

Gender Issues in Governance

- Gender bias pervades at all levels of governance
- Stems from illiteracy, poor health, invisibility in the SNA and suffer legal, political, economic and social discrimination in all walks of life
- Private/Public dichotomy
- Unequal distribution of power and resources
- Women are invisible in all the governing institutions – does this have an impact on good governance?

Situation in South Asia – focus on politics

- Women occupy 7% of the parliamentary seats
- 9% cabinet ministers are women
- 6% of the positions in the judiciary are women
- 9% of the civil servants are women
- 20% members of local government are women

Political Governance

Historically women have been accorded a secondary status in political institutions

Beginnings of Change

- Private-public dichotomy: marginalisation of women in public space and decision making
- Male dominance in political system
- Reservations for women in elected bodies to bring their issues onto the political agenda
- 73rd & 74th ammendment Act 1993, providing 1/3rd reservation to women in local self governments at different levels

Political Governance

- This affirmative action (reservation) would build a critical mass of local leadership who will be active participants in the strategic decision making process
- Agency role of women realised
- Change in gender relations
- Are we looking forward to a different form of governance?

Some Pressing Questions

- Is it enough for an increasing number of women to be in the political office?
- Is it crucial to have women who are capable of bringing transformatory visions and practices into the arena of formal politics?
- How to support and sustain them so that they remain in power and committed to a feminist agenda for equality and justice?
- Do women have to create a new mode of political engagement to break away from hierarchical, unequal and unjust mores/ways of traditional mainstream politics?

Panchayati Raj (PRI) Experiences

1 million women have found space in Local Govt. through reservations

Evidence from the field depicts several paradoxes:

- Women have been given political power but not seen as political entities, not heard seriously
- Attributes seen as necessary for political effectiveness are masculine (connections, clout etc.)
- Restrictions on their mobility
- Illiteracy and inability to deal with the public
- Dependency on male relatives/kins/village elders
- Problems of learning the rules
- Regulations and procedures

PRI Experiences

- Authority patterns and powerlessness in the familial sphere in order to play a new role
- HH level conflicts and bargaining – different patterns of subservience and resistance
- Women's representation being largely proxy in nature
- Strong women discouraged and troubled
- Women want to be active outside the formal set up – SHGs, Women's groups and federations and still have an influence over the PRIs.

Study of women panchayats (12) in Maharashtra

- Panchayats replicate the rural power structure and deeply embedded patterns of patriarchal dominance and inequalities
- The impact of women's lives is mediated by class/caste position
- Work is acceptable if it does not change or challenge the male privileges and power
- *“Behave like women, but think like men”*
- *“Who will make the chappatis?”*

Global Assessment of Women in Politics

- Women choose issues of importance to themselves
- No issues are tied to one political context and condition
- Political problems: personal safety, security and autonomy, reproductive rights and maternal and child health problems, equalising access to public, communal and market resources for problem solving and empowerment and remaking the political and legal rules of the game
- Politics is not about “*representation, position and power*”
- Use of violence (sexual) to control women
- Women not interested to seek political power in a man’s world – too cumbersome and complicated