

CHANGING THE TEXT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORKSHOP ON GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

In 1993 a Constitutional Amendment in India allowed for strengthening of local governments through reservation of seats for women. Tremendous opportunities were opened up to involve grassroots women and communities in local planning and development. But the entry of large number of women in local governments alone is not a sufficient condition for women to transform these political institutions.

SSP's experience in the last two years has shown that active participation by women's groups and communities can change the agenda of local governments. For this to happen, we initiated a capacity building exercise in two districts with over 22,000 elected members both men and women and community women's groups. Planners and policy makers also participated in this learning and convergence approach. Use of Local experiences, resources and skills were some of the main features. Every year over 2,000 women emerge as leaders in local development. They mobilise communities to participate, plan and manage resources, monitor basic services and audit public resources.

PERSPECTIVE

Community concerns such as credit, health and education exert profound influence on access to basic entitlements by the poor. Since the inadequacy of these resources affects women, they are **gender issues** as well. Women's concerns are acknowledged and addressed when "**critical mass**" of women are able to articulate their priorities within spaces for planning and decision making.

Involvement of grassroots women in local governance means:

- Participation in civic fora
- Access and control over resources
- Planning and management of services

Alliance building between elected women in local/national government and grassroots women's collectives is crucial to spearheading the transformation of local governance to include women and community concerns.

Three elements are then at the heart of en-gendering governance:

- **Opening up spaces** for women's participation, particularly in the context of local planning.
- **Building women's capacities** to address local development agendas by articulating their concerns, interacting with other actors, building alliance among women's collectives and managing local resources.
- Creating new institutional arrangements that respond to the needs of poor women through partnerships with mainstream institutions - in particular **Community - State Partnerships**

Changing the text of governance

- Empowerment of women's groups and elected members
- Plan, design and manage community owned initiatives
- Gender audit of public resources
- Monitor functioning of basic services
- Entry of women in planning and decision making
- Create a critical mass through information and communication networking
- Create institutional arrangements that work
- Community state partnership

Bottom up planning requires Direct **Community feedback** and information flow is crucial to community involvement.

Capacity building of community and institutional actors if gender in community concerns have to be addressed.

A critical mass of "informed women's groups and elected members" will form the alliance for transforming local governments.

Advocacy Advocate policies and programs that support direct flow of resources to women's groups and local communities.

- **Community-State partnership** Women's entry in spaces for planning and decision making can become the basis of community state partnership. Institutional actors need to be educated on how grassroots women and communities can participate in local development. Similarly, women's capacities to access information resources, gender and community audits, plan and design community alternatives need to be built.