

Abstract

Policy recommendations for gender-responsive decentralized governance

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Korea's policies on gender equality have been driven by the central government. Local governments have been responsible for implementing the policies in the exercise of the power given by the central government. Decentralizing governance and increasing local autonomy provides new opportunities for Korean women to advance their needs and interests and take part in local politics. Most local governments assume an increasing role in making policies for families, women, children, and young people. Some have passed laws and regulations or have established administrative units for gender equality policies. The sustainability of these

institutions, however, depends on the political environment of the locality and the political will of the leadership. It is important to establish a system of gender-responsive local governance that can respond to women's local needs and interests and guarantee women's participation in local politics.

This research reviewed the literature on decentralization and gender equality, conducted a case study of Australia, and surveyed Korea's local governance in terms of legislation, administration, finance, and civic engagement. The analysis identified the following policy recommendations for effective and gender-responsive decentralized governance.

At the national level, the central government is required:

1. To develop guidelines on how to establish local goals and plans for gender equality, how to monitor and evaluate implementation, and how to collect and respond to feedback;
2. To develop benchmarks and measures to assess local areas on gender equality;
3. To institutionalize information sharing between local governments on gender equality policies;
4. To establish a support system for local areas facing major challenges to gender equality;
5. To integrate existing gender mainstreaming measures;
6. To develop different guidelines for gender equality policies for lower- and upper-level local governments;
7. To allow flexibility to local governments to reflect local characteristics on gender policies; and
8. To promote collaboration among central government departments and/or local areas for setting up gender-responsive social overhead capital projects.

This research also identified the following requirements at the

local level:

1. Local assemblies should legislate gender equality ordinances, introduce policies on gender issues, and disseminate the results of gender impact assessments of major ordinances and policies.
2. Local governments should be financially supported to operate gender-responsive projects such as Women-Friendly City development. Lower-level local governments should be supported by upper-level local governments, and upper-level local governments by the central government.
3. Local government restructuring is required for gender mainstreaming. Administrative institutions should be introduced such as gender policy officers and gender equality committees.
4. A professional gender policy research institute should be established at the local level. It should not only conduct research on local gender issues but function as a gender governance hub by offering gender training and information on gender policies.
5. Local government should promote women's leadership by offering capacity-building opportunities. It should also prepare a plan to increase the number of senior women officers.
6. Local assembly members and government employees should receive regular gender training. Gender training should also be offered to civil society.
7. Gender policy development should be a process engaging with not only local assemblies but also political parties, media, trade unions, and residents. A stable, standing administrative institution for gender policy development is required for effective gender-responsive local governance.