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Women Empowerment and Public Administration: Challenges, Progress and Strategies for Inclusive Governance

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ABSTRACT: Arunachal Pradesh is among the noted states in India for its commitment towards women's and children's safety as well as progress. Here, equality reigns supreme, and women are revered for their invaluable contributions to society. Whether it is excelling in agriculture, academia, or preserving cultural heritage, females are held in high regard, matching their male counterparts in strength, knowledge, and societal impact. Join us as we discuss the empowering atmosphere in Arunachal Pradesh, where a woman's potential knows no limitations and Govt. interventions have further uplifted several women wings in the state.

Uplifting Women Self – Help Groups
The state government of Arunachal Pradesh is marking a silent revolution by transforming the lives of its women and bringing about a positive change in the socio-economic fabric of the state. This revolution is none other than the empowering movement that has mobilized a staggering 67,280 women into 8,410 self-help groups (SHGs), igniting a wave of empowerment and driving economic progress across the region.

This wave of empowerment has not only resulted in statistical gains; it has also been seen in specific measures that have resulted in long-lasting, significant change. In-depth training has been provided to more than 1,100 SHGs, giving women of Arunachal the tools, knowledge, and self-assurance they need to succeed as independent business women. The opening of more than 6,000 bank accounts, which demonstrates the women's increased financial independence, is a testament to this initiative.

Nevertheless, the journey continues beyond this. These SHGs have served as both change agents and entry points for financial inclusion. Women now have access to capital for their initiatives owing to credit linkage with more than 2,500 SHGs, opening up new avenues for growth and development. The fact that 500 SHGs each have a ₹1,000,000 Fixed Deposit seeded in their bank accounts, acting as a beacon of monetary security and confidence, amplifies the impact.

The commitment toward women's empowerment is ingrained in every layer of Arunachal's policy framework. A remarkable example of this is the Atmanirbhar Arunachal scheme, where 50% of the funds have been earmarked for SHGs. This forward-thinking initiative, coupled with a ₹14 crore-bank credit to SHGs, has catalyzed economic activity and paved the way for sustainable growth.

Giving Wings to Girl Child
The essence of empowerment extends beyond the present moment and spans across generations. The Dulari Kanya Yojana eloquently reflects the state's progressive attitude towards women's empowerment. The initiative's decision to deposit a fixed deposit of ₹25,000 in the accounts of 8,371 girl children born during the Golden Jubilee Year is a commitment to a better future, nourishing hopes, and securing aspirations.

Arunachal Pradesh fully comprehends the importance of education as a weapon for empowerment. The state is investing in education and promoting the belief that every girl's dreams are valuable and achievable by depositing a ₹10,000 fixed deposit in the bank accounts of girl children, payable upon clearing their Class XII exams.

Healthcare & Accessibility for Females
Additionally, women's empowerment transcends all spheres of life and is not limited to just one. Therefore, Arunachal is fostering the health and wellbeing of its women and future generations by providing coverage to 1,80,000 pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children through 6,225 Anganwadi Centers.

The dedication to women's advancement also extends to the grassroots level, as demonstrated by the training of 2,839 Anganwadi workers in the Poshan Tracker Abhiyan. This demonstrates a holistic approach to empowerment that places equal emphasis on fostering healthy lives and robust communities as well as financial development.

Arunachal Pradesh's commitment to women's empowerment serves as proof of its proactive attitude and persistent drive to build a better, future that is more inclusive. Although the numbers speak for itself, it's the quality of

transformation unfolded through the stories of determination, perseverance and progress, that best express the spirit of this effort. These women beneficiaries portray an incredible representation of a state on the verge of transformation—a state that believes in the potential of its women and is making great strides towards a wealthy and equal society.

KEYWORDS: women empowerment, self help groups, governance, inclusive

I. INTRODUCTION

The Uzbekistan Development Action Strategy for 2017-2021 opens new opportunities for raising the level of education and economic activeness of women, attracting them to entrepreneurial activities, strengthening the role of women in the governance of the state and society, and further strengthening the foundations of the family. In this context it is advised to further improve the legislation in order to enhance the participation of women in managing the affairs of society and the state, provide equal opportunities for access to the public administration system, develop national mechanisms for the advancement of women and implement ratified international treaties in the field of human rights.

Empowering Women to Participate in Public Administration and Socio-Economic Life is a joint project conducted by the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The overall objective of the project is to empower women, increase women's participation in public administration in accordance with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The project will also contribute by increasing social and political activeness of women and strengthening their role in governance of the state and society, in the conext of Outcome 8 of UNDAF 2016-2020: more reliable protection of citizens' rights and freedoms.

In our ever-evolving world, the concepts of "inclusion" and "inclusive governance" have taken center stage as critical components of creating a just, equitable, and progressive society. These ideas emphasize the importance of not merely including underrepresented groups but actively integrating their voices, perspectives, and experiences into the fabric of governance. This article delves into the distinctions between "inclusion" and "inclusive governance". It explores the imperative of empowering women in policy-making in Nigeria, highlighting the need for inclusivity throughout the policy process.[1,2,3]

Definition of Terms

Definition: Inclusion refers to the practice of including individuals from diverse backgrounds, irrespective of their differences, in various aspects of society, such as education, the workplace, and politics. It recognizes the need for representation but often falls short of ensuring that those included have an active role in decision-making processes.

Focus: Inclusion emphasizes creating opportunities for underrepresented groups to participate and be seen. It addresses the initial step of providing access and representation, but it may not guarantee that their perspectives are integrated into policies or decision-making.

Empowering Women in Policy-Making for Good Governance

Like many countries, Nigeria has recognized the importance of women's participation in policy-making. However, to truly achieve good governance, the country must move beyond surface-level inclusion to embrace inclusive governance, and below are my recommendations:

- Political Representation:

Nigeria has made strides in increasing women's representation in politics and policy-making, but there is room for growth, especially at the local government level. True inclusivity requires increasing numbers and ensuring that women's voices are influential in decision-making processes.

- Inclusive Policy Design:

While Nigeria has taken steps to incorporate gender concerns into policy design through the National Gender Policy, there is room for greater integration. Policymakers must actively seek women's input in the early stages of policy development to create solutions that address their unique challenges effectively.

- Implementation with Equity:

Inclusive governance extends to the implementation phase, where policies should be executed with a strong focus on gender equity. This includes allocating resources and services equitably to address the specific needs of women in areas such as education, healthcare, and economic empowerment.

- Monitoring and Evaluation:

Nigeria's efforts in monitoring and evaluating policies for gender inclusivity have improved. However, transparency and the active involvement of women in these processes are crucial. Civil society organizations and women's groups can play a significant role in holding policymakers accountable.

In conclusion, inclusion and inclusive governance are essential to building a just and equitable society. While inclusion is an important first step towards representation, it should not be the endpoint. True inclusivity, embodied by inclusive governance, requires active participation, engagement, and integration of marginalized groups, especially women, in all policy development, implementation, and evaluation phases.[4,5,6]

Nigeria's progress in promoting women's participation is commendable, but the journey towards inclusive governance is ongoing. By championing inclusive governance, Nigeria can harness the full potential of its diverse population and pave the way for sustainable development and good governance that benefits all its citizens, regardless of gender. It is not just about including women in policy-making; it is about ensuring their voices shape the policies that affect their lives and communities.

II. DISCUSSION

As International Women's Day approaches, this offers an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come and the hurdles that remain in achieving gender equality, particularly in the public administration sector.

Women's leadership in the public sector is crucial for promoting inclusive and effective governance. Women bring a unique set of perspectives, experiences, and skills that enhance decision-making processes. Viet Nam's Constitution explicitly states that women have equal rights with men in all aspects of daily life, spanning politics, economics, culture, society, and family. This commitment aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 5, emphasizing gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

Despite commendable efforts, a stubborn gap remains between men and women in top government jobs. It is time for decisive action to "invest in women and accelerate progress" towards gender equality in public offices, including in the provinces.

Over the past decade, more than 40% of staff in Viet Nam's ministries have been women. Some ministries even have more women than men among their staff. But when it comes to top leadership roles, only around 21 percent of these are held by women. Invisible barriers, including persistent stereotypes about men and women, continue to hinder women from accessing the same opportunities as men. As a result, women often find themselves in lower-level positions where they have less influence in policy- and decision-making than men. This is especially true in key sectors such as industry, agriculture, transport, security and defense.

It is even harder for women to get involved in local decision-making. According to findings from a study supported by UNDP and the Australian Government together with Ireland, women are under-represented in politics at the local level, particularly for village leadership positions. Of 832 villages surveyed, only 199 (less than 24 percent) had women leaders.[7,8,9] While this is a significant increase from 12 percent in 2019, there is still a long road ahead.

To address these challenges, concrete steps are needed to help women succeed. Viet Nam's ambitious Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2030 sets targets for how many women should be in leadership positions. It aspires to see 60 percent of state agencies and local governments having women in key leadership positions by 2025. By 2030, it wants to see that figure rise to 75%. Meanwhile, the Election Law 2015 stipulates that 35% of candidates for elected offices across all levels should be women.

To meet these crucial targets, the country will need to address the obstacles that make it hard for women to move up in public sector careers. This includes changing the way people think about leadership, so that women are trusted, supported and, where relevant, elected to important positions.

It also means easing the burden of family responsibilities for women, which limits the time they have available for their careers. Making work hours flexible, letting people work from home, and putting in place adequate social assistance programs, including for childcare, can help fix these problems.

It is also crucial to help women learn new skills and meet other people who can help them in their careers. We have worked with the Viet Nam's Women Union to create women's leadership networks and build the capacity of elected women leaders in six provinces. These groups build women's leadership capabilities by giving them training, giving them opportunities to learn from each other, and offering them chances to meet new professional contacts. We have also worked with the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics to design the "Women in Leadership Journey" and "Young Women Ready to Lead" programs. These programs help established and emerging women leaders be even better at what they do by giving them someone to learn from and work with.

Completing the legal framework for gender equality and establishing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating compliance with gender equality targets in public administration is also crucial. This could include developing implementation strategies for gender equality in specific sectors or provinces, such as the Women's Leadership Index Australia is supporting the Ho Chi Minh Academy to develop.

Lastly, we need to make sure that everyone knows about the importance of treating men and women equally. This includes breaking gender stereotypes and developing codes of conduct for sexual harassment prevention.

As we celebrate International Women's Day, let us challenge the biases that limit achievement of gender equality in public administration. By "investing in women: accelerating progress," we not only unlock the full potential of half the population but also build a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Let us make sure every woman has the chance to be a leader and succeed

III. RESULTS

"Increasing the proportion of women in public institutions makes them more representative, increases innovation, improves decision-making and benefits whole societies" - António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, Message on International Women's Day 2017

Background

In 2015, governments unanimously endorsed the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and, through its Goal 16 on "promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies" and Goal 5 on "ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment," recognized the role of gender equality and inclusive public administration and institutions in achieving more peaceful, prosperous, equal and sustainable societies.

Public administration refers to the aggregate state-funded machinery, including agencies, policies and services, in charge of the management and implementation of laws, regulations and decisions of the government. It enables countries to implement national policies and programmes and is essential in driving sustainable development[1].

In many countries, public institutions continue to be male-dominated and patriarchal, perpetuating harmful, and sometimes violent, attitudes and practices. Although there is no global baseline on women's participation in public administration, existing research from UNDP shows that women are under-represented, especially in leadership and decision-making roles. The available data suggests that women make up on average 45% of public administration, yet there is high variation of women's participation[10,11,12] across countries, ranging from 3% to 77%. The overall share of women in public administration is highest, on average, in OECD countries (55.1%), and lowest in the Arab States (35.9%). However, when looking at the share of women in decision-making positions in public administration, the highest average share is found in Latin America and the Caribbean (43.4%) and the lowest in Africa (25.1%). Moreover, just 20% of countries have reached parity (50%) in the share of women in decision-making positions of public administration[2].

Diversity, including equal access of women to leadership roles, is not only the right thing to do but also the most productive. A recent UNDP and McKinsey study found that female participation in public administration and in decision-making roles is positively correlated with economic development as well as gender equality in society. It also

suggests that women's equal participation and leadership creates conducive environment for a better and more effective government. These findings are reinforced by another recent report by the Wilson Center that concludes: "where there are more women in power, there is better governance, and where there is good governance, there are more women in power."

Objective

This e-Discussion is a forum to promote a dialogue on the role of women in public administration and decision-making and exchange knowledge and good practices on ways to increase and strengthen women's participation in public administration and decision-making and ensure public institutions are safe and free of sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Please join the e-Discussion from 28 March to 19 April 2019. Women and men in politics and in public administration, national and local government representatives, civil society activists, experts, practitioners, and academia are invited to contribute with their experiences

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by Member States during the 2015 United Nations General Assembly affirmed that "The spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies." (paragraph 15, A/70/L.1). However, against a backdrop of rapid growth in access and technology, many segments of the world's population are still being left behind. Although mobile phone use and mobile internet use by women is increasing, there remains a gender gap. Globally, women in middle and lower income countries are 10 per cent less likely than men to own a mobile phone and this gender gap rises to 23 per cent for mobile internet usage. The largest mobile gender gap is in South Asia. Across Asia and the Pacific, only 47 out of every 100 inhabitants use the internet. The proportion of women using the Internet is 8.2 percentage points lower than the proportion of men in Asia Pacific, with an internet penetration rate of 39.7 per cent. In recognition of the potential contribution of ICTs for women's empowerment, target 5b of the Sustainable Development Goals aims to 'enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women'. Governments in Asia and the Pacific have been proactive in harnessing ICTs to enhance their governance systems and service delivery through e-Government.[13,14,15] The high-demand for ESCAP capacity development services in e-Government highlights the increasing interest and demand in this area. It is, therefore, vital that governments in Asia-Pacific ensure that their e-government strategies provide opportunities and equal benefits to women through gender-sensitive public service delivery and inclusive decision-making processes. E-Government can advance the rights of women through better institutional coordination and gender mainstreaming across line ministries; accountability mechanisms that help respond to women's needs, as well as online channels to engage women in co-creating or co-producing services that better serve their own needs. To address the gender deficit and raise awareness of governments and strengthen their capacity to develop and implement policies that promote e-Government as a tool for women's empowerment, ESCAP has developed an online toolkit "eGov4women".

Strengthening Capacity on e-Government for Women's Empowerment:

The eGov4women toolkit draws on findings and case studies of original research conducted for this initiative, which are presented in the report on "e-Government for Women's Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific", as well as input from an expert consultation (4 -5 October 2016) on the training outline. The online toolkit aims to enhance the capacity of national policy-makers and civil servants to design and implement policies and strategies to promote e-Government for women's empowerment. Through a set of 5 comprehensive modules (Gender, governance and e-government; Gender-responsive e-service delivery; Gender-responsive e-participation; Gender-responsive connectivity architecture; Assessing gender-responsiveness of e-government ecosystems), it provides key pointers for policymakers on gender-responsive design of e-service delivery, e-participation and connectivity initiatives, and introduces a capabilities-based approach to outcome evaluation of e-government for women's empowerment. The training modules enhance understanding of gender implications of e-government and also suggest strategies and actions to promote gender-responsive service delivery, citizen participation as well as connectivity. Training modules have been developed to also be multi-functional. For example, they can be taken as a self-contained online training course, with mini-quizzes to reinforce learning and capacity development. The modules can also be reconfigured to design tailored training courses, such as by national training institutes. To this end, a trainers' manual is included to suggest different modalities for different types of training. ESCAP has partnered with the UN Project Office on Governance (UNPOG), a project office of UN-DESA's Division for Public Administration and Development Management as well as worked in collaboration with IT for Change in implementing this initiative.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined within the Constitution of India which guarantees gender equality and empowers the State to formulate affirmative action in favour of women.

The Government of India has taken various steps to ensure empowerment of women through their social, educational, economic and political uplifting through various schematic interventions. While the schemes implemented by the Government like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban & Rural), the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), Pradhan Mantri Vyay Vandana Yojana (PMVVY) and Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) support women and girls to be socially secure, the initiatives like Samagra Shiksha, Scheme of National Overseas Scholarship, Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojna, Swacch Vidyalaya Mission, etc. ensure that schools are girl-friendly especially for vulnerable sections of society and have adequate facilities in place to fulfill their special requirements.[18,19,20]

Further, the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 prioritises gender equity and envisions ensuring equitable access to quality education to all students, with a special emphasis on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).

In order to enhance the employability of female workers, the Government is providing training to them through a network of Women Industrial Training Institutes, National Vocational Training Institutes and Regional Vocational Training Institutes. To ensure economic independence of women through skill development and vocational training, the Government has also introduced Skill India Mission. The National Skill Development Policy focuses on inclusive skill development, with the objective of increased women participation for better economic productivity. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Kendras lay emphasis on creating additional infrastructure both for training and apprenticeship for women; flexible training delivery mechanisms, flexible afternoon batches on local need-based training to accommodate women; and ensuring safe and gender sensitive training environment, employment of women trainers, equity in remuneration, and complaint redressal mechanism. There are schemes like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and Stand Up India, Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), for helping the women to set up their own enterprise. Under the Swacch Vidyalaya Mission, it was ensured that all schools have at least one functional toilet for girls. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna (PMUY) aims to safeguard the health of women by providing them with clean cooking fuel and also from drudgery of collecting firewood.

Further, in order to encourage employment of women, a number of enabling provisions have been incorporated in the recently enacted Labour Codes viz. the Code on Wages, 2019, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 and the Code on Social Security, 2020 for creating congenial work environment for women workers. Stand Up India scheme promotes entrepreneurship amongst women. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) mandates that at least one third of the jobs generated under the scheme (MGNREGS) should be given to women. Government has also made enabling provisions for allowing women's participation in non-conventional sectors such as fighter pilots in Indian Air Force, Commandos, Central Police Forces, admissions in Sainik Schools etc. The Government also implements the scheme of Working Women Hostels for providing safe accommodation to working women.

Though, "Police and Public Order" are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India and responsibility to maintain law and order, protection of life and property of the citizens including investigation and prosecution of crime against women and children rests primarily with the respective State Governments, the Central Government gives high priority to ensuring safety and security of women and has undertaken various legislative and schematic interventions in this regard. These include legislations such as "The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018", "The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013",

IV. CONCLUSION

"The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013", "The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2006", "The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961", etc. The schemes/ projects include One Stop Centres (OSCs), Universalisation of Women Helplines (WHL), Mahila Police Volunteers (MPV), Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) which is a pan-India single number (112)/ mobile app based system for emergencies, a cyber-crime reporting portal to report obscene content and assistance to States/ UTs for strengthening cyber forensic capabilities, safe city projects in 8 cities (Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai), training and skill development programs for Investigation Officers (IOs), Prosecution Officers (POs) and Medical Officers (MOs), distribution of Sexual Assault Evidence Collection (SAEC) Kits to States/ UTs, establishment of state of the art DNA laboratory at CFSL, Chandigarh, assistance to 24 States/ UTs to strengthen Forensic Science Laboratories, assistance to States/ UTs for their respective victim compensation schemes under Central Victim Compensation Fund (CVCF), setting up of Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) for speedy disposal of cases of rape and cases under POCSO Act, setting up/ strengthening of Anti Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) in all

districts of the country, setting up/ strengthening of Women Help Desks (WHDs) at Police Stations, Integrated Emergency Response Management System (IERMS) at 983 railway stations, Video Surveillance System at Konkan Railway Stations, scheme for customization, deployment and management of State-wise vehicle tracking platform, etc.

In addition, the Government of India has decided to implement the Umbrella Scheme for Safety, Security and Empowerment of Women as an integrated women empowerment program under the name 'Mission Shakti', for addressing the issues of women on a life-cycle continuum basis and for making them equal partners in nation-building through convergence at different levels of governance and a participative approach.

This information was given by the Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani, in a written reply in Rajya Sabha [20]

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