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SUPPORTING DECENTRALISED URBAN GOVERNANCE:
TRAINING WOMEN MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS
IN MUMBAI, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Having realised that the participation of women in local governance in India would not come about naturally, India included a clause in its new 1992 decentralisation legislation to the effect that women are to occupy 33% of all seats in all local bodies, including rural but also municipal councils and the ward committees of large cities. While this bold attempt to involve (or rather kick-start) women in governance through radical positive discrimination has many supporters, the realities, implications and impacts of such policy in the urban areas of India—in contrast to the rural areas—have not been studied much. There is, however, agreement that it is too much to expect that women will be effective and powerful councillors just by being elected. Indeed, there is ample and increasing evidence that newly elected women municipal councillors in India's cities find it hard to establish and consolidate a strong position. There are many reports that women only manage and survive with the support (or by following the dictates) of husbands, fathers or other family members. There is wide agreement then that these women councillors need professional support and strengthening of their capacity, and increasingly training programmes are organised to this effect. This article is about one set of such training programmes organised by a Mumbai training institution, with the support of the Dutch based Institute of Social Studies. It sets the general context of decentralisation and women's involvement in urban governance and depicts the characteristics and needs of women municipal councillors in Mumbai and other Indian cities. In a preliminary way, it assesses, first, the extent to which the training programmes met the needs of women newly elected into local bodies and secondly, what their perceived impacts are in view of the logistical conditions and constraints related to capacity building in India.

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ABSTRACT

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1 INTRODUCTION

One crucial clause in the new 1992 Indian legislation on rural and urban decentralisation stipulates that women must occupy at least 33% of all seats in all newly created local bodies. And whereas many other important–but often optional–clauses of the acts were diluted or not implemented, today in virtually all local bodies women are in fact represented as intended- more than one million. So while there is reason to speak of some kind of revolution, enthusiasm is tempered by increasing evidence that women face rather heavy odds to make their voices actually heard on the councils. Women face practical difficulties to meaningfully carry out their tasks as elected representatives, and there are quite a lot of women–especially in the more rural and backward parts of India– who simply and often blindly follow the dictates of their husbands or other family members—in what is often called 'proxy' representation. Many of the problems women face find their origin in the gender relations prevalent in India, and in the 'gendered' institutions of India. This refers on the one hand to the norms, values, rules and customs which govern daily life, and which find their origin and legitimisation in religion and culture, condemning Indian women by and large to a secondary and subservient position. On the other hand this is about the position and roles of women in concrete organisations, where they rarely rise to the highest positions and where male dominated power positions and relations tend to keep them away from positions of true power and authority.

Such problems faced by Indian women generally also operate in the case of women elected to political office. They are more and more recognised—but better documented for rural councillors than for their urban counterparts. Fortunately, there is increasing awareness of the need to strengthen women councillors, and more and more training programmes are organised, both by Indian authorities, NGOs and by (training) institutes with or without donor support. The present paper deals with training programmes for Women Municipal Councillors (WMCs) from cities in Western India. These were developed by Trainers from a Government sponsored Training Institute in Mumbai (The All India Institute of Local Self Governance AIILSG) during a Training for Trainers Programme held at the Netherlands based Institute of Social Studies (ISS).[1] The Mumbai based trainers first travelled to The Netherlands in May 2002 for an intensive three-week training programme, which resulted in a three-day training

programme for women municipal councillors- with modules tailor made to their needs both in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The Mumbai trainers then returned to Mumbai where they organised three pilot training programmes based on the model developed at ISS. Two ISS trainers–the authors of this paper–subsequently travelled to Mumbai for follow-up training and research work, and were witness to two more pilot trainings.

This paper describes the process of, first, the training the Mumbai trainers at ISS, next the on-the-ground training of WMCs in Mumbai, to the evaluation of usefulness of the training programmes by the WMCs. The latter evaluation is based, first, on the impressions of the AIILSG Trainers who gave the initial three training programmes in different places and who kept records of the participant's views; second, on our own impressions during participating in two (the final of a series of five) workshops ourselves in Goa and Mumbai; and finally on discussions with WMCs whom we interviewed personally during site visits in Mumbai and Pune. However, most of the evidence on training programmes and WMCs we collected relates to the WMCs in Mumbai, with some additional evidence from WMCs from other places.

One issue that influenced discussions between ISS trainers, the Mumbai trainers and the Indian WMCs was the fundamental rationale for the decentralisation legislation to stipulate women's representation in local bodies, and this also has implications for the role of women elected to these bodies. Is the idea of the legislation to *mainstream gender* by forcefully inducting women into ULBs to affect some degree of gender balance in terms of numbers? Or, in contrast, are women inducted to *represent other women* and to take special charge of women issues such as domestic violence, abortion and literacy of women? The act is silent about the motivation, and different authors have advanced different suggestions. Had the act been more specific, this would have given more direction to elected female councillors, and it would have facilitated setting up relevant capacity building efforts.[2] The above distinction may be linked loosely to a distinction into different types of participation and leadership. Gender mainstreaming (Goetz, 1997) runs the risk of focusing only on numbers, and may then take on the

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[1] The former name of Mumbai was Bombay.
[2] The same applies to the induction of members of Scheduled Caste and Tribes SC/ST into rural and urban councils. It was argued during the Goa Conference on Urban Decentralisation that it was the mandate for both women and SC/ST council members to focus on enhancing the position of their respective constituencies (AIILSG 2002).

shape of 'instrumental leadership or participation', where women- just like men are more or less capable councillors. In terms of Kabeer (1999), what is needed is 'transformative participation and leadership', where women become active change agents to explicitly take it up for other women, and attempt to actively work towards gender equality, women welfare and women empowerment.

The paper is linked to an increased awareness of the importance of local governance, after a period in which most attention as well as donor support was focused on the national level, for example in relation to the Good Governance agenda. It is recognised today that local government is the key institution between the state and the population—including the poor, communities and civil society organisation. It is local government that ultimately has to translate national or donor programmes into concrete activities, and where national legislation has to be enforced. One sign of this recognition is the intense interest for decentralisation world wide, but it is already clear that decentralisation is no panacea for improving governance. More often than not, there are many constraints, including a lack of political will by central agencies and politicians to part with power, unclear or inadequate regulatory and fiscal frameworks, elite capture at the local level, and a lack of capacity by 'receiving' local bodies (Crook and Manor 1998).

Training is seen in this paper as just one (and limited) component of a broader process of capacity building. Following Lusthaus et al. (1999) and Hildebrand (2002) capacity first refers to the individual capacity of persons, workers or employees. It is about knowledge, skills but also about attitudes, and the match between an individual and an organisation, for example a Women councillor working in a Municipal Council. Capacity also includes the organisation, its objectives, structure and organisational culture—the latter referring to the degree of hierarchy, of team spirit but also to gender relations within an organisation. Capacity building here can for example take the shape of organisational development focusing on incentive systems, accountability systems or organisational restructuring. The most complex but probably most important dimension of capacity concerns the institutional contexts in which organisations and staff work-involving economic, financial, political, social and cultural factors. This context can be restrictive, for example if there are no budgets for important policies, but also enabling when there is political stability and political support. In relation to capacity building for women to participate in Governance, Butegwa (2000: 17) identifies several critical factors such as a legal framework that supports women's participation, adequate civic

education and public awareness of the power of participation for self, familial, community and national development, and sufficient organising and mobilisation skills for women to convert their numbers into political power. She finally adds personal empowerment of women at individual, family and community level.

The present paper first reviews the 1992 decentralisation legislation, with a focus on the 74d Constitutional Amendment (74th CAA), dealing with urban India, and next looks at the outcomes of the reservation policies for women under the Amendment. Constraints are depicted which affect women in local governance in general and in India in specific, and the efforts to address some of these constraints and problems through capacity building. We then review the administrative and political set up of the Mumbai metropolis, as well as the roles, interests and realities of male and female municipal councillors. This sets the stage for focusing on women municipal councillors: the selection and election process, their positions compared to those of male councillors and the specific roles they play—all of which brings out specific problems and constraints they face- including concrete issues such as a lack of knowledge, skills, negotiation power and self-confidence. The remainder of the paper then discusses the Training for Trainers Programme organised at ISS; the programmes given for WMCs in five Indian cities which are evaluated in terms of logistics, outcomes and impacts. In a final section the paper draws the conclusion that individual training of WMCs is only one small contribution to empowering them. Probably more important is the training (including changing attitudes) of male councillors and municipal officials—which would be helped by an overall change of gender relations in India. Apart from individual training then, attention is needed for the functioning and performance of municipal councils and ward committees as such, and changes in the institutional context in which women municipal councillors work.

1   WOMEN AND DECENTRALISED LOCAL GOVERNANCE

1.1   The 1992 urban decentralisation legislation of India

In 1992 the Indian Federal Parliament in New Delhi passed an ambitious legislation to allow for the decentralisation of powers, tasks and funds from the state level to various levels or tiers of rural and urban local bodies. The 73d Constitutional Amendment Act deals with rural India (and various levels of rural councils or *panchayats*); the 74th Amendment (or CAA) pertains to urban India, dealing with the

creation and empowerment of elected municipal bodies and the creation of ward committees in cities with more than 300,000 inhabitants. Even while this is not stated explicitly in the act, its objectives are widely seen to 'give power to the people', to create appropriate institutional mechanisms for planning and development at local levels, and imparting greater balance, order and stability in the state-local and fiscal relations (Mathur 2000: 3). It is important to note that many provisions of the CAA are not compulsory. Hence, it is for the State Legislators to decide as to which powers, authority *and* funds are to be devolved to a municipality or ward committee. States are only obliged under the law to enact so-called Conformity Legislation binding for each individual state, and to set up statutory bodies such as State Finance Commissions to advise on the delegation of finance and tax powers to urban local bodies (or ULBs). Generally, states retain ample discretion (very often the CAA legislation text uses 'may' rather than 'shall') to actually decide on the nature and contents of decentralisation. As a result, quite a few states have only delegated few functions and funds to their urban local bodies, leading to a very limited type of decentralisation (de Wit 2003).

One example is the delegation of tasks to municipalities and new urban local bodies. These are listed in the so called Twelfth Schedule of the CAA, including diverse planning, regulatory and developmental duties ranging from water supply, fire services and public health to urban poverty alleviation and slum improvement. However, many states have only delegated certain maintenance and local planning duties to the ULBs, with state governments retaining full control over important duties such as regulating land use and urban planning. But on the positive side, states can no longer dissolve an elected ULB council and postpone elections indefinitely: the CAA clearly stipulates that new elections have to be held within six months.

An important element of the 74th CAA is its effort to balance inequalities as to the political representation of women and members of scheduled castes and tribes. Section 243T-3 mentions that 'Not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality' (Government of India 1992).[3] This provision was a result of the frustration that constitutionally guaranteed rights had not led to a sufficient number of women actively

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[3] This includes the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (SC & ST).

participating in governance. While the provision does not follow demographic representation–then nearly 50% of the seats would be reserved for women–it nevertheless demonstrates a very clear intention of affirmative action in governance. In fact, this clause has been one of the most striking, important and well-implemented clauses of the CAA, which has led to a silent revolution in India, with more than 1 million women presently being member of urban or rural councils. Most recent data show that out of a total of 67.990 elected municipal representatives (in cities), there are 22.665 women, roughly conform the 30% CAA reservation clause (AIILSG 2002: 285). Besides, women head 22 out of India's 99 city corporations (op.cit.: 44).

The more or less forced induction of women into local government councils stands in stark contrast to conditions before 1992, when only occasionally women were elected into local councils: besides, most women entered the local bodies not through elections but by co-option or nomination. For rural areas, Mandal (2003: 15) says 'From the outset women's involvement in PRIs was dominated by two interrelated themes: representation of women in these bodies and effectiveness and outcome of their participation. Co-option of few women was the only available option for women to participate, and, tersely put, could not produce desired, and verily, no result at all. It, instead, resulted in proverbial patronage of the dominant political and social groups and families. Those nominated women could not, nor were expected to, free themselves from the clutches of the males who inducted them'…'It was not the ability and worth of women members but their passivity and complicity that actually determined their membership.'

Today, ten years after the 1992 CAA, there is still a large contrast to conditions at the state and national level. In 1952 only 2.8% of all Members of Parliament in Delhi were women; it has crept up to a very low 7,9 % 1998. In the 1998 General Elections there were 217 women candidates for 541 seats; only 43 women (or 8.6%) were elected as against 498 men. In the individual states the proportion of women parliamentarians is equally poor (Santha 1999).

There are many constraints that may explain the very low active political participation of Indian women, starting with general disparities between women and men, the result of traditional values, attitudes and views holding that men are superior to women. Traditionally, women's work is confined to the household and rearing of children, and the identity of women is derived from her father, husband and son (Escap 2001). While male literacy in India is 75.85%, for women it is only 54.16. Other

indicators of women's position are low too as in maternal mortality, health, poverty, employment and incomes and considerable violence against women, for example in the ill-famous dowry-deaths.[4] In a general sense, a number of constraints operate at the level of individual women who aspire to become active in local government (Escap 2001: 4). These include fundamental inequality as anchored in culture and tradition; discrimination as when women in highly patriarchal societies are discouraged to take up public positions, when their self-confidence is undermined and when they have limited access to information and skills. All these factors reinforce their lower status. Besides, there are more practical issues such as campaign costs that can be very high, the need to organise childcare, the fact that meeting timings can be a barrier to participate. Finally, and this is a factor of increasing importance in Indian politics, women may not be prepared to work in political environments characterised by an aggressive culture, combative debate and increasing corruption (op.cit.: 6). However, on the positive side, there are also supportive factors, including kinship ties, certain electoral systems like proportional representation, and of course reserved seats or quotas as is the case now in Indian local bodies.

The ESCAP study quoted here also provides information on the self-image of (Asian) women who are already active in local governance. They tend to feel that they practice 'transformative leadership', defined as a framework within which power is used to create change and develop people and communities: it is seen as non-hierarchical and participatory, giving priority to the poor and marginalised. Women's leadership styles are perceived to be more inclusive, entailing more sense of social issues and community welfare, giving a higher priority than men to issues like domestic violence and dowry problems with an emphasis on acting more as role models so as to support and motivate other women to be aware and politically active (op. cit.7). Talking about transformative leadership, Antrobus (2000: 56) asserts that 'In addition to technical training, those who wish to further a feminist agenda require a commitment to caring, sharing, and co-operation, rather than to selfishness, greed, and competition'.

This distinction parallels 'instrumental participation' as opposed to 'transformational participation' as defined by Mikkelsen (1995: 63). Applied to the 74th CAA, women's participation in urban governance would be instrumental, if

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[4] http://www.undp.org/hdr2002/presskit/HDR%20PR_GEM.pdf.

women would simply partake in the administrative and political councillor activities just like the men. In contrast, transformational participation would mean that increased welfare, inclusion of women, and the elimination of discrimination against women, thus gender equality would be acknowledged as the ultimate objectives. Yet, another possibility is that women are being 'used' by others, who seek to achieve their own objectives. A common example is the male councillor, who finds that the ward from which he was elected for many years, has suddenly been reserved for a woman. He then grooms his wife to become a councillor, and he becomes the motor of and behind her election, including broad advisory and financial support. If she is indeed elected (and this seems more likely in rural areas and small towns than in bigger cities), she would at least initially be dancing to her husband's tune. We could call this phenomenon 'marionette' participation, referring to the often used expression in India: 'women as proxies'. The controversies around the efficiency and effectiveness of the women reservation clause of CAA, circle around this distinction in three types participation of women municipal councillors (or WMCs). There is first a gender-neutral (Kabeer 1994) instrumental participation, then a gender-redistributive (ibid.) transformational participation with a gender equity and empowerment agenda, and finally, a distorted gender-manipulative marionette participation. This distinction might be conceptually useful, but in actual practice, WMC's trajectories show fluidity and shifts from one position into the other, as we shall see below.

So on the one hand, women, spoken generally, have the worst starting position and least opportunity to become local leaders, councillors or even mayors. On the other hand there is a sense that women would be equally good, if not better leaders than men, if only they were given the chance. Now in India women *are* given a chance; they are so to say catapulted into leading positions, and we will consider their ups and downs to date in some detail later. But it is already clear that all is not well as yet: efforts will be needed for some time to bolster those women newly elected to the ULBs, and perhaps to create conditions so that others are better prepared to be effective leaders later. This leads us to consider the potential and problems related to capacity building efforts for women councillors.

1.2   Capacity building for decentralised local governance and gender

Since the early nineties large amounts of donor funds have been invested in capacity building efforts in developing countries, a result of the recognition that existing

capacities were very weak and problematic, but also from a wish to work towards sustainable development, to enable governments to manage their affairs independently over the long term. For donors, a key condition is then 'ownership' or starting from the wishes or demands of the recipient country or organisation. Despite considerable investments in capacity building project and plenty evaluations and academic studies, there are still problems to define capacity, to operationalise it properly and to achieve and measure results (Grindle and Hildebrand 1997). There is agreement that capacity is a 'means' towards a specific goal (poverty alleviation or increasing specific individual skills) and that it refers to increasing the ability to fulfil a task or achieve an objective effectively.

However, capacity is often defined narrowly to refer mostly to individual or group training, whereas there is increasing recognition of the importance of the nature of organisations and the larger institutional framework and environment that shapes, constraints or supports performance of organisations and their staff. Hildebrand (2002: 3), who can be seen to represent a multilevel systems approach to capacity building argues:

> One of the major findings of empirical analysis of capacity is that the institutional frameworks are many times so constraining that it is unlikely that interventions aimed solely at the individual or single organisational level alone will be effective.

While it is hard to disagree with this, the question then becomes: what *should* be the (first) focus of capacity building? It is next important to recognise the political implications of capacity building: where capacities are built there are both losers and winners, and capacity building cannot be disconnected from changes in the balance and sources of power, competition of resources, or control over them (Lusthaus et al. 1999). This then has implications for the focus of capacity building, the choice of partners and the way/context in which capacity is built: training of individuals, of groups, on-the-job training or, in contrast, to isolate trainees in special training location, targeting organisations as a whole, target incentive systems etc. Finally, there is more and more attention for the outcomes or, even better, the *impacts* of capacity building. These are notoriously hard to measure, and one can have doubts about the efficacy of many capacity building efforts and investments for example in terms of actual benefits for the poor, for the environment etc. (while there is much evidence of negative impacts such as trainees leaving previous jobs and more generally the brain drain). To reduce the risk

that impacts will be limited or even negative, there is agreement that one should strive for iterative and on-going planning, monitoring and evaluation systems for capacity building, using appropriate indicators.

Capacity building for women is one field that is receiving increasing attention presently. This leads from a recognition that women play (or should play) an important role not only within households, but also in the public sphere in terms of occupying positions of power and decision making: in organisations, in communities, in government and politics. Hence the many programmes aimed at raising the awareness and organisation of women, literacy training, workshops for legal literacy etc. The assumption would be that these efforts would lead to empowering women: strengthening women to play public–rather than mostly private–roles. However, specific attention for capacity building aimed at women already occupying public positions of power appears to be rare and has only recently gained grounds through initiatives at UN level (Escap, UNDP), by the World Bank, and by some institutes and NGOs.

One entry point for capacity building in governance is gender mainstreaming (Razavi and Miller 1998, Goetz 1997). Gender mainstreaming, however, deals more with strategies for gender equalities in institutions–how to get women into male-dominated institutions–than with capacity building for women who are already operating inside. For mainstreaming inside institutions, issues of power, values, resources, management styles and human resource development are important and need to focus not only on the individual, but also on the organisation and its internal relationships. According to Kabeer (1999: 38), the intention of gender mainstreaming needs to be accompanied by more than just presence in governance:

> Ultimately, however, mainstreaming is more than a question of numbers of women in an organisation and in high places, although that clearly helps. It is only when the attempts to shift gender perspectives and women's concerns from their marginal location, in both institutional and ideological terms, to the centre of the development agenda, leads to a process of rethinking of institutional rules, priorities and goals and substantial redistribution of resources that mainstreaming strategies can be considered to have a transformative impact on development practice.

In such a sense, gender mainstreaming on the one hand can be interpreted as instrumental participation ('numbers'), or, on the other, as suggested by Kabeer, as transformational participation. For achieving the latter, she focuses on rules, activities, resources, exclusion/inclusion of people and power. For our purpose – the identification

of capacity building needs for WMCs – we shall concentrate 1) on the identification of the mechanisms of inclusion of WMC in a context of gendered power; 2) the gendered rules in urban governance, 3) on governance activities, and 4) on the access to and distribution of resources by municipal councillors. With such a perspective, we can assess what kind of capacity building training would be necessary to have a transformative impact on gender relations. But first the background on Mumbai's urban governance structure in the light of decentralisation and city administration is presented.

2   MUMBAI: DECENTRALISATION AND ADMINISTRATION

2.1   Decentralisation in Mumbai: administrative and political set-up

Mumbai Municipal Corporation (MMC; more precisely the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai) is one of the oldest and largest civil bodies of India administering a city with an estimated 18 million inhabitants (Kumar Kharn et al. 2003: 3576). It is entrusted with the task to provide basic amenities, health and education, city transport, while planning and maintaining roads and facilities. The mayor who heads its deliberative wing is heading the house of elected municipal councillors totalling 227— one each for each electoral ward of the city represents the MMC. The executive powers are vested in the (appointed) commissioner, who is assisted by additional and deputy commissioners. The latter are in charge of the 24 administrative ward offices. The MMC has a budget of over Rs. 40 billion (about US $. 800 million: Jain: 2002), which is decided about in the so-called 'Standing Committee', the most important sub-committee of the Municipal Council. Next in importance comes the sub-committee dealing with BEST, the semiautonomous massive Bombay Electric Supply and Transport body. Apart from that there are Education and Improvement Committees.

Following the 1992 CAA legislation, the State Government of Maharashtra (of which state Mumbai is the capital) took some time to draft and enact the so called 'conformity legislation' so as to adopt its own state legislation (including the Mumbai Municipal Corporation Act 1888) and rules in line with the federal legislation. For example, a state finance commission was constituted in 1994, and elections for the new local bodies were held here in 1997-8. But it was only in January 2000 when ward committees were formed in Mumbai, and that only after a lot of deliberation, lobbying and litigation. Before forming the ward committees, Mumbai was divided into six zones and 24 administrative wards. The ward officers (with the rank of

assistant commissioner) were the heads of the ward administration, but directly accountable to the Mumbai Municipality Corporation, abbreviated MMC (Jain 2002). An administrative officer of almost all municipal departments (e.g. health) was deputed to each ward. However, the planning and construction of major roads and bridges, tax issues, and capital works of all engineering departments were the responsibility of MMC, working independently of the ward administration.

A new administrative situation hence arose in 2000 with the constitution of 16 ward committees in Mumbai—but not 24 as might have been the case. In reality, there was then some kind of *centralisation* as some wards were joined together under the governance of one elected ward committee (Navtej 2001: 75). On an average, each ward has a population of approximately 650,000 people; an average WC presently has about fourteen elected members, and its chairperson is elected from amongst these members (Jain 2002: 5). The most important administrative change has been that the elected ward councillors now have authority over the executive officials at ward level. The ward officers who were always only accountable to the deputy municipal commissioner (MMC) have new masters now in the chairpersons and councillors of the WC.

It is important to emphasise that Ward Committee councillors are directly elected from the city's administrative wards; in fact they are elected to the Central Municipal Council, where they regularly meet under chairperson-ship of the Mayor to decide on city-wide issues. At the same time, they are members of the ward committees, which administer the area of their electoral ward—as indicated there may be 14 electoral wards to a WC. The Mumbai councillors then have both a ward role and a city-wide role. In their latter capacity they represent massive numbers of people and decide about large amounts of money in terms of budgets and decision making.

However, in contrast to the large mandate and budgets of the MMC, in an administrative and financial sense, the powers of the WCs are quite limited indeed. Compared to the possible functions that might have been delegated to the WC by the Central Municipal Council (the 12th Schedule as mentioned before), the tasks of the WC mostly include the following: i) speedy redress of common grievances of citizens as regards basic services like water supply and sanitation; ii) considering proposals regarding estimates of expenditures of the wards under various budget headings; and iii) granting administrative approval and financial sanction to the plans for municipal works to be carried out in the territorial area of the WC, up to a maximum of Rs. 500,000

(only about US $ 11,000-AIILSG, 2002: 366). However, even this is provisional to the MMC having sanctioned that budget. An analysis of the budget of one ward revealed that the WC only controlled 6% of the total budget of the ward: decisions on the remaining–but main part of–the budget are taken at the central MMC level: infrastructure, roads, licenses for large buildings etc. WC members only have an advisory role in preparing and implementing such larger works in their ward area (Navtej 2001:75).

While in principle – and on paper – municipal administration in India is well organised, in reality it is beset with a multitude of problems which seriously hamper its effectiveness, efficiency and transparency. This is certainly true for many smaller municipalities of India, many of which are more or less bankrupt and where corruption is rife. Financial constraints are common to all Indian cities, but perhaps less so for Mumbai, which is generally seen as a more resourceful city also in terms of per capita incomes. But Mumbai, like any other city suffers from the fact its administration is extremely politicised. Many cities are in reality muddling through from year to year, and in many cases politicisation is such a dominant feature of policy making that there is little 'management' worth the name. The fights and claims related to group or party politics undermine entire municipal administrations. Put briefly, the key concern of elected members of parliament or councillors is not so much to cater to the needs of as many people as possible. Rather, the key issue is as to how to serve one's personal interests (in terms of money, but also land, jobs, career prospects) and the interest of his or her party—even when that may jeopardise or contradict with effective or transparent governance (cf. de Wit 1996, Desai 2003). The position of Mumbai as the financial capital of India, with enormous pressures on basic services, land and housing gives rise to very high economic stakes in local politics. Besides, Mumbai has an active criminal underworld with *dadas*, slumlords, contractors and land speculators believed to have links to parties and councillors, not least those of the Shiv Sena (Hansen 2001: 98, 225). Also – and related to this – there are many complaints that both the municipality and ward committees do not play an adequate developmental role, if only in terms of planning for and providing basic infrastructure and housing to the city's numerous urban poor. An estimated 5.85 million people or 34% of the inhabitants of the Greater Mumbai Municipal Corporation Area live in slums (Kumar Kharn et al. 2003: 3576).

2.2 Roles, interests and realities of the Mumbai municipal councillors

The Mumbai municipal council (MMC) presently has a majority of councillors of the Shiv Sena (SS) party which has joined with the BJP party (leading India's federal government). Together they have 130 of the 227 council seats. Other parties represented in the MMC council include the Congress party (the party of the late Indira and Rajiv Ghandi), and a party that split from the latter party before (NCP). The Shiv Sena has a strongly nationalistic ideology, and has for example opposed the mass influx of migrants into Mumbai from other Indian states. While the SS and BJP tend to have relatively old fashioned and patriarchal ideas about the role and position of women—the SS has nevertheless succeeded to attract quite a few women into its cadre partly through its effective organisation and strategies.

Presently, 30% of the MMC municipal councillors are women, which conforms to the 74th CAA legislation. Like their male counterparts, WMC duties can be summarised to generally include the following (AIILSG 2001, 2002, also Taylor 1990: 79);

- to balance the needs of various stakeholders who have or would like to have influence over the council, including state politicians, party colleagues and officials, and the people, including voters and civil society organisations;

- in terms of the constitution and municipal legislation, consulting and mobilising people for development activities, the provision of basic facilities, maintenance of law and order and to promote democracy;

- the more technical duties including involvement in strategic analysis, planning and implementation, setting and guiding policy, financial management including setting of budgets, monitoring of expenditure and a fair collection of revenue; formulating, implementing and monitoring projects and the effective participation in or chairing of meetings both of councillors, officials and constituents;

- last but not least, there are leadership tasks such as educating and mobilising constituents which requires advocacy and representation skills, and the use of different leadership styles.

It must be noted that Mumbai has a large population of urban poor, who lack housing, land and basic facilities. Hence, councillors also have to carry out the balancing act in trying to satisfy the huge demands of the urban poor with only limited funds and the

need to maintain some popularity to safeguard a chance to be re-elected (cf. Navtej 2001, de Wit 1996). The specific roles of Municipal councillors regarding the urban poor entail having a knowledge of services relevant to them; monitor whether these services actually reach the poor and poorest, identify and rectify implementation problems; work with the (participatory) structures that are part of the urban poverty policies such as SJSRY and with community groups and NGOs; share information on al public expenditures, promote convergence of services and promote linkages between various platforms and networks at community, ward and city level (AIILSG, 2001: 38).[5]

Concretely, a municipal councillor is a policy maker, decision maker, communicator, facilitator, negotiator, power broker and leader. He or she has to represent the citizens, deal with their grievances, actively participate in ward and MMC council meetings, and participate as a member of various subject committees dealing with issues such as finance, public transport and energy (BEST) public works, health and education (AIILSG 2002: 290). A municipal councillor in Mumbai is offered a sitting allowance of Rs. 2,700 monthly (US $ 57), which is by all means a meagre amount. He or she also obtains a free bus pass, but that is hardly used under conditions where a Mercedes and bodyguards are popular status symbols. However, each municipal councillor is provided with an individual discretionary fund of Rs. 2 million (US $42,000). This money must be used for developmental works in his or her constituency. It may be noted that this is much more than the aforementioned meagre funds (Rs. 500,000), the limit of the amount up to which a ward committee *as a whole* can decide. So while on the one hand ward committees have only a limited developmental role, individual councillors do have, in principle, a more substantive role in terms of funds—but these are being used at their individual discretion, and they are often used for concrete, tangible projects or services. One could argue that the latter funds are neutral to decentralisation as the *collective* of ward committee councillors has no say about them.

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[5] The Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rojgar Yojana or SJSRY is an all-India urban poverty programme which provides for community organisation in support for all poverty alleviation programmes, social welfare and physical improvement schemes. Interestingly, the institutional structures created under SJSRY at the neighbourhood, community and city levels are entirely and exclusively for and by (poor) women. Ideally, plans developed at the neighbourhood level are to be integrated into city or ward plans through the Community Development Societies (AIILSG 2001).

It is widely believed that the combination of low remuneration, large interests in terms of decisions on costly land and housing plans and deals, and a general culture of opacity and secrecy results in large scale and institutionalised corruption. Some say that the incidence of corruption has increased with the coming to power of the Shiv Sena party with it relatively less experienced and more populist politicians (Desai 2003, Navtej: 2001: 44).

In view of the above multiple requirements of and demands on the Mumbai municipal councillors the question arises how people get elected and whether they have common characteristics. Not much has been written in general about these selection and election processes, especially about the intra-party process of providing a ticket to this or that candidate to stand for a seat in a particular constituency. Obviously, a party would field a candidate who is expected to have the best chance to win the election, and this will obviously differ from constituency to constituency, from ward to ward. Considerations of caste, ethnicity or religion may play a role in a heterogeneous city as Mumbai, but generally prized qualities would be social, leadership and oratory skills, being known/ living in a ward area, and having a good reputation. However, this may only be half the story if and when a person has a bad reputation but is known to be a good broker or 'fixer', or when a person is close to important high-level persons in politics, administration or business. Indeed, these–rather more informal, particularistic considerations–may determine whether a person is fielded for a seat or not. Not least, money plays a critical role, as political positions are seen as opportunities for making money quickly. Says Navtej (2001: 77): 'Entry into the formal political arena even at the local level through election is expensive; payments have to be made at every stage, to get a party ticket and to fight for the elections. All these expenditures are seen as investments towards reaping these back once local elections are won. The political arena is known for its patron-client relationships and payments and cuts for everything'. WMCs have to operate thus in a highly dynamic, contested arena where many economic and political interests are acted out. Who are those women and how do they operate?

3 CHARACTERISTICS AND PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS

3.1 Becoming a WMC: mechanisms of inclusion

In the years before the enactment of the 74th CAA, at most fourteen women from a total of 140 were a member of the MMC central city council, and in 1990 this was only five out of 170. The 74th CAA led to a considerable increase in seats held by women: in 1992 73 women gained seats in a total of 221, and 79 women in 1997, due to the reservation of a similar number of electoral wards to be reserved for women. However, not all these women were elected from reserved wards; 13 WMCs were elected from an open ward without reservation (Hajare 2002: 10ff.). Sixteen WMCs who were elected in 1992 were re-elected in 1997, which may be an indication of their credibility or competence—however, it could also be due to the efforts of their husbands.

Various common factors appear to allow women to stand for elections, and the one most mentioned is family relations and support. Personal accounts of female Indian leaders in local politics mention over and over again the essential support by husbands, mothers in law, parents, and other family members in order to be able to take up and continue a public function.[6] Only those women, who have backing of their family and especially the male members of their family, can enter the political world (Paricha 2002: 7). Our interviews with WMC's demonstrated the necessity of a flexible division of labour in the households of the councillors as a back-up condition for their frequent absences: among women, the older generation (mother, mother in law), the younger generation (daughter) or the same generation (sister) take over household duties in order to allow the WMC to perform her duties.[7] We see here an inter-generational transfer of duties within the same gender, and only in a few cases a are taking over some of the caring and domestic tasks.

With this intergenerational flexibility traditional gender relations in the family are kept intact. It is the male family members (husbands, fathers, brothers, eventually also grown-up sons), who are key agents with a view to allowing a public role of women (wives, daughters, sisters, mothers). 'Being encouraged by her husband' to take public office is a repeated phrase in the profiles of women leaders.[8] A similar

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[6] See http://womenw.decentralization.ws/rirf/Profile/Inprf.htm
[7] In middle-class households this flexibility is less critical, as servants are carrying out housework.
[8] http://womenw.decentralization.ws/rirf/Profile/Inprf.htm, p.1.

statement also emphasised the role of the husband. 'The fact that my husband accompanied me to election meetings helped my image a great deal' (Devarj 2001: 1). A case in point may be a newly elected WMC in one Mumbai ward who was invariably accompanied by her brother. In fact, rumours had it that the woman had been perceived to be politically weak by her political party, so that the prospects looked bright for the party to easily control her. However, they had not counted on the brother who, after his sister won the seat, developed as the WMC constant guide and advisor, no doubt with his very own private agenda. The case goes to show that perceived 'controllability' can also be an advantage for a woman to be given a party ticket. Ironically, a 'weak' woman may then have a better chance to become a councillor than a 'strong' woman who is assertive and demanding and who has her own agenda. This obviously links to the dynamics of the 'proxy' or 'marionette' type of women's participation in governance that we mentioned before as being so pervasive in India.

Another element of the importance of the private sphere for success in the public is the effort WMCs make 'to keep up the posture as housewife to preserve the family honour' (op.cit. p1). Devraj (2001: 1) says of one councillor that 'marriage enhanced her image among voters'. The importance of women's morally appropriate affiliation with a man reflects the importance of a gender ideology of dependence on men in the determination of women's action radius.

The complexities of inclusion into urban governance—family, party and individual agendas, are mirrored in the profile of WMCs. The AIILSG (1996: 287) has identified four strata to which WMCs mostly belong: women from families of politicians, professional women (e.g. doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers), socially committed women, and women belonging to other reservation groups like tribal communities. Hajare (2002: 20) has presented an insightful profile of WMCs in Mumbai elected since 1992. Only three of the 151 WMCs elected in 1992 and 1997 were below 35 years, the majority (N=73) were in the age of 36-45 years, followed by a smaller number (N=47) of women between 46-55 years; in the oldest age group (above 55 years) only12 women were found. These data show that life cycle demands for child care greatly influence access to political functions: women in the age of 35 and above have left behind to a great deal the care intensive years of their children. Hajare (op.cit. p. 40) mentions also that attractive youthfulness is another explanatory factor for the

numerical strength of women between 35-45years in public functions. Hence, beauty appears to be an asset in terms of increasing the chances of women to be elected.

As to education, the majority of WMCs did not study beyond the 10th Standard (secondary school). Yet, we do find 20 teachers, 5 lawyers, and 4 doctors among them. None of the WMCs is from the underprivileged segments of Mumbai: 70% have a middle class, and 30% a high-class background (Hajare 2002: 23-24). Unfortunately, data are not available about the women councillors from the Scheduled Caste (or Dalit) communities; after all, there is also a reservation for the members of these formerly untouchable castes.

This privileged background of WMCs is also reflected in their origins as members of a family with politicians (90% according to Hajare 2002: 25). Her study confirms that male family members (fathers, husbands, brothers) gave their 'voice' to what she calls female 'proxies'. Yet, at the same time, there are also examples of newly elected women who raised their own voice and did not need or did not listen to male whisperings, and thus were immune to (or overcame) a marionette status. This may be conform general trends both in rural and urban India that things are changing over time, of a gradual increase towards greater professionalism and self-motivation of WMCs and a decreasing influence of male politicians on the politically active female members of their family (Santha 1999; Mathew 2000).

3.2   Women Municipal Councillors working in a gendered context

After being elected, a WMC enters a gendered space of political decision-making. Formal spaces of decision-making exhibit locations of power: the writing desk, the pompous office chair, modern utensils like watches or pens, telephones, and since a few years cellular phones, etc. are those symbols of power in the public. It is easy to identify the highest ranked person in an office: the one, usually a man, sitting in the biggest chair behind the biggest table. Simultaneously, women councillors line up on wooden benches, listen to the Municipal President or Commissioner, never speak when not asked—visibly demonstrate their low rank already through this spatial arrangement and body languages (Holzner, Field notes 2002).

The formal space of political decision-making follows rules and rituals of speech and address, requires knowledge of the right terminology and procedures, and of the codes of conduct of municipal council meetings. Some WMCs who were groomed in their political parties have learned the rules of voice, most of them need to learn 'on-

the job' or elsewhere. School education prepares to a certain degree for these skills, but this obviously applies far less to interaction and forms of communication in the context family and household. The step from 'kitchen to the council' is also a step from informal to formal language, from private to public speech codes, from free self-expression to self-restraint.[9] Professional middle class women (doctors, lawyers, NGO workers), who have made this step already and learned the codes of being part of the public world, face less problems than those women who have only a limited work experience in the public sphere.

The formal context of the Councillors meetings or the weekly party meetings is not the only or even most important arena where decisions are taken: observers of political decision-making processes mention the importance of informal spaces, in which decisions are prepared. Such spaces are predominantly male spaces which cannot easily be entered by women, because of no-go areas (bars) or inaccessible places (high-ranking offices, cars, hotels) or inconvenient time (evenings). Presence in such places could question the women's virtue, and WMCs need to guard their virtue in order to legitimise their suitability for a public function. WMCs are reluctant to join male councillors in such places, and only dare so in company of their husbands (Hajare 2002: 30). And even when such predominantly male formal and informal spaces of decision-making are entered, WMC's may face gender-based discrimination. Ignoring (non-inviting, non-informing, non-asking), ridiculing, interrupting, threatening with physical and sexual violence, include some the experiences of women who contested in politics and took on a public role (Shanta 1999; Devraj 2001).[10] One study mentions a case where a male Mumbai councillor deliberately fed a new WMC misleading advice so that she would make mistakes and lose credibility with her colleagues and the public (AIILSG 2002: 292). Given the male exercises of maintaining control in their formerly male dominated and uncontested arenas over the female intruders into their realm of power, WMCs choose a strategy of acquiescence by proving their virtues as good wives, good mothers, good housewives but also to prove to be a good councillor or politician. This complex of attempts to dutifully meet with all the multi-facetted and

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[9] We owe this expression to Mrs. Vishaka in a conversation in November 2002.

[10] However, confrontations can also come from women, when party agenda's or personal animosities prevail over female solidarity in this political space (Hajare 2002).

multi-level expectations related to the position of women politician can be has been referred to as the *Super-Woman syndrome.*[11]

3.3   Women Municipal Councillor activities

An indicator for the access to power in urban governance is the representation in ward committees. As was already indicated, within the Central Municipal Council of MMC there are a number of committees in which decisions are taken on specific subjects. Unsurprisingly, the best known and also most contested committees are those where most money is involved and these are first of all the Financial Standing Committee and next the BEST committee (Bombay Electric Supply and Transport). Besides, there are the committees on education, health etc. In the BEST committee, women count for only 18% of members as per 2001. On the other hand, the education committee had a 42% women membership in 1992, reaching 50% in 2001. But it is in the Public Health committee (47%); the Education committee (65%), and in the Women and Child Welfare Committee (100%) where women make up a majority of committee members (Hajare 2002: 13-18). Hajare (ibid.) comments that 'positions of financial importance are in the hands of men'. Hence, this gender segregation in public affairs neatly reflects the traditional division of responsibility in households and transposes tasks of family welfare into public tasks.

Important for the councillor's work is her accessibility, to open up new doors for citizens, especially women, who are much less linked to the political system than men. Some quotes from our field study on the work of one WMC illustrate this:

> Every day I am sitting for three hours in my office of the party and talk to people who come to me with their worries. I note down those worries, sometimes I give them direct assistance, sometimes I help them with addresses, sometimes I promise them to convey their concern to the council.

Most councillors go daily to the office and twice a week to their ward. According to some WMCs whom we have interviewed, citizens bring issues of a common nature as well as of private concerns to them: as to the former, complaints about inadequate basic services like water supply, street traffic problems, pollution, solid waste management, liquor shops, are most often mentioned. As to private concerns, women bring forward problems with school admission of their children, occurrence of domestic violence

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[11] Thanks to Mr. Mukesh for this comparison.

(wife battering) and rape—which latter issue is taken up very seriously according to several WMC's.

In a ward in Virar in the North of Mumbai, the local council established a women's society for grinding and the sale of flour as an income generating activity. The councils' Welfare Committee initiated nutrition courses, sewing activity of school uniforms, and the fabrication of toys. Some WMCs of the council focus on school dropouts, and engage in informal education for girls and literacy training for adult women. Such a concentration on health, education and income is a choice for capability enhancement of women and, in our opinion, cannot be dismissed as a reduction to practical needs only; in the contrary, greater capabilities are also opening up paths of greater gender equality and justice.

To summarise, WMC's have to balance and adapt to cultural norms, family interests, party agendas, a political demand to represent other women, to alleviate poverty, and certainly, to make decentralisation efficient. Are newly elected women councillors prepared for this balancing act? What do they need to *know,* what *skills* are required? The tasks of WMCs are not different from the tasks of male councillors, and, consequently, are rarely related to the social relations, in which WMC's are embedded nor the fact that institutions are gendered (Goetz 1998) and that public decision-making occurs in gendered spaces with gendered rules and rituals. To the contrary, in Mumbai, the WMC position appears to be seen as gender-neutral, into which WMC's are mainstreamed. Accordingly, training contents tend to concentrate on the learning of those tasks, thus are based on transmission of knowledge about laws and services, the 'what' and 'how' of public administration. But they may lack reference to, for example, the gender dimensions of urban poverty. A social analysis would focus on interests of marginal groups, a gender analysis would focus on practical as well as strategic gender needs (Moser 1995) [12]. Based on the above sketch of the context and practice of WMC's work, some major constraints can be identified that prevent WMCs from effective participation at the local level, which can be clustered into constraints regarding knowledge, skills, general environment of governance, and gender-specific constraints (AIILSG 2002: 290 ff):

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[12] We ignore here the debate around gender needs and interests.

- Knowledge-related constraints such as a lack of orientation in issues related to urban and municipal administration; lack of knowledge about municipal acts, rules and regulations and their implementation and a lack of understanding of municipal/ward budgets;

- Skills-related constraints include lack of confidence to address public gatherings, to chair meetings, the inability to assess budgets quickly or to analyse policies and projects and proposals thereof;

- Contextual constraints refer to the general environment of governance, including a lack of party support and poor organisational structures; lack of money and resources to sustain electoral campaigns and criminalisation of politics and use of money power, and finally;

- Gender-specific constraints entails issues such as a lack of support from senior male/female colleagues in the party/municipal body, and difficult co-operation with municipal officials, as well as family responsibilities.

4 THE TRAINING MODULE DEVELOPED BY ISS AND THE AIILSG TRAINING INSTITUTE

In May 2002, a group of trainers working with the Mumbai based All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIILSG) came to the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) for the first stage of a tailor Made Training Programme aimed at strengthening Women Municipal Councillors who were newly elected to municipal councils under the 74th CAA legislation. The AIILSG is a well-established training institute for municipal officials and political representatives, offering short term and long term courses in fields as diverse as accounting and solid waste disposal, while training fire brigades as well as sanitary inspectors. The institute is partly financed by India's Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation. And while the AIILSG offers many courses, even for municipal councillors, it perceived the need to give specific courses for WMCs, tailor made to their backgrounds and needs. It then approached ISS to help formulate such a course and with the support of NUFFIC a Tailor Made Training Programme was developed jointly. [13] The Programme entailed a first intensive three

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[13] NUFFIC is the Dutch acronym for Netherlands organisation for International Co-operation in Higher Education.

weeks training of AIILSG trainers at ISS, The Hague, and a follow-up training and research stage in Mumbai in November-December 2002, when the authors visited Mumbai and the nearby city of Pune. The Tailor Made Training Programme (TMTP) focused on the trainers either employed or associated with AIILSG. The latter are practitioners or have been councillors or mayors themselves and thus bring their practical experience into the training course, which greatly enhanced quality and credibility of the trainers. On the whole, most participants (fourteen women, one man) were well-qualified and confident trainers with ample experience in training.

The three week course organised at ISS (see the programme in box 1) aimed to enhance the knowledge and skills of the AIILSG trainers in the broad field of policy making—setting agendas, formulating policy and projects, monitoring their implementation and evaluation. Specific attention was given to participatory methodology, starting from the perception that India's decentralisation aimed at 'giving power to the people', and that councillors need to be aware of the potentials, benefits

BOX 1
TMTP for trainers of WMCs

Objectives of the TMTP

The overall course objective is capacity enhancement of internal and associated faculty of the All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIILSG) based in Mumbai, India, to meet new challenges in the field of decentralised and participatory urban governance. The focus is on enhancing training skills in the field of formulating and implementing participatory policies and programmes relevant for newly elected women municipal councillors. Derived objectives include exposure to national and international experiences in the urban governance field, such as decentralisation and participatory local governance, including the involvement of various stakeholders, including the government, politicians, the private sector and communities of poor urban men and women.

Topics

- Introduction to Public Policy and Development Management
- The Policy Process—Agenda Setting, Policy Formulation, Implementation and the Role of Organisations
- Introduction to Gender and Development
- Gender Issues in Rural/Urban Planning and Development
- Training Workshop- Methods for Effective Training
- Government, the poor, intermediary organisations and public-private Partnerships
- Strategies for Women's Empowerment and Participation
- Decentralisation for Empowerment and Effective Service Delivery
- Participatory Methods for Gender Sensitive Policy Formulation
- Case Studies on Women's Participation
- Project Management Strategies
- Participatory and Gender Aware Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

but also risks and costs of participatory approaches and frameworks. Similarly, ample attention was given to gender issues, starting from our assumption that Women Municipal Councillors would primarily see it as their tasks to work towards gender equality and to focus on the practical gender needs but especially the strategic gender interests of women. This would be specifically critical for poor women who are making up a large proportion of the inhabitants of (large) Indian cities. We will indicate later that both assumptions on the importance of participatory approaches and gender issues were not entirely in line with the thinking of AIILSG staff and WMCs, as well as the realities of WMC functioning. The ISS TMTP course finally paid attention to enhancing training skills, project management and, cost-benefit analysis, change management and negotiation skills.

There were three linked thematic clusters in this course on urban governance for WMC's: a) public policy, b) gender, and c) participatory methodology for policy implementation and training. The key outcome of the TMTP was envisioned to be the development of one model Pilot Training Programme for WMCs, and all interactive sessions as well as some excursions were to feed into this programme. After agreeing on the programme framework, during the TMTP thematic sub-groups elaborated various key topics such as administrative and legal issues, poverty alleviation strategies, social issues such as health and education, and individual skills enhancement in terms of communication and leadership. This resulted in a comprehensive three-day training programme for WMCs that applied the methodology for effective training, which was presented during the course.

The Indian (federal) Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation was very interested in the concept of WMC training and committed to finance the organisation of five pilot training programmes based on the TMTP model in different cities of Western India. Between the return of the AIILLSG trainers to Mumbai in May and November 2002, three such training programmes for WMCs were offered in the states of Maharshtra and Rajastan—so that AIILSG trainers obtained first hand experiences with the model course developed at ISS. They also documented the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the programmes in relation to different groups of WMCs from different states and backgrounds, which proved very helpful later when the authors of this text reviewed these first three programmes with the trainers. After reaching Mumbai in November 2002 for our follow-up training and research mission, the group of trainers was in a position to assess the programme developed at ISS and to

work with us to adjust the programme where needed. We participated in the two final pilot programmes for WMCs in December 2002, while observing the trainers, trainees and by giving on the spot advice. We also had intensive discussions with WMCs, both women who participated or who had earlier participated in a Training Programme, but also women who were not trained, for example during site visits to and with WMCs in their Mumbai wards (ISS 2003 Mission Report). These interviews and interactions were extremely useful to obtain first hand views of women who had only recently joined municipal politics, and who had often very clear ideas on where they needed support and strengthening of their abilities.

4.1   The training programmes for women municipal councillors

In box 2 we have included a list of topics that were core to all five WMC training programmes given on the basis of the initial model Training Programme developed at ISS.

BOX 2
Topics of the training programmes in Pune, Mumbai and Goa

> **Topics**
> - Laws relating to municipal corporations
> - Laws of meeting
> - Awareness of laws with respect to women
> - Government's initiative for women's self-employment
> - Financial planning in management & gender budgeting
> - Analysis of community needs
> - Mapping of services and resources at ward level
> - Slum sanitation
> - Education and public health
> - Urban Poverty Alleviation programmes
> - Effective urban governance
> - Enhancing communication skills and stress management
> - Participatory learning and action
> - Strategic planning

Three thematic fields stand out: a) administrative and financial topics, b) service delivery that respond to practical needs of the urban poor, and c) women specific topics regarding protective laws for women and items that promote 'power within' (in terms of Kabeer, 1999) like communication, leadership and stress management skills. The training hence emphasises an administrative, financial and legal agenda, but is, different from the TMTP at the ISS, relatively silent on gender issues, the theme that we expected to be key to the field of 'women in decentralised governance'.

Indeed, it is fair to say that the WMCs as well as the AIILSG trainers generally felt that the highest priority for WMCs would be to first become all-round and capable representatives and administrators. WMCs foremost want to demonstrate their ability to function as well as men as municipal councillors, and their first concern is then to know the rules, procedures, networks, programmes and policies, all of which enable them to address the needs of all their constituents, *both* men and women. In a very pragmatic way, they realise that they first need to build up a solid and generally good reputation, and that it would undermine their position if they were to identify too closely with women or gender issues ('it will not help me to be seen as a 'women activist' said one woman; 'we were not elected to solve women's problems only, scoring on women only is not good for us'. Another woman said 'that focus on women would dissatisfy the men'. One WMC to whom we spoke asserted that 'women rule their constituency by the heart, the men by their head: A woman would see that for example water is important, men care much less about daily needs'. Linked to the safeguarding of a reputation of all-round competence is the issue of re-election, where the voters are both male and female. We may note that the tendency to (initially) focus on acquiring broad, all-round expertise seems to be a more common trait of WMC training programmes, as documented by Palanithurai (2001: 111 ff) for a training programme for WMCs in the urban local bodies of Tamil Nadu, a state in South India.

This training programme had a strong focus on legal and administrative issues relating to the 74th CAA, including modern management techniques as to how to work towards an enabling role of the municipality so that communities take on larger roles, how to affect economic growth and development, while the programme also incorporated the strengthening the capacity of women as leaders. Some of the observations of the trainees following the training were that "we are now conscious of our leadership rather than gender. This programme gave us orientation to look at issues as leaders not as women' (ibid: 113). Interestingly, it was also noted that: 'The mindset of the women leaders that women are to represent the women issues has changed. Now we feel that we are only representatives of the people'. However, the participants' reactions also included a few remarks that they have learnt more about women's issues and about the importance of reserving seats for women.

Judging from limited available evidence, there appears to be some consensus then that women councillors are foremost expected to be all-round administrators and

leaders, and should only in the second place focus on or be responsible for specific women and gender issues. Yet, there is of course attention for *practical gender needs* in terms of discussing for example credit programmes for women, improved delivery of basic services and housing, urban poverty alleviation policies in which women play a key role (like the aforementioned SJSRY; see also: De Wit 1996). In contrast, there is only little attention for *strategic gender interests*, which link to structural determinants of unequal gender relations. In the WMC courses however, there was some attention for more strategic women issues, especially on legal issues (inheritance law, property law, divorce, and dowry). One woman said: 'Let the first WMC training programme be quiet on gender; let it be mainstreamed as an appetiser on gender. However, there needs to be follow-up and in a second course there should be more on women and gender, and a full blown gender course as a third stage'. It was also argued that even if women do not profile themselves as being focused on women's issues, the very fact that the councillor is a women and not a man is already extremely important. Women facing problems such as dowry or domestic violence will much earlier approach a WMC than a male councillor. Also, it is also easier for a WMC to interact with the women during site visits etc.

Yet, because of this adaptive mainstreaming strategy – to prove to be as capable as a man – the transformatory aspects of WMCs as change agents towards gender equality are considered secondary. This is a conscious strategy – becoming a successful WMC requires first to "de-womanise" oneself, to de-gender oneself and learn first and foremost the rules of governance in order to get respectability.

4.2 Training schedule and practical realities

However, the context of the training is not too conducive for successful and immediate capacity building. During one of the two workshops in which we personally participated, we observed that the combined factors of invitation practice, massive numbers of participants, time shortage, and logistics limit the success of the training. We will briefly consider some issues – which are common to many WMC training programmes – here:

- *Invitation practice*: As per existing procedure, the invitation for the training is sent to mayors of municipalities with the request to identify or 'send' not more than two WMCs. However, the mayor may have a dilemma of selection: if his council has more than two parties and if he were to delegate two women, the

non-selected others feel insulted and might make trouble in the council or in their respective parties. In order to avoid conflict, but also to respond to the wide interest in such training, not two, but sometimes five, six, seven or more women are sent from one ward or municipality to a course. As 30 mayors or commissioners are usually contacted, it has happened that a course originally prepared for 60 participants has to cope with as many as 160. Moreover, information on the precise number of participants from a municipality may come in very late – or be only clear on their arrival.

- Such *massive attendance* on the one hand reflects the popularity of the training, on the other it does not only create logistical problems (food, handouts, documentation), but naturally also communication and interaction problems. There may be insufficient chairs, tables, writing utensils, the blackboard cannot be seen by those sitting in the rear, or the lack of microphones prevents hearing what someone says. This is compounded by the fact that all sessions are plenary and that there is not a tradition of breaking up in smaller groups for in-depth discussion and experience sharing, which of course would need more training staff. The high number of participants and the tradition that one topic is presented by one expert trainer leads to a classical teaching style of lecturing with little space for interaction. The trainers allowed participation of trainees through the question-answer method, but generally group discussion and iterative deepening of learning were rare, and limited to (very lively) evaluation sessions.

- *Limited time* (three days at most). We are talking in fact about a highly intensive crash course, which timing is explained by the fact that three days is the most that women can attend given their household and family duties. The actual learning period is even less, at most 2,5 days are available for actual learning due to registration time and opening ceremonies. Such a short period naturally limits the depth and width of training. In comparison, a similar training in Tanzania, also for local councillors, but not aimed at women, lasted eight days: two days each on: a) the councillors role, b) constitutional and legal position, c) technical skills, and d) leadership skills (Taylor 1999: 89).

Such a difficult training context requires well trained and highly qualified trainers who are not only experienced professionals in terms of subject knowledge, but

who are also able to handle a large group. Thus, capacity building is not only a must for WMC's, but also for their trainers. Studies on the effectiveness of trainings under such constraints are still lacking, and it is still unclear what would be most effective forms of learning for such a big and diverse group. Some indications for such effectiveness we observed in the wish and partial availability of small booklets or handouts in which important information is compressed, and in the purposeful, built-in use of role models of WMCs who inform on their practical experiences.

4.3   Perceptions on the usefulness of the training programmes

Following the remarks made already about the nature of the five WMC training programmes, we will briefly assess the views of participants, as documented during the end-of-course evaluations. Generally, women were positive to very positive about the training programmes. They had appreciated the sessions, the sharing of experiences with other WMCs, they had gained confidence to deal with day to day issues: 'the awareness is increasing now that women actually have and can use powers'; and 'we are now aware of our rights and know how to enforce them'. For that reason, one of the best-appreciated parts was the training in leadership skills, in communication skills in relation to attending and chairing meetings, and how to deal with stress caused by juggling of the public and private tasks due to the gendered expectations in both spheres. Very important too was the appreciation especially for the sessions on gender budgeting and strategic planning: women came to understand using percentages and many felt they were better equipped to scan a budget quickly. Understanding the municipal budget, how to get grants for social services and activities, how to access and allocate funds was seen as extremely helpful, even, or maybe because, women were underrepresented in the city's financial committee. Finally, they liked the teaching style of those trainers (one of them a man) who were most interactive and who allowed most sharing of experiences. Also, the women trainers were perceived as role models; they were asked many questions about how they ran their households, whether they could travel alone, whether they were not afraid etc.

In terms of weak points, many said that the programme was too full, that topics were only dealt with superficially, that more days were needed (a seven days course was even suggested). There were many suggestions to improve training logistics, for example that invitations should be sent directly to the WMCs and not to city mayors; that the invitation be sent much earlier as it often comes very late (which is normally

due to internal co-ordination problems in municipalities rather than to AIILSG action); that women should not be allowed to bring children as they diverted away attention not only from the mother but also others; that all women 'should attend all sessions, and take things seriously, and not go roam and shop here and there, making things confused'.

Unsurprisingly, many WMCs would have liked (even) more attention for issues such as gender budgeting, long term/strategic planning, project formulation. There were requests for locally specific and local language information (e.g. small manuals) with simple tips and important information for women: homes for battered women, places of support in cases of dowry, domestic violence and abortion. Some would like a list of national and international agencies/offices with programmes, funds and subsidies relevant for the poor and women and for basic services, social welfare, housing and the environment. Finally, there was a suggestion from both WMCs and trainers that, ideally, there should be a series of training programmes for recently elected WMCs, with an initial emphasis on administrative and legal issues and a second series with increasing emphasis on women and gender issues. Besides, there is a clear perception that there are rather large differences between the WMCs from smaller, rural, provincial towns and cities and those from the large cities like Mumbai and Pune. Often the latter are already more 'street wise' and better educated. All this would imply a need for three types of separate programmes: for 'new' WMCs from larger cities; for the new WMCs smaller towns and cities; and for more experienced (second term) WMCs generally. And, of course, apart from this, there is a felt need to follow up a more general first training focused on enhancing administrative skills and confidence, with a more gender-focused training programme.

5   CONCLUSIONS

This paper has illustrated the considerable odds Indian women face before and after they are elected into municipal councils – and this is even the case for relatively well situated and literate women in relatively progressive cities such as Mumbai and Pune. The first thing that is often noted in relation to women councillors elected into governance under India's decentralisation also applies to our case study: they need to be given time—we are talking about an incremental evolution. Surely one cannot expect women, after generations of being banned to the private sphere, to suddenly be

effective, independent and autonomous public local leaders. However, it is not so clear that there is much time for women to grab with both hands the opportunities offered by the reservation of women seats.

> Already there has been the tendency to put the onus on women to prove their worth as they have been given the opportunity. If they cannot prove their merit it is *their* (italics ours) failing or floundering, some have already insisted. The real possibility here is that without contextual reference and reflection women's failure, even if marginal, is likely to debase women's candidature altogether (Mandal 2003: 27).

So the matter is not only very important, but also somewhat urgent. It is not that the legislation will be withdrawn, but that the example of less effective women councillors may have an adverse impact on (young) women who could and should also take up positions and who need positive role models in effective women leaders with solid reputations.

In view of the extreme complexity of the institutional context in which WMCs have to operate, it needs little to see that one or even two incidental training programmes cannot make much difference in their performance. That is not to say that they are not important as for many women in India these are probably the only chance to broaden their horizon and to exchange experiences and perceptions with other women. For that reason there must be many more WMC training programmes, but these also need to be better prepared and implemented in terms of logistics and quality. Fairly simple improvement in registration practice, in teaching methods (move towards more interactive methods and group work) and in teaching materials in local languages can make a lot of difference already.

However, in line with what Grindle and Hildebrand (1995) Lusthaus et al. (1999) and Kabeer (1999) argue, apart from training individual or groups of councillors, there has to be attention for the larger institutional context in which WMCs have to work. Concretely, there would have to be attention for the organisational development (OD) of the Ward Committee and Municipal Council in terms of incentive systems, monetary compensation and systems of accountability and transparency. Rather than training only the WMCs, it would be – perhaps even more – important to train also the male councillors, ward officers/DMCs and officials to sensitise them in women and gender issues. Donor agencies sympathetic to the position of women and the success of the 74th CAA may be advised to support such training programmes in order to change institutional cultures. More broadly, however important the reservation policy for

WMCs is, it can never be a substitute for an urgent need in India to work towards equitable gender relations. Broader institutional change is urgently needed e.g. in rules of employment and promotion, wages, inheritance, and division of labour including reproductive tasks. However, the present inequitable rules and institutions are the result of and legitimised by a strongly patriarchal culture and ideology which itself needs to be changed. Much more concerted efforts are needed from women groups, NGOs, the media to work towards this, or rather to oppose trends in India, which weaken the position of women, both by Hindu and Moslem forces.

However, it has been argued that it is too much to automatically expect women's solidarity or collective action:

> In the workshop of National Commission for Women the uncomfortable impression was that women have not formed lobbies to influence public opinion in favour of women. All this pertains to the fact that women elites are apathetic to the problems affecting larger sections of women in India. Similarly the findings about women *panchayat* members in the district reveal that they do not prefer working for women exclusively. This reverts one to ponder why this is so and to what extent women *panchayat* members are capable of justifying one of the supposed rationales of their induction (Mandal 2003: 177).

The same question raised for rural women is also valid for women in urban governance. So if one single training is by no means enough, there should be follow-up training with increasing attention for both the practical needs and strategic interests of women. Another suggestion that is already being considered in urban India is the setting up of networks of WMCs—so that they can exchange information and experiences. Perhaps networks should not be too large in terms of space, and the members should have a comparable background. It is not so clear to what extent party membership would undermine efforts for women to link up, but most women interviewed indicated that this would be no problem. This may be true, but is perhaps also indicative of the fact that women are hardly anywhere in the apex of municipal power. In contrast, networks of male councillors for mutual support would probably have little chance to survive-certainly if they belong to different political parties. They would not need them, and be probably very suspicious of them: the party counts for all, and the most critical information and experiences would be most secret (land deals, bribery, deciding on a strategy to deal with the budget, the Mayor or Commissioner etc.). It is important to note than that women are not part of the real decision-making in towns and cities. Even after the reservation of seats for women, it is the men who are elected into the critical municipal committees such as the (financial) Standing Committee, or the Transport and

Power committee (BEST) in Mumbai. Still now it is WMCs who are active in the (no doubt also very important) social welfare committees, but this is not where the power and money is. And if WMCs are to play a truly transformatory role, they should *also* be part of the latter (finance focused) committees.

The gender focus of the Training for Trainers Programme organised at ISS was only found back in a diluted and less overt way in the (pilot) training programmes that were subsequently organised for WMCs organised in India However, it is also true that the trainers' personal experience in politics and administration becomes part and parcel of their training and allows them to be role models for new WMCs. Gender awareness and gender analysis skills acquired and enhanced during the ISS based TMTP strengthened their overall functioning as trainers, even if gender issues were not very manifest in the training programmes they themselves organised.

It can be established that the trainers, but also many WMCs want to give priority to knowledge and skills regarding the councillor's function in general, and give gender issues a secondary rank – certainly initially – in order to gain not only 'capacity' but also credibility in a male-dominated institutional setting. This can be seen as a strategic choice, to be defended by arguing that women need to be credible and capable as councillors so as to make it clear that the concept of reservation can work in the first place. This then would create conditions for ever more women to be and remain part of urban governance systems - with increasing self-confidence and autonomy. At this point it is difficult to decide whether the trainings in the Netherlands as well as those conducted in India are contributing to an instrumental (better functioning) or transformatory (different functioning) participation of WMCs in their urban governance tasks. At any rate a gender-focused curriculum as a follow-up to the basic course would need to address the transformatory elements of women's participation in terms of responsiveness to poor women's needs and interests in improving their livelihoods and security, and in terms of contributing to changing the now predominanty male orinted and the related gendered arrangements of space, time, and finances.

This paper addressed the complexities of capacity building efforts for WMCs: the importance of gender relations for the WMC position, the complex structures and power relations of the municipality, the difficulties of operating in this gendered institution, and the broad responsibilities of councillors. Despite those complexities, the Indian policy of reservation and affirmative action is no longer questioned and has proven its merits as a policy of linking equity with justice, and of recognition with

redistribution of power. Continued capacity building for WMCs is not just a vehicle for realising the principle of giving concrete voice to women in urban governance, but also a way of guaranteeing its success. It is, as yet, too early to assess as to whether women are better or more transformatory leaders than men, whether they would be more participatory and caring as some have argued. First, there will have to be a more 'level playing field' with more women councillors, who operate as councillors on an equal footing with their male counterparts in a more gender equal socio-political context.

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