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Women's Political Empowerment and Leadership

Module - 2

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Modules of Women's Political Empowerment and Leadership

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

One finds that women elected representatives (WERs), by and large, are unable to exercise their leadership. Gendered identities and practices have often limited their capacities to articulate and act upon their claims and concerns. The discourses, procedures, structures and functions of governance are still, by and large, heavily skewed in favour of men. Women are unable to articulate the priorities of their constituency and influence decision-making. Consequently their voices are silent. The patriarchal culture neither sees women as political entities nor allows them to develop in that direction. Men, both within households and institutions of governance, exploit women's inferior position. Their efficacy is always under scrutiny, their views are not considered significant, and they are not included in meetings. Male elected representatives and government officials have reservations about their potential to lead and govern, as they are by and large ignorant of administrative proceedings. Social perceptions about women leadership in governance need to be changed. The social image of WERs as housewives renders the work of many WERs invisible. Clearly, political representation alone cannot be a sufficient mechanism for women to exercise their agency. They need skills, knowledge and information to articulate their concerns and influence decision-making as per their concerns.

Learning Objectives

On completion of this Module, we will be able to understand:

- How enabling environments for political participation of women can be created
- How processes within a group work
- How to strengthen groups

Unit 1: Creating an Enabling Environment for Women's Political Empowerment

Political participation is a continuous process. It begins with an aware constituency that raises concerns and holds responsible officers accountable to address those concerns. For women's political participation, it is necessary to create an environment that will facilitate the election, appointment or promotion of a sufficient number of women to decision-making positions.

There are a range of possible mechanisms to increase women's participation in political life which have had varying degrees of success, including (Oxaal & Baden, 1997):

- Reform of political parties; quotas and other forms of affirmative action;
- Training to develop women's skills and gender sensitivity
- Work with women's sections of political parties
- The development of women's political organisations

One important approach to supporting women's empowerment is promoting women's active participation in formal politics, along with supporting any programmes for democratisation and good governance that emphasise on the development of a strong civil society (Oxaal & Baden, 1997). This is premised on three fundamental principles of:

1. The equality between women and men;
2. Women's right to full development of their potential; and
3. Women's right to self-representation and self-determination.

From the above, it is clear that it is not enough that relevant legislation is passed, provisions of international conferences ratified, quotas instituted, or policies adopted for increasing women's access to decision-making positions in politics. It has to be complemented by strong political will on the part of government, political parties and other organisations.

Measures to increase the quality of women's political participation include awareness raising, training programmes for female candidates, the cultivation of links and networks between women in local governance and women in NGOs, and timing of meetings and provision of childcare to fit with women's domestic responsibilities.

1.1 Strategies to Increase Women's Access to Decision-Making Positions In Politics

Some specific strategies that are directed at increasing women's access to power and their number in decision-making positions are:

1.1.1 Affirmative policies

Women represent more than half of the world's population, yet they constitute less than half of the global electorate. Although India was one of the first democratic nations to grant women the vote, women currently hold only 11 per cent of the parliamentary seats (Kably, 2013) and women are neither represented in legislative spaces nor substantially contribute towards the formation of national laws. If women represent half the population, they therefore have the right to half the seats, since decisions made in parliament have a direct impact on their lives (Kumari & Dubey, 1994).

In order for women's perspectives to be placed on the political agenda, a critical mass of women is required, with 30 per cent often cited as a figure above which women begin to make an impact on political life (Oxaal & Baden, 1997).

Quotas have often been used to increase women's participation in the leadership of political parties and in party lists for elections. Although quotas are useful to advocate women's inclusion, governments must be careful to ensure that the quota percentage does not become a 'glass ceiling' that limits the proportion of women to a specific figure.

India has been on threshold of another landmark for some time now – a women's reservation bill has been debated in the Rajya Sabha (upper house of the Indian Parliament). This bill makes provisions for:

- Not less than $\frac{1}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ of seats to be reserved in the Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian Parliament, members of which are directly elected by the people) and state legislative assemblies for women

- $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of the total number of seats reserved under clause (2) of article 330 (the existing quota for Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes) be reserved for women belonging to Scheduled Castes or Schedules Tribes
- Reservation of seats to cease to exist or expire after 15 years of the commencement of the constitutional amendment
- To select women candidates through a system of rotation, by which $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of the total number of constituencies to be reserved for women candidates will be determined through a draw of lots
- To consider extending the reservation to Rajya Sabha and the legislative councils of states, without making any definite provisions within the scope of the current bill (Kumari & Dubey, 1994).

1.1.2 Capacity Building

Knowledge, training, and education as resources enable women to exercise their agency. Empowerment through processes of learning and action strengthens their self-esteem, analytical skills, competencies and political consciousness. Marginalised and excluded citizens gain a sense of their rights and join together to transform inequitable power relations and develop more democratic societies. WERs need to be politically enlightened, not only about their rights and duties, but also about the nature of the constitution, democratic processes and values, working of democratic institutions, and concepts and relevance of local administration (e.g., in the context of India the 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts which are related to the strengthening of local self-

governance and reservation of $\frac{1}{3}$ rd seats for women), various programmes and policies specifically for women and those for weaker sections of society. WERs who receive such training are able to exercise their leadership effectively. However, systematic orientation and capacity enhancement of elected women has been largely ignored.

PRIA's Women's Political Empowerment and Leadership programme (2008) aimed at addressing the gaps in education and training women leaders to effectively take up political roles in institutions of local self-governance, both at the urban and rural levels. (Further information on this capacity building intervention with Women Elected Representatives are attached as extra readings with this Module)

Some of the strategies that were followed were:

(i) Curriculum development

The curriculum was specifically designed based on an understanding of knowledge, skills and attitudes which women leaders need to enable them to carry out specific tasks and behave in certain ways.

(ii) Capacity building

On issues such as perspective building in understanding issues of governance, gender and leadership and their inter-relationships, skill-building in networking, interfacing and communication (public speaking, campaigning, advocacy, etc).

(iii) Mobilisation

Mobilising women leaders to network on common issues, interests or concerns and

articulate their common concerns and priorities in meetings in order to influence district level planning and implementation.

(iv) Gender awareness

Demystifying gender so that processes are initiated for women leaders to make informed choices and exercise power.

(v) Building agency of women leaders

Women leaders are encouraged to participate and articulate their concerns at meetings of the local governing bodies, i.e., gram sabha, gram panchayat, panchayat samiti, zilla parishad and municipality. In this way, they ensure that women's issues are reflected in the agenda of the contesting candidates in the panchayat and municipal elections. This agency also acts as a motivational force for encouraging and supporting potential women candidates to contest elections and groom them in the finer details of political dynamics.

Training and education programmes were carried out as a three-step process:

- a. Half-day workshops at the local level and one-day workshops at the district level on roles and responsibilities of women leaders in governance were designed. Some women leaders were identified and selected for an advanced level of education for political empowerment at the state level.

- b. Three-day state level workshops were conducted for potential leaders who were selected from the district level workshops, which were aimed at providing capacity building initiatives on the issues identified through a needs assessment exercise.
- c. Five-day national level workshop (national school) for political empowerment. A core group of approximately 100 women leaders emerged from this school.

1.1.3 Political will

A strong political will on the part of the government and the leadership of political parties, business, trade and labour unions, academic and other social institutions is critical in achieving an environment conducive to promoting women's political participation.

- Political parties play an important role in helping women get elected. They can establish a committee on gender equality to review their policies and procedures for candidate selection and ascending to leadership positions in the party. Self-imposed quotas for the inclusion of women in a party's list of candidates could be seen as being more effective than one that is mandated by law.
- Governments which provide special subsidies for political campaigns can also consider allocating incentives to parties that include a significant percentage of women in their list of candidates; or to parties that secure women get elected to office.
- Sex-disaggregated statistics on decision-making bodies at all levels is necessary to convince government leaders to pursue changes favouring women's increased representation in these political structures. These statistics should be readily available to be used by NGOs and national women's machineries to monitor and follow-up with individual ministries with regard to increasing the proportion of women in higher level positions.

- Governments can also include specific targets and goals for women's political participation in their national development plan for women. According to the UN report *World's Women 2010*, women hold an average of 17 per cent of the seats in parliament, and only 7 of 150 elected heads of state and 11 of 192 heads of government were women.
- A committee on gender equality within the party can also examine its processes, such as the setting of schedules of meetings to ensure that it does not conflict with family time. It can also plan for the provision of free or inexpensive childcare facilities.
- Parties can draw up a roster of women candidates interested in running for electoral office or nomination for appointive positions in government. They can help these women prepare for their leadership positions by facilitating formal and informal mentoring schemes. Seasoned politicians, senior party members and political advocates can coach potential women candidates on such topics as how to organise and work with a constituency as well as to advocate for issues.
- Political parties can also provide training on parliamentary procedures, understanding the government budgeting system, building an electoral image and using the media effectively.
- Adequate financial and logistical support of political parties to women during the conduct of their campaign is very critical.
- Women's representation in local government structures does not automatically result in their informed and effective participation in these structures. The simplistic appeals for increased participation of women generally overlooks the institutional inadequacies such as timing of meetings, problems of quorum, procedures adopted for finalising development plans and projects, articulation of their priorities and issues in the meetings, the quality of deliberations and manipulation of discussions by dominant groups, rules for filing nominations and travel allowances, etc. Consequently women, including WERs, rarely attend local body meetings and hardly ever articulate their priorities.

Unit 2: Conscious and Sub-conscious Processes of a Group

The marginalisation of women reflects certain biases that exist in society that is closely related to its power structures. It thus becomes crucial that we understand what the dynamics of group behaviour are to gain theoretical understanding on the conscious and sub-conscious elements that shape our social life. When administering steps to better the condition of women in political spaces, one is most likely to face opposition since such a step disturbs the existing power structure. In this section, we will understand what are the origins of such dissent and how to bring about basic changes in a more consensual manner.

A group is a collection of people who interact and depend upon each other. We are all in some way or another part of a group. A group has the following characteristics:

- A common objective, goal or shared common purpose (although not every member of the group may know it)
- A framework or boundary in terms of time and space
- A definable membership which is relatively stable (a relatively fixed number of people who remain members of the group over a period of time)
- Interaction and interdependence between members
- A group consciousness or a conscious identification with each other
- The ability to act together as one unit or organism

- A clear boundary (in relation to physical space and time). It is possible to identify who is a member and who is not.

Group sizes may vary, some may be small families or they could be large trade unions. We are all members of a family, a club, a religious group, an organisation or a community.

It is important to understand the processes that work in a group – how it functions, handles communication and how group members relate to each other.

The different processes that a group exhibits are discussed below.

2.1 Conscious processes of a group

When we observe a group, we usually take note of what the group is talking about, the ideas being exchanged, and the goal the group is working towards. All of this refers to the content of the group.

But there is another aspect which is equally important, since it affects performance of the task. This refers to how the group functions, i.e., how it handles communication, how its members try to fulfil the task, and how they relate to each other. This aspect refers to processes going on within the group.

There are a number of processes which will be discussed in the following sections of this unit:

- Communication
- Participation
- Leadership
- Decision-making
- Problem solving
- Conflict resolution

Every group manifests these processes. As a skilful observer within or outside the group we can identify the patterns in which these processes occur. It can then be decided whether these patterns should be changed or improved. Understanding these processes helps the leader deal with issues of learning and change within the group, physical setting or facilitation (PRIA, 2002).

2.1.1 Communication

The pattern of communication within a group is sometimes a reflection of what is happening in the group at any given moment of time. Communication within a group may be spoken or unspoken, verbal or non-verbal. Different patterns of communication have different impacts on the performance of a group. All the various aspects of communication need to be taken into consideration.

One-way and two-way communication

One-way communication relates to a situation in which one person conveys the message and others listen, e.g., during a lecture. This form of communication is sometimes dismissed as merely the passing on of information and ideas rather than authentic communication.

Two-way communication implies a situation in which two people talk to each other and also exchange ideas with each other. This helps in:

- Clarification of doubts, confusion and misconceptions
- Both parties understand each other
- Receive and give feedback
- Indicates the degree of respect between both parties

Vertical and horizontal communication

Two individuals, or an individual and a group, may sometimes treat each other as inferior or superior based on differences in sex, caste, class, status, etc. Those who assume the inferior position talk 'up' to the other, expressing humility and submission. Our efforts should be to communicate with each other as equals so that communication can occur 'horizontally'.

Mode of communication

We have a tendency to equate communication with talking or exchanging words. But communication may also be non-verbal, such as expressions, gestures and change in voice. It has been estimated that, of the entire message that gets transmitted, words constitute a tiny part, while the bulk is comprised of non-verbal expressions.

Listening

A very important element in effective communication is to listen to what the other person is saying. Just the mere fact that two people are talking does not imply that listening is taking place. Listening is based on hearing and understanding what others say to us. It is possible only when we pay attention to what is being said. Most of us are so busy thinking and putting across our own ideas and points of view that we seldom listen carefully to others.

Note Bank: *Guidelines for effective listening*

- Concentrate on hearing. Pay attention to the person who is speaking
- Hearing the speakers point of view with an open mind
- Understanding the feelings behind what is being said (e.g., equating the statement "I do not want to continue this communication" with the feelings of being hurt or rejected)
- Do not assume or predict what the speaker is trying to say
- Do not become defensive, argue or interrupt when the speaker challenges some of your ideas.
- Hearing what is not being said or what is implied but not uttered
- Asking questions to clarify what the speaker means to say
- Do not pretend to have understood when you have not. Reword and repeat what you have heard and check with the speaker if you have understood correctly
- Summarise main points or principles in the communication

(PRIA, 1995; PRIA, 2002)

2.1.2 Participation

Participation is the fundamental process within a group, because many of the subsequent processes depend upon participation of the various members. However, the levels and degrees of participation vary – active participants converse more, they are demanding and volatile; while others are more quiet, withdrawn and passive.

Participation of members is vital to the existence of a group. If members do not participate, the group ceases to exist. But this does not mean that everyone must talk. There will be many in the group who may be listening very carefully but prefer to remain silent. And there may be some who are uninvolved and indifferent to the task. It is important, therefore, to identify those members who are present and involved, and those who are present but not involved.

Note Bank: *Factors which affect members' participation*

- The content or task of the group – is it of interest, importance and relevance?
- The physical atmosphere – is it comfortable physically, socially and psychologically?
- The psychological atmosphere - is it accepting, non-threatening?
- Members' personal preoccupations – are there any distracting thoughts on their minds?
- The levels of interaction and discussion – is adequate information provided for everyone to understand? Is it at a level everyone understands?
- Familiarity between group members – do members already know each other?

(PRIA, 2002)

We have already discussed the factors that inhibit women from participating actively in politics in Unit 1. We can now begin relating to those factors and discerning the reasons for women's hesitation to participate in public sphere or in groups.

2.1.3 Decision-making

All groups make decisions, but different styles of decision-making are used with different effectiveness. The manner in which decisions are taken affects group performance, particularly in terms of implementation. Decision-making in a group occurs in any one of the following ways (PRIA, 2002):

- *The plop*: The manner in which a decision is proposed by an individual and no one opposes it. This occurs in a group in which the members have equal status or when one member is highly aggressive.
- *Self-authorized decision*: Is one in which the authority makes the decision on behalf of the whole group. The individual who assumes authority makes a decision. The others find it easier/convenient to accept the decision rather than to reject it. The difference between this and the plop is that the plop is not tendered with authority but gets adopted by default, whereas in this case the decision is tendered with the assumption that it will be adopted.

- *Pairing*: When two individuals join forces to make a decision, one floats the idea and the other seconds it on behalf of the group
- *Minority group*: The decision is made by the clique and the rest accept it
- *Vote*: The final decision taken depends upon the number of people accepting the decision. A vote may be taken by a show of hand or even by a ballot.
- *Consensus*: This is minimum consent by all. It is important to distinguish between true and false consensus. True consensus occurs when everyone has contributed to the discussion, all angles have been considered and everyone is in full agreement. This type of consensus is desirable, but does not always happen. What we have to aim for is to make everyone feel that they have had the opportunity to put forth their views and influence the decision, that it was a good and open discussion and that they are prepared to act on the decision taken.

2.1.4 Problem Solving

Most groups find that they are unable to solve a problem because they address it at a superficial level. After that, they find themselves blocked because they cannot figure out why the problem occurred and how they can tackle it. Therefore, the process that is adopted for problem solving can determine the types of solutions that are consequently implemented. An effective problem solving procedure would be to:

- *Clearly define the problem*: Collect additional information from elsewhere if necessary, and analyse it to understand the problem further

- *Look for solutions:* and the normal sequence of events. Sometimes, it pays to deliberately think of ideas which are apparently not relevant. The objective should be to generate as many ideas and suggestions as possible.
- *Choose the appropriate alternative:* This will involve resolving only some of the conflict. Collaborative and consensus based resolution is preferable rather than forcing a choice. Considerable discussion is needed to evaluate the various alternative solutions on the basis of constraints and available resources.
- *Implement the solution:* through a plan; evaluate how the problem is solved.

2.1.5 Leadership

Understanding leadership

Leaders are those who provide direction to others. Leadership is a process through which an individual influences a group of individuals, enabling them to work together to achieve a common goal. There is usually one leader designated in a group. In small groups, a leader (chairman, secretary, etc.) is designated, through voting or common consensus, to perform the role of a leader. This individual may be from among the members or an outsider.

One perspective believes that leaders are born with characteristics and qualities that make them a leader. Another perspective believes that leaders engage in the two

primary tasks of task behaviour and relationship behaviour. A successful leader pays attention to the task at hand as well as paying attention to relationships and social processes. In small groups, the task of the leader is sometimes shared between the different members of the group at different times. One member may provide leadership with respect to achieving the goal while a different individual may provide leadership in maintaining the group as a whole. But the most important task of a leader is to provide vision and inspiration to the group.

The two types of leadership are:

Ascribed leadership: when the leadership role is given to the person because s/he is born into the particular family, such as political or ancient inheritance of thrones.

Acquired leadership: when a leadership role is given to the person who demonstrates the competencies to influence.

Leadership styles are based on the behaviour of the leader

Autocratic leader: is one who imposes her/his own will with little or no concern for the needs, opinions and preferences of the other members. This leader is greatly concerned with completing the task.

Laissez-faire leader: is one who has little or no concern for the task at hand, but is primarily concerned with letting people act according to their own wishes with minimal interference.

Democratic leader: is one who is equally concerned about the task and the people. The leadership functions are also shared in this leadership style.

Role of the leader

Leaders have specific roles. They are:

- To raise the awareness of the group
- To motivate the group
- To increase the readiness of the group to accept responsibility
- To develop group work
- To convince the group that they can affect change
- To further individual members' needs for growth and development

2.1.6 Conflict Resolution

It is important to remember that conflicts do exist in groups. Differences are bound to arise when members with different experiences and attitudes come together in a group. Sometimes these conflicts are expressed and at other times suppressed.

The primary task when conflicts arise is to understand the cause of the differences arising within the group. Conflict resolution is an ongoing process because conflicts do not go away; each conflict resolution feeds into the next conflict.

2.2 Sub-conscious Processes of a Group

To understand why the processes that have been discussed occur within a group, one needs to consider some of the sub-conscious processes and emotional undercurrents that produce interfering or destructive behaviour amongst group members.

Response to authority

From the moment we enter a group, we sub-consciously try to relate to the authority figure in the group. Depending upon our individual experiences and reactions to authority in the past, the first response is either one of dependency or of counter-dependency:

- *Dependency*: Members look up to the authority to tell them what to do. They are lost without the authority of the leader.
- *Counter-dependency*: Members resent authority, and their behaviour reflects hostility towards authority.

The group must emerge from this state and enter a state of interdependency where members can relate to each other.

Fight, Flight and Pairing

Working cohesively in a group is not a natural function. The unconscious response in the group is to either fight, to flee or to pair up (PRIA, 2002).

- *Fight*: Disagreement, asserting dominance, attacking whatever is believed to be responsible for stress, trying to get one's own way
- *Flight*: Staying out of discussion, making irrelevant remarks, and cracking jokes continuously
- *Pairing*: Forming groups or sub-groups that are not task oriented, in which members protect or support one another.

In order to function cohesively and work towards the goal, these unconscious processes must be resolved.

Unit 3: Making Groups Stronger

As we have seen in the previous unit, there are various factors, some that we are aware of and some that have become so embedded through socialisation that we no longer discern them, that dictate group behaviour. These dispositions can cause dissent when change is being introduced in a group that has heterogeneity in terms of attitudes and opinions of individuals. Here we look at how to promote solidarity and how to enable groups so that they can communicate better and are harmonious in their functioning.

A body of people is not a group when the primary interest of members is individual accomplishment, where there is a lack of concern with the activities of the group as a whole, and where members are often absent during meetings and the rivalry between group members is allowed to dominate.

Outlined below are some of the ways to make groups stronger:

i. Proximity

One method is to keep the members close to each other geographically so that they are close enough to discuss and participate in all group activities. Besides work, the group can come together to celebrate festivals and occasions together. This fosters a sense of unity within the group.

ii. Homogeneity

An effective leader develops a sense of oneness within the group so that they can collaborate better with each other. Similar values should be fostered within the group and

all newcomers should be put through training and an orientation period so that they too might be able to blend into the group easily.

iii. Cohesiveness

There has to be cohesiveness within the group for the group to be strong. When there is cohesiveness, the interest levels of group members for group activities increases and their levels of participation in group activities increases.

Cohesiveness within the group can be achieved if each group member can identify their own individual needs and is determined that the need can be satisfied by the group.

It is also important to remember that some group members remain within the group when they know that the group can protect her/him from outside events. At the same time, members also forego a group membership when they feel that they are vulnerable to outside threats because of their membership.

iv. Work on behalf of the group

For a group to function as a united force, it is important for group members to agree on the group's purpose, activities, goals and shared beliefs.

It is imperative to also examine and then transform our personal beliefs, attitudes and experiences.

Summary

At the end of this module, we have been able to gain some conceptual clarity on strategies for creating an enabling environment for women's political participation. It is imperative to examine and then transform our personal beliefs, attitudes and experiences. However, these strategies will not be effective if women do not possess the necessary pre-requisite skills to interact effectively in a large group. We have therefore examined the dynamics involved in group processes, and the key skills needed to be an effective, participatory leader, so that women are enabled to make their voices heard and to act collectively in order to create momentum for gender-sensitive change.

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