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Women's Political Empowerment and Leadership

Module - 3

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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

The process of decentralisation marks the devolution of power from the centre to local units of governance. It is based on the idea that such local governments are closer to the people and therefore understand their issues and share their aspirations. In such a situation, decentralisation empowers the people. Governance becomes democratic and not an abstract that originates from a remote centre.

Gender mainstreaming becomes a crucial aspect that should be incorporated in the process of decentralisation. This is so because the gender question is a larger social issue and a decentralised government is expected to represent the concerns of society as a whole. As the motive behind decentralisation is to subvert traditional power structures, the assertion of the gender issue and countering the lack of representation of women are important. This module discusses what decentralisation is and how to incorporate gender into it.

Learning objectives

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

- Understand the concept of decentralisation;
- Understand the concept of gender mainstreaming
- Understand how gender can be mainstreamed into decentralisation processes

Unit 1: Types of Decentralisation

Depending on the nature and type of power that is transferred, decentralisation can be categorised into four types. A brief description of each is given below.

1.1 Political Decentralisation

Definition

Political decentralisation normally refers to situations where political power and authority has been partially transferred to sub-national levels of government. The most obvious manifestations of this type of decentralisation are elected and empowered sub-national forms of government ranging from village councils to state level bodies (European Commission, 2007).

Rationale

The rationale behind political decentralisation is that citizens or their representatives should have more power in public decision-making. Decisions that are made with greater participation would be better informed and more relevant to the diverse interests in society as compared to those made by national authorities. It would also lead to efficient and effective public services. Political decentralisation is therefore about creating the spaces for local governments to understand and act on the needs and preferences of the people.

Indicators for Political Decentralisation

Political decentralisation requires:

- The creation of new sub-national jurisdictions at regional or local level;
- The generalisation of elections by universal suffrage to cover all sub-national jurisdictions;
- The transfer of authority with sufficient financial resources for sub-national jurisdictions to carry out functions assigned;
- The removal of the a priori (*theoretical*) supervisory role of state representatives and the institution of legal administrative control (*administrative tribunals*), and a posteriori (*experiential*) control of budgets.

To achieve the above, the following would also have to be undertaken:

- Constitutional or statutory reforms to adapt to decentralised contexts;
- The development of pluralistic political parties;
- The strengthening of legislatures;
- The creation of local political units; and
- The encouragement of effective public interest groups.

1.2 Fiscal Decentralisation

Definition

Fiscal decentralisation involves a level of resource allocation to local government, which would allow it to deliver decentralised functions. Fiscal decentralisation regulates four areas:

- (i) Expenditure assignment;
- (ii) Revenue assignment;
- (iii) Intergovernmental transfers, and
- (iv) Sub-national borrowing.

Rationale

If local governments and private organisations are to carry out decentralised functions effectively, they must have an adequate level of revenue – either raised locally or transferred from the central government – as well as the authority to make decisions.

Indicators of Fiscal Decentralisation

Structure of fiscal revenues: Which level of government collects what proportion of tax?

Central-local tax discretion: How are taxes collected? Which level of government actually gets the money out of the taxpayer? How much top-down redistribution is there from the centre to local government? If there is little redistribution, each level of government stands on its own feet and is responsible for the outcome. If there is a lot of redistribution from the top down (in the form of block grants, automatic funding, etc), then this encourages fiscal irresponsibility. Nobody knows or cares where the money goes or comes from. It is reasonable to believe that such fiscal incoherence would be associated with high levels of taxation.

Local discretionary taxing power: Which level of government exercises the power to determine taxes from a legal point of view? How much influence does the citizen/taxpayer have to control central and/or local government expenditure? Are tax referenda possible?

Local discretionary spending power: Who decides what public revenue should be spent on? Are different levels of government autonomous, or are tasks set from above?

Legal rights of taxpayers: What legal protection do taxpayers enjoy? Do the tax authorities enjoy special privileges, do people have to address themselves to special administrative courts, or can they seek redress through the normal courts? Such conditions indicate the legal provision for taxpayers. Taxpayers need to have easy access to independent local courts if they find themselves in conflict with the tax authorities.

1.3 Administrative Decentralisation

Definition

Administrative decentralisation refers to the full or partial transfer of decision-making authority, resources and responsibilities for the delivery of selected public services from the central government to the lower levels of government, agencies and field offices of central government line agencies.

Kinds of Administrative Decentralisation (World Bank, 2014):

Deconcentration: Deconcentration is one of the weakest form of decentralisation. It is most commonly found in unitary states. In this form of decentralisation, local officials are not elected. Rather, there is observed a transfer of power to an administrative unit that rests in the central government and is usually a field or regional office.

Delegation: This form of decentralisation is more extensive than the previous one. Here we see delegation of power where now the power of decision-making and administration of public functions rests with organisations that are not wholly controlled by the centre.

But these semi-autonomous organisations are ultimately answerable to the central power. Also, even in this level of decentralisation, local officials are not elected. Governments delegate these responsibilities in certain activities like the creation of corporations, housing authorities, transportation authorities, special service districts, semi-autonomous school districts, regional development corporations, or special project implementation units.

Devolution: This is the most decentralised form of administration. Here most functions of the center are devolved to local units of governance with corporate status. There is a transfer of authority to make decisions and handle the finance and management to local units that are quasi-autonomous.

In the case of India, responsibilities for services are transferred to panchayats and municipalities in the rural and urban local levels respectively. These units of governance are elected by the people with sarpanch/mayors and councils and can raise their own revenues. Investment decisions can also be made by these authorities. In this system, geographical boundaries have been clearly defined and legally recognised.

Rationale

If local governments and private organisations are to carry out decentralised functions effectively, in addition to the finances needed to do so, there is a need for human resources (functionaries), along with the required capacities (the know-how) to undertake the decentralised functions. This would involve a reform of the civil services.

Indicators for Administrative Decentralisation

Selection of local executive: Are the local executives elected?

Transfer of functions: Which functions have been transferred to the local units? Do these functions significantly concern communities and generate public interest?

Assignment of roles and responsibilities: Are the roles and responsibilities of the functions that have been decentralised clearly defined? For instance, if education is transferred to the local units, which level of government has authority over hiring primary school teachers, as well as over the details of the curriculum? In the case of infrastructure, which level of government decides what roads are built, where and by whom?

1.4 Economic Decentralisation

Definition

Economic or market decentralisation is the passing over to the private sector of functions previously exclusively performed by government.

Rationale

This type of decentralisation promotes the engagement of businesses, community groups, cooperatives, private voluntary associations and other non-government organisations.

Kinds of Economic Decentralisation

Privatisation or ‘debureaucratisation’ can range in scope from leaving the provision of goods and services entirely to the free operation of the market to ‘public-private partnerships’ in which government and the private sector cooperate to provide services or infrastructure.

Deregulation reduces the legal constraints on the private sector in their delivery of services previously monopolised by the government. In recent years, privatisation and deregulation have become more attractive alternatives to governments in developing countries. Local governments are also privatising by contracting out service provision or administration.

Unit 2: Limitations to Decentralisation

While it is too early to judge the success or failure of decentralisation, a number of reasons can be pinpointed to explain the poor track record of decentralisation. The experience with decentralisation has been quite mixed. For instance, central governments have not been able to set up the basic institutional infrastructure for substantial political and administrative reform. Related legal frameworks that describe the division of powers, resources and accountability are poorly developed.

Capacity is often constrained. This includes shortage of qualified staff and equipment, lack of effective management systems and the absence of accurate and comprehensive local data on which to base precise planning.

The inadequacy and unreliability of national grants and transfers to the local level disrupts the local resource base, diminishes effective local authority and erodes its credibility.

Some actors in the process feel threatened by the radical changes that democratic decentralisation implies. Political actors may see changes in their political base and patronage systems. Civil servants may expect to lose control over resource allocation and decision-making powers. They may also resist being transferred from a central ministry to work directly for the local government. Loopholes in decentralisation law allow central ministries and civil servants to override or ignore local authorities.

A weak institutional framework often results in poor or incomplete implementation. In a number of cases local democratic structures have been created, but have not been designated any powers, or powers are devolved to non-representative or upwardly accountable local authorities. This leads to unworkable situations, and undermines the credibility of the newly created local institutions.

Despite the above-mentioned constraints in the decentralisation processes so far, there is still hope that these processes will result in more local ownership and improved development programmes. The prerequisites for effective decentralisation include *autonomy, accountability, social capital* and *participation* (Kurian, 1998).

The local institutions have *autonomy* when legislative, executive and judicial powers are conferred upon them. Political will is required for devolving power, authority and resources to lower levels. The decentralisation policy should cater to an enabling and clear constitutional, legislative and regulatory framework. It should provide a comprehensive division of responsibilities between the various levels of government and civil society, and clarify the relationship between these levels.

Accountability establishes power balances. Regular elections and performance auditing by an active and organised electorate can establish accountability of a local institution.

Social capital such as civic engagement, active community organisation and social reciprocities contribute to an effective decentralised system.

Participation is an important element of a responsive government. It involves citizens performing local public duties, thereby strengthening checks and balances of political power.

Capacity building programmes are essential both for local government authorities and civil society representatives. The local government authorities need to promote participatory planning, and implement and improve public services to local citizens. This may lead to the establishment of a community interchange process and also the optimisation of citizens' access to decision-making.

Unit 3: Gender Mainstreaming in Decentralisation

Gender mainstreaming is a process that challenges the biases towards people of a particular gender and ensures equality and equity in the existing mainstream. It is a strategy that considers the experiences, needs and priorities of both men and women at all stages of planning and implementation and ensures that the outcomes of development are available equally to both men and women. *Gender mainstreaming is a process in which gender needs, power relations and problems arising from them are analysed and integrated in the local development planning process.*

Society consists of people who are powerful and exercise domination and those who are not so powerful and find themselves on the periphery. The power relations between these groups exist across caste, religion, class, race and gender. The dominant group controls the key power structures, processes, values, beliefs, relationships and all this is added up to be referred to as the 'mainstream'. It is the mainstream which determines those who are influential and those who are not, who controls resources, who gets what and who does what. These mainstream institutions are generally male dominated and controlled, so the perspectives to development proposed by them do not reflect the perspectives of all.

Since the intent behind decentralisation is to break down traditional power relations, the question of gender becomes crucial. This is so because traditional systems of governance have been gender blind with an inherent patriarchal bias. To subvert this, one needs to bring the question of gender into the mainstream. Gender mainstreaming in

decentralisation demands the equal participation of women in all the processes of decentralisation. It also ensures better participation of women in influencing decision-making.

3.1 Who should achieve gender mainstreaming in decentralisation

Here it is important to remember that gender issues are not women's issues alone. They are social issues and, hence, everyone has a responsibility in ensuring that gender justice is met. It is the responsibility of everyone at all levels of the government and government departments, not just the social welfare, the women's commission or the elected women representatives, to achieve gender mainstreaming.

When we review the decentralisation process we see that we have not really designed our plans effectively to bring about a change in the status of women.

A successful development plan is both sustainable and one that is complete and holistic. Development can only be complete if women's specific needs are assessed and addressed in the development process. Sustainable development projects are about improving the quality of life; it is also about the conservation and preservation of human lives and the environment. Sustainable development projects are those that identify, assess and address the needs and priorities of both men and women.

3.2 How to achieve gender mainstreaming in decentralisation

The two primary approaches to achieving gender mainstreaming are:

- a) **General Projects:** Inclusion of women's issues such as their basic needs and activities for livelihood in the general development projects of the community.
- b) **Women's Component Plan:** Planning for projects that will enhance the status of women and help them to overcome constraints, backwardness and discrimination. Challenges should be included as projects under the women's component plans. These projects should address violence against women, ensuring women's access and control over resources, etc.

The strategy for mainstreaming should be to decide, prioritise and include the needs that can be implemented through the general projects and through the women's component plan. The strategy should be to consciously decide to keep women at the centre of leadership, decision-making, implementing, monitoring and evaluation, irrespective of the policy that is being implemented.

Methods of gender mainstreaming in the decentralisation process:

Gender based planning

This is a new approach in planning that accepts that both women and men have different

needs and responsibilities. An important component of the planning process is to correctly identify the roles, responsibilities and access to resources of both men and women. It aims at understanding women's situation, needs, roles and responsibilities; prioritise them on the basis of a gender analysis; and then attempt to address them effectively.

Step 1: Identification and Analysis

Data collection and identification of needs to determine priorities: Women's access to education, health, knowledge, services, etc, are determined by their social and economic positions within the household and in the public sphere. Therefore, data collection of women's status and needs is imperative to the planning process.

The basis of every planning process is the identification of needs and problems. Women's practical needs (e.g., drinking water, house, livelihood and so on) and women's strategic needs (e.g., ending violence, security and safety, and so on) need to be made the basis of all gender-planning initiatives. Needs are identified and analysed through gender analysis.

Gender analysis and study on the status of women, of institutions of self-help groups (SHGs) and other Community Based Organisations (CBOs): Sometimes plans and policies might reinforce certain gender prejudices and existing gender

discrimination. Sensitive methods of gender analysis will help identify and bring out these gender differences so that there are favourable outcomes to the development processes. Gender analysis is an important step towards the gender mainstreaming process. It is through this that women's needs can be identified and prioritised so that gender-planning and gender budgeting can be done effectively.

Step 2: Plan Formulation and Gender Budgeting

Working groups should be formed and each must prepare a project document with the underlying aim of gender equality and equity. Once the plans have been formulated, funds have to be allocated for them. Gender budgeting is the process by which funds are identified, allocated and set aside for meeting the practical and strategic needs of women from the general fund and the women's component plan respectively.

Step 3: Plan Implementation

Project implementation should be implemented in a time-bound manner according to the objectives that were laid down during project formulation. Successful project implementation will be achieved if those who have very clear gender perspectives supervise it. Guidelines for evaluation and monitoring must be formed at the beginning and they must be carried out at regular intervals during project implementation.

Step 4: Gender Auditing and Recommendations

Gender audit is a part of social audit. It reviews the process and the impact of the project on men and women.

Practical Gender Needs

- Primary and basic needs (water, food, house) which are immediate;
- Specific needs of specific groups of women;
- Needs related to daily requirements (food, water, house, income);
- Needs which women can identify easily; and
- Needs which can be solved by some specific services, for example, food, health clinics.

Strategic Gender Needs

- Needs which are immediate but needed for a long time;
- Needs which all women have in general;
- Based on women's backward status and oppression; deprivation of educational opportunities, lack of property, vulnerability to violence;
- Most often women are not able to realise the basis of discrimination and possibilities for change; and
- Raising consciousness, increasing self-confidence, forming solidarity of women, political mobilisation, etc, can lead to change.

(SAKHI, 2006)

Assessing Gender Sensitivity

Gender blind: Research, analysis, policies, advocacy materials, project and programme design and implementation that do not explicitly recognise existing gender differences but assumes biases in favour of existing gender relations and so tend to exclude women

Gender neutral: Research, analysis, policies, advocacy materials, project and programme design and implementation that do not explicitly recognise existing gender differences

Gender aware: Research, analysis, policies, advocacy materials, project and programme design and implementation that recognise that women and men are constrained in different and often unequal ways but may not be in a position to address it explicitly

Gender sensitive: Research, analysis, policies, advocacy materials, project and programme design and implementation that recognise that women and men are constrained in different and often unequal ways but take concrete steps to address it explicitly. (ILO, 2007)

Two kinds of data are important to undertake a Gender Analysis:

- **Sex disaggregated data**, which is quantitative statistical information on differences and inequalities between women and men – morbidity, mortality, education enrolment, retentions
- **Gender analytical data**, which is more qualitative on gender differences and inequalities – patterns & norms of what men and women do & experience in relation to the issue being examined

Sex disaggregated data reveals differences and inequalities, and gender analytical information helps in analysing why that difference is there.

Summary

This module has discussed the centrality of gender mainstreaming in the process of decentralisation. Decentralisation is essential for enhanced democratic administration. However decentralisation is often constrained due to lack of needed capacities, resources, etc.

Since traditional centralised administration has been gender blind, one needs to ensure that a decentralised set-up is gender sensitive. This is only possible if one mainstreams the question of gender and how it shapes our lives. The process and steps involved in gender mainstreaming have also been discussed in this module.

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