

**ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK**

**GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN  
FOR  
BANK OPERATIONS  
IN  
PACIFIC DEVELOPING MEMBER COUNTRIES  
1999-2002**

**OFFICE OF PACIFIC OPERATIONS  
June 1999**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. International experience has demonstrated that improvements in gender equity translate into development achievements that enhance living standards and human rights for all people. Support for a stronger role of women in society contributes to improved health status, higher literacy and education levels, non-coercive management of population growth rates and, generally, improved economic growth combined with more equitable distribution of its benefits. In the Pacific, women still face many barriers in contributing to and benefiting from development. Some of these relate to the general development constraints that confront Pacific island countries, some to issues of tradition and culture, while others are a direct consequence of development.

## **II. GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES**

### **A. Socio-cultural issues**

2. The Pacific region comprises three main cultural groups, Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia. Each of these groups has distinct cultural values and characteristics that have had significant influence on development and created major variations in levels of human development among Pacific islands. Although the status of women varies widely among the different cultures and the different countries, generally women remain economically and socially vulnerable in all Pacific countries. Gender inequities are skewing and impeding social and economic development, contributing to poor health status, rapid population growth and problems in human resource development<sup>1</sup>. Appendix 1 provides a breakdown of selected development indicators by gender for each Pacific Developing Member Country (PDMC).

3. In Melanesian countries in particular, maternal mortality rates and fertility rates are high, women have higher rates of illiteracy and lower school participation rates than men, and violence against women is a major concern. Melanesian customary law usually considers males to be generically superior to females, thus defending privileged male access to resources and opportunities. Women have an established economic value in Melanesian culture and “bride price” (a man’s family gives money and goods to his wife’s family when they marry) is often still paid. Customary law often still takes precedence in practice over legal provisions for women’s human rights.

4. In Polynesian countries, traditional value systems have often provided women with a more superior status. In Tonga and Samoa for instance, customary law dictates that men should respect their sisters. This has traditionally had a flow-on effect benefiting the status of all women, in particular by encouraging the equal provision of educational opportunities. Even in these countries however, demographic and social changes are resulting in a decline of traditional values. Increasing dependence on the cash economy, rapid urbanization, modernization and the shift toward market-driven economic development, for example, are resulting in a gradual breakdown of traditional social institutions, networks and customary practices.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Sociocultural issues and economic development in the Pacific Islands*, Pacific Studies Series, Asian Development Bank, 1996.

## **B. Economic Issues**

### **1. Access to resources**

5. In this context, the issue of women's access to and control of resources is growing in significance. For example, the two basic causes of undernourishment in urban areas are insufficient income and poor allocation of the household budget<sup>2</sup>. Men are more likely to use available cash unproductively, while women are more likely to pay for food, school fees, and other needs of the family with available cash. Therefore, facilitating women's access to cash is not only a gender issue, but also a development issue.

### **2. Agriculture and fisheries**

6. In addition, the role of women in agriculture and fishing is recognized as being critical throughout the Pacific, despite the fact that biases and inadequacies in official statistics continue to provide a distorted picture of women's economic roles and development contribution, both absolutely and relative to men. In Melanesian countries, subsistence food production and production for informal markets have traditionally been seen as "women's work" and women also provide significant labor inputs to commercial agriculture. In Polynesian countries, where women traditionally have only been peripherally involved in agriculture, the situation is changing as a result of a combination of factors, such the growing importance of the cash economy, and changing demographic and migration patterns. As agriculture intensifies, women have to work harder against decreasing yields. Most extension services are directed to men as the "managers" of agriculture production, rather than to women as the actual producers. This is particularly important for smallholder settlement projects, where men hold the lease on blocks, are responsible for the repayment of loans, and are paid income for the harvest yields<sup>3</sup>.

### **3. Land ownership**

7. Discrimination in the area of land law is one of the most politically sensitive issues in the Pacific, yet one that must be addressed in the interest of sustainable longer-term development. In many Pacific countries, customary land tenure prevents women from owning land, thereby often denying them access to credit. This is a significant development constraint, given the increasing role of women in both subsistence and commercial crop production and marketing, and their better repayment rates and overall creditworthiness. Even in traditionally matrilineal societies in the Pacific, the increasing trend towards the commercialization of land and disregard for women's traditional rights over land is resulting in women becoming disinherited. While men are engaging in modern practices that are fundamentally challenging and contesting women's traditional rights, women are still expected to behave and respond in traditional ways<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Gibson, J., *Food consumption and food policy in PNG*, Institute of National Affairs Discussion paper No. 65, Port Moresby, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Schoeffel-Melesae, *Women in development, Papua New Guinea*, Country briefing paper, Asian Development Bank, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> *Women in Development: Issues, Challenges and Strategies in Asia and the Pacific*, Asian Development Bank, 1994.

#### 4. Formal employment

8. In most Pacific countries, the participation of women in the formal sector is very low, albeit increasing. Within the formal workforce, women are concentrated in lower paid, lower income jobs and often have a lower social, legal and economic status than men. In many cases, improvement in the employment status of women will require legislative action to eliminate existing inequalities and discrimination.

##### C. Policy Framework

9. Although a number of Pacific countries have progressively adopted national women's policies over the last ten years, the quality and effective implementation of these policies vary widely. In many cases, the legal bodies have neither the authority nor the budget to operate effectively. Some countries have integrated gender issues into their national development plans and have put in place a national women's policy and associated action plans and institutional frameworks, while others still have no gender policy. As at May 1999, only four Pacific countries<sup>5</sup> have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

### III. THE BANK'S GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

#### A. Bank Policy

10. The Bank's Gender and Development policy reflects a recognized need to integrate gender considerations into all its operations. The policy is based not only on equity arguments, but also on sound economic logic. The Bank recognizes that investments in women are crucial to the achievement of sustainable development. Low levels of education and training, poor health and nutritional status and limited access by women to resources not only depress the quality of life of women, but also limit productivity and hinder economic efficiency and growth.

#### B. Strategic Focus and Objectives

##### 1. Mainstreaming

11. In the Pacific, much work has been done over the last ten years to facilitate 'mainstreaming' of gender considerations. However there is still a long way to go in encouraging the *integration of gender considerations in legislation, public policy, programs and projects*. In all of its activities and policy dialogue, the Bank promotes gender equity and seeks to ensure gender concerns are addressed at every stage in the programming, implementation and evaluation of project activities. The way in which this is done varies from country to country, reflecting the need to develop approaches that are flexible, pragmatic, and based on the cultural realities and policy frameworks that exist in each country. This approach enables emerging opportunities to be utilized more effectively.

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<sup>5</sup> Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Vanuatu.

12. At the macroeconomic level too, the Bank has a role to play in *promoting gender-sensitive policies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty*. The Bank is now assisting most Pacific countries in their efforts to undertake significant economic and structural reform programs. The Bank recognizes that structural adjustment policies often have a disproportionately negative impact on women, particularly in the short term, and can lead to an increase in the number of women who are marginalized and living in poverty. These impacts need to be systematically assessed and documented much more carefully in the Pacific, a task made all the more difficult by the lack or unreliability of statistics in all countries.

*For example:*

*In reform programs in the Cook Islands, FSM, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the Bank is encouraging and assisting countries to obtain gender-disaggregated data, develop systematic approaches to monitoring the social impacts of reform, and involve women in decision-making bodies and task forces.*

*In the Solomon Islands, a Bank-assisted review of public expenditure in the health sector will seek to correct under-funding of rural and preventive health programs, which bear more severely on women than men.*

*Under the FSM's reform program, the Bank is assisting with the provision of social safety nets to mitigate against the social impacts of redundancies of women. A tracer study of women who retire early from the public sector is being undertaken and the Bank is seeking to ensure redundancy decisions are gender-neutral.*

*In Nauru too, a transition unit is being established specifically to assist women find alternative sources of employment, including support to set up small businesses.*

*In Vanuatu, Bank support will be provided to the National Council of Women to enhance its dialogue with Government on practical measures to ensure gender concerns are addressed throughout the reform program.*

*In its own economic and sector work, the Bank will also seek to provide gender-disaggregated indicators of development, especially with regard to service delivery performance in health and education.*

*The Bank is proposing to provide an advisory service and training in FSM to ensure the legal status of women in the development process.*

*In all of its sectoral and institutional strengthening activities, such as in water and sanitation, agriculture and rural development, infrastructure, health and education, the Bank is seeking to integrate gender-specific needs in both design and implementation.*

## **2. Developing appropriate policy frameworks**

13. As a first step, the Bank should encourage Pacific governments through its regular policy dialogue to *adopt a National Women Policy as a baseline for their policy framework*. By identifying the key areas of concern and formulating appropriate strategies, the development of national women policies is an important step towards

ensuring meaningful commitment to gender issues on the part of governments. At the same time, greater effort within the Bank to regularly update country briefing papers on gender issues would assist in ensuring that they can be appropriately addressed within country programs.

*For example:*

*In Vanuatu, the Bank will be assisting the National Council of Women in its efforts to promote practical application of gender policies throughout Government decision-making.*

*In Fiji, the Bank's operational strategy is supporting implementation of the National Women's Plan of Action that was launched in October 1998. Gender-specific concerns are being directly addressed in infrastructure projects, and particular attention is being paid to ensuring women have access to essential water and sanitation services.*

*In Solomon Islands, the Bank is supporting gender and development programs through the Department of Women, Youth and Sport.*

*In Tonga, where official statistics mask the key role of women in agriculture, the Bank will be including the preparation of a Women in Agriculture Plan as one of its priorities in the forthcoming agriculture sector study.*

### **3. Applying cultural sensitivity**

14. Given that throughout the Pacific men are at the forefront of national and local structures, including national policy and planning agencies, *it is important that men are included in all discussions aimed at gender mainstreaming.* Socio-cultural realities and the wide variations in cultural perspectives also need to be taken into account in designing specific strategies to address gender inequalities in individual countries. In most Pacific societies for example, the family is a crucial cultural unit. Programs that focus on the family therefore provide a more acceptable means of promoting gender mainstreaming than do those that focus specifically on women. Through such programs, the impact of development policies and activities on the conditions and positions of women and men can be highlighted effectively<sup>6</sup>.

*For example:*

*In its policy dialogue in all sectors, the Bank is encouraging better understanding amongst both men and women of the different gender impacts of policy and programming decisions.*

*In its support for development in health and education, the Bank is promoting better understanding of gender differences, thus leading to improved project designs, priority setting and resource allocation decisions.*

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<sup>6</sup> *Lessons Learned from the Pacific Mainstreaming Projects in the Pilot Countries*, UNIFEM Pacific, 1999.

#### 4. Improving gender analysis

15. There is also a need for more in-depth gender analysis to be incorporated at the earliest possible stage in programming of Bank activities. In relation to social goods (water and sanitation, health services) for example, assessing benefits separately for men and women can be instructive to help ensure that projects are designed to take full advantage of the differences in benefits. Women are now widely recognized as playing a central role in the water and sanitation sector. In addition, women often benefit more directly than men from improved water facilities and so may have a greater incentive to work for project success. However, the design of programs still does not sufficiently reflect this pivotal role. *Gender analysis can help to ensure provision of services that are needed by men and women and are appropriate to their circumstances.* The design of projects could further integrate gender considerations by including relevant conditions in loan covenants and adding indicators related to women in the policy framework.

*For example:*

*Consultation with women in the design and implementation of road rehabilitation and maintenance assistance in PNG is assuring appropriate evaluation of costs and benefits.*

*In Tuvalu, gender-specific time use surveys are being included in the Island Development Program to assess and monitor the demands on women's labour time.*

#### 5. Focusing on access to resources and employment

16. In the past, most Bank assistance and investment in the Pacific was directed toward the formal sector, thus mainly benefiting men, since most women are engaged in the informal sector, including subsistence production. Those activities that have been gender-oriented have focused mainly on the health and education sectors. While these remain important, the Bank is now expanding its effort to assist also in directly improving women's access to economic resources and more qualified jobs. *Improving women's access to formal employment, as well as salary levels and employment conditions for women in the formal sector,* is a high priority within the Bank's poverty alleviation strategy in the Pacific. It recognizes that, in the longer term, economic independence for women will be achieved through their integration in the formal sector. At the same time, preliminary steps are required before this goal can be reached. For example, there is an urgent need to *facilitate more equitable access to credit by women working in the informal sector* in most Pacific countries.

*For example:*

*In Fiji, the Bank is working with the Fiji Women's Rights Movement to study and recommend improvements in legislation to support the rights of lower paid female workers in both public and private sectors.*

*In Kiribati and Tuvalu, the Bank's support for outer island development will increase the financial resources and training available to women.*

*Microcredit programs being developed in Nauru, the Marshall Islands, PNG, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are being geared to meet the needs of women, particularly in isolated areas.*

*In preparing its proposed private sector development project in FSM, the Bank will ensure there is consultation with women on proposed legal changes relating to land and business activities, and that women have an equal right to make economic use of land.*

*In PNG, women are being targeted as both beneficiaries and providers of employment-oriented skills development activities supported by the Bank.*

*In its skills training and vocational education programs, specific activities to improve the employability of women are being included.*

### **III. THE BANK'S OPERATIONAL PROGRAM**

17. Over the period 1999-2002, Bank lending in the Pacific region will comprise 30 projects totaling \$406 million. 37 percent of these loans are in social infrastructure, 30 percent involve macroeconomic and public sector reform, and 17 percent are in the transport and communications sectors.

18. Individual gender and development action plans for Bank operations in each PDMC are attached as appendices 2 - 13. These plans summarize the Bank's approach to addressing gender and development concerns in each of its loan and technical assistance activities for the period 1999 – 2002. It is not anticipated that the Bank can (or should) attempt to address all gender-related concerns. Rather, country action plans aim to provide a practical focus on those areas where there is local commitment to achieving improvements, and where the Bank has a comparative advantage to assist.