

Women's representation in Assam Legislative Assembly Enhancing Gender Equality: Its Prospect and Challenges

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Abstract:

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encompasses seventeen goals for international growth and development in all sectors globally. Among those goals gender equality under goal no. 5 deals with the contribution of women or girls around the world who are leading the charge on climate change, decision making process in terms of participation and representation in political domain, mitigation, and response, to build a more sustainable future for all. Interestingly, women's political participation is an emerging issue that is highly responsible for balanced growth and development. Politics has been defined as the art of acquiring and exercising, the power to effectively influence the decision-making processes and policies, to reverse the existing situation whenever they are disadvantageous and to bring about the necessary social changes. The present paper is concerned with the participation of women in Assam Legislative Assembly for enabling women development in the political field. The objective of the paper is to find out the opportunities of women in decision making process in Assam Legislative Assembly. It also investigates the challenges faced by women in participating in politics. The research is carried out on the existing facts and literature available in this area of study so far. The findings of the research show that opportunities are increasing for empowering women in comparison to earlier study. Yet, it is found that these are not sufficient enough to sustainable growth of women globally.

Keywords: SDGs, gender equality, women participation, Assam Legislative Assembly.

Introduction:

The term Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Gender equality is one of the important prerequisites for enhancing sustainable development in the society globally, nationally, and locally. SDGs encompasses seventeen goals for international growth and development in all sector globally. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development (SDGs) includes a specific goal to achieve gender equality, which

purposes to end discrimination and violence against women and girls and ensure equal participation.

A nation is marked as progressive and successful if it is able to provide equal status and opportunities to all its citizen irrespective of caste, creed, class sex etc. Women are the most important part of the society who constitute almost half of the population in the world, yet their participation in the formal political structures and in the political processes is very insignificant. Women are socialized to take the responsibility of the household work at first, economic function in second and their role in politics remains in the periphery. For the progress of every society importance of women is essential, but irrespective of the fact they are considered as weak and vulnerable in the society.

Political participation Enhancing SDGs:

Political participation of women is also one of the key factors for achieving sustainable development at the global and national and local level. Women's equivalent participation in political actions plays a crucial role in the development of the country's political system. Adequate representation in representative bodies is very important for women's empowerment in the political process, and reservation /affirmative action is being seen as the most effective strategy. Democracy becomes successful only with the equal political participation of both men and women of the society. Political participation of women is considered very important in the political process of a nation. Women's representation and participation in the active political structure and process have been very low and insignificant though they constitute half of the total population. Lack of space for Political participation and representation in political bodies has not only resulted in their presence in inadequate numbers in decision making bodies but also in the neglect of their issues and experiences in policy making. The present world has become more sensitive towards the political empowerment of women. But the irony is that till today women all over the world do not have equal access to politics with that of their male counterpart. The 20th century has brought great changes in the lives women all over the world influencing their values and inspiration, ways of living and effective participation in every sphere of life. The search for women equality with men has become a world-wide phenomenon.

Objectives of the study:

- To study the opportunities of women in decision making process enhancing gender equality leading to sustainable development.
- To study the challenges faced by women in participating in politics.

Methodology:

The present study is analytical and descriptive in nature. The study is based on secondary sources such as books, published journals, websites etc.

Women participation and representation in Assam legislative Assembly:

Assam is one of the important parts of India. Though in Assam women enjoy equal status and dignity with men then many other parts of India but still there is a strong breach between men and women regarding their participation in the political domain. Women's participation in the context of Assam are still fighting for their survival and participation level is very low in spite of having a pride history. Despite having a glorious history, woman in Assam could not occupy a good position in decision making process and leading role in the party politics of Assam. The Representation of women at the central and the state level is quite average in comparison to the male. Their participation in the Lok Sabha and Assam Legislative Election is not at all satisfactory compared to the male political participation. There is always a male domination in party politics, the women representation is very few in decision making process, and the few who get represented are mainly due to hereditary, family dynasty or male political patronage. Political parties do not provide specific support to women candidates. Even if they get the tickets, it is on the basis of compassionate ground rather than their capabilities. Women in huge numbers from Assam participated in the freedom struggle against the British government. Kanak Lata Baruah, Bhogeswari Phukanani, Chandra Prabha Saikiani, Guneswari Devi, Kiran Bala Bora and several others who took active part in India's freedom movement and sacrificed their lives courageously for the cause of the country.

Women have been historically underrepresented in the state legislative assembly. The proportion of women MLA's has hovered anywhere between 1% and 5% for 50 years between 1952 and 2001. Late Usha Barthakur was the first women MLA from Samaguri constituency in the first election in 1952. In some year such as 1957 and 1978, only one woman was elected in that election has been on a constant decline, with the lowest number elected in 2001.

Percentage of Elected women in Assam Legislative Assembly since 1985:

Sl No	(Year)	Total No of Elected Representative	No of Elected women	Percentage (%)
1.	1985	126	4	3.17
2.	1991	126	5	3.97
3.	1996	126	6	4.76
4.	2001	126	10	7.94
5.	2006	126	13	10.32
6.	2011	126	14	11.90
7.	2016	126	8	6.34
8.	2021	126	6	4.76

Source: Election Commission of India: www.eci.nic.in

Challenges faced by women in participating in politics:

- Patriarchal society is considered as one of the challenges faced by women in political participation. Male member did not want to give equal rights to women in Political field.
- Discrimination continues to be a barrier to women's political participation. Unlike men, there are fewer opportunities for women to get involved in organizations to gain leadership skills.
- Women are considered fit for household & agriculture activities rather than involvement in politics.
- Narrowmindedness of the society or family member is also for not allowing women to take part in active politics.
- It is a general view that women are physically & mentally weaker than male. So, they cannot take quick decision in times of problem.

Findings and suggestion for Enhancing sustainable Development:

- Women are poorly represented in the political office in Assam. They do not get the equal opportunities as the male member of the society get.
- Women are underrepresented in the parliamentary politics worldwide though they constitute half of the world population.
- Gender gap in the political domain is one of the factors responsible for less representation of women in Assam Legislative Assembly.
- Gender role attitudes of our society, the voter also show lower level of support to the women candidates in the election process.
- Party leaders who basically do the selection process of politician, prefer male candidates rather than female candidates to contest election.

Suggestions:

- Proper Political Education should be given to all women so that they can know about their rights.
- To pass women reservation bill in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha ensuring political protection and empowerment.
- Establishing mechanism to facilitate consideration of women candidates in appointments to senior positions in governments and public sector boards and agencies.
- Attitude towards women should be changed.
- Motivation is essential to uplift position of women politics.
- Promote awareness and support for the goal of gender equality among decision-makers through public awareness, campaign etc.
- Ticket should be provided to women so that they can take active part in decision making.

- Strengthening legal system aimed at elimination of all form of discrimination against women.
- The society also has a very important role to play and create an environment where discrimination of women can be reduced and equal opportunities can be ensured for the women to participate in social, political, and economic life of the country.

Conclusion:

The papers try to highlights that women participation in politics is very dissatisfactory. Women faces a lot of challenges to achieve the SDGs goal 5 which is concerned with gender equality enhancing the sustainable development in the society Though there are many reservations and constitutional provision for women, all these are not sufficient for empowerment of women or active participation of decision making. Their participation in national as well as state level is very dissatisfactory. Women's' presence at the decision-making level will bring a different, explicitly women's perspective to the political arena

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