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REVIEW ARTICLE

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION FOR PARTICIPATION – THE POWER OF EDUCATION

The Role of Education for Participation – The Power of Education

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CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMMES AND NGOS

One way to overcome the problems of 'proxy' women is, according to Dahlerup and Freidenvall, massive capacity-building and support from women's organizations. The capacity building trainings aim to educate women about their rights and help them to become more equal. The basic approach would be to give women confidence and bring out an awareness of their own potential for development as well as their rights and privileges. Already in 1985 at the World Conference of the UN in Nairobi it was stated that NGOs and the governmental education of women about their civil, political and social rights is one of the most important ways of rising consciousness, but also the need for a quota system. Education is a powerful tool in the way of empowering women. During my time in the field I could see that education enables women to gain more knowledge about the world outside of their heart and home, increase their skills and help them to get status-giving employment – all of which will develop their personalities.

Training over a half million Panchayats members in the state, a majority of whom are poor, uneducated and helpless, is a task that is enormous in its magnitude and complexity. NGOs have a key role in generating awareness and mobilizing the people. Haryana has a large number of NGO and the capacity building training is very different among all of them offering it, but most have the same goal; to help get women become more self confident and to give them more knowledge about their role as Panchayats members. Some NGOs have training for women only and some have a mixed stream for both women and men. This is a direct result of feedback they have had, explaining that some women prefer to be trained in mixed groups. Men also need training in broad gender issues as the women need to be accepted by the male members and the chairmen. Training for both sexes is also the conclusion of many evaluations the NGOs have done themselves. Previous empirical research on the subject also argues that only training for female members will not give any great change in the roles and functions of the female members as one must also

change the male members' attitudes. One of the NGOs told me that this had been a problem and that they now provide training for both male and female members. They said "we hope that by running training programs for both sexes we can maximize the help and support we are giving to women, as well as introduce men to the valuable work which we are doing." Several NGOs describe another problem; the students have very different backgrounds, conditions and levels of ambition. Many of them need to take a big responsibility in their homes. Some students are difficult to motivate while others have high ambitions. It makes it harder to educate when their participants have so different ambitions.

The program offers different parts; i.e. the influential woman candidate that provides the opportunity to share experiences with other women candidates and will cover topics such as communication skills, team-building work, assertiveness for women and campaigning skills. Most of the programs focus on: understanding local self-governance, democratic values, gender issues, leadership development, financial management etc.

For the illiterate women the education has to start on a more basic level – teach them how to read and write. During my time in the field I could see how NGOs help Haryana women to get empowered by helping them in many different fields; i.e. to become more economically independent, better health and work against illiteracy. This has also helped the women to get a higher self-confidence. According to Shirini M. Rai, as said before, there is no use in working to get more women in politics if they have no economical support. Several of the NGOs and capacity building helps women to become more economically independent and also emphasis the need of independents. The NGOs I visited provide education and a few organizations had also focused on job training; if women can earn their own money they will become more equal. Therefore all the sample organizations contribute to the improvement of women's living standards. In other words - they promote the economic, social and cultural rights of one vulnerable minority in the Haryana society. The

political context of Haryanan economic, social and cultural rights has a democratic relevance. If these rights are provided and defended it gives the citizens, in this case the women, the possibility to participate in the society. Education and job training are all crucial needs of the disabled and a precondition for integration into the community. Furthermore, it is argued that these so-called positive rights are a precondition for civil and political rights. By adopting replicable and sustainable strategies that could bring about large-scale impact to improve the lives of poor women and their families, these NGOs have offered a realistic vision to other agencies involved in women development.

One NGO has gone even further than educating only women and men and had capacity building for children as well, where they learn how it works. In these Panchayats 50 % are women and 50 % men. "Because children is the tomorrow and in the future we want to see 50/50 in the Panchayats", said the NGO representative I interviewed. Some of the NGOs actually recruit women to the Panchayats. First they have a capacity building program for all the women that wanted in the village and then later the women themselves choose their representative to the real Panchayat. It is not only NGOs that offer training, some parties are also running training sessions, and they also have the same program focus and goals. The parties in Haryana also started to care about the female candidate because they realized that they needed them not to lose places in the Panchayat.

During my time in the field I noticed that NGOs could also act like a watchdog of the Panchayats to see that women really get a saying in the decision making process. The women's movement and network of NGOs that have strong grassroots presence and deep insight in women's concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women and helped women to get a place in local politics. Women don't need just a couple of days training, they need long-term support and in order to give them that is why it is important that the NGOs offer education, but also, that government and Panchayats cooperate. With 33 % reserved seats for women this gave them the initial trust – the so-called critical mass that was enough to sustain and give momentum for the rest of the movement. Women are no longer an exception in Haryanan local politics; they still are a minority but a minority that counts. Women still have barriers to overcome but with training this traditional power structure can be broken.

THE INTERVIEWED – RAISING VOICES

I wanted to learn more about the participants in the capacity building programs; their thought about the project, change and opportunities that the reserved seats and capacity building programs might have given them - about their reality, to get the answers I did a field study. Out of the women I interviewed some of them had gotten training from several NGOs. One

woman had gotten training from three different NGOs. Even so, all of them expressed that they wanted more training. Several of the women also said that they would not have run in the election if there had been no reserved seats for them. Experience of women found high levels of stress and suggested that many women might not stand for election again. Of the women that I interviewed, two had run for re-election more than one time and one of them was re-elected again, because there was no other female candidate. The woman that was not re-elected told me that she was not re-elected because the men knew that she after one term and being in the capacity building program knew her rights and was not going to be a proxy if she got elected again. The other women told me that they had all kinds of bad experiences and that they felt that women didn't have any say in the Panchayat. To run for election again, the system first needs to be change in many ways. Caste and religion is important in Haryana. Some of the women that were Panchayat members said that because of their political position they have been able to help their families and caste. Many of the women say that because of their gender and the social structure they are often excluded from politics on all levels. One woman said that she is just acting as a stand in for her husband. He knew that he would never have won a seat on local level, so he forced her to be a candidate. Now he has taken over her seat. She says that it is hard to prove because her name is on all the official documents but he is the one that makes all the decisions and goes to the meetings. She also said that the interview I did was the first interview with her, other interviews have been made with her husband; even when she won the election he was the one that had been answering all the interviews. The interview I did with this woman was also the most emotional one; I came to the village and was going to interview a woman by the name Pinkey but instead of a woman coming to meet me a man showed up. After some time I understood that he is the husband. He said that I should do the interview with him because his wife did not know anything about politics and that he always went to the meetings. He told me that if I didn't want to do the interview with him there would be no interview, I said that in that case there would be no interview and after a long and harsh discussion between the husband and my interpreter he let me do the interview with his wife. She was so happy and told me that this was the first time someone asked her something about the capacity training and her time as a politician. She was crying during the whole interview, happy-tears she called them. Another woman said that she has support from her family and that her husband now helps out more with the housework so she has been able by entering politics to transform her family and today her husband and she are more equal partners. Her husband gives her more respect. It all sounded so great that I was wondering if it was true, and she soon looked sad and told me that she is discriminated by the men who are panchayat members. So she might have changed her family but to be equal in the Panchayat

and as an equal citizen in Haryana she still has a long way to go and many barriers need to be broken.

One woman that had been involved in politics for many years and had been working for a party said that she never dreamed about being able to be elected during her lifetime. She now hopes that more women will get involved in politics and she said that she had got great self-esteem after the training. Her status has changed both in her own family but also in the village, she said that a woman in Panchayat has a higher status in other. In some cases the women's self esteem has grown during the interviews and since this is the first time they can speak so openly about their experiences in local politics and how important their work is – their ability to help the people in the village. A question that I was interested in was; is there a female political agenda? The answer is yes, in almost all the cases women said that the most important on the political agenda is improvement in education, health, drinking water and employment opportunities for women. Looking at official documents it is possible to see that these questions has been more on the agenda these last years since women have receive more place in the Panchayats than before. Men don't talk about women's problems and the importance of things we bring up on the political agenda said one woman, "so we have to learn to make demands for ourselves and bring these up on the agenda". Most of the women, all except one, said that they had the support of their families. This is not so strange; most of the women are actually proxies that have taken their husbands or father in laws place. Many men have lost their own site since the reserved seats for women. To let women in the family run in the election is one way to keep the post in the family. I asked the women in all categories whom they represented, most of the women told me that they represent the poor people of their ward. Some women were open about the fact that they, apart from representing their ward, they also represented their families. Others said that they used to do so but after getting the training now became more independent. Only one woman told me that she only represented her husband and relatives, she had only attended one meeting during her five years term. One of the villages that I visited was really a fine example of women empowerment. As a result of women becoming active members of Panchayats many problems in the village have been solved, today several problems concerning healthcare and school are solved. Women have started to work. They got material from the NGO and they make clothes from it that they sell and they pay back the NGO for the material but all the rest of the money they make they get to keep and this is a great way for them to become more economically independent. Along with the economic development of the village, the women of the village have also occupied a respectable position in the society.

With capacity building programs all over Haryana this program has succeeded in attracting women in over thousand programs. These women learn to increase their awareness, become active in politics, and acquire the self-esteem needed to dare to demand and influence. Many of the women worked per wishes of their guardians, but after being in the program they learned the importance of their role and one woman told me that she had been voting against her husband's wish several times after getting education.

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