

Engendering Urban Governance in India

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is the buzzword now-a-days. No country can afford development without considering women who constitute about half of its stock of human resource. However, development has bypassed women in India despite worshipping and paying respect to women in mythology and historical texts. Women specific and women related legislations have been enacted to safeguard the rights and interest of women, besides protecting against discrimination, violence, and atrocities and also to prevent socially undesirable practices. Empowerment of women is closely linked to the opportunities they have in education, health, employment and for political participation. Over the years, significant advancements have been made in India on many of these counts. The issue of engendering development and women empowerment has been in the central stage with the shifting of paradigm of development and governance at the global level and particularly in India. Against this view point, present paper purports to review the engendering urban governance in India and suggesting policy measures for women empowerment.

Introduction

Engendering development and inclusive growth requires an enabling environment in which women's contribution to the economy can be tapped and enhanced in a substantial and holistic way. This environment needs to ensure from conception to death – an environment that provides physical, emotional, economic and political and community security to girls and women. The engendered development also requires addressing the issues of accountability, capacity building and governance that are of utmost importance for gender equity and inclusive growth. Women's role in decision making institutions needs to be enhanced through providing them reservation and enforcement and implementation of all pro-women legislations. It is also imperative to eliminate all forms of violence against women through improving institutional mechanisms and enhanced budgetary resources. There is also need to redefine poverty through gender lens. In order to promote pro-women inclusive growth, it is imperative to create and strengthen institutional mechanism for addressing the destitute, marginalized,

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disadvantaged and vulnerable women. The enhanced budgetary resources besides strong political and bureaucratic will for engendering growth and development will lead to progressive society (Government of India, 2013).

The 12th Five Year Plan Working Group on 'Women's Agency and Empowerment' builds on the view that development is a process of expanding freedoms equally for all individuals, and considers gender equality as a core development goal in itself. It expands the definition of women's empowerment by looking at it as a process, which enables women to have a notion of dignity and self worth, bodily integrity, freedom from coercion and control over resources. It affirms that empowerment is achieved when, along with the condition of women, their position improves and their freedoms and choices are enlarged economically, socially and politically. Empowerment must enable *all* women to negotiate these freedoms and increase their capabilities. The overall framework takes steps to advance substantive equality by addressing the causes and consequences of social, economic and political exclusion on all women especially the dalits, tribals, minorities, women with disability, migrant, displaced and trafficked women, women in the unorganized workforce, women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, single and excluded women especially widows and women in conflict zones. The Plan advocates a shift from mere 'income' poverty of women to the adoption of a 'multi-dimensional' approach to poverty and wellbeing.

Engendering development has gained importance in the context of development planning and governance in the recent years. There has been paradigm shifts in development and governance in the context of women. Women welfare, women empowerment, gender mainstreaming, gender inclusive development and now engendering development is the focus of development planning in India. Engendering development and inclusive growth requires an enabling environment in which women's contribution to the economy can be tapped and enhanced in a substantial and holistic way. This environment needs to ensure from conception to death – an environment that provides physical, emotional, economic and political and community security to girls and women. The engendered development also requires addressing the issues of accountability, capacity building and governance that are of utmost importance for gender equity and inclusive growth. Women's role in decision making institutions needs to be enhanced through providing them reservation and enforcement and implementation of all pro-women legislations. It is also imperative to eliminate all forms of violence against women through improving institutional mechanisms and enhanced budgetary resources. There is also need to redefine poverty through gender lens. In order to promote pro-women inclusive growth, it is imperative to create and strengthen institutional mechanism for addressing the destitute,

marginalized, disadvantaged and vulnerable women. The enhanced budgetary resources besides strong political and bureaucratic will for engendering growth and development will lead to progressive society (Government of India, 2013).

The role of governance, in particular local governance, in which women can play an active role in developmental planning, given their political presence is critical in this convergence. Women's participation as elected representatives in local bodies has been noteworthy. Hence, the strengthening of these agencies' roles and powers, especially for implementing the 'inclusive' programmes at the grassroots level would be enabling for women led governance factored in. Needless to state, it is the combined effect of these inclusive programmes that can ameliorate much of the rural deprivation, in particular for women who perform some of these tasks in the unpaid 'care economy'. India is the world's largest democracy triggered by the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution. The reservation of one-third seats for women has resulted in more than a million women elected women leaders in decision making positions at grassroots levels. With the reservation already increased to 50 percent in several states, e.g., Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Rajasthan and a Constitutional amendment to this effect in the process, the Panchayats will have great potential for women's empowerment and their contribution to gender sensitive good governance. While affirmative action in terms of reservation for ensuring women's political representation is an imperative step, it is not adequate to promote women's leadership and their participation in governance. However, women face social, economic and various other forms of institutional barriers to entering local governments and even in performing their duties as elected representatives.

Gender Roles and Challenges

The nature and scope of municipal functions under the 74th CAA of the Twelfth Schedule offer a vital clue to understand the expected roles and responsibilities of municipal councilors. Accordingly, municipal councilors are expected to shoulder a host of responsibilities concerning almost every major aspect of municipal governance ranging from decision-making and their implementation, provisioning of civic amenities and services, undertaking development initiatives, ensuring augmentation and optimum utilization of local resources and so on (Sen 2015). As custodian of municipal powers, both legislative and administrative, the local councilors collectively set the vision and direction of municipal governance. More precisely, a municipal councilor is required to fulfill the following key mandates:

- 1) **Community Representation:** Effective representation requires that the councilor knows and understands the interests of the residents in

their respective constituencies. They serve as an essential communication link between the local government and the citizens. This calls for regular consultation with the local residents and ensuring that they are kept informed of council decisions and progress of municipal work.

- 2) **Municipal Leadership:** As members of the council, the councilors are required to arrive at policy decisions by attending the council meetings and participating in the discussions therein. This includes providing guidance to municipal officials, asking for periodic reports and ensuring that they follow procedure and are held accountable for their actions.
- 3) **Urban Planning:** As per the constitutional stipulations, the urban planning process is supposed to be driven primarily by the councilors. The constitutionally mandated Ward Committees led by the ward councilor stand as potential participatory mechanisms whereby local communities assemble to deliberate on development priorities, resource allocations, infrastructural gaps, deficiencies in service delivery, etc.
- 4) **Management of Public Finances:** As custodians of public finances, the councilors need to oversee financial management system of the municipalities for ensuring transparency, accountability and professionalism in management of municipal finance. Based on assessment of community needs by councilors, the task of drawing up and approval of municipal budget is undertaken by the council. Effective revenue collection especially entails to mobilize the larger community for this purpose.

Women's Participation in Local Government

Women constitute half the world as well as in urban population. Despite their large numbers they have a very limited role to play in urban governance—policy and decision making as they are not sufficiently and properly represented in the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). Though the functions and working of ULBs affect every man and woman, the latter has no or very minimal role as they are under-represented in leadership positions in local government institutions until recently. They do not have a role to influence local decisions resulting in insufficient access to services. This necessitates measures to provide equal representation in the municipal councils. As the ULBs are closest to the community they are the best places to involve women in local policy and decision-making so as to enable them to contribute in the policies and decisions that impact provision of civic services and quality of

life. Several factors including discrimination, family burdens, financial constraints to contest to local governments, cultural factors, etc., come in the way of women participation. The political empowerment requires transformation of existing political structures and processes that are more responsive to women.

As the World Declaration on Women in Local Governance, 1998 noted that the problems and challenges facing humanity are global but occur and have to be dealt with at the local level. Women have the equal right to freedom from poverty, discrimination and insecurity. To fight these problems and to meet the challenges of sustainable human development, it is critical that women are empowered and participated in local governments as decision-makers, planners and managers. The 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 for the first time widened the base to provide representation to hitherto under represented or unrepresented categories of the community, including women, in urban local self-government institutions. This has raised the question as to what key role women could play in urban governance. The 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 provided one-third reservation for women. Based on the experience gained over two decades, the Government of India proposed 50 per cent reservation for women in urban local bodies. There are many programmes in the formal and informal sector which promoted women's participation in local development like urban basic services to poor (BSUP), SJSRY, self-help groups, Kudumbashree in Kerala, etc., with different degrees of success in mobilizing women and their participation in local planning and development. The reservation for women in the local bodies is aimed at securing their active involvement and support in socio-economic development. Reservations became very important as in the normal process women were reluctant to contest the elections either because of murkiness and violence that often characterize electoral politics (Prasad, 2014). The 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 has laid foundations for the emergence of strong bottom up women leadership who could climb the ladder to occupy positions of power at the state and national levels. The 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 which provided a constitutional status for ULBs in the country and considered a revolutionary and radical legislation, provided reservation of one-third of the strength of the council to women and also extended the same principle of reservation to women in other categories like SCs, STs apart from General category. The 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 entrusts, through the 12th Schedule, important development functions to ULBs viz., urban planning, planning for socioeconomic development, slum improvement, urban poverty alleviation, provision of basic amenities like roads, water supply, public health and sanitation, protection of the environment, safeguarding the interests of the weaker sections, etc., which have a major bearing on the development of women and children.¹⁶ The

ability of the local bodies to undertake these functions, particularly those relating to poverty alleviation, safeguarding the interests of the weaker sections would, to a great extent, depend on the composition of the members of the councils who influence the local decision-making process (Prasad , 2014).

Role of Women in Urban Governance

Municipal Acts governing their organization and working specify the functions of municipalities and municipal corporations. Experience reveals that the chairpersons or councillors, whether they are men or women, have broadly four important roles to play in ULBs viz., policy, developmental, political and administrative.

Policy Role

Formulate development policies, prepare town development plans, take decisions regarding the integration of spatial development planning with economic development planning, lay down broad parameters for the future growth of the towns, mobilize resources to undertake both obligatory and discretionary functions, undertake measures for assisting the weaker sections, etc.

Development Role

Formulation, implementation and monitoring of development plans, including those for the weaker sections, women, etc. is their responsibility. Both national and state governments have articulated a number of development programmes. Formulation of city action plans under these schemes and ensuring their proper and effective implementation is a part of their development role. They have also to mobilize their share of the resources, to implement various plans and programmes wherever necessary.

Political Role

As peoples' representatives, the elected councillors are to be in constant touch with their constituents to reflect their aspirations, needs and perspectives in the articulation of town's development policies and plans. They are the links between the electors and the urban local body. Apart from this, as representatives of political parties they also have to undertake political activities. Mayors, Chairpersons and Councillors are constantly approached by their constituents with complaints or grievances relating to the municipal functioning. As people's responsibilities, they have to attend to their day-to-day problems and continuously establish rapport with the community.

Administrative Role

Mayors, chairpersons and the chairpersons of standing and special committees play important role in civic governance. Supervising the functions of municipal officials in the implementation of development plans, monitoring their progress, ensuring the proper implementation of municipal laws and regulations, administrative coordination and convergence within the municipality and with external agencies, liasoning with non-governmental organizations, resolutions of conflicts in the management of municipal affairs between the groups and communities, effective utilization of resources both internal and external, etc. are some of their administrative roles. The mayors and chairpersons, who are directly elected and have a term co-terminus with that of the council, will tend to have more of these responsibilities.

In particular, women can play a purposive role as mayors, chairpersons and councillors (Prasad, 2014):

- Ensuring access to basic services like water and sanitation and to provide higher allocation to these services. Enhancing the access of women to economic resources by strengthening linkages with banks and other financial institutions and encouraging innovative savings, thrift and lending practices.
- Ensuring access to education to all with a view to eradicate illiteracy, particularly among women and children.
- Improving access to women to vocational and technical training for skill formation and development.
- Increasing access to quality health care, particularly preventive and promotive health care, provision of information about factors which increase risks to women's health.
- Initiating measures for the prevention of violence against women, raising awareness among women on the issues of violence against women and organizing support to community-based organizations working in this field.
- Promoting women's economic right including access to employment and appropriate working conditions and strengthening women's economic capacity through skill development, training, self-employment and establishment of market and trade networks.
- Ensuring full participation of women at all levels of decision-making concerning the well-being of the society, particularly those concerning women, children and disadvantaged people.
- Preparing women to leadership positions, organizing legal and administrative literacy programmes to educate women on various aspects of their rights.

- Involving women's groups in environmental protection and up-gradation; and
- Protecting the rights of the children, particularly those of the girl child.

The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1992) to the Indian Constitution have served as a major breakthrough towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in political power structure. There are about one million elected women representatives in Panchayats and municipal bodies in India. The women representatives in ULBs of the selected states are shown in Table 6. It is estimated that elected women in all the three categories of ULBs account for 22622. However, a few states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have declared to provide 50 percent reservation to women in ULBs elections (Table 1). Thus, the number of elected women representatives is likely to increase.

Table 1
State wise Reservation of Women in Urban Local Governments in India

S.No	Name of the State	Reservation for women in Urban Local Bodies
1	Madhya Pradesh	50%
2	Chhattisgarh	50%
3	Manipur	33%
4	Bihar	50%
5	Rajasthan	50%
6	Odisha	50%
7	Uttar Pradesh	33%
8	Uttarakhand	33%
9	Jharkhand	50%
10	Sikkim	33%
11	Arunachal Pradesh	33%
12	Assam	50%
13	Nagaland	33%
14	Mizoram	33%
15	Tripura	50%
16	West Bengal	33%
17	Meghalaya	33%

Source: RCUES, Lucknow

Gender Sensitive Urban Governance

Gender-sensitive urban governance involves more than simply increasing women's *participation* in urban planning, however. Research has shown that women and men experience and use the urban environment in different ways, and have different priorities in terms of municipal services and infrastructure (Beall, 1996). A gendered perspective involves planners,

designers, decision-makers and community actors looking at problems with the needs of both women and men in mind (UN-Women, 2010). UN-HABITAT's work on governance and security in cities has also demonstrated the problems associated with gender-blindness within local government institutions, and the Safer Cities programme has focused attention on the need for greater gender sensitivity in planning practice (Earle and Mikkelsen, 2011).

Women and Cities International (2007) highlighted key elements that need to be in place to ensure gender mainstreaming in local governance, including the:

- Importance of other levels of government (regional, national and international) to support the efforts of local authorities;
- Adoption of local policies on gender equality;
- Creation of offices of women or gender equality in municipal structures (accompanied by human resources and appropriate budgets towards clear objectives);
- Development of methods and tools to mainstream gender;
- Importance of partnerships between women's groups and municipalities, while recognizing the autonomy of women's groups;
- Key role of citizen participation, and in particular women's participation, in urban decision-making processes;
- Significance of improvements in women's safety; and
- Importance of sharing good practice and developing exchanges

While this report looks primarily at gender and inclusion in urban planning, it is important to recognize that gender intersects with other vulnerabilities based on class, migration, age, disability, ethnicity, etc (Jagori, 2010). Addressing urban planning in a gender-sensitive way involves looking at how women and men access and benefit from the different aspects of urban life such as municipal services, employment and livelihoods, housing, transport, and safety. The following sections provide information on the key topics related to the most urgent areas that need reform in the policy, legal and regulatory environment to enable gender and socially inclusive urban planning in South Asia. Due to their domestic responsibilities, women and girls are often most impacted by how municipal services, such as water, sanitation, fuel and waste management (UN-HABITAT, 2000) are delivered. The quality of and access to health, education and recreation services also impacts on women's care-giving responsibilities.

Conclusion

Women are major contributors to India's economy and important constituent of development. Their empowerment is essential for distributive justice for the nation's growth. Engendering national development plans is imperative for gender mainstreaming and their empowerment. Engendered development plans would include a gender dimension in all macro policies and budgetary support for their implementation. Engendering public policy and gender budgeting are the major gender commitments by Government of India. Gender budgeting has three basic dimensions. One, the empowerment has to be holistic and it should cover political, social and economic implications for women. It should be universal in terms of equal opportunities. The second dimension is that it should be participative and inclusive. This requires that planning, policy and implementation process should have a bottom to top approach, where women have a voice from the grass roots to the highest echelons of power. The third dimension of gender budgeting is the need for convergence. Women's needs are multi-dimensional - access to health and nutrition, water and sanitation, asset based marketing, credit, technology, education and skills, political participation etc. Thus, convergence of development policies, programmes, schemes and institutional resources is imperative for engendering and inclusive development. There is also the need for revision in existing urban development schemes and programmes so that gender issues may be incorporated and their concerns are effectively addressed.

Suggestions

- India should adopt a broad policy framework including growth with equity, improving governance through participation of poor and collaboration with all stakeholders in planning process and regional cooperation to remove trade barriers and eliminating harmful taxes and competition practices.
- Promoting the greater participation of women in decision making process remains another major objective towards the goal of empowering women. Thus, it is imperative to create more opportunities for women to participate in the institutions of government.
- Participation of women in planning and decision-making still remains an area of neglect. The formal institution such as political parties, legislators, trade unions, cooperative, techno-bureaucracy, industry, trade and commerce reflect a very low level of participation of women particularly at more responsible positions. In order to resolve this problem and to initiate necessary policy initiatives, a comprehensive policy statement should be brought out both by the government and corporate

sectors. This policy should focus on the reservation, entitlements and gender just equatous society.

- There should be creation of permanent cell at the state level to oversee the functioning, monitoring and evaluation of the policy, programmes, projects and schemes oriented towards women, with fully equipped infrastructure, facilities and qualified manpower.
- Gender commitments must be translated into budgetary commitments. Increase in budgetary allocation is required. A higher budgetary allocation on women specific programmes and schemes by government is needed. The state governments should also launch women specific programmes and schemes in order to cater emerging needs of women.
- The gender disaggregated database has to be created and strengthened in the local governments including parastatal agencies, which will enable better analysis and more effective monitoring of targets and achievements for men and women.
- The role of women in decision making process and urban planning must be enhanced besides, ensuring participatory budgeting in local bodies.
- Political and administrative will power is required for gender mainstreaming in urban development and governance. The women counselors need training for their active participation in decentralized governance.
- Construction of toilets, night shelters, rest houses, etc. for women has to be ensured at the major bus stations, railway stations and public places besides ensuring proper street lighting in isolated places, fruits and vegetable markets, hospitals, nursing homes, religious places, etc.
- In order to ensure transparency and accountability in the allocation for women, open a budget head on Gender Development in municipal budgets. This will help in protecting these provisions earmarked for women by placing restrictions on the re-appropriation for other purposes.
- Elected People's Representatives in urban local governments must necessarily be brought under the purview of gender sensitization processes besides including district level officials such as District Collectors, DDOs, Commissioners, and BDOs, District Social Welfare Officers, line department officials, District Local Fund Auditor (DLFAs) and ULB / Panchayat functionaries.

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