

# DO WE HAVE PROPORTIONATE GENDER IN POLICY MAKING? A STUDY BASED ON KEY GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS OF SAARC REGION

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## ABSTRACT

Women empowerment has remained a long standing issue for practitioners and policy makers at all levels even in the present modern known era of modernization. The basic objective of this study is to assess gender equality in the top sphere of the SAARC key governmental institutions from the recruitment and selection perspective. This study has used secondary data collected from the official websites of the governments and its affiliated key institutions. The unique feature of this study is that it analyzes gender inequality phenomena from the recruitment and selection perspective. An extensive gap has been identified between male and female top executives serving in key government institutions, which is not only a serious challenge for the global gender equality policy but also a serious question on government gender selection policies in the region. The notion of male dominance clearly prevails in the current scenario of the gender representation in government institutions, which remains a serious challenge for the gender equality. It has been concluded that a special focus is needed to prioritize the selection mechanism for females in top power structure of these governments especially in SAARC region.

## KEY WORDS

selection policy, gender selection, gender in judiciary, women empowerment, SAARC

## CLASSIFICATION

JEL: J16, N45

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## INTRODUCTION

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his/her country. In 1995 a comprehensive 4<sup>th</sup> UN world conference regarding women empowerment was held in Beijing Peoples Republic of China which ended up with a unanimous Beijing declaration, according to which the women must be empowered in each and every field because it is necessary to make the transparent government and accountable administration. Subsequently, in 2010 another follow up meeting was convened in UN to assess the implementation progress of Beijing declaration. It was found in a comparative study based on SAARC with some developed countries that this region is far behind from developed countries in terms of gender equality [1]. But the most impressive issue is to analyse women empowerment from the recruitment and selection perspective in top hierarchy of the government in SAARC region. The basic objective of this paper is to assess the women empowerment through their representation in the top policy and decision making sphere of the various governments in the South Asian Association for regional cooperation (SAARC) and analyze them in the light of earlier findings regarding gender equality. As recruitment and selection is most crucial phase of all sorts of organizations regardless of their nature of business or size, where studies have argued that survival and success depends on effective recruitment and selection. Any issue as identified in earlier studies i.e., transparency, male dominance, female stereotypes, traditional barriers and organizational politics can inflict damage the selection of women any organization regardless of whether it is in public or private sector. Organizational key resources are employees that drive and manage all other resources of any organization to achieve their desired set objectives effectively in which female employee play a key role in bringing positive results for the organizations. Diversity due to gender on the top positions brings various advantages in the way of making decisions in a specific situation because female way of assessment to handle a specific situation is different that are a positive aspect for this organization [2] The outcomes of the recruitment and selection may lead either higher productivity if right person is being selected or it may have to face failure of the organization [3]. Women managers have full capacity to handle the issues or concerns of stakeholders arising due to the changing environment acceptable to all; however they stressed the need of their institutional or systematic support [4].

It has been identified that most of the studies on the relationship between the performance and leadership have not been focusing on the public sector [5] which we agree specially from the selection of the heads in the public sector organizations perspective. Investigating this gender equality issues in the federal public institutions has vital significance because they are the figures who are actual operators of federal ministries, corporations and autonomous bodies having thousands of employees to prove the best services from the government. If these top executives intend to maintain gender equality, this can be achieved, though that may take some time because they normally are in charge of all sorts of the selection about the people working under them. Furthermore, they are always involved in the policy making especially drafting various policies for the approval from the legislators sitting in the parliament particularly for cabinet ministers.

Ethically, socially, equal justification, legally or from the economic perspective, women has equal right to play their role in the development of peace and prosperity of this globe and they need to be included in the top executive levels of key governmental institutions to make a balanced developmental policies. It has been have stressed that by empowering the female there will be positive effect on the policies and the way actions are being taking place, however if we empower a single women in a dominant environment, that will not bring any change in the context of using force but a real change will occurs when the gender

empowerment takes place in groups [6]. Therefore, the key focus of this study is to analyse critically the gender composition in the top sphere of the key governmental institutions i.e., executive legislators (cabinet), election & planning commission, higher education/university grants commission, bureaucracy, top executives of federal or central universities, higher judiciary and provincial top executive working for the central or federal government. This study revolves around a main research question “Does male dominance has become a main hurdle in the way of gender equality” in spite of all the claims in various international and national forums of bringing gender equality and empowerment. Therefore this study is very significant because this helps to ascertain the level of commitment and compliance made by the governments in the world’s one of a most populated region with various democratic setup. Secondly, this analyses the gender composition in the top power structure in the light of earlier findings of the related study that caused barriers to the gender equality. Thirdly, the whole SAARC region consists upon developing countries which have different social, cultural, political and economic scenario than the developed countries, thus it will be helpful to assess the generalization aspect of earlier findings that are almost noted from the developed or English speaking countries. Finally, this study may become useful for the governments of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (a forum of 8 countries) and related bodies to address this long standing issue demanding human justice by the humans.

## **RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW**

It has been observed that due to lack of representation in the government there were great consequences and impact on the gender related agendas and public policies in the North America, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia countries, whereas it is necessary that the legislators should be similar of those whom they are going to serve. There is no doubt about the women capability even in the politics speaks but they are not doing enough for the other women politicians as highlighted by [7] that female once become elected have more ability to be re-elected as compare to their counterpart male candidate and this has not any positive impact over the other females to win in the election. Women empowerment project to unfold the discourse which is concerned about women on top positions of corporate sector and he argued that there was not much progress on bringing equality on top positions which may be due to the change in government [8]. Gender inequality had remained all time issue especially for the top management positions for women even among the developed countries as well and in Scandinavian countries the gender equality policy has remained central policy but still there is male dominance in the public sector institutions which [9] has described as paradoxical phenomena. There is a vivid gap between the male and female mobility towards the upward in employment hierarchy [10]. Generally according to the official census of the governments the women population is more or equal to the male population which has been ignored to give them value in the employment of the organized sector. Actually there are multiple reasons of not allowing the women in appointments and according to the [10-11] has found that one of the issues is lack of the transparency in making the female selection and another reason according to the [12] is the male dominance in the selection committees which influence the female selection.

There are many issues that are causing due to ambiguities are causing due to lack of clarity in the standardized procedures which makes those who are in the power strong to make involvement that may affect the process [5]. It has been reported that in many decades in the European universities and governments the equality of the gender remained on their agenda to bring gender equality [13]. Transparency has remained a top issue in the gender selection for bringing gender equality, especially when the authorities practices such selection evaluation process which is confidential by nature because in an open selection evaluation system the females have more

chances to be selected [14, 15]. The lack of transparency in the selection can cause more favour to a specific candidate because in flexible criteria's in the selection evaluation, the panel members may change their opinion that can be due to power game as well [16].

Researchers generally argue that in open competition the women perform better but due to the lack of transparency in selection procedures it has influenced the gender selection [11, 17]. In the open competition the women were selected twice as compare to the males [14]. It has been identified in some studies that there are specific networks in the organizations that play a crucial role in career opportunities and it is difficult for the women to make an access with these networks [11, 18]. It is difficult for women to be selected if the panel or committee is being male dominated [12]. It has been elaborated that the gender discrimination can be avoided if organizations would adopt open selection (advertising the post in the journals or newspapers) as compare to the closed or semi open selection procedures [10]. The situation in the field of medicine is not different regarding gender disproportion on the top positions which [2] have argued that this may be due to the issue of family related duties with their job apart from the glass ceiling barriers. Women in top, that women managers have full capacity to handle the issue or concerns of stakeholders arising due to the changing environment acceptable to all, however he stressed the need that they need institutional or systematic support to advance in their career [4]. Women can have more probability to be appointed if the selection committee consists of a significant number of women members [10]. It has been reported that in many Swedish researches that the traditional gender norm have been kept preserved [19] and if you want to maintain gender equality on the top then this traditional phenomena must be checked to realize the gender equality objective [8]. Various studies have mentioned that people use discourse to identify themselves without prejudices and believer of equality while as they show the gender prejudice [8]. Mandatory quotas for bringing more women have shown a considerable increase of the women but at the same time this has shown a fast down fall in their performance regardless of their past background of experiences [20]. Although the academic excellence is considered neutral, while as considering the gender about the merit but in Netherland based study he found that this does not hold true and actually the prevailing practices in academic practices in academic excellence are supportive for the male dominancy [21]. Leadership in the universities of Germany and Netherland were predominately dominated by the males but due to government legislations this situation was overcome and almost in all old and young higher education institutions showed 50 % female participation [22]. There are various countries which have set up some special departments to maintain the merit in the selection system and in this regard the most prominent one is the United States Merit Systems Protection Selection Board (MSPB) that conducts various studies to maintain the merit system in selection of federal employees [23]. Ely and Meyerson have identified that mostly only those females have made their job that were white and with the help of education and training the females can occupy those positions in the field of business and professional that were traditionally held by the male [24]. Empowering the female there will be positive effect on the policies and the way actions are being taking place, however if we empower a single women in a dominant environment, that will not bring any change in the context of using force but a real change will occurs when the gender empowerment takes place in groups [6]. Woman presence in an office of the United States seems damaging for the other females along with other factors that cause problems for women working in various offices and concluded that female presence are not helping other females to get selected [25].

Gender bias is not only due to male dominancy but also the females have more stereotypical perception towards male applicants and in a study it was found in a recruiter evaluation

process of the candidates that during the selection process the male recruiter views gender qualification & experiences same, while as female recruiter showed tilt towards male applicants [26]. Generally two reasons being cited in the researches for the lower or negligible representation of women, one is the large number of aged professor who have blocked the upward mobility of the younger people particularly female employees and the another cause is the lack of female employees in the higher ranks of the academia [10]. In some studies it has been found during the analysis that at every step, the recruitment and selection process is being gendered which starts from writing the profile for a job according to the male applicant in mind and this is also influenced by the similarity to me selection philosophy which is normally male dominated [27, 28]. It was noted that in a selection board women was not selected because of the similar to me reason in spite of all this that they had same qualification and were on merit too [27]. In an another study it was noted that women and men both selected the male candidate by ignoring the fact that both had equal and same level of qualification, which implies females have gender bias towards male as well [29]. Syed et.al. suggested that the important factor of gender equality is their historic culture, socio political and economic setup that may have the gender impact on their employment pattern, especially when it is concerned to the top most in public offices because it has been noted that that women candidates qualify more in open competition as compare to male candidates [30].

## **METHODOLOGY**

The main objective of this article is to analyse the gender composition in the context of recruitment and selection among the higher policy making and execution institutions of the governments in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) which consists of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives Pakistan and Sri Lanka, all these countries are either developing or least developing countries. This association is one of a worlds most populated part of the world that has almost 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the world population with various democratic governments. Almost all country of this association has designed their official websites both at national and as well as departmental level that is comprised on the authentic information and statistics about the respective government. Therefore, this study has adopted a strategy to collect data from these official websites to maintain the authenticity and relatedness. This data searching and collection was made through a carefully devised strategy in which initially we made a classification according to the key official departments of respective governments. Further sub classification were made to collect data on the basis of legislative executive bodies, (i.e., President, Prime Minister, Cabinet Members and their advisors), Election Commission and Judiciary (election commission members and Judges of Supreme and High Courts), Higher Education Executives (Members of Higher Education or University Grants Commission and Vice Chancellors of the federal or central universities), Planning Commission (members or officials ) and the top executives representing federation or central government in the provinces (normally these people are governors or chief ministers).

Rigorously, on the first stag this data was tabulated in a MS Office Excel software country wise keeping in view the number of male and female representation in each category for further analysis. In order to represent the raw data in proper and meaningful form, this study has used various tables that were properly prepared with the help of MS office excel and were subsequently manually checked multiple times. For further understanding and analysis this study has used various graphs (figures). Basic statistics were applied to get some valid percentages from this data and were translated into figures as well. The analysis in the discussion is based on the noted key observation of this study and earlier findings of the related studies that were followed by a reasonable conclusion.

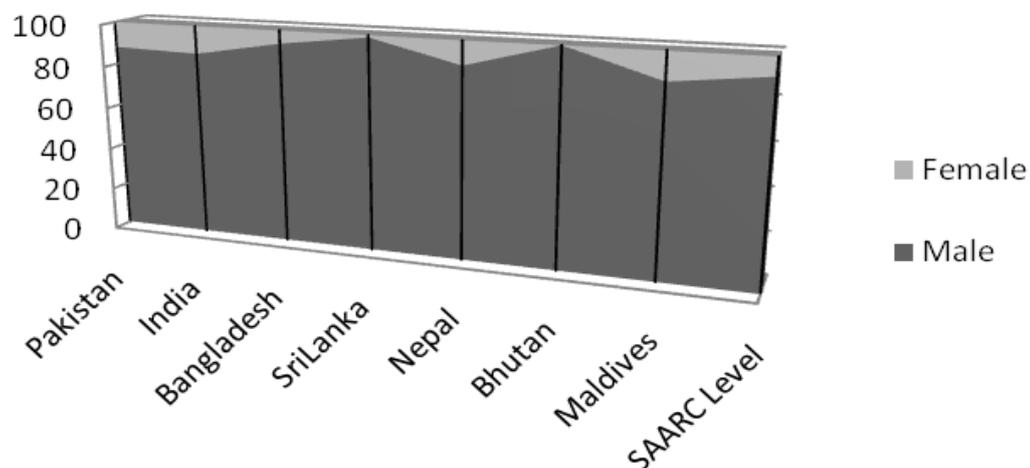
## EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section we begin with the gender selection or representation at top legislation level, which is being mentioned in Table 1 along with Figure 1 to show them graphically for more clarity.

**Table 1.** Gender in Legislative Executive Bodies.

Sr. No.	Country	Male	Female	M/F Gape, %
1	Pakistan	88	12	76
2	India	87	13	74
3	Bangladesh	94	6	88
4	Sri Lanka	99	1	98
5	Nepal	89	11	78
6	Bhutan	100	0	100
7	Maldives	87	13	74
8	SAARC Level	92	8	84

Table 1 consists of the facts regarding the gender wise selection or selection for performing the pivotal legislation related duties and obligations, that lead the country towards its overall future. On the extreme right column Table 1 consists of male and female gap in percentages. The last row in Table 1 highlights the figure regarding the existing gender in the legislation level in whole SAARC regions, that clearly shows a significant gap between the male and female selection or representation at legislation level, where Bhutan stands higher in this category with 84 % followed by the Sri Lanka and Bangladesh 89 % and 88 %, respectively. For more understanding these facts has been translated into graphical representation in Figure 1, in which the area shaded with dark colour denotes male representation which shows complete male dominance.



**Figure 1.** Gender Participation at Legislation Level.

Table 2 depicts the factual information about the gender selection of the election commission and higher level justice department (Judicial Commission, Supreme and High Courts) that shows almost similar results except Sri Lanka which is comparatively better as the gender gap between male and female is around 38 % but the situation in the rest of the countries in SAARC regions, this gap is higher specially at SAARC level which is around 86 %.

In Maldives, Pakistan & India this gap is 100 %, 95 % and 86 %, respectively. This for more clarification and learning these facts are being depicted through area graphical representation with the help of Figure 2, in which it is evident that the total scenario is male dominated by male both at country and department level as well.

**Table 2.** Gender Representation in EC and Justice Department.

Sr. No.	Country	Male	Female	M/F Gape, %
1	Pakistan	98	3	95
2	India	93	7	86
3	Bangladesh	96	4	92
4	Sri Lanka	69	31	38
5	Nepal	94	6	88
6	Bhutan	92	8	84
7	Maldives	100	0	100
8	SAARC Level	93	7	86

**Table 3.** Bureaucracy & Higher Education (HE).

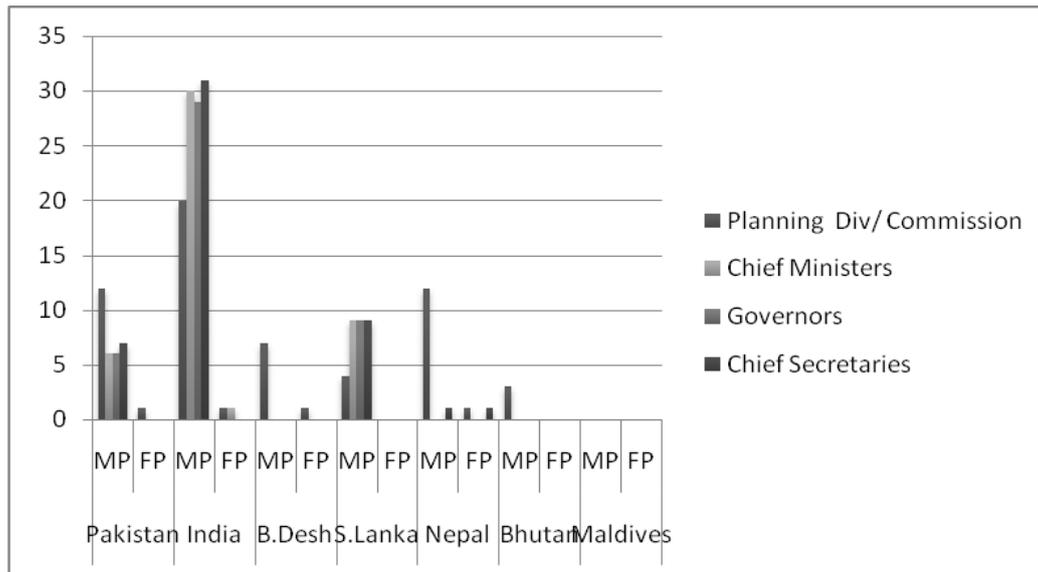
Sr. No.	Country	Male Bureau.	Male HE	Female Bureau.	Female HE	M/F Gape Bureau., %	M/F Gape HE, %
2	Pakistan	95	97	5	3	90	92
3	India	89	91	11	9	70	82
4	Bangladesh	96	93	4	7	92	86
5	Sri Lanka	87	92	13	8	74	86
6	Nepal	96	100	4	0	92	100
7	Bhutan	93	88	7	12	86	76
8	Maldives	80	100	20	0	60	60
9	SAARC Level	92	94	8	6	84	88

Gender representation or selection in the top Bureaucracy and higher education executive level is being tabulated in Table 3 separately in different columns. The facts of the male female gap in top Bureaucracy level in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan represents 92 %, 92 % and 90 %, respectively, which shows a significant gap and overall the SAARC countries figure in the last row also reveals a big gap of 84 %. The scenario in the field of higher education or university grants commission is not different as it is almost the same with Nepal in on top most having 100 %. The male female gap on SAARC level in higher education/university grants commission and top university executives (Vice Chancellors) is highlighting 88 %. This is further elaborated in Figure 3 through bar chart, where it can be noted that the male representation in the top bureaucracy and higher education/university grants commission, as well as the top executive of the public sector university under the central or federal government are depicting presents a total male dominant scenario.

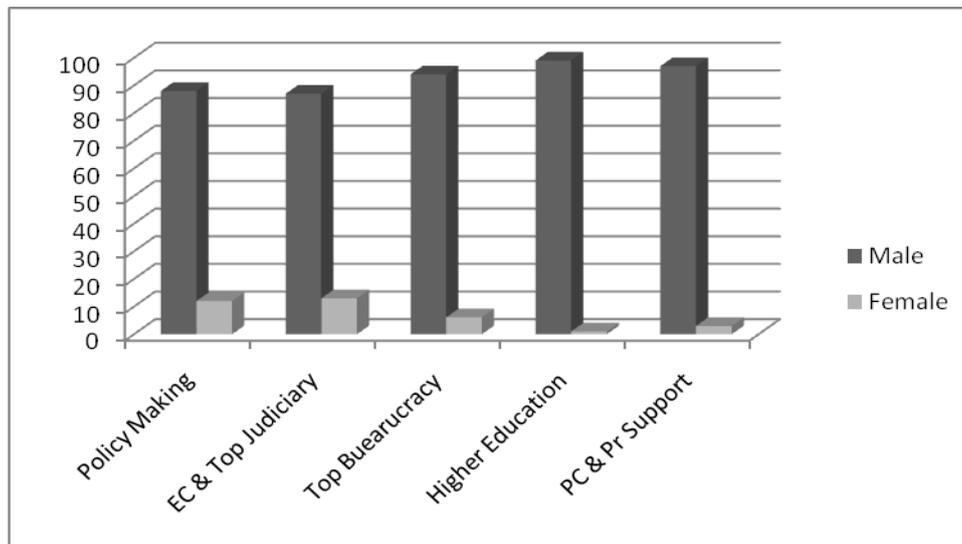
The facts in Figure 4 summarize the gender representation or selection in some crucial supporting departments of federal and provincial level, among which the most important ones are planning commission and provincial heads.

Overall the results disclose that in the SAARC countries there is a great difference between male and female participation highlighted through black shaded area in Figure 5.

Figure 5 shows overall gender representation in the central and federal governments. Overall by closely monitoring this figure, it is being very clearly that the male dominance over female in almost on all top levels of the central and federal government in SAARC region. The notable observation in Figure 5 is that the female representation is almost around 10 % and while as this representation is further deteriorated around 5 % at planning commission and provincial heads level.



**Figure 4.** Gender at Provincial Administration and Planning Commission (MP – male percentage and FP – female percentage).



**Figure 5.** Gender at Federal Governments (MP – male percentage and FP – female percentage).

## DISCUSSION

We initiate our discussion by touching the top sphere of all sorts of governments, which is the legislation level where the results shown above are showing a very alarming picture because of substantial difference between the male and female. It seems that Beijing declaration in 1995 regarding gender equality has not materialised in the governmental sector in one of a most important and highly populated area of world. The most significant part under representation or poor selection of female representative in legislation level is not only damaging for the country but also a major stain on bringing workforce diversity in the government structure which serves as a base for the survival and development of all other systems in the country. Although we have observed female candidates in the general parliament in various countries, especially in major SAARC countries, they all are normally elected through the party reserve quota and have minimum role in the legislation and also are not by any way equal or close to the overall male representation in the governments. It has already been noted in a significant study that the performance of women, who are selected on

quota based reserve seats, remains very low regardless of their past performance [12]. Here the issue is worse, because women, selected on women reserve quotas for the parliament, are not empowered by inducting them in cabinet of ministers that actually runs the government. The overall tendency of female negligible representation raises multiple and serious questions about the overall system that is being followed on the counties top level in the SAARC regions legislation level because this neglects the importance of almost half of the women population in these countries, who needs their equal representation not only ethically, rationally but also through man made international polices, e.g., 1995 Beijing declaration under the United Nations according to which the women must be empowered in each and every field because it is necessary to make the transparent government and accountable administration but these claims seems ineffective for gender empowerment [31].

Another aspect of this study was to women representation in one of a most important section of the federal or central government is dealing directly with women rights to bring them into the legislation bodies. We have noted zero representation in some major countries in SAARC government which we consider is a serious issues for maintaining gender equality in the governments and overall this shows a rosy picture because of a larger gender gap that seems very difficult to fill. Similarly the condition in the top judiciary i.e., Supreme and high courts honourable judges is the same, where we observed a serious lack of representation of female judges, who are equally needed like male judges to understand the some difficult aspects that a female can understand, secondly this also become serious in the absence of female judge to understand the different aspects of the reality to make justice this is bit sensitive as [2] have identified that female on the top positions can be more advantageous as their way of thinking in a particular situation is different than male which ultimately is in favour of the organization. While keenly observing the facts mentioned in the result section, it seems a big issue for chalking out the judicial policies and its implementation along with electoral policies, that has directly or indirectly relevance with the female participation or issues because a true and genuine representative judge or member can understand their concerning issues more appropriately. This may help them in selection as well as earlier in a study [12] have found that lack of female representation in the selection committees are causing hurdle for their selection.

Bureaucracy is one of the most significant pillars for the federal and central governments of any country and with reference to the SAARC countries, this is being considered most powerful profession, especially when it is the top or secretary level position. They are the main pillars who prepare all the basic drafts related to their current responsibility about the government polices and play a significant role in their implementation. At this stage female representation on top level in bureaucracy is highly needed to give a valuable input in the policy making and their implementation because in a latest study [32] have identified that women can handle organizational matters more comprehensively as compare to male because of their dependencies on the other organizational members. In SAARC region it is evident that women are badly misrepresenting in the top bureaucratic administration that causes serious concerns over the existing selection mechanism and procedures, as it has been found in an earlier study [10] that selection procedures are causing gender differences in organizations. Almost all SAARC countries have huge gender inequality that seems one of a very major issue for the policy makers who themselves are male dominated. One factor for the huge gender gap in the bureaucracy is male dominance as identified by [10, 12] and traditional gender norm [8] and this is which influences the female selection.

Universities play a significant role in bringing gender balance in the higher sphere of academia not only in their employment structure but also in the student male & female enrolment that becomes a base for female applicant availability on later stage for

employment. The higher education or university grants commission that formulate the policies with the help of the top university officials are themselves, male dominated and under such circumstances how it is possible to focus the bringing the gender equality. This was also identified by [13] in a Netherlands based study in which they found that in universities the existing practices support male candidate. In the top level of higher education both the commission and the university executive level, the gender equality is a serious threat for bringing the females in the main stream of the government activities which is ultimately very crucial for the economic development. Even the alarming situation is that in some countries in this region this gape is almost or near to 100 % which we argue in the light of earlier research that this may be due to some transparency issues in selection procedures that affect the women candidates to qualify [11]. This also supports earlier findings that in academics the gender is being differentiated in multiple ways [10]. Furthermore, all the top officials in the universities and commission are being made through a specific procedures approved by the chancellors who normally are the sitting politicians directly or indirectly and the affect the selection procedures outcomes as found in earlier study in a country of this region [31]. The gender equality in the higher academics both at the policy making and implementation seems main issue in bringing the gender equality in the long run.

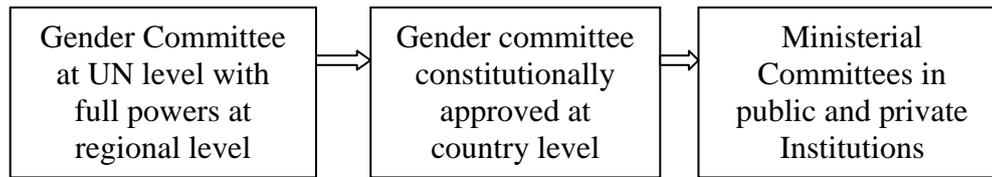
Similarly the situation of gender gap in a federal or central government planning commission is presenting a gloomy picture with a wide gap between male and female. In some countries even the planning commission department is yet not been set up which shows their interest in planning. While observing the gender gap on the top government officials in provinces that are falling under direct or indirect control of the federal/ central government on provincial level are resolving almost 100 percent dominance by the male officials. Even the representative of the federal government in the provinces are completely male dominant which further creates the room for policy concerns regarding gender equality and strengthens the notion of being that there is a great care needed to understand the gender politics [33].

## **CONCLUSION**

Previous studies have made a substantial contribution in the development of research progress in the field of gender equality through various recruitment and selection procedures with multiple conclusions. Based on those significant findings and present scenario of this study, it has become comparatively easy to assess the situation with reference to the gender inequality in SAARC countries. Though it seems that all those findings are relevant that causes barriers (male dominance at all levels and in selection committees, transparency issues, ambiguous selection mechanism, state and organisational politics, specific networks, female stereotypes, social impact and traditional gender norm) for the female selection but those can affect gender selection mostly in the middle and lower level decision making hierarchy of the public institutions. However, reference to the top key sphere of the government particularly in SAARC countries, based on early conclusions and the analysis of this study “male dominance” seems a very clear indication of being one of a main hurdle that hampers the female selection or election in these key institutions that have a strategic impact.

Therefore, keeping in view this grave scenario of gender inequality, this study proposes a simple model that can be effective if applied fully because this time the change needs to be started from the top since only this can boost the gender equality process at the gross root level, Fig. 6.

Further research is needed to investigate causes of not making gender equality based cabinet by chief executive of the governments keeping a special focus on the reality that they had the authority both constitutionally as well as by reality. Besides of this a comparative study can also help to understand and further verify this issue from the economic and geographical concerns in mind.



**Figure 6.** Simple model to boost the gender equality process.

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