

WOMEN COUNCILLORS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF HYDERABAD-SINDH: GLITCHES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The Local Government Ordinances 2001 were promulgated in all provinces to let the power and authority seep down to the grassroots level of Pakistan's poverty ridden society and usher in an era of genuine democracy. This paper attempts investigate the causes of partial failure of women councilors in district Hyderabad and draw recommendations for development a future strategy aimed at empowerment of women in local bodies system to make the role of women councilors more effective. A random sample of 122 women councilors of district Hyderabad were administered copies of structured questionnaire and the findings were analyzed to examine inter alia discriminatory attitudes of local government functionaries vis-à-vis participation of women councilors in budget making and development planning process as well as appraising the criteria for selecting women councilors on the reserved seats.

INTRODUCTION

The military regime of General Pervez Musharraf had introduced reforms in local governments through devolution of political power and decentralization of administrative and financial authority at grassroots level in order to achieve objectives of good governance, effective delivery of services, transparent decision-making participation process and participation of women in socio-economic development. The government introduced three tiers of local government system: (i) District Government and Zila Council in a District or a City District; (ii) *Tehsil* Municipal Administration and *Tehsil* Council in a *Tehsil* (Rural Area)/Town Municipal Administration and Town Council in a Town (City Area); and (iii) Union Administration and Union Council in a Union. The elections for these of three branches of local government were held in five stages from December 31st 2000 to August 8th 2001 and the new system of local governments of district and sub-district governments including four capital cities was inaugurated on 14th August 2001 under its respective provincial Local Government Ordinances.

Each tier has its Nazim and Naib Nazim (Mayor and Deputy Mayor for city governments), elected council and administration.

Under the devolution plan, conceived and prepared by National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB), the district governments were to be vested with significant financial grants and tax powers. The plan envisaged a district council comprising Nazims of all Union Councils in a district. The council was made responsible for approving bylaws, taxes, annual development plans and budgets. It was empowered to oversee governmental departments through its monitoring committees in order to improve service delivery system. A *Tehsil* Council would have its own Nazim and Naib Nazim and 19 councilors. The main function of the union councils was to undertake local development projects and monitor citizen rights, security and services. In the union councils, 33 percent seats were reserved for women.

The military government of General Pervez Musharraf promulgated Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 2001 to let the power and authority seep down to the grassroots level of society. The aim of this reform was to conceivably introduce genuine democracy at the local level throughout the county. In order to achieve this objective, Nation Reconstruction Bureau was established to formulate and prepare devolution of power plan under which the power be transferred to the people representatives at all level along with responsibility and administrative authority coupled with check and balance to preclude the abuse of power or authority (*The News*, May 2000). Employment of the masses and decentralization of authority is at the core of the devolution plan. The simplest definition of devolution of power is the transference of decision-making authority and funds to the grassroots. The local people will be in position to know what is and what is not needed is a particular village or union council. This reduces the gap between the public and policy makers. The local councils have to monitor the performance of local government departments (*Dawn*, February 2002). The provincial governments promulgated the LGO 2001 in their respective provinces to install a new integrated local government system to function within the provincial framework and adhere to the federal and provincial laws (Aziz, 2003). Under the local government plan, three tier system of government has been established at union, *tehsil* and district level.

The district is a political, administrative and financial unit, whose functions include district coordination, education, health community development, information, technology, law and magistracy, works and services, land revenue, agriculture environment, finance and planning and rural development (Nazir, 2005). In past the provincial government was responsible for above mentioned responsibility. There was no participation of people at local level. Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) has to provide basic facilities, i.e., water supply, sanitation, conservancy, removal and disposal of waste, drainage, roads, bridges and related infrastructure and law enforcement. Union Council is the lowest tier of local government system. The union councils constitute the electoral colleges for district and *tehsil* councilors and the district and *tehsil* Nazim and Naib Nazim (GoP, 2001). The primary function of the union council is to monitor the development schemes and to ensure the participation of masses in decision-making in order to achieve the basic objectives of the devolution of power.

The women actively participated in the local bodies elections in 2001 and 2005. Subsequently, their number grew in each phase of the election; however the participation rate has remained high in the urban areas with 100 percent of all town councils seats being filled. At the district level, Sindh and Punjab have the highest percentage of filled seats. Additionally women were elected Nazims and Naib Nazims in open contest at the Union Council level. This response by women may be attributed to the willingness and desire to take part in the political process' By and large, women in the previous local bodies system lacked awareness training and information and faced cultural constraints and discrimination (*The Express Tribune*, November 2011). According to section 49 of the law, the union council is responsible for the construction and maintenance of roads, passages and streets, provision of street lights tree plantation, maintenance of *shamlats*, sanitation, cleaning public health, death registration, reconciliatory role in marital affairs, divorce and mediation in matters of alimony arrangements of festivals, participation in civil-defence works, cooperation with police, help in rehabilitation/reconstruction in case of calamity, and water supply scheme. And, women councilors, especially those of urban areas, being organic part of

the local government are vociferously attempting to make their presence felt in all these domains. This paper surveys the perceptions of women councilors of district Hyderabad vis-à-vis the attitude of different office bearers in the local government administration.

COMPOSITION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF HYDERABAD

After the bifurcation of Hyderabad district on 4 April 2005, District Hyderabad comprises of four *tehsils*, i.e., Hyderabad City, Hyderabad Rural, Qasimabad, and Latifabad. Hyderabad is noteworthy for its ethnic character, where according to Census of 1998, 56 percent Urdu Speakers, 36 percent Sindhis and 8 percent other ethnicities reside. Of the total population of Hyderabad district, 46 percent are female. It consists of 52 Union Councils. The structure of each union council is tabulated below:

Table-1

Category	Seats as per SLGO 2001 [amended]	Seats as per SLGO 2001	Qualification on the basis of Gender/ Religion
Nazim	01	01	Male and Female of any religion can contest
Naib Nazim	01	01	- do -
General Muslim Councilors	08	04	Muslim male and female can contest
General Muslim for women	04	02	Only Muslim female can contest
Peasants and workers	04	02	Male and Female of any religion can contest
Peasants and works women	02	02	Only female of any religion can contest
Minorities	01	01	Non-Muslim Male and Female can contest
Total	21	13	

Source: Devolution Plan, 2000, National Reconstruction Bureau, Government of Pakistan/The Sindh Local Government Ordinance, 2001 (As Amehded up to June 6, 2005).

Composition of *Tehsil* council and District council given in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively below:

Table-2

S.No	Name of Tehsil	Nazim/Naib Nazim	Number of Urban Councils Each Union council is represented in Tehsil council by Naib Nazim	Woman 33% total number of the unions in the Tehsil	Peasants and workers 5% of total number of the Unions in the Tehsil	Minority communities 5% of total number of the Unions in the Tehsil	Total
1	Hyderabad	2	20	7	1	1	31
2	Hyderabad Rural	2	11	4	1	1	19
3	Latifabad	2	17	6	1	1	27
4	Qasimabad	2	4	1	1	1	9
	Total	8	52	18	4	4	86

Source: Local Government Department, Government of Sindh, Karachi.

Table-3

S #	Name of District	Nazi m/N aib Nazi m	Number of Union Councils Each Union council is represented in District Council by Nazim	Women 33% of total number of the Unions in the District	peasants and workers 5% of total number of the Unions in the District	minority communities 5% of total number of the Unions in the district	Total
01	Hyderabad	02	52	18	03	03	78

Source: Local Government Department, Government of Sindh, Karachi

All above tables show that women are given inappropriate representation in all three tiers of the local government.

HYPOTHESES

- Political and economic powerlessness of women councilors retard their efforts to uplift their community.

- Lack of proper training and education contributes to their little or no role in decision making at local level.
- Due to lack of unity and organization among union councilors, they have not been able to raise voice against the efforts aimed at reducing their role.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling

This study is based on primary data. From the selected district a total sample of 122 councilors was taken where 208 women union councilors, 18 members of *tehsil* council and 18 members of district council exist. The method of sampling was based on 50 percent of the seats reserved for women of each 'Union council', 50 percent of the seats reserved for women of each 'Tehsil council' and 50 percent of the seats reserved for women of each 'District Council'. The 122 sample size was broken down into 3 categories based on 50 per cent of seats reserved for women in Union council, *Tehsil* Council and District Council. Sampling frame is shown in the table below:

Table-4

Name of Tehsil	Union Council		Tehsil Council		District Council		Total	
	Number of reserved seats x Number of Union Councils	Sample 50% of reserved seats	Number of reserved seats	Sample 50% of reserved seats	Number of reserved seats	Sample 50% of reserved seats	Number of reserved seats	Sample 50% of reserved seats
Hyderabad City	20x4=80	20x2=40	07	03	07	03	94	47
Hyderabad Rural	11x4=44	11x2=22	04	02	04	02	52	26
Latifabad	17x4=68	17x2=34	06	03	06	03	80	40
Qasimabad	04x4=16	04x2=8	01	01	01	01	18	09
Total	52x4=208	52x2=104	18	09	18	09	244	122

DURATION

The study was carried out during the month of March and April 2009. Only those councilors, who served during 2005 to 2010, were interviewed.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data is being presented in the form of tables and graphs which provide a clear view of the results. 122 copies of questionnaire were administered among the women councilors.

Table-5
Decision of Councilors to Contest the Election

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Own Decision	29	23.77
Encouraged by Guardians	52	42.62
Encouraged by Politically Influenced persons	41	33.61
Total	122	100

When asked how the women decided to contest elections, 52 respondents out of 122 respondents replied that they decided to contest under the influence/encouragement of their guardians. While 29 respondents said they decided to contest independently and 41 respondents were encouraged by politically influenced persons to contest. The table clearly shows that the majority of women councilors were influenced by guardians to contest.

Table-6
Attitude of Male during Campaign and Election

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Encouraging	51	41.80
Encouraging	32	26.23
Discouraging	29	23.77
Highly Discouraging	10	8.20
Total	122	100

Table-6 reveals that 41% councilors were highly encouraged by the male and 26% contestants were encouraged during the election campaign and election. Women are not supposed to move freely in the rural areas without the consent of their male members of family. The environment in these areas is not encouraging for working women. 23% respondents were discouraged by male while only 8% were highly discouraged.

Table-7
Reasons for Success

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Personal reputation	4	3.28
Clan affiliation	73	59.83
Political affiliation	43	35.25
Gender Factor	2	1.64
Total	122	100

As is evident from Table-7 that the dominant factor behind the success of women councilors in the elections was their clan affiliation. Secondly political affiliation played a significant role in achieving success. 35% councilors claim their success in elections was due to their personal reputation. But only 1% councilors feel that they were preferred on gender basis.

Table-8
Attitude of Nazim

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Encouraging	92	75.41
Highly encouraging	5	4.10
Discouraging	22	18.03
Highly discouraging	3	2.46
Total	122	100

According to 75 percent of women councilors the attitude of Nazim towards them was encouraging and according to 4 percent councilors it was highly encouraging, whereas 18% of total number responded that the attitude of Nazim was discouraging and according to 2% respondents his attitude was highly discouraging

(see Table-8). Hence, it can be argued that the overall attitude of Nazim was fair with few exceptions.

It has found that the attitude of other staff of union administration is even more encouraging than that of Nazim. This fact is recognized by 94 percent of the women councilors.

Table-9
Role of Nazim in the Resolution of Problems

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Encouraging	19	15.58
Discouraging	17	13.93
Partly discouraging	86	70.49
Encouraging	122	100

Although the Nazim's role in resolution of local problems taken by the women councilors has not been effective yet there is a consensus among the women councilors that he has played a partial role in society.

Table-10
Attitude of Police in the Resolution of Problems

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Encouraging	5	4.10
Discouraging	94	77.05
Highly Discouraging	23	18.85
Total	122	100

Police have completely failed to solve the problems taken by the women councilors. This view is supported by over 77% councilors. However, according to 18% of women councilors, police was highly discouraging local conflicts and other problems of the area(see Table-10). Only 4% councilors are of the view that police resolved the problems taken by them.

Table-11
Attitude of Civil Bureaucracy in Resolution of problems

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Encouraging	7	5.74
Discouraging	96	78.69
Highly Discouraging	19	15.57
Total	122	100

From Table-11, it can be estimated that over 78% women councilors responded that attitude of civil bureaucracy was discouraging even highly discouraging for 15% respondent. Whereas, 5% women councilors agreed that the problems taken by them were fully resolved by civil administration.

Table-12
Reasons for the Lukewarm Attitude by Police and Civil Bureaucracy

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Gender discrimination	101	82.79
Powerlessness of all councilors	12	9.83
Ineffectiveness of devolution of power plan	9	7.38
Total	122	100

83% women councilors are respondents that they were discriminated on the basis of gender(see Table-12). This attitude indicates that the police and civil bureaucrats are unwilling to obey or respect the decisions of the women councilors. Therefore, the gender discrimination is an obstacle in the way of implementation of decisions taken by the women councilors and implementation of devolution plan.

Besides 8% councilors opted for powerlessness of councilors and 5% form effectiveness of Devolution of Power Plan for the lukewarm attitude of police and bureaucracy.

Table-13
Discrimination in Budget Allocation

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Discriminatory	79	64.75
Discriminatory	19	15.58
Discriminatory	24	19.67
Total	122	100

As indicated in Table-13, 79% out of 122 women Councilors responded that they were highly discriminated in the allocation of funds comparatively. Large funds were allocated to male councilor of the same area. In addition 19 (15%) observed mild discrimination of allocation of funds. But, 24 (19%) respondents replied that there was no discrimination on the basis of gender. They were equally treated in the allocation of development funds.

Table-14
Response of Authorities towards Resolution of Problems which were Unanimously Taken by Women Councilors

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Encouraging	21	17.21
Encouraging	17	13.94
Discouraging	84	68.85
Total	122	100

The 17% Councilors believe that the authorities were compelled to solve issues taken by them unanimously. Whereas 13% Councilors responded that they were succeeded to a some extent in getting the problems solved by the authorities through collective efforts(Table-14). Here it is pertinent to note that through to note that through a consensus women Councilors can play more effective role. Also, 68% respondents replied that even their unity was failed before authorities to resolve problems.

Table-15
Freedom of Speech

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfactory	71	58.20
unsatisfactory	11	9.02
Highly-unsatisfactory	40	32.78
Total	122	100

As estimated in Table-15 that 58% women councilors were free to speak on any issue in the council. Whereas over 92% respondents were not completely free to speak on the issue. In contrast the response of 32% councilors admits that there were huge barriers in their freed of speech.

Table-16
Main Factor that Hampered the Performance/Progress

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Education & Training	69	56.56
Experience	27	22.13
Economic Empowerness	7	5.74
Political Affiliation	19	15.57
Total	122	100

It has been found in the research that the lack of education and adequate training was main factor determining the performance of women Councilors. The above view is supported by over 56% councilors. The experience was hurdle for 22% respondents. Economic powerlessness played little role in the performance of councilors. Political affiliation was also hurdle for 15% responds (see Table-16).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women had begun to play a positive and active role with the inauguration of new system. However, due to the male chauvinism prevalent in our society, the women councilors have not been able to play a role as envisaged in the original plan of devolution of power and the promises were never full-filled. They were neglected in the allocation of funds and participation in decision making process and finally they became merely show pieces.

A progressive society cannot flourish without equal and active participation of women in every aspect of development. Their empowerment is intrinsically linked with the growth and progress of Pakistan. Therefore, the government needs to pay attention towards problems of women councilors by removing hurdles in their way to development. Women councilors represent the most depressed class of our society hence the government at district, provincial and federal level should create an environment where they could play their role independently.

The one-third representation has been ensured in this District, Tehsil and Union Council. The government has been striving to take steps for the development of women which ensures that as female population enjoys political, civil and socio-economic rights. For that reason present government has introduced radical changes through its devolution plan. This silent revolution will bring a new change in our society. Where, the gender gaps are widespread. The women have no access to and control of resources in economic opportunities and in power. They are confronted with a problem of illiteracy and injustice in our social system. There is no any field in our country where women are equal to men in social and economic status. Therefore, giving effective participation to women in this devolution of power plan would be first step on the road towards women empowerment. On the basis of above study

- National level gender awareness campaign to change traditional mindset in favor of women's role in public life.
- If Nazim at any tier of local government happens to be man, then Naib-Nazim must be a woman or vice versa.
- Modality of election on reserved seats for women should be direct, constituency based and filled through joint electorate.
- 33% representation of women should be extended through legislation in all monitoring committees and community based structures in the Local Government
- Legal cover to the Gender mainstreaming as an official strategy in the Local governance.
- Setting up a criteria for women to contest seats reserved for women
- Minimum of 10% budget should be allocated for women specific development projects and programs

- Roles and responsibilities of women councilors should be clearly defined and stated in the LGO.
- Listing of discriminatory practices and social attitudes of LG functionaries against women such as non-availability of office space, separate toilets, not informing women councilors about meetings, not including women in budget making and development planning process, not allowing women to speak in sessions and not allocating development fund or giving them development grants less than their male colleagues and sanctions should be prescribed in the LGO for such gender discriminatory practices and behavior.
- Gender capacities should be included as part of the performance assessment of public sector functionaries
- Transformative gender trainings for public representatives of LG to build their gender capacities so that they could promote gender equality issued in governance.
- Capacity building training should be a part of continuous process of iteration rather than one-off event.

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