Creating citizens who demand just governance:
gender and development in the twenty-first century

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The issue of good governance assumed enormous significance in debates on global development in the 1990s. By and large, this translated into policies aimed at building accountability of public administration institutions to the broad 'public', but omitted to consider two key issues: first, the 'public' consists of women and men, who have gender-differentiated needs and interests; second, civil-society institutions have a role to play in creating the demand for democratic, accountable, and just governance. To address these omissions, and to reinforce the importance of bringing a gender perspective to global debates and approaches to international development, KIT Gender, at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, initiated a three-year programme in 1999. It is entitled 'Gender, Citizenship, and Governance'. This article discusses the programme and its relevance to international development, and provides three case studies from the programme; from India, Bangladesh, and South Africa.

Mainstreaming a gender perspective in development was the overall strategy adopted at the Fourth UN Conference for Women, held in Beijing in 1995, to support the goal of gender equality. The rationale for this strategy is that it is important to bring the goal of gender equality to the centre of the development process. After three decades of gender and development activism, most in development institutions continue to need constant reminders of the need for gender analysis in their work. Why is it that policy makers still have to be lobbied to include the 'g' word, and colleagues need to be convinced that integrating a gender analysis in their work makes a qualitative difference?

There are two ways in which gender equality concerns can be mainstreamed. *Integration* aims to ensure that such concerns are integrated in the analysis of obstacles to development, and that these concerns inform the formulation of policy, programmes, and projects. Specific targets are set for outcomes, and the monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes must capture the progress made in the achievement of gender equality. For example, an agricultural development project might focus on ensuring that women involved in farming have equal access to technology and information. In contrast, the *transformation* approach aims to move beyond integrating women's concerns relating to the demands of their daily lives, to focus on improving women's position (status), and thereby transforming the agenda. For example, if the key issue facing women in agriculture is lack of independent land rights, this approach would move far beyond ensuring that women have equal access to technology and information, to advocating for changes in inheritance practices and land ownership.

Integration and transformation require work at two different institutional levels. Integration involves working within development institutions to improve the quality of their work – improving the 'supply' side of the equation. A transformative agenda requires efforts to support,

nurture, and create constituencies who demand change. To do this, development organisations need to understand the nature of government and of state–society relationships, and the degree of autonomy that policy-making institutions have from international development and financial institutions. In many countries in Africa, for example, social and political movements have marginal influence on what the policy-making institutions are doing, because many governments are dependent not only on the people, but on international support, to stay in power. Working on governance involves understanding the interconnectedness of institutions at different levels, and determining the role that social movements can play in demanding justice for the poor.

KIT's programme

KIT's programme on gender, citizenship, and governance was set up in order to address such issues. The programme aimed to make gender equity and equality a core concern in governing development. It provided a framework to facilitate innovative gender and governance initiatives in nine countries and in two regions of the world: South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) and southern Africa (Namibia, Zambia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe). The programme was undertaken in collaboration with 16 organisations from these countries. The development of these partnerships, and of collaborative action research, was the cornerstone of the programme. The aim was to construct a forum for linking and learning, in the best traditions of participatory and action-oriented research, and contribute the insights generated to improve development policy and practice.

The international development context

In the 1990s, the issue of good governance assumed enormous significance in the debates on global development. One reason for this was the growing realisation on the part of many that conventional development efforts had failed to achieve the desired ends. These were to eliminate poverty and inequality, and promote respect for human rights.

Attention began to shift away from traditional development concerns towards a greater consideration for the way in which power is exercised in the management of economic and social resources for development. International financial institutions such as the World Bank, bilateral donors, and donor groupings like the European Union (EU) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC), highlighted the need for good governance, to ensure that development aid had the desired results of bringing about economic, social, and political changes in developing countries.

Good governance meant different things to the donors and other actors involved in development, according to their different priorities and mandates. However, on the whole, the good-governance agenda aimed to make public administration institutions accountable to the public whom they are supposed to serve. Most money spent by donors in support of good governance in developing countries went towards reforming the state and attempting to improve public administration. Democratic reform concentrated, in the main, on reform of electoral systems, decentralisation and devolution of government, and reform of administrative and legal systems.

Good governance and the international 'crisis of control'

The good-governance agenda did not automatically address the question of gender inequality. For example, establishing the rule of law has not automatically translated into the legal recognition of violence against women as a crime. Similarly, expanding the scope of citizens' participation in governance, by decentralising government, has not by itself

ensured that women and men are represented on an equal basis.

The attempts to improve governance took place at a time when the processes of rapid economic globalisation were at their peak. Over the last three decades of the twentieth century, the speed and range of the globalisation of economics, politics, and culture have involved bringing in new-comers into governance. The traditional actors – the state, civil society, and political institutions – have been joined by international development and financial institutions. State capacity to manage the political economy of a country has been seriously undermined in both the North and the South, because of the processes of economic globalisation. Needless to say, Southern countries have suffered more because they start from a position of greater poverty, less social development, inade-quate development of markets and institutions, and weaker bargaining power in international trade and financial systems. The processes of globalisation have resulted in a *crisis of control* in the world order. By this I mean that no single centre of authority has the ability to manage economic and social changes in a way that will take care of those groups of people who are harmed by the changes (for example, those whose livelihoods are lost). The crisis of control, and the negative effects that the current model of global development has had on people's lives, has resulted in movements promoting global justice. These have moved the struggle to rights beyond individual nation states.

One of the more successful instances of global citizen action has been women's activism for rights, equality, and policies that enhance human development and justice for all. Women's constituencies have emerged as global citizens, arguing for the right to development, freedom from domestic and sexual violence, sexual and reproductive rights, and the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action.

While global citizen action has been necessary to provide the wider political environment for the construction of new rights, entrenching these rights has involved hard work at local and national levels. It has been necessary to work with powerful institutions to change the rules and to demand responsiveness and accountability. This has meant working within the political spaces provided by these institutions, and also constructing new political spaces.

Gender, citizenship, and governance: what did we do?

In the KIT programme we have focused on three areas of concern: taking office, engendering governance institutions, and claiming citizenship. Organisations which have participated in KIT's Gender, Citizen-ship, and Governance programme have adopted a three-pronged strategy, consisting of the following elements:

- creating access to governance institutions
- effecting change within these institutions to improve their ability to respond to women's needs and interests
- staking women's claim to new entitlements, arising from the needs articulated by those women affected by lack of rights and influence.

The organisations have worked hard to bring about changes in institutional practices that would help women to secure their strategic gender interests. The projects undertaken by these organisations have not been limited to advocating decentralisation of government, or getting more women into government and political office, or reforming the law. Rather, the participating organisations have intervened in these areas with the objective of reforming and

rewriting the 'rules of the game'. The case studies presented here illuminate what is involved.

India: building political legitimacy for minority women in local government

In India, the question of representation of disadvantaged groups has been debated in political circles since independence in 1947, with caste-based discrimination as the major concern. The Indian Constitution banned discrimination on the basis of caste and included those castes that had historically been wronged and treated as 'untouchables' in a special schedule of the Constitution. These caste groups came to be known as 'scheduled castes', and quotas were instituted for their representation in Parliament, state assemblies, the public sector, and in educational institutions. In 1993 the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution were passed, making Local Self Governing Institutions (LSGIs) mandatory as part of government. A uniform three-tier system – district; *taluk*/block (a cluster of villages); and village levels in the rural areas or Municipalities and Corporations in large urban centres – came into formal existence. An important aspect of the amendment was that one-third of the seats in all levels of local government was reserved for the election of women. In the following year, 350,000 women entered local government as elected representatives. Civil-society groups rallied to support the new incumbents, offering training in order to enhance their effectiveness.

The Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA) – a non-government organisation based in Hyderabad, south India – is one of the NGOs that took up work in this area. COVA saw that the opportunity presented to women to become political agents and address women's gender-specific concerns was not being realised, despite the large numbers of women entering local government as a result of the quotas. COVA was particularly concerned about the effectiveness of women representatives from Muslim, *Dalit*, and other marginalised groupings.

COVA saw its main task as establishing the legitimacy of female political representatives, in a context where the dice were loaded against women on two counts. First, political parties and male representatives saw the women representatives as entering political office on the basis of favours by government, rather than on account of their leadership qualities. Second, political parties and individual politicians had captured the reserved seats for women by placing 'proxy women' in these seats. These were women who did not take active office, but whose men (usually husbands) did this for them.

COVA's strategy was to hold four workshops for a core group of women representatives. The workshops were held at six-month intervals, and aimed to support the women and foster a sense of accountability to their constituents. The training focused on ensuring that women gained a better understanding of rules and procedures, and developed skills such as public speaking, interaction with the media, and interaction with government officials. COVA produced an information handbook for each participant.

In between the workshops, the women representatives were required by COVA to put their training into practice by meeting their constituents and engaging with local administration officials, political parties, and the media. The women's performance was monitored by COVA, whose representatives met with constituents, officials, political parties, and the media to get a sense of whether perceptions of the political representatives were shifting. This monitoring acted as a further impetus for the women representatives to undertake the agreed tasks.

For the first time, the women political representatives visited constituents unaccompanied by male relatives. They also began to engage with officials, and address council meetings and the media. This gained them respect as leaders, which in turn improved

their confidence and self-esteem. At the second workshop, the majority said they were not interested in continuing a career in politics; by the fourth workshop, the majority were interested. The women representatives now saw themselves as legitimate political actors, and this reinforced the perceptions of others that women were to be taken seriously as political leaders.

The case of Ameena, who participated in this programme, illustrates both the possibilities and difficulties of establishing women as legitimate political actors. Women's position in relation to men shapes the nature of their political participation. Ameena came to be a political representative at the instigation of her husband and the local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA).[1] Her husband had always been active in politics; he was a former councillor for his wife's ward, and the City President of the Minority Cell of the Congress Party. He was planning to contest the election, but when the ward was reserved for women, he asked his wife to stand. She was not interested in politics and declined, but the elders of the area, including the local MLA, pressed her. Ameena reluctantly agreed, although she was a little scared and tense about taking on the job.

Ameena's husband undertook a door-to-door campaign, with six women of the area, covering 1,000 houses. She won by 987 votes, the highest margin of victory in the history of the ward. Her husband motivates her to visit the field and meet with officials on her own, and also encouraged her to participate in the trainings organised by COVA. He feels that his wife is capable of discharging her responsibilities without support, and he does not interfere with her activities and freedom of movement. However, he says that he does not feel like sharing domestic work, because he has never done this and it is not a man's role. Unlike men, women entering politics have to manage both roles – their new role as public representative and their traditional role of caring and being responsible for the family. This imposes special limitations on women's participation in politics and in public life, limitations that men do not face. Thus, while Ameena's husband was extremely helpful in furthering her public role, her private/domestic role was seen by him, and by the larger society, as something that women, in order to be 'women', are obliged to do. Ameena's participation in the COVA programme helped to open up discussion about gender roles, and this is a first step towards change. Her husband had never before been confronted with the 'taken for granted' nature of gender roles and relations.

Ameena is a graduate in Home Science, was active during school and college days, and successful in many quizzes and debating competitions. Despite her education and experience in public speaking, she felt a little scared during the Municipal Corporation meetings and did not speak in the first three meetings. By the fourth meeting, she decided to move a resolution about a civic problem in her area. She was the first woman to speak in the Corporation meetings. Gradually others also started speaking, and now women take an active part in the proceedings.

Ameena now says she wants to continue in politics, and does not want to become a housewife again. She admits that earlier she never used to read about politics in the newspapers, but now the first thing she reads is the political news. However, her constituency will not remain reserved for women during the next elections, and her husband is keen to contest this seat himself. Under the circumstances, Ameena may not contest the elections and may have to make way for her husband, in order to keep peace in family relations.

Bangladesh: ensuring accountability of health-service providers to stakeholders

Naripokkho is a women's rights organisation based in Bangladesh. Founded in 1983, it has established a reputation as an

advocacy group for women's health and rights. Bangladesh has a very high maternal mortality ratio, at 450 per 100,000 live births. These deaths are largely due to preventable causes. The statistic shows the failure of the public health system to provide effective services for women.

Around 1979, primary health care in Bangladesh was organised around the *upazila* (sub-district level). The Upazila Health Complex (UHC) is the comprehensive primary health-service provider institution, and is administered by the Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer, who convenes the Upazila Health Advisory Committee (UHAC) which is to be chaired by the local Member of Parliament. The Committee, which should have representation from the providers (government health officials), citizens, and elected representatives in local government institutions, is supposed to meet every month. Its objective is to improve health and medical services at the hospital that it serves and solve any problems that might arise at the local level. Naripokkho worked in one *upazila*, Pathorghata, in collaboration with a local NGO, to improve the response of the government health-service providers to women's reproductive health needs. The UHAC of Pathorghata was defunct, with no meetings having been convened for five years. Doctors took fees from patients at the UHC for services they were supposed to provide free, and sometimes resorted to extortion.

Naripokkho explored how the forum offered by the monthly meeting of UHAC could be used to enforce accountability on a sustainable basis. The organisation made a series of strategic choices about the most effective ways to stimulate debate about women having a right to health care, and acceptance of this as a principle, through the forum of the UHAC. This included ensuring that all members had faith in using the UHAC as a problem-solving forum, as well as ensuring respect for its decisions, especially on the part of health-care providers. At the outset, Naripokkho chose to engage first with the concerned local official, rather than engaging with the Ministry, which would have resulted in top-down directives.

Following this, Naripokkho encouraged stakeholders to see the UHAC as a body that could address and solve some of the problems being raised, and to see its meetings as an 'invited space' for citizens to participate in decision making. Naripokkho built up support among the stakeholders for the revived UHAC, so that it could actually start functioning, and service providers and users could support each other in problem solving. Since this was an effort to strengthen 'citizen voice' as well as 'state response', it was important to involve diverse actors. These included women from the community, NGOs, elected representatives, the doctors of the UHC, journalists, other health practitioners, and the local government administration.

Naripokkho also engaged with the local elected representatives, since they were already motivated to improve women's health and rights, and were also members of the UHAC. As such, they were accountable to their electorate. They monitored compliance with the decisions of the UHAC. This was very effective, as it was based on the power of the 'public mandate' of elected representatives to take decisions on behalf of their constituencies. Journalists helped by creating a public debate about the need for health providers to be accountable to users, no matter how poor. This was very effective: whenever there was a lapse in service, there was immediate media coverage. This enforced compliance with the agreements of the UHAC, since anyone violating the norms risked exposure and public embarrassment.

Some significant results of the project include enhanced and proactive participation of the UHAC members in the committee meetings; monitoring of hospital practices by the journalists and councillors; improved professional behaviour on the part of the doctors; better service provision

(for example, fewer instances of bribery, and regular health education classes); and encouragement for women to negotiate lower fees for consulting the doctors.

South Africa: reform of customary law

The Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) is a research organisation at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. The Gender and Research Project (GRP) at CALS was formed in 1992. It had the broad objectives of promoting gender equality and human rights. From its inception, the GRP was involved in the negotiations about the new South African Constitution. It provided technical assistance to the Women's National Coalition, and to women in the African National Congress (ANC), which formed the first democratically elected government. It also played a role in one of the key disputes during these negotiations, which was the place of customary law in the Constitution.

Customary law is a set of rules and practices which governs the lives of the majority of black South Africans. Prior to the onset of democracy in 1994, customary law did not enjoy a status equal to civil law. The customary system, which was not codified before colonial rule, had been manipulated by successive white governments, in collaboration with state-supported male elders, into a codified system which entrenched and extended the subordination of women.

In 1995, the Rural Women's Movement (RWM) identified reform of customary marriage as a key priority, and asked CALS to conduct research and advocacy with them on this topic. CALS began a research project which sought to identify the practices, needs, and interests of women in relation to customary marriage. It documented the experience of women who had married under customary law, as well as their attitudes towards their marital status, and to the idea of reform. CALS believed that the information collected would provide a basis for influencing the state to reform customary

laws on marriage. It hoped that the result would be a law that would meet the needs of women. When the South African Law Commission (SALC) started investigating reforms to customary law in 1996, CALS engaged in this process through providing a written submission, oral advocacy, and attending SALC meetings and workshops. It relied on the research undertaken to inform the process. CALS also hoped that women who were involved in the research (especially those who were part of an organised constituency) would go on to participate in the democratic process.

One issue – that of polygyny, in which one man marries two or more women – caused much debate within CALS and the RWM. The RWM and CALS research findings overwhelmingly showed the practice to be oppressive to women. However, questions were raised about whether or not prohibition of polygyny should be called for. Certain events caused CALS to rethink the issue. Significant here was the annual general meeting of the RWM in February 1998, where members were chanting the slogan 'one man, one woman'. CALS noticed that some members sat quietly, without chanting the slogan. When asked why they did not chant, they replied that they were living in polygynous relationships, and this prevented them from chanting the slogan. During discussions facilitated by CALS, the divisiveness of the slogan was raised. CALS became aware that women were not a homogeneous group, and they were not condemning polygyny with one voice. It was critical to ensure that the law offered protection to women and children in existing polygynous households. In the CALS research, enormous concern had been expressed about the rights of women and children to property in polygynous marriages. Prohibition of polygyny might result in making wives and children even more vulnerable and marginalised.

When the Bill was finally tabled in Parliament, CALS had to make a series of strategic choices about its content. The Bill

provided for equality within customary marriage, reflecting the wishes of women for marriages that gave them legal security (especially in respect of property), while enabling them to maintain positive cultural links. The Bill sought to contribute to the decline of the practice of polygyny, yet protect vulnerable women in polygynous unions. The Bill did not reflect all CALS' proposals, and aspects of it were controversial (especially the provisions on polygyny).

However, CALS was aware of the compromises and choices that had been made during the SALC process, as well as the lengthy process of research and consultation. CALS decided to support the Bill, and focused on its strengths, while highlighting the concerns of rural women. The Bill was fast-tracked through Parliament, which meant that the resultant Recognition of Customary Marriages Act was made operational only two years after its enactment in November 2000.

The engagement of CALS did not end here: the organisation was particularly concerned to examine the way in which the Act was implemented, from the perspective of women using it. Given that the law had been structured around the expressed needs of women, did it actually address these needs, and solve the previously identified problems of minority legal status, which affected access to property during marriage, lack of decision making power, and non-consensual polygyny? To measure this, CALS began to collect information on how the Act affects the lives of women connected to the original research sites. CALS also interviewed officials responsible for implementing the Act. A number of problems with implementation came to light through the monitoring research; for each of the problems identified, CALS has sought to engage the stakeholders to seek solutions.

Governing for equity: lessons learned

We at KIT began the Gender, Citizenship, and Governance programme with the intention of contributing to the generation of knowledge and practice that would help to make gender equity and equality a core concern in governing development. Through their action-research projects, participating organisations arrived at understandings and definitions of good governance from a gender perspective.

The meaning of good governance from a gender perspective

We found that 'women taking political office' means not only creating mechanisms for their entry into public office. It also means establishing women as legitimate political actors, as opposed to private persons who do not have a place in politics and the public sphere.

'Engendering' the institutions of national governance means ensuring that they are accountable to women as citizens; changing rules, procedures, and priorities that exclude the participation of poor women and the incorporation of their interests in the development agenda; and mobilising and organising women's voices in civil society.

The meaning of citizenship

What does citizenship mean for poor women? First, we found that it means the right to participate and to be agents. For groups on the margins of society, citizenship means acquiring the power and understanding to define the problem of lack of rights, and the solutions to this problem.

Second, it means aspiring to substantive equality, as opposed to formal equality. The case studies highlight the need to be pragmatic, and discuss and analyse rights according to the priorities of the affected population, rather than relying on orthodoxies about women's rights. However, this is not to suggest that we should promote cultural relativism. Rather, as the case

studies show, this is a way of finding a successful way to struggle for substantive equality – and make rights real. It involves honestly understanding and representing the lived experience of specific categories of women (the most marginalised, or those who are most affected by lack of specific rights). It means moving away from the idea that women's interests are only about gender relations – that is, about women in relation to men – towards a more nuanced understanding of the specificities of a woman's position, the construction of which depends on other social relations (for example, race). The best illustration of this is the case study of customary-law reform undertaken by CALS in South Africa. In its work on reforming customary law, CALS established that women's experiences and needs must be the key to the reform process. The organisation moved away from a universalistic idea of women and women's interests, once it was made aware of the realities of women who lived in polygynous marriages.

The practice of good governance

Constructing voice

Women face barriers which restrict their claims to citizenship, preventing them from participation in politics and the institutions of governance. To break through these, they need to have a voice, and organise as a political constituency within civil society. The projects outlined here all helped to articulate the voices of the most marginalised women, by highlighting real-life experiences of exclusion from entitlements and rights.

Creating 'communities of struggle'

The case studies highlight the important role of a political constituency of women in building awareness. This awareness is key to creating a public which is broadly sympathetic to the principle of gender equality, and in challenging prevailing notions of women's subordination. In order to give voice to women's demands, an immense amount of work has to take place, to organise and mobilise constituencies that grow into an awareness of the right to have a right, and the right to participate in decisions affecting one's life.

Shaping the accountability interface

'Constructing and articulating voice' does not necessarily lead to better outcomes for women. The case studies highlight the significance of ensuring that this voice is heard by the institutions that affect the lives of citizens, so that changes take place, and there is an accountability and responsiveness from these institutions. The project undertaken by Naripokkho sought to develop the accountability of local health-service providers to women. Naripokkho did this through a gamut of strategies, which included giving providers a voice to articulate their problems; reviving a defunct health-accountability body and making it function as a problem-solving body, including multiple stakeholders; and providing information about women's health needs so that the service providers were aware of what they had to address.

Carving out space

The projects discussed here also demonstrate the importance of carving out spaces which enable women to articulate their interests, and provide an 'accountability interface' between interests and institutions of governance. Sometimes these spaces are opened up by decision-making institutions, and at other times spaces have to be created through women's own efforts. The projects constructed, created, and, on occasion, opened up spaces that were by all accounts closed to public participation.

Working on both sides: in and out of the state

On the one hand, women in civil society need to become more aware of their rights and more aware of how to hold institutions to account. On the other, women need to work within institutions of governance to reshape how they function. Most of the projects worked in tandem with state

institutions, sometimes aligning with the agenda of the state, and other times agitating for change.

Establishing authority through contributing knowledge

In all cases, the organisations which participated in our programme were able to engage with civil society and state actors as they did because of the legitimacy and authority that they had established through their active contributions. Some organisations, like the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) in Sri Lanka, and Sister in Namibia, worked to increase the number of women elected to political office, and undertook research into the kinds of electoral system and mechanism that would be needed to increase women's access to political office. CALS in South Africa became an important resource for the SALC, because of the extensive research that it had undertaken to identify the practices, needs, and interests of black women in relation to marriage. PRIP Trust in Bangladesh and Sakhi in India researched the structures and functioning of local government institutions, and was able to suggest with authority changes that would enable both women and men elected to these institutions to perform their roles. Naripokkho in Bangladesh researched and provided information on women's needs to the local health-accountability forum set up to monitor health-care provision.

Understanding institutions and whose interests they represent

The projects demonstrate that once civil-society organisations have insinuated their way into the functioning of governance institutions, a main task is to make transparent the manner in which the institution functions, how decisions are made, and how resources are allocated. Bringing poor women's needs and interests to bear on the agenda of decision-making institutions makes visible the deficiencies of the structures and processes that make up these institutions. PRIP Trust in Bangladesh

did this by involving elected representatives of local government bodies in a resource-mapping exercise; undertaking a situational analysis of how these function, and presenting the results to the stakeholders; and organising workshops and meetings to develop the capacity of elected members. In the process, undemocratic practices were unearthed, the marginalisation of elected women representatives was made visible, and information regarding resources available to local government was more widely shared.

All the action-research projects highlight the importance of understanding organisations of state bureaucracy, their structures, and processes of policy formulation, planning, and implementation, in order to locate strategic entry points – in terms of location and timing – for beginning to turn around seemingly monolithic organisations, to make them operate in ways that are aware of, and accountable to, the interests of poor women.

Decentralisation of government is being offered as the panacea to improve governance, make governance transparent and participatory, and bring government structures closer to people and therefore make them more relevant to people's lives. The experiences of the action-research projects that have worked with local government institutions have helped to destroy many of these myths, precisely because the myths have been interrogated from the point of view of women. This process has shown the following.

First, since local government is more embedded in local social structures than national government, and since prevailing gender ideologies are more concentrated at the local level, it is more difficult for women to penetrate as independent political actors, or for them to raise controversial gender issues at this level.

Second, the experiences with local government institutions highlighted that, even where attempts are made to put in

place structures for people's participation in these institutions, this does not mean that women are taken into account. Procedures were found to be gender-neutral and gender-blind in decentralised development, despite strict guidelines for democratic decision making, women's participation, and budgetary allocations. There was the incorrect assumption that women and men have equal power and status, and the model of development did not consider the need to transform unequal gender relations.

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Notes

1 India consists of 25 states, each with its own legislature with elected representatives. An elected representative to a state legislature is called Member of the Legislative Assembly.

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