

Women Empowerment and Decision Making: A catalyst for Gender Budgeting

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ABSTRACT

Women participation in decision making is not only a right, but also crucial to sustainable development. In a democracy it is vital that every section of the population is equally represented. Women's participation in power structures is important because it directly impacts the formulation and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and budgets. When women hold key decision-making positions, they will probably focus on policies that address gender-specific issues, such as education, employment, health, violence etc. India, as a developing nation, faces many challenges regarding achieving the goal of gender equality, particularly in the domain of political leadership and decision-making. At present, women participation in parliament is only 14.7%. The representation in State Legislative Assemblies is even lower with the national average being around 9%. The involvement of women in decision making processes at all levels of government and policy is essential for a productive gender budgeting.

Keywords- Decision Making, Gender Budgeting, Policies& Programmes, Women Empowerment.

Introduction:

Women participation in decision making is one of the important factor to measure their empowerment. Women are underrepresented in government especially in high level executive and legislative bodies which limits their influence over governance and public policies. According to the UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation 'women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women'. Women are nearly half of the population and their perspective matters too in any democratic and just society. The sufficient representation of women in power and decision making is needed because they can bring different perspective to governance and policy making. They can focus more on issues which affect the lives of women. To achieve gender equality political empowerment of women is important because it provide them the

platform to address issues like education, healthcare, employment and other social evils like gender based violence, dowry system etc. Ample representation of women in power and decision-making role is important for the success of gender budgeting. Their active participation affirm that public resources address the needs of all genders.

Objective:

- To analyse the representation of women in legislature.
- To understand the impact of women's participation on gender budgeting.

Women in Legislature :

In India women representation in Parliament is low. According to the report of Inter-Parliamentary Union, India was ranked 149th out of 193 nations in terms of the percentage of women who serve in the lower house of Parliament. Women constitute nearly half of the population in India but their representation in Lok Sabha is 13.6% only. The percentage of women member has risen from

5-10% until 2004 to 13.6% in the current 18th Lok Sabha while in Rajya Sabha it is 13%. In 2024 among the candidates contesting election 9.5% of the candidates were women. The female voter turnout had also increased significantly, the turnout was 46.6% in 1962 and it had increased to 65.8% during the 18th Lok Sabha election in 2024. In Rajya Sabha women representation stood at 12.7 percent in 2014, 11 percent in 2018 and 10.2 percent in 2020. In the upper house of parliament elections are indirect but still the representation of women is low.

In Bihar, the representation of women in Legislative Assembly is low. There are 243 assembly seat in the state. In the 17th Legislative Assembly election women won only 26 seats and in the previous assembly they were 28 in number.

Women in local governance:

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment reserved one-third seats for women in local administrative bodies. The 2022 Expert Committee Report by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, highlights the role of female leader. The studies have revealed that women leaders focuses more on issues like health and education and advocates for policies that advance social justice and strengthen women's rights. As an example, Sushumlata, a two time Sarpanch from Gram Panchayat Dawa, Bhojpur District, Bihar, organized self-defence training and legal literacy workshops for women and girls. Similarly, many other elected women representatives have launched campaigns against social evils like dowry, domestic violence etc. women's reservation in local bodies had an evolutionary impact at the grassroots level, resulting in the rise of over 1.4 million women to leadership positions.

Bihar was the first state to reserve 50% seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in 2006. Bihar has nearly 52% women representative at panchayat level. Fifty percent reservation in the panchayat elections have given them a meaningful

voice and influence in the local power structure at the village and panchayat levels. This involvement in the development process and decision making empowered them socially and economically. This resulted in the changes in the patriarchal norms that prohibited women mobility in society and politics.

Impact of women's leadership:

Women's participation in decision making and power structures directly impact the formulation and implementation of gender-sensitive budgets. Gender budgeting aims to reduce gender inequalities by aligning financial resources with the needs of women. When women occupy key decision making position they will try to prioritize policies that address gender-specific issues, like employment, education, healthcare, social services, safety etc.

Rawanda has many efforts in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, mainly in political participation. Nearly two-third of its parliamentary seats and 52% of cabinet positions are held by women. The country has a strong political commitment and institutional level accountability for gender equality. Rawanda is a good example of program-based budgeting approach. In this approach the government focus on the outcomes and outputs of the budget process rather than just focusing on the inputs. The government has implemented gender-responsive budgeting to achieve the goal of gender equality. The country allocates resources towards women's education, health, empowerment programmes etc and regularly assesses the impact of these allocation on women's lives.

Iceland, one of the most gender equal countries has adopted a strong gender budgeting process. In parliament the representation of women is nearly 46 percent. The country's policies ensure that gender considerations are included into every aspect of public spending from social programme to infrastructure projects.

Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) highlight the importance of women's political participation and study the impact of women's leadership on policy decisions. The study shows that the leaders invest more in infrastructure that is relevant to the needs of their own genders. Women who occupy political office work more efficiently to address women's needs, such as access to drinking water and the improvement of road infrastructure.

In the article Political Will: A significant driver of gender budgeting (2019) the Author explains that to advance Gender Budgeting the most important thing is political commitment and placing women in powerful decision-making positions such as Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Women and Child Development. Participation of women in decision making is a definite prerequisite to ensuring gender equality.

It can be said that there is a strong connection between women in power and gender budgeting. But there are various factors which contribute to the underrepresentation of women in India. Lack of education, financial dependence, patriarchal societal norms, gender based violence etc often restrict women from holding powerful decision-making positions. The government of India has introduced many schemes to educate girls and women and make them empower. The government is also trying to improve the number of women in leadership positions. The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, also known as Women's Reservation Bill reserves one-third of all seats for women in Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital

Territory of Delhi, including those reserved for SCs and STs.

Conclusion:

To make gender budgeting more effective it is important to increase the number of women in leadership positions. Gender budgeting will be taken seriously if we increase the number of women in leadership. Women participation in decision making can lead to better policies and outcomes for everyone because they have different perspectives and experiences. They can focus on policies that have long-term impacts on women's social, political and economic advancement. If participation of women increases in power and decision making, gender budgeting will achieve its real goal and will help to create more just and inclusive society for future generations.

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