

---

## Chapter 8: Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The project successfully addressed gender and good governance issues in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. The forums were instrumental in creating an interface among government officials from line agencies, women members, NGO representatives, and women from other agencies and CBOs. The forums also reinforced the learning, knowledge, and confidence of women members and also established a source of support if male representatives refused to help them or blocked their efforts.

In varying degrees, the women members facilitated the opportunity for local poor women and youth to gain access to training and poverty programs, employment schemes, and social safety net programs in Bangladesh. The ward forums there also encouraged the monitoring of poverty programs by the constituents. In Pakistan, women councilors were able to design and implement schemes for much needed water supply, for streets and roads, and for vocational centers for girls. In Nepal, the forums made contact with the village development committees and have been working to organize health programs and make links with education, agricultural, veterinary, and extension officers as well as with other agencies.

Regardless of the actual numerical outcomes, the project improved the ability of women to act as responsible and effective members of local government and improved the transparency, management, and accountability of the delivery of local development resources. In so doing, they improved their status and visibility in their communities and became models for other women to follow. Women members were able to bring the benefits of poverty schemes and social services to the poor who need them most. They mobilized resources for employment, health, sanitation, small roads, and educational opportunities. Project outcomes suggest that powerful benefits accrue when a combination of local political will and increased technical capacity of local stakeholders are combined in a partnership with civil society and NGOs.

### Lessons Learned

#### Legislative Lessons

Long traditions of patriarchy and male privilege continue to dominate local government bodies and their operations in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. This makes it difficult for women members, particularly in Nepal and Pakistan, to fully participate in council activities or to gain access to local development resources for their constituents despite enabling legislation. The findings of the country reviews of local government acts and ordinances indicate there are structural problems with the legislation and that implementation with respect to incorporating female representatives in local bodies has been incomplete. The enabling legislation in each country needs to clarify the rights and duties of women members, and specific issues need to be addressed.

#### Bangladesh

- The law that reserves seats for elected women in the ward should be revised. Currently, one woman represents a constituency with three male ward members. This makes it difficult for her to be effective.

- Legislation should insure that women members are included on all union parishad standing committees. Women members should chair at least three committees, and should be vice-chairs on committees for education, law and order, finance and establishment, agriculture, livestock, and environment.

## Nepal

- Elected female representatives should be included in the village development committees in addition to the nominated member.
- Nominated women members should have rights and duties similar to those of elected women thereby increasing the active presence of women in local government.
- Steps should be taken to provide the means for elected women to occupy more advanced leadership positions.

## Pakistan

- Changes in the enabling legislation should insure the presence of women members in any quorum established for any council meeting.
- Women members should be included in meetings and on council committees and should have control over one third of all resources from development and non-development budgets.

The initial successful inclusion of women in local government suggests that specific weaknesses in existing legislation did not prevent their making an impact. However, the effect of their presence could be greatly expanded if such weaknesses were corrected. Legislative support for including women in governance at all levels of local government is important and needs to be fully implemented.

## Lessons Learned from Capacity Building

- Poverty reduction is best implemented at the grassroots level.
- An interface among elected women officials, government officers, and poor people can be achieved. More than that, the results of the project indicate that these connections are an effective means of improving the delivery of public sector resources to the poorest and most disadvantaged people, particularly women.
- When women elected officials work to link the needs of their constituents with the resources of government and other public sector organizations, they make government more transparent and more effective.
- Regular meetings with local people attended by government representatives increase the participation of poor people in governance and involve them in crafting decisions that address their needs. The fact that the majority of the poor and very poor are women means that the project has been effective in reaching an often forgotten and most disadvantaged segment of local communities.
- Participation in local arbitration committees provided women and the poor with access to social justice.
- The training of female elected officials has great and immediate benefits in terms of enhancing the effectiveness of local government in meeting the needs of the poor and very poor.

Additionally, such training makes a contribution to the human capital development of the women representatives themselves as it enables them to act more effectively in local government councils.

- The capacity building training combined with ongoing learning in the women's forums have been important for ensuring that the women members and community leaders have consistent support for their new ways of thinking and acting.
- Including gender sensitivity training for elected male council officials, council chairs, and other male government officials is important for providing them alternative ways of interacting with women members.
- The NGOs that delivered the capacity-building training and did the review of government laws and ordinances also benefited from the project. For example, these NGOs now have expanded capabilities to offer capacity building and other services to government councils and organizations. The NGOs have learned a great deal about local government laws and operations and have a clearer view of how local councils should operate and what laws and regulations guide their operations.
- The NGOs have seen improvement in the confidence and abilities of locally elected or nominated women to operate in predominantly male environments. This can serve as an incentive to stimulate their own commitment to gender equity issues.
- Local male representatives have also seen the difference in the women members after training. Combined with their own gender sensitivity training, this has encouraged many of the male chairs to include women on committees, to inform them when meetings will be held, and to begin to change their attitudes about what women can do.

In general, a start has been made in righting the gender imbalance that has existed for so long in these countries. However, much still needs to be done, and it would be presumptuous to imagine that there are not still many problems to be solved. As the initial results of the project suggest, an excellent beginning has been made in creating a model for poverty reduction at the grass roots level using the interface between trained and knowledgeable female members of local government councils, their constituents, and the public sector.

## Recommendations

### Legislative Recommendations

It is apparent that while the women members have the advantage of legislation to legitimate their presence in local government bodies, there is much that needs to be done to aid them in their endeavors. The governing legislation in all three countries is gender biased in favor of males and makes no explicit reference to the duties, rights, and obligations of women members.

### Bangladesh

- A clause should be added to the beginning of the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance of 1983 making it clear that while the language is male, it refers equally to men and women. Duties and responsibilities apply equally to men and women members.

- In regard to wards, it is recommended that of the nine wards in each union parishad, three should be designated and rotated each election period as wards where only women will stand for election. They would be the sole representatives from that ward.
- Clarification needs to be made in the functions of the union parishad in relation to gram sarker, upazila, and zilla parishads. The union parishad has been given the responsibility for law and order in its area. If this is the case, the union parishad should have administrative authority over the village watchman, and salaries and allowances paid by the upazila should be countersigned and attested by a woman member and the chair of the union parishad standing committee on law and order.
- The annual confidential reports of the upazila sectoral officers should include comments from chairs of the standing committees of the union parishad. Moreover a regular system of recording births, deaths, and marriages should be maintained by the secretary of the union parishad.
- In order to promote the involvement of the union parishad in development decisions, there should be a reordering of upazila committees so that men and women from the union parishads can be included to implement development programs and projects.
- Because of the project, women representatives have been included in three standing committees in their respective union parishads. It is recommended they should be included as members in all standing committees particularly finance and establishment.
- Women representatives should be included in the upazila coordinating committee on a rotating basis.
- Women should be included as members and not just as advisory members in the Gram Sarker Committee of Twelve.

## Nepal

- The Local Self Governance Act should be revised to include gender sensitive language and amendments that would enable women to be represented in greater numbers in various local bodies on the village development committees, on the district development committees, and on municipal development committees.
- Nominated members should have the same rights as elected members in all local government bodies. This should include the right to succeed to leadership positions.
- Elected or nominated women should be appointed to various subcommittees such as the arbitration committee and the decentralization, implementation, and monitoring committee.
- Elected and nominated women representatives and women from user groups and other local bodies in which women are playing active roles should have capacity building and other training.
- Gender sensitivity training for all government officers and elected local government representatives should be ongoing.
- Women must be included in any quorum established for meetings in any committee in the local government system.
- Women representatives must be notified well in advance of any meeting that is to be held and must be given an agenda for the meeting. Also, meetings must be held at a time and place that is suitable and convenient for women members.

## Pakistan

- The federal government should extend the law to include the tribal areas in the North West Frontier Province and should add a clause detailing the right of women to vote, to stand as candidates, and to act as public representatives.
- The duties and responsibilities of women councilors should be clearly stated and should include both the special interests of women and the interests of their entire constituencies.
- Women members must be included in any quorum established for council meetings.
- At least one woman member should be included in the panel of chairs in all councils.
- A specific date should be set for meetings, and members should be notified and given a copy of the meeting agenda at least 3 days in advance. The meetings should be in a public place and should be held at a time when women councilors can attend.
- Women members should have the opportunity to raise their issues in the council meetings.
- Women members should be included on charity (zakat) fund, public funds for vulnerable groups, and agricultural tax committees and on subcommittees and consultative committees of their respective councils.
- At the union council level, one third of all resources for development and non-development budgets should be earmarked for women councilors. They should be able to prepare, recommend, and oversee development projects related to both women's issues and to their general constituencies.
- Some form of honorarium should be allocated for women representatives (and peasant or worker representatives who require it) at all levels of local government to facilitate their work and to compensate for their lack of resources.

### **Recommendations for Capacity Building and the Interface among Key Stakeholders**

It is apparent as well that while the project has made some progress, the continued presence of supportive NGOs and the continuation of the forums are critical for sustaining the effectiveness of women representatives in local bodies. The following recommendations were made at the project's regional workshop held in Manila in March 2004 as actions to be taken by ADB as a follow-up to the project. These recommendations also reflect the recommendations of the country reports and the voices of women unable to attend the Manila conference.

- Formalize the framework as an effective approach that meets ADB's strategy of poverty reduction through gender equity and good governance. The framework of building the interface among representatives of local government, line agencies, and local constituents; building capacity; and gender sensitivity should be recognized at three levels as a means to reduce poverty: grassroots, ADB project, and government program.
- Continue the activities begun in the project and provide additional training and support. Training should not necessarily duplicate what has already been done but should be additional and more extensive.
- Expand the existing framework to other areas in the same countries with the intent of building additional and stronger networks among women members. Here the capacity building and legal information in the first project could be repeated.
- Require basic forms and greater standardization of monitoring and documentation of the work in progress to identify problems in project implementation and to illustrate the success of poverty reduction, good governance, and the gender equity approach.

- 
- Recognize that in any local governance and gender equity scheme, new problems in the relationships between men and women elected officials will continually develop. Therefore, ongoing gender equity programs must build strong support systems among women representatives to counterbalance efforts by men to undermine their effectiveness. Ongoing training for male councilors should be included.
  - Require that ADB grants and loans for governance projects in its developing member countries include gender equity and women's empowerment as indicators for approval and monitoring.
  - Require that ADB grants and loans for microlevel governance projects include a multi-pronged approach of capacity building and social mobilization of local women representatives, male members, and government officials and the creation of an interface that will bring key stakeholders together in regular meetings to consider service delivery for women, the poor, and youth. Key stakeholders are women representatives, government officials, and the poorest constituents of the women members.