

MAGNIFYING WOMEN'S PORTRAYAL IN MINISTERIAL DECISION MAKING: ROADMAP FOR GENDER INCLUSIVE ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

Despite recent progress, women continue encountering fundamental challenges that are restricting them from attaining key positions and making significant administrative /essential decisions in society's personal and professional domains. The persisting problem of women being underrepresented in ministerial decision-making is one of the main reasons for the ineffective implementation of gender equality in society. To better understand the disparities and propose a solution for improved gender inclusion, Women at the ministerial level should take an active part in decision-making, which is possible only if they attain the top of the hierarchy. To emphasize and eliminate the present gaps in gender inclusion, this study addresses a vital subject of female representation in governmental decision-making procedures. Following an in-depth examination, the research paper offers a strategic approach for increasing the influence of women in decision-making and policy-making at the ministerial level. The research suggests that lawmakers and interested parties actively encourage and amplify women's roles in shaping the future of governance by examining the present scenario of facts and calling on best practices. Using a mixed approach to these issues, the roadmap intends to unlock the door for more equitable representation of women in ministerial decision-making, offering helpful recommendations for bringing about positive change, and shedding light on the continual issue of female underrepresentation in ministerial decision-making.

Keywords: Ministerial Position, Women empowerment, Policy making, Public opinion, Decision making.

1. Introduction

"The role of women in decision-making was central to the advancement of women around the world and to the progress of humankind as a whole" - **UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan**
Women are consistently underrepresented in politics around the world, which makes it difficult for them to participate in decision-making. Even if every nation's political environment is different, they all share one thing in common: an unfair playing field that prevents women from participating in politics. In addition to pre-existing political frameworks, barriers also result from sociological and economic institutions. In India, a person's family history frequently determines the course of their public career, particularly for women. Women also hesitate to participate in activities essential for holding political office. They are comparatively underrepresented in State Legislatures, the Parliament, and high political positions. Equal political representation among voters, candidates, and officeholders must still be fulfilled.

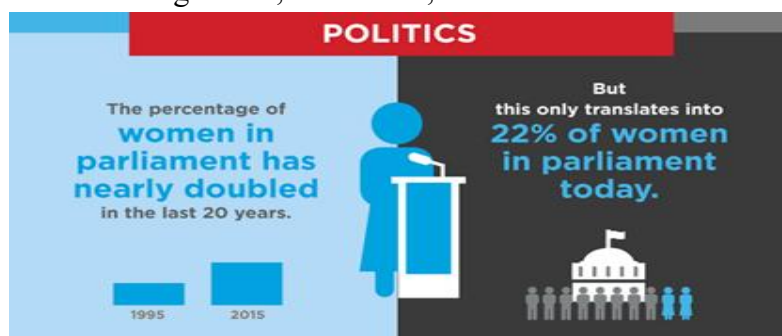


Figure 1: Woman politics

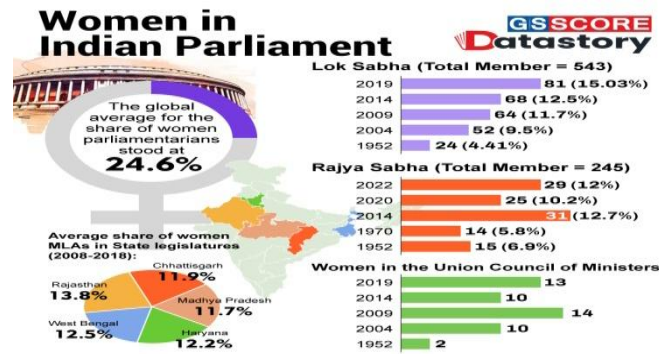
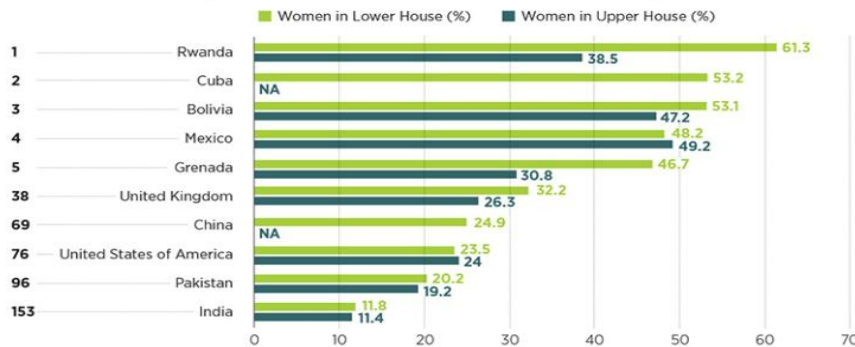


Figure 2: Woman Indian parliament

Despite their nearly equal population share (48.6%), women have yet to get over the 10% threshold needed for participation in the parliamentary election. The countries with the highest percentage of elected women were Rwanda (61.3%), Cuba (53.2%), and Bolivia (53.1%). In the US, women held 24% of the seats in Congress in 2019, while the US Senate has only 25% representation by women.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

How India ranks among 193 countries in representation of women in legislature



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, as on December 1, 2018

Figure 3: India and the world representation of women in legislature

The lack of representation of women in politics is caused by demand (biases and leadership backing) and supply (women's aspirations and resources). Campaigns pose challenges because women tend to put in more effort, even with comparable fundraising efforts. Women need help in the recruiting process due to network inequalities and the preferences of party leaders. Furthermore, women's engagement in politics is hampered by violence against them. Politics brings about cross-cultural issues and is influenced by elements such as race and class. Gender inequality within families, unequal household roles, and cultural conventions are also considered for the under-representation of women in post-Soviet democracies. It is also observed that high levels of corruption are associated with voter preferences for male leaders and patriarchal customs. Strong male-dominated cultures frequently have local power structures that limit women's influence and cause their interests to be underrepresented or ignored.²⁻³

1.1 Obstacles faced by women in the political arena

POLITICAL CHALLENGES

- Men set the rules of the political game, control the political field, and provide the criteria for assessment. Moreover, the structure of political life is based on male conventions, attitudes, and occasionally even lifestyles.

- The absence of party support, which manifests itself in the form of restricted funding for female candidates, restricted access to political networks, and the predominance of unfair standards
- Lack of communication and collaboration with other public groups, like women's organizations and trade (labor) unions
- Women have several challenges, including the need for comprehensive education and training programs for women's leadership in general and for preparing young women for political life.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

- Poverty and unemployment.
- insufficient funds
- restricted access to education and career options
- illiteracy
- Moreover, the combined weight of personal and professional responsibilities.

IDEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

- The traditional roles of mothers and homemakers are still reinforced and often prescribed in many nations.
- Women are underrepresented in official political institutions such as governments, political parties, and parliaments, primarily due to a lack of self-confidence.
- Women in certain nations view politics as a "dirty" game. As a result of this, women no longer feel confident enough to engage in political processes. This kind of perspective is common everywhere. Regrettably, in many nations, this impression matches the reality
- In addition to failing to criticize government initiatives aimed at advancing women's status, the media, particularly women's periodicals, needs to sufficiently educate the public on the rights and responsibilities of women in society: ⁴⁻¹¹

The UN identifies six strategies to increase the involvement of women in politics and governance:

- Ensuring that both genders have equal access to school
- Implementing quotas to enhance the presence of women in governing bodies
- Adopting changes to address matters important to women and children
- Funds are allocated in budgets that consider the demands of both men and women equally to finance gender-responsive budgets.
- Increasing Sex-Disaggregated Statistics: Improving the accessibility of gender-specific data in national studies.
- They are increasing the visibility and impact of grassroots initiatives for women's empowerment.

These tactics seek to advance gender parity and stimulate increased female participation in governmental and political spheres. ¹²⁻¹³

1.2 Need and Scope of the study

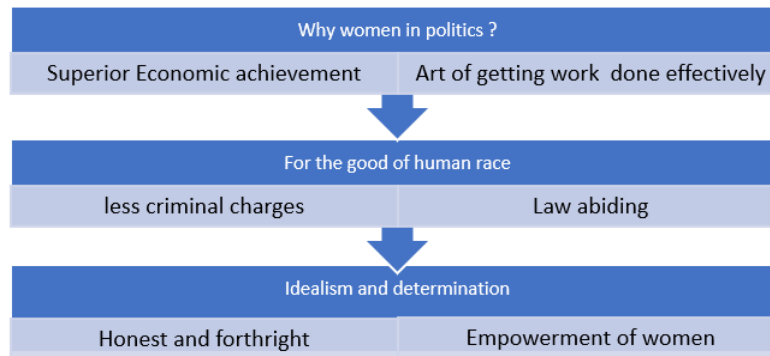


Figure 4: Women in politics

To support the above, the Government of India has proposed and implemented a women's reservation bill. Below is the timeline.

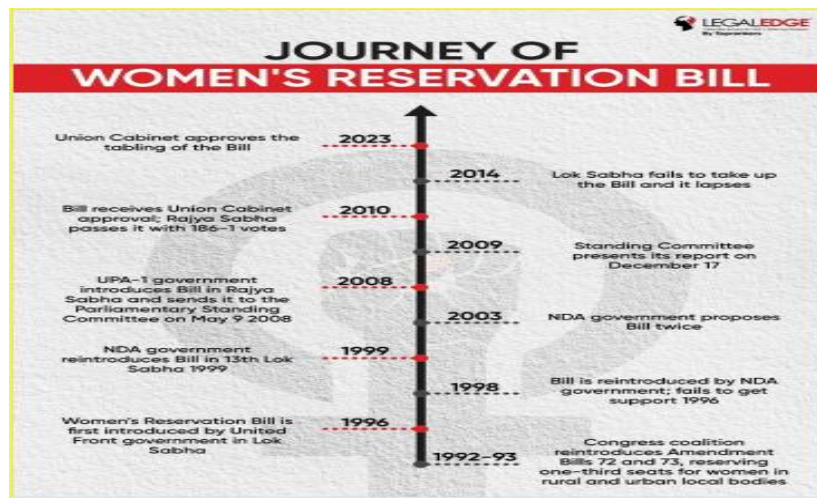


Figure 5: Journey of women reservation bill

1.3 Objectives of the study

- To understand the concept of gender inclusion.
- To examine the challenges that hinder women from having a solid role in managerial decisions.
- To assess the impact of existing policies on women's participation in ministerial decisions and propose improvements for gender inclusivity.
- To advocate awareness programs and educational initiatives to challenge gender stereotypes and promote a more inclusive perception of women in ministerial roles.
- To construct a comprehensive roadmap for gender inclusion, outlining specific steps to enhance women's roles in ministerial decision-making.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

The research was done to analyze the percentage of women on the Supreme Court compared to the proportion elected to Parliament, and it was observed that despite both the percentages being similar, the overall percentage of women increased significantly. Institutional variations in the hiring procedure caused the discrepancy in the growth rate. ¹⁴According to a study, only 34% of Members of Parliament (MPs) were women in the UK democracy in the year 2021. It added that the main barrier to women's participation in politics is the ancient and unfriendly working practices of Parliament and the necessity for parental time. It was also found that

individuals, especially women, consider flexibility when provided. Female MPs employ digital participation during hybrid proceedings compared to male MPs at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In conclusion, the study throws light on the significance of informal interaction in the hybrid Parliament, which could narrow the gap between people and the legislature while improving the standard of significant representation, particularly for underrepresented groups.¹⁵ One of the studies examined the minority status of women in political representation and concluded that systematic, practical, and normative institutions impact political recruitment. Progressive political parties and countries with more inclusive political settings are more inclined to encourage women in politics.¹⁶

An investigation of various factors influencing the involvement of women in decision-making at Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) was done in one of the study and it was found that the laws envisioned to address gender disparities have not been put into practice because of inequality, limited access to education, and government regulations prohibiting women from growing to positions of authority. To conclude, higher financial benefits, implementation of gender equality programs, providing incentives to encourage women to seek higher positions, and a shift in social and cultural perceptions of women in decision-making roles are all likely to increase the participation of women in ZRA.¹⁷ A study examined "gendered accountability," explaining why and how female representation encourages the adoption of laws that are important to women. Researchers analyzed that women's participation in civic life tends to have more robust female representation in Parliament, resulting in a strong correlation among lower infant child mortality, higher health care expenditure, and more extensive female representation in the legislature.¹⁸

A case study on Rwanda was investigated, where women represented up to 48.75% of the Parliament, the highest percentage worldwide, as women's issues here have shown up on the policy agenda more frequently compared to the past. However, the results of policies have not been significantly impacted by more excellent female representation.¹⁹ A paper explores the portrayal of women in management and leadership roles globally, identifying the correlation between the inclusion of women in rural local self-government organizations and the effects of their representation. The findings indicated some correlation between the increase in female representation and political participation.²⁰

Examining women's representation in politics and their degree of involvement was the primary goal of this article. The study's findings demonstrated that, contrary to the general belief that women are underrepresented locally, women are currently represented appropriately in two local administrations in the Amhara regional state of Ethiopia. It also demonstrated the impact of the increasing female population on their political participation. The researcher concluded that women's political participation is directly correlated with the number of female council representatives.²¹ The research attempts to investigate the barriers to gender equality that hamper economic development and how to overcome them. In conclusion, the significance of women's empowerment is understood in terms of the general ease with which women may assume roles involving decision-making.²²

Nisha Agrawal focuses on gender equality, providing a road map for achieving gender inclusion, emphasizing how a 2013 government committee report demonstrated the continued dominance of men in India. With contributions from academics, professionals, and elected officials, the book challenges equality in families, the economy, and politics. Agrawal hopes

that disruptive transformation will quickly overthrow gendered conventions and accelerate progress past the glacial pace of the previous seven decades.²³ A study examines the attitudes of the Qatari public towards a law that mandates a specific percentage of women in high government positions. The main objective was to find out what the general public thinks of this proposal and whether it could help address gender differences in political power in the Arab Gulf.²⁴ This study examines the various and contradictory readings and formations of the ideas, problems, and organizational realities related to gender mainstreaming to comprehend how these elements restrict the efficacy of laws and the capacity to impact change.²⁵

2.1 Hypotheses

2.1.1 Key societal issues and women's representation

According to a study conducted by Paxton, P., and Kunovich, S. (2003), societal attitudes and public opinion are key influencers of women's political representation. In more conservative countries, public opinion often harms the election or nomination of female ministers.²⁶ Inglehart, R., and Norris, P. (2003) opined that while education often enhances political engagement, structural and cultural hurdles in some countries prevent educational gains from translating into enhanced ministerial representation for women.²⁷ A study done by Ross, K., and Comrie, M. (2012) found that media coverage frequently promotes gender stereotypes, depicting women as emotional or less competent. This hinders efforts to employ media literacy to promote female leadership.²⁸

Based on the above, the following hypothesis is framed.

Hypothesis 1: There is a negative impact of key societal issues like public opinion, media literacy campaigns, and education on increased women's representation at the ministerial level.

2.1.2 Gender inclusive policies and effective participation of women

Goetz, A. M., and Hassim, S. (2003) discovered that gender-inclusive policies frequently fail owing to tokenism and a lack of actual institutional backing, limiting their effectiveness in strengthening female ministers.²⁹ In the study on "Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide", Krook, M. L. (2009) opined that gender quotas can increase numbers but not always influence or effectiveness, as women often face restrictions in ministerial roles.³⁰ Franceschet, S., Krook, M. L., & Piscopo, J. M. (2012), in their study, stated that gender-inclusive policies often encounter institutional resistance that limits women's authority and effectiveness in ministerial roles.³¹

The following hypothesis is developed based on the above.

Hypothesis 2: There is a negative impact of Gender inclusive policies on the effective participation of women in ministerial positions.

3. Research Methodology

Using a mixed approach, this study tackles the research challenge by carefully examining the variety of literature that is readily accessible. Data is being collected using a combination of secondary sources and online surveys, following the study's goals. Online questionnaires are used for primary data. Books, journals, speeches, and official pronouncements are examples of secondary sources enhanced by original documents, such as provisions in a constitution.

4. Data analysis and Interpretation

The questionnaire was forwarded online using a random sampling technique, wherein 106 responses were considered for the analysis due to time constraints. Considering the objectives and hypothesis, below is the analysis of a few crucial questions that were asked.

Table 1 – Demographic Profile

Variable	Description	No. of respondents	%
Gender	Male	45	42.5
	Female	61	57.5
	Others	0	0.0
Age	Below 25	31	29.2
	25-35	20	18.9
	35-50	45	42.5
	Above 50	10	9.4
Occupation	Government servant	1	0.9
	Business	6	5.7
	Working under an NGO	4	3.8
	Education	34	32.1
	Politician	1	0.9
	Software employee	24	22.6
	Student	24	22.6
	Housewife	9	8.5
	Others	3	2.8

Out of the total respondents, more than 50% are female in the age group of 35-50. 34 % are in the education field, and the remaining fall in other categories like student, housewife, software employees, etc.

Table 2 – In what way, educational initiatives and awareness campaigns assist in a more accepting view of women serving as lawmakers?

Options	%
Include gender equality in the classroom	58.5
Emphasize the historical contributions of women	45.3
Workshops and seminars related to gender inclusion	56.6
Encompass studies concerning women's services	46.2
Civic participation initiatives	34.9
Open discussions and forums, both online and offline	48.1

The above table shows that 58.5% of the respondents view that it is essential to incorporate gender equality into the curriculum and offer focused workshops and seminars on gender inclusion to promote a positive perception of women in legislative roles.

Table 3 – Major obstacles faced by women in actively participating in administrative decision making

Options	%
Absence of opportunities	43.9

Challenges of work-life balance	58.5
Discrimination based on gender	64.6
Having trouble establishing professional relationships	46.3
Social and cultural norms	48.8

Table 4 – Unique challenges faced by women in ministerial positions compared to their male counterparts

Options	%
Lack of advancement opportunities	58
Lack of flexibility	40.9
Lack of work-life balance	53.4
Unequal pay	35.2
Lack of recognition	42
Lack of sponsorship	21.6
Gender inequality	47.7

Tables 3 and 4 show that there are several problems faced by women serving as ministers, with gender imbalance accounting for the most significant amount (64%). Subsequently, the biggest challenge faced by women is achieving a balance between work and personal life (58.5%) followed by a notable lack of opportunities for professional advancement (43.9%). Additionally, the research shows that discrimination based on gender is a significant obstacle that keeps women from actively engaging in administrative decision-making processes.

Table 5 – The extent of Media Perceptions impacting public attitudes towards women serving as ministers

Options	%
Very effective	33
Effective	40.9
Not very effective	26.1
Negative	0

The above table shows that media perceptions have a practical impact on public attitudes towards women in ministerial roles.

Table 6 – Results of women functioning as ministers in the political environment

Options	%
Economic and social progress	53.4
Better governance	43.2
Addressing issues based on gender	40.9
Influence on legislation policies related to the enhancement of women	43.2
Enhanced representation of women's interests	43.2
Worldwide representation	37.5
Challenging conventional authority structures	31.8

Support for unorganised groups	46.6
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According to the data analysis, there is a strong correlation between the percentage of women serving as ministers and the achievement of economic and social improvement (53.4%). Close behind are the significance of improved governance (43.2%), assistance for underprivileged groups (46.6%), and tackling gender-related concerns (43.2%) for the advancement of society as a whole.

Table 7 – Specific actions needed to be included to strengthen the role of women in Parliamentary considerations

Options	%
Encourage gender inclusive laws	46.6
Programs that emphasise gender sensitization	43.2
Equal access to learning	51.1
Public awareness programs	51.1
Adaptable schedules for work	34.1
Regular inspections by higher authorities	42
Monitoring initiatives to develop leadership abilities	42
Reporting of incidents of gender discrimination	29.5

The above analysis illustrates specific actions for strengthening the role of women, wherein public awareness programs and equal access to learning and education top the list by 51.1%

Table 8 – Factors that must be included in a Comprehensive road map in enhancing the inclusion of women in the government decision-making process

Options	%
Monitoring and evaluation	37.5
Public awareness	48.9
Legal and policy amendments	42
Flexibility and adaptability	39.8
Long-term outlook	28.4
Cultural understanding	35.2
Openness in the decision-making process	46.6
Strengthening women's workforce especially in higher positions	46.6
Enhancing protection in policies, laws, and regulations	36.4
Women's education, training, and skill development	39.8

The data analysis illustrates a practical roadmap where public awareness programs, openness in decision-making, and strengthening women's workforce top the list with more than 45%.

Analyzing the mentioned hypothesis based on data collection

Hypothesis 1: There is a negative impact of key societal issues like public opinion, media literacy campaigns, and education on increased women's representation at the ministerial level.

Table 9 - Key societal issues enhancing women's representation at the ministerial level

Factors	Observed	Expected
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Media literacy initiatives	31.8	48.8
Public opinion influences political decisions	60.2	48.8
Education	54.5	48.8
P value		0.01

The null hypothesis is rejected as the P value is less than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that public opinion, media literacy initiatives, and education significantly impact women's representation at the ministerial level.

As the alternative hypotheses are validated, it would imply that a comprehensive strategy that incorporates public awareness campaigns, mentoring programs, gender-inclusive policies, equal access to education, and global best practices is successful in achieving a notable and long-lasting rise in the number of women serving as ministers in legislative settings.

Hypothesis 2: There is a negative impact of Gender inclusive policies on the effective participation of women in ministerial positions.

Table 10 - Changes recommended to current policies for better participation of women in ministerial decision-making

Changes Recommended	Observed	Expected
Top-level cabinet committees that are women-inclusive	59.4	40.87
Effective implementation of policies related to women	43.2	40.87
Training for women who are gender sensitive	25.4	40.87
Programs for mentoring to voice their opinion	35.5	40.87
P value		0.0

The null hypothesis is rejected as the P value is less than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that policies have a significant impact on women's effective participation in ministerial decision-making.

As the alternative hypothesis is proved correct, implementing gender-inclusive policies, such as representation quotas, equal opportunities, and policy flexibility, may effectively encourage the active and meaningful participation of women serving as ministers in politics. These results would highlight how crucial it is to develop laws that aggressively support gender diversity and equitable access to increase women's participation in political decision-making.

5. Findings and Suggestions

5.1 Findings

Though current policies are appropriate in encouraging women's participation at the ministerial level, there are still disparities in the representation of women at higher levels, and gender balance can contribute to more comprehensive decision-making processes.

Effective gender policies related to women should be implemented practically, not merely on paper or for gaining votes during elections. Review policies regularly to identify any discrepancies and develop strategies to implement them effectively.

Countries such as Rwanda, New Zealand, Ireland, Japan, and the USA practice can be considered as the best examples where equal opportunities are given to women on par with men.

Significant challenges faced by women for effective administrative decision making and appointment at higher levels include issues with work-life balance, gender discrimination, and social and cultural standards. Families may encourage women to engage as well; women with solid family support are more inclined to run for government.

With the help of analyzed data, a road map on gender inclusion is depicted below.

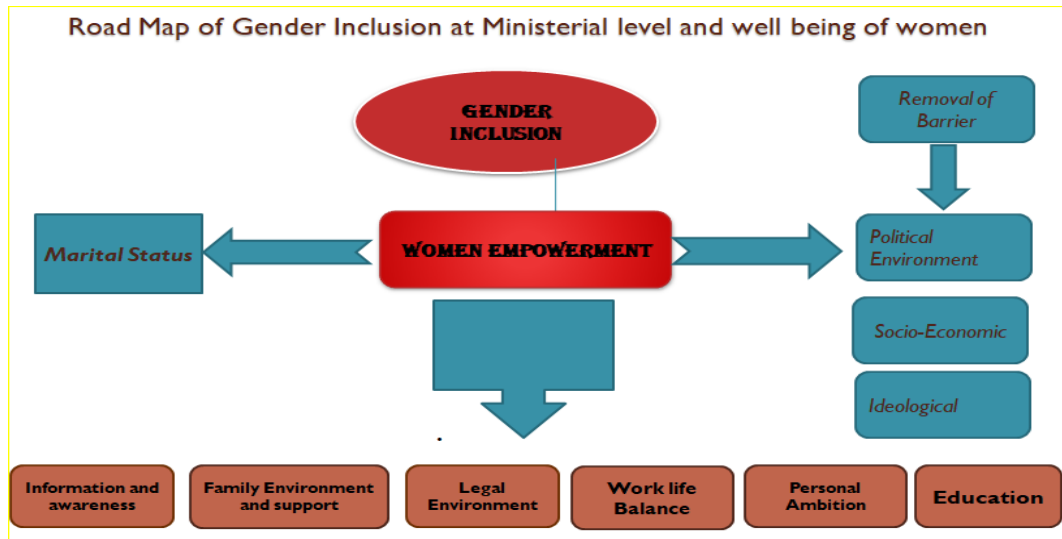


Figure: Road Map of Gender Inclusion at Ministerial Level and Well-Being of Women

5.2 Suggestions

Realistic actions can be implemented to increase women's political engagement. First and foremost, the long-proposed 33% reservation for women in public offices and Parliament must be implemented. This would guarantee more equitable representation and give women more influence in decision-making positions. Secondly, raising the literacy rate among women is essential to promote consciousness and encourage more political participation. To enhance women's active participation in politics, family support is crucial, and efforts must be made to end prejudice against women.

Targeted actions are also necessary to address the dropout rate among females. Female-based schools must be established to provide accessible education. Parents must be aware of the value of educating women to bring about societal change. Introducing initiatives designed explicitly to assist young girls and guarantee their continuous education will substantially contribute to reducing disparities between genders in educational possibilities. These feasible measures collectively contribute to developing a climate where women are educated, influential, and politically engaged.

Public education campaigns can effectively raise awareness of the critical importance of increasing the number of women in ministry positions. Mentoring programs, recognition events, and specialized leadership development courses for women are crucial in further empowering, inspiring, and encouraging them in authoritative positions.

By implementing the suggestions mentioned above, it is possible to develop an environment promoting women's advancement to higher positions of authority along with their involvement in ministerial responsibilities, which will assist in fostering inclusive and comprehensive governance. A more inclusive and diverse decision-making process and increased representation of women at the ministerial level can be greatly enhanced.

6. Conclusion

Although there are still obstacles to overcome, India has made progress in reducing the socioeconomic divide between men and women. Empowerment of women and gender inclusion can be effective if women rise to the top levels of decision-making and down to improve ordinary lives.

Women in power can influence the financial system, which has denied women access to funding for education, business, and entrepreneurship, or public health policies, such as extending maternity leaves or educational access to pregnant teens. It is crucial to empower more women to occupy these spaces in public office and political decision-making so that they can overturn patriarchal systems that continue to hold women back.

Above all, gender statistics must be utilized to guide national, regional, and international policies that can address and lessen gender inequality if gender equality is achieved.

7. Limitations of the study

The sample size needs to be expanded, making it challenging to conclude. Furthermore, since all the participants were educated, it is possible that the study does not accurately reflect the realities of struggling, rural, or less educated participants. More research with a more extensive and varied population is required to examine potential barriers to internet engagement and the dangers associated with sharing personal experiences online. Longitudinal studies can also be conducted in the future.

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