

Gender Specialists in ADB's Resident Missions

EDITORIAL

Perspectives and Activities¹

This is a special issue of the Gender Network Newsletter written by some of the local gender specialists in the Asian Development Bank (ADB)'s resident missions (RMs)—Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Uzbekistan. The articles provide a portrayal of Asian women with common constraints and enormous potential to contribute to regional economic development and poverty reduction. Collectively, they confirm that gender-based policies and programs are not well established throughout government agencies at all levels, and that gender issues remain largely marginalized by policymakers and institutional structures.

The RM gender specialists (RM-GSs) provide gender technical guidance, continuity, and cross-fertilization of ADB's gender mainstreaming efforts. Shireen Lateef presents an overview of the achievements and success of the regional technical assistance project, *Enhancing Gender and Development Capacity in Developing Member Countries Phase I & II* and the critical contribution of RM GSs to ADB's improved performance on gender. She points out that the placement of gender specialists in RMs has proven to be the most successful institutional innovation under ADB's gender and development policy.

The successful approach of the RM-GSs to achieve gender-inclusive results in a broad spectrum of ADB operations focuses both on strategic interventions at policy, program, and project levels, and a strong emphasis on gender capacity building of ADB staff and its development partners.

- *RM-GSs help policymakers and ADB recognize and integrate gender issues through gender assessments and policy dialogue*

In *Towards a More Gender Responsive Civil Service in Nepal*, Ava Shrestha analyzes the obstacles to women's



employment and career advancement in Nepal's civil service such as the inconvenient time and location of Public Service Commission (PSC) examinations, lack of women's rest rooms in government offices, and the glass ceiling for promotion of female employees. She was closely involved with the ADB team that prepared the 2004 NEP: *Governance Reform Program*, which included policy conditions such as amendments to the Civil Service Act. Since then, the Government has approved a gender mainstreaming policy with an affirmative action agenda to achieve goals for gender equality in civil service. The policy includes a reservation for recruiting women; revising the PSC curriculum to make it more gender-friendly; providing paternity leave; engaging women staff in managing grievances; and establishing a model child care center in the capital with gradual replication in district headquarters.

- *RM-GSs facilitate gender-responsive policy making*

Samvada Kheng presents an exemplary case of government leadership in *Ministry of Women's Affairs Leads Women's Empowerment*, which promotes gender-responsive policy making. Over a decade, ADB has provided a series of technical assistance

¹ Under RETA 6092: Enhancing Gender and Development Capacity in DMCs, Phase II (2002-Present), seven local gender consultants provide direct technical assistance to address gender issues in ADB's development programs in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Uzbekistan. In addition, former gender consultants in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Viet Nam have been hired as national officers by ADB resident missions.

(TA) projects in Cambodia to the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) for strengthening its capacity to contribute to various national planning processes. The initial TA helped MoWA clarify its overall goals, objectives, and strategies; put structures and systems into place; and provide training to facilitate implementation of its gender mainstreaming strategy. Continued TA assisted MoWA to coordinate with line ministries (such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries) to develop sectoral gender policies and programs. With strengthened capacity, MoWA has successfully and effectively influenced the national socioeconomic development plan (2001-2005) and the national poverty reduction strategy (2003-2005) to be gender inclusive. ADB currently supports MoWA initiatives to promote women's entrepreneurship and business development.

- ***RM-GS provide gender technical input to the design and implementation of ADB-financed projects***

In *Women Make Ends Meet in the Aftermath of the Tsunami*, Nelun Gunasekera tells the story of a Sri Lankan woman who is a tsunami survivor, entrepreneur, and a mother of two girls. Kamala's story demonstrates women's strength, capabilities, and survival skills despite the vulnerabilities caused by the sudden loss of their livelihoods after the tsunami disaster that hit Sri Lanka in 2004. Ms. Gunasekera was a member of the team that designed ADB's *Tsunami Affected Areas Rebuilding Project*, which recognizes women not only as victims but as strong, capable individuals who can contribute their knowledge and experience effectively in rebuilding their communities. She supports the implementation of the project's Gender Action Plan (GAP) that facilitates both men's and women's participation in village reconstruction; urban planning; economic activities; planning, construction and maintenance of water supply and sanitation systems, irrigation schemes, and roads; and environmental and coastal resource management activities.

In *Business Women and Their Untapped Potential*, Ferdousi Sultana Begum draws attention to business women's constraints and their wasted potential contributions to private sector development, economic growth, and poverty reduction in Bangladesh. Legal, institutional, and socioeconomic constraints still pose serious barriers to women's access to resources such as land, credit, technology, skills training, information networks, and markets. In addition, cumbersome registration procedures and loan applications combined with security concerns related to women's mobility, mode of transportation, and business locations increase women's challenges to establish and expand their businesses. Ms. Begum prepared the Gender Action Plan for ADB's *Bangladesh Agribusiness Development Project*, which addresses improving the enabling environment for women entrepreneurs through the

reduction of regulatory constraints, provision of agribusiness support services, promotion of networking through trade fairs and training workshops, and expansion of targeted credit and information campaigns. Ms. Begum has also developed innovative ways to promote women's employment and entrepreneurship in a series of urban and rural infrastructure projects.

- ***RM-GSs organize lateral learning/peer exchange workshops for executing agency staff to share good gender mainstreaming practices***

In *Results Based Lateral Learning*, Nelun Gunasekera and Tulin Pulley illustrate how lateral learning/peer exchange has been used as a mechanism for gender capacity building of executing and implementing agency staff in developing member countries (DMCs). The use of results-based lateral learning as a strategic framework for gender capacity building is proving to be successful for several reasons: project directors (mostly engineers, economists, and financial analysts) learn primarily from each other rather than from gender specialists; peer presentations on gender-based interventions achieving good results provide powerful incentives to replicate successful designs and approaches; and using loan projects as examples transforms the training from abstract levels to the concrete context of the participants' own work. The presentation of good practices in gender mainstreaming by engineers and other sector specialists has credibility and is well received by other sector experts. The exchange program between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka project directors is provided as an example.

- ***RM-GSs represent ADB in gender working groups and substantially expand ADB's partnerships with government agencies, donors, and nongovernment organizations***

In *Gender and Transition in Central Asia*, Mekhri Khudayberdiyeva discusses the impact of Uzbekistan's economic and social transformation on women. In the post-Soviet Union period, Uzbekistan has experienced dramatic declines in women's wage employment and representation in national parliaments. To address these concerns, the Government has recently initiated some gender-based policies and reinstated the reservation quota system at the local levels to address women's declining political representation. Despite some increases in women's political participation observed in recent years, traditional norms and gender stereotypes still influence the perceptions of decision makers, dampen women's own initiatives, and undermine many policies and programs. Ms. Khudayberdiyeva is an active member of gender working groups in Uzbekistan.

Tulin Pulley
RETA Consultant

Gender Specialists in ADB's Resident Missions—Achievements and Success

Shireen Lateef

Director, Social Sectors Division,
Mekong Department

The regional technical assistance (RETA) project 6092: *Enhancing Gender and Development Capacity in Developing Member Countries Phase II (2002–present)* and the predecessor RETA Project 5835 *Phase I (1999–not yet closed, completion date 2004)* have proven to be the most successful institutional innovations under the ADB's gender and development (GAD) policy. They have significantly contributed to improved performance on gender mainstreaming in all three core strategic areas of ADB's operations—poor economic growth, inclusive social development, and governance.

Since the approval of the GAD policy, ADB loans with gender mainstreaming have increased between 1998 and 2004 by 15%. These loans span a range of sectors extending from the usual social sectors (health, education, water supply) to agriculture, transport, rural infrastructure, governance, and natural resource management. Two positive trends are noteworthy in this respect: (i) ADB is doing a better job of mainstreaming gender concerns in sectors with the greatest potential for addressing gender disparities such as education, health, water supply and sanitation, and agriculture; and (ii) ADB is also addressing gender issues in more difficult areas such as physical infrastructure, especially transport, and in sector and policy-based loans.

This progress can be largely attributed to the two RETA projects, 6092 and 5835. Through the recruitment and placement in RM of long-term local gender specialists, ADB was able to include technical gender experts in a wide range of loan processing and implementation teams, as well as build gender capacity of government executing agencies. At the end of Phase I, three of the six consultant gender specialist positions in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Viet Nam were converted to regular ADB national officer positions. RETA project 6092 continues to finance gender specialists in Nepal, Indonesia, and Uzbekistan while expanding coverage to four new countries—Afghanistan, Cambodia, Mongolia, and Sri Lanka.

The RM-GSs have substantially contributed to accelerating the implementation of the GAD policy in three areas by:

- increasing the number of loans that address gender issues;
- gender capacity building in developing member countries; and
- partnerships with government focal agencies, donors and nongovernment organizations (NGOs).



They have provided technical input and support to the design of new projects and to the implementation of ongoing projects, and engaged in policy dialogue on gender issues with government agencies. Some have also initiated TA projects to promote gender-responsive policy making at national and local levels (Indonesia and Pakistan). Moreover, GSs have piloted the use of GAPs in loan projects. These GAPs have proven to be user-friendly, replicable, and effective tools for mainstreaming gender concerns in projects. By 2004, virtually all new loans with a GAD theme or effective gender mainstreaming included GAPs in their designs. GAPs have been improving over time, becoming more detailed and more closely aligned with the main components of the project with specific features, mechanisms, strategies, targets, and resources to facilitate both men and women's active involvement in the projects and direct access to project benefits.

The RM-GSs have also been particularly effective in strengthening the gender capacity of executing agency (EA) staff especially through their hands-on assistance in developing and implementing GAPs for loan projects and lateral learning/peer exchange workshops in which EA staff from different countries share good gender mainstreaming practices. Their participation in gender working groups and other outreach activities has also substantially expanded ADB's partnerships with government focal agencies, donors, and NGOs to promote gender equality at the country level. Locating gender specialists in RMs and strong networking give continuity to ADB's gender mainstreaming efforts, and ensure that lessons learned in implementing ongoing projects are incorporated in the design of new ones across the region.

NEPAL

Towards A More Gender Responsive Civil Service

Ava Shrestha

Nepal Resident Mission

Civil service in Nepal has always been seen as a prestigious employment. Even though entrance is based solely on merit, women's lower educational levels, limited mobility, and time and information asymmetries have constrained them to successfully compete in the Public Service Commission (PSC) examinations for entry into the civil service. While glass ceilings pose serious obstacles for women's advancement in civil service, many are deterred from pursuing a career in civil service due to inconvenient time and location of the PSC examinations, and also due to lack of separate toilets for women in government offices. As a result, the proportion of professional women in civil service is abysmally low, less than 10%, with approximately 93% of women being employed as support staff.

The opportunity to address these significant gender disparities arose in 2001 during the preparation of the ADB's Governance Reform Program (GRP) in Nepal. Policy dialogue sessions were held with the executing agency (EA) and the Ministry of General Administration (MOGA), and a workshop was organized for all stakeholders to discuss gender inequalities in the civil service. The workshop resulted in (i) identifying gender as a central issue within the governance reform agenda; (ii) including the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare (MWCSW) as a key stakeholder; and (iii) agreement within the Government to undertake affirmative action to achieve the goals of gender equality. Critical changes were made in the loan design including (i) revising the GRP goal to make it more gender responsive; (ii) articulating the need to alleviate constraints and create new opportunities for women in the civil service; (iii) requiring annual progress reviews on increased representation of women in civil service; and, (iv) agreement that approval of an affirmative action policy would form part of GRP's second tranche loan release conditions.

Since five governments assumed power and fell during the GRP implementation, it was difficult to move the governance reform agenda forward. Nonetheless, regular monitoring of gender provisions and tranche conditions by ADB during loan review missions provided an ongoing incentive for the Government to develop a consensus on gender mainstreaming approaches. As a result, the EA worked closely with MWCSW and continued to support actions such as holding special coaching classes for women in different regions of Nepal to encourage more women to take the PSC examinations; issuing directives for the provision of toilet facilities for women in all ministries; establishing a gender unit in MOGA; appointing gender focal points in all ministries; developing a computerized personnel information system disaggregated by gender; and incorporating gender issues in staff development training courses.

During 2003–2005, the total number of women in the civil service increased from 8.7% to 10% with the number of women in gazetted class one and two level positions increasing from 3 to 9, and 50 to 79, respectively in the same period, indicating the momentum for reform.



However, while the environment for increasing women's representation in civil service was improving, consensus on actions that are necessary to promote greater gender equality was lacking. In September 2004, the Government approved a gender mainstreaming policy, which included a reservation for recruiting women; revising the PSC curriculum to make it more gender-friendly; providing paternity leave; engaging women staff in managing grievances; and establishing a model child care center in the capital with gradual replication in district headquarters. Legislative changes were required to operationalize these reforms.

In July 2005, the Government promulgated amendments to the Civil Service Act by an ordinance incorporating these gender-based policy recommendations under sensitive political circumstances. As a result, the Government fulfilled most loan conditions and, for the first time mandated positive discrimination to favor recruitment of women, ethnic groups, disadvantaged castes, and the differently abled for a period of 5 years. The Government is currently working on drafting the rules and regulations to ensure enforcement of its gender mainstreaming policy to reduce gender discrimination and equalize opportunities for women. Resources from ADB's Multidonor Cooperation Fund on Gender and Development are now being used to build the EA's capacity to lead the reform process while working closely with MWCSW to encourage legislative changes to promote greater gender equality.

ADB's support for gender mainstreaming activities under Nepal's GRP had a catalytic impact in significantly raising the level of debate and assisting the Government to take the first important step to redress gender imbalance in the civil service. The enactment of the ordinance provided an enabling environment for women to pursue a career in the civil service. Hopefully this will result in a critical mass of women in civil service groomed to take up more senior management positions in the future. Nepal still has a long way to go to realize and achieve this goal.

CAMBODIA

Ministry of Women's Affairs Leads Women's Empowerment

Samvada Kheng

Cambodia Resident Mission

“Microenterprise and the informal sector are very important sources of livelihood in Cambodia for the vast majority of the population—but particularly for women—but current development assistance that is mostly aimed at improving the broader enabling environment for private sector development and export trade facilitation will provide little benefit to businesses in the informal economy in the near future,” said Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi, Minister, Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), at the Regional Workshop on Gender and Economic Policy (Bangkok, 24–26 October 2005).

Cambodian women constitute slightly more than 50% of the population, 52% of the labor force, and 29% of head of households. Cambodia's 82% labor force participation rate of women for over 15 years is the highest in the region.

Women participate actively in the private sector as owners and operators of micro and small enterprises (MSE) rather than small and medium enterprises (SME) due to (i) low levels of education and lack of market-oriented skills that lead to low self-confidence in business start-up and management; (ii) multiple demands on their resources—as household livelihoods are primarily dependent on women's income generated from MSE activities, women entrepreneurs usually spread their risk by operating multiple microenterprises and can only consider reinvestment in one business after all family needs are met; (iii) time and mobility constraints—through productive and reproductive roles, women carry the total workload of their businesses as well as child care and household maintenance within a tradition of no support from husbands on household work; and (iv) lack of access to information on market opportunities, market demand, and appropriate technologies for productivity improvement.

Although microfinance programs have expanded over the past several years, they are often inadequate to meet the needs of businesses owned by women. Women entrepreneurs either need working capital for petty trade or long-term capital investment in equipment, and loans provided in short cycles at 4%–5% interest per month are simply not affordable.

Support for microenterprise development is critical because women usually contribute more than half of all household income, thus improving family well-being and alleviating social problems. Women constitute a strong labor force that needs to be mobilized and encouraged to make an effective contribution to the economic development of Cambodia. The Government's Rectangular Strategy for growth, employment, equity, and efficiency, recognizes women as the “backbone of Cambodia's economy and society.” MoWA is mandated to act as a catalyst and facilitator for the implementation of national policies toward promoting the status of women in Cambodia. The objectives of MoWA's Strategic Plan (2006–2010) for the economic empowerment of women cover expansion of employment opportunities for women, protection of women workers' rights, and development of MSEs. The main activities of the strategic plan, called



Neary Ratanak II, aim to increase gender equity in access to and control of agricultural resources and services to reduce poverty, ensure food security and transform MoWA's credit program into an independent microfinance institution.

ADB supports the socioeconomic empowerment of Cambodian women through the Women's Development Centers Project funded by the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR) by upgrading the provincial women in development (WID) center in Kompong Chhnang and building a new one in Siem Reap. The WID centers aim to (i) facilitate human capacity development for poor women through life skills training and advocacy support; (ii) promote entrepreneurship development through the provision of information related to raw materials, appropriate technology, and markets; (iii) facilitate access to credit; (iv) build linkages with the association of women-owned MSEs and other business networks to increase women's bargaining power and voice in public-private forums; and (v) build capacity of institutions that promote women's entrepreneurship.

MoWA has been an active participant in interministerial committees in Cambodia. MoWA has incorporated gender issues into the two socioeconomic development plans and The National Poverty Reduction Strategy, and identified key gender benchmarks for the National Strategic Development Plan for 2006–2010. MoWA also has a voice in establishing priorities and providing inputs into drafting of new laws through its membership in the Council of Ministers and the Minister's position as Deputy High Commissioner of the Supreme Council for State Reform. MoWA is now working closely with the Ministry of Finance to address gender issues in the Government's comprehensive Public Financial Management Reform Program.

Challenges for the economic empowerment of Cambodian women remain critical. Specific needs and constraints of businesswomen are not properly understood by development organizations. The consistency of the policy framework and institutional support programs with regard to the development of women's enterprises is very important. Strategies for MSE development should support policy and program interventions that would enable the growth of these businesses into SMEs by reducing sociocultural barriers, alleviating legal and regulatory constraints, and mandating institutional reforms.

SRI LANKA

Women Make Ends Meet in the Aftermath of the Tsunami

Nelun Gunasekera

Sri Lanka Resident Mission

Kamala* lived with her husband and their three daughters in a small fishing village near the town of Kalutara, about 35 kilometers south of Colombo. Their livelihood depended on her husband's meager earnings as a fisherman and the small income Kamala earned by sewing clothes and making cakes and buns that were sold at small shops close by. Their house, an illegal structure on the beach, had literally been built brick by brick from the savings she had scraped together over the past 15 years. Kamala was determined to provide her daughters with a better life and a better future, so she worked hard to improve their living conditions and ensure that her daughter are educated at a school nearby.

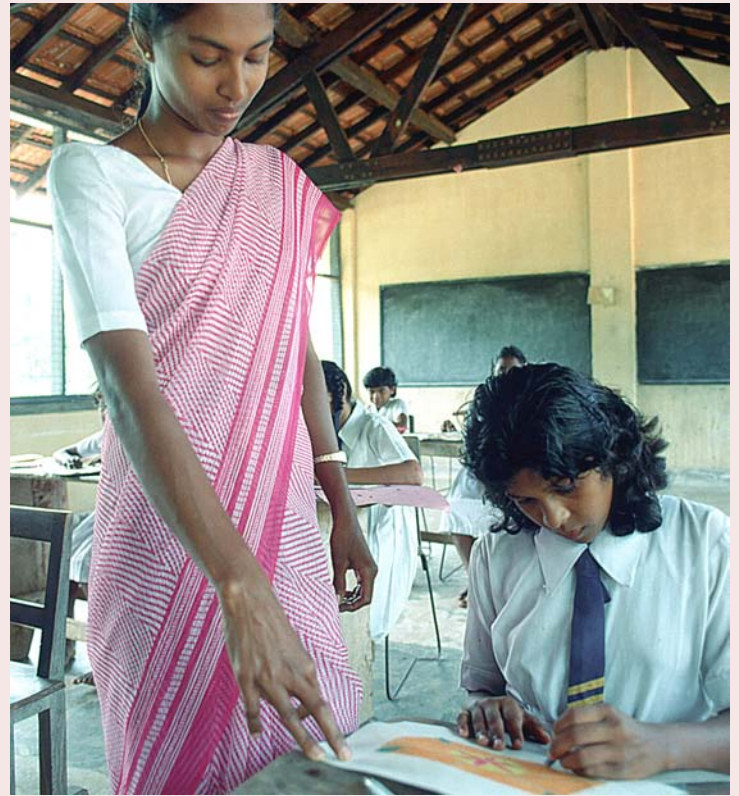
On 26 December 2004, the massive waves of the tsunami destroyed their home and damaged her husband's fishing boat. They were among the lucky ones who did not lose any family member including her mother who lived nearby. Together with other survivors in their village, they moved to a camp set up in a school. This camp was managed by a private organization and the families who lived there were well looked after. Even after the school was reopened, the displaced families continued to live there.

With her usual entrepreneurial spirit, Kamala wanted to help the people in the camp. Many of the families had spent most of the compensation received from the Government to buy food from shops in the area. She felt that if she could get some funds to buy pots and pans, she could cook for the people in the camp so that they would reduce their expenses on food. However, she was unable to get such assistance.

The families lived in this camp until May 2005. Half of the families were then moved to a camp further inland and the others, including Kamala's family, were provided with transition housing in another area. Their present home in the transition house is nothing like the small house she had built over the years for her family.

Her hopes for her family were dimmed but not destroyed by the tsunami in December 2004. Kamala has now managed to get some additional cooking utensils and is, once again, making food items for sale. Her daughters go to a school close by and she is happy that their education is continuing and their lives have some semblance of normalcy. Almost a year after the tsunami, many survivors still languish in tents or in small transition houses. Some, more fortunate, have been given houses built by local and international NGOs.

Our newspapers and TV screens are now filled with news and images of new disasters and tragedies elsewhere around the



globe. The tsunami and the plight of people like Kamala are beginning to fade from our collective memories. The lives of thousands were irrevocably changed by the tsunami and many of those who were affected are resigned to wait for the state or an NGO to help put their lives together again. Kamala, with her unrelenting spirit and energy, is making the best of her situation and doing whatever she can to support and care for her family. They wait in hope—as do so many others—that someday they will be able to return to their village, have their own home, and rebuild their lives.

Many women like Kamala in Sri Lanka have vulnerabilities but they are still strong, capable, resilient, and determined. They have amply demonstrated their strong capabilities and survival skills in the aftermath of the tsunami as well as over 20 years of war and other smaller scale natural disasters such as floods and droughts. Development assistance needs to recognize them not as helpless victims but as strong, capable individuals with much knowledge and experience to contribute to rebuilding their communities and their own lives.

Under the emergency Tsunami-Affected Areas Rebuilding Project, the ADB is assisting the Government's post-tsunami reconstruction activities to help families like Kamala's put their lives back together again. ADB's project promotes and facilitates men and women's participation in community-based organizations that will be involved in implementing (i) urban planning and village reconstruction and development programs; (ii) recovery of livelihood and economic activities; (iii) planning, construction, and maintenance of infrastructure schemes (irrigation, water supply, and sanitation and roads); and (iv) environmental and coastal resource management activities.

** name has been changed*

BANGLADESH

Business Women and Their Untapped Potential

Ferdousi Sultana Begum
Bangladesh Resident Mission

Women's entrepreneurship is gradually on the rise in Bangladesh like in other Asian countries. During the last three decades, women have become more visible in business operations, creating employment opportunities and contributing to economic growth. Even though women's businesses support individual households and contribute to the overall economy, their contributions to private sector development and poverty reduction are not well recognized. As traditional social norms and gender stereotyping still influence activities of individuals and institutions involved in business promotion, opportunities for business start-up and growth remain more limited for women compared with men.

Operating a business, however, provides women the flexibility to balance their productive and reproductive roles. "I am happy as a businesswoman that I can do things creatively. I work for myself and can generate employment for other women. Particularly for women with family responsibilities, business is a better option," says Selima Ahmed, President, Bangladesh Women Chamber and Industry. She feels that managing her own venture and time is both rewarding and challenging.

Women's businesses in Bangladesh are generally home based and small in size due to lack of resources such as access to land, credit, technology, information networks, and markets. Without skills training, women rely on their traditional domestically acquired skills such as sewing, food processing, livestock care, and handicrafts to produce mainly for the domestic market. Their involvement in nontraditional businesses still remains very limited. As a result, women compete among themselves with similar products in the same markets primarily in clothing manufacturing, retail sales, textile weaving, as well as livestock and dairy production. Large ventures are often owned jointly with male family members.

Cumbersome procedures and lack of support from male family members make it difficult for a woman to start her own business. In many cases, social, political, and business support networks are required for business growth. Women generally do not have such networks even when they may have economic resources to start a business. Women's networks are restricted to their direct buyers, raw material producers, and comembers. Their networks do not extend to regulatory bodies, banks, or business associations. Visible mobility of women in offices to resolve problems, conduct business negotiations, or interact socially with clients is generally not well accepted.

"In most cases, businesswomen are considered as contributors to family welfare but not as professionals. Business



is not yet accepted as a respectable career or profession for women like other professions, such as teaching, medicine, or office work," says Selima. "If you are a director of a large business house, you have authority, feeling of power, and respect but only a few women with family support can gain those." Sangita Ahmed, a lead video producer says, "There always is a need to balance your household responsibilities with your business. Family support is so important, particularly when you are involved in nontraditional business like media production. I was a housewife before. I joined the media business with my husband but now I am managing it. I enjoy my work very much."

Regulatory and security concerns are important for business success. However, for women entrepreneurs, they are crucial due to additional risks related to women's mobility, mode of transport, and business locations. Private sector development policies that affect individual businesses and the industrial sector do not consider the support women entrepreneurs require particularly during the initial years of business growth. The critical roles of promotional, financial, and training institutions in developing women's entrepreneurship are not well understood or coordinated. It is essential to create an enabling environment for businesswomen through policy measures and institutional support networks to build their capacities in technical, financial, and business management skills.

Women entrepreneurs are gradually emerging as an economic resource but they are largely constrained by various barriers related to social norms, legal and regulatory constraints, unfavorable private sector policies, as well as inaccessible financial services and institutional networks. There is ample potential to harness the contributions of women to private sector development and economic growth in Bangladesh. The stakeholders are still unaware of this untapped potential and, therefore, lack a vision to support women as contributors to the growing private sector. A consistent approach is needed to sponsor women's entrepreneurship in all the relevant areas by all stakeholders through carefully orchestrated implementation measures.

Sri Lanka–Bangladesh: Results-Based Lateral Learning

Nelun Gunasekera

Sri Lanka Resident Mission and **Tulin Pulley**

Recognizing the challenge of gender mainstreaming, the regional technical assistance (RETA) project 6092: *Enhancing Gender & Development Capacity in Developing Member Countries Phase II (2002-present)* emphasizes results-based lateral learning as a strategic framework for promoting gender mainstreaming and building the gender capacity of executing agencies (EAs).

- ***Learn from Results of Ongoing Loan Projects.***

Showcase innovative approaches to integrating gender that are simple, replicable, feasible, and getting positive results in different country contexts.

- ***Learn from Each Other.***

Exchange experiences among EA project directors (PDs) from the same sectors in different countries to demonstrate how concepts and techniques on gender mainstreaming are being translated into action in the context of ADB-funded loan projects. Emphasize lateral learning where participants primarily teach and learn from each other through concrete examples rather than learn from gender experts presenting abstract material.

- ***Learn with Real-Time Feedback.***

Highlight positive results that are being achieved under loan projects by using gender action plans (GAPs) as a mechanism to guide implementation, supervision, and monitoring of project activities to deliver results.

In 2004–2005, the gender specialists from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh organized two lateral learning opportunities for PDs implementing projects in the same sectors in different countries. The first was an in-country gender workshop in Sri Lanka for PDs of ADB-financed loan projects using PDs from Bangladesh as resource persons. The Bangladesh PDs were from the following projects: *Third Rural Infrastructure Development Project*, *Northwest Crop Diversification Project*, *Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project*, and the *Small Scale Water Resources Development Sector Project*.

The seminar focused on presentations and discussions on the design, implementation, and monitoring of project GAPs; results being achieved; and lessons learnt from loan projects in Bangladesh that successfully integrated gender concerns. The presentations highlighted how the use of project GAPs has provided a road map and facilitated implementation of the projects' gender-design features. They also highlighted how GAPs contributed toward meeting the overall poverty reduction objectives of the projects. Through presentation of actual Bangladesh loan project case studies, the workshop aimed to promote

and strengthen gender mainstreaming of loan projects in the education, rural infrastructure, and water resource development sectors in Sri Lanka.

As a follow-up, in 2005, a 4-day peer exchange visit to Bangladesh was organized for PDs from Sri Lanka. The exchange visit aimed to provide opportunities for Sri Lankan officials to experience and see firsthand implementation of the Bangladesh projects where gender concerns were being successfully mainstreamed. The five-person team from Sri Lanka comprised four PDs from the *North East Coastal Community Development Project (NECCDP)*, *Secondary Towns and Rural Community-Based Water Supply and Sanitation Project*, *Southern Province Rural Economic Advancement Project (SPREAP)*, and *Road Network Improvement Project*.

The team visited livestock development, rural infrastructure, small-scale water management, and crop diversification projects in four districts of Bangladesh that were being implemented by the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), and Palli Karma Shahayak Foundation. The Sri Lankan PDs were able to observe how projects similar to their own are successfully addressing and integrating gender concerns. By rearing livestock, growing agricultural crops, maintaining local roads, and running small shops in marketplaces, poor, low-caste, and tribal women have been given opportunities to earn incomes and livelihoods, support their families' well-being, participate in community decision making, and contribute to economic development.

Besides visits to the projects, the peer-exchange program included a series of workshops where Bangladesh PDs presented their case studies of gender-inclusive loans, results achieved, and lessons learned in the design, implementation, and monitoring of GAPs. A theatrical performance was also presented to illustrate how LGED used local traditions to create awareness among project beneficiaries and assist in mobilizing and organizing local communities in the course of project implementation.

The peer-exchange visit further strengthened the links among ADB PDs in the two countries and enhanced lateral learning on the design and implementation of gender-inclusive loans achieving concrete results. The visit increased the motivation and knowledge of government senior officials to “incorporate gender issues in loan projects, assist their EAs develop GAPs/strategies to promote gender equality,” and improve the effectiveness and sustainability of their projects. As a result of the visit, the Sri Lanka *Southern Province Rural Economic Advancement Project (SPREAP)*, a multisector project that has an infrastructure component, intends to build a marketplace for women in the bus station that is being reconstructed in the tsunami-affected town of Weligama, along the lines of the one observed in Bangladesh. The majority of women living in this area are post-tsunami widows who lost the “breadwinners” of their families. It is expected that a women-friendly market area would be an incentive for these women to get engaged in income-generating activities. Similarly, following the Bangladesh example, the *North East Coastal Community Development Project (NECCDP)* adopted the strategy of using cultural groups to create awareness and increase community participation in project activities. Awareness-raising programs on community development and participation, environmental concerns, gender issues, and peace and reconciliation will be delivered through street dramas, radio programs, and cultural events in 325 villages in the project area.

Uzbekistan: Gender and Transition in Central Asia

Mekhri Khudayberdiyeva
Uzbekistan Resident Mission

The extensive socioeconomic transformation taking place in the transition countries of Central Asia over the last decade has substantially affected the structure of these countries' economies and the living standards of their populations. While both males and females were equally affected, the overall impact and experience of transition on men and women have varied.

Gender equality was a major achievement under the previous socialist regimes of Central Asia. Women had equal access to education, health care, employment opportunities, and, to some extent, leadership positions. Literacy rates and levels of employment were high for both men and women, while they shared equal benefits such as pensions. Moreover, a system of "quotas" guaranteed equal or proportional representation of men and women as well as various social groups in the political structures of their countries. In Uzbekistan, while the system of quotas was never made public, it was recommended by the former Communist Party. Although the 30% female representation was rarely achieved, the quota system helped promote and legitimize women's presence and participation in political institutions. Given the prevailing traditional sociocultural perceptions and attitudes in Central Asia, without a quota system, this would not have been possible.

With the collapse of the Soviet regime, the quota system disappeared and the number of women represented in politics and positions of authority drastically decreased. Similarly, when employment was no longer guaranteed for men and women, due to the restructuring or closing of state enterprises and former collective farms, economic hardships were felt by all. Women especially faced declining opportunities in formal sector employment due to existing social security regulations and generous maternity rights that made female workers more expensive for employers. Moreover, limited employment opportunities in the formal sector forced men and women to seek jobs in the informal labor market or led to internal and external migration. Economic insecurities further contributed to other vulnerabilities such as domestic violence and human trafficking. Reductions in health and education budgets affected people's access to basic social services and the quality of those services. In terms of legal status, men and women in Central Asia have equal rights *de jure*, but *de facto* there are many barriers to women's active participation in society because of conservative attitudes. Patriarchal values and gendered norms continue to underpin many policies and programs, gender stereotypes imbedded in the perceptions of decision makers and internalized by women further reinforce inequalities.

In Uzbekistan, specific national issues have influenced the transition process: the economic situation of the country, demographic processes, people's traditional perceptions and attitudes, and strong family ties. From the time of the declaration of independence in September 1991, radical changes in all spheres of life have taken place.

Women's status in Uzbekistan has been influenced by many factors, of which three have been dominant: the (i) Soviet inheritance, (ii) social



and economic difficulties of transition, and (iii) traditional Uzbek values and culture. Like in other former Soviet republics, gender equality is enshrined in Uzbekistan's constitution, labor code, and other main legislations. Uzbekistan is a signatory to several international agreements on women's rights and status in society (e.g. the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW] and the United Nations Declaration and Action Platform set forth in Beijing in 1995).

During the 14 years since its independence, the Uzbekistan Government has attempted to develop gender-based policies. It is encouraging to see recent government initiatives designed to address the decline of women's political and social status. Since the December 2004 elections, the number of women elected to the national Parliament, the Oliy Majlis, has increased from 9% to 18%. This was largely due to the reintroduction of a quota system that required political parties to field 30% female candidates rather than a quota or reservation of a share of parliamentary seats for women. Participation in the election process is very important as it provides political awareness both for the women leaders and the voters. The effectiveness of the activities of legislative bodies depends on the election of good candidates. However, even with broad representation at the local level, women still have to struggle to reach the highest legislative body (Oliy Majlis), where the country's most important laws, national policies, and strategic decisions are determined. Women still remain underrepresented in top economic and political positions in Uzbekistan. No woman holds a management position in the staff of the President of Uzbekistan, or in the Council of Ministers of the Karakalpakstan Autonomous Republic, or among governors of *oblasts* and major cities.

Despite official decrees supporting women and the high-level recognition of the importance of gender issues, the full participation of women in Uzbek society remains limited due to social gender stereotyping. Considerable problems remain at the implementation level of development assistance where gender-based policies and programs are not well understood by government officials at all levels. Gender issues are marginalized by policymakers and institutional structures. Addressing gender as a crosscutting issue in development is still a relatively new concept that sets a challenging context for all gender-related activities in Central Asian countries.