fruitful results. The women Councilors (hailing from the other party) are not ready to meet the chairman pati. They say he hardly does any work that is expected of a Chairman.

Special Support for Women

Even after two rounds of elections in most of the places it has been witnessed that women, despite reservation at the local level, have not been able to fight for their cause. The hindrances in their way come in the form of social taboo, family pressure, male dominance and the fact that at the local level women enter politics just to fill the seats reserved for them.

Despite their low level of involvement, people have immense faith in them because women work on issues related to all round development and not just to improve their positions politically. This type of concern for development of their ward should be taken up by the male Councilors too. Some of the ground realities that motivate the women Councilors are: they face the crunch of the lack of basic services e.g. fetching water from long distances and also that they understand women's issues better. Women's entry into politics is because of reservation and not political interest hence their concern is for the betterment of their ward whereas men have a political motive behind their entry.

The justification for male dominance over a woman representative is explained in that the house and family get neglected if she does active work as a Councilor, she is bound to complete the household work due to family pressure and that politics is not suited for her as active political participation is required for 24 hours.

On the basis of our observations, the main findings are:

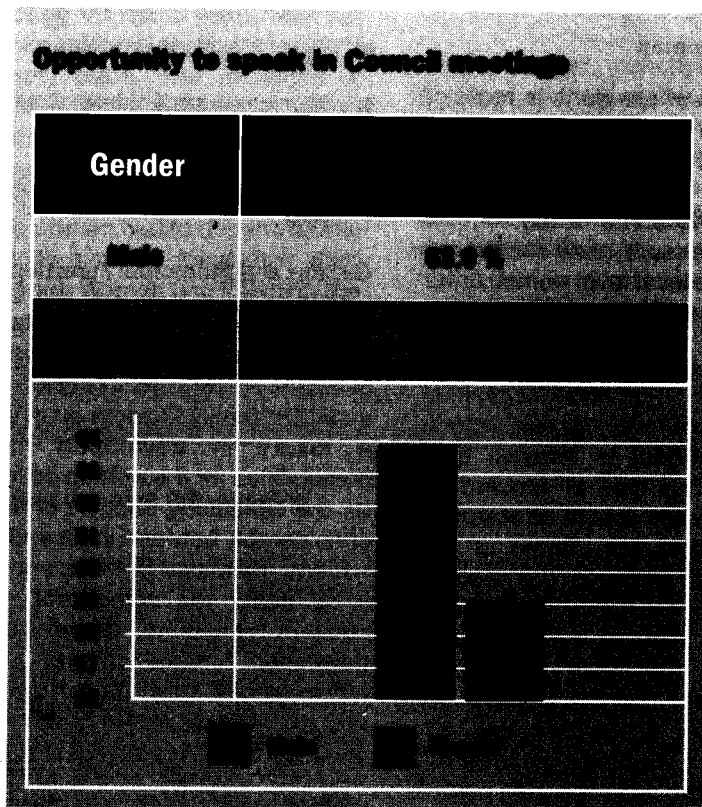
- ◆ Division on caste and party lines
- ◆ Lack of collective thinking
- ◆ Municipal staff thinks Councilors are not aware of their functions
- ◆ Social structure of the society plays a vital role

Gender and Municipal Functions

Women in India have a definite advantage as compared to the women in developed nations. Domestic help, either paid or within the extended family, is common in India, while it is a luxury in developed nations. Also, possibilities for the women politicians to count on the continuing support of the family differ considerably between India and the developed nations. Extended families and grand parents living under the same roof as their grand children are common features in India while in developed nations children come back to empty homes. This is one of the major reasons why the representation of women at the local level has been very successful.

Women have always had little or no say in the family as well as in the society. Their voice was not considered to be important in the male dominated world but due to reservation at the local level they now have a platform to voice their feeling. This was clearly felt when the field level interviews were done with the elected representatives. This was also noticed more at the bigger centers as compared to the smaller ones.

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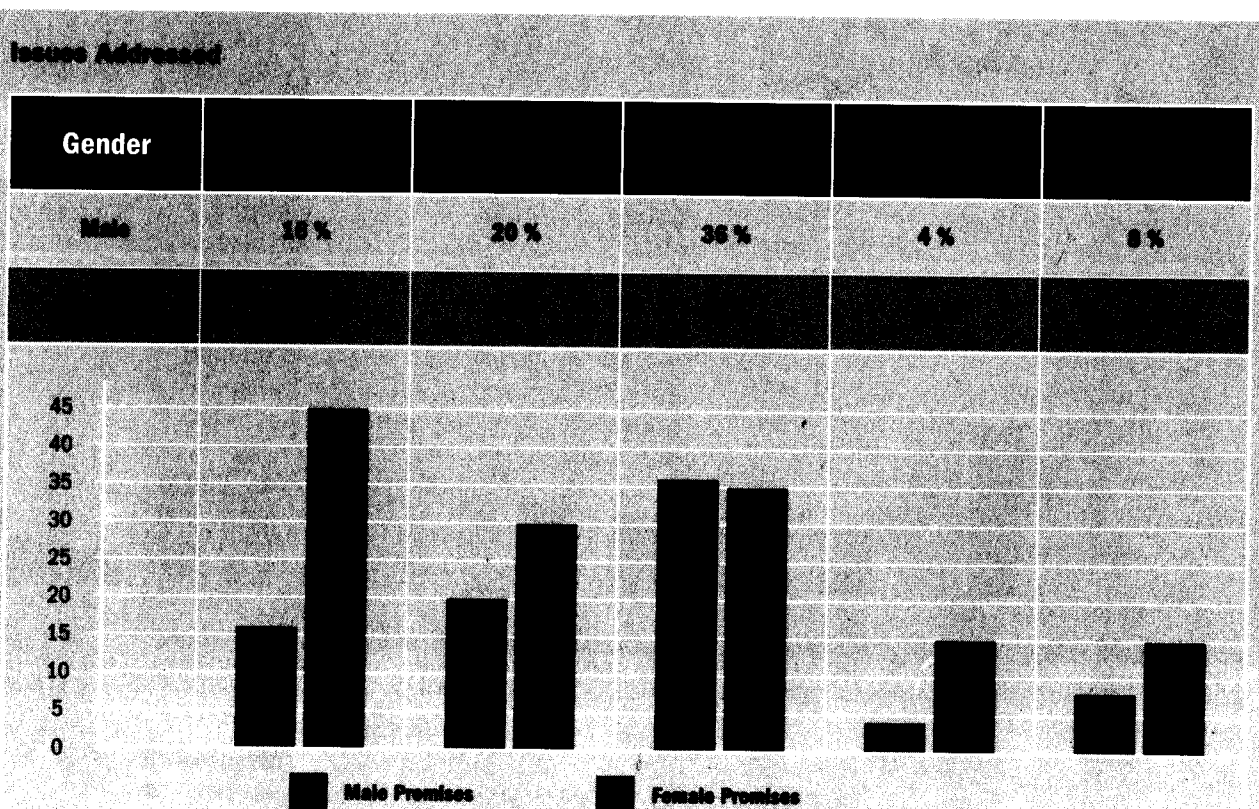


Both males and females have opportunity to speak in the meeting but men have an advantage. Even in the small span of time if women have started to express their feelings and speak at the meetings this implies that given the right platform and chance they can address to many societal problems of women.

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Issues Addressed

Females are more concerned with the basic issues as it is very clear from the data from various areas of intervention. The main area of concern for women was education, health, pension issues and distribution of other self-employment goods for women. Even in the case of general employment their concern was to have an equal footing with the male members.



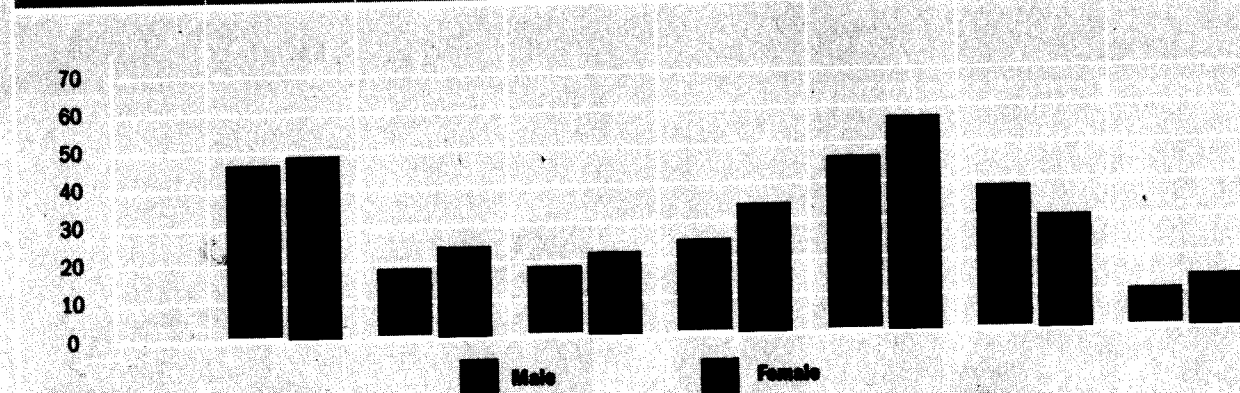
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The problems faced by the Councilors

It was observed at the field level that the major problems faced by the female Councilors are lack of resources followed by bureaucratic apathy and lack of planning.

The problems faced by the Councilors

Gender							
Male	45.9 %	18.0 %	18.0 %	24.5 %	45.9 %	37.7 %	9.8 %



All the facts mentioned in the paper are based on the work done by PRIA and its partners in the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Rajasthan. The responses in percentage if any is based on feedbacks of respondents.

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About PRIA

PRIA is an international center for learning and promotion of participation and democratic governance. It is a non-profit voluntary organisation, promoting initiatives for the empowerment and development of the poor, marginalised and weaker sections of the society. Its interventions and programmes are based on the philosophy of participatory research and people centered approach.

PRIA recognizes the value of people's knowledge and the importance of their life experiences and learnings. It raises awareness of people's rights as provided for in the Constitution and aims at creating a conducive environment for the promotion of democratic governance.

Challenging traditional myths and questioning contemporary policies is a key element in PRIA's quest for promoting

equity and justice.

PRIA also undertakes socio-economic research and analysis, as well as a range of training programmes to develop capacities and skills of individuals and institutions. It promotes people's participation through its programmes at the grassroots level and encourages their involvement in the process of reviewing, developing and influencing disseminates and shares its experiences, findings, reflections, perspectives and analysis.

PRIA's contribution in the area of social development gains impetus through effective networks and partnerships. This creates multidimensional opportunities for institutions and individuals to interact, dialogue and provide space for growth and progress.

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- ◆ Case studies from interventions in the field area

Notes



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