

The Status of Elected Women Representatives in Rural Assam, India: Their Performance in Local Self Government

PINAK PRATIM DAS, YAGNESWAR DEB, DEBTOSH CHAKRABORTY, GOLAB CHANDRA NANDI & SANJEEB KUMAR SINHA

Abstract One of the important agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations is gender equality. Despite possessing constitutional privileges like 50 percent seat reservation for women in panchayat elections in Assam, India, their actual performance is still up for debate in many discussions. So, using the TOPSIS approach composite index on the performance of elected women representatives has developed. Then, using the ordinary least square method, their performance was assessed against key variables based on primary data collected from the Hailakandi Development Block of Hailakandi District of Southern Assam, India for identification of factors influencing their performances for policy changes.

Keywords: • rural development • panchayati raj institutions • sustainable development goals • women reservation • elected women representatives

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1 Introduction

In 1992, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment brought about a substantial change in the local self-government of rural India through Panchayati Raj System. This amendment had crucial provisions, including reserving seats for women running in Panchayat elections. Giving women political power is a great move that will help them reach the sustainable development goal of gender equality. Women are becoming more involved in society overall, but women in public office have yet to show their visible influence in terms of leadership roles and authority over decision-making, and there are still numerous cases where they are simply utilized as an extension of male power structures. Under the Assam Panchayat Act of 1994, Assam put into place the new three-tier Panchayat Raj system. The Panchayati Raj system, which consists of Zilla Parishad, Anchalik or Block Panchayat, and Gaon Panchayat, which operate at the district, block, and village levels, respectively, make up the Panchayati Raj system, adopted the outline. This provision in the act has given political, administrative and financial power to the Panchayat Raj representatives aiming to achieve economic development and social justice through planning and implementation of development schemes with the help of people participation in rural areas. One of the important dimensions for ensuring social justice is to maintain equal participation for both men and women in the decision-making process.

In recent years, the inclusion of women's participation in decisions-making has gained enough importance due to the setting up of target 5.5 in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework to 'Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life'. This SDG target underlines the importance of women's leadership at the local level in promoting and preserving democracy (Kumar & Ghosh, 2024). The inclusion of women in local governance was also added as a new indicator in the (World Economic Forum, 2023)¹. Where it has been found that out of 146 nations studied, only 18 have attained a representation of more than 40 percent for women in local governance. India is among the nations with the highest percentage of women serving in local government. Around 44.4 percent of all elected local government representatives are women. This puts India ahead of its peers in the Global South, such as Brazil 15.7 percent, Indonesia 15.7 percent, and China 28.1 percent, as well as its counterparts in the Global North, such as Germany 30.3 percent, and the UK 35.3 percent.

In Africa, the desire for women's representation at the regional level is equal to the political will at the national and political party levels. Members of the South African Development Community pledged to adopt "any methods available to increase the participation of women at all levels of decision-making to 30 percent

by 2005" when they signed the Declaration on Gender and Development in 1997 (Monika, 2021). The fifty-five African states that make up the African Union mandate a 50 percent quota for women in all African Union bodies and at all levels.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) released data in 2019 showing that 32.6 percent of EU-28 local and municipal council members and other leaders were women. While the ratio of female representatives in local and regional legislatures is much lower than that of women in the European Parliament at 39.5 percent, it is comparable to that of national assemblies within the EU at 32.2 percent. The proportion of women elected to municipal and regional governments varies throughout EU member states. The EU nations such as Denmark, Sweden, France, Finland, Belgium, Spain, Latvia, Slovenia, and the Netherlands had the greatest participation rates in 2019. In Sweden, the proportion of women serving in municipal or regional administrations has grown without the requirement for a formal gender quota. Quotas had been implemented in Belgium, France, Spain, and Portugal to increase the proportion of women in national and/or local government. In general, Nordic nations and those with quotas are more likely to have a higher percentage of women elected to local or regional offices (Margaras, 2020).

Gender quotas for local elections are legally mandated in 88 countries as of January 2023 (UN Women, 2023). Women's reservation in local government has been pioneered by India. As per the provision of the 73rd Amendment Act Women should hold at least 50 percent of the seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The Indian Constitution defines panchayats as "Institutions of self-government." As of January 2019, India had 2,53,163 Gram Panchayats, 630 Zilla Parishads, and 6614 Panchayat Samiti or Anchalik or Block Panchayats².

India is clearly transforming as a result of women's leadership in panchayats, according to (Pattanaik, 2010), who looked at how elected women representatives functioned in a number of panchayats. The development agenda is being changed by these elected women, who are now role models for other women in their communities, to address issues crucial to village life. The Global Gender Gap Report 2012, which is based on a composite assessment of these factors: economic engagement, academic achievement, political sway, and survival and health, ranks India 105th out of 135 countries (Hausmann, Tyson, Bekhouche, & Zahidi, 2012). Ensuring the reservation of women under the 73rd Amendment by the India Government has significantly improved the women's empowerment in the rural areas. Through this platform, women are now participating in the election process and emphasising the fulfilment of basic needs and social security for women. With the various provisions like Gram Sabha and direct election, people's participation in planning and decision-making has brought a positive change in the mindset of

the rural population. People are now participating in the decision-making process through (GPDP) which is the Gaon Panchayat Development Plan (Das, 2022).

India has an effective constitutional framework and reservation policy for women in the local government with the highest percentage of women serving in local government compared to the other countries, the next dimension is to enhance the quality of performance of the women representatives to improve rural residents' quality of life and to promote social justice. Their primary responsibilities include providing clean drinking water, building and maintaining roads, promoting education, setting up drainage systems and streetlights, and helping the underprivileged. Fair, health, water, market, and house taxes, as well as fines, and other subsidies from state and federal governments, are the primary sources of income for gaon panchayats. The major goal of this research project is to pinpoint the variables affecting how well the women representative performs. In light of this general context, the current research project intended to assess the effectiveness of the elected women Representatives of the Gaon Panchayat. The analysis will be conducted for the Gaon Panchayat (GP), more especially, the GP Women Representatives, the lowest level of local self-government.

For assessment of the quality performance of the elected women representatives, the selection of variable is very important. Hardly any research has been conducted to highlight the performance of elected women representatives while taking into account some important factors, such as their knowledge of the panchayat system, conducting ward/gram sabhas, maintaining their roles and responsibilities of panchayats, participating in meetings, participating in the school management committee, provision for reservations, and participating in ward/gram sabhas. Furthermore, no research has been done on the efficiency of the elected women legislators from northeastern states, notably those from the numerous panchayats of Hailakandi Development Block of the Hailakandi District. By creating a Performance Index for the elected Gaon Panchayat women's representatives in the Hailakandi Development Block of the Hailakandi District, The purpose of this investigation is to close this knowledge gap by examining the crucial socioeconomic variable' influence on the elected women representatives' performance.

1.1 Profile of the study area

The Hailakandi dev. Block in the Hailakandi District of Assam, India, is the only area being studied now. The southern part of Assam is where the Hailakandi District is located. The Hailakandi district has an area of 1,327 square kilometres (512 square miles). Forestland is designated for use on more than half of the total area. This district has four revenue circles, each with 372 settlements and 15 forest

villages. Of the remaining half of the district's land, 33.2% is used for agriculture. Paddy is one of the principal crops. There are also 17 tea gardens in the area. Six police stations and four police outposts are present. Three colleges grant undergraduate degrees and 1098 Lower Primary schools. There are five Development Blocks in the Hailakandi District. Out of these 5 Development Blocks, only the Hailakandi Development Block is the focus of this study. Fourteen Gaon Panchayats are in the Hailakandi Development Block of the Hailakandi District. As per the 2011 Census, the total population of the Hailakandi District is 659296 out of which the male population is 337890 and the female population is 321406. The rural population is 611156 and the urban population is 48140. The sex ratio of the district is 951 and the literacy rate is 74.33.

2 Literature review

2.1 National studies

Many studies have been conducted across the states of India. It has been stated that after getting the opportunities women have not used them efficiently as it is found that they are indifferent towards their own issues (Narasimhan, 1999). It was expected that political participation may result in a drastic change in the distributive system of benefits (Buch, 1998). But it has been found that the reservation system has not performed up to the mark as expected. Krishnaswamy (2001) has observed that in Tamil Nadu the women representatives faced many problems after the introduction of the latest panchayati raj setup which is diversified in nature. As a result, failures rather than success stories have received greater media coverage. However, such predictions are frequently overestimated rather than being grounded in reality. Failure rates are no higher than 5 percent, according to official figures.

Three sources were used to acquire information on the issues facing the women representatives and the women. First, an interactive session was organized as part of training sessions for women representatives, in which all the issues faced by the women representatives were covered in detail. In order to strengthen their demands for representation for women in local bodies, the women delegates conducted regional meetings around the country after federating and forming an association with the help of the Gandhigram Rural Institute. Four zones were used to record the interactions and conversations among the women leaders throughout the aforementioned exercise (Palanithurai, 2001). Third, members of the Elected Women's Representatives Federation met annually in Gandhigram to share experiences and offer suggestions for improvements (Palanithurai, 2002).

Although the male culture has not offered much assistance, the reservation in local governments helps women acquire respectable positions and address their

challenges and problems. Women's empowerment is still a major problem. The most recent suggestion to provide women one-third or half of the seats in PRIs cannot be the only means of empowering women. Most frequently, women are housewives who are also representatives in politics. According to reports, their patriarchal lifestyle, small-minded mentality, and Low educational attainment are the root causes of their low levels of political involvement in remote local government (Dahlerup, 2005; Gochhayat, 2013). Women are becoming more empowered in a variety of sectors as an outcome of spontaneous processes or affirming measures in the long-dominant caste- and class-based society in India (Makwana, 2012). Reservations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SCs/STs) are reportedly operating successfully and made in accordance with (Behar & Aiyer, 2003). Additionally, seat reservation for women has created the ground for innovative transformations in the social, political, and cultural spheres by facilitating the election of more than a million women in free and transparent elections — a quality that is unmatched in the entire globe. To transform women's seeming empowerment into true and genuine empowerment, there is still a long way to go. According to (Kadam, 2012) in 25 GPs, young, educated women participated in the panchayat elections in the Shimoga district of Karnataka, with the majority of them planning to run again. Along with their contribution to societal advancement and public services, the social and familial standing of women has also improved (Billava and Nayak, 2016).

Women now have the opportunity to enter politics and actively participate in the established political structure that handles economic and social challenges, (Mishra, 1997). According to Pai (2001), reservations provide OBCs (other backward classes) a voice in local government and balance off the dominance of upper and middle castes. Hust (2002) explored how women were portrayed politically and how they could become more powerful inside Orissa's local government structures. She found that only a very small percentage of women (12.8%) had run for panchayat elections on the basis of their own personal traits or self-confidence. Instead, the majority of women candidates had used a reservation quota. Duflo and Topalova (2004) evaluated the "Millennial Survey," information which contained a random sampling of reserved presidential positions for women and encompassed 36542 households, 2304 towns, and 24 states nationwide. They discovered that female leaders from reserved Gramme Panchayats (GPs) had provided more public amenities and excellent facilities (such as water, roads, and others) than male leaders from unreserved GPs. The reservation system is advantageous for guaranteeing sufficient female representation, as well as for providing underprivileged groups with local panchayat services and amenities, according to a work by Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004).

The participants, Palanithurai (1994), held the opinion that more women from weaker parts would raise concerns about serving in local government organisations in Tamil Nadu and that women from affluent and upper castes would not tolerate women from the reserved category. As part of her research of Orissa's local panchayats, Panda (1996) discovered that women had hardly ever entered politics as a result of the required reservation provision or any demands made by their village group or family. Women joined because the seat was designated for them rather than because of their social standing, and the majority of them were nameless (Narayana, 2005). Nilekani (2010) found that while male relatives of the GP held the real power, women presidents of the Karnataka GP system were ineffectual in their role as the system's reservation pattern researchers.

Behar and Kumar (2002) argue that while constitutional provisions have helped women advance and showcase their talents, the results of the investigation in the districts of Madhya Pradesh, any move to question masculine dominance ended in the seizure of power. Among Dalit women, a mere one-third were successful in winning the panchayat elections on their own, according to Das (2013), examination into tribal and Dalit leadership in Gujarat. He finds out that women are qualified to serve in panchayats because of their education, familiarity with social issues, prior performance in panchayats, familial support, a desire to improve their society, close ties to the villagers, economic security, and political connections made by their families. This demonstrates how arduous the route to success is for people without such a background. Age, occupation, and income are almost as significant for women pursuing political office as education and land ownership, according to research (Bhaskar, 1997) on the female members of 84 GPs in Kerala.

2.2 International studies

In this section, some important studies on women's participation in political decision-making in Spain, Greece, the Netherlands, and the European Union have been highlighted. The Dutch government's policy to encourage women's involvement in politics and public governance is mostly presented in terms of women falling behind men (Lombardo & Meier, 2009). Occasionally, the focus of the problem definition changes to the scant evaluation and observation of laws intended to increase the proportion of women in politics. According to Meier and Paantjens (2004), there is a concern regarding the underrepresentation of women in EU texts. This is because balanced participation is viewed as a prerequisite or fundamental principle for equality, and it also signifies an underutilization of human resources. Another definition of a prerequisite for democracy is the equal involvement of men and women.

The most specific political issue in Spain is the underrepresentation of women in political party lists and positions, as well as in national and regional Parliaments and Municipalities. The general issue is the underrepresentation of women in high positions in the labor market, both in private enterprises and in public administrations (Meier, Lombardo, Bustelo, & Maloutas, 2004)). Greece emphasizes how women are underrepresented in political decision-making due to a lack of equitable opportunity (Alipranti-Maratou & Nikolaou, 2016). This emphasis stems from the Greek argument that women's low representation in politics is problematic since democracy demands equal rights and opportunity for all people. Women are less likely to be invited to participate in political decision-making, which is thought to be the reason for this low number. Social institutions or other abstract entities are also held accountable (Meier et al., 2004). This shift is not seen as simple because, as the Greek texts reveal, women encounter psychological (personal fears) and social (lack of welfare provisions) barriers to entering the political sphere (Alipranti-Maratou & Nikolaou, 2016).

According to certain studies, people may be reluctant to support a woman if she is the only contender. Nonetheless, voters could be more likely to back a female candidate if she is one of several. Accordingly, a more proportional system should benefit women more than a less proportional one (Matland & Brown, 1992; Reynolds, Reilly, & Ellis, 2008). According to Squires and Wickham-Jones (2001), quotas are viewed as an effective but somewhat selective means of boosting the representation of women.

Studies that have examined socioeconomic issues have produced conflicting results about the significance of a nation's wealth in influencing the representation of women in society. The variable was included in the global study by Moore and Shakman (1996) and Paxton (1997), but no evidence of its relevance was discovered. On the other hand, Matland (1998) discovered indirect effects—but only in wealthy nations. According to him, development results in a decline in traditional values, a drop in fertility rates, a rise in urbanization, a rise in women's engagement in school and the workforce, and a shift in attitudes regarding what roles are appropriate for women.

The period of extended suffrage in Europe varied significantly. For example, women in Portugal and Spain were not allowed to vote until 1981, but women in Finland were granted the right to vote in 1906 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2005). As per Kenworthy and Malami (1999) and Matland (1998), the right to vote is associated with the political empowerment of women. According to the hypothesis, women may enter politics at a younger age if they were granted equal political rights. Over time, this engagement ought to result in more female deputies and the political empowerment of women.

Taking into account structural elements like the proportion of women in managerial roles, who frequently participate directly or indirectly in political decision-making processes and typically have a strong interest in politics. Women will lack the financial and human resources to run for office and will be less likely to be chosen as potential candidates by parties if they are denied access to professional possibilities (Darcy, 1994; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003). Nevertheless, conflicting findings have been reported by Welch (1977) and Matland (1998), indicating that women's interests and involvement in politics are less affected by their employment status.

In a nation with an egalitarian political culture, women will be more represented than in a nation with a conventional political culture. The percentage of women in parliament is still influenced by cultural attitudes and values, claim (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Gender disparity should continue to be a major barrier to women being elected. In traditionalistic societies, elite opinion leaders and the general public have a tendency to prevent women from participating in legislative politics because they both wish to preserve the status quo, which is oriented toward men. Accordingly, the public will be more accepting of women's issues and will demand greater female political engagement in societies that value equality and liberalism (Norris & Inglehart, 2001; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003).

The key findings from the already available literature are that arguments have been made for and against the political reservation system for women. Some of them also believe that women continue to be marginalized from a variety of socioeconomic and cultural perspectives and that elected women are not fully exercising their rights to bring about essential social structural improvements. According to some studies, the reservation system has significantly improved women's attitudes as they have become more involved in a range of activities and encouraged others to participate in decision-making. Through this discussion of the review of literature both on national studies and international studies a comparative status can be analyzed. India has already adopted the women's reservation policy as a constitutional right for women for a long time which has significantly improved women's participation in the decision-making. On the other hand, from the international studies, it can be seen that the reservation for women or quota system is still under discussion in many of the European States. However, the Council of Europe has already adopted policy by the Committee of Ministers on 12 March 2003 for achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making (COE, 2003).

3 Research

3.1 Data- sources and collection

All of the data gathered for this study is primary in nature. The selection of samples is done entirely at random. Using a simple size method with a 95% confidence level, a 5% confidence interval, and a 20% population proportion, 60 women's representatives of local self-government of the Hailakandi District covering only the Hailakandi Development Block were selected from a population of 77 elected women representatives. Using a pre-planned interview schedule, interviews were solely performed with elected female Gaon Panchayat officials who covered the president and ward members. The sample size represents a particular region therefore the size of the sample is small but statistically significant for the analysis. The selected variables in the present study to analyse the performance of the elected women representatives can be generalised for any region where the structure of local self-government is similar to Panchayati Raj system or similar kind of local governance, administrative setup, the women reservation system of any region. It is also to be noted that the local women representatives of this selected region have been representing a significant portion of the rural population. In light of the aforementioned information, the study's findings can therefore be applied depending on the structure of the local self-government.

There are several parts of the interview schedule. Part A contains questions about the respondents' fundamental information. Part B of the study deals with the understanding of the PRI system, the 73rd Amendment, several committees, and rural development initiatives. The topics of Part C are the roles and obligations performed by the women delegates. Part D focuses on the respondents' participation in various panchayat activities. The focus of Part E is on the women representatives' problem-solving abilities and dilemmas.

3.2 Construction of performance index

The performance of elected women representatives aims to achieve significant development indicators in accordance with the study's objective. Performance is described in this context using the percentage of achievement. Sanitation Facility (SF), Literacy (LR), Drinking Water (DW), Electricity (ET), and Cooking Gas (CG) are the five key areas that were identified in this case. At the time of the survey, the women representatives were questioned about the overall success in the attainment of proper sanitation facilities of their specific village, the Literacy of their specific village, The extent of coverage of Drinking Water facilities, coverage and provisions of Electricity Connection, and Coverage of Cooking Gas (LPG) Connection to the households of the villages they represent. Applying the TOPSIS approach, which originally was developed by Hwang and Yoon (1981) and later enhanced by Yoon (1987) and Hwang, Lai and Liu (1993), we constructed a composite index based on the total sample of 60 out of 77 elected

women representatives of Gram Panchayats randomly chosen from Hailakandi Development Block. The TOPSIS method must be used to calculate the following three variables: (i) distances; (ii) weights; and (iii) sum of squares. Under the TOPSIS technique, the Composite Index [CI] comprises two components that come from ideal and anti-ideal sources.

Let X_{ij} is the i^{th} facility provided by j^{th} elected women representative.

$$i=1, 2, 3, 4$$

$$j=1, 2, \dots, 60$$

Let $L(J, IDR)$ and $L(J, NIDR)$ be the components derived from the Ideal and Anti Ideal sources, such that:

$$L(J, IDR) = \left[\sum_{i=1}^5 \frac{(x_{ij} - u_i)^2 w_i}{\sum_{j=1}^{60} x_{ij}^2} \right]^{\frac{1}{2}} \quad (1)$$

$$L(J, NIDR) = \left[\sum_{i=1}^5 \frac{(x_{ij} - v_i)^2 w_i}{\sum_{j=1}^{60} x_{ij}^2} \right]^{\frac{1}{2}} \quad (2)$$

Here, $u_i = (\min x_{1j}, \min x_{2j}, \dots, \min x_{Nj}) = u_1, u_2, \dots, u_N$,

$v_i = (\max x_{1j}, \max x_{2j}, \dots, \max x_{Nj}) = v_1, v_2, \dots, v_N$

For calculating weight (w_i) we have used the technique of Shannon's Entropy Measure of Weight (w_i)³ Where,

X_{1j} – Percentage of achievement in Sanitation Facility by j^{th} representatives.

X_{2j} – Percentage of achievement in Literacy by j^{th} representatives.

X_{3j} – Percentage of achievement in Drinking Water by j^{th} representatives.

X_{4j} – Percentage of achievement in Electricity by j^{th} representatives.

X_{5j} – Percentage of achievement in Cooking Gas Connections by j^{th} representatives.

By adding all the values of the respective variables separately to obtain

$$\sum X_{1j}, \sum X_{2j}, \sum X_{3j}, \sum X_{4j}, \sum X_{5j}$$

For each of the variables we have to calculate the proportion by applying the following formula:

$$p_{ij} = \frac{x_{ij}}{\sum_j x_{ij}} \quad (3)$$

Here, i^{th} facility is provided by j^{th} elected women representative. Now W_i represents the weight of i^{th} facility provided by the elected women representative, where W_i is measured by Shannon's entropy, such that:

$$\varphi(i) = - \sum_j \frac{p_{ij} \ln(p_{ij})}{\ln(m)} \quad (4)$$

$$\text{And, } w(i) = \frac{1 - \varphi(i)}{\sum_i [1 - \varphi(i)]} \quad (5)$$

Now, to calculate the performance index of elected women representatives (P.I) by applying the Composite index formula:

$$(PI)CI_j = \frac{L(J, IDR)}{L(J, IDR) + L(J, NIDR)} \quad (6)$$

with $j = 1 \ 2 \dots m$. W_i and CI_j both have values that fall between 0 and 1.

3.3 Variables description and measurement, econometric model

The performance of the women representatives is determined by several important variables included in the present study's ordinary least squares regression analysis. There are a total of nine independent variables that have been identified to regress on the performance index of elected women representatives, including Knowledge Level (KL), which refers to having a fundamental understanding of the Panchayati Raj Institution System, the fundamental provisions of the 73rd Amendment, the existence of numerous standing committees, and some familiarity with current government-sponsored programs. By giving each elected woman representative a question worth one mark and combining the resulting marks separately, their knowledge level was ascertained. In this case, the variable Reservation (RV) has been considered to ascertain if the chosen women representative participated in the election voluntarily or merely because of the reservation system. If someone is contesting for office due to the reservation system, they have received a 1; otherwise, they have received a 0. The attending Capacity Building Programme (CB) variable is calculated using the total number of Capacity Buildings Programmes in which elected women representatives took part in the preceding year. This is also taken into consideration as a dummy variable under the premise that involvement in several training programs is either counted as 1 or as 0. Meetings & Sabhas (MS) that are successfully held may enhance the panchayat

representatives' system of government. The number of ward sabha and gaon sabha meetings that elected women representatives held in the previous year was sought in order to assess the value. In order to measure the variable that is the maintenance of the Roles based on Responsibilities (RO) of panchayats, it has been questioned whether the elected women representatives actively participate in the routine maintenance of the books of accounts, the preparation of annual action plans, the collection of panchayat's own sources of revenue, and the carrying out of social audits. The value of (RO) is based on each of the five commitments that are involved. The elected women representative is defined as Actively Participating in Meetings of the standing committee, ward sabha, and Gram Sabha denoted by (PM). The percentage of meetings attended by elected women representatives among all annual meetings is how we measure the variable. When asked if they usually Participated in or went to Meetings of the School Management Committee (SC) within their purview, the elected women representatives admitted to neither. As literacy is already one of the primary factors for a performance index, participation in School Management Committee meetings will increase the likelihood of raising the literacy level or quality of education, which will boost the elected women representatives' performance index. If they regularly attend School Management Committee meetings, they receive a score of 1, otherwise, they receive a score of 0. Elected women representatives were asked to comment on six different aspects of their variable Capabilities to Make Decisions (CD), including whether they had participated in the budget proposal submission process, the proposal to increase women's empowerment, their opinions on how to set priorities for development work, the proposal of development work, allocating development funds, and decision-making during the execution of development work. When computing the variable (CD), participation in a specific number of these six fields is taken into consideration. Last but not least, elected women representatives' Formal Education (FE) is 1 for classes I through V, 2, for classes VI through VII, 3, for classes IX through X, 4, for classes XI through XII, and 5, for graduation and higher. In light of all these key factors, the Performance Index can be expressed in its function form as follows:

$$P.I = f(KL, RV, CB, MS, RO, PM, SC, CD, FE)$$

Therefore, the OLS regression model for identifying the influences of key variables on the Performance Index is:

$$P.I = \alpha + \beta_1 KL + \beta_2 RV + \beta_3 CB + \beta_4 MS + \beta_5 RO + \beta_6 PM + \beta_7 SC + \beta_8 CD + \beta_9 FE + \mu_i \quad (7)$$

In the aforementioned model, α is the intercept coefficient, all β 's are the selected independent variables' slope coefficients, and μ_i represents the error term.

4 Discussion

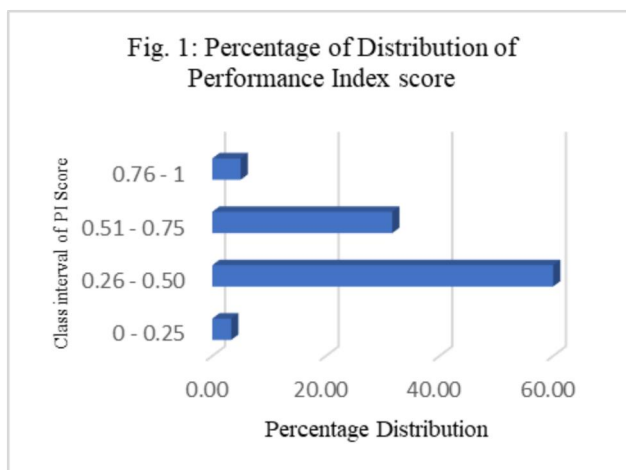
Let's start by examining the distribution of the elected women representatives' performance index scores for the chosen study region, which can be explained using Table 1 and Figure 1, respectively. In this analysis, the performance index score has been divided into four categorical distributions, meaning that scores between 0 and 0.25 are considered unsatisfactory, those between 0.26 and 0.50 are considered below satisfactory, those between 0.51 and 0.75 are considered satisfactory, and scores between 0.76 and 1 are considered highly satisfactory.

Table 1: Distribution of performance index score of elected woman representatives

Class interval of performance index	Number of elected women representatives	Percentage distribution
0.00 - 0.25	2	3.33
0.26 - 0.50	36	60.00
0.51 - 0.75	19	31.67
0.76 - 1.00	3	5.00
Total	60	

Source: Authors' estimation based on primary data.

Figure 1: Percentage of distribution of performance index score



Considering that there are just 2 elected women representatives or roughly 3.33 percent of the whole sample, their performance is unsatisfactory. Only three

elected women representatives, or around 5% of the total samples of elected women representatives, are, nevertheless, performing at a level that is highly satisfactory. The second highest score in the categorical distribution of performance index score is achieved by 31.67 percent of the whole sample of elected women members, or 19 elected women representatives of the panchayat. Now, the largest performance distribution is 60% of the whole sample of elected women representatives, or 36 individuals that have been found in the category of performance that falls short of satisfactory. As a result, the analysis's key finding is that the majority of the sample's elected women representatives are performing below average in the selected study region.

The regression findings of the chosen variables, which were regressed on the Performance Index (PI) score using equation number (7), are now the focus of the analysis in the second section. Due to a multicollinearity issue, we divided the data in this case into four models, and the following results have been analyzed.

The following variables have been regressed on the Performance Index in Model 1 (Table 2): Knowledge Level (KL), Reservation (RV), Attending Capacity Building Programmes (CB), Meetings & Sabhas (MS), Roles based on Responsibilities (RO). The Constant is positive and quite significant at the 1% level in this case. All of the chosen factors are positive and highly significant at the 1% level, with the exception of Attending Capacity Building Programmes (CB), which is significant at a 5% level.

Table 2: Estimated result of the regression model 1

Independent variables	Model 1	Regression statistics	
Knowledge level (KL)	0.009	Number of observations N	60
	(2.48) *		
Reservation (RV)	0.098	R square	0.77
	(4.23) *		
Attending capacity building programmes (CB)	0.06	DW	1.893
	(2.15)**		
Meetings & sabhas (MS)	0.01	F-stat	36.184
	(2.68) *		
Roles based on responsibilities (RO)	0.024	Prob. (F-stat)	0
	(2.88) *		
Constant (α)	0.185		
	(5.15)*		

Source: Author's estimates based on primary data, Notes- Figures in parentheses are t-statistics, ** & * denotes significant at 5% & 1% level respectively.

The findings suggest that the elected women representatives' performance in delivering basic services to the people has been significantly and favorably improved by their level of knowledge regarding the Panchayati Raj Institution System, the core provisions of the 73rd Amendment, numerous standing

committees, and their familiarity with current government-sponsored initiatives this finding. However, Dassonneville and McAllister (2018) found that higher levels of women's elected representation will increase women's political knowledge. Therefore, more women's representation in the decision-making field will enhance their knowledge level and also help to improve their performance. However, additionally, it has been discovered that increasing the number of Meetings & Sabhas (MS) contributes directly to the effective performance of the elected women representatives. Meeting and Sabhas have a significant role in the identification of local problems and people prefer to attend village-level meetings to address their problems (Kaur, Bhardwaj & Rathore, 2020). Hence organizing frequent meetings will help to identify the problems and discuss the possible solution which increases the performance of the elected representatives. The elected female members who are well-versed in their positions and duties are performing better than others. Gadekar (2016) has commented that women cannot be blamed for not performing their roles because he has found that men are interfering with their work. It has been discovered that the current reservation system (RV) has given many of the elected women members the opportunity to run in the panchayat election, allowing them to participate in decision-making and so improve their performance. Some studies more conclusively demonstrate that reservations positively influence women's empowerment, showing that women are now more prominent and self-assured and that they also attempt to address community issues and advance women's interests (Jayal, 2006). According to Priebe (2017), gender quotas are a useful tool for eliminating inequality and have helped marginalized women get more voice and opportunities for political empowerment. He also discovered that one significant avenue via which public service delivery is impacted is the political engagement and empowerment of women. Attending Capacity Building Programmes (CB) is significant at a 10% level even though it is not significant at a 5% level. This is a crucial factor as well because taking part in training programmes strengthens the panchayat representatives' capacity-building efforts and improves their performance. According to Garg and Sharma (2020), one important and well-liked component of the capacity-building approach has been training. Building capacity is the process of helping individuals and groups of people acquire the information, abilities, and attitudes necessary to create, develop, and maintain operational infrastructures and procedures that have significance on a local level. Model 1 has an R square value of 0.770, which is likewise quite important. This indicates that all the important factors are significantly influencing how well the women representatives performed.

In Table 3, we attempted to regress Knowledge Level (KL), Reservation (RV), Attending Capacity Building Programmes (CB), Meetings & Sabhas (MS), Actively Participating in Meetings (PM), and Participating in School Management Committee Meetings (SC) on Performance Index in Model 2. In this instance, the

Constant term is positive and highly significant at the 1% level. With the exception of Meetings & Sabhas (MS), all of the considered variables in this model are positive and highly significant at the 1% level. The findings suggest that the elected women representatives' consistent participation at sessions of the standing committee, ward sabha, and gram sabha has a favorable and significant effect on their level of performance. Because resources may be used more effectively for development purposes the more discussions they have. Additionally, it has been discovered that the elected women representatives' attendance at School Management Committee Meetings (SC) has had a significant positive impact on raising the literacy rate in the village and aiding in providing children with a high-quality education, both of which improve the performance of the elected representatives.

Table 3: Estimated result of the regression model 2

Independent variables	Model 2	Regression statistics	
Knowledge level (KL)	0.009 (2.41) *	Number of observations N	60
Reservation (RV)	0.083 (3.51) *	R square	0.792
Attending capacity building programmes (CB)	0.072 (2.79) *	DW	2.11
Meetings & sabhas (MS)	0.008 (1.98)**	F-stat	33.555
Actively participating in meetings (PM)	0.001 (2.75) *	Prob. (F-stat)	0
Participating in school management committee meetings (SC)	0.053 (2.80) *		
Constant (α)	0.172 (4.88)*		

Source: Author's estimates based on primary data, Notes- Figures in parentheses are t-statistics, ** & * denotes significant at 5% & 1% level respectively.

As would be predicted, the variable Attending Capacity Building Programmes (CB) becomes significant in this model, indicating that the elected women representatives' performance has improved as a result of their participation in the training programme. The model's R square value of 0.792 makes it also very noteworthy. This indicates that in model 2, all of the important variables significantly contribute to the explanation of the performance of the women representatives.

Table 4: Estimated result of the regression model 3

Independent variables	Model 3	Regression statistics	
Knowledge level (KL)	0.007	Number of observations N	60

Independent variables	Model 3	Regression statistics	
	(1.78)**		
Reservation (RV)	0.107 (4.46)*	R square	0.755
Attending capacity building programmes (CB)	0.074 (2.71)*	DW	1.87
Meetings & sabhas (MS)	0.017 (4.42)*	F-stat	33.336
Capabilities to make decisions (CD)	0.019 (2.12)**	Prob. (F-stat)	0
Constant (α)	0.167		

Source: Author's estimates based on primary data, Notes- Figures in parentheses are t-statistics, ** & * denotes significant at 5% & 1% level respectively.

In Table 4. Knowledge Level (KL), Reservation (RV), Attending Capacity Building Programmes (CB), Meetings & Sabhas (MS), and Capabilities to Make Decisions (CD) have all been regressed on the Performance Index in Model 3. The Constant term is positive and highly significant at the 1% level. Except for Knowledge Level (KL) and Capabilities to make Decisions (CD), which are significant at a 5% level, all the selected variables in this model are positive and highly significant at the 1% level. It was discovered during the study that elected women representatives have a viewpoint that sometimes prevents them from participating in the decision-making process because of societal issues and beliefs. The model's R square value of 0.755 indicates that it is likewise very significant. This indicates that in model 3, all of the important variables significantly contribute to the explanation of the performance of the women representatives.

Table 5: Estimated result of the regression model 4

Independent variables	Model 4	Regression statistics	
Formal education (FE)	0.05 (2.48)**	Number of observations N	60
Constant (α)	0.352 (6.6)*	R square	0.1
		DW	1.97
		F-stat	6.15
		Prob. (F-stat)	0.016

Source: Author's estimates based on primary data, Notes- Figures in parentheses are t-statistics, ** & * denotes significant at 5% & 1% level respectively.

In Table 5, we independently regressed Formal Education (FE) on the Performance Index in Model 4. Additionally, we can see that the Constant term is positive and highly significant at the 1% level. Formal Education is positively significant at the 5% level in this model. The model's R square value of 0.10 indicates that it is likewise highly significant at the 1% level. This indicates that

model 4's fitness is not sufficient even though the variable is highly important and the R square value is quite small. According to Asiedu, Branstette, Gackwad-Babulal, and Malokel (2018), through education, women can develop the abilities necessary to compete with males. This is important for young ladies who want to go into politics. Education improves the abilities of people who are currently in politics by giving them the means to influence the discourse, propose legislation that is attentive to the needs of women, launch public inquiries into women's difficulties, and utilize the results to put issues on government agendas and inside program guidelines. The crucial thing to remember is that the elected women panchayat representatives do better than men despite their varying educational backgrounds.

5 Conclusions

A fundamental framework for addressing issues connected to gender inequalities in society has been established by the inclusion of a reservation system for women to participate in panchayat elections. After exercising this constitutional right to reservation for women, it was anticipated that women would take part in the electoral process and make political and administrative decisions, helping to reduce the gender gap in society. likewise, O'brien and Rickne (2016) conducted research on Sweden and found that the quota system raised the proportion of women thought to be qualified for higher positions. They also contend that quotas can hasten the advancement of women's representation in local government leadership roles.

The study's conclusion includes some important findings, including the fact that the elected women representatives of the chosen region still don't perform up to the same level overall. This finding is based on the study's objective to examine the performance level of elected women representatives and the factors affecting their performances. Similarly, Panday (2011) has also concluded that the decision-making process under the Local government system of Bangladesh has not been influenced by women who were elected as members. A patriarchal and male-dominated societal structure has made it difficult for them to participate in decision-making.

The majority of elected women have acknowledged that the reservation system was the only reason they were able to win this position, but they have also noted that social issues and ingrained attitudes sometimes prevent them from participating in decision-making. Only Ensuring constitutional rights is insufficient to enable women in rural self-governance to become politically empowered. In addition to the reservation, the government and society have an obligation to establish an atmosphere that allows women to use their political rights and take part in decision-making without hindrance or fear (Gadekar, 2016).

Their performance has improved as a result of their understanding of the Panchayati Raj Institution System, the key provisions of the 73rd Amendment, several standing committees, and current government-sponsored initiatives.

The elected women representatives have been able to debate the many topics linked to the planning and implementation-related concerns by holding frequent ward sabha and gramme sabha and participating in those sessions, which has enabled them to increase their performance. They are able to manage tasks more effectively and perform better the more they are aware of their obligations and positions within the panchayat. The importance of holding public meetings has been also highlighted in the research work of (Blair, 2000). where he stated that Council meetings and hearings are used in the Philippines and Ukraine to gather public opinion and rally support for their respective initiatives. The sessions have been quite effective in educating people about decentralization and involving them in its implementation in Mali, especially by allowing them to take part in the redistricting process that created the new communes.

It was also discovered that the majority of female members were able to run for office thanks to the reservation system, allowing them to participate in a variety of panchayat activities relating to social welfare aspects and improve their performance. In this regard, Martínez-Córdoba, Benito, & García-Sánchez (2023) have come up with an interesting finding that Increased representation of women in local government and opposition leadership leads to increased efficiency through lower spending. On the other hand, many women in the opposition and in positions of leadership in the government undermine efficiency by endorsing expenditure without augmenting social services.

They get new skills and techniques that enable them to operate more effectively with the panchayat system, which improves their performance, by taking part in regular training programs that encourage them to advance their knowledge and capacities. Similar to studies in the literature, elected women representatives' educational backgrounds play a significant influence in determining how well they represent their constituents. Osman and Abdulai (2018) conducted research in the Sissala East District of Ghana and claim that increasing capacity is a way to address the obstacles that women have while trying to participate in local governance due to inadequacies of women in leadership roles, including their lack of self-assurance, inadequate presenting skills, unimpressive public speaking talents, unsatisfactory public relations, emotional instability, and susceptibility to discouragement. Training could be used to reverse these traits. Ofei-Aboagye (2000), Ohene-Konadu (2001) and Myers (2002) have endorsed the idea that women must get capacity building or training in order to ensure their effective involvement in local government. This is due to the fact that women in local

government are more effective since they possess the necessary abilities in addition to their numbers.

It is reasonable to say that, in addition to government initiatives, society should offer opportunities to women living in rural areas and encourage them to participate more in the decision-making process to achieve the desired results. This is true if we take into account all of these facts as well as the targets that were set up under the SDG goals on gender equality.

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Notes:

¹ World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Report 2023," June 2023.

² News18 Lifestyle. (2024, April 24). National Panchayati Raj Day 2022: Which State of India has no Panchayati Raj Institution? News 18. Retrieved March 25, 2024, from <https://www.news18.com/news/lifestyle/national-panchayati-raj-day-2022-which-state-of-india-has-no-panchayati-raj-institution-5038357.html>.

³ Lotfi, F. H., & Fallahnejad, R. 2010. 'Imprecise Shannon's entropy and multi attribute decision making'.

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