



**INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY**

Initiative in Education & Lifelong Learning

## **Appreciation Programme**

# **Women's Political Empowerment and Leadership**

## **Module - 1**

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## **Modules of Women's Political Empowerment and Leadership**

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### **Module 1: Engendering Governance**

- Looking at Governance through the Gender Lens
- Engendering Governance
- Women's Empowerment

### **Module 2: Creating an Enabling Environment for Women's Political Leadership**

- Creating an Enabling Environment for Women's Political Leadership
- Conscious and Unconscious Processes of a Group
- Making Groups Stronger

### **Module 3: Concept of Decentralisation and Democratic Decentralisation**

- Types of Decentralisation
- Limitations to Decentralisation
- Gender Mainstreaming in Decentralisation

### **Module 4: Role of Panchayats in Implementing Government Schemes and Programmes**

- Five Year Plans and Women's Component Plan
- Analysis of the Schemes and Programmes through the Gender Lens

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## Introduction

### What is governance?

Governance refers to decision-making by a range of interested people (or ‘stakeholders’) including those in formal positions as well as ‘ordinary citizens’. These decisions have a huge impact on the ways in which women and men lead their lives, on the rules they are expected to abide by and on the structures that determine where and how they work and live. These decisions also shape how public resources are allocated and whether services take account of both women’s and men’s needs and interests. (Brody, 2009).

Good governance refers to the quality of these processes. Different organisations see good governance differently. But for us today in this module, we will consider governance to be ‘good’ or ‘effective’ if it focuses on “*achieving social justice and gender equality*” (Brody, 2009).

## Learning Objectives

On completion of this module, we will be able to:

- Build conceptual clarity on issues of governance;
- Build an understanding on engendering governance; and
- Become familiar with strategies for strengthening women's active participation in political leadership roles

## Unit 1. Looking At Governance Through A Gender<sup>1</sup>

### Lens

The laws in most countries state that both women and men have equality of rights and equality of opportunity, including equality in access to capabilities and other productive resources that enable opportunity, and equality of voice to influence and contribute to the development process.

While it is difficult to generalise, there are some factors that act as indicators when determining the sensitivity of our institutions of governance and its processes:

#### ***i. In policy and decision-making, do women participate in equal comparison to men?***

The criteria of equality between sexes should give women the right to participate and represent in formal political decision-making without any discrimination. However, not all nations across the world guarantee their citizens the right to political equality.

Equal participation by both men and women in governance is essential for a number of reasons, viz.,

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<sup>1</sup> Gender is defined as the roles and relations between men and women that are not biologically determined. They are constructed socially through socially perceived norms. It is dynamic and changes from situation to situation since what is relevant in one society may be irrelevant in another. For instance, what is woman's work in one country may be man's work in another. Many factors such as age, class, caste, economics, and geographical and political environment affect how gender roles and relations are formed.

- To influence the allocation of resources;
- To improve living conditions and to promote the interests of women;
- To shift political focus towards issues affecting the quality of life of both men and women by ensuring an equitable distribution of productive resources and opportunities for growth;
- To give visibility to reproductive roles of women in policymaking and increase women's participation in the political process. (Commonwealth Foundation: 2004)

***ii. Is there equality in the treatment between men and women in governance institutions and processes?***

Even though today we find that there are a large number of women in governance, they are still fighting for equal treatment. Women often find themselves kept on the margins of decision-making in governments, relegated to 'soft' policy areas such as education and health, while important decisions are often made between men in the 'inner circle' of male politicians keeping women out of decision-making (Brody, 2009). The under representation of women in the political sphere is inextricably linked with the low and inferior status of women in society in countries like India, especially in the context of declining sex ratio, increasing violence and crimes against women, and their marginalised status in employment, education and health sectors (Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre, 2000).

***iii. Do institutions of governance consider women's 'double burden'?***

People have a different set of expectations of male and female leaders. While male leaders are not expected to be primarily responsible for their families' needs, female

leaders are expected to fulfill this role too. It is normal for male leaders to set aside family concerns for needs of their constituents and other job-related demands. In contrast, female leaders are expected to give full and equal time and energy to raising children and taking care of the home while discharging their functions as politicians.

The demands of traditional gender roles and economic and social obligations leave women with little time and energy to pursue active participation in politics as opposed to men who have no assigned roles and responsibilities in the household, leaving them with plenty of free time.

### **1.1 Causes of Gender Imbalance in Governance Structures**

*i) Private-public divide:* By tradition, the public sphere is considered to be a male domain. While women are confined to the background, hidden in their homes as caretakers, men are encouraged and expected to actively participate in the public sphere and aspire to be traders, academics, artists, inventors, scientists, etc.

The private domain is associated with the household, reproductive work and femininity, whereas the public domain is associated with political authority, public decision-making, productive work and masculinity. These spaces associated with women and men have always hindered women's ability to negotiate in the public domain. Although the private domain of households is typically associated with women, men are held responsible for the welfare and safety of all family members. And women in the public domain find themselves either being criticised for their inadequacies, or find themselves being patronised by men.

**ii) *Autonomy of women:*** Studies have shown that far from being a unit where all resources and benefits are pooled and shared equitably, the use, distribution and output of resources and labour have to be constantly negotiated within the household. Typically, women's bargaining power in the household is restricted due to their lack of access to and control over resources, no autonomy in decision-making, low self-esteem, low skills and education, restricted physical mobility and eventually less power as compared to men.

**iii) *Women are not qualified to take on leadership positions:*** Since women are excluded from leadership roles, they are deprived of opportunities for leadership skills training. Girls have lesser chances for schooling and higher education; as a result, they have limited opportunities to develop skills and talents in the public sphere. Women also find themselves passed up for training opportunities at work because it is not considered to be cost efficient to invest in women who might give up work anytime for the sake of their families. Since a woman's primary commitment is commonly perceived to be domestic chores and taking care of the family, education is seen as time consuming, hindering her other activities.

**iv) *Violence Against Women In Politics (VAWIP):*** VAWIP is rooted in the attempt to dissuade or stop a woman (and other women by extension) from realising her full capabilities and legal rights, exerting her leadership, mobilising constituents and critically deliberating policy choices. In our context, it is an intentional effort against a woman gaining officially sanctioned political power. This can take a variety of forms – from a community member's physical or verbal assault, to fellow elected officials' concerted creation of administrative difficulties to a few prominent individuals' pre-meditated media slandering campaign.

***Some common forms of VAWIP are:***

*Physical / sexual assault:* Incidents include slapping; tearing of clothes; throwing of acid; public beating; coercing/forcing sexual relations; gang rape; murder/assassination of a Women Elected Representative (WER) or the murder of her children.

*Verbal assaults:* Incidents include the use of abusive or explicit language; insinuations; taunting and false accusations of corruption and wrongful conduct.

*Threats to self / family / community:* The deployment of fear is a common weapon against WERs (Mayaram, 2002). Incidents revolve around coercion, conspiracy, psychological torture/harassment and include wielding of guns/weapons.

*Character assassination:* Incidents include ridiculing, blaming, passing negative comments and publicising negative and false information about the attributes of the WER to the community. Comments passed could be about the 'loose' character of the WER, and associations between performance in public position, style of physical movement, appearance and resultant inability, abnormality and shamefulness.

*Women's multiple burdens block political participation:* The demands of traditional gender roles and economic and social obligations leave women with little time and energy to pursue active participation in politics as opposed to men who have no assigned roles and responsibilities in the household, which leaves them with plenty of free time.

*Other intersecting hierarchies such as class, caste, ethnicity, religion, and rural / urban locations:* These further complicate gender inequality in governance. In India, for example, women from low caste groups, despite reservations, seldom wield any real

political power due to the strongly entrenched notions of caste and gender hierarchy (Anandhi S, 2002). Studies have also shown that WERs with no economic entitlements were often under the control of those who owned and controlled resources, predominantly males. Consequently, dependency curbed their independent decision-making powers (Niranjana, 2002).

The existence of persistent discrimination against women and inequality between women and men requires that engendering governance strategies be by and large complemented with targeted interventions on women's empowerment.

Women and men do not have equal social, economic and legal rights. Women still lack independent rights to own land, manage property, conduct business or even travel without their husband's consent. Women continue to have poor command over a range of productive resources including education, land, information and financial resources. Limited access to resources and weaker capabilities constrain women's power to influence resource allocation and investment decisions at home, in their community and at the national level, and women still remain vastly underrepresented in national and local governments the world over (World Bank, 2001).

**v) High expectations from women who are in leadership roles:** As discussed earlier, apart from the expectations from women to fulfill their dual responsibilities at home and as leaders, women leaders are expected to possess exceptional personal traits and qualifications in terms of educational background and professional accomplishments as well as being politically astute. They are expected to be accessible to their constituents at all times without neglecting their roles as wife, mother or daughter.

**vi) Differential access to political resources:** Seeking an elective position entails huge costs which most women cannot afford on their own. Women seek to gain the support needed for a political campaign by taking membership in a political party. But women are not given priority by parties as candidates because they often lack an organised constituency. And women candidates endorsed by political parties are usually those who are from a political family or clan, from among the elite, well connected to influential people, or those who have a celebrity status. Many successful women leaders also trace their ascent to power through their relationship with a male political leader: as the wife of a slain leader or daughter of an older, if not deceased, politician.

Therefore, we find that the most persistent obstacles to women's political empowerment are deep rooted in gender stereotypes that regard women as being unsuitable for leadership roles. To fight these stereotypes, many women in power are pushed to excel at everything. These undue and unfair expectations from women act as a deterrent for women to pursue leadership positions.

## UNIT 2. Engendering Governance

### *What does engendering governance refer to?*

An engendered governance structure implies that the governance structures and processes are gender sensitive. Gender sensitive governance would mean (Brody, 2009, p. 60):

- More women and men who do not conform to a heterosexual stereotype be employed in decision-making positions in governance institutions, whether they be local government authorities, UN agencies or in the home. This particularly includes areas of governance that have been considered the province of (heterosexual) males, such as trade and finance, in government and international institutions, and community level politics.
- Women and men will be actively involved in shaping these governance institutions, processes and policies in order for transformations to take place within these governance institutions, and in society more broadly, towards gender equality goals
- More women will be involved in CSOs that are holding governments to account and involved in governance processes such as participatory budgeting.
- Gender-sensitive governance will be responsive to the different needs, interests, priorities and responsibilities of men and women. It applies and measures principles of responsiveness, accountability, transparency, equity and inclusiveness in ways that recognise gender inequalities and differences.

- Governance institutions and processes will follow the rule of law and are committed to its implementation, with a clear focus on promoting human rights, particularly the rights of women.
- Above all, governance institutions will uphold the principles of gender equality and social justice as central principles, as well as goals of governance in their own right.
- At the highest level of governance institutions, political conviction will drive this gender-sensitive approach to governance.
- Strategically placed and well-resourced teams of gender specialists will promote capacity building on gender equality, and will have the power to hold individuals to account for performance against clear institutionally agreed indicators. Organisations promoting effective or good governance such as bilateral and multilateral development agencies and CSOs will apply the same governance goals and principles to their own institutions.
- All women will be recognised as citizens of the country where they are living regardless of their ethnicity, race, caste, disability, income, lifestyle, refugee status or country of origin and are able to claim the full rights of their citizenship.

Achieving gender-sensitive governance requires:

- Questioning the problems that governance is seen as addressing, as well as the goals it hopes to achieve.
- Questioning how these problems have been prioritised.

- Providing evidence for gender inequalities to be tackled as a priority both in institutions and in society.
- Devising strategies for addressing gender inequalities through governance institutions and processes.
- Presenting a vision of the outcomes required for gender equality.

Engendering governance therefore implies bringing in gender or mainstreaming gender (which was not there earlier) in the governance of different structures and institutions of society (Panda, 2008). This would include raising awareness; challenging discriminatory stereotypes that place women in the private domain and men in the public domain in important positions; ensuring and encouraging communities to support and demand women as leaders and managers; developing a culture of sharing household responsibilities between men and women; capacity building for women to conduct themselves effectively in the public domain (for example, to contest elections); and providing adequate funds to enhance women's capacities in governing structures (Panda, 2008). We will discuss gender mainstreaming in greater detail later.

Any sort of attempt at engendering governance institutions should have a transformative agenda without which there will be no impact in terms of sustaining the changes introduced and improvement in the status of women (Panda, 2008).

### UNIT 3. Women's Empowerment

The idea of power is at the root of the term empowerment. Power can be understood as operating in a number of different ways (Williams, Seed, & Mwau, 1994; Oxaal & Baden, 1997):

- *Power over:* This power involves an either/or relationship of domination/subordination. Ultimately, it is based on socially sanctioned threats of violence and intimidation, it requires constant vigilance to maintain, and it invites active and passive resistance;
- *Power to:* This power relates to having decision-making authority, power to solve problems and can be creative and enabling;
- *Power with:* This power involves people organising with a common purpose or common understanding to achieve collective goals; and
- *Power within:* This power refers to self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness. It relates to how individuals can recognise, through analysing their experience, how power operates in their lives and gain the confidence to act to influence and change this.

In a patriarchal society, as is the case in India, men have the decision-making power in many areas of life. This means that women are often discriminated against because of their powerless position in society. It means that men are the group with power and women are in positions of subordination. Redistribution of power sometimes leads to

conflict because giving power to one group leads to taking power away from another. We shall discuss about how to deal with conflict in a later module.

Therefore, empowerment is about the redistribution of power between the powerful and the powerless. It is about having the authority to influence decision-making and making decisions on factors that affect one's life with awareness, consciousness and confidence. Participation in decision-making that comes from the process of voting and standing for elections is a significant example of empowerment. Empowerment is about enabling the processes that make people believe in themselves as decision-makers and rightful members in the decision-making space.

Empowerment can also involve challenging the forms of oppression which compel millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny their human rights (Oxfam, 1995).

Women's empowerment involves a process through which women are able to critically assess their situation, and develop their voice to raise issues concerned with their needs, interests and concerns in order to bring about a transformation in society without any influence from others. This includes:

- Supporting and encouraging women's participation
- Encouraging and enabling women's capacity building and skills in adequate spheres
- Encouraging women's decision-making capacity
- Enabling women to have control over resources
- Funding women's organisations that work to end gender discrimination and subordination
- By fostering dialogue between women and persons in positions of power.

## Summary

At the end of this module, you are familiar with the engendering process for governance. You have studied and are able to discern structures that hinder women's active participation in the political sphere. You have also examined strategies which can be used to enhance and strengthen the participation of women in governance. Finally, the imperative of empowering women so that they can be active participants and act as equals alongside men has been highlighted as an integral part of any gender strategy.

## Recommended Readings

- PRIA (2014). *Understanding gender*. New Delhi: PRIA (has been taken from PRIA archives)
- PRIA (2014). *Engendering governance in India*. New Delhi: PRIA (has been taken from PRIA Archives)

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