

Provisions within the Constitution of India to protect women rights
Article 14 : Right to Equality
Article 15 : Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth
Article 15(3) : State is permitted to make any special provision for women and children
Article 16 : Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment
Article 21 : Protection of life and personal liberty (Right to Life)
Article 39 : Certain principles of policy to be followed by the State—The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing— (a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Equal Right to Means of Livelihood)
Article 42 : Provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief
Article 51(A)(e) : Fundamental duty of the State to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women

Figure 2

Urban local bodies (ULBs) form the closest and most accessible launching pad for women to be involved in governance thereby making governance structures and processes more just, equitable, inclusive and accountable. UNU-Wider draws on the findings of a multi-country research programme, Pathways for Women Empowerment and narrates a series of stories of 'what works' that illustrate local dynamics and dimensions of change (Cornwall 2014). Translating national objectives into locally-relevant ones gives urban governments an opportunity to identify specific development priorities of women at the grassroots and to develop policies that best respond to gender differences and hierarchies. Clearly, in the context of urban governance, gender mainstreaming strategy to be meaningful calls for greater representation of women in political spaces.

4. State of Gender Representation in Indian Cities

Protection of women rights and support to empower them has been duly acknowledged by the international community. Right from the incipient stage, the United Nations has focused on promotion of human rights, elimination of discrimination and violence against women. The global spirit has reasonably found resonance in the national doctrines. The Constitution of India offers wholesome protection to women rights (Figure 2). It treats them equal to men in all matters through right to life,

equality, prohibition of discrimination and also enshrines it as a fundamental duty of the State.

The aspect of women becoming elected representative is also recorded at all the three levels (refer Table 1). While India has a good record of women holding all the important posts in the country, the overall participation of women in politics is not very satisfactory. As per the provisions of Article 243 D of the Constitution, one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in Panchayats (local self-Government) at all levels and also those of the Chairpersons are reserved for women. Even some States like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tripura and Uttarakhand have legislated for 50% reservation for women. As a result of this initiative, out of about 28 lakh elected members in Panchayats, around 10 lakh are women.

Meanwhile, the presence of women in India's ULBs (includes town councils, municipal councils, municipal corporations, etc.) has for long been minimal and gender concerns seldom featured in the urban development policies. Despite being major users of urban space and services, their engagement in civic affairs is relatively new. The enactment of the Seventy-Fourth Constitution Amendment Act (74th CAA) in 1992 by the Parliament was a landmark legislation sought to promote decentralization, civic engagement including women access to and enhanced participation in ULBs. Besides mandating reservation of one-third of elected seats for women in the ULBs, the Act extended the same principle of reservation for women belonging to backward sections of the society. As instruments of planning for socio-economic development and social justice, the functional mandate of the ULBs in India encompasses a host of development concerns such as roads, water supply, public health, sanitation, transportation and devising & delivery of social welfare schemes and identification of the target beneficiaries for these. By the very nature, these have important implications for meeting a number of women's practical needs. Thus as women move into leadership positions in the local bodies, gender issues are likely to receive a greater impetus.

Empirical literature on efficacy of 74th CAA and internalization of women issues in cities offers a diverging and confounding viewpoint. While SARC (2010) suggests that women elected to ULBs have performed very creditably resulting in their empowerment, the SCUD (2010), Lal & Kumar (2007) and Prasad (2014) have noted that despite increased women representation, their expected empowerment and participation in decision making process has not fully materialized. Meanwhile UNDP (2009), Prasad (2014), Sen (2015) have made attempts to identify intermediate issues in enhancing specific roles in gender responsive urban governance in India.

Table I.

State	Lok Sabha	Vidhan Sabha	Panchayat
Andhra Pradesh	7.00%	8.16%	33.46%
Assam	14.29%	11.90%	36.89%
Bihar	7.50%	14.81%	50.00%
Chhatisgarh	9.09%	11.11%	54.50%
Goa	0.00%	2.50%	32.33%
Gujarat	15.38%	6.59%	33.02%
Haryana	0.00%	10.00%	36.50%
Himachal Pradesh	0.00%	4.41%	50.11%
Jammu & Kashmir	16.67%	3.45%	0.00%
Jharkhand	0.00%	9.88%	58.56%
Karnataka	3.57%	1.33%	43.62%
Kerala	5.00%	5.00%	51.85%
Madhya Pradesh	17.24%	13.48%	50.47%
Maharashtra	10.42%	3.82%	49.93%
Odisha	9.52%	4.76%	0.00%
Punjab	7.69%	11.97%	34.93%
Rajasthan	4.00%	14.00%	50.00%
Tamil Nadu	10.26%	7.26%	35.00%
Tripura	0.00%	8.33%	36.01%
Uttar Pradesh	16.25%	8.93%	39.99%
Uttarakhand	20.00%	7.14%	56.13%
West Bengal	28.57%	11.56%	38.43%

5. Gender Roles and Challenges

The nature and scope of municipal functions under the 74th CAA, the Twelfth Schedule offer a vital clue to understand the expected roles and responsibilities of municipal councillors. Accordingly, municipal councillors 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 councillors collectively set the vision and direction of municipal governance. More precisely, a municipal councillor is required to fulfill the following key mandates:

- 1) Community Representation: Effective representation requires that the councillor 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 councillors 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 councillors. The constitutionally mandated Ward Committees led by the ward councillor 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 councillors 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 councillors, 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.

The functional mandate of the ULBs in India encompasses a host of development concerns such as water, sanitation, transportation and devising and delivery of social welfare schemes and identification of the target beneficiaries for these. By the very nature, these have important implications for meeting a number of women's practical needs. Thus as women move into leadership positions in the local bodies, gender issues are likely to receive a greater impetus. Women representatives having better contact with the grassroots are expected to share a deeper understanding of the specific needs and issues concerning women and children in their localities. The multiple functions to be performed by them demand expertise, insights and sound knowledge about the local government system and municipal environment. An efficacious discharge of municipal responsibilities thus calls for capacitating and skill development of the municipal councillors and functionaries. Councillors require an in-depth understanding of their roles and responsibilities that could guide them in their role performance. Rising level of expectations of the community they serve, competing interests among the different groups of citizens living in the municipality, limited human, material and financial resources and tight timelines for delivery of services are some of the complex challenges that councillors face on an everyday basis (Sen 2015).

In consideration of the graveness of the situation, the High Powered Expert Committee for Estimating the Investment Requirements for Urban Infrastructure and Services aptly urges the need for a concerted effort in strengthening the capacity of local government institutions and its members to ensure quick and improved delivery, on the one hand, and to implement urban sector reforms, on the other. The struggle is even harder for the elected women representatives who have made their way into the public realm merely by virtue of the reservation provision. An overwhelming majority of them being new entrants in municipal governance and management of service delivery are relatively inexperienced having no previous exposure to the structures and processes of municipal governance and administration. Besides lack of required knowledge and skills, their gender identity- as women- stands as a major stumbling block which continually subjects them to the manifest and latent pulls of a patriarchal system.

The discussion in the preceding section makes it amply clear that although numeric presence is necessary, it can certainly not be a sufficient condition for women's full, equal and informed participation in political, social and economic decision-making. Undoubtedly, the reservation policy has

gifted women with accessibility to the decision-making positions and has broadened the local democratic base, but over the decades a growing chasm is witnessed between the expected and actual levels of their performance. The real test of empowerment lies in their ability to participate in and influence the local decision-making process. Currently, female councillors in India lack requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes for change. Empirical evidences point to a host of distinct yet inter-related limitations that prevent genuine inclusion of women in local governance. Some of the major challenges that affect women from effective participation at local level include, inter-alia: lack of initiation in urban development issues and municipal administration, no proper knowledge & orientation about municipal acts and rules and regulations, no prior experience about dealing with multidimensional urban development issues or civic issues and its complexities, lack of knowledge about technical inputs related to urban service delivery system, lack of support from senior male / female colleagues in the party, municipal officials, lack of money and resources to sustain the electoral campaigns (in spite of code of conduct by election commission), lack of confidence in public speaking, criminalisation of politics and use of money power and family responsibilities.

6. Conclusion

Based on this study, it could be plausibly concluded that a resilient framework of capacity development needs to be constructed to bridge the existing gaps. This country assessment of women participation in ULBs builds a compelling case in favour of their capacity development. Conceptually, capacity development strategy is grounded in a thorough understanding of the constraints that obstruct the flourishing of latent human potentials. The individuals that make up organizations and societies need the skills, knowledge and experiences to grow and transform the world around them. Within municipal governments, the women councillors need to learn skills and acquire knowledge that will empower and equip them to act as active agents of development and change. This ability is not only conditioned by factors internal to the individual (skills, knowledge) or the organization (human resources), but also by a number of external dimensions, such as societal norms and values, political environment and legal and administrative realities.

The study has several research applications in policy evaluation and integration. Mainstreaming gender in urban development being a relatively new area of enquiry, the findings of this study offer useful insights to urban planners and policy-makers for drawing up an accommodating framework for gender integration in national policies pertaining to decentralization, urban development, local governance and civic engagement. It practically contributes in providing substantive inputs on implementation of the 74th CAA and recommendations of the government appointed Administrative Reforms Commission and State Finance Commission. As the study explores gender role and performance across India, it will significantly influence the quality of leadership, administration and institutional management and thus help re-orient planning policy, development initiatives, investment, capacity development

towards sustainable urban development. Internationally, the study will offer an authentic and updated insight into possible opportunities and challenges for women in India's urban governance, which is home to the one of the world's largest representation of women in local development.

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