

Research Article**Women's Participation in Public Policy: A Study of Mulugu District, Telangana****SADUVELLY MAHESH SAI KIRAN**

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Corresponding Author: SADUVELLY MAHESH SAI KIRAN.**Abstract**

Women's participation in public policy is essential for promoting gender equality, inclusive development, and democratic governance. The present study examines women's participation in public policy and local governance in Mulugu district, Telangana, with particular attention to policy awareness, participation in Gram Sabha meetings, family influence, decision-making autonomy, and barriers to political involvement. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, using primary data collected from 60 respondents through a structured questionnaire and purposive sampling. The findings reveal that 53.3 per cent of respondents have low or very low awareness of public policies, while 66.7 per cent report low or very low participation in policy formulation. Similarly, 66.7 per cent experience low or very low decision-making autonomy. Furthermore, 38.3 per cent indicate that family members usually make political decisions on their behalf. Family pressure, inadequate policy awareness, and limited administrative knowledge emerge as major barriers. The study recommends leadership training, awareness programs, direct access to administrative officials, and measures to prevent proxy decision-making. It concludes that strengthening women's independent participation is essential for responsive public policy, accountable local institutions, and inclusive rural development.

Keywords: Women's Participation, Public Policy, Local Governance, Decision-Making Autonomy, Gram Sabha, Gender Equality etc.

Introduction:

Women's participation in public policy is an essential component of democratic governance, social justice, gender equality, and inclusive development. A democratic system becomes more representative and responsive when women participate actively in political institutions and contribute to decisions affecting the social, economic, and political life of society. Women play a significant role in agriculture, household management, education, healthcare, community development, and local economic activities. Their experiences and perspectives can help public institutions identify community needs and formulate policies that respond to the concerns of different social groups. Participation in public policy provides women with opportunities to express their views, influence development priorities, monitor government programmes, and hold public representatives and administrative institutions accountable. Therefore, women's participation should not be limited to voting or occupying elected positions; it should also include their meaningful involvement in policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation.

Despite their contributions to society, women have historically faced several social, economic, cultural, and institutional barriers that have restricted their participation in political decision-making. Patriarchal attitudes, gender-based divisions of labour, unequal access to education, financial dependence, domestic responsibilities, and limited exposure to political institutions can affect women's opportunities to exercise leadership. In some communities, political leadership is traditionally perceived as a male responsibility, while women are expected to concentrate primarily on household and family responsibilities. Such expectations may influence women's access to political networks, administrative information, financial resources, and decision-making forums. Addressing these barriers requires more than providing formal political opportunities. It also requires strengthening women's capabilities, improving institutional support,

promoting gender-sensitive public administration, and creating a social environment in which women can participate confidently and independently in public affairs.

In India, constitutional provisions and decentralisation reforms have created important opportunities for women's participation in local governance. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, established a constitutional framework for Panchayati Raj Institutions and introduced provisions for women's representation in rural local government. Article 243D of the Constitution provides for the reservation of not less than one-third of seats for women in Panchayats, including seats reserved for women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Telangana has adopted 50 per cent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, expanding opportunities for women to become Sarpanches, ward members, and other elected representatives. This institutional arrangement is intended to improve women's representation and encourage their participation in local development decisions. Reservation can also create opportunities for women from rural, tribal, economically disadvantaged, and socially marginalised communities to enter formal political institutions and contribute to democratic governance.

The significance of women's representation extends beyond increasing their numerical presence in elected bodies. Women representatives can contribute to identifying local development priorities, strengthening the delivery of welfare programmes, improving public services, and addressing problems that may receive insufficient attention in male-dominated decision-making structures. Their participation can bring greater attention to drinking water, sanitation, maternal and child health, education, nutrition, livelihood opportunities, public safety, and access to social security programmes. Women's representation may also encourage other women to participate in Gram Sabha meetings, community organisations, and local development initiatives. Nevertheless, the extent to which these benefits emerge depends on the capacity of elected representatives to exercise their responsibilities, access relevant information, communicate with administrative officials, and influence decisions concerning public resources. Reservation provides an institutional opportunity, but the actual outcomes depend on how effectively that opportunity is translated into substantive participation.

Review of Literature:

Bhardwaj (2024), in her article *Improving Governance Outcomes: The Dynamic Role of Women in Public Policy* examined the contribution of women to public policy development, governance, and social change. The article discussed women working in areas such as rural development, education, healthcare, financial inclusion, technology, and environmental governance. It highlighted the contributions of grassroots organisations and women policy professionals in promoting inclusive development and strengthening civic engagement. The author also identified barriers such as gender bias, limited access to resources, and institutional inequalities that may restrict women's leadership and decision-making opportunities. The article emphasised that women's participation should extend beyond symbolic representation to meaningful involvement in policy formulation and implementation. This discussion is relevant to the present study because it provides a broader conceptual understanding of women's participation in public policy.

Kumari, Nanduri, Sharma, and Batar (2024), in their article *Women in Politics: Examining Their Impact on Policy Development—A Comprehensive Review*, examined women's political representation and its implications for public policy development. The authors discussed the influence of women's participation on policy formulation, public service delivery, institutional quality, and social change. The review identified gender prejudice, unequal educational opportunities, patriarchal social structures, limited institutional support, and male-dominated political systems as important barriers to women's political participation. It also highlighted the potential contribution of women leaders to policies concerning health, education, and public welfare. The authors emphasised the need to strengthen women's representation and address structural inequalities that restrict their involvement in decision-making.

Objectives:

1. To examine women's participation in public policy formulation and local development decision-making in Mulugu district, Telangana.

2. To analyse the influence of family members on the decision-making autonomy of elected women representatives.
3. To identify barriers to women's independent political participation and suggest measures to strengthen their role in public policy.

Research Methodology:

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine women's participation in public policy in Mulugu district, Telangana. Primary data will be collected from 60 respondents in selected villages using purposive sampling and a structured questionnaire. The study focuses on women's participation in local governance, family influence on decision-making, and barriers to independent political participation. Secondary data will be gathered from books, research articles, government reports, and official publications. The collected data will be analysed using frequencies, percentages, cross-tabulations, and appropriate statistical tests to examine relationships between family influence, policy awareness, and decision-making autonomy.

Data Tabulation and Analysis:

Table-1. Age-wise Distribution of Respondents:

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
18-30 years	12	20.0
31-40 years	20	33.3
41-50 years	16	26.7
Above 50 years	12	20.0
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field data

The table presents the age-wise distribution of 60 respondents selected for the study on women's participation in public policy at the rural level in Mulugu district, Telangana. The data indicate that the largest proportion of respondents, 33.3 per cent (20), belongs to the 31-40 years age group, followed by 26.7 per cent (16) in the 41-50 years category. Respondents aged 18-30 years and those above 50 years each account for 20 per cent (12). The distribution indicates that respondents from different age groups are represented in the study.

Table-2: Educational Status of Respondents

Educational status	Frequency	Percentage
No formal education	10	16.7
Primary education	14	23.3
Secondary education	18	30.0
Intermediate	10	16.7
Degree and above	8	13.3
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field data

The table presents the educational status of 60 respondents participating in the study on women's participation in public policy in Mulugu district, Telangana. The data reveal that the largest proportion of respondents, 30 per cent (18), have completed secondary education, followed by 23.3 per cent (14) with primary education. Respondents with no formal education and those who completed intermediate education each account for 16.7 per cent (10). Only 13.3 per cent (8) have a degree or higher qualification. The findings indicate variations in the educational background of the respondents, with a considerable proportion having education up to the secondary level or below.

Table 3. Occupational Status of Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture	12	20.0
Daily wage labour	18	30.0
Self-employment	10	16.7
Salaried employment	8	13.3
Homemakers	12	20.0

Total	60	100.0
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Source: Field data

The table presents the occupational status of 60 respondents included in the study on women's participation in public policy in Mulugu district, Telangana. The data reveal that the largest proportion of respondents, 30 per cent (18), are engaged in daily wage labour, followed by those involved in agriculture and homemaking, each accounting for 20 per cent (12). Self-employed respondents constitute 16.7 per cent (10), while 13.3 per cent (8) are engaged in salaried employment. These findings indicate that the respondents represent diverse occupational backgrounds, with daily wage labour forming the largest category. Occupational conditions may influence women's ability to attend Gram Sabha meetings, participate in village development discussions, and engage with local governance institutions.

Table 4. Awareness of Public Policies and Local Governance

Level of awareness	Frequency	Percentage
High	12	20.0
Moderate	16	26.7
Low	24	40.0
Very low	8	13.3
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field data

The table presents the level of awareness of public policies and local governance among 60 respondents in Mulugu district, Telangana. The data reveal that 40 per cent (24) of respondents have low awareness, while 26.7 per cent (16) possess moderate awareness. Only 20 per cent (12) demonstrate high awareness, and the remaining 13.3 per cent (8) report very low awareness. Overall, 53.3 per cent of respondents fall into the low or very low awareness categories, indicating a potential gap in understanding public policies and local governance processes.

Table 5. Participation in Gram Sabha Meetings:

Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Regularly	18	30.0
Occasionally	22	36.7
Rarely	14	23.3
Never	6	10.0
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field data

The table presents the participation of 60 respondents in Gram Sabha meetings in Mulugu district, Telangana. The data indicate that 36.7 per cent (22) of respondents participate occasionally, while 30 per cent (18) attend meetings regularly. A further 23.3 per cent (14) participate rarely, and 10 per cent (6) have never attended a Gram Sabha meeting. Thus, 53.3 per cent of respondents participate only occasionally or rarely, or do not participate at all, indicating scope for improving consistent public engagement. Gram Sabha meetings provide an important platform for discussing village development priorities, identifying beneficiaries for welfare schemes, and expressing community needs. Irregular participation may limit women's opportunities to influence local planning and public expenditure decisions.

Table 6. Level of Participation in Public Policy Formulation

Level of participation	Frequency	Percentage
High	12	20.0
Moderate	08	13.3
Low	22	36.7
Very low	18	30.0
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field data

The table examines the level of participation of 60 respondents in public policy formulation in Mulugu district, Telangana. The findings reveal that 36.7 per cent (22) of respondents report low participation, while 30 per cent (18) indicate very low participation. Meanwhile, 20 per cent (12) demonstrate high participation, and 13.3 per cent (8) report moderate participation. Overall, 66.7 per cent of respondents fall within the low or very low participation categories, suggesting that many women may have limited involvement in identifying village development priorities and influencing local policy decisions.

Table-7. Influence of Family Members on Political Decisions

Nature of family influence	Frequency	Percentage
No family influence	05	8.3
Supportive advice	07	11.7
Joint decision-making	20	33.3
Considerable influence	05	8.3
Family usually decides on their behalf	23	38.3
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field data

The table examines the influence of family members on the political decisions of 60 respondents in Mulugu district, Telangana. The findings indicate that the largest proportion, 38.3 per cent (23), report that family members usually make political decisions on their behalf. Joint decision-making accounts for 33.3 per cent (20), while 11.7 per cent (7) receive supportive advice from family members. A further 8.3 per cent (5) report considerable family influence, whereas another 8.3 per cent (5) indicate no family influence. These findings suggest that family involvement plays an important role in women's political decision-making.

Table 8. Decision-Making Autonomy of Respondents

Level of autonomy	Frequency	Percentage
High	14	23.3
Moderate	06	10.0
Low	16	26.7
Very low	24	40.0
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field data

The table presents the level of decision-making autonomy among 60 respondents in Mulugu district, Telangana. The findings reveal that 40 per cent (24) of respondents report very low autonomy, while 26.7 per cent (16) indicate low autonomy. In contrast, 23.3 per cent (14) experience a high level of autonomy, and only 10 per cent (6) report moderate autonomy. Overall, 66.7 per cent of respondents fall within the low or very low autonomy categories, suggesting that many women may face constraints in making independent political decisions and influencing local development priorities.

Table 9. Major Barriers to Women's Participation in Public Policy

Major barrier	Frequency	Percentage
Family pressure or control	14	23.3
Lack of policy awareness	12	20.0
Limited administrative knowledge	10	16.7
Financial dependence	8	13.3
Domestic responsibilities	9	15.0
Social and cultural restrictions	7	11.7
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field data

The table presents the major barriers to women's participation in public policy among 60 respondents in Mulugu district, Telangana. The findings reveal that family pressure or control is the most frequently reported barrier, accounting for 23.3 per cent (14) of respondents. Lack of policy awareness is identified by 20 per cent (12), followed by limited administrative knowledge at 16.7 per cent (10). Domestic responsibilities account for 15 per cent (9), while financial dependence is reported by 13.3 per cent (8). Social and cultural restrictions are identified by 11.7 per cent (7). These findings indicate that women's participation may be influenced by family, informational, administrative, economic, and social factors.

Table 10. Measures Suggested for Strengthening Women's Participation

Suggested measure	Frequency	Percentage
Governance and leadership training	16	26.7
Awareness of government schemes	12	20.0
Direct access to administrative officials	10	16.7
Measures to prevent proxy decision-making	9	15.0
Financial and administrative literacy	7	11.7
Support through women's groups	6	10.0
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field data

The table presents the measures suggested by 60 respondents to strengthen women's participation in public policy in Mulugu district, Telangana. The findings reveal that governance and leadership training is the most frequently suggested measure, accounting for 26.7 per cent (16) of respondents. Awareness of government schemes is recommended by 20 per cent (12), followed by direct access to administrative officials at 16.7 per cent (10). Measures to prevent proxy decision-making are suggested by 15 per cent (9), while financial and administrative literacy accounts for 11.7 per cent (7). Support through women's groups is recommended by 10 per cent (6). These findings highlight the importance of building women's leadership capacities, improving policy awareness, and facilitating direct communication with government authorities.

Findings and Discussion:

1. Socio-economic profile of respondents: The age-wise distribution indicates that the largest proportion of respondents (33.3%) belongs to the 31–40 years age group, followed by 26.7% in the 41–50 years category. Regarding education, 30% have completed secondary education; while 16.7% have no formal education. Occupationally, daily wage labourers constitute the largest group (30%), followed by women engaged in agriculture and homemaking, at 20% each. These characteristics suggest that the respondents have diverse educational and occupational backgrounds. Their employment conditions and household responsibilities may influence the time and opportunities available for participation in rural governance.

2. Awareness of public policies and local governance: The study reveals that 40% of respondents have low awareness of public policies and local governance, while 13.3% report very low awareness. Only 20% demonstrate high awareness. Together, 53.3% fall within the low or very low awareness categories. This finding indicates a potential gap in knowledge about government programmes, Panchayat procedures, and opportunities for public participation. Limited awareness may make it difficult for women to identify development priorities,

understand administrative processes, and communicate their needs effectively to local authorities.

3. Participation in Gram Sabha meetings: The findings show that 36.7% of respondents participate in Gram Sabha meetings occasionally, while 30% attend regularly. Another 23.3% participate rarely, and 10% have never attended. Thus, regular participation is not reported by the majority of respondents. Gram Sabha meetings provide an important forum for discussing local development needs, welfare programmes, and public services. The results indicate a need to improve women's access to meeting information and create opportunities for their consistent participation in village-level discussions.

4. Participation in public policy formulation: The study indicates that 36.7% of respondents report low participation in public policy formulation, while 30% report very low participation. Only 20% indicate high participation, and 13.3% report moderate participation. The combined proportion with low or very low participation is 66.7%. This suggests a gap between the opportunity to participate in local governance and active involvement in policy-related decisions. Women's participation should extend beyond attending meetings to include expressing opinions, proposing development activities, discussing resource allocation, and monitoring the implementation of government programmes.

5. Influence of family members on political decisions: Family influence emerges as an important issue in the study. The findings show that 38.3% of respondents report that family members usually make political decisions on their behalf, while 33.3% report joint decision-making. Supportive advice is reported by 11.7%, whereas 8.3% indicate considerable influence and another 8.3% report no family influence. These results suggest that family involvement takes different forms. Supportive advice and joint discussions may assist women's participation; however, decisions made on their behalf may restrict their independent voice. Therefore, family support should complement, rather than replace, women's own political judgment and decision-making authority.

6. Decision-making autonomy: The findings indicate that 40% of respondents report very low decision-making autonomy and 26.7% report low autonomy. In contrast, 23.3% experience high autonomy, while 10% report moderate autonomy. Overall, 66.7% fall within the low or very low autonomy categories. This pattern raises concerns about women's ability to exercise independent judgment in political and public policy matters. Strengthening autonomy requires leadership development, access to administrative information, opportunities for direct communication with officials, and institutional support for women's independent participation.

7. Major barriers to participation: Family pressure or control is identified as the most frequently reported barrier, accounting for 23.3% of respondents. Lack of policy awareness is reported by 20%, followed by limited administrative knowledge at 16.7%, domestic responsibilities at 15%, financial dependence at 13.3%, and social and cultural restrictions at 11.7%. These findings show that barriers to women's participation are multidimensional. Consequently, a single intervention may not be sufficient. Measures should combine awareness programmes, administrative training, economic empowerment, accessible meeting arrangements, and institutional efforts to encourage women's independent involvement in decision-making.

8. Measures to strengthen women's participation: Governance and leadership training is the most frequently suggested measure, identified by 26.7% of respondents. Awareness of government schemes is recommended by 20%, while 16.7% emphasise direct access to administrative officials. Measures to prevent proxy decision-making are suggested by 15%, followed by financial and administrative literacy at 11.7% and support through women's groups at 10%. These responses indicate that respondents recognise the importance of both individual capacity-building and institutional support. Training should therefore cover Panchayat

responsibilities, policy formulation, government schemes, budget understanding, record maintenance, and communication with administrative authorities.

Suggestions:

1. Governance and Leadership Training: Regular training programmes should be organised to improve women's understanding of Panchayat administration, public policy formulation, budgeting, and village development planning.

2. Policy Awareness Programmes: Awareness campaigns should be conducted at the village level to educate women about government welfare schemes, Gram Sabha functions, and opportunities to participate in local decision-making.

3. Strengthening Decision-Making Autonomy: Elected women representatives should be encouraged to express their views independently and exercise their official responsibilities without undue interference from family members or other individuals.

4. Direct Access to Officials: Local administrative authorities should facilitate direct communication between women representatives and government officials to address village-level problems and improve the implementation of public policies.

5. Prevention of Proxy Decision-Making: Appropriate monitoring and awareness measures should ensure that elected women representatives exercise their own authority and that family members do not substitute for them in official decision-making.

6. Financial and Administrative Literacy: Practical training should be provided on public expenditure, government records, development budgets, scheme implementation, and financial management to improve women's administrative capabilities.

7. Flexible Participation Opportunities: Gram Sabha meetings and training sessions should be scheduled at convenient times, with adequate advance notice, to enable women with domestic and occupational responsibilities to participate.

8. Promotion of Women's Groups: Women's self-help groups and community organisations should be encouraged to provide platforms for sharing information, discussing local issues, and developing collective leadership.

9. Inclusive Rural Development Planning: Gram Panchayats should actively seek women's views while preparing village development plans, identifying beneficiaries, prioritising public services, and monitoring welfare programmes.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation: Local governance institutions should periodically assess women's attendance, opportunities to express opinions, involvement in decisions, and influence on development priorities to identify gaps and improve participation.

Conclusion:

The present study examined women's participation in public policy and local governance in Mulugu district, Telangana, focusing on policy awareness, political participation, family influence, decision-making autonomy, and barriers to effective involvement. The findings reveal that 53.3 per cent of respondents have low or very low awareness of public policies, while 66.7 per cent report low or very low participation in policy formulation. Similarly, 66.7 per cent experience limited decision-making autonomy, and 38.3 per cent state that family members usually make political decisions on their behalf. Family pressure, inadequate policy awareness, and limited administrative knowledge emerge as major barriers. The study highlights the need to strengthen women's leadership skills, improve awareness of government programmes, and ensure direct access to administrative authorities. Effective implementation of these measures can promote independent decision-making and inclusive governance. Therefore, women's participation must extend beyond representation to meaningful involvement in policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation, strengthening democratic accountability and gender equality at the grassroots level.

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