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Participation of women gram panchayat members in local governance

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Abstract

The present study was carried out in the Latur district of Marathwada region of Maharashtra state. From Latur district, three tehsils namely Latur, Renapur and Ausa were selected randomly. From each selected tehsil eight villages were selected randomly. Thus total twenty – four villages from three tehsils were selected for this study. From each selected village, five – women gram panchayat members were selected randomly. Thus, total 120 women gram panchayat members were selected for the study. The study was based on an ex-post facto research design. The study indicated that majority (80.83%) of the women gram panchayat members had a medium level of participation, indicating satisfactory performance.

Keywords: Women gram panchayat members, local governance, participation

Introduction

Women's participation in Gram Panchayat governance is an important component of democratic decentralization and inclusive rural development. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 provided constitutional recognition to Panchayati Raj Institutions and reserved at least one-third of seats and chairperson positions for women, with many states later increasing the reservation to 50 percent. This has created greater opportunities for women to participate in grassroots decision-making and address local issues related to education, health, sanitation, drinking water and women and child welfare.

However, despite increased representation, women representatives continue to face challenges such as limited education, lack of training, patriarchal attitudes, family responsibilities and the practice of "Pradhan Pati" where male relatives influence or control the elected woman representative's decisions. Therefore, effective participation of women in Gram Panchayats requires not only political representation but also leadership development, capacity building, awareness, and institutional support. Studying women's participation in Gram Panchayat governance is essential to understand their role in decision-making and their contribution to effective and sustainable rural development.

Objective

1. To study the participation of women gram panchayat members in local governance

Materials and Methods

The present study was carried out in the Latur district of Marathwada region of Maharashtra state. From Latur district,

three tehsils namely Latur, Renapur and Ausa were selected randomly. From each selected tehsil eight villages were selected randomly. Thus total twenty – four villages from three tehsils were selected for this study. From each selected village, five – women gram panchayat members were selected randomly. Thus, total 120 women members were selected for the study. The research design followed for the study was Ex-post-facto. The collected data was measured by using frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean.

Participation of women gram panchayat members was measured by using scale developed by Adikary *et al.* (2009). This scale has identified six major dimensions for assessing the participation of women members in Gram Panchayats namely political, social, economic, developmental, decision-making and policy-making activities.

Results and Discussion

This identified six component namely political activities, social activities, economic activities, developmental activities, decision making activities and policy making activities were used to know participation of women gram panchayat members and accordingly result has been discussed below,

A) Political activities

Political activities reflect the active involvement of women gram panchayat members in the democratic and decision making process of local governance. Their engagement in campaigning, meetings, demonstration and expressing opinions indicates the extent of their active role in political affairs.

Table 1: Distribution of women gram panchayat members according to the frequency of their political activities

Sr. No.	Component and their statements	Always Freq. (%)	Most of time Freq. (%)	Some times Freq. (%)	Rarely Freq. (%)	Never Freq. (%)
1.	Door to door canvassing.	76 (63.33)	29 (24.17)	15 (12.50)	00 (00.00)	00 (00.00)
2.	Addressing public meetings.	97 (80.83)	10 (8.33)	07 (5.83)	06 (5.00)	00 (00.00)
3.	Distributing Pamphlets and posters.	90 (75.00)	12 (10.00)	12 (10.00)	06 (5.00)	00 (00.00)
4.	Canvassing outside the village.	85 (70.00)	17 (14.17)	13 (10.83)	05 (4.17)	00 (00.00)
5.	Affiliated political parties meeting.	92 (76.67)	14 (11.67)	10 (8.33)	04 (3.33)	00 (00.00)
6.	Parties demonstration.	68 (56.67)	30 (25.00)	15 (12.50)	05 (4.17)	02 (1.67)
7.	Women accompanied by family while coming to a meeting	24 (20.00)	23 (19.17)	45 (37.50)	14 (11.67)	14 (11.67)
8.	Women representatives express their opinion and ideas during meeting.	40 (33.33)	30 (25.00)	34 (28.33)	16 (13.33)	00 (00.00)

Findings indicated that, Door-to-door canvassing was with nearly three-fifth (63.33%) was always practiced. Another 24.17 per cent reported that, it occurred most of the time, while 12.50 per cent indicated that, it was practiced sometimes. None reported that it was rarely or never practiced. Regarding addressing public meetings, a substantial majority (80.83%) reported that, it was always conducted. In comparison, 8.33 per cent stated most of the time, 5.83 per cent indicated sometimes, and 5.00 per cent reported rarely. None selected never. For distributing pamphlets and posters, majority (75.00%) reported that, this activity was always undertaken. Additionally, 10.00 per cent each indicated most of the time and sometimes, while 5.00 per cent stated that, it was rarely practiced. None selected never. With respect to canvassing outside the village, majority (70.00%) indicated that, it was always practiced. Furthermore, 14.17 per cent reported most of the time, 10.83 per cent stated sometimes, and 4.17 per cent indicated rarely. None reported never. Similarly, affiliated political party meetings were reported as always conducted by about three-fourth (76.67%). Another 11.67 per cent stated most of the time, 8.33 per cent indicated sometimes, and 3.33 per cent reported rarely. None selected never. For party demonstrations, more than half (56.67%) reported that, they

were always organized. In addition, 25.00 per cent indicated most of the time, 12.50 per cent reported sometimes, 4.17 per cent stated rarely, and 1.67 per cent indicated never. Concerning women being accompanied by family members while attending meetings, only 20.00 per cent reported that, this always occurred. Nearly similar proportions indicated 19.17 per cent for most of the time, while nearly two-fifth (37.50%) stated that, it occurred sometimes. Additionally, 11.67 per cent each reported rarely and never, suggesting that, family accompaniment was not consistently observed. Regarding women representatives expressing their opinions and ideas during meetings, 33.33 per cent reported that, this always occurred. Another 25.00 per cent stated most of the time, 28.33 per cent indicated sometimes, and 13.33 per cent reported rarely. None selected never.

B) Social activities

Social activities reflect the active involvement of women gram panchayat members in addressing communities need and promoting social welfare. Their participation in sanitation, education, nutrition, drinking water, housing and village infrastructure activities indicates their contribution towards overall rural development.

Table 2: Distribution of women gram panchayat members according to the frequency of their social activities

Sr. No.	Component and their statements	Always Freq. (%)	Most of time Freq. (%)	Some times Freq. (%)	Rarely Freq. (%)	Never Freq. (%)
1.	Organizing beneficiaries for construction and supervision of housing project.	35 (29.17)	38 (31.67)	36 (30.00)	09 (7.50)	02 (1.67)
2.	Maintenance of drinking water facility.	53 (44.17)	49 (40.83)	13 (10.83)	05 (4.17)	00 (00.00)
3.	Distribution of fuel and fodder.	06 (5.00)	12 (10.00)	39 (32.50)	41 (34.17)	22 (18.33)
4.	Supervision of village sanitation activities.	53 (44.17)	46 (38.33)	15 (12.50)	06 (5.00)	00 (00.00)
5.	Supervision of formal and non-formal education.	66 (55.00)	34 (28.33)	11 (9.17)	09 (7.50)	00 (00.00)
6.	Supervision of distribution of nutrition for children and women	62 (51.67)	36 (30.00)	08 (6.67)	14 (11.67)	00 (00.00)
7.	Construction and maintenance of link roads, village roads and bridges.	81 (67.50)	23 (19.17)	05 (4.17)	11 (9.17)	00 (00.00)

The findings presented in Table 2 indicated that, nearly one-third (31.67%) of the respondents selected organizing beneficiaries for construction and supervision of housing projects was undertaken most of the time, followed by sometimes, always, rarely and never with (30.00%), (29.17%), (7.50%), and (1.67%) respectively. The about two-fifth (44.17%) reported that, maintenance of drinking water facilities was carried out always, followed by 40.83 per cent most of the time, 10.83 per cent sometimes, 4.17 per cent rarely, and none selected never. In the case of distribution of fuel and fodder, about one-third (34.17%) reported that, it was carried out rarely, followed by 32.50 per cent sometimes, 18.33 per cent never, 10.00 per cent most of the time, and 5.00 per cent always. The nearly half (44.17%) stated that, supervision of village sanitation activities was undertaken always, followed by most of the time, sometimes, rarely and never with (38.33%), (12.50%), (5.00%), and none selected never respectively. For supervision of formal and non-formal education, more than half (55.00%) reported that, it was undertaken always, followed by most of the time, sometimes,

rarely and never with (28.33%), (9.17%), (7.50%) and none selected never respectively. Similarly, nearly half (51.67%) reported that, supervision of the distribution of nutrition for children and women was carried out always, followed by most of the time, rarely, sometimes and never with (30.00%), (11.67%), (6.67%) and none selected never respectively. Regarding construction and maintenance of link roads, village roads and bridges, the majority (67.50%) reported that, it was undertaken always, followed by most of the time, rarely, sometimes and never with (19.17%), (9.17%), (4.17%) and non-reported never respectively.

C) Economic activities

Economic activities reflect the involvement of women gram panchayat members in promoting livelihood opportunities and improving the economic well-being of rural communities. Their participation in employment, poverty alleviation, agricultural extension, family income and irrigation schemes highlights their contribution to rural economic development.

Table 3: Distribution of women gram panchayat members according to the frequency of their economic activities

Sr. No.	Component and their statements	Always Freq. (%)	Most of time Freq. (%)	Some times Freq. (%)	Rarely Freq. (%)	Never Freq. (%)
1.	Implementation of rural unemployment scheme.	43 (35.83)	42 (35.00)	26 (21.67)	09 (7.50)	00 (00.00)
2.	Implementation of poverty alleviation scheme.	36 (30.00)	27 (22.50)	40 (33.33)	17 (14.17)	00 (00.00)
3.	Implementation of Agricultural extension scheme	43 (35.83)	32 (26.67)	25 (20.83)	20 (16.67)	00 (00.00)
4.	Implementation of family income scheme	44 (36.67)	27 (22.50)	34 (28.33)	15 (12.50)	00 (00.00)
5.	Implementation of irrigation scheme.	49 (40.83)	35 (19.17)	20 (16.67)	16 (13.33)	00 (00.00)

The findings presented in Table 3 revealed that, more than one-third (35.83%) of the respondents were the implementation of rural unemployment schemes was undertaken always, followed closely by who reported most of the time (35.00%), while 21.67 per cent indicated sometimes, 7.50 per cent rarely, and none reported never. In the case of the implementation of poverty alleviation schemes, one-third (33.33%) of the respondents reported that, the schemes were implemented sometimes, followed by who reported always (30.00%), most of the time (22.50%), rarely (14.17%), and none reported never. Regarding the implementation of agricultural extension schemes, more than one-third (35.83%) stated that, the schemes were implemented always, followed by most of the time, sometimes, rarely and none with (26.67%), (20.83%), (16.67%) and none reported never respectively. Similarly, more than one-third (36.67%) of the respondents reported that, the implementation of family

income schemes was carried out always, followed by 28.33 per cent who reported sometimes, 22.50 per cent most of the time, 12.50 per cent rarely, and none reported never. With regards to the implementation of irrigation schemes, more than two-fifth (40.83%) of the respondents reported that, the schemes were implemented always, followed by most of the time, sometimes, rarely and none with (29.17%), (16.67%), (13.33%) and none reported never respectively.

D) Developmental activities

Developmental activities represent the contribution of women Gram Panchayat members towards the overall socio-economic progress of rural communities. Their involvement in agriculture, allied activities, employment generation, health, welfare and support for weaker sections reflects their role in promoting inclusive rural development.

Table 4: Distribution of women gram panchayat members according to the frequency of their developmental activities

Sr. No.	Component and their statements	Always Freq. (%)	Most of time Freq. (%)	Some times Freq. (%)	Rarely Freq. (%)	Never Freq. (%)
1.	Promotion of agriculture and horticulture.	77 (64.67)	24 (20.00)	17 (14.17)	02 (1.67)	00 (00.00)
2.	Promotion of dairy farming, poultry and piggery.	60 (50.00)	42 (35.00)	14 (11.67)	04 (3.33)	00 (00.00)
3.	Planting of trees on roadside, farm forestry and social forestry	62 (51.67)	24 (20.00)	17 (14.17)	17 (14.67)	00 (00.00)
4.	Promotion of rural and cottage industry.	27	52	29	12	00

		(22.50)	(43.33)	(24.17)	(10.00)	(00.00)
5.	Creation of employment and productive assets.	34 (28.33)	33 (27.50)	47 (39.17)	06 (5.00)	00 (00.00)
6.	Leprosy, polio eradication and malaria control.	00 (00.00)	13 (10.83)	57 (47.50)	40 (33.33)	00 (00.00)
7.	Implementation of women and child welfare activities.	56 (46.67)	27 (22.50)	25 (20.83)	10 (8.33)	10 (8.33)
8.	Specific activities for weaker section.	64 (53.33)	35 (29.17)	17 (14.17)	04 (3.33)	00 (00.00)

The findings presented in Table 4 revealed that, more than three-fifths (64.67%) of the respondents selected the promotion of agriculture and horticulture was carried out always, followed by who reported most of the time (20.00%), sometimes (14.17%), rarely (1.67%), and none reported never. Half (50.00%) of the respondents reported that, the promotion of dairy farming, poultry and piggery was undertaken always, 35.00 per cent most of the time, 11.67 per cent sometimes, 3.33 per cent rarely, and none reported never. More than half (51.67%) of the respondents stated that, planting of trees on roadsides, farm forestry and social forestry was carried out always, followed by most of the time, sometimes, rarely never with (20.00%), (14.17%), (14.17%) and none reported never respectively. More than two-fifths (43.33%) of the respondents reported that, the promotion of rural and cottage industries was undertaken most of the time, followed by sometimes (24.17%), always (22.50%), rarely (10.00%) and none reported never. Nearly two-fifths (39.17%) of the respondents reported that, the creation of employment and productive assets was undertaken sometimes, 28.33 per cent always, 27.50 per cent most of the time, 5.00 per cent rarely, and none reported never. Less than

half (47.50%) of the respondents reported that, leprosy, polio eradication and malaria control activities were undertaken sometimes, followed by 33.33 per cent rarely, 10.83 per cent most of the time, none reported always, and none reported never. Less than half (46.67%) of the respondents stated that implementation of women and child welfare activities was carried out always, followed by most of the time (22.50%), sometimes (20.83%), rarely (8.33%), and never (8.33%). More than half (53.33%) of the respondents reported that, specific activities for weaker sections were undertaken always, followed by most of the time (29.17%), sometimes (14.17%), rarely (3.33%) and none reported never.

E) Decision making activities

Decision-making is a key indicator of women's effective participation in local self-governance and their empowerment at the grassroots level. The involvement of women Gram Panchayat members in beneficiary selection, group formation, training and development-related decisions reflects their role in shaping village-level development priorities.

Table 5: Distribution of women gram panchayat members according to the frequency of their decision making activities

Sr. No.	Component and their statements	Always Freq. (%)	Most of time Freq. (%)	Some times Freq. (%)	Rarely Freq. (%)	Never Freq. (%)
1.	Selection of beneficiaries.	95 (79.17)	13 (10.83)	12 (10.00)	00 (00.00)	00 (00.00)
2.	Selection of village artisans and youth of training.	56 (46.67)	33 (27.50)	20 (16.67)	11 (9.17)	00 (00.00)
3.	Group formation activities selection.	65 (54.17)	18 (15.00)	26 (21.67)	11 (9.17)	00 (00.00)
4.	Preparation of workers list.	54 (45.00)	26 (21.67)	20 (16.67)	19 (15.83)	01 (0.83)
5.	Deployment of Anganwadi worker within a gram panchayat.	46 (38.33)	25 (20.83)	49 (40.83)	00 (00.00)	00 (00.00)
6.	Preparation of scheme from gram panchayat share.	58 (48.33)	48 (40.00)	06 (5.00)	08 (6.67)	00 (00.00)
7.	Identification of families without house/house site for housing under rural housing scheme.	53 (44.17)	29 (24.17)	37 (30.83)	01 (0.85)	00 (00.00)
8.	Distribution of seed fertilizer and pesticides	55 (45.83)	30 (25.00)	27 (22.50)	08 (6.67)	00 (00.00)
9.	Mini-kit distribution	52 (43.33)	33 (27.50)	33 (27.50)	01 (0.83)	01 (0.83)
10.	Identification of landless families for land distribution.	57 (47.50)	29 (24.17)	24 (20.00)	10 (8.33)	00 (00.00)
11.	Women representatives take interest in panchayat work.	43 (35.83)	19 (15.83)	52 (43.33)	06 (5.00)	00 (00.00)
12.	Family of women representatives interfere in panchayat work.	01 (0.83)	12 (10.00)	25 (20.83)	46 (38.33)	36 (30.00)

The findings presented in Table 5 revealed that, majority (79.17%) of the respondents reported that, selection of beneficiaries was carried out always, followed by most of the

time (10.83%), sometimes (10.00%), while none reported rarely or never. Less than half (46.67%) of the respondents stated that, selection of village artisans and youth for training

was undertaken always, followed by most of the time, sometimes, rarely and never with (27.50%), (16.67%), (9.17%) and none reported never respectively. More than half (54.17%) reported that, group formation activities and selection were carried out always, 21.67 per cent sometimes, 15.00 per cent most of the time, 9.17 per cent rarely, and none reported never. Less than half (45.00%) of the respondents reported that, preparation of workers' lists was undertaken always, 21.67 per cent most of the time, 16.67 per cent sometimes, 15.83 per cent rarely, and 0.83 per cent never. More than two-fifths (40.83%) of the respondents reported that, deployment of Anganwadi workers within the gram panchayat was carried out sometimes, followed by always (38.33%), most of the time (20.83%), while none reported rarely or never. Less than half (48.33%) of the respondents stated that, preparation of schemes from the gram panchayat share was undertaken always, followed closely by 40.00 per cent most of the time, 6.67 per cent rarely, 5.00 per cent sometimes, and none reported never. Less than half (44.17%) of the respondents reported that, identification of families without houses or house sites under the rural housing scheme was carried out always, followed by sometimes, most of the time, rarely and never with (30.83%), (24.17%), (0.83%) and none reported never respectively. Less than half (45.83%) of the respondents stated that, distribution of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides was undertaken always, followed by most of the time (25.00%), sometimes (22.50%), rarely (6.67%), and

none reported never. More than two-fifths (43.33%) of the respondents reported that, mini-kit distribution was carried out always, followed equally by 27.50 per cent most of the time and sometimes, 0.83 per cent rarely, and 0.83 per cent never. Less than half (47.50%) of the respondents stated that, identification of landless families for land distribution was undertaken always, 24.17 per cent most of the time, 20.00 per cent sometimes, 8.33 per cent rarely, and none reported never. More than two-fifths (43.33%) of the respondents reported that, women representatives took interest in panchayat work sometimes, followed by always (35.83%), most of the time (15.83%), rarely (5.00%), and none reported never. In contrast, less than two-fifths (38.33%) of the respondents reported that family members of women representatives rarely interfered in panchayat work, followed by never, sometimes, most of the time, and always with (30.00%), (20.83%), (10.00%) and (0.83%) respectively.

F) Policy making activities

Policy-making activities reflect the participation of women Gram Panchayat members in planning, resource allocation and addressing community-level issues. Their involvement in annual planning and budgeting, disaster relief, protection of public resources and mobilization of community participation indicates their contribution to effective local governance.

Table 6: Distribution of women gram panchayat members according to the frequency of their policy making activities

Sr. No.	Component and their statements	Always Freq. (%)	Most of time Freq. (%)	Some times Freq. (%)	Rarely Freq. (%)	Never Freq. (%)
1.	Preparation of annual plans.	42 (35.00)	39 (32.50)	28 (23.33)	10 (19.44)	01 (0.83)
2.	Preparation of annual budget.	34 (28.33)	35 (29.27)	39 (32.50)	09 (27.08)	03 (2.50)
3.	Removal of encroachment on public properties	40 (33.33)	33 (27.50)	24 (20.00)	21 (16.67)	02 (1.67)
4.	Providing relief in natural calamities.	48 (40.00)	31 (25.83)	31 (25.83)	10 (21.53)	00 (00.00)
5.	Organizing voluntary labour and contribution for community works.	44 (36.67)	36 (30.00)	26 (21.67)	12 (18.06)	02 (1.67)

The findings presented in Table 6 further revealed that, more than one-third (35.00%) of the respondents reported that, preparation of annual plans was undertaken always, followed by most of the time (32.50%), sometimes (23.33%), rarely (8.33%), and never (0.83%). Nearly one-third (32.50%) of the respondents stated that preparation of annual budgets was undertaken sometimes, 29.17 per cent most of the time, 28.33 per cent always, 7.50 per cent rarely, and 2.50 per cent never. One-third (33.33%) of the respondents reported that, removal of encroachment on public properties was carried out always, followed by most of the time, sometimes, rarely, and never with (27.50%), (20.00%), (16.67%) and (1.67%) respectively. Two-fifths (40.00%) of the respondents reported that, providing relief during natural calamities was undertaken always, followed equally by 25.83 per cent most of the time and sometimes, 8.33 per cent rarely, and none reported never. More than one-third (36.67%) of the respondents stated that, organizing voluntary labour and community contributions for community works was carried out always, followed by most of the time, sometimes, rarely, and never with (30.00%), (21.67%), (10.00%) and (1.67%)

respectively.

Participation of women gram panchayat members

The participation level of women Gram Panchayat members was determined based on their combined participation scores across six components, namely political activities, social activities, economic activities, developmental activities, decision-making activities and policy-making activities.

Table 7: Distribution of women gram panchayat members according to their participation of women gram panchayat members

Sl. No.	Category	N = 120	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (up to 60)	22	18.34
2	Medium (61 to 89)	96	80.83
3	High (above 89)	2	0.83
Total		120	100.00

Participation of women gram gram panchayat members, majority (80.83%) of the women gram panchayat members

were having medium level of participation of women gram panchayat members, followed by 18.34 per cent of women gram panchayat members having low level of participation while only 0.83 per cent of the women gram panchayat members having high level of participation.

Conclusion

The study further indicated that the majority of the women gram panchayat members had a medium level of participation in gram panchayat activities, suggesting that although women are actively involved in local self-governance, there is still considerable scope for enhancing their participation and decision-making roles.

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