



Summit Organizers



Women in Local Self Governance

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



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Abstract

The deprivations of women in society have put them into manifold vulnerabilities. They have been excluded from almost all aspects of society. Socially, economically, politically, educationally, and in many other fields, women have always been systematically sidelined. The privileges of having space in all the aspects of society have remained with the male members of the society. As a result, women have always been considered vulnerable and subordinate to their male counterparts. However, by designing several policies, schemes, programs, and enacting different laws, the government of India has made efforts to create a space for women in the mainstream aspects. The 73rd constitutional amendment act was one of the positive and most vital measures to include women in the local governments passed by the government of India to empower women politically also in the process of development. As a result of this, certainly, women across backgrounds have started contesting elections, but women's real political empowerment remains questionable. Therefore, the focus of the present paper is to highlight the issues and concerns of women in local self-government. People from different parts of the South-Asian countries have given their opinion on the three broad questions i.e. motivating factor behind women contesting in elections, key factor restricting women in politics in rural India, and most immediate action that needs to be taken to achieve political empowerment of women.

Key Words: *Exclusion, vulnerability, 73rd Constitutional Amendment empowerment*

Introduction

Like all other societies, Indian society is also considered highly patriarchal, and so women do not enjoy equal positions with their male counterparts in their social life. There are causes and historical evidence that proves that women's status in Indian society is subordinate, but this has been abolished by the law after independence. The constitution of India gives equal rights to men and women and also mandates the empowerment of Women. However, there is evidence that research has provided over the years that males have predominance in creating their values, attitudes and social practices, and privileges for them. This privilege is loosely dubbed "patriarchy". There are viewpoints by feminists regarding the biased behavior with women expressed by men in many aspects of social life as reality. The relations between men and women affect women's position in all aspects of their lives (Krishnaraj, M & A Kanchi 2012). As stated in one of the documents of (UNWOMEN 2017), Women and girls everywhere must have equal rights and opportunities and live free of violence and discrimination.

Women's equality and empowerment are one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development. Indian society has been bound by culture and tradition since ancient times, but the patriarchal social system and the gender stereotypes in society have always shown a preference for the male child. The Son was considered a genuine inherent and light of the clan and means of social security. On the other side, girls were given secondary preference and remained under male domination. Due to her subordinated position, she has suffered discrimination, exploitation, and subjugation for years. This discrimination and violence against women affected women's participation in the Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti, which discouraged their political empowerment. The general perception is that the women in our society hold a particular position by their being women. To understand what this position is and why one needs to understand how social processes called gender construct their relation to men and society. Social control on women generally describes three border areas; women's labor, women's sexuality, and reproduction. The rationale for this control lies in the maintenance of male dominance as well as caste. Women share in the general destiny of women in their society and face specific conditions because of the way agriculture is organized (Krishnaraj, M & A Kanchi 2012).

In India, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution of India (in the Preamble and fundamental rights), whereby the constitution upholds and grants equality to women. The National Commission for women, which was set up in 1990 through an Act of Parliament to safeguard women's rights and legal entitlements, is considered to be the apex body to ensure rights and work towards women empowerment (Mallick, 2018). Mahatma Gandhi has insisted upon women's equal participation and devotion of power to the institutions of local Self-Governance and the Village Panchayat. The Panchayat Raj Act provides for people's active participation in the local administration by granting them the power to question and by requesting their participation in planning for the development of their villages (Mallick, 2018).

Methodology

This study was descriptive; it aimed to understand the views of participants of RISE World Summit 2021 on the status of women in local self-governance. The following parameters of the study are highlighted in this paper.

- 1) To understand the socio-economic and demographic profile of the participants
- 2) To understand the views of participants on women in local self-governance
- 3) To the possible way forwards on gender-inclusive local self-government institutions

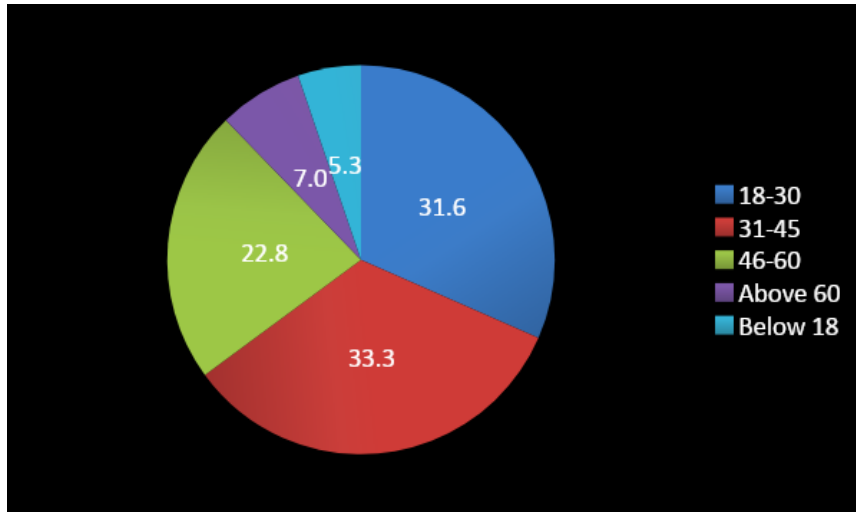
The study variables were circulated through electronically generated forms at the time of RISE World Summit 2021 to the total 57 participants and the data was analyzed based on the responses received from the participants.

The practical reality on the ground raises various concerns concerning women's control over the power in local self-government though she is protected by law and included in the electoral mechanisms. The respondents from various countries have given their opinions on her being in the local politics which will be discussed in the following pages of this paper.

Findings:

This section analyses the data collected and presents it according to the objectives outlined. Findings are divided into different sections about the objectives of the study/Following were the different areas focused in the study.

Figure - 1 Age of the respondents



The age of the respondents participated in this survey was mostly (33.3 percent) between 31-45 year old. Another major (31.6 percent) age group was between 18-30 years old. Respondents between 46-60 were 22.8 percent, whereas 7 percent were above 60 and 5.3 percent were below 18 years old.

Figure 2. Gender of the respondents

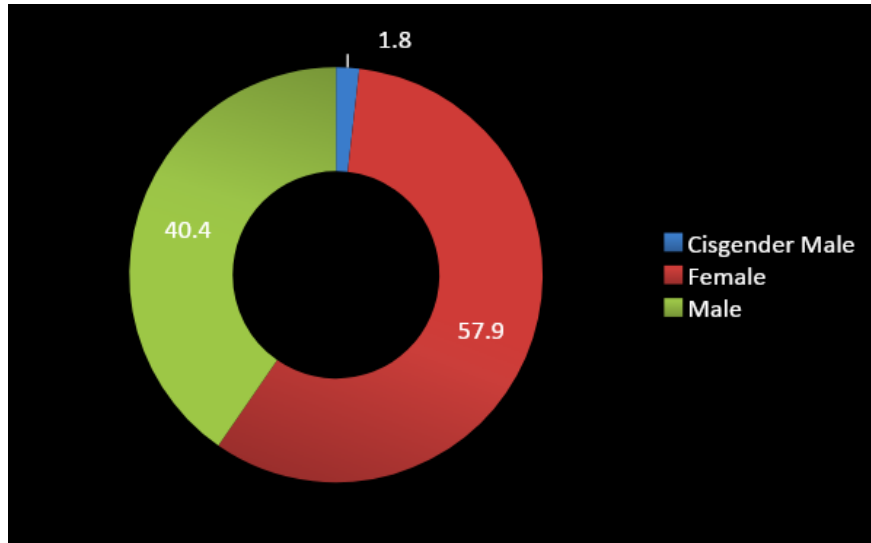


Figure no 2. presents data on gender-wise participation in the survey, as reflected in the graph, 57.9 percent of females given their responses to the questions asked in this study, and 40.4 percent of male members given their responses, whereas 1.8 percent of respondents were from the cisgender category.

Figure 3. Country of the respondents

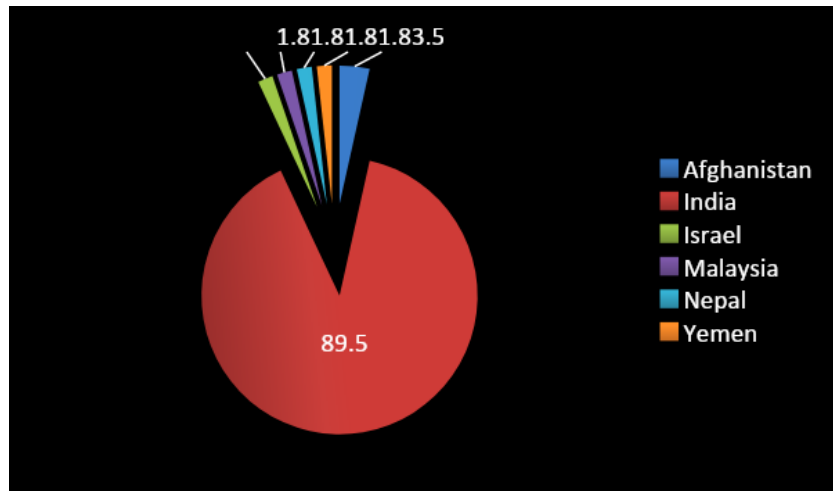


Figure by labor sent data on the respondents' country, people from different parts of Asia responded to this survey. The large number (89.5 percent) of participants who responded were from India. 3.5 percent of respondents were from Afghanistan, and 1.8 percent of respondents were from Israel, Malaysia, Nepal, and Yemen.

Figure 4. Education of the respondent

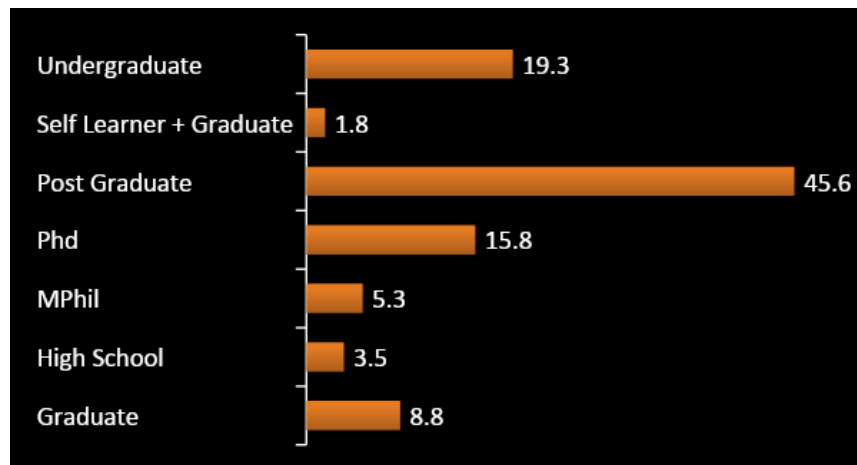


Figure no 4. Presents data on the educational status of the respondents, in which 45.6 percent of respondents are post-graduate. Secondly, 19.3 percent of respondents are undergraduate whereas 15.8 percent of respondents are having PhDs. 8.8 percent of respondents are graduates, 5.3 percent of respondents have an MPhil degree, 3.5 percent of respondents have high school level education, and 1.8 percent are self-learners.

Figure 5. Motivating factors behind women contesting in elections

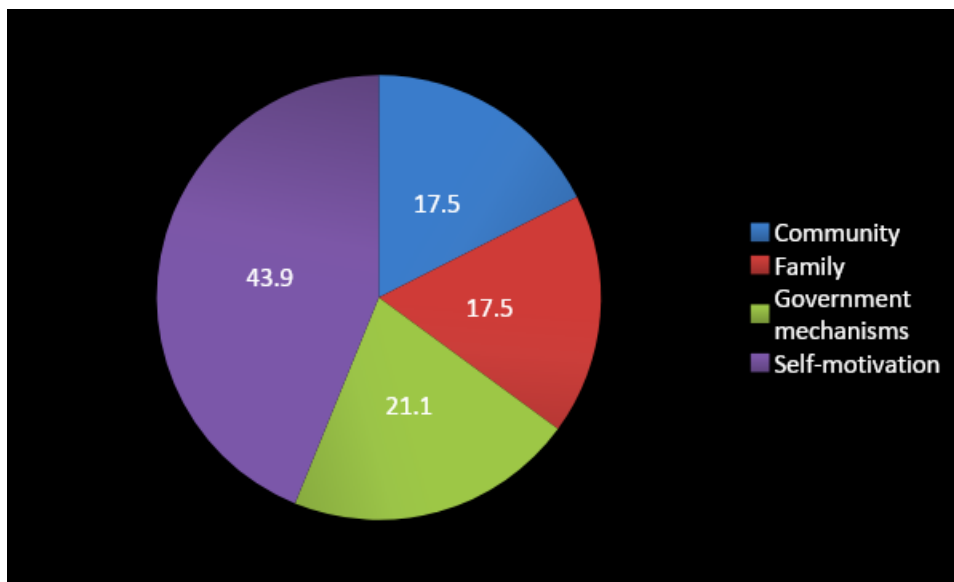


Figure no. 5 presents data on motivating factors behind women contesting in elections. 43.9 percent of respondents said that self-motivation is the primary factor that led women to contest elections. 21.1 percent of respondents said that government mechanisms are the key factors in motivating women to contest elections. 17.5 percent of respondents said that community plays an important role whereas 17.5 percent of respondents said the family motivates women to contest elections. Therefore, it seems that there are mixed views of people participating in this survey regarding the motivation of women to contest elections.

However, one important view came from a person from India as she says;

'In many countries, there is a government mechanism and a certain no. of seats are reserved for women but it is not the only reason. Even when certain seats are reserved for women, there is a huge probability that women become only the face of the campaign and the real power lies in the hands of the male members of the family. There are very few cases where we see that women are self-motivated to contest elections'.

Figure 6. Factor restricting women in politics in rural India

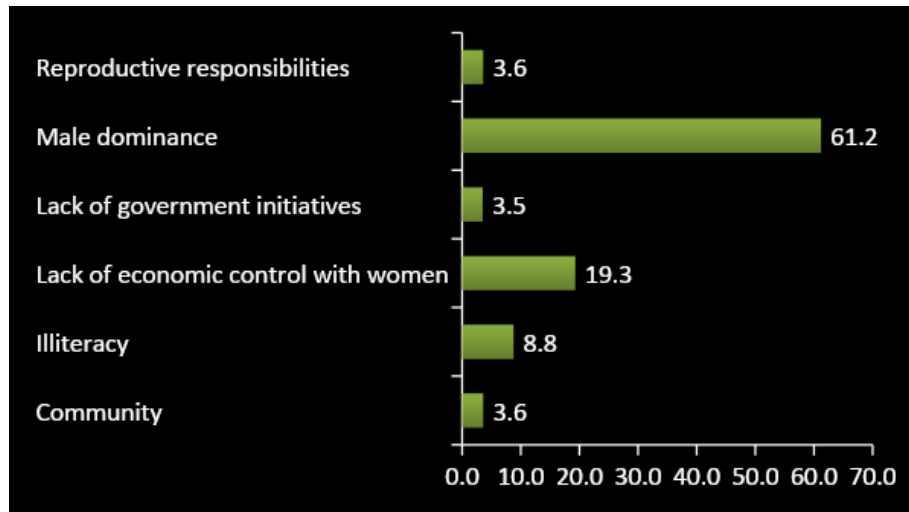


Figure no 6. presents data on the factors restricting women in politics in rural India. Amongst all the other factors, male dominance is one of the most influencing factors responded by 61.2 percent of the total people participating in this survey. 19.3 percent of people say that lack of economic control with women is also one of the influencing factors restricting women in politics. 8.8 percent says that literacy is the one that restricts women, whereas 3.6 participants said reproductive responsibilities, and another 3.6 percent says the community is the one that controls women in politics. Thereby it can be concluded that male dominance is the most influencing factor which restricts women in politics in rural India.

Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

How can the political empowerment of women be achieved?

The political empowerment of women is very important to achieve the fifth goal of the sustainable development goals (SGDs). Certainly, the opinion of people participating in this survey was taken on this question; almost all the participants responded to this question. Also, half of the total people participating in this survey said that the educational enrollment of women would be the key factor in empowering women in rural politics. Also, many people said that policy interventions are important measures to achieve the political empowerment of women. Some people also said that awareness of the different policy measures is also important in empowering women in politics.

Further, the different views have been reflected from different people, i.e. Reserving some seats for women in various elections (as is being done in India at some levels like village councils called *Panchayats*. Respect women, motivate women, Treat them as equals, Protection from harassment and exploitation, Moral support from society, educate the community, and Economic independence and community support.

In India, the 33% reservation for women has been achieved in two and a few states have gone ahead and implemented 50% reservations for women at the local level. However, the local self-governance structures still have to achieve much more in terms of the practical inclusion of women in local self-governance. The time has come to review the experiences of the local self-governance with the view to enhance the system.

Conclusion & Way forward

The paper confides that women in different societies are living in manifold vulnerabilities; men, a patriarchal society, mostly control their participation in different aspects of the society. She has been denied her natural rights and excluded from mainstream discourses either by a policymaker or society. As a result, despite certain inclusionary measures by different countries, women's political representation is a major concern. Hence to achieve the equal position of women in local self-governance the need for their socio-economic empowerment is of utmost need. This can be achieved by enhancing their participation in self-help groups SHGs and other economic activities. Further, the educational status of women is also one of the major concerns which need to be addressed on priorities. Overall the state has to take responsibility for gender-sensitive policies and the same should be promoted by organizational organizations.

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