Violence, Economics and Power
Decoding the impact of violence and economic insecurity on women’s political participation in India
Research in Government of India-UN Women Programme, ‘Promoting Women’s Political Leadership and Governance in India and South Asia’

In 2009, the Royal Norwegian Embassy, India signed an agreement with Unifem, now UN Women, South Asia Regional Office to initiate a three-year programme entitled ‘Promoting Women’s Political Leadership and Governance in India and South Asia’. The programme aims to empower elected women representatives in local governance to make public policy and resource allocation patterns responsive to women’s human rights. The programme covers 5 countries of South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan). In India, the programme is co-owned by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.

The Programme has been designed with the spirit to capture the specific issues and challenges with regard to women’s political empowerment that each country experiences. This is a demand driven programme that seeks to understand and address issues of women’s participation in local governance from the grassroots perspective. Generation of a body of knowledge on women’s political leadership and governance in India and South Asia is one of the key outcomes of the programme.

There are two main purposes of the research component of the programme –

(a) To build a body of knowledge on women’s political leadership and governance in India and South Asia – this is especially significant since no on-going programme on women’s political empowerment in the South Asia region is working at the grassroots level – down at the level of the village councils. This being the value addition of the programme in the region, and there being very little existing policy literature which analyses governance at its fundamental grassroots institution; this programme provides an opportunity to develop innovative and unique literature based on experiences from the programme on strengthening village councils – the structure of local governance closest to ordinary citizens – to enable women as equal and fair participants and decision makers at the local level.

(b) As we build this body of knowledge, the data gathered from field experiences will in turn help to inform programme implementation and fine tune the intervention strategies as the programme progresses. Such a large and complex programme is, by nature, dynamic, and hence useful feedback in terms of baseline data, focused studies such as barriers and promoters of women’s political leadership and governance in India and South Asia throughout the course of the programme will be useful for the programme interventions.

UN Women

UN Women is the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their rights worldwide.

UN Women supports United Nations Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women’s equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women’s leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women’s economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the United Nations system’s work in advancing gender equality.

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

International Centre for Research on Women

The International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) is a global research institute with headquarters in Washington D.C., and regional offices in Nairobi, Kenya, and New Delhi, India. We also have project office in Mumbai. ICRW is comprised of social scientists, economists, public health specialists and demographers, all of whom are experts in gender relations. We are thought leaders driven by passion to alleviate poverty and rectify injustice in the world. And we believe that women and girls – in collaboration with men and boys – are essential to the solutions. We know that when their quality of life improves, families are healthier and economies are stronger. ICRW’s mission is to empower women, advance gender equality and fight poverty in the developing world. To accomplish this, ICRW works with partners to conduct empirical research, build capacity and advocate for evidence-based, practical ways to change policies and programs.
Violence, Economics and Power
Decoding the Impact of Violence and Economic Insecurity on Women’s Political Participation in India

ICRW – UN Women Joint Publication
Message

India has witnessed the world’s largest experiment in grassroots local democracy, triggered by the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution, which created a third tier of governance – Panchayati Raj Institutions (Village Councils) and urban local bodies. These are elected bodies and cannot be dissolved by administrative order. Since 1995, three rounds of elections have been held; and as one-third of seats (proposed to be increased to 50 per cent) are reserved for women, more than 1.5 million women have been elected to office in each round. It is evident therefore that first generation issues of framing the ‘rules of the game’ and creating an understanding about them have been addressed.

The UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) aims to address second generation issues of democratic governance under its programme ‘Promoting Women’s Political Leadership and Governance in South Asia’ with focus on Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan. The programme works with women – both elected and aspiring at the local level – to achieve three main outcomes: (1) Strengthened legal frameworks and policies for women’s political participation in local governance in India and South Asia by 2015; (2) Elected women and men representatives in local governments have the knowledge and capacity to transform and implement policies, programmes and resource allocations for gender sensitive governance in five states in India by 2015; and (3) Key capacity development and media institutions and structures in India and South Asia are strengthened to mainstream gender into their policies and programmes by 2015.

Research for evidence based advocacy is an integral part of this programme. It plays a very important role in capturing the ground level situation in India and South Asia and informs programme implementation. Research supported under the programme is contributing to the body of knowledge on what enables and/or prevents women’s political leadership and governance in India and in South Asia.

The research thus far is presented in a set of four publications. The research conducted by ICRW has provided the programme with a conceptual clarity on ‘gender responsive governance’; the effects of economic disempowerment and violence against women on women’s political participation; the status of women’s political participation and leadership in South Asia; and finally, the determinants of women’s political leadership and participation in three districts – Alwar (Rajasthan), Gajapati (Odisha), and Mysore (Karnataka) in India.

I congratulate the ICRW team and the many women and men, elected as well as aspiring representatives who have contributed to further the understanding of issues pertaining to women’s political leadership and governance in India and in South Asia.

I hope you find the report useful and insightful for understanding and promoting women’s political leadership.

Anne F. Stenhammer
Regional Programme Director
UN Women South Asia Sub-Regional Office
New Delhi
Message

It is with great excitement that we launch this important publication, “Violence, Economics and Power: Decoding the Impact of Violence and Economic Insecurity on Women’s Political Participation in India.”

As the world’s largest democracy, and one that has taken important steps to open opportunities for marginalised groups, including women, to lead, India is an important case study for global policy dialogues around good governance. This research not only contributes to our understanding of how quotas mandating women’s representation on local governing bodies—the Panchayti Raj Institutions (PRIs)—are playing out for the individuals who comprise them and for the policymaking process in the three states studied, but it also shines important light on a matter of increasing international interest: how to achieve gender responsive governance and advance the cause of gender equality and representative democracy?

In this exciting collaboration with UN Women, we have uncovered important lessons. We reaffirm the power of gender roles and social norms to shape behaviour. We find that female elected representatives desire to re-contest but are more likely to do so if they have a supportive husband who is helping with chores at home. Among women who do not re-contest, we see the number one reason for withdrawing from public life being the time burden of home and child care. We see powerful and challenging attitudes among women and men as to what role women can and should play in leadership, and we find that PRIs are not considered to be spaces where gender issues, such as domestic violence, can be raised.

These findings inform key conclusions. We confirm the value of gender quotas as an important tool for moving us toward our goal of gender responsive governance, insofar as the mere presence of women can transform patriarchal frameworks. Yet we find that the simple adage of “add women and stir” is insufficient on its own—women cannot be solely expected to carry the burden of transforming the governing process into a gender responsive ideal. Additional work needs to be done—at the policy and at the individual level—to transform these spaces into truly democratic and gender-equitable realms.

This report makes an important contribution to the discourse on gender responsive governance, and it comes at a critical time. This is the kind of evidence we need to inform our strategies to achieve true equality and democracy and a future where girls will not need a quota system to achieve parity in their local, state and national governing bodies. It is a future well within our reach. Let’s make it happen!

Sarah Degnan Kambou
President, International Center for Research on Women
Acknowledgements

This research has benefitted immensely from the constructive advice of Dr. Devaki Jain, Dr. Vibhuti Patel, Ms. J. Devika, Ms. Meenakshi Kathel, Ms. Rita Sarin, Ms. Veda Bharadwaja and Ms. Madhu Bala Nath in their role as Technical Advisors. Dr. Ratna Sudarshan and Ms. Nirmala Buch reviewed preliminary drafts and provided useful suggestions to improve them. Dr. A. K. Shiv Kumar and Mr. Subhash Mendhapurkar took out invaluable time from their busy schedules to go through the initial results and worked with us to add insights into the analysis and interpretations.

We thank our field research partners and team members in each of the three districts, Sansristi, Odisha; Sigma, Karnataka and Prof. Sanjay Lodha and his research team in Rajasthan for the efficient implementation of the field study and data management. We specifically thank Dr. Amrita Patel for her contribution during the data collection and preliminary analysis phase of the project in Odisha.

We received unflinching and cheerful support from Prakash Mishra, our colleague within ICRW towards data analysis. Prasenjit Banerjee provided unfailing and efficient support to manage the finances of the grant. Ellen Weiss, our Technical Editor kept us on our toes through her meticulous editing and eye for detail. Several colleagues within ICRW have supported us at different stages of the project – we specially thank Pranita Achyut and Kavya Bopanna. We also received support from Ms. Swati Chakraborty and Ms. Mukta Banerjee for specific aspects of the research study.

We acknowledge with sincere thanks the support we received from the Governance Unit of UN Women, South Asia Sub Regional Office, New Delhi and for according significance to the issue of gender responsiveness within local governance and envisioning the need for evidence on this critical issue. Thanks are due to the UN Women team, Suraj Kumar (Head, Governance Unit), Renu Wadehra (Senior Advisor, Royal Norwegian Embassy, India) and Diya Dutta (Research Analyst) for their support and inputs during the course of this project; and to Ms. Anne F. Stenhammer, Regional Programme Director for her passion and vision on this issue. We also thank Dr. Hrusikesh Panda, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India for his suggestions and advice during the initial phase of conceptualising this research project. We wish to thank government officials in the states of Karnataka, Rajasthan and Odisha for their support and cooperation during data collection. We also thank Sangeeta Gandotra and Minaram Patnaik (District Project Officers, UN Women) for their support during the implementation of the study. We also thank the Royal Norwegian Embassy in India who has sponsored the UN Women programme on, ‘Promoting Women’s Political Leadership and Governance in India and South Asia’.

Finally, and most importantly, we acknowledge the respondents of our study for sparing their time and sharing their experiences with us, and trusting that their individual contribution will enable the realisation of a gender responsive governance system that has social justice and gender equality as its core principles.

Nandita Bhatia
Sunayana Walia
Tina Khanna
Ravi Verma
### English equivalents of some commonly used terms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gram Sabha</td>
<td>Village Council meetings</td>
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<td>Zilla Parishad</td>
<td>Local Government Body at the District Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gram Panchayat</td>
<td>Local Self Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyaya Panchayat</td>
<td>System of dispute resolution at the village level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gram Kachari</td>
<td>Local Judicial Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarpanch</td>
<td>Elected Head of a village level statutory constitution of local self-government, the gram panchayat (village government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panchayat Samiti</td>
<td>Local government body at the <em>tehsil or taluka or mandal</em>&lt;br&gt;(administrative division at the village level)</td>
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INTRODUCTION

The World Map of Politics (United Nations, 2010) has served to identify that countries worldwide are making progress in ensuring that women play a greater role in politics as embodied under the goals outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action. By ensuring that violence against women in politics is effectively curtailed, the goal of ensuring that more women become involved in politics is easier for countries to achieve. One of the reasons why women are not as active in politics as they could be is due to the threat of violence against women. It is evident from the World Map that several countries have taken steps such as amending their constitutions and introducing quotas to ensure that the involvement of women is augmented. In the light of the current movement to ensure that women achieve a greater role in the political arena, it is therefore imperative to ensure that such an arena is a safe one and that women therein are not subjected to violence in any form.

(The Age, 2008)

In India, discourse on women’s political participation is centred around the Constitution (73rd Amendment Act) that provided constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj Institutions and reservation of a fixed quota for women representatives within them. The strengthening of local governance structures gave impetus to notions that empowering local bodies can expand and enhance the participation of all sections of society, even those that are usually marginalized in political processes, and make governance more responsive to their needs. This also includes women, thus making an analysis of how and what hinders their participation, a specific area of enquiry. A range of barriers to women’s participation in political processes, including those at the local level, has been discussed in literature, ranging from structural barriers, social and economic inequities to family and individual factors. This paper discusses the potential impact of two such factors – violence against women and economic insecurity on women’s political participation, with a focus on the local governance bodies in India, the Panchayati Raj Institutions, it also examines the evidence base of women in national politics globally and discusses the probable pathways of impact.

Violence against women (VAW) remains one the most pervasive, yet normal manifestations of gender inequity and power imbalance between men and women that impacts the daily lives of women. Violence against women through its many forms, both in public and private spheres, contributes to women’s vulnerability and has far reaching consequences on women, communities and the nation as a whole. As the prevalence of violence raises concern worldwide, it is often positioned as a women’s issue, a public health concern. However, the argument (Burton et. al., 2000) that violence impacts development as a whole is now well recognised. There are currently three identifiable approaches to violence as a development issue wherein violence is viewed as (i) a cost undermining development outcomes, (ii) an obstacle to participation in development, and (iii) a blatant contradiction to development goals (Sen, 1998). Thus, the exploration of VAW within the discourse of governance, specifically gender responsive governance (GRG), is particularly significant because governance processes seek sustainable and
equitable development as their ultimate outcomes, and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India are critical sites where development can be influenced by women’s participation. Gender Responsive Governance involves the incorporation of gender concerns within its processes, and defines gender equality and social justice as its outcome. The definition of GRG developed for this research study is ‘a process that embodies measures, attitudes and practices of different stakeholders, both men and women, at different levels of governance, with a clear purpose to impact issues that concern empowerment of women and promote gender equality and social justice. It is a process that promotes and sustains the ability of women to fully participate in the governance and development process, enhances their ability to raise critical questions about inequity and collectively without fear and pressure and ensures gains from the services.

Women’s participation in political processes at different levels of governance can encompass a wide range of actions and strategies (Bello, 2003). These may be delineated to include processes that entail (i) facilitating their entry into governing bodies such as voting, voter education and applying for candidacy in local and national level elections, (ii) once elected into these bodies, strengthening their performance through capacity building training programmes for improving their capability to deal with governance-related matters, actively raising strategic gender issues, raising ‘voice’ against issues that harm women’s concerns in elected bodies, regular attendance in meetings, lending support to candidates and groups who carry gender-sensitive agenda, and at times campaigning against groups that discourage women from public/political participation and finally (iii) effectively delivering or tabling relevant gender issues in formal meetings as officiating members of local governance systems. All of these different phases of functioning as an elected representative and their associated activities are sites of action where women may be vulnerable to different forms of violence. On the other hand, elected women representatives may not naturally or automatically raise gender-related concerns or even those related to violence. Their perspective on gender issues may not necessarily be different from those of their male counterparts, and many may choose to follow the norm set by male representatives and function within the ‘acceptable’ and non-threatening parameters of governance and societal structures. Case studies of women chairpersons (sarpanches) taking a stand on gender and violence related issues do exist; but they remain select successful examples, and are not reflective of the norm.

The lack of economic independence for self, as well as household economic insecurity has also been noted as barriers to women’s effective participation. The lack of economic independence for self, as well as household economic insecurity has also been noted as barriers to women’s effective participation. As women in India often do not have an independent income, they are heavily dependent on their families for any resources required (Mukhopadhyay, 2005), and this dependency consequently can lead to various forms of violence. The insecurity that follows from such reliance can act as a barrier to active political participation. All these issues need to be explored in detail, and this document lays out the possible pathways by which the myriad forms of violence and their social and economic consequences can potentially impact the effective participation of women in India in local governance.
Violence needs to be understood both as a risk faced by women elected representatives, and as an issue of concern for PRIs, to be raised by the men and women elected representatives. The former has received more attention, than the latter, primarily due to interest in understanding the circumstances and consequences of women’s political participation.

Violence Faced by Women in Politics

Globally, studies conceptualise the inter-linkages of violence and women’s political participation in several ways. Many examine national politics as the arena within which women entrants participate as representatives linked with various political parties. Others focus on the concept of political participation beyond looking at women holding political office, to include the participation of other women in the processes of political governance. These studies underscore the impact of deep rooted patriarchal mindset in subduing the participation of women in public offices, stressing on the link between VAW and women’s under-representation in politics as mutually reinforcing. Violence reflects the lack of basic personal safety and freedom, denying women their rights and opportunities as individuals in society.

Before describing the forms and impact of violence faced by women who seek to participate in political processes, it is important to lay out the conceptual underpinnings of why violence maybe associated with women and political participation. Gender norms define and describe public space and behaviour that is perceived as acceptable or unacceptable within it. Gender roles limit women’s engagement in spaces beyond family needs and the household. Notions of patriarchy dominate public space, and these spaces, particularly within South Asia, are considered primarily as masculine spaces, while private spaces are considered a woman’s habitat (Nussbaum, 2003). It is widely believed that women belong at home and a woman who goes out into ‘male’ spaces may face the consequences of this decision, ranging from verbal name calling and sexual harassment to more extreme forms of assault. The patriarchal paradigm of protection and punishment dictates that women are to be ‘protected’ and relegated to the confines and controls dictated by patriarchy and overstepping or violating these dictates justifies punishment, which is often in the form of violence. Women in India’s Panchayat Raj system expressed vulnerabilities and threats of violence from male villagers and from male colleagues within local governance (Matthew, 2003). Programmatic initiatives that work with women elected representatives document several instances of resistance and the increased risk of violence these women face as they contest elections and as engage themselves in various activities related to governance processes. In most places, violence is deliberately used to target, control, penalise and silence women who are active in public arenas and politics (ActionAid, 2010, UNDEF, 2012).
Though some empirical evidence is available in the Indian context, global literature on women’s political participation in national politics is more comprehensive. The example of Sierra Leone (Castillejo, 2009) highlights the use of violence against women in politics. All women Members of Parliament and counsellors reported facing harassment of some sort and hostility from powerful men in their community who were opposed to women’s political participation, because they viewed women’s participation in governance as threatening their power base within these extremely important institutions. Often the attack was on the person’s character and morality, so that they withdrew out of fear and intimidation. This gave rise to stigma and disapproval from families and communities. Many women members felt that communities needed more sensitisation to overcome such prejudice and encourage women to stop judging other women for undertaking political responsibilities.

A study on promoting women as decision makers highlights the strong structural and social barriers to women’s political participation (WomanKind Worldwide, 2008). The study emphasises that even when women are able to participate, real power and influence are often out of reach, because the systems and institutions at the heart of decision-making processes tend to be controlled by dominant political bodies that in turn are controlled by men. Therefore, power inequalities between women and men continue to be reinforced. Amongst other obstacles, the study focuses on recent examples of violence faced by women around the world. The relationship between VAW and politics according to WomanKind Worldwide, is a complex one, because violence impacts women’s physical, psychological and emotional health, thereby limiting their ability to get involved in politics or participate in community meetings. For instance, the fear of violence has had the psychological effect of restricting women’s participation in Afghanistan, not only in politics, but also in other areas of public life, as journalists, teachers, development workers, health workers and so on. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNAMA/OHCHR, 2009) reports that the attacks on women operating in the public sphere send a strong message to all women to stay at home. This effective captivity of women in their homes in an electoral period raises additional concerns regarding women’s contribution in the public sphere. The earlier research (WomanKind Worldwide, 2008) additionally shows that women’s isolation from public and community life can contribute to increased violence, while women who become more involved in community groups and social networks are able to decrease their vulnerability by accessing practical solutions such as legal protection, counselling and advice. Interestingly, the report also observes that violence against women can actually increase when women start to play a greater role in decision-making, because of the ensuing shift in existing power dynamics, which the perpetrators of violence perceive as a threat to their own status.

Recognising the expanse and intensity of the phenomenon of VAW in politics, a partnership network of
organisations in South Asia sought to highlight this issue through a report to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee. The report advocated for the inclusion of VAW in politics as a separate category to be considered within the ambit of violence under the human rights law framework. In their most recent paper, South Asia Partnership International state that:

‘Violence Against Women in Politics’ has been defined as including any act/s of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women politicians, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life; within family, inter or intra-political level, at societal and at state level during their political career. It further encompasses any act of violence against any family member of woman politician, which can affect her mental well being, deterring her political participation’ (South Asia Partnership International, 2009, p. 7). This global recognition of violence that inhibits women from participating in any political platform, at the national or local level, needs to be addressed urgently.

The links between VAW and women’s political aspirations have also been recorded, largely as (ad hoc) anecdotal incidences reported by women. One tragic story that has been documented details the murder of female chief of a Panchayat Raj who was killed after she defied her husband and called a meeting to discuss budgetary issues (Mohanty, 2001). However, systematic documentation, examining and recording the various dimensions of VAW remains a gap. Currently, very few rigorous evaluations of VAW are available, which look specifically at the impact of violence on women’s political participation. Accordingly, a statement by UNIFEM stated that, ‘Governments still have a long way to go to find effective means of addressing election violence and other forms of intimidation targeting women’ (UNIFEM, 2009, p. 26). Similarly, another multi-country study report (Zimbabwe, Malawi, Afghanistan, Guatemala, Bangladesh, Nepal etc), has argued that the relationship between VAW and governance must be addressed seriously because at present VAW is not recognised as a vital issue, despite its widespread prevalence, nor is the under-representation of women in politics. The report concludes that ‘governments would do well to recognise how the two issues are linked: violence against women acts as a structural barrier to women’s participation in politics and public life. Indeed women are often placed at increased risk of violence the further they move into public life and politics. The relationship between the two needs to be tackled for either to make any progress’ (ActionAid, 2010, p. 40). Advocates for women’s rights have challenged the entrenched biases against women in party politics and raised the issue of VAW as a political issue of concern to all. This has led to the opening up of political spaces for women, by changing the meaning and process of political participation (UNIFEM, 2009). Women elected representatives from various parts of India concerted this need on April 24, 2004 when over 1500 women from PRIs gathered in Delhi for the Women Political Empowerment
Day. During this meeting, the women laid out several demands, including a call to the state to “provide for stringent laws to deal with violence against women during and after elections” (Patel, 2005).

Yakin Ertürk, the UN Special Rapporteur on VAW (2008) notes that data collection on VAW and women’s political engagement has been inconsistent and unreliable. Data gathered systematically, disaggregated into relevant categories and published periodically, is severely lacking in relation to women and girls, making it difficult to measure progress. Moreover, data gaps on VAW have long been a problem at the international level as there are no agreed upon indicators or benchmarks for assessing progress over time. It is only very recently that a few indicators on violence have been emphasised (UN Security Council, 2010). Once these are published and made operational, they would provide a valuable foundation for the creation of databases to assess progress on reducing VAW and its impact on women’s political participation.

Literature on VAW in politics has also attempted to frame the nature of violence faced by women in politics. The forms of violence are broadly categorised as physical or psychological encompassing many behaviours within each category. Those categorised under physical violence include beating, pushing, gripping, pinching, physical torture, molestation and sexual abuse. More severe forms of physical violence may include kidnapping or abduction, attempts of rape, rape, murder attempts, or even murder, physical mutilation or disfiguring the person. Psychological violence includes trauma, mental torture, blaming, threats, mental harassment, mental pressure, passing derogatory comments, verbal abuse, creating guilt in the person for something that the person is not responsible for, mentally weakening a person, making a person feel incapable, boycotting and creating a feeling of helplessness. Examples of psychological violence against women in politics include the use of abusive language, threats to make women politicians withdraw from elections or membership, coercion to vote for unwanted leaders or bribery, extortion threats, death threats, violence against family members, character assassination of women politicians, family members or husbands becoming suspicious. Character assassination and blaming of women, denial of rightful office and bias, and vulnerability and stigmatisation are the main forms of violence that women in politics have to face. From a large body of data collected, the report has summarised the landscape of VAW in politics in the Table on the next page (SA Partnership International, 2009).
### Landscape of Violence against Women in Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Violence</th>
<th>Place of its Occurrence</th>
<th>Types of Victims</th>
<th>Types of Perpetrators</th>
<th>Aims of Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical</strong>: Murder, beating, throwing acid</td>
<td>Grassroots level, home, societal and political level</td>
<td>Influential women leaders, <strong>women activists</strong></td>
<td>Opposition parties, <strong>women</strong> parties, extremist religious organizations, <strong>fatwabaj</strong></td>
<td>Win inter and intra party war, maintain status quo role of women in society, satisfy patriarchal insecurities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual</strong>: Rape, sexual exploitation, harassment</td>
<td>Situations of armed conflict, at the political level</td>
<td>Women activists</td>
<td>Security forces, warring forces, male politicians</td>
<td>To deter political mobilization of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological</strong>: Slander and character assassination, insults, equating women politicians’ character with dirty games and hunger for power, denial of rightful office</td>
<td><strong>Political level</strong>: Electoral process – during nominations and election campaigns; <strong>Organization or State level</strong>: In office, parliament, family</td>
<td>Young women aspiring to a political career, active women leaders and family, established women politicians</td>
<td>Opposition parties or members of own parties, male superiors</td>
<td>To deter women politicians from getting tickets from parties and from winning elections, to stop women leaders from active and rightful fulfillment of their duty, to satisfy jealousy, male ego and own weaknesses, to manipulate and maintain male authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threats and coercion</strong>: Conspiracy against women leaders, female relatives in political office, trauma, torture and harassment, ridicule and accusations by male politicians directed at women politicians, biased decisions against women politicians when males face accusations of misconduct</td>
<td>Parliament, police stations, councils, party organisations, committees, home, office</td>
<td>Established women politicians, women in positions of political authority, including her team and family, <strong>panchayats</strong> and council leaders at grassroots level</td>
<td>Party men, police men, subordinate staff, male colleagues, family members</td>
<td>Deter and overthrow women politicians exercising power and control, revenge, settling of vendettas, stop from contesting elections and joining political office, to frustrate ambitious and committed women politicians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: South Asia Partnership International, 2009*

**Violence as an Issue of Concern for Governance Bodies and PRIs**

Interestingly, even as the violence experienced by women in politics receives attention, the agenda of VAW as a development issue, that must be taken up for collective action by panchayats or local governance structures remains neglected. In India, instances of individual elected representatives, primarily women Gram Panchayat chairpersons (sarpanches) taking a stand on issues of violence and other strategies gender concerns have been documented, but the focus on exploring whether PRIs are spaces that encourage dialogue on gender concerns has been minimal. A
few studies have attempted to highlight the need for PRIs to be engaged with gender issues, including VAW, arguing for the need to focus on social justice and gender equality within governance and development. A study in Karnataka that explored whether panchayats actively engaged on the issue of violence, found that local governing bodies considered violence a family matter and do not accord it importance in the formal work of the panchayats. Many members were approached with problems of resolving conflicts and VAW cases, but most retained gender-biased notions regarding resolving conflicts (Rajan and Bhatla, 2004). In Uttarakhanda State, women have tried hard to bring issues of violence onto the panchayat agenda, with support from collectives (Banerjee et. al., 2010). In Kerala, Panchayat Jagratha Samitis were formed in 2007, to address women’s issues for out-of-court settlements of many cases, thus avoiding unnecessary litigations (The Hindu, 2010). The engagement of governance structures with VAW is an important area of attention as the inclusion of gender-specific development issues within the agenda of local governments is a key objective of gender responsive governance besides being an essential catalyst to achieving long term and sustainable political gains for women. 

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Inequitable gender norms and the resultant gaps in the social and economic status between men and women not only manifest themselves in the form of violence, but also lead to economic vulnerabilities for women. The economic subordination of women can act against their ability to enter the local political arena and participate effectively in several ways. High levels of economic and social dependence, due to structural inequalities between men and women, have led to heightened dependence on the family, which inhibits women from using resources from their families for their own purposes. This acts as a barrier for them as any activity related to public participation would entail considerable expenditure and opposition from family members (Mukhopadhyay, 2005). Therefore, weak economic status and the associated insecurity act as deterrents to women’s participation in politics in South Asia (SAPI, 2007). Similarly, limited access to economic resources such as income, land, house, and credit facilities impairs women’s effective participation in electoral processes such as contesting elections, campaigning, building and sustaining their constituencies and fulfilling their role as elected representatives (Prakash, 2002).

Studies examining the determinants of participation have highlighted that socio-demographic variables, including economic status does impact participation in certain contexts, though the pathways are not always linear or entirely well understood. A study found that female, illiterate, and wealthy constituents show low participation in governance related activities such as attending the gram sabha or gram panchayat meetings, while marginalized groups like Scheduled Castes, Sched-
uled Tribes, and landless households are more likely to attend these meetings. This could be due to the fact that the poor benefit from access to social programmes available, while the wealthy may not be so inclined (Raabe et al, 2009). Further, it has been noted that patriarchal pressures may be more visible amongst the rich in that they may inhibit them from actively raising their voice, while the poor seek to gain socially from getting membership in panchayats and thus voice their opinion. A tribal woman chairperson in Uttar Pradesh explicitly stated that men did not really want women to be members in panchayats as they would have to share the powers with women, which were so far exclusively exercised by men. She also mentioned that there were different norms for men and women, because of which resources that could be accessed by men could not be accessed by women, and yet they had to concede to the fact that women were able to perform quite well in public offices. These patterns were visible at the district and block levels with comparatively more educated, economically better off representatives (Buch, 2000).

Reports from other countries state that many women mention the lack of funds or resources available as a factor hampering their political participation. Most receive very little financial support (from parties) and must use the meagre personal funds that they may have for their campaign, travel within the constituency or to host events where they are expected to provide food or gifts to supporters. Women interviewed mentioned that while male candidates usually use their own and their wives personal money or access patronage networks, women have little access to these and their supporters also are mostly other women, who cannot provide financial support. Consequently, they end up taking loans and falling into debt. For instance Jariatu Kamara, a female councillor in Kambiah, in Sierra Leone reported that she had spent 17 million leones on her campaign, the majority of which was borrowed from the bank and which she must now repay (Castillejo, 2009). A network (iKNOW Politics Network, 2007), describing the consolidated reply of members regarding their experiences and perceptions of violence against women in politics from around the world, including examples from Kenya, Ecuador, Sweden, Iraq, Southeast Asia and South and Eastern Europe found that deep rooted cultural and patriarchal ideas must be recognised where women have historically been subordinated economically to male members in families.

All of the above arguments point to the fact that the structural barriers of economic insecurity and other discrepancies (such as in educational or social areas) inhibit women’s participation in the public and political arena. Even within governance structures women are denied the resources that should be available to an officiating member due to poor patronage networks and male domination. The manner in which wealth and other economic assets interact and impact the active participation of women needs to be investigated further. Many women mention the lack of funds or resources available as a factor hampering their political participation.
**Dimensions of Violence against Women Representatives in PRIs in India**

This section specifically discusses the probable ways in which VAW can impact the participation of women in PRIs in India. Some of the conceptual linkages have been noted in studies, while many have not been explored or validated through rigorous research. Amongst these, as outlined earlier, this paper attempts to outline three distinct aspects of women’s political participation where violence may occur. The most common one is related to women’s entry into the local political arena; the second concerns elected women representative’s (EWR) participation and functioning in the different tiers of PRIs and the last assesses their ability to perform or deliver on the expectation of bringing women related issues to the forefront within PRIs. In each of these aspects, violence can take many forms and can be perpetrated by various agencies such as formal /state institutions and non-state actors including the family and community. Violence can be both a determinant of women’s participation and an outcome of their participation in political processes. If the impact of violence on women’s political participation has to be fully understood, in addition to investigating the impact of violence on EWRs, its impact on other women in the community must be explored as well.

**A. Violence Impacting the Entry of Women in the Political Process**

At the entry level, violence can impact the possibility of women’s involvement in governance through influencing her decision to contest. A woman facing violence at home may be forced to contest or even not contest, as she is likely to have compromised her status, voice and decision making abilities. Apart from physical violence, threats and coercion, violence may manifest in economic forms such as withholding of money for contesting and canvassing. Reports of physical violence or the threat of it, as well as shades of intimidation and outright coercion, are commonly reported (Buch, 2010; Banerjee et al, 2010). In many states across India, EWRs of panchayats have faced threats of violence when they have expressed a desire to contest elections or, once elected, have insisted upon certain decisions. In many states there have even been attempts to intimidate women into withdrawing from the election by insinuations of affairs with men (Jayal, 2006). An illustration of VAW in the panchayats is given in the box (SAPI, 2009).

Economic factors may influence the decision to contest in two ways – either by acting as barriers wherein the lack of resources limit women’s participation or actually spur women’s participation in anticipation of the potential economic gains for the household. Few studies have documented violence or the economic status of the household as factors influencing the decision to contest. Most studies have analysed the economic status of women who come in as elected representatives. A recent study (Buch, 2010) highlights how women from poor families with few resources have entered the political process, but whether many such women were kept away or out of the political arena due to these...
Janaki Devi, a semi-literate and married woman of Purnia District of Bihar, India, was murdered at her house on May 26, 2006 when she refused to withdraw her candidacy for the local panchayat elections. After filing her nomination, she had started canvassing and the village people totally supported her candidacy. The candidates belonging to other political parties, namely Mohamad Habib and Mohamad Jamal, perceived Janaki Devi as a significant threat to their political survival. They attempted to persuade Janaki Devi and her husband to withdraw her candidacy. When Janaki Devi and her family refused their request the men began to threaten her. On the day she was murdered, at 2:00 am while she was sound asleep, Janaki Devi’s daughter woke up on hearing her mother’s cries. She went to her mother’s room and saw her lying in a pool of blood. She saw Habib Jalal and Ismail repeatedly stabbing her mother with a knife before fleeing the crime scene. Her mother was rushed to hospital but was pronounced dead. Her case is still in court (SAPI, 2009)

factors, needs further exploration. If indeed this is the case, then violence finds another pathway, through the economic cost that it places on poor households. Similarly in Sierra Leone, women district councillors have reported that they lack funds to travel and meet with constituents or conduct any activities for their communities that can impact the support they can garner from their constituencies. This in turn can influence their chances of winning elections, being perceived as effective representatives once they win, and even their aspirations for recontesting. Women members do not usually have much personal money or ability to mobilise funds through informal networks, and hence are often perceived as unable to deliver, by community members. Thus, the question of how women can compete in a political system where loyalty is to a large extent bought remains fundamental (Castillejo, 2009).

B. Violence Impacting Women’s Participation in the Functioning and Practices of the Panchayats

The extent and quality of women’s functioning and participation in various levels of PRIs can also be significantly affected by violence. A most obvious and immediate form can be through the impact on women’s ability to attend meetings. In some cases, husbands have actually attended panchayat meetings in place of the elected female representative, and women report that it is expected to let their husbands represent them (Sekhon, 2006). Inability to attend meetings can be due to actual acts of physical violence by the husband and family members. Forms of violence include control over mobility, refusal to allow women to attend meetings, women left unaccompanied at odd timings. Physical acts of violence resulting in injuries also means productive time spent away from work and increased cost of health care.\(^1\) Additionally,  

\(^1\) Several surveys conducted in ICRW studies show that nearly 30% of all women reporting violence report injuries serious enough to warrant medical attention /hospitalisation. A preliminary analysis of economic costs of domestic violence is presented in Domestic Violence Summary Report 3 : findings from a household survey , ICRW 2000.
hostility encountered from the community in forms of harassment, verbal abuse, libelling and ridiculing, casting aspersions on the character can further impede women’s movement and participation. Such forms of violence would inhibit not only EWRs, but also impact the participation of other women, for instance, in the gram sabha, where every member of the community must be present.  

Violence against women representatives is worse when they also happen to belong to the Scheduled Castes or Tribes. Dalit women (belonging to the Scheduled Castes/Tribes) usually face a hostile community environment and this impedes their participation in panchayat work. For example, lower caste (dalit) woman sarpanches are often told when to come to the panchayat office (not necessarily to attend the meeting), is not consulted on the agenda of the meeting and is simply asked to sign or put her thumb impression on official papers, without exercising any choice. A dalit woman sarpanch of Pipra Village in Tikamgarh District of the state of Madhya Pradesh was prevented from hoisting the national flag in her village on Independence Day, because the majority in the village thought that a dalit should not pollute the national flag by touching it (Jayal, 2006). Within the panchayat meetings and gram sabha meetings, a similar hostile attitude of other panchayat members, including male counterparts, members of other castes/classes/religious groups and the administrative officers creates a threatening environment that impedes effective participation. Women members would either be silenced or ignored, verbally abused, intimidated and issues raised by them not prioritised. One researcher found that “instances are not uncommon where the women dalit sarpanches sit on the floor during the course of the panchayat meetings while the male upper caste members sit on the chairs” (Matthew, 2003). Furthermore, failure to bring to attention the interests of their families, parties, caste or vested interest groups may also lead to violence. Another study found that, “inter-caste violence has become more acute. A woman member of the nagar palika in an urban area of Tamil Nadu was killed because she wanted to bring piped water to her ward. She belonged to a low-caste community. In yet another case, a woman was forced by the villagers to quit her menial job because it did not suit her position as elected representative” (Mohanty, 2001). An additional pathway by which VAW could impact women’s effective participation is by the impact of violence on the women’s sense of self esteem, the confidence to raise their voice and issues in public.

A study by Rao Gupta and Weiss 1998 highlighted that violence or its threat hinders women’s ability to leave the house long enough to participate in community projects.
C. Violence Impacts Women’s Performance and Women’s Ability to Deliver as an Officiating Member

If violence impacts the entry and ability of women representatives to function effectively, it can invariably result in them not fulfilling their role as elected representatives, in the true sense. Women who are experiencing violence, maybe more likely through the pathways of infrequent attendance, inability to raise their voice, are unlikely to take affirmative action towards problems brought before them or in other planning functions of the panchayats. Indeed, one study states that, “we know of elected women who have been placed under virtual house arrest for attempting to challenge budget allocations; they have been beaten up, threatened, bribed and cajoled into supporting dominant caste or class agendas of the Councils” (Batliwala and Dhanraj, 2004). Decentralised decision making and planning would have little meaning in circumstances where women have no power or voice. On the other hand, women raising social issues that are against the overarching patriarchal sentiments may unleash gruesome forms of violence, including sexual violence against them. Similarly, other than rape and sexual abuse, it has also been found that women representatives who are efficient often attract slanderous allegations of sexual liaisons (Jayal, 2006). The tools of empowerment, from individual assertion, collective resistance or questioning ideologies can all be compromised in situations where VAW is not recognised or addressed as a problem.

Conclusions

Gender specific barriers such as violence against women, compounded by economic dependence and consequent insecurity, faced by elected women representatives have not been adequately recognized or comprehensively explored for their impact on women’s political participation, or even on the development agenda. Nor has the engagement of PRIs as institutions of local governance with issues of strategic gender interest, such as violence against women, been emphasised enough. In India, where the Constitution (73rd Amendment Act) embodies concepts of social justice and equitable development, focuses on these issues is even more necessary. This paper has attempted to explore the various probable ways in which these factors can act as barriers to the effective and sustained participation of women in political processes, especially at the local levels and urges for continued systematic evidence on the various aspects laid out.

While VAW has the potential of affecting governance processes through its impact on individual women, family economics and community as a whole, the recognition of VAW as a priority issues for PRIs to address is also nascent. The few examples and anecdotes cited in the earlier sections show the innovative ways in which women have been able to address the issue of violence, and its various manifestations, in the panchayat agenda. It would be interesting to empirically document

If violence impacts the entry and ability of women representatives to function effectively, it can invariably result in them not fulfilling their role as elected representatives, in the true sense
the various strategies evolved and mechanisms devised in different states to address this issue through panchayats. This must be complemented by a gender analysis of Panchayat Raj Acts, operational rules and relevant directives, to examine spaces, powers and resources accorded to PRIs to deal with issues of violence, injustice and inequality.

As noted earlier, research that comprehensively explores the various dimensions of VAW, and economic dependency as a barrier to participation within governance structures in India is limited. Nonetheless, there is growing recognition of various subtle forms of violence in the political processes within South Asia. These are mainly anecdotal in nature; however these shed light on the distinct ways in which women are repressed, drawing much needed attention to this area of study. The three distinct stages outlined in the paper, where VAW can have potential impact on women’s participation can serve as a framework for detailed documentation and fill data gaps. Additional focussed research in these areas would be necessary to develop a better understanding of the nature and extent of violence faced by women in politics at national and local levels, and ways to decrease them. A report submitted to CEDAW argues for the incorporation of violence against women in politics (VAWIP, 2006) as a form of discrimination against women and a violation of women’s human rights. Against a backdrop of women’s representation at different levels globally, it gives several horrific cases of different forms of violence experienced (murder, sexual assault, threats) by women representatives in different countries of South Asia.

With the aim of creating a favourable environment for women’s political participation in South Asia, to help expand women’s opportunities for participation in politics and reducing violence against women in politics, an initiative called South Asia International has developed a Surveillance System and has a guidebook to monitor, document, communicate, refer and advocate against VAW in politics. This system can help popularise the idea of increasing women’s participation in politics, engendering political institutions and overall development, through a reduction in VAW.

As more and more countries espouse a move towards gender responsive governance, it is essential to develop mechanisms to promote women’s involvement in politics as well as ways to ensure their effective protection from any violence that may result as a consequence of their political involvement.
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