



*From Token Representation
to Women Leadership in Local Government
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)*

POLICY BRIEF

Lobbying & Advocacy for Women Leadership



Policy Brief



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The issue

Local government brings administration closer to communities and represents and engages citizens in decision making about specific local needs and delivery of services. It is an extension and nursery of democratization in all spheres of public life at the grassroots' level. For that to happen, full participation of citizens is ensured irrespective of race and gender in administration and government. Hence the principle of equity runs through the local government systems.

Women representation is also emphasized, it is argued, because men cannot fully represent women in the communities or might not be that sensitive and accessible to women citizens.¹

To attain above purposes a system of considerable quota for women councilors was introduced in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province. Amidst starting off its new tenure, it is now required that the system is revisited and to see that whether this has worked for local women representatives in KP.

The present policy paper is an effort for such an assessment and to present guidelines that, if advocated and adopted, their roles will be maximized. Its primary users are women councilors, aspiring candidates, the local governments and the activist youth who are sensitized to the need of increased participation and opportunities of women leadership at the local level.

The local government (LG) system of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is faced with a similar dilemma that other parts of the country are equally witnessing; in that, despite a sizable representation of women councilors at this grassroots level a change towards equality of roles in sharing of local power hasn't been observed.

¹ Dahlerup, Drude. "Quotas – A Jump to Equality? The Need for international Comparison of the Use of Electoral Quotas to obtain Equal Political Citizenship for Women", in The Implementation of Quotas: Asian Experiences, Quota Workshops Report series, no 1, Stockholm: International IDEA, 2002.

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There have been continued discussions, advocacy and lobbying efforts and support programmes to induct and prepare women in local government since the local government legislation in 2001 in terms of a women quota. The LGO 2001 opened windows of opportunity for women through the affirmative action of reserving 33 percent seats for women, 20 percent for peasants and workers and 1 seat for the minorities.²

The number of women representatives has certainly increased at the grassroots level, especially after the LG legislation 2013 and have spread across different tier of the LG system. In KP's case it's more so due to village and neighborhood councils the latest tenure of LG system in the province (2015-2019). This has the potential to increase women participation in local politics, opportunities of political training and the community women's access to the elected representatives.

In practice, however, the women representatives exercise little roles in decision making at the local government level especially when it comes to their share in development planning and budgetary provisions.

The token participation in local government is central issue of the present policy brief and as to how the situation can be transformed for inculcating women leadership roles in decision making at the local level. For functional purpose, the focus of the policy brief has been on perceptions and observations of the KP women representation during the last tenure.

The policy brief is largely informed by nine consultative sessions with women councilors, the local government officials and youth. Changes have been made in the latest LG legislation (May 2019) in the KP but till the elections and operations of the new LG regime in the longer run the substantive issues and qualitative benchmarks will remain the same despite quantitative variation in women representation in the LG system.

Women participation (quota) in the KP

There are various quotas for women councilors at all tiers of the KP LG system under the LG legislation 2013. The formula of women quota at different LG levels was as following:

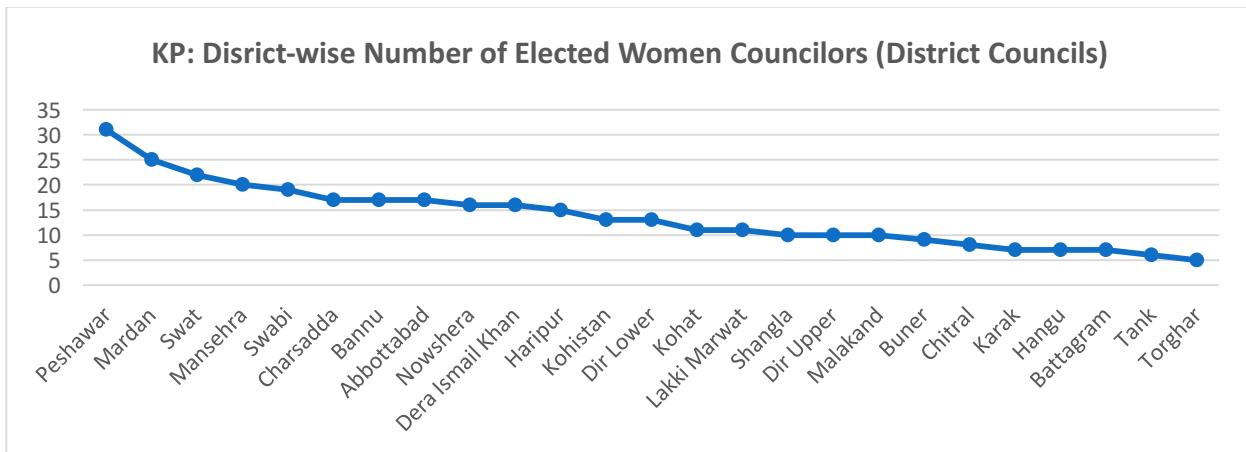
#	Level	Women Quota
1	District	20-24%
2	Tehsil/town	11-24%
3	Village/neighborhood	2 members

Within the district councils the number of elected women councilors, according to statistics of the Local Government, Elections and Rural Development Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP),

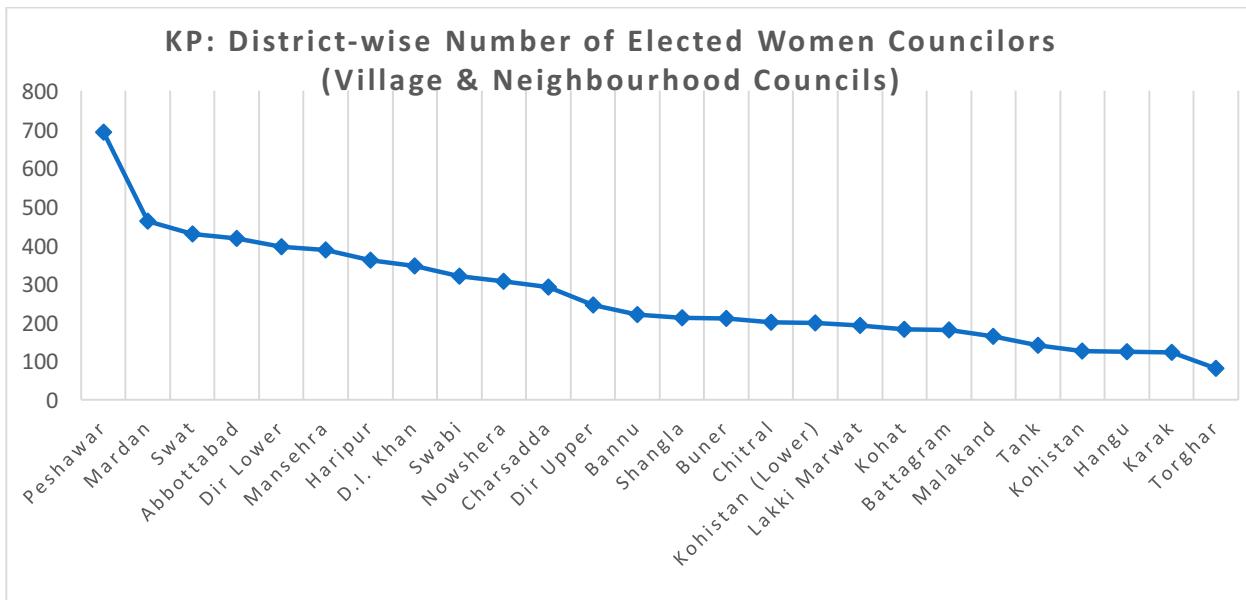
² National Commission on the Status of Women. "Study on Local Bodies System and its Impact on Women," Islamabad, November 2010.

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amounts to a total of 342 women councilors according to the LG records pertaining to 25 districts. Peshawer hosts the largest number with 31 district councilors followed by district Mardan (25), Swat (22), Mansehra (20) and Swabi (19). The lowest number of women district councilors are in Torghar (5), Tank (6), 7 each in Battagram, Hangu and Karak districts and Chitral (8) and Buner (9). The share of women councilors at the district councils is 22.21 percent of the total district councilors in KP. The line chart given ahead shows number of district women councilors in each district.



There were 2996 village councils and 505 neighbourhood councils with a total of 7002 elected women councilors in recorded 26 districts in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to data compiled, here also Peshawer district tops with a sum total of 692 women councilors of village and neighborhood councils. It is followed by district Mardan (462), Swat (428), Abbottabad (418) and Lower Dir (396). The lowest number of elected women councilors at this level are in districts Torghar (80), Tank (122), Battagram (124), Hangu (126) and Karak (140). The following chart shows number of elected women councilors of these two level in each district.



Status of women leadership in local government

Women empowerment has been a contested area of discussions among social and political activists, legal practitioners, academia, media and public intellectuals. However the voices for gender parity gained a considerable momentum in international policy and development environment the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. Its two agreed strategic objectives were to take measures for ensure women's equal access to full participation in power structures and decision-making, and to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership. This framework helped introducing women representation in the form of quotas in a big way globally. Some developing countries like Rwanda, Cuba, Bolivia and Mexico have especially shown significant progress. In our neighbouring countries, India has done well in women leadership in local government where the number of women councilors in three different levels is 25.6 percent for whole of the country.

The cultural and other barriers are constant between LG system and provincial and national assemblies, the difference lies in systemic support to women participation by practical measures i.e. women caucus, membership in standing committees, ministerial positions, etc, and position and competencies of women representatives.

When women representation goes further down the ladder in decision making at the local level, it shows steady progress in numerical terms but the elected women still are far from exercising power and their visibility in decision making is questionable. Apart from cultural issues of women public visibility, permission from families to participate in public forums and general discouragement this also pertains to less space given to women councilors in the LG system.

The elected women councilors in KP local government is a case as example. During consultations in district Peshawer, the women councilors are concerned that they are not duly functional and cannot fully participate in the annual development planning process. They informed that they were called on short notices to the annual development planning meetings and when there they are given documents and handouts these are written in English language which is inaccessible to them. Moreover, their election on reserved and non-constituency basis put them in a disadvantaged position. Even within the families, male members discourage them to participate in meetings and processions and most often they represent them in meetings. Their active participation in party politics is limited and results in poor quality, capacity of women councilors as regards to their abilities to use the LG framework. They are made part of different departmental committees but only as members. Men are chosen as executive members.

The women councilors further complain of rare approval of their proposed projects in the local assemblies mainly due to their role limited and elections on reserved seats.

Being closer to the grassroots, local government can maximize the benefits of women participation and leadership. Generally, it's assumed that the women councilors may change the role of local decision

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making and how business is run because they bring a different viewpoint than their male counterparts. They are more focused on human security approaches and services delivery.

There are researches available to establish that women “representatives place a priority on issues that concern women, families, and children (such as clean water, primary schools, health), while males prioritize financial and economic policy.”³ In that sense the women representatives are more inclined towards a welfare state so their active leadership roles are more likely to change focus of state institutions towards direct human needs.

Women representatives also place a higher value on getting things done for welfare of families. They are more accessible to and represent the unique concerns of women population which, despite its size, is otherwise neglected.

Policy guidelines for enhancing women leadership opportunities

Presently women representative are confronted with not only socio-political, ideological and cultural gaps but are also limited by system-wise lack of support to affirmative actions. There are no women-specific clauses in terms of functions and rules of business of the LG system mentioned. The system further ignores offering exclusive and leading roles to them in municipal functions. This is not to reduce their roles according to certain sexist stereotypes but to capitalize upon gender-specific social roles.

This situation is exacerbated by absence of hardly any bye-laws or guidelines, howsoever non-binding, to encourage women participation in a meaningful way and leadership roles in the LG system.

To transform roles of women councilors, they will have to be able to gain sense of empowerment, control over the resources and administrative and bureaucratic tiers, as well as their political ability to pursue political careers in a smooth way.

The women councilors are not only aware of their present status in the local government representative position but are prepared to take up active and meaningful participation and leadership tasks. In view of discussions and consultation with women councilors, the following policy guidelines are recommended for empowerment at the local government:

System-wide support

Women representatives will have to be empowered through elaboration of the LG framework and making subsequent guidelines. This can be done by women-friendly distribution of work in all type of LG function and making women representatives responsible for relevant LG functions, i.e health and hygiene, WASH, girls Education, family dispute resolution, price control, etc., due to reasons of women experiential proximity.

³ Hassan, Amina, and Shandana Khan Mohmand. 2008. "Gender and devolution." In Devolution and governance: reforms in Pakistan, by Syed Mubashir Ali and Muhammad Amjad Saqib, 237-273. Oxford University Press: Oxford University Press.

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This will also have to be ensured that they are part of any relevant decision making forums and the system mandates gender balance on committees and department specific bodies as executive members in order to involve them in local decision-making. All departmental committees should be gender balanced with ensuring at least 2 women in each committee.

Presence of women councilors should be ensured in the meetings relating to the drafting of Annual Development Plan (ADP).

A code of conduct has to be followed to prohibit gender stereotyping in business of the local government.

Access to timely information on local government meetings and agendas to women can be another measure in the direction of supporting affirmative actions in the local government. There is need that written material is provided in Urdu. At present, the budget document and all written material is drafted and shared only in English which is tough to understand by most of the women councilors.

A portion of projects has to be allocated to women councilors. It is needed that the development projects are designed in consultation with women councilors and priority should be given to those initiatives which have long-term impact and are sustainable. In the current circumstances they are actually told that they are on reserved seats so they need not have these projects. The women councilors while sharing this were quite uncomfortable about this non-allocation of projects. The LG officials attributed this to capacity of the women councilors.

Training and capacity

- A training need assessment should be done with women councilors for understanding their issues according to the ground realities of their areas.
- Training material should be developed on bye-laws and rules of business of the councils so that women can access information on their potential leading roles. Currently the emphasis is more on general information about the LG legislation and structures.
- Women councilors should be linked with civil society organizations CSOs for different capacity building trainings and activities.
- Training of women councilors should be more on operational and functional roles of the LG representatives rather than mere about theoretical description of KPLGA.
- Leadership training for taking up political and leadership positions (not just capacity to know the LG structures) should be carried out.
- Committee members should be specifically trained according to the objectives of their committees.
- Women councilors should be given orientation about updated KPLGA after amendment.

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- Training topics should also include material on women empowerment, primary and girls education and WASH and health hygiene issues.
- Training manuals, already in use, should be updated and all material relating to the local government department should be published bilingual.

Furthermore, there is a need that male councilors and officials are trained in gender sensitive governance so that conducive environment for efficient working of women councilors is facilitated. Interactions of women councilors with female students of local schools and colleges will additionally encourage youth led campaigns on social issues, on the one hand, and will promote youth volunteerism for gender equality in the local areas.

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BARGAD is a youth organization to promote peace, justice and cooperation among youth in Pakistan. It has a long and unique standing among civil society in Pakistan having worked exclusively on youth development since 1997, when it was founded. With a large youth volunteers base throughout the country including Punjab, Bargad has implemented more than 100 short and long term projects in collaboration with various national and international development agencies of repute on youth training, mobilization and policy including provision of technical assistance to all the provincial governments of Pakistan, and regions of Gilgit-Baltistan and the State of Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) for formulation and implementation of their respective youth policies.

This policy brief has been developed within framework of the project, “Lobbying and Advocacy for Women Leadership” (LAWL) implemented by Bargad a youth development forum to promote peace, justice and cooperation among youth in Pakistan. The LAWL project contributes to women empowerment by way of advocating and strengthening representative roles of women councilors in the local government.

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