

Wide disparities between men and women in politics: report

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BANGALORE: Though India is a signatory to UN Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a report on political participation of women in India shows wide disparities between men and women in the political sphere.

India ratified the international treaty in 1994, albeit with some reservations, and was supposed to submit the country report within one year but has not done it till date. The draft report, prepared by the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP), is said to be lying with the external affairs ministry.

Besides CEDAW, India is also a signatory to the Platform for Action, the outcome of the fourth world conference on women and the Beijing Declaration.

Based primarily on secondary data, the

report shows that from 1996 to 1998 parliamentary elections, the percentage of women's participation has gone up by just one per cent — from 7 to 8 per cent. Based on statistics and over 45 case studies from all parts of the country, the report says that there exists disparity by law and disadvantage by gender everywhere.

National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) coordinator for the project Ashima Chopra says, "A good case is the Panchayati Raj elections in Karnataka. Most of the women stand as proxy for their male relatives. Further, the daily allowance of Rs 20, which women in gram panchayats get for attending meetings is far too less against the trouble they take in travelling and managing domestic chores."

"Our study has also highlighted that there has been no panchayati raj election in Bihar which is unconstitutional. We plan to go there shortly and document the actu-

The findings

- De facto female inequality remains
- Lack of corrective approach to tackling female inequality
- Caste, religion, cultural stereotype obstacles
- Double burden
- Poor investment in female education on political rights/access
- No provision of child care facilities and other support structures
- Reduced impact of 74th amendment on female political participation
- Failure to pass 84th Constitutional amendment in current session
- Failure to present CEDAW report due in 1995
- No mechanism for CEDAW reporting with NGO involvement

al condition of women," Ms Chopra said.

Since the IWRAP project aims at identifying country-specific issues, other countries in the Asia Pacific region have taken one issue but India, because of its sheer size, has taken up three issues — political rights of women; women in armed conflict situation with focus on North-east, Tamil Nadu and Punjab; rights of women in marriage.

A national workshop in March will further consolidate the report before it is submitted to IWRAP. However, as a fallout of this, the Gender Studies Unit (GSU) at NIAS has undertaken a longitudinal study of women's political participation in the districts of Mysore, Bijapur and Dakshina Kannada.

Aiming at finding what is impeding women's political involvement, Ms N. Shantha Mohan of GSU says, "Our previous studies in rural Karnataka have shown

that there is a need for redefinition of effective political participation. Case studies have shown that often a woman seeks resources for education, sanitation or other 'softer' issues and a man for more visible issues like roads or electricity. The outcome in terms of visibility is more in the latter case. Does it mean that women are less effective?"

With the panchayat elections in Karnataka scheduled in March, the GSU study intends to explore both pre and post election scenario in the gram panchayats.

The baseline study facilitated by IWRAP, which will monitor the fulfilment of state obligations toward women's equality under CEDAW, will also make recommendations to CEDAW for effective participation of women in Indian politics. It also aims to mobilise women in their advocacy.