

Report of the Study on

Women Councilors in Urban Local Governments

Avenues for effective participation in Governance in
Karnataka, South India
(April-September-2005)

In Association with
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
New Delhi



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MARCH 2007

© Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, March 2007

Published by :

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, (India Office)
K-70B, Hauz Khas Enclave,
New Delhi
Email : fes@fesindia.org

Designed and Printed by :

Aksharographics
No. 3/1, 6th Cross,
Agrahara Dasarahalli, Bangalore-560 079

ISBN

81-7440-064-8

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Acknowledgements

The idea of this study is a result of our project interactions with women councilors of Udipi town of Udipi District of Karnataka and our subsequent efforts to bring the women councilors to share and learn from their experiences. The women councilors' exposure programme in Udipi in June 2003, the women councilors' state level workshop in Bangalore in November 2004, their orientation programme, done as a part of this study for the women councilors in Mysore in August 2005 and a meeting to exchange the views on this study held in Bangalore in September 2005 are some of the specific activities carried out to bring women councilors together.

The study adopted a methodology in which local organizations, women councilors, former women councilors and well wishers were involved from the very planning stage. A series of meetings were organized in April 2005 to discuss the methodology and the questionnaire to be used in the study. The study team visited the various towns and interacted with the women and men councilors, members of the legislative assembly and the legislative council and had fruitful discussions with them.

Credit is due to the partner organizations and their staff members for the groundwork they did in meeting the women and men councilors and the party and municipal officials. Our thanks are also due to Prof. Bhargava, Prof. Hanumantha, Mr. L.C.Jain and Mr. Bapu Heddurshetti, who inspired us and provided us with valuable insights.

Mr. Raghavendra assisted, planned and coordinated the entire process of the study, interacting with the partner organizations and organizing the various activities, workshops etc. This study would not have been possible without him. The members of the Urban Research Centre and of the Council of Management also have been very helpful.

The Urban Research Centre acknowledges the guidance and support extended by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, New Delhi, by sharing the concerns and encouraging the actions for the empowerment of women in the political process.

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Foreward

Urban governance today incorporates a whole host of players – the citizens, the local bodies, and the state government as also the central government along with various autonomous bodies, which fall within the purview of any of the above mentioned political structures. The 74th CAA with its emphasis on decentralisation of fiscal, administrative and functional powers to elected local level bodies raised hopes of improved governance with the deciding elected women and men being close to the people and their concerns. The practical experience, since the 74 CAA came into being in 1994, unfortunately does not vindicate these expectations. Overlapping jurisdictions between the urban local bodies, independent agencies, and various state departments have resulted in lack of clear delineation of functions for service delivery and indulgence in a blame game for the failures. Added to this is the connivance of interest groups to serve their own purposes and in most cases the helplessness and to some extent the apathy of the governed. The citizen's movement as in the case of Mumbai or the judicial activism in Delhi to get rid of infrastructure bottlenecks and land misuse issues are some responses which came through too late and maybe with too little. Having said that, one needs to keep in mind the mammoth investments, which are coming forth in urban infrastructure. The Central government set up Jawahar Lal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission in December 2005 with a promise of Rs.1,25,000 crores to 63 chosen cities to improve urban governance, meet their infrastructure needs and provide basic services to the urban poor. The intention is to meet the 'Millennium Development Goals' by halving hunger, reducing poverty and ensuring water to all. While several of the reforms are progressive in nature it is very crucial to ensure that such initiatives are rooted through the local bodies. And for this to happen the elected representatives need to be proactive and discerning in taking up these tasks.

It is against this background that one needs to view initiatives to build capacities of elected representatives with the involvement of women and men in their respective representative areas. There are examples of organisations, elected representatives and citizen's groups who all are trying to bring in changes for the better. Urban Research Centre (URC) is one such organisation working on issues of Governance and Economy in Urban areas in Karnataka. One of its focus programmes is to bridge the gap between local groups and elected representatives through participatory planning. As a step further, to understand the ground realities concerning elected women representatives URC undertook the present study. Its main objective is to examine factors affecting women councillors for effective policy making, and to understand support measures available for women councillors in political parties, state government and through other groups. The study results are expected to help in developing a framework for intervention to enhance the effective participation of women councillors in urban governance.

In order to facilitate the discussion on crucial issues related to the development process in India, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung publishes a series of books and papers of which this publication is a part. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a non-profit, NGO supported by the Government of Germany. Aiming at the strengthening of democratic structures, the FES promotes training and policy oriented research programmes in Germany and in cooperation with partner organizations - in more than 100 countries across the world. The India office of FES works with policy makers, academic and research organisations, trade unions, and NGOs. Within the overall gender approach the Women's Empowerment Project of the FES extends support to initiatives of NGOs and self-help groups aiming at the economic and political empowerment of women. Accordingly its priority areas are livelihood and income generation, natural resource management, displacement and rehabilitation and participation of women in decision making. Facilitating workshops and roundtables, action based research and publications around these concerns are integral to the Project.

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