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## Training for women in local bodies catches UN eye

An initiative to train elected women representatives of local self government bodies from Pune and other districts of the state to function effectively and with more confidence has found appreciation from international quarters.

One of the workshops organised as part of the Krantijyoti Yojana of the the state election commission was attended by Anne F. Stenhammer, Regional Programme Director UN Women, (South Asia). She was impressed and immediately expressed interest in initiating a dialogue with the government.

"The UN is interested in the project," said state election commissioner Neela Satyanarayan.

Many workshops were already conducted with the support of the rural development department. A workshop in February was the one that the UN representative attended and a letter to the state election commission expressing interest in

supporting, monitoring and tracking the unit to assess the process, followed. "In their letter on February 19, the UN appreciated the Krantijyoti initiative of the state election commissioner and invited further dialogue," said another official of the state election commission.

The training being imparted to elected women representatives is an effort to empower women in local self government bodies so that they remove their "rubber stamp" tag. The training module was designed for 76,585 women from the total 2.29 lakh representatives in local self government bodies in the state. With a budget outlay of Rs 2.75 crore, a three-tier plan to train women representatives was rolled out through Kranti Jyoti. According to Satyanarayan, she wanted the women to be not just empowered by the position they have got, but also arm them with knowledge to carry out their duties effectively.

Until now, 10 districts including Pune have participated in the project. The other districts were Kolhapur, Wardha, Sindhudurg, Satara, Solapur, Nashik, Nanded, Amravati and Thane. A pilot run in Wardha and Thane formed the basis of the programme while there was a training session in Pune as well. While the target is to train 24,203 women representatives, according to the state election department, 7,942 women have been trained in the 10 districts.

Initially, about 70 women were groomed as core trainers. The training stresses capacity building, self confidence, leadership skills, administrative efficiency and participation in governance, besides gender equality. The aim is to make the training simple, interesting and effective.

Panchayat members state that women tend to shy away from handling the functioning of gram panchayats and skip even important budget allocation meetings, leaving most of the work to their husbands.

"This training has helped us take on the work with full responsibility," says panchayat samiti member Vaishali Nagude who attended the training.