

WOMEN WHO LEAD SERIES**WHO GETS THE LIMELIGHT?**
WOMEN POLITICIANS & INDIAN MEDIA**Key Takeaways**

In 2020, India was ranked 112th in the Global Gender Gap Index. This gap is evident in the news-hour too, with lack of representation and limited space for women politicians. In fact, the Global Media Monitoring Project 2015, in India pointed out that only 7% of the political news covered stories of women in politics. It then becomes paramount to bring this gap to the fore and discuss ways to reduce it.

Thus, on 21st June 2020, NETRI Foundation in partnership with SheThePeopleTV to hosted the first online dialogue - "*Who Gets the Limelight*": *Women Politicians and Indian Media*- as part of the **Women Who Lead Series**. The panel included:

- *Yasmin Kidwai*, Municipal Councillor, New Delhi, Indian National Congress
- *Charu Pragya*, National Media Panelist, Bhartiya Janta Party
- *Neelam Pandey*, Senior Assistant Editor, ThePrint
- *Pratik Sinha*, Co-Founder, ALT News
- *Tara Krishnaswamy*, Convener, Shakti & Co-Founder Citizens for Bengaluru (Moderator)

The following emerged as key-takeaways from the discussion:

1. **Diversify** the issues on which **women's views** are sought on:

Women politicians are most often invited as panellists in media discussions on women-centric issues. This prevents them from being viewed as having credible opinions on other subjects. Moreover, men should also be invited and must be encouraged to get comfortable discussing women-centric issues.

2. **Social Media** is a Net Positive: Social Media is becoming an effective platform for *women politicians* to express their opinions on various socio-political issues which they cannot usually take up in the mainstream media. It also gives them a direct interface with people.

3. **Safeguards** are required to ensure the safety of women **on social media**:

While the direct interface is an advantage for women- it has also led to a lot of fake news/morphed images and other dangerous forms of online harassment against public figures to emerge. With regard to women

politicians, these attacks are almost always personal- such as body shaming, speculation about romantic lives etc. It is critical to identify these forms of abuse and harassment and have solutions in place to tackle the same.

4. **Democratizing social media**

It is crucial to include voices of women politician from the grassroots- the local self-governments- and particularly from rural India. Social Media continues to be an elite platform. Actively democratizing the space will also aid the cause of intersectionality- women from different intersections (caste, class, religion etc.) will find a platform to express their minds and opinions.

5. **Young Women to build expertise:**

To become leaders, they should start training as issue experts:

They can pick a cause/social issue and start developing expertise on it. Importantly, they shouldn't hesitate to make their minds and thoughts actively visible. Writing, blogging, and recording those thoughts matter.

6. **Journalists to make an extra effort**

Media to make a conscious effort to go the extra mile to bring stories and issues of women politicians to the forefront. They need to ask the right questions and make an effort to meet these women. Often male family members or associates take over interviews for the female sarpanch. Journalists have to make that extra effort to meet the female sarpanch and bring her voice out.

7. **Gender-sensitization**

Workshops for politicians, media persons, political parties, students of

journalism etc. is important but the real training must begin in homes and schools. Boys need to be raised knowing that women can be leaders and with an awareness that historically genders other than men have been at a disadvantage and that needs to change.

8. **Women-centric spaces for political expression:**

In terms of media spaces, taking inspiration from Dalit organizations that have started creating their own spaces because of mainstream underrepresentation, we have to build more women-focused spaces for women to safely express their political opinions.

9. **Large-scale awareness program on women politicians and fake news:**

The common perception that people hold is that what you see is what you believe in which is why fake news ends up being consumed by masses without question, only awareness can solve this issue.

Conclusion:

The solution to increasing representation of women politicians as well as stories and subjects relevant to them is a step by step process. The aforementioned are few such steps which can serve to be an initiation to the process of creating safe and equitable media spaces for women politicians.

NETRI Foundation is committed to advocating for these recommendations at every level to achieve an equitable and proportionate representation of women in politics.