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## **ROLE OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN KALABURAGI ZILLA PANCHAYAT: A DATA-BASED STUDY**

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### **Abstract**

*The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India, 1992, institutionalized women's participation in grassroots democracy by reserving one-third of the seats for women in Panchayat Raj Institutions, which was later raised to 50 percent in Karnataka. In the current paper, the author analyzes the importance of women representatives in developmental planning in Kalaburagi Zilla Panchayat based on empirical data, which was gathered based on elected women representatives and community members. The research is founded on a sample of 100 respondents who have been selected based on various levels of Panchayat Raj, and the results have shown that 72 percent of women representatives are active in the Gram Sabha meetings and 65 percent in standing committee decision-making concerning education, health, and social welfare. Approximately 68 percent said that they gave attention to developing the social sectors like drinking water, sanitation, and gender-based welfare programs. However, 54 percent reported a technical knowledge deficiency, and 47 percent reported proxy leadership. The research concludes that quantitative representation has been enhanced by the participation of women, but qualitative empowerment or capacity building, financial devolution, and institutional support are needed.*

**Keywords:** *The political representation of women; Panchayat Raj Institutions; Decentralized development; Zilla Panchayat; Development planning; Gender empowerment; Grassroots governance; Local self-government; Social sector development; Kalaburagi district; Democratic decentralization.*

## **Introduction**

Decentralization is viewed as an emblem of a democratic government and integrative growth. The Panchayat Raj system that was brought about by the 73rd Amendment Act of the Constitution was to democratize development planning by engaging the local communities in the decision-making process (Government of India, 1992; Manor, 2019). The reservation of women in this model was made to rectify gender inequalities in history and women's empowerment in politics (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Rai, 2011). Karnataka is among the states that have been at the forefront of empowering their women politically through reserving 50 percent of the local bodies (Government of Karnataka, 2015). In socio-economically backward Kalaburagi district, where female literacy is low and agricultural practice is practiced by large numbers, women representatives are important to local development priorities (Census of India, 2011; Patangi, 2011). The level of planning development in the Zilla Panchayat involves identification of needs, annual action plans, resource allocation, and government schemes monitoring (Raghunandan, 2012; World Bank, 2018). This paper aims to take a data-driven approach in examining the real position of women representatives in development planning instead of only relying on the provisions of the constitution. It tries to determine whether the presence of women in local institutions implies the presence of meaningful presence and influence on development outcomes of these institutions (Behar & Kumar, 2002; Jayal, 2006).

## **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the level of participation of women representatives in development planning activities.
2. To analyze women's role in decision-making and standing committees.
3. To identify constraints affecting their effective participation.

## **Research Methodology**

The research is premised on the primary data gathered among 100 respondents chosen among Kalaburagi Zilla Panchayat and its representatives, as women, Panchayat members, and officials. Structured interviews and questionnaires were used to collect the data. The government publications, the Census of India, and past research studies were used to get the secondary data. Interpretation is analyzed by the use of percentages and descriptive statistics.

## Review of Literature on Women's Role in Local Governance and Development Planning

Author(s) & Year	Title of the Study	Objectives / Focus	Major Findings / Conclusions
Chatropadhyay & Duflo (2004)	Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India	To examine impact of Women leaders on water, education, and welfare development priorities	Women leaders prioritized drinking water, education, and welfare services more than male leaders.
Jayal (2006)	Engendering Local Democracy: The Impact of Quotas for Women in India's Panchayats	To analyze effectiveness of women's reservation	Reservation increased participation but not always effective decision-making power.
Behar & Kumar (2002)	Decentralization in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh	To study decentralized governance functioning	Women's participation improved service delivery but faced institutional barriers.
Agarwal (2010)	Gender and Green Governance	To assess gender in local resource governance	Women bring inclusive and sustainable planning perspectives.
Rai (2011)	Gender and the Political Economy of Development	To examine gendered power structures	Patriarchy limits women's autonomy despite political inclusion.
Raghunandan (2012)	Decentralized Governance and Development	To evaluate Panchayat performance	Lack of training reduces effectiveness of women representatives.
Deshpande & Sethi (2012)	Women's Political Participation in India	To assess women in politics	Financial and social constraints reduce women's leadership roles.
Planning Commission (2014)	Report on Decentralized Planning	To review planning mechanisms	Women under-represented in finance and planning committees.
World Bank (2018)	Local Governance and Service Delivery in India	To study governance effectiveness	Women improve transparency but lack financial authority.
Manor (2019)	Political Economy of Democratic Decentralization	To analyze power relations	Decentralization benefits limited without capacity building.
UN Women (2019)	Women's Leadership in Local Government	To assess global local governance	Training improves women's confidence and participation.
Census of India (2011)	District Census Handbook: Kalaburagi	To provide socio-economic profile	Low female literacy affects political effectiveness.

**Table 1: Participation of Women in Gram Sabha Meetings**

Level of Participation	Respondents	Percentage
Regular participation	72	72%
Occasional	18	18%
Rare	10	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Interpretation

The data given in Table 1 indicates the degree of female representatives' attendance at Gram Sabha meetings, which have been the greatest forums of grassroots democracy within the Panchayat Raj system. The decentralized planning relies on the Gram Sabha meetings since the villagers come to deliberate on local issues, the developmental needs, and the performance of the Panchayat institutions (Government of India, 1992; Raghunandan, 2012). Thus, the level of participation of women in such meetings is a critical indicator of the actual involvement of women in democratic governance. It is evident in the table that 72 percent of the women representatives attend Gram Sabha meetings frequently. This rate of frequent attendance is a good sign of the positive development of political interest and the growing publicity of women in the political systems of the country. It indicates that constitutional clauses of reservation and state-level policy support in Karnataka have played a major role in introducing women into the world (Jayal, 2006; Government of Karnataka, 2015). Regular participation helps women to raise concerns on matters of the community like health, sanitation, education, drinking water, and welfare schemes, and such issues tend to be directly related to the daily lives of women (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Behar & Kumar, 2002). This enhances participatory planning and makes development policies more sensitive to local requirements. The 18 percent of women who occasionally participate is a semi-active population. They are also irregular in their attendance and are usually influenced by their personal conditions, like time availability, family support, and distance between the meeting locations. This group features the nature of women empowerment as transitional in that women are formally incorporated in governance systems yet they continue to encounter restrictions that inhibit their continued participation (Rai, 2011; Jayal, 2006). The occasional participation is also suggestive that although women can take part in meetings, their contribution to the discussion and decision-making process is not always effective and constant.

The other 10 percent of women do not frequent Gram Sabha meetings at all, and this shows that there are still social and structural constraints that limit women in their politics. The key factors that have contributed to low participation are household duties, unavailability of childcare, patriarchal family values, and social barriers to female mobility (Agarwal, 2010; Deshpande & Sethi, 2012). In others, women representatives are used as a puppet whereby the decisions made by male family members are used on her behalf, thus defeating the purpose of true empowerment (Behar, 2011; Rao & Sharma, 2010). In general, the results indicate that the representation of women in Gram Sabha meetings has increased tremendously, although not all representatives are equally represented. The success of the reservation policies to increase the visibility of women in politics is shown through high attendance rates. Nonetheless, the fact that there are, however, occasional and rare participation groups means that empowerment cannot be achieved without consideration of socio-cultural restraints. The involvement needs not only constitutional rights but should be supported by social environments, capacity-building programmes, and awareness

programs (World Bank, 2018; Manor, 2019). This means that to have inclusive and democratic development on the ground, the participation of women in Gram sabha meetings should be strengthened.

**Table 2: Involvement in Standing Committees**

Type of Committee	Active Members	Percentage
Education Committee	28	28%
Health Committee	22	22%
Social Justice	15	15%
Finance & Planning	12	12%
Not in any committee	23	23%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Interpretation**

In Table 2, the number of women representatives in various standing committees in the Panchayat system has been given. Standing committees are important in decentralized governance since they undertake specific sector planning, the execution of development programmes, monitoring of schemes, and also distributing resources at the local level (Government of India, 1992; Raghunandan, 2012). Thus, the representation of women in these committees directly depends on the share of their influence on the policy formulation and development process outcomes (Manor, 2019). The statistics show that 28 percent of women representatives are the most active in the Education Committee, and 22 percent are in the Health Committee. The trend can be attributed to the high propensity of females towards the social development sectors that are closely connected with family welfare and well-being of the community (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Jayal, 2006). The involvement of women in such committees allows them to discuss such challenges as school infrastructure, mid-day meal programmes, dropout rates, maternal healthcare, nutrition, sanitation, and immunization that constitute the main indicators of human development (World Bank, 2018; UNDP, 2020). The experience of women, given that they are the main caregivers in the homes, plays a significant role in determining the needs of the locals and enhancing service provision in such sectors (Agarwal, 2010).

There are also many female representatives in the Social Justice Committee (15 percent). This shows the increasing interest of women in the matters of marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, and economically weaker groups (Behar & Kumar, 2002, p. 1; Rao & Sharma, 2010). Women representatives are engaged in the application of welfare schemes, pension programmes, housing initiatives, and other gender-specific interventions through this committee, which makes inclusive and rights-based development stronger (Rai, 2011; Planning Commission, 2014).

However, still, the proportion of women in the Finance and Planning Committee is quite low, only 12 percent. It is a top priority because budget creation, funds distribution, and expenditure control are the main tools of the local authority, and they are handled by financial committees (World Bank, 2018; Manor, 2019). Low representation in financial decision-making areas implies structural exclusion of women in economic governance and long-term planning of the strategic development (Deshpande & Sethi, 2012; Jayal, 2006). Such marginalization inhibits women in their capacity to impact on the cross-scale infrastructure developments, resource prioritisation, and long-term policy models. Lastly, 23 percent of the female population does not belong to any standing committee, portraying passive inclusion without functional authority. It implies that the very fact of the numerical representation would not be sufficient to guarantee substantive participation unless women are actively placed in the significant committees with the help of the capacity-building programmes (Behar, 2011; Raghunandan, 2012). The efficient decentralization as such needs institutional arrangements to guarantee women's representation not only in the social development committees (Education, Health, Social Justice) but also in the financial and strategic planning committees (under-represented). This trend demonstrates more profound power inequalities in the village and district institutions of governance and restricts the transformational power of female political empowerment (Agarwal, 2010; Manor, 2019).

**Table 3: Priority Areas in Development Planning**

<b>Development Sector</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Drinking water & sanitation	32	32%
Education	20	20%
Health & nutrition	16	16%
Women & child welfare	14	14%
Roads & infrastructure	10	10%
Others	8	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Interpretation**

Table 3 indicates the areas of priority that are selected by the women representatives of development planning at the Panchayat level. Decentralized governance is fundamentally based on development planning since it entails the evaluation of the needs of communities, priorities, and allocation of resources, as well as monitoring of welfare programmes execution (Government of India, 1992; Raghunandan, 2012). Women's developmental orientation is illustrated by the distribution of responses and how they shape the inclusivity and need-based local governance. The statistics indicate that at the top of the list is drinking water and sanitation (32 percent). This shows that women are very aware of the need to have clean water and access to clean sanitation as a basic

development issue. Water collection and household hygiene are mostly female responsibilities; thus, women are directly affected by water shortage, unsanitary conditions, and other health hazards (Agarwal, 2010; World Bank, 2018). The priority on water and sanitation underlines the practical understanding of women and their orientation toward the enhancement of the daily living standards. It is also consistent with the national efforts like Swachh Bharat Mission and Jal Jeevan Mission, which highlight the importance of sanitation and safe drinking water as important elements of human development (Government of India, 2019).

The second most significant sector is education, and 20 percent of the respondents emphasize it. This indicates the consciousness women have regarding education as a long-term investment in social mobility and empowerment. The key areas highlighted by women representatives are infrastructure in schools, education of girl-children, lunch-rabid school programmes, and dropout reduction programmes (Jayal, 2006; UNDP, 2020). Education is considered a social service as well as a means of ending the intergenerational poverty and gender inequality cycles (Sen, 1999). 16 percent of the responses are health and nutrition. This shows the interest of women in maternal health, child nutrition, immunization, and the availability of primary healthcare services. The participation of women in health planning also leads to a better implementation of schemes like Anganwadi services, National Health Mission, and nutrition programmes (World Bank, 2018; Planning Commission, 2014). Their involvement improves community outreach and prevents.

The women and child welfare (14 percent) also represents the interest of women in the vulnerable groups. These are domestic violence prevention, pension schemes, self-help groups, and social security benefits (Rai, 2011; UN Women, 2019). Conversely, roads and infrastructure are ranked at a relatively lower position (10 percent), which indicates that women are more concerned with human development than capital-intensive physical infrastructure (Agarwal, 2010; Manor, 2019). The results show that there is a gender wise planning method, with women being more concerned with sectors that directly impact the quality of life and social well-being. This substantiates the thesis that an increasing number of human-centered, equitable, and inclusive development outcomes would be achieved through the application of women in local governance (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2020).

**Table 4: Constraints Faced by Women Representatives**

Type of Constraint	Respondents	Percentage
Lack of technical knowledge	54	54%
Patriarchal attitudes	49	49%
Proxy leadership	47	47%
Financial limitations	38	38%
Low literacy	35	35%

## Interpretation

Table 4 points out the key limitations to the participation of women representatives in the operation of Panchayat Raj Institutions. Despite constitutional guidelines that have seen women have numerical representation in local government, their successful participation in the local government system hinges on their capacity to overcome social, institutional, and personal obstacles. The statistics are categorical in showing that women still experience several issues that limit their active participation in the development planning and decision-making.

The most detrimental limitation that was reported is the absence of technical knowledge, with 54 percent of the respondents reporting it. This involves poor knowledge of government procedures, budgetary procedures, legal requirements, and administrative regulations. Most of the women representatives are not exposed to formal systems of governance, and therefore, they find it hard to participate actively in the planning meetings, even prepare project proposals, or even in the implementation of the schemes. This lack of technical capacity makes them lack confidence and, in many cases, they depend on the male officials or family members to make decisions. Women are technically marginalized and excluded without proper training and institutional backing.

Patriarchal behaviors, as indicated by 49 percent of the respondents, are a strong social limitation. Conventional gender roles tend to deter women from being vocal in the social arena, opposed to the patriarchal rule, or expressing their own opinions. Most of the time, male colleagues or members of the community do not take the women representatives seriously, hence their influence in making decisions jointly is restricted. The patriarchal culture also strengthens the notion that leadership is a male preserve, and this therefore places women in a disadvantaged position as legitimate political actors.

Another serious problem is the proxy leadership, which has been experienced by 47 percent of women. This is the case in which elected women representatives are manipulated or dictated by their husbands or other male family members who literally act in their place. Proxy leadership negates the intention of reservation and decreases the level of women's involvement, thus turning it into a mere formality. Rather than empowering women, it replicates an already established set of power and limits the freedom of women in governance.

Thirty-eight percent of the respondents are concerned with financial constraints. Most of the women representatives have no independent financial means, and this limits their movements, knowledge, and even access to training programmes. Their bargaining power at the political institutions is also restricted by the fact that they are economically dependent on other members of the family. Also, poor financial decentralization to Panchayats limits the women from carrying out development projects even where they recognize local demands.

The low literacy rate that was reported by 35 percent of women is a major obstacle to successful involvement. Low education levels impact their reading skills on official documents, their grasp of policy directives, and their ability to communicate effectively during meetings. This means that they are limited in their interactions with the bureaucratic system and lack trust in dealing with the authorities. The results indicate that political representation is not enough to experience real empowerment. The representation of women should be accompanied by systematic capacity-building programmes, leadership training, provision of financial support, and social awareness programmes. It is only with such comprehensive interventions that women representatives are able to be transformed beyond being symbolic participants in the process of local development and democratic governance.

## **Findings**

The paper shows that the percentage of women who attend the Gram Sabha meetings is quite high, which proves the enhancement of their visibility and participation in the democratic processes at the grassroots level. Nonetheless, the participation is still disproportionate, with a considerable number of women not attending meetings very often because of domestic issues, social constraints, and not supported by institutions. This disproportionate involvement is indicative of the disparity between the formal inclusion and the substantive involvement in local government.

The other significant discovery is that the women representatives have more distractions in social sectors of development, like education, health, sanitation, and welfare schemes, compared to financial planning and infrastructure development. This inclination reflects the gender-sensitive nature of women towards governance since they put more emphasis on issues that directly impact the welfare of the household and quality of life in the community. Although this is a positive contribution to human development, it also demonstrates the low accessibility of women to strategic and economic spaces of decision-making.

The research also indicates that the position of women in budgetary decisions is low. They are not represented adequately in the finance and planning committees, thus limiting their influence in determining the priorities of resource allocation and long-term development. Since control over finance is still vested in the male domains, women in this regard have limited opportunities to be involved in the life of those in real power, but instead, they are consulted. Lastly, there are also structural and cultural impediments that contribute to the lessening of women's autonomy in local governance. Poor literacy, technical ignorance, patriarchal values, and proxy leadership are some of the factors that still affect the confidence and independence of women. These blocks prevent women from being able to enjoy their complete political rights and reduce their abilities to act as effective leaders.

## Conclusion

The data analysis vividly shows that women representatives in the Kalaburagi Zilla Panchayat have a significant role in the development planning, especially the development planning of the social sector. They have been involved in more inclusive and need-based grassroots-level governance. Their effectiveness is, however, limited by low levels of education, technical skills, and highly entrenched patriarchal social systems. Numerical representation has advanced so much due to reservation policies, but qualitative empowerment is still lacking. To become real agents of decentralized development, women should be effectively trained in leadership, have decentralized finance, and institutional reforms that will foster capacity building and equality between the genders. It is only then that the political participation of women can be involved.

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