

## **Gender and Local Governance in Pakistan: Promoting Participation through Capacity Building**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Women's equal and full participation in decision making is extremely important for good governance, poverty alleviation and equitable human resource development in developing countries. Realizing the need, the Devolution of Power Plan system of Pakistan 2001 provided women 33% representation at all, three tiers of local governance including District, Tehsil (Sub District) and Union Council through the adoption of affirmative action/quotas. However, despite this visible formal representation women participation remained low and limited in the previous term of local governance. A review of existing studies on the subject suggests that diverse cultural, political, economic and demographic factors in Pakistan account for women's low participation in governance. While the situation determines a clear need for capacity building initiatives it is important that a comprehensive gender capacity building framework be developed in view of the indigenous requirements. Based on a systematic analysis of the diverse factors and domains in which this phenomenon takes place, the paper offers useful insights for developing such a framework for local governance of Pakistan. It suggests adopting a two pronged strategy that seeks to promote participation through developing the people (women councilors and groups) and creating enabling environment in institutions. Specific interventions in this regard include provision of requisite knowledge, developing specific skills, building alliances, networking and mentoring at the individual level and gender sensitivity training, advocacy, institutional alliances and linkages, enhancement of the devolution management skills, and research and documentation at the institutional level.

**KEY WORDS:** Gender, Participation, Local Governance, Capacity Building, Pakistan

### **Introduction**

Over the last 30 years, development process has gone through dramatic changes through out the world. An array of institutional, structural, administrative and

human resource reforms have been introduced to improve the performance, responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness of governing institutions including public, private and civil society organizations. A fundamental shift has also taken place in terms of roles of governing institutions. The states under the new mode of governance have more dynamic, entrepreneurial, facilitative and supportive roles to play, as opposed to their traditional roles relating to the static welfare, command and control and direct provision of public goods and services. Most of these governance reforms have been introduced in the form of liberalization, decentralization, devolution, democratization and privatization and call for greater citizen participation, involvement and inclusion.

In the line with global trends, developing countries including Pakistan adopted the shift in market, led governance reform. Since 1980s a wide range of governance reforms have been introduced in the country in order to achieve objectives of the improved public sector performance, economic growth, poverty reduction, citizen participation, greater accountability and transparency. This new wave of governance reform reflects the paradigm shift in development thinking over time regarding political, economic, social and economic roles of state and society. The central role of the state has been gradually replaced by recognizing civil society and private sector organizations as potential partners in the process of governance. The new mode of governance by putting people at the centre of development, promotes participation of all institutions and people irrespective of gender in democratic governance.

There is a great realization that seeking public participation on various social, political and public issues is important to promote people's empowerment and enhance their confidence in governing institutions. Democratic means such as, public debates and discussions, expression of public opinion on various policy issues, involvement of community in the process of development, especially at the local level and their representation and participation on different decision making and implementing forums are commonly adopted as initiatives to encourage participation of people in governance (Haque and Zafarullah, 2006; Rondinelli, 2006; Cornwall and Gaventa, 2006; Haque, 2003; 2000; Mohan and Stokke, 2000).

In this regard, the issue of gender equality in terms of representation and participation in various governing institutions has also gained global attention. Gender equality and equity of opportunities on the basis of gender are recognized as key strategies of the development framework of International development community to achieve sustainable good governance (UNDP Gender Equality, 2008; Support for Implementing, 2008; Millennium Development Goals, 2006; Cheema, 2000).

The universally accepted values of governance such as equity, accountability, transparency, efficiency, participation and responsiveness also recognize gender as an essential construct and encourage the contribution of both women and men in various development efforts (Kaufmann and Kraay, 2007;

Transforming the Mainstream, 2003; The Revolution for, 1995; Hyden et al, 2004; Schneider, 1999; Capacity Building for, 1997; governance and Development, 1992).

It is widely believed that without including women that constitute nearly half of the world's population in the process of governance, nations can not reach their full human potential (Kamal, 2000; IPU, 1997; www.onlinewomen.org). Kofi Annan, Secretary of the United Nations while expressing the organization's commitment to gender equity in terms of development and empowerment said, 'It is impossible to realize our goals while discriminating against half the human race' (Kofi Annan, 2006 quoted in DFID, 2007, p.1.). Thus, the greater significance of female participation in governance is not only due to the democratization, liberalization and modernization processes around the world but also a matter of human development.

Realizing the importance, gender concerns have received greater attention in the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, resulting in more expanded roles for women in community and changing their traditional roles and relationships to work and family. This phenomenon has occurred not only in the developed countries but also in developing countries including Pakistan where women have been given greater representation in different spheres of public life. In politics alone, women have been given 33% representation at Local Government level through decentralization reform 2001 to enhance their political participation in governance (The Local Government, 2006; Anjum, 2001; Bari, 2000).

The significant representation of women in local governance is a land mark reform in the history of Pakistan which is expected to open new window of opportunities for Pakistani women to organize themselves at grass roots level and effectively voice their concerns in policy arena. It is also anticipated that the initiative will empower women to take part in the political, economic and social decision making process on equal basis which may help in eliminating gender biases in-built in Pakistani society (ADB, 2008; GRAP, 2006; UNDP, 2007, 2008; World Bank, 2005).

Nevertheless, the reform, at the same time, has created a substantial need for the capacity building of women and men at the institutional, organizational and individual level.

Since politics in a tradition-bound Pakistani society has been dominated by men and women's entry in this sphere through local governance, is only a recent phenomenon, there is an enormous need to build capacity of all stakeholders for gender awareness, gender sensitization and new roles and responsibilities of both women and men including specific skills and knowledge.

What makes capacity building more pertinent for gender participation is that while women have been given a remarkable representation in the local governance, the requisite social, economic and political changes have not yet been made in this regard. Several anecdotes and reports point to the construed power structure, overall low women status, their lack of access to the

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development opportunities including education, health and employment, misinterpretation of religious norms and over dominance of cultural traditions in Pakistani society as major impediments constraining women's participation in governance. Therefore, it is extremely important to enable all the potential partners including women and men to comprehend the recent shift in governance and transform themselves accordingly for their equal and full participation in the system through a sustained process of capacity enhancement.

Building on the above arguments, the article examines the issue of women's low participation in local governance in the specific context of Pakistan and suggests implementation of a comprehensive gender capacity building framework to address the issue. More specifically, it covers the following components:

- 1) a general overview of significance and trends in women's participation in governance;
- 2) The context of local governance of Pakistan;
- 3) The state of women in contemporary local governance;
- 4) The conceptualizing of capacity building in terms of its role and importance for participation;
- 5) The broad features of capacity building framework to promote women's participation in local governance for improved performance.

Both primary and secondary sources of information have been used to put the discussion into proper perspective. While secondary sources of information included published and unpublished reports, documents, official web sites and discussions, the primary sources included the authors' deep interest and involvement in the Devolution Support Program for Pakistan (CIDA) and interaction with civil society organizations and women and men councillors during various training programs. All these sources together, provide an insight to address the issue of low participation of women in Pakistan's local governance through capacity building measures to achieve the goals of poverty reduction, human development and improved governance.

## **Trends and Significance of Women Participation in Governance**

The world in the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has gone through a subtle revolution regarding women's share in the political, economic, social and administrative arenas. They have now more substantial role to play in every sphere of life which has changed their traditional relationship to work and family. Equality in terms of gender representation and participation is recognized as a crucial factor for development worldwide. The level of countries' human development, poverty assessment, gender development and empowerment and

good governance including the political, economic and civic governance is now determined by the roles and engagement of women in such development efforts.

The growing representation and participation of women, a universal phenomenon, is considered as one of the most remarkable developments of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Global trends in women’s representation in governance show that number of women increased in national legislatures around the world during the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, variations exist across the regions and countries within the same region. Women’s share in governance doubled in developed countries and Nordic countries and discerned a visible increase in Latin America, the Caribbean Countries and Asia with a global increase from 7.4 percent to nearly 11 percent during 1975-1997 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1997; The Revolution for, 1995; <http://www.gdrcorg/vem/capacity-define.html>).

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, (IPU) 2005 on its ranking of 128 countries of the world on female’s political representation found Rwanda, Sweden and Norway at the top with 48.8%, 45.3% and 38.2% representation respectively. While the United Kingdom and the United States of America were ranked at 52 and 61 having 18.1 and 15.2% representation; India was ranked at 97 with only 8.3% female representation in national legislatures ([www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com)). In terms of regional comparison Paxton and Hughes (2007), reported that the Scandinavian countries are having the highest average rate of women participation followed by the Americas, Europe, Asia, Sub Saharan Africa, Pacific and Arab States as exhibited in the table:

**Table: 1**  
**Percent of Women in National Legislatures, by Region, 2005**

Regions	Lower House	Upper House/Senate	Combined/ Both Houses
Scandinavia	39.9	-	39.9
Americas (including USA and North American Countries)	18.8	19.5	18.9
Europe	16.9	16.9	16.9
Asia	15.2	13.5	15.1
Sub Saharan Africa	15.0	14.2	14.9
Pacific	11.2	26.5	13.3
Arab States	8.8	5.6	8.1

**Source:** Women, Politics and Power: A Global Perspective, Paxton and Hughes, 2007, pp. 18.

In line with these trends, the number of countries without any representation of women ministers dropped from 93 to 47 during 1975-1997, with 10 countries reporting women holding more than 20 percent of ministerial level positions (IPU, 2005; The United Nations, 1991).

The Human Development Report (2000), also reported progress in terms of women's representation in governance at various levels while ranking 130 countries of the world on a global scale using the gender-related development index (GDI)<sup>1</sup> however, the report also pointed to serious gender gaps on various indicators of human development (Human Development Report, 2000). Today, women account for 16% of parliamentary membership around the world, compared with 11.7% in 1997 (IWDC, 2007; IPU, 2005). The international development organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations, Asian Development Bank, DFID and other developing bodies believe that without having equal participation of women in all spheres of life, the goal of poverty reduction, sustainable development and good governance could not be achieved.

In line with the universal trends, the South Asian countries including Pakistan have also made some progress in terms of representation of women in governance in the recent past. Women in this region can be seen in governance structure holding the parliamentary seats, cabinet positions, judicial, civil services and local government positions although their share in these positions is quite low at present. According to the data provided in the Human Development Report (2000), women in South Asia occupy 7% of the Parliamentary seats, 9% of the cabinet seats and 6% of the judicial positions while they represent 9% of the civil services and 20% of the local government seats (Human Development Report, 2000). In Pakistan alone, women's proportion in the National Parliament doubled with 9.7% in 1985 to 18.1 % in the year 2002 (Gender statistics in, 2003). At the local level too, their share in the representation increased from 10% in 1993 to 33% through reservation of special seats for women (The Local Government; NRB, 2006; Reyes, 2002).

The universal increase in women's representation and participation in the political, economic, administrative and social arenas can be attributed to a number of developments including the historical events such as, the industrial revolution, the emergence of capitalism, the socialist revolution, decolonization and shift in development thinking after the Second World War which brought a gradual change in perspectives on gender issues and redressal approaches.

The welfare approach during 1950s gradually changed into the equity and then efficiency approach during 1970s and 1980s which ultimately turned into the empowerment approach during 1990s and shifted the whole focus of gender development (Hyden et al. 2004; Neft and Levine, 1997; Moser, 1989; Buvinic, 1983). While the welfare approach focused on development for the people through provision of technical assistance with the assumption that benefits of growth would trickle down, the empowerment approach emphasized on development with and by the people through a process of inclusion and participation (Haque and Zafarullah, 2006; Jolly, 2002; Prasad and Sahay, 2000). This view led to the emergence of 'humane governance'<sup>2</sup> through people's involvement, participation and empowerment through recognizing the potential of both women and men in the development process and brought a paradigm

shift in gender perspectives in governance (Jolly, 2002; Sen, 2001; Human Development Report, 1999).

The global importance of female representation is also due to the various efforts of the international development organizations, institutions and donors including the United Nations, CIDA, DFID, the World Bank, IMF and WTO for overall gender equality and elimination of discrimination on the basis of gender. Besides these, civil society organizations that are considered as partners in development under the new mode of governance and governments' own commitments to various international conventions and treaties to promote gender equality for poverty reduction and sustainable human development have also played pivotal role in this regard.

The United Nations' first resolution on Women's Political Rights 1946 dealing with 'granting to women the same political rights as men' (Resolution, 56 [1], the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979<sup>3</sup> and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) 1995 stating 'no government can claim to be democratic until women are granted the right to equal representation' (UN, 1995) are some of the path breaking conventions to define the charter for women's legal, political, economic, social and human rights. Other important declarations and laws include the U.N. Decade for women, 1976-1985; the Declaration on the Ending of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) 1993<sup>4</sup>; the Vienna Declaration, 1993<sup>5</sup>; Security Council Resolution (CSR 1325) (2000); the Millennium Declaration (2000) and the UN Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Strategy<sup>6</sup> (2006). These conventions, declarations and treaties are internationally accepted and widely used as guiding framework for addressing issues relating to the gender equality, equity, development and empowerment in public and private arenas.

The growing importance of women's representation and participation in the governance is also due to the world wide gender awareness campaign through media, feminist movements around the world, better access to the opportunities, i.e., education, health and employment and above all, women's own desire to contribute to the democratic governance. Academicians, researchers, scholars and professionals have also put in their efforts to bring gender issues in the spotlight through research and publications. Since 1980s several conferences, workshops, symposiums and debates have been organized at the international, regional and national level to address gender issues and devise action plans. Having the realization that gender issues are social issues and no universal strategy can be adopted for the complex gender problems, the role of indigenous search has also been recognized to understand the phenomenon in each country's own unique context.

In order to ensure the implementation of various conventions, laws, policies, and resolutions, the international donors and development bodies such as, the World Bank, ADB, and UNDP are regularly undertaking the governance assessment of countries through World Governance Indicators (WGI)

(worldwide Governance Indicators, 2006); World Governance Assessment (WGA) (UNDP, 2002 in Hyden, et al. 2004) and Human Governance Index (HGI) (Human Development Report, 1999)<sup>7</sup>. They have also tied the international support for developing countries with adoption and implementation of governance reforms, of which the participation and equity on the basis of gender is a key criteria.

At the national level too, special ministries of women affairs, commissions on status of women and bodies such as Gender Reform Action Plans (GRAPs) have been established to strengthen the implementation and integration of gender in governance reforms. In Pakistan too, various policies and plans, i.e., the National Plan of Action (1998), the National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women (2002), and Ten Year Perspective Plan (2000-2011) incorporate the country's commitment to promote the participation of women in all spheres of life (Economic Survey, 1999-2000). The Ministry of Women Development, the National commission on Status of Women and GRAPs have been established at the national and provincial level to ensure smooth implementation of reform. All partners in the development process including public, private and civil society organizations are putting in concerted efforts to fulfill promises of gender inclusion and participation at all levels.

Nevertheless, despite all of the above global, regional, national and local level efforts to enhance women's representation and participation, they are still under-represented in governance with wide gender inequalities and subtle discriminatory practices around the world. According to the IWDC statistics (2007), women account for only 16% of the world's parliament seats, with only 12 women heads of the states out of over 180 governments. While the number of sovereign states have increased seven-fold during the years 1945-1995, women's share in the parliaments have increased only four-fold. More interestingly, women ministers through a process of gender streaming are concentrated in social areas (14%) as compared to the legal, economic, political and executive areas with 9.4%, 4.1%, 3.4% and 3.9% representation respectively (www.iwdc.org, 2007; Paxton and Hughes, 2007).

The Online Women Statistics (2007), reported women are holding only 9% of the top management jobs and 21% of senior management positions according to the United Nations record (www.womenstatisticsonline.com, 2007). The Human Development Report (1995) also revealed the glaring gender inequalities on basic indicators of human development with women finding lesser access to education, health and employment. The report found women working for longer hours with lesser earnings and sharing the major burden (70%) of the world poverty. It reported South Asia as one of the lowest ranked regions on the gender related development index with a weighted average of 0.415 as compared to 0.564 for developing countries and Pakistan having a weighted average of only 0.399 while pointing to wide gender gap in the region (www.hdr.undp.org/HDR 95).



There is also an empirical evidence that suggests that women in South Asian countries where granted representation through reservation of special seats or quotas, lack effective participation mainly due to the traditional cultural norms, stereotypic societal beliefs and role socializations patrons that tend to restrain women's active participation in the public arena (Human Development Report, 1995; Ryes, 2002; Jabeen, 2000; Kamal, 2000). The above low participation of women in development has critical implications for poverty reduction, sustainable human resource development and good governance. The phenomenon points to the need for more serious and collaborated capacity building efforts to enable women participation more effectively in the democratic means of governance.

### **Context of Local Governance in Pakistan**

The history of local government system in Pakistan can be traced back to the Sub-Continent of India and the British Colonial Rule throughout 1800s and 1900s. While the All India Municipal Act of 1850 set the basis for local government legislation at a broader scale, several acts and resolutions during the colonial rule such as, Lord Mayo's Resolution (1870), Lord Ripon's Resolution (1882), Minto-Morley Reforms (1909), Montagu Chelmsford reform proposals, (1919) which ultimately took the shape of the Government of India Act and the Government of India Act 1935 which allowed the provinces autonomy and power to frame legislation on local government systems contributed to strengthen the system (The Local Government, 2006). However, the colonial local government system was largely designed to serve the colonial interests such as collection of land revenue, maintenance of law and order and dominance of state control. Bureaucratic elitism, over centralization and strict control of federal administration over local institutions were the main features of the system.

After coming into being in 1947, Pakistan inherited a system of local government from its colonial past with unbalanced institutional development that perpetuated in the post-colonial period. Despite the realization and need for an indigenous local government system, suitable to the local requirements of the country, several acts and laws such as, the Land Revenue Act (1967), Police Act (1861), Criminal Procedure Code and Pakistan Penal Code continued to be implemented in the same way. Similarly, a status quo was maintained regarding the powers of the Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, Police Superintendents and officers in other line departments. It was also observed that despite its western orientation the system deviated from the basic principals of bureaucracy such as, rule of law, merit, accountability, impersonality and public service delivery.

Over the years, every initiative to bring local governance closer to the people through the amendment of acts and policies and changing laws and manuals, in fact contributed to further increase in gap among public officials and general masses mainly due to the dominance of cultural practices such as, nepotism, feudalism, elitism, corruption and absence of rule of law. For instance, in 1956 and 1962 an effort was made to introduce the constitutional changes with regard to the Local Government System and the Basic Democracies System was introduced in 1959 through promulgation of Basic Democracies Ordinance (1959). In 1960, the Municipal Administration Ordinance was introduced to facilitate the implementation of Basic Democracies Ordinance. However, both of the ordinances could not be implemented due to the mounting political unrest and instability in the country<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, an altogether new system of local government was formed by the first democratically elected government of the country in 1975 through promulgation of People's Local Government Ordinances (1975), which remained unimplemented as local government elections were not held and bureaucrats and politicians continued their control over local institutions throughout the period.

The current local government system in Pakistan, envisaged by the military government of General Pervez Musharraf was introduced in the country on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2001 through the promulgation of Local Government Ordinance (2000). The system reflected a paradigm shift in development thinking and was a major transformation from federally controlled and highly centralized government system to people centered system of local governance. National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB), a federal agency established for the purpose, was given the task to design and lead the plan. NRB formulated the Devolution of Power Plan which provided conceptual and legal framework for the new system of local governance for each of the four provinces. The official goals of devolution included devolving political power of elected politicians, decentralization of the administrative authority, distribution of resources to districts, de-concentration of management functions and diffusion of power-authority nexus for checks and balances, efficient delivery of services and citizen participation in governance (The Local Government, NRB, 2006; Local Government, 2004).

In other words, by the year 2000, a gradual shift took place from local government to local governance encompassing the role of corporate and civil society organizations as partners with public institutions for good governance. The new system acknowledges the local government as important third tier along with federal and provincial governments. It clearly defines the roles and functions of each of the three levels of local governance i.e. District, Tehsil (sub-district) and Union Council and their relationships that are not hierarchical in nature but are politically integrated and geographically collaborated. More important of all is that the system provides for 33 percent representation of women through the reservation of special seats/quotas and 20 percent representation of workers/peasants at all three levels of local government.

Devolution represents a major governance reform which is expected to bring the fundamental changes in the political, social and administrative set up of Pakistan.

Devolution after the completion of its first term in 2005 has entered in the second term but still facing several institutional, organizational and human resource challenges. Political decentralization has not been adequately followed by the administrative and fiscal decentralization to ensure responsiveness and quality in public service delivery at local level. Citizen participation including the participation of women in local governance and their engagement in decision making has been also very low. The operational autonomy and enabling environment required for realizing full potential of the people and community empowerment have yet to occur. Moreover, political will to allow the provinces having more say in their development is also missing (Burki, 2007).

In the context of current local governance scenario, the section below specifically discusses the status of women's representation at various levels and their participation in the previous term of local governance in the country.

### **State of Women in Local Governance of Pakistan**

Women constitute 48 percent of the total 160 million population of Pakistan (www.womenstatisticsonline.org, 2007; Coleman, 2004; Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2003). The Constitution of Pakistan ensures equal status to women and provides protection for their rights including the rights to vote and contest elections. Article 25 of the Constitution states, "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law and there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone". Article 27 provides protection from the discrimination in employment and states, "No citizen otherwise qualified for employment in the services of Pakistan shall be discriminated against on the basis of race, religion, cast or sex". Article 34 of the Constitution further indicates the state's commitment to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of national life and provides room for affirmative action (Khosa, 1992: 26-28).

Nevertheless, despite these constitutional provisions, minimal effort was made in the past to enhance representation of women in governance. Though all the previous constitutions, 1956, 1962, 1970, 1973 and 1985 provided for the reservation of seats for women in Provincial and National Assemblies, however, this reservation remained very low and limited ranging from 5 percent to 10 percent. Furthermore, this constitutional provision lapsed in 1988 and deteriorated women's representation in political decision making. It is only through the Devolution of Power Plan, 2000 that women were provided 33 percent representation at all three tiers of local governance through special quota<sup>9</sup>. The table below illustrates representation of women in local governance

through allocation of the reserve seats/quotas in various local government elections of Pakistan.

**Table: 2**  
**Women Representation in Local Governance**

Time Period	Regime	Representation
1958-1968	Ayub Khan	No special representation under Basic Democracies Ordinance
1971-1977	Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto	No special representation was provided
1977-1985	Zia-ul-Haq	2 seats at UC and 10 percent for other tiers except NWFP
1988-1990	Benazir Bhutto	Local government elections were not held
1990-1993	Nawaz Sharif	10.4 percent
1994-1996	Benazir Bhutto	Local government elections were not held
1997-1999	Nawaz Sharif	12.7% in Punjab, 25.8 % in Balochistan, 2.9% in NWFP and 23% in Sindh
1999-2008	Pervez Musharraf	33% at all levels
2008 to date	Yousaf Raza Gillani	Status quo maintained

**Source:** Adapted from Aurat Publication and Information Services Foundation, 2001

The above table shows that first time in the history of Pakistan, women were provided a substantial representation in local governance through reservation of 33 percent seats. It was expected that nearly 40,000 would be elected on reserve seats, however, the actual results of the elections 2000-2001 showed that 36,105 women got elected as representatives at various levels of local governance<sup>10</sup>. The table below illustrates the status of women in terms of the number of seats, reserved for them at the Union, Tehsil and District levels and their representation against the seats at each level:

**Table: 3**  
**Status of Women in Local Governance**

Local Government Level	No. of Seats Reserved for Women	No. of Elected Women
Union Councils	36,066	32,222
Tehsil Council	1,749	1,675
Town Councils <sup>11</sup>	161	161
District Councils	1,988	1,905
<b>Total</b>	39,964	35,963
Women elected on reserved seats for Minorities		126
Women elected on Nazim / Naib Nazim seats		16
<b>Total No. of Elected Women</b>		36,105

**Source:** Adapted from Reyes, 2002 and Naz, 2001

It is evident from the table above that affirmative action opened a new window of opportunities for a critical mass of 36,000 women to organize themselves and voice their concerns at grass roots level of local governance (Alam, 2004; Yazdani, 2002-03; Anjum, 2001).

At the National and Provincial level too, women were provided representation through reservation of 17% seats (60 and 128) at each level. Although, their representation in both the National and Provincial Assemblies doubled during 2002 as compared to 9.7% representation in the year 1985, however, it remained very low from gender equality point of view. The government also ignored its commitment to the various international and national treaties and conventions to provide women at least 30% representation for a critical mass at all levels of governance.

With regard to the profile of elected women councilors who were expected to make a strategic change in the socio-political landscape of Pakistan the existing data shows that the majority of women (60%) were relatively younger, (less than 45 years), 75% had never been elected before, 73.7% were housewives and half of them were illiterate (Social Audit, 2004-2006; Bari, 2000). In terms of socio-economic status of elected women, the ADB (2004) report found 52% of the elected women as poor or financially dependant, 32% coming from working or middle class, 13% from the upper middle class and only 3% belonging to the land lord or elite class (ADB, 2004).

The existing studies also indicate to the low participation of women in their respective councils during the first term of the local government system (Social Audit, 2004-2006; Alam, 2004; Yazdani, 2002-03). According to the CIET Social Audit Report (2004-2006), only one third of the elected women attended all or nearly all the meetings of the council. While in Balochistan province, only one third of women councilors received timely notification of council meetings and 13% could actually make it to attend the meetings. It was further reported that 77% women submitted at least one proposal for their community development, however, two third of the proposals were turned down and only one third of the proposals could get a chance for fair discussion (ibid). The ADB report (2004) also found a very low percentage of women (having any knowledge of the meeting agenda of the last two sessions and council budget (25% and 29% respectively). These findings have critical social, political and economic implications for how the elected women represent themselves in the new system. The above findings also point to the clear need for building capacity of the elected women to enable them to perform their governance roles more effectively.

While formal and descriptive representation of women by increasing their number in local decision making through affirmative action was an important first step, their participation to make some difference requires more qualitative improvements in the form of substantive representation of women in policy arena<sup>12</sup>. As, 'for women's interests to be presented in politics, female politicians

have to be willing and able to represent their interests' (Paxton and Hughes, 2007: 9). Building on the above arguments, the section below discusses the capacity building and its role in promoting the women's participation in local governance of Pakistan.

## **Conceptualizing the Capacity Building**

The concept of capacity building has been at the centre of development debate since 1990s. The worldwide governance and the administrative reforms in the form of decentralization, deregulation, privatization and participation created greater need for capacity building at various levels. Realizing that new mode of governance requires more rigorous role of state in terms of regulation and intensive involvement of citizens and corporate sector in the development of developing countries, the international community focused its attention to enhance the state and institutional capabilities through capacity building. The developing countries too with failure of economic benefits to trickle down to the poor recognized capacity building as crucial for poverty reduction, sustainable growth and institutional development.

Apart from the fact that there is a universal consensus on vitality of capacity building for good governance, variations exist in terms of defining the concept. While international development organizations define the concept from their own program's perspective, scholars look into the concept from their disciplinary perspectives. The diverse views on the capacity building also vary in terms of its approach ranging from micro to macro, broader to specific and normative to descriptive although theoretical and ideological elements remain the same. These competing notions present a holistic view of capacity that encompass wide spectrum of activities such as, tasks, competencies, roles, relationships, attitudes, values and responsibilities etc. at multiple levels and embrace the shift in development thinking over time (Hope, 2006; Hilderbrand, 2002; Schacter, 2000; Morgan, 1999).

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines the capacity building as "the creation of an enabling environment with appropriate policy and legal frameworks; institutional development, including community participation (of women in particular; human resource development and strengthening of managerial systems" (UNDP, 1997; <http://www.gdrc.org/vcm/capacity-define.html>). It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which capacities of stakeholders including state functionaries, local government authorities, civil society organizations, professional associations, academics and citizens can be enhanced for achievement of the desired goals. This definition clearly identifies three levels: institutional, organizational and individual and broad arenas such as legal, administrative, managerial and HR to be included in the capacity building process. The latest view of UNDP (2003) defines the

capacity building as a continuous process which should build on and expand the existing indigenous capacity rather than replacing it (UNDP, 2003).

The UNCED (1992) definition of capacity building while expanding the above view of UNDP adds a contextual and cultural dimension to the concept. It defines capacity building as encompassing the country's human, scientific, technological, organizational and institutional resource and capabilities. The basic objective of the effort is to enhance the ability of stakeholders to formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate development projects in view of the needs perceived by the people and the country concerned (UNCED, 1992).

A similar notion of the capacity building has been put forth by the World Bank (1996), which defines the capacity building as a process of performing functions effectively, efficiently and sustainably through the combination of individual, organizational and institutional resources. It recognizes the importance of improved capacities of people in solving complex problems; formulating, executing, and evaluating development choices that represent them and enable them to achieve the desired objectives (World Bank, 1992).

Several views have been drawn on the above notions of capacity building with little variations in terms of focus and approach (Grindle, 2007, 1996; Cheema, 2003; Hilderbrand, 2002; Bolger, 2000; Brinkerhoff, 1995). While Hilderbrand (2002) focuses on the institutional and administrative capacity to be used as a goal for development, Grindle (2007,1996) views capacity building as a subset of overall state capacity including technical, institutional, administrative and political dimensions and emphasizes on building state capacities for improved governance<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, Cheema (2003) regards the capacity building as a comprehensive and continuous process which is more strategic in nature and necessary for long term development of countries and Bolger (2000) notes the amount of change and transformation involved in the process at each individual, organizational and institutional levels as vital for the process (Cheema, 2003; Bolger, 2000).

It is evident from the above discussion that there is no single interpretation of capacity building, therefore, the concept may mean different things to different countries and have different implications in the context of their development. However, a review and analysis of the available literature on the subject suggest the following predominant trends over time:

- 1) The concept has been enriched and expanded over time by encompassing more activities such as; skills, competencies, abilities, roles, responsibilities and relationships and more arenas including human, technical, financial, administrative and legal;
- 2) While earlier approaches during 1970s and 1980s focused on the individual and organizational aspects of capacity building; the emerging approaches in 1990s focused on more integrated view of the concept by considering institutional and societal contexts as important dimensions of capacity building;

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- 3) The concept, over time has acquired new meanings that refers capacity building a dynamic and continuous process of development rather than a passive and one time training activity;
- 4) More recent perspectives of capacity building recognize the inclusion and local participation of all stakeholders irrespective of gender as crucial for long term development rather than imposing external solutions to the problems;
- 5) A clear shift is also reflected in terms of merely presenting an instrumental and objective view of capacity building to a more subjective and qualitative view that recognizes change and transformation at the heart of the concept;
- 6) Boundaries have become blurred over time and today, the concept is not limited only to enhancing the capacity of public sector institutions alone as was the case in 1970s but is equally applicable to the local communities, corporate sector and civil society organizations that are new partners in governance.

In addition to the above, the issues such as how to most effectively build capacities of stakeholders to get them reflected in their development, retaining the acquired capacities over a longer period of time and transferability of learned competencies have also generated heated discussions among scholars and practitioners. Since different countries and organizations have different capacity requirements in view of their specific context and unique challenges, a universal application of the concept may be misleading having implications for the development. Therefore, it is important that the concept should be understood in view of the specific context, country or region and applied according to the indigenous requirements for more effective outcomes.

Building on this argument, the section below provides broad contours of the capacity building framework to be adopted for promoting the participation of women in the context of local governance of Pakistan.

### **Capacity Building Framework for Promoting Participation in Local Governance**

In view of the growing significance of women's participation in governance and their current low participation, discussed earlier, it is crucial that they are assisted to avail the existing opportunities more effectively. Among many other benefits, women's increased participation in local governance can ensure the most efficient utilization of scarce resources, alleviation of poverty, equitable, just and sustainable human development along with having a national pool of talent for future leadership (Paxton and Hughes, 2007, ADB, 2004; UNDP, 2000; Ofei-Aboagye, 2000).



The new local governance system of Pakistan through its Devolution of Power Plan (2001) provides a unique opportunity to women for their contribution in community development through effective participation. However, the existing empirical studies and data suggest that due to various cultural, ideological, normative and demographic factors, women's participation remained very low in the previous term. The studies also point to the weak capacity of female councilors due to not having sufficient knowledge, skills and prerequisites of Pakistani politics (Social Audit, 2004-2006; Alam, 2004; Yazdani, 2002-2003; Naz, 2000; Bari, 2001). Although some capacity building efforts were undertaken to prepare women to perform their responsibilities with the involvement of local, national and international community organizations, however, most of the endeavors catered to the needs of small community besides being one short, ad hoc and reactive in nature.

Recognizing the need, it is important to enable women councilors to cope with their new roles and responsibilities through developing and adopting a comprehensive gender capacity building framework which is proactive and grounded in the local realities. In view of the above, the paper attempts to identify the broad contours of gender capacity building framework for effective participation of women in local governance. The suggested framework based on a systematic analysis of gender in the cultural specific context of Pakistan addresses the questions such as,

- a. What are the factors that hinder women's participation in governance?
  - b. When and where the phenomenon of underrepresentation of women takes place?
  - c. Why and how it has persisted over time even after the formal visible representation of women at local level?
  - d. What needs to be done, when it needs to be done and how it needs to be done?
- a. As discussed earlier, women's representation and participation in the major realms of governance is low, as compared to their male counter parts. There are diverse cultural, political, economic and demographic factors responsible for their low participation. A brief examination of each of the above category suggests how these factors affect female representation and restrict their full participation in governance in Pakistani context.

First, there are social and cultural norms and traditions that shape individual identities and impact their behaviors throughout the lives. These cultural and societal norms ascribe different roles and status to women and men and place women in a subordinated position. While men are assigned breadwinning responsibilities with more visible roles in public arenas women are more valued in their domestic roles as mothers, wives, family helpers and care takers of family and children. This

gendered role division has serious implications for women in terms of their access to development opportunities including their aspirations to join and effectively participate in governance.

Second, in terms of political factors, the marred political history in Pakistan has put women at a disadvantageous position as compared to men. Politics in Pakistan is known as a dirty business often associated with ambiguity, corruption, enmity, rivalry, violence, nepotism and negative influence. Moreover, it is dominated by feudal mindset, business elitism and tribal value system favoring men more than women. Women's role in politics has remained very low and limited since inception of Pakistan. Women's late entry in politics has implications in terms of getting acceptance in their new roles and acquisition of appropriate knowledge and skills needed to perform these roles. The complex political system starting from voting registration to election, absence of political party support, lack of funding and networking and behavior of male colleagues in sessions further hinder their grass roots participation.

Third, there are economic factors pertaining poverty, low income, wage discrimination, unemployment, economic dependence and lack of financial support for electoral campaigns that add to the low representation and participation of women in governance. Their daily struggle for survival hardly leaves them with any time to get involved in politics. Even after being elected women find fewer opportunities for training and development and are provided with limited access to funds for development projects as indicated earlier due to the complex procedures and certain biases involved in project approval which further lower their motivation and political aspirations.

Finally, there are demographic factors including multiple roles of women in domestic and professional arenas, work family conflict, lack of child care and elderly support and non egalitarian family attitudes and gender gaps in development opportunities including access to education, health, employment and political representation that affect women's participation in governance. These factors not only influence perceptions and attitudes of significant others about women but also lower female councillors own motivation and self confidence to effectively represent their communities.

- b. It is evident from the foregoing discussion that phenomenon of under representation and low participation of women in governance takes place due to the complex interrelated and overlapped factors at systemic, organizational, familial and individual levels. These levels are interconnected and each level influences the others. For instance, the influence of cultural norms, values and ideologies that shape gender related laws, rules and regulations such as status and position of women in society is reflected in organizational practices, policies and outlooks.

Similarly, the individual and familial behaviors and attitudes represent a mirror reflection of cultural expectations and vice versa. Since, all three levels are integrated any change at one level can be seen at other levels with varying degrees and intensities. Therefore, to facilitate women for their effective representation in governance will require a holistic and integrated approach at institutional (including systemic and organizational) and individual (including familial and personal) levels.

- c. It is also noted that in a tradition bound Pakistani society gender development and empowerment is deeply influenced by cultural norms, customary behaviors and stereotypes. Who does what is largely determined on the basis of cultural perceptions of each gender. Once created, it becomes difficult to eradicate these social stereotypes and they are reflected in multiple arenas in the form of gender biases and overt or covert discriminatory practices. It has been observed that the hold of cultural norms and traditions is so strong in some tribal areas including NWFP, Balochistan and Rural Sindh that even state sponsored gender development initiatives are disregarded and constitutional provisions for gender equality are ignored. No wonder that Human Development Report (1998) ranked Pakistan at 131 among 163 countries on Gender Development Index (GDI) and 100 on Gender Empowerment Index (GEM) out of 102 countries surveyed (Human Development Report, 1998). Several empirical studies point to the considerable gender inequalities in the country in terms of education, health, unemployment and representation in the National Parliaments (Coleman, 2004; World Bank, 2004; Kamal, 2000; Human Development Report, 2000; 1995). Women's lack of power to choose their occupation, construed power relations, their immobility, token status and lack of experience further restrict their participation.
- d. Based on the analysis of factors and key domains constraining participation of women in local governance of Pakistan the proposed gender capacity building framework suggests a two pronged strategy to address the issue.

Firstly, it emphasizes on the need for building capacity of the women elected or aspiring to contest and perform in local governance through education, training and provision of the requisite knowledge and skills.

Secondly, it stresses upon the need for enhancing capacities of the institutions involved such as, Federal, Provincial and Local Governments, NRB, training institutions, civil society organizations and development agencies to facilitate women's participation through positive action, provision of resources and enabling environment. The suggested individual and institutional strategies must be aligned with the contextual realities and be adopted on consistent basis for desired outcomes.

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As mentioned earlier, some collaborated efforts are already being undertaken in this regard, however, to enhance the impact of capacity building initiatives and making local governance more responsive to gender concerns more specific interventions are required.

i) The first set of activities that seeks to promote participation through enhancement of individual capabilities may include:

- Provision of knowledge on general and specific roles and responsibilities of elected women; rights of women as human beings, voters, candidates, and elected members; procedure of voting registration, campaigning and polling; availability of financial, technical and human resources; key gender issues and concerns; filing complaints and reporting unethical practices including workplace harassment and discrimination; Local Government Ordinance (LGO); structure of LGO; and profile of their councils etc.
- Building skills for general and specific management functions. while general management skills include communication, decision making, information technology, ethical behavior, time management and leadership effectiveness specific skills focus on local planning, budgeting, preparation and submission of development proposals, priority setting, team building, conflict management and political skills including the art of envisioning, articulating, negotiating and influencing decisions.
- Transforming attitudes, perceptions and perspectives of women councilors and those aspiring for participating in democratic governance on basic philosophy of devolution and participatory governance, values of public administration and local government, community development, empowerment and involvement, transparency and accountability and awareness of gender concerns including effective participation.
- Forming networks and building alliances for harnessing social support on key gender issues. Such alliances can also provide women a common platform to organize themselves, share views and mobilize support.
- Mentoring and guidance for newly elected women through experienced women to learn necessary ropes for successfully coping with their new challenging roles, gaining confidence, overcoming barriers and performing functions effectively.

ii) The second set of activities aim at promoting participation through institutional support by creating enabling environment for women and include the following:

- Gender training for officials at local government institutions to enhance awareness on gender issues, concerns and rights including equity in terms of representation of women in various decision making bodies and important policy making forums, gender sensitive budgeting and planning, gender conducive work environment, sexual harassment, domestic violence, human and legal rights of both women and men etc.

- Advocacy for enhancing women's political participation by encouraging authorities including political parties to implement affirmative action in its true spirit and take positive actions through developing gender friendly policies on child care, elderly support, mobility, financial incentives and allowances/stipends, meeting timings and logistical arrangements etc, fostering social and political change by highlighting the positive aspects of women's involvement in local governance encompassing their special concerns for health, education, environment, family issues and sustainable community development besides having more transformational, inclusive, participative, communal and consensus oriented styles (Reyes, 2002; Myers, 2002; Drage, 2001; UNDP, 2000).
- Building capacity of stakeholder institutions including the federal, provincial and local governments, NRB, civil services and civil society organizations to manage devolution effectively by examining the existing policies, practices and structures for mainstreaming gender at all levels, providing them technical support and encouragement to initiate policy debates and discussions on the subject.
- Identifying possible individual and institutional linkages for building networks and strengthening alliances among institutions, involved in promoting women's political participation for more synergy, better coordination, effective cooperation and an efficient use of resources.
- Collaborating with local universities, research institutions, academia, media and women's groups for undertaking in depth research on gender issues, challenges and coping strategies including the issues of political representation and participation and documentation of the research findings for a reservoir of local knowledge on the subject. Such indigenous knowledge can be very useful for designing, formulating and implementing gender sensitive policies and evaluating their impact on participation. It can also be used for identifying training needs and developing training material besides sharing with women the contributions of their female colleagues, successful practices and lessons for improved participation.

The above proposed measures if adopted along with political will and determination will not only help developing capacity of individuals and institutions for effective political participation but will also contribute to the improved economic and social outcomes in the form of poverty reduction, sustainable development, egalitarian attitudes and more balanced gender relations in the country.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, women's effective and equal participation in decision making is extremely important for good governance, poverty alleviation and even for a sustainable human resource development in a country. Realizing the need, the local governance system of Pakistan (2001) provided for 33% representation of women at all three tiers i.e. District, Tehsil (Sub District) and Union Council through the adoption of affirmative action. However, despite this significant increase in women's representation, their participation remained very low in the previous term (2001-2005). The empirical studies on the issue reveal that several cultural, political, economic and demographic factors are responsible for women's low participation in governance. While the situation determines a clear role for capacity building initiatives, it is important that instead of following any borrowed model a comprehensive gender capacity building framework be developed in light of the indigenous requirements. Based on a systematic review and analysis of the diverse factors and domains in which the phenomenon takes place, the paper identifies contours of such a framework and suggests adopting a two pronged strategy focusing on developing people (women councilors and groups) and creating enabling environment at institutions. While specific interventions regarding the first include provision of requisite knowledge, developing specific skills, building alliances, networking and mentoring; the second set of activities seek to promote the participation through gender sensitization, advocacy, institutional alliances and linkages, skill enhancement of stakeholder institutions, and research and documentation. It is anticipated that a sincere and sustained implementation of the framework will not only promote the political participation but will also enhance women's contribution in economic and social arenas through facilitating a positive attitudinal change in Pakistani society.

## Notes

1. Gender-related Development Index (GDI) is a composite of Gender Development and Gender Empowerment Indices. It adjusts the Human Development Index (HDI) for gender equality in life expectancy, educational attainment, income and political participation. For more details on female participation and progress in governance, see Human Development Report, 2000. See also [www.undp.org/hd](http://www.undp.org/hd)
2. Dr. Mahbub ul Haq, drawing mainly on the ideas of Amartya Sen, the Second Nobel Laureate, reformulated the concept of good governance defining it in terms of human governance that ultimately aims at promoting human development. It encompasses three governance arenas: political, economic and civic and presents a combination of good political, good economic and good civic governance which is not only people centred but is also owned by them (Human Development Report, 1999, pp. 28).
3. CEDAW defines discrimination and possible areas it may take place including political life, international affairs and national concerns relating to education,

employment, health care, law and family life etc. The convention also suggests measure to be taken by states to address discrimination in the above areas. It is a comprehensive convention widely ratified by 160 countries of the world including Pakistan.

4. DEVAW particularly focuses on gender based violence and its various forms in social, political and domestic life, which CEDAW does not address explicitly. For more details see UNDP, Gender Equality Strategy, 2007.
5. The Vienna Declaration emphasized on equal enjoyment of human rights by both women and men and was widely ratified by 171 countries at the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993, mentioned in the UNDP report on the Revolution for Gender Equality, 2006.
6. The United Nations Gender Mainstreaming concept aims at eradicating inequality between women and men in political, economic and social arenas and emphasizes on inclusion and participation of both women and men in process of development. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) 1997 defines gender mainstreaming as 'the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programs, in all area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated' (ECOSOC, 1997, pp. 2).
7. The World Bank developed and launched the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) in September 2006 to assess quality of governance across the world. WGI include voice and accountability; political stability; government effectiveness; regulatory quality; rule of law; and control of corruption (World Bank, 2006). The United Nations University, Tokyo for its World Governance Assessment Project identified six dimensions of governance including socializing, aggregating, executive, managerial, regulatory and adjudicatory with corresponding arenas encompassing civil society, political, government, bureaucratic, economic and judicial institutions. Under WGA quality of governance is assessed for governance values of accountability, transparency, participation, decency, fairness and efficiency in each of the six identified arenas. For more details on WGA see Hyden, et al. 2004. Building on the UNDP's views on governance the Human Development Centre, Pakistan developed Human Governance Index (HGI) 1999 to assess quality of governance and ranked 58 developed and developing countries for which data was available on Human Governance. HGI is calculated on the basis of indicators representing good political, good economic and good civic governance. For more details on HGI, see Human Development Report 1999, pp. 39.
8. Basis Democracies System (1959) was introduced by the regime of Ayub Khan after disbanding the national and provincial system of local government, as part of the military government's efforts to engage people in local affairs. All modalities of the new system were devised, however, after the fall of Ayub Khan the system could not be implemented as designed (Local Government Department, Sindh, 2004).
9. Pakistan is a signatory of both the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979 and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), 1995 that recommend adoption of quotas/affirmative action to increase women representation to at least 30% in politics and employment.
10. The value of 33% reserved seats was calculated on the basis of base number seats in each of the District, Tehsil, Town and Union Council instead of the gross number of seats at each level which decreased women reservation to 27.7% and declined their representation from 40,000 to 36,105.
11. In order to address the specific needs and problems of large cities the system provided for subdivision into city district and towns when it fulfills criteria in terms

of urbanization, volume of economic activities, administration, politics and population (up to 10 million). Each City District may have further subdivision into varying number of Towns. Further details can be accessed through NRB site: [www.nrb.gov.pk](http://www.nrb.gov.pk)

12. Paxton and Hughes (2007), provide a useful account of feminists' perspectives on women's equal political representation in terms of formal, descriptive and substantive forms of representation. Formal representation is the earliest and basic form which requires legal and policy level support for eradicating overt forms of discrimination while descriptive representation perspective offered in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century argues for a parity principle by providing women a significant representation at decision making forums. Similarly, substantive representation which is the most recent equality argument involves both quantitative and qualitative measures to enable women and men to be willing to and able to advocate gender interests at various levels (Paxton and Hughes, 2007, pp. 8-11).
13. Merilee Grindle (2007) using Moore's (2001) typology of political systems defines states in terms of specific characteristics of their regimes and their capacities by identifying five types of states including: collapsed, personal rule, minimally institutionalized, institutionalized non-competitive, and institutionalized competitive states and determining their capacities form low to high regarding institutional stability, organizational capacity, legitimacy and policies in place. For details see Grindle, 2007, pp. 564.

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