

SEN'S CAPABILITY APPROACH AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

This paper tries to measure the level of empowerment of elected women representatives (EWRs) at the Gram Panchayat level in the light of Prof. Amartya Sen's 'Capability Approach.' In this paper, the level of empowerment of EWRs or "agency" has been measured through Women Empowerment Index (WEI) on the basis of five types of 'instrumental freedoms' like, Social Opportunities, Economic Facilities, Political Freedoms, Transparency Guarantees and Protective Security. On the other hand, the 'capability set' or the "alternative combinations of functioning" of EWRs or "agency" has been assessed through Gram Panchayat Performance Index (GPPI). By comparing WEI and GPPI, the paper has assessed the level of empowerment of EWRs during the last two boards (2003-08) and (2008-2013) in West Bengal.

Keywords: Amartya Sen, Capability Approach, Women Empowerment, Women Empowerment Index, Gram Panchayat Performance Index .

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Context and Background

As India has been carrying on the patriarchal set-up characterised by the subjugation of females and turned its back to “the need to restore what is rightfully theirs but is unjustly denied to them” (Anand, 2010), the women are not allowed in the top corridor of power but were allowed to get entry at the lower level (i.e., at Panchayats) by the impact of reserving a third of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for women in 1993. The Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendment) Acts, 1992 sets out in detail, in Article 243D, how reservations are to be provided to women and others belonging to the SC/STs. Moreover, in all the offices of the local governments in both rural and urban areas, one-third of the total seats should be reserved for women. This ensures the participation of women in the local decision-making process. Accordingly, this reservation policy was incorporated in the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 through an amendment (1993). In West Bengal, 50 per cent of seats of Panchayats are occupied by women since 2013.

Since women’s participation in governance is an indicator of women empowerment, the following questions are asked.

- What is the status of women’s political participation?
- What is the role played by elected women representatives (EWRs) in local-level governance and its impacts?
- What are the constraints faced by the EWRs in discharging their duties and people’s perception about the role of the women representatives?

The present study, ‘Sen’s Capability Approach & Women Empowerment in Governance (2003-2013)’ is an effort to look into some of these issues.

Review of Literature

Now, we will discuss literature related to profile of the women members, performance issues and

empowerment of EWRs, reservation, constraints and strengths of EWRs and women development in the context of gender. A few of such empirical works have been reviewed below:

Dhanmanjiri Sathe et al. (2013) examined the impact of the reservation of office bearer posts at Local self-government on the perceptions of service delivery and women’s democratic participation and their findings are as follows.

- The average self-rated performances of the male & female sarpanches are the same.
- Participation in the Gram Sabha and filing complaints are high in female-headed GP rather than male-headed GPs.
- Future programmes perceived by both male and female sarpanches are the same.
- Though the male sarpanch has a better profile the female sarpanch seems to have interesting impacts.

Pranab Bardhan, Dilip Mookherjee and Monica Parra Torrado (2005) have examined the effect of randomised reservations of office-bearer position (Pradhan) in the local government of West Bengal for women and SC/ST members. It focuses on the impact of reservations on a wide range of programmes administered by the GPs, including allocations of IRDP credit, agricultural minikilts, employment programmes across different beneficiary groups and allocation of spending across different areas.

Lori Beaman, et al. (2010) studied the effect of the reservation across Indian village councils on the villagers. This study shows that after 10 years of reservation, though the villagers rate their feelings toward the male members, there are no negative feelings towards the idea of female members. It expresses that men dislike the female Pradhans because they implement pro-women policies.

Esther Duflo (2012) established the connotation that women empowerment and economic development are closely related through the

empowerment–development nexus. Through some evidence, this paper shows that poverty and lack of opportunity breed inequality between men and women so that when economic development takes place, it affects women doubly: firstly, women's condition improves and secondly, gender inequality also decreases. This essay argues that empowering women does indeed change society's choices in important ways but rendering the best decisions by women is somewhat exaggerated.

Raghabendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo (2004) studied the impact of women's leadership in West Bengal and Rajasthan. In West Bengal, after reservation, women participation in the labour force has increased, but in Rajasthan, the employment motive is common for all. An interesting result of reservation in West Bengal and Rajasthan is the investment in public goods. Thus, the reservation policy has important effects on policy decisions at the local level.

Suparna Ganguly and Sonali Chakravarty studied women members of Gram Panchayats (GP) in West Bengal and focused on the profile of EWRs which portrays the poor status of EWRs in terms of experience, income, education, political career, etc. On the whole, women members of West Bengal do not exactly appear to be truly empowered.

Prabhat Dutta and Panchali Sen (2003) have done an exploratory study by asking questions about the socio-economic and political background of the women members. This study identified that the issue of empowerment of the lady members should be tackled both at political and administrative levels coupled with other issues, like, economic independence, etc.

Asha Ramesh and Bharati Ali (2001) studied the profiles of elected women representatives in local self-governance in Gujarat and Karnataka during 1997-98. This study reflects that the power balance in society is still tilted in favour of men, but despite various constraints, women are visible in large numbers in the local political scene.

Bhola Nath Ghosh (1999) conducted a study in two districts of West Bengal. The leading question

was about the constraints faced by the women members and their prospects.

Satyabrata Dutta (1998) also showed how far women members are effectively participating in the local governance. This study showed that women were playing their roles properly though they were marginalised in some panchayats due to political opposition.

Aurobindo Ghosh (1997) showed the various contradictions towards women participation in West Bengal. The main research question was to find out the women's representation in different standing – committees of the Panchayat Samiti. The study revealed that the women members were not given any tasks like, infrastructure development, land, forest, agriculture, etc., due to gender discrimination.

Mary E John (1996) reflected that "Women's issues are rarely allowed to be – and seldom are – women's issues alone." It is always seen tied with other issues. Though women's issues get momentum during the last decades "it would be quite misleading to believe that women's issues have gained an autonomous space."

D. K. Ghosh (1995) studied the reservation of seats for women of West Bengal. Obviously, his major conclusion was that the Panchayat elections of 1993 "proved that rural women are mentally prepared to participate effectively in the political and developmental process but the elected women leaders are grossly denied of their legitimate share in heading the offices at different tiers of PRI bodies".

Ashim Mukhopadhyay (1995) did a case study covering EWRs of Kultikri Gram Panchayat of Paschim Midnapore. This study showed that all the members were from peasant –families having no significant academic background and without any experience of serving in any panchayat. But all members were "articulate, active and effectively participating in decision making".

G. K. Lieten (1994) also carried out a study on EWRs which showed that most of the women members were direct from the kitchen, mostly with

a lower level of education and without experience with politics. They recognised the improvement of educational achievement and also their liberty and free movement and access to the people after being elected.

The study conducted by Development Dialogue (1994) finds that women's participation was not from within. Lack of education, lack of awareness and information, traditional rural system, gender discrimination, etc., were the primary constraints towards their proper functioning though voters opine that women members were better in the context of time management, capability, understanding, and leadership.

Neil Webster (1992) also studied the EWRs of PRIs in West Bengal and were emphatic in denouncing gender discrimination. This study noted that women have largely failed to gain representation because "social structure and cultural practices mitigate very much against a woman standing, with the pressure from a woman's own household being very strong in this matter".

Research Gaps

This brief review of literature portrays that all these works done by eminent researchers have elevated our understanding of the background and strengths and weaknesses of the women members but also reveals that there is a scope for in-depth study regarding women's participation in politics and rural development. Despite valuable contributions by researchers and scholars in this field, still there are some gaps as follows:

- How far the members are imparting their roles that have not been assessed yet?
- There have been very little efforts to compare and contrast the background of women members with that of male folk.
- After reservation, women's participation in Panchayats has increased. But there is no clear picture whether EWRs are properly groomed or not or whether they have their role clarity or not.

Scope of the Study

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To understand the socio-economic and political backgrounds of the EWRs of Gram Panchayats compared to that of the male members.
2. To examine the role of women members in various aspects of Gram Panchayat functioning, especially those related to health and women's issues.
3. To compare the relative levels of Gram Panchayat performance in (a) male-headed GPs, (b) female-headed GPs and (c) All-Women GPs.
4. To examine the relationship, if any, between the level of empowerment of EWRs and the overall performance of the Gram Panchayats.
5. To identify the constraints towards the effective participation and decision-making by women members at the GP level.

There are a few presumptions relevant to our study. These presumptions are:

- There is an inherent gender gap in 'development' (Rajan, 1999)¹.
- 'Freedom' helps to empower the elected women leaders for the development of the community (Joseph, 2011)².
- The element of 'corruption', if any, in Gram Panchayat functioning being hard to quantify and measure, may be assumed as a 'given' variable for all the three categories of Gram Panchayats considered.

With these presumptions, the present study analyses the Choice and voice of elected women representatives (EWRs) in gram panchayats in West Bengal during the two Panchayat Boards: 2003-08 and 2008-13.

Methodology

Design of the Study: The present study has been designed and carried out holistically targeting our objectives covering five major areas as follows:

- i) **Background of the elected women representatives (EWRs):** This includes an assessment of the socio-economic and political status of the EWRs of two boards (2003-08 and 2008-2013).
- ii) **Performance of the EWRs:** This looks into the achievements of the EWRs as panchayat functionaries in certain areas like fund utilisation, employment generation, own resource generation, pro-poor service delivery and women development programmes.
- iii) **Performance of the Gram Panchayat:** EWRs' performance can also be judged through the overall performance of the GPs which is measured in terms of a Gram Panchayat Performance Index (GPPI) developed on selected indicators.
- iv) **Capacity Building of the EWRs & Enabling Environments:** This aims at identifying the supports given to EWRs for education and training and empowerment by different stakeholders of the PRI system.
- v) **Challenges & Constraints:** This reflects the obstacles faced by EWRs in their proper functioning as GP representatives.
- These five areas of enquiry have been examined in seven sub-projects as follows:

Table 1*Strategy and Sample Design of the Total Study*

Sub-project No.	Title
1	Purposive sample Survey of 32 Gram Panchayats covering all elected and few selected functionaries.
2	Purposive sample Survey of 11 All-women Gram Panchayats covering all elected and few selected functionaries.
3	Analysis of the GP Performance Schedule, Audit Reports, Form 27 and Form 26 of 2003-08 and 2008-2012 of the GPs
4	Few focus-group discussions & interviews with various stakeholders (State-level high officials of various departments, Academicians, Opinion leaders, Political Persons, Women leaders and Activists) of Panchayats and Rural Development.
5	Six district-level Women members' meet
6	Ethnographic fieldwork in a few selected Gram Sansads
7	A perception survey of a cross-section of the villagers

Period for the Study

We have tried to look into the performance of the sample Gram Panchayats (GPs) with special reference to the role of EWRs of GP during 2003-08 and 2008-13 Boards.

Bengal, namely Jalpaiguri (north), Murshidabad (east), Birbhum (west) and South 24 Parganas (south) are done on the basis of the following reasons:

1. Geographical & Socio-cultural diversities
2. Level of backwardness in terms of Human – Development & gender gaps

Sample Design

The sampling and data collection have been done in the following stages:

Purposive selection of four districts of West

From each district purposive selection of 'high-performing' GPs headed by female Pradhan & male Pradhan and 'low-performing' GPs headed by female Pradhan & male Pradhan is done based on

the Annual Self-Evaluation Reports submitted by the three tiers of Panchayats to the P&RD Department.

Side by side, we have taken the All-Women GPs in 2003 and All-Women GPs in 2008. Thus, two high-performing GPs and two low-performing GPs covering four districts (Jalpaiguri, Murshidabad, Birbhum and South 24 Parganas) constitute our sample. Side by side 11 All-Women GPs from another four districts (Paschim Medinipur, Bankura, Hooghly and Bardhaman) are covered.

Out of the 43 GPs [16(2003) + 16 (2008) + 11 All-Women GPs] an average of 8-10 members from each GP have been interviewed through a common schedule. Besides this, 20 villagers (10 male & 10 female) in each of the 43 GPs have been interviewed following a structured schedule. Thus 1325 respondents from villagers and GP members are covered in the survey.

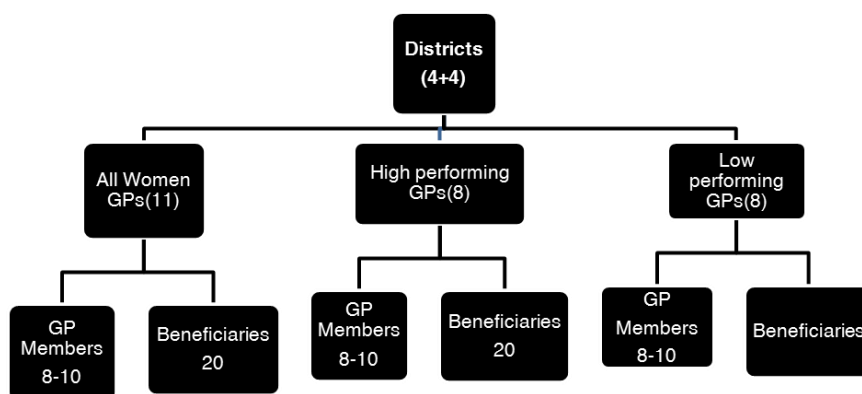
Besides this, a random selection of academicians, opinion leaders, political persons, women leaders and activists and various stakeholders of panchayats and rural development have been done for focused group discussions (FGD). This is the qualitative part of the study to reinforce the validity of the results found in the field.

To understand the effectiveness of the Gram Panchayats as well as that of the women members, ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in a few wards of GP. We arranged & interacted with group discussions with Panchayat officials, elected representatives and stakeholders. We have portrayed this experience through "Coding" (for identifying and quantifying themes) and "Show Case" in order to contextualise the discourses of pro-Panchayat feelings and people's concerns and performance mapping of the elected women representatives.

Our sample has been presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Sample for the Study



List of Variables

A. The socio-economic profile of Elected Women Representatives has been depicted based on nine indicators: Age, Caste, Religion, Occupation, Income, Marital status Political Experience, Political space and Panchayat experience

B. Capability or Empowerment of women GP

members (independent variable) has been measured by constructing a Women Empowerment Index (WEI) which is based on the following indicators:

V-1. Female literacy

V-2. Access to Education

V-3. Access to Training

V-4. Involvement in women's issues	i) Schedule for elected representatives
V-5. Direct communication with people	ii) Schedule for Gram Panchayats
V-6. Access to income	iii) Schedule for villagers/ beneficiary household
V-7. Political engagement	iv) Semi-structured Interviews and
V-8. Political status	v) Focus Group Discussion
V-9. Access to governance (panchayat)	
V-10. Access to information	
V-11. Sex-ratio	Secondary data has been collected from Government Records such as
V-12. Relative representation of women	i) Audit Reports of GPs
V-13. Association with Women Forums	ii) Relevant AG Reports

C. The performance of Gram Panchayats (dependent variable) has been measured through a Gram Panchayat Performance Index (GPPI) developed based on the following indicators:

- V-1. Total literacy
- V-2. Female literacy
- V-3. Percentage of people having access to drinking water
- V-4. Percentage of malnourished children
- V-5. Percentage of villages covered by all-weather road
- V-6. Percentage of BPL women covered by IAY
- V-7. Percentage of households covered by Gratuitous Relief
- V-8. Rate of resource mobilization
- V-9. Per capita Tax Collection
- V-10. Percentage of Fund Utilization
- V-11. Man-days created under MGNREGA
- V-12. Rate of functioning of Upasamitis
- V-13. Percentage of members attending GP meetings
- V-14. Rate of monitoring and supervision of SSK, MSK, Anganwadi Centre, etc.

Sources of Data

The study is primarily based on primary data (both quantitative and qualitative) collected through:

Secondary data has been collected from Government Records such as

- i) Audit Reports of GPs
- ii) Relevant AG Reports
- iii) Annual Self-Evaluation Reports of the GPs
- iv) Relevant studies and data published by the Ministry of Panchayat and Rural Development, GoI, Books, Working Papers/Monographs, etc., from some Research Institutes/NGOs in the field.

Statistical Tools

Women Empowerment Index (WEI) and Gram Panchayat Performance Index (GPPI) have been prepared and Correlation, standard deviation and 'T-test' have been used to explore the relationship between WEI and GPPI and to measure the effect of each component on women's empowerment. "Rank" is also used to see the status of 43 GPs in the context of WEI and GPPI.

Findings

This section focuses on the change in governance brought by the EWRs or 'critical mass'. It is also important to assess the 'quality' of the 'critical mass' as the strength or capability depends on it. Thus, we have tried to assess the following issues:

Socio-economic and political profile of the Elected Women Representatives (EWRs): In this context, we have taken the following parameters: 1) Age, 2) Caste, 3) Religion, 4) Education, 5) Marital status, 6) Occupation, 7) Income pattern, 8) Political background and 9) Panchayat

Experience. We had 167 female and 132 male GP members out of 299 respondents of the 2003-08 board and 90 female and 76 male GP members out

of 166 respondents of the 2008-13 periods across 43 Gram Panchayats covering eight districts.

Figure 2

Respondents of 2003-08

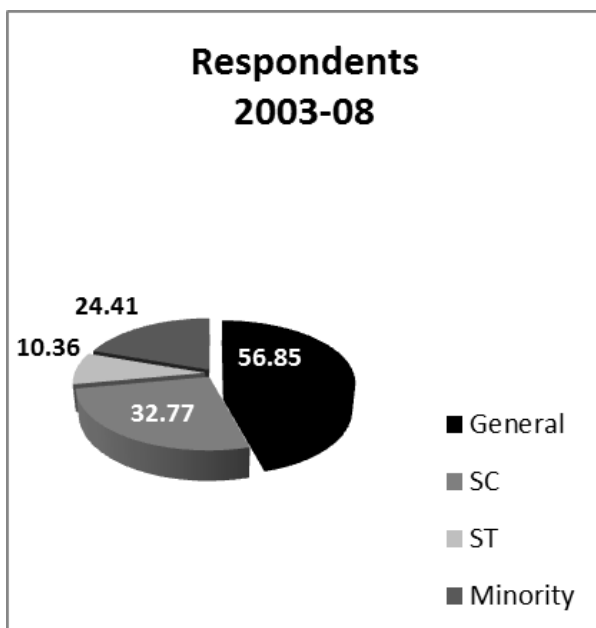
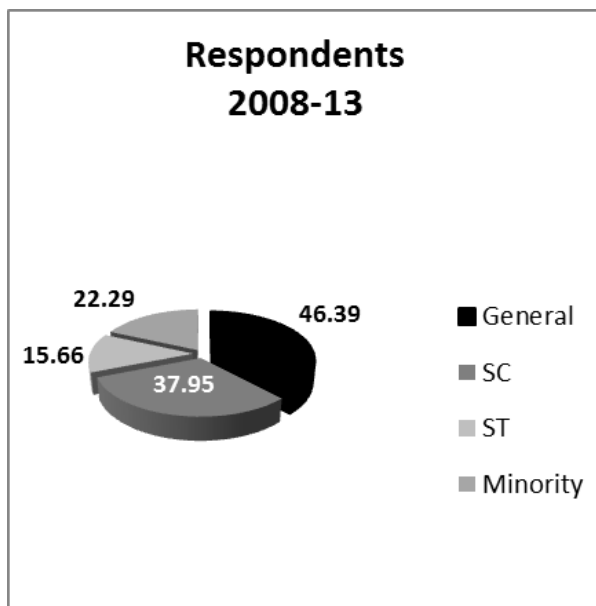


Figure 3

Respondents of 2008-13



Our findings have been portrayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Socio-Economic and Political Profile of the EWRs

Parameters	Male Members	Female Members	All Women GPs
Age	Younger folk's participation in Panchayat is less. Though some young girls are participating, young boys have shown their apathy towards governance.		
Caste	In both Boards, upper caste domination is seen among male members.	Upper caste domination in 2003-08 Board but lower caste domination in 2008-2013 among female members.	Lower caste domination in both Boards.
Religion	Except Murshidabad, in all other districts, Hindus have enjoyed unchallenged and unqualified supremacy at the GP level.		
Education	Compared to female members, male members are in a better-off situation in terms of formal education. More than 65% are above class VIII	Overall standard of educational attainment in 2008-13 is of below quality than that of 2003-08 as 1/4 th of the women respondents are illiterate or neo-literate	Representation of illiterate or neo-literate has been increased in 2008-13 (39.28%)
Occupation	Large representation is from production sector, i.e. agricultural labour	Most are housewives in both Boards but a large part is attached with SHGs	60% are from labour market or service sector in 2008-13 whereas 54% are housewives in 2003-08
Income	More participation of higher income group in 2008-13. Compared to females, male members belong to better economic status	More than 80% of both Boards are from lower income group.	Majority (78.48%) are from lower-income groups.
Political Experience	More than 70% are politically sound and experienced and participated in a Panchayat on both Boards.	Majority are not active Players of politics though the poorer women appear to be less inhibited and more inclined to join politics. Indeed, they are not quite organically linked to the local political process.	In both Boards, mostly newcomers are planted by the party.

Conclusion

Our findings regarding the socio-economic and political profile of EWRs in the GPs under consideration are mixed. Our survey indicates that more women (18-35 yrs.) joined Panchayats in 2003-08 Board (52.69%) than in 2008-13 (36.67%). Most women members in the 2008-13 Board, are older and lacking literacy and formal education, and faced difficulties in their functioning as Gram Panchayat members. Many of them expressed their helplessness towards their functioning due to lack of literacy.

There is lower caste representation at the GP level among female members while male representation is dominated by the upper caste. Though the minority representation varies from district to district, overall Hindu dominance is there. According to grassroots level party workers, since the 2003 election, relatively young women in the village had not shown their interest in electoral politics at the Gram Panchayat level.

Most of the women members are housewives without income (hence financially dependent on males) or agricultural labour of the lower income groups. An average woman member at the GP level would normally be a little poorer than the average male member in terms of family income. They are both socially and economically impoverished.

Problems are even more acute if we consider the tea garden-based GPs of Jalpaiguri or drought-prone GPs of Birbhum or the remotest GPs at the border areas of Murshidabad where the minimum standard of decent living is conspicuous by their absence. Consequently, women have to bear the hardship. For example, in Lankapara of Jalpaiguri, village Bahara of Murshidabad or Nabagram in Birbhum, women have to traverse a long distance to fetch drinking water. They have to come to the GP office after serving all the members of their families.

Besides this, many of them are burnt by the problem of drunkard husbands. In terms of political

socialisation, the average women members do not appear to be active players in politics though the poorer women appear to be less inhibited and more inclined to join politics. Indeed, the women members are not quite organically linked to the local political process. Most of them are not members of any political party but rather are seen as loose adjuncts by their patron politicians.

Level of Empowerment of the EWRs through Women Empowerment Index: The level of empowerment or capabilities of EWRs at the grassroots level has been measured in the light of Sen's 'capability approach'. According to this approach, the 'capability set' of a person comprises the "alternative combinations of functioning" that are feasible for a person to achieve (beings and doings). Such functioning is based upon his/her level of 'entitlement' (resource base, both extrinsic and intrinsic resources). Sen has examined the 'agency role' of the individual as a member of the public and as a participant in economic, social and political actions³. Thus, the EWRs at grassroots governance can be referred to as an 'agency' that is acting towards a change in governance (Jain, 1996)⁴ or change in political disclosure, social climate of political life, political attitudes, policy priorities, legislative styles and decision-making roles (Dahlerup, 1998)⁵.

Here, the level of empowerment has been measured on the basis of five types of 'instrumental freedoms' which contribute to the general capability of a person or agency (Sen, 1992) such as,

- Social opportunities
- Economic facilities
- Political freedoms
- Transparency guarantees and
- Protective security

Under each of the 'instrumental freedoms', a few parameters have been selected as portrayed in Table 3.

Table 3*Indicators of Women Empowerment*

Types of freedom	Indicators
A. Social opportunities	1) Female literacy 2) Access to education 3) Access to training 4) Awareness of and access to Women's issues 5) Direct communication with people
B. Economic facilities	6) Access to income
C. Political freedoms	7) Political engagement 8) Political status 9) Access to governance (panchayat)
D. Transparency Guarantees	10) Access to information
E. Protective Security	11) Sex-ratio 12) Relative representation of Women 13) Association with Women Forum

Using the standardised formula of normalisation, $\frac{\text{Actual value} - \text{Minimum value}}{\text{Maximum value} - \text{Minimum value}}$,

we got Women Empowerment Indices (WEI) as depicted in Table 4 (a) followed by Table 4(b).

Table 4 (a)*Women Empowerment Indices (WEI)*

Year	V ₁	V ₂	V ₃	V ₄	V ₅	V ₆	V ₇	V ₈	V ₉	V ₁₀	V ₁₁	V ₁₂	V ₁₃	WEI INDEX
2003- 08	0.245	0.554	0.394	0.427	0.097	0.436	0.508	0.230	0.191	0.846	0.162	0.498	0.775	5.369
2008- 13	0.253	0.493	0.333	0.341	0.362	0.668	0.510	0.200	0.212	0.591	0.128	0.606	0.594	5.296
Average	0.249	0.526	0.365	0.387	0.220	0.544	0.509	0.216	0.201	0.727	0.146	0.548	0.691	5.335

Sources: Computed, 2012.

Where V₁ = Sex ratio, V₂ = Female literacy, V₃ = Relative representation of EWRs, V₄= Access to Education, V₅= Access to training, V₆ = Access to Income, V₇ = Political engagement, V₈ = Political space, V₉ = Access to governance, V₁₀ = Direct communication to Public, V₁₁ = Working for women issues, V₁₂= Access to information, V₁₃= Affiliation with Women Forum.

Table 4 (b)

Women Empowerment Index based on 13 Variables

Gram Panchayats	Female Literacy		Access to Education		Access to Training		Awareness & access to women issues		Direct Communication with people		Access to income		Political engagement		Political Status		Access to governance		Access to information		Sex-ratio		Relative Representation of women		Association With women forum		Index
	VAR	00001	VAR	00002	VAR	00003	VAR	00004	VAR	00005	VAR	00006	VAR	00007	VAR	00008	VAR	00009	VAR	00010	VAR	00011	VAR	00012	VAR	00013	
Ashuti-I	0.85	0.34	1.00	0.19	0.33	0.98	1.00	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.85	0.18	0.20	0.33	7.74												
Kultikri	0.71	0.76	0.26	0.19	1.00	0.27	0.67	0.50	0.50	0.50	1.00	0.37	1.00	0.67	7.39												
Kultikri	0.71	0.42	0.16	0.16	1.00	0.51	0.67	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.75	0.37	1.00	0.86	7.35												
Benachap	0.62	0.32	0.16	0.11	0.90	0.54	0.74	0.00	0.00	0.84	0.88	0.34	1.00	0.87	7.30												
Andhari	0.46	0.24	0.11	0.19	1.00	0.40	0.67	1.00	1.00	0.22	0.86	0.26	1.00	0.86	7.26												
Birpara-	0.62	0.64	0.58	0.19	1.00	0.76	0.78	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.67	0.22	0.29	0.33	7.06												
Falakata	1.00	0.39	0.08	0.14	1.00	0.54	0.83	0.38	0.38	0.25	0.75	0.25	0.20	1.00	6.81												
North Ba	0.65	0.52	0.35	0.17	0.80	0.81	0.67	0.30	0.30	0.45	0.80	0.13	0.39	0.60	6.63												
Karisund	0.57	0.31	0.16	0.18	1.00	0.62	0.57	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.88	0.21	1.00	1.00	6.60												
Nalbona	0.50	0.03	0.25	0.19	0.88	0.63	0.42	0.31	0.31	0.19	1.00	0.29	1.00	0.88	6.57												
Jenkapur	0.63	0.32	0.11	0.19	1.00	0.45	0.47	0.21	0.21	0.11	0.86	0.34	1.00	0.86	6.54												
Kotor	0.70	0.26	0.32	0.19	0.50	0.74	0.47	0.05	0.05	0.30	1.00	0.23	1.00	0.70	6.45												
Moukhali	0.88	0.60	0.16	0.04	1.00	0.74	0.33	0.40	0.40	0.00	0.60	0.43	0.08	1.00	6.25												
Amlagora	0.65	0.14	0.27	0.19	0.50	0.36	0.71	0.22	0.22	0.22	1.00	0.14	1.00	0.71	6.10												
Raidighi	0.55	0.35	0.16	0.19	1.00	0.82	0.57	0.43	0.43	0.11	0.85	0.07	0.10	0.83	6.01												
Jhar Alt	0.03	0.43	0.28	0.11	0.80	1.00	0.93	0.10	0.10	0.30	1.00	0.03	0.12	0.80	5.95												
Nischint	0.73	0.48	0.16	0.19	1.00	0.87	0.33	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.88	0.14	0.05	1.00	5.82												
Koma	0.35	0.00	0.47	0.19	1.00	0.54	0.67	0.00	0.00	0.75	0.67	0.12	0.05	1.00	5.81												
Kaitha-I	0.45	0.44	0.05	0.16	1.00	0.60	0.44	0.33	0.33	0.50	0.33	0.20	0.23	0.83	5.57												
Shyambaz	0.54	0.15	0.14	0.01	1.00	0.48	0.48	0.00	0.00	0.27	0.42	0.18	1.00	0.90	5.56												
Madariha	0.45	0.44	0.07	1.00	0.67	0.11	0.89	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.00	0.28	0.11	0.88	5.39												
Jogardan	0.41	0.36	0.13	0.04	1.00	0.45	0.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.60	0.20	1.00	0.66	5.25												

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Gram Panchayats	Female Literacy		Access to Education		Access to Training		Awareness & access to women issues		Direct Communication with people		Access to income		Political engagement		Political Status		Access to governance		Access to information		Sex-ratio		Relative Representation of women		Association With women forum		INDEX
	VAR	00001	VAR	00002	VAR	00003	VAR	00004	VAR	00005	VAR	00006	VAR	00007	VAR	00008	VAR	00009	VAR	00010	VAR	00011	VAR	00012	VAR	00013	
Gangasag	0.68	0.45	0.16	0.19	1.00	0.34	0.54	0.19	1.00	0.34	0.54	0.19	0.00	0.25	0.20	0.09	1.00	0.09	0.25	0.20	0.09	1.00	0.09	1.00	5.08		
Rania	0.67	0.51	0.47	0.06	0.00	0.54	0.78	0.34	0.00	0.54	0.78	0.34	0.00	1.00	0.08	0.21	0.33	0.00	1.00	0.08	0.21	0.33	0.00	0.33	5.00		
Raipur-s	0.47	0.50	0.05	0.10	0.50	0.38	0.56	0.50	0.50	0.38	0.56	0.50	0.12	0.50	0.20	0.16	0.83	0.12	0.50	0.20	0.16	0.83	0.12	0.83	4.86		
Madhabda	0.45	0.51	0.11	0.00	0.67	0.00	0.67	0.00	0.67	0.00	0.67	0.00	0.25	0.33	0.16	0.41	1.00	0.25	0.33	0.16	0.41	1.00	0.05	0.70	4.72		
Gurudasp	0.51	0.37	0.02	0.19	1.00	0.40	0.05	0.29	1.00	0.40	0.05	0.29	0.32	0.57	0.20	0.05	0.70	0.32	0.57	0.20	0.05	0.70	0.05	0.33	4.66		
Nialliah	0.58	1.00	0.05	0.15	1.00	0.44	0.28	0.09	1.00	0.44	0.28	0.09	0.13	0.17	0.33	0.05	0.33	0.13	0.17	0.33	0.05	0.33	0.05	0.33	4.58		
Hasan-II	0.44	0.51	0.05	0.19	1.00	0.87	0.56	0.23	1.00	0.87	0.56	0.23	0.00	0.33	0.06	0.14	0.16	0.00	0.33	0.06	0.14	0.16	0.06	0.16	4.54		
Salar	0.47	0.39	0.05	0.17	0.81	0.34	0.24	0.18	0.81	0.34	0.24	0.18	0.20	0.36	0.20	0.22	0.90	0.20	0.36	0.20	0.22	0.90	0.05	0.33	4.54		
Bautia	0.43	0.44	0.05	0.08	1.00	0.33	0.61	0.00	1.00	0.33	0.61	0.00	0.00	0.67	0.16	0.05	0.67	0.00	0.67	0.16	0.05	0.67	0.05	0.67	4.48		
Hantapar	0.21	0.16	0.21	0.06	1.00	0.49	0.39	0.25	1.00	0.49	0.39	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.67	0.34	0.67	0.00	0.00	0.67	0.34	0.67	0.06	0.67	4.46		
Kundala	0.62	0.48	0.16	0.16	0.83	0.54	0.33	0.09	0.83	0.54	0.33	0.09	0.00	0.36	0.18	0.08	0.50	0.00	0.36	0.18	0.08	0.50	0.05	0.50	4.33		
Jashohar	0.43	0.13	0.28	0.13	0.67	0.98	0.33	0.50	0.67	0.98	0.33	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.23	0.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.23	0.60	0.00	0.60	4.29		
Hartharp	0.50	0.20	0.35	0.08	0.20	0.54	0.40	0.20	0.20	0.54	0.40	0.20	0.15	0.57	0.03	0.24	0.60	0.15	0.57	0.03	0.24	0.60	0.05	0.60	4.06		
Bhadrapu	0.51	0.12	0.63	0.09	0.50	0.54	0.50	0.00	0.50	0.54	0.50	0.00	0.38	0.33	0.20	0.17	0.00	0.38	0.33	0.20	0.17	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.98		
Sanmatin	0.19	0.43	0.00	0.09	0.50	0.38	0.50	0.00	0.50	0.38	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.17	1.00	0.09	0.50	0.00	0.17	1.00	0.09	0.50	0.00	0.50	3.86		
Bhabanip	0.51	0.48	0.47	0.00	0.00	0.54	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.54	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.30	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.50	0.30	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	3.81		
Na-Hazar	0.52	0.56	0.05	0.03	0.16	0.33	0.33	0.08	0.16	0.33	0.33	0.08	0.00	0.50	0.28	0.08	0.85	0.00	0.50	0.28	0.08	0.85	0.05	0.85	3.77		
Swaruppu	0.43	0.30	0.58	0.06	0.33	0.98	0.22	0.17	0.33	0.98	0.22	0.17	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.09	0.33	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.09	0.33	0.05	0.33	3.69		
Lankapar	0.38	0.40	0.09	0.20	0.00	0.22	0.56	0.17	0.00	0.22	0.56	0.17	0.00	0.00	0.55	0.14	0.60	0.00	0.00	0.55	0.14	0.60	0.05	0.60	3.30		
Doulatab	0.56	0.38	0.09	0.05	0.75	0.14	0.25	0.25	0.75	0.14	0.25	0.25	0.19	0.00	0.20	0.03	0.25	0.19	0.00	0.20	0.03	0.25	0.05	0.25	3.07		
Lankapar	0.00	0.43	0.16	0.06	0.00	0.87	0.11	0.00	0.00	0.87	0.11	0.00	0.00	0.33	0.54	0.12	0.33	0.00	0.33	0.54	0.12	0.33	0.05	0.33	2.95		

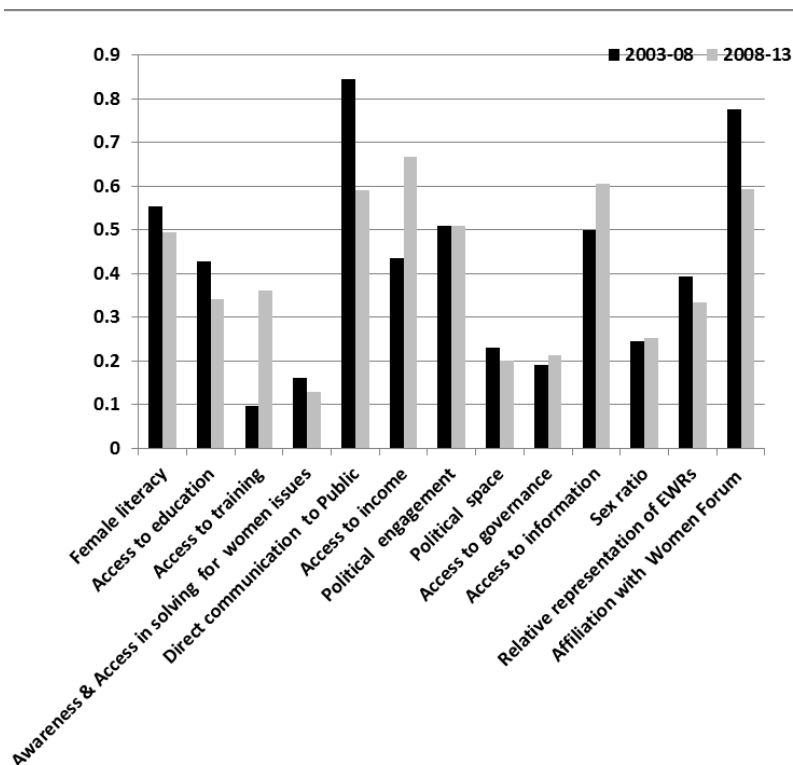
From Table 4 (a) & (b), it is clear that the average Women Empowerment Index (WEI) is 5.335. The WEI in the 2003-08 Board is 5.369 and

that of the 2008-13 Board is 5.296.

Figure 4 shows the change in the values of the variables over the last two Boards.

Figure 4

Percentage Change in Indicators of WEI during the Last Two Boards



From Chart 4, it is clear that the crucial variables behind women empowerment (according to magnitudes) in the 2003-08 periods were,

- i. direct communication to public (V5), and
- ii. affiliation with women's forum (V13).

And the crucial variables behind women empowerment (according to magnitudes) in 2008-13 periods were

- i. access to training (V3)
- ii. access to income (V6), and
- iii. access to information (V10).

In the case of public contact, EWRs of 2008-13

are lagging while women members of 2003-08 could reach more at the doorstep. The political environment after the Panchayat election of 2008 proved to be disempowering for those EWRs who were in power opposite to the ruling party.

Political engagement, political space, access to governance and sex ratio are somewhat the same over the two Boards. On the other hand, access to training, access to income and access to information are higher in the 2008-13 Board. Over the two Boards, 'freedom' in the field of social opportunities, economic facilities and transparency guarantees has increased but political freedom and protective security have come down as shown in the following Table 5.

Table 5
Inter-Board Change in the Components of Freedom

Types of Freedom	Changes during 2003-08 and 2008-13
A. Social opportunities	positive change > freedom increased
B. Economic facilities	positive change > freedom increased
C. Political freedoms	negative change > freedom restrained
D. Transparency guarantees	positive change > freedom increased
E. Protective security	negative change > freedom restrained

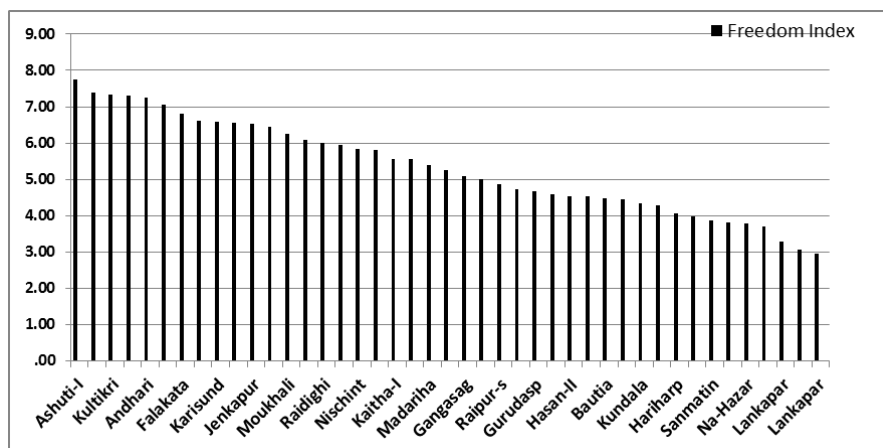
The number of women attached to women forums (mainly SHGs) has been comparatively less in 2008-13 due to rising political tensions and conflicts in the web of political transition. Secondly, in 2008-13 EWRs are from better income groups. Thus, they don't find much interest to be attached to SHGs for economic betterment.

Access to information has given more freedom to the EWRs of 2008-13. This credit largely goes to the P&RD Department, GoWB as they have started video conferencing, training through Distance Communication Channel, monthly magazine, mobile training van, etc., for women empowerment. But this opportunity was not available in 2003-08.

access to income has favoured women agencies of 2008-13 rather than in the previous period, but this advancement could not cover the gaps in female literacy and access to education of the EWRs. Despite less freedom in transparency, training and economic status, the women agency of 2003-08 gained better empowerment due to more freedom in social opportunities and protective security.

According to Women Empowerment Index based on 13 variables, 43 Gram Panchayats have been ranked and it has been found that out of the top ten (10) GPs, seven (7) are female-headed or all-women GPs. This has been portrayed in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Ranking of 43 Gram Panchayats on based of freedom of EWRs



Performance of the EWRs through Gram Panchayat Performance Index: The functioning of the EWRs of GPs in our sample has been assessed through Gram Panchayat Performance Index based on 14 parameters in respect of 6 types of assigned duties of EWRs of GP [Office

management, Finance management, Pro-poor service delivery, Social sector development, Economic development and Supervision & monitoring]. These parameters have been depicted in Table 6.

Table 6

Components of GPPI

S. No.	Role of the Elected Representatives	Indicator
1	Social Sector Development	1. Total literacy (V1) 2. Female literacy (V2) 3. Percentage of people accessing safe drinking water (V3) 4. Percentage of malnourished children (V4) 5. Percentage of villages covered by all-weather road (V5)
2	Pro-poor Service Delivery	6. Percentage of BPL Women covered under IAY (V6) 7. Percentage of BPL households getting GR (V7)
3	Financial Management	8. Rate of resource mobilisation (V8) 9. Per capita Tax collection (V9) 10. Percentage of funds utilised (V 10)
4	Economic Development	11. Average man-days created under MGNREGA (V11)
5	Office Management	12. Rate of functioning of Upasamiti (V12) 13. Percentage of Members attending Meeting (V13)
6	Monitoring and Supervision	14. Rate of Monitoring and supervision (V14)

Based on these 14 indicators, we have constructed the 602 indices (following the statistical method as mentioned in section 3.8) for the 43

Gram Panchayats and formed the performance index of each Gram Panchayat as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

GPPI of Male-headed, Female-headed and All-Women GPs

2008 - 2013			2003- 2008		
Name of GPs	Type of GPs	GPPI	Name of GPs	Type of GPs	GPPI
Amlagora	AW	9.198	Kultikri	AW	7.845
Kultikri	AW	8.582	Falakata-I	FH	7.410
Ashuti-II	FH	8.519	Karisunda	AW	7.221
Koior	AW	8.421	Jenkapur	AW	7.160
Kundala	FH	8.290	Moukhali	MH	6.997

Contd...

2008 - 2013			2003- 2008		
Name of GPs	Type of GPs	GPPI	Name of GPs	Type of GPs	GPPI
Bhabanipur	MH	8.174	Shyambazar	AW	6.822
Nalbona	AW	7.717	Andhari	AW	6.534
North Bawali	MH	7.635	Benachapra	AW	6.461
Koma	MH	7.628	Raipur-supur	FH	6.269
Birpara-1	MH	7.533	Jogardanga	AW	6.261
Rania	FH	7.332	Madhabdanga-I	MH	6.121
Sanmatinagar	MH	7.285	Gangasagar	FH	5.981
Nischintapur	MH	7.263	Na-Hazari	FH	5.978
Jashohari Anukha -II	FH	6.168	Gurudasapur	MH	5.679
Hariharpara	FH	6.113	Raidighi	MH	5.633
Swaruppur	MH	6.018	Madarihat	MH	5.576
Jhar Altagram-II	FH	5.278	Niallishpara-Goaljan	FH	5.482
Bhadrapur-II	MH	4.828	Salar	FH	5.464
Hantapara	FH	4.820	Hasan-II	MH	5.336
Lankapara	MH	2.622	Bautia	MH	5.238
Source: Computed, AW= All-Women, MH=Male-headed, FH=Female-headed			Doulatabad	MH	5.139
			Kaitha-I	FH	4.618
			Lankapara	FH	2.615

It is also clear from Table 7 that, out of the ten better-performing GPs in 2008-13 Board, seven (7) are women-headed GPs and three (3) are male-headed GPs and out of the top five (5) GPs, three (3) are All-Women GPs and two are female-headed GPs. In the 2003-08 Board, out of the top ten GPs, nine (9) were female-headed or All-Women GPs and only one (1) was male-headed GP.

Based on the GPPI, Table 8 shows that in 'social sector development', All-Women GPs perform the best (2.6509) and female-headed GPs perform better (2.4818) than the male-headed GPs (2.2257). In 'financial management', male-headed

GPs perform better than Women GPs (1.3725) than female-headed GPs (1.3073). But the performance of the All-Women GPs in this sector is the best (1.6521).

The scenario is the same in 'office management' and in 'monitoring and supervision'. But a different scenario in 'pro-poor service delivery' and in 'economic development' is found where male-headed GPs perform the best rather than All-Women and Female-headed GPs. However, among the three types of GPs, it has also been seen that the performance of All-women Gram Panchayats is the best.

Table 8*Sector-wise Performance Differentials among Three Categories of GPs*

Types of GP		Social sector development	Pro-poor service delivery	Financial Management	Economic development	Office management	Monitoring and Supervision
AW	Mean	2.6509	0.2608	1.6521	0.2673	1.7930	0.8506
	N	11	11	11	11	11	11
	Std. deviation	0.47192	0.34991	0.44951	0.13241	0.30162	0.14809
FH	Mean	2.4818	0.1763	1.3073	0.2881	1.2169	0.5411
	N	16	16	16	16	16	16
	Std. deviation	0.77404	0.31692	0.33722	0.23961	0.41523	0.31056
MH	Mean	2.2257	0.2729	1.3725	0.3228	1.3127	0.6535
	N	16	16	16	16	16	16
	Std. deviation	0.64730	0.34884	0.59483	0.27973	0.29064	0.29794
Total	Mean	2.4298	0.2339	1.4198	0.2957	1.3999	0.6621
	N	43	43	43	43	43	43
	Std. deviation	0.66810	0.33245	0.48466	0.23052	0.41174	0.29375

Source: Computed

It has also been found covering 43 GPs through the Pearson co-relation (2- tailed) test, that there is a strong correlation between the Women Empowerment Index, WEI and the overall Performance of the Gram Panchayats (GPPI) and the result has been 0.671. It helps to understand the conditions that increase the empowerment through women's internal development and creating an enabling environment for them will increase their capability to transfer their thinking into doing and hence will enhance their performance level.

Policy Implications

The study on 'Sen's Capability Approach & Women Empowerment in Governance' has unmistakably shown that given the opportunity and 'freedom', women can perform no less efficiently than men, even better sometimes, in grassroots governance. In all the three categories of GPs considered, women empowerment (WEI) has shown a positive and significant correlation (more so in all-women and female-headed GPs) with Gram Panchayat Performance (GPPI). However, it

is also clear from our study that there have been quite a few inbuilt 'pull' factors as well as the absence of some enabling factors that work together as constraints for greater empowerment of elected women representatives.

The policy implications of our study, based on findings, thus centre mainly around initiatives and measures that would go a long way in both enhancing the level of empowerment of EWRs and also increasing their effectiveness as Panchayat functionaries. Such needed initiatives assume a never-before significance in the background of a 50 per cent reservation of seats for women at all levels of PRI in the State, starting from the 2013 Panchayat election. Some of the issues and measures that need serious consideration by respective stakeholders are the following.

- i. Political parties nominating candidates should contemplate (a) younger women with at least secondary level education, (b) preferably good mix of fresh and experienced candidates and (c) candidates attached to women's forums, e.g. SHG.

- ii. As for training and capacity building of the EWRs, we suggest the following:
- The orientation should be at least twice a year at the GP level
 - The training modules should have more 'skill' and problem-solving (related to issues of GP functioning) components compared to the 'knowledge' component. Some inputs on leadership, interpersonal relationships, gender issues, conduct of meetings, planning, etc., should be part of the training course;
 - the contents and design of the training programmes should be region-specific, target group-specific and need-based as much as possible;
 - GP members, especially women members, should be trained at the GP/Block, with field-level exposures to make the training more specific to each target group.
 - Some experienced women Pradhans/Upapradhans should be inducted as trainers/counsellors for women members;
 - Parallel to the official training programmes (which are mostly one-time and much delayed), the district/ block should arrange training hiring resource persons from the training fund
 - There should be exposure visits and exposure talks by experts for EWRs in every Block
 - A crash course on functional literacy should be organized for the elected non-literate and neo-literate GP members
 - There should be a special cell at the Block level dedicated to counselling and support for women members in various sub-committees at the Gram Panchayat level and standing committees at the Panchayat Samiti levels
 - A dedicated helpline at the Block level will be very useful for the GP and PS members, especially for the EWRs
 - A news bulletin in the local language should be published by the department and distributed to all elected representatives.
- iii. It is essential to take initiative to form forums of EWRs at the State/district or block levels to help and empower EWRs through fruitful interactions, sharing of experiences and problems and lobbying at higher levels on professional issues.
- iv. The State Panchayat Act should be amended for granting EWRs to serve at least for a second term on a rotation basis.
- v. Some appropriate performance-grading systems should be introduced for all EWRs so that individual good work can be rewarded/recognised appropriately.
- These are only some of the needed initiatives towards greater empowerment and effective performance of EWRs of Gram Panchayats. Whatever the proportion of seats reserved for women in rural local governance, their participation will, by and large, remain symbolic and numerical unless they are adequately empowered and recognised by all other stakeholders, especially by the 'other half', as 'equal partners' in all senses of the term.

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