

Gender and Governance Issues in Local Government

Regional Report of Technical Assistance in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan

South Asia Regional Department
Asian Development Bank
Manila, Philippines
2004

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Published December 2004

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Publication Stock No. 111004

Published by the Asian Development Bank
6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City, 1550 Metro Manila, Philippines

Acknowledgements

This report was jointly prepared by Florence McCarthy, consultant, and Monawar Sultana, Social Development Specialist, SARD. Special thanks are due to Mr. Edward Haugh, Jr., Director, SASS; to Klaus Gerhaeusser, Director, SAGF; to Shireen Lateef, Principal Social Development Specialist RSDD; to Asha Newsum, Principal Governance Specialist, RSDD; to Sukhdeep Brar, formerly with RSDD now Senior Education Specialist with MKRD; and to Surya Shrestha, Senior Governance and Capacity Building Officer, Nepal Resident Mission for their support during the implementation of the project. Special thanks are also due to Gregory London, Principal Consulting Services Specialist for his assistance in recruiting the NGOs and preparing their contracts. Thanks to Manoshi Mitra, Senior Social Development Specialist, MKRD and Susan Wendt, Social Development Specialist, SERD for their comments on the final draft; again to Shireen Lateef for her comments on the initial draft; to Anne Sweetser, Social Development Specialist, RSDD, Keith Leonard, Principal Evaluation Specialist, OED and Kamal Ahmad, Counsel, OGC for facilitating working groups at the regional conference; to Ziba Farhadian-Lorie, Principal Economist formerly with SPD and now with SARD for her assistance with developing monitoring indicators during the project extension; and to Lynette Mallery and Carolyn Dedolph in OER for their support and assistance. We would also like to thank Judy Goldman for her help in editing the report.

The project could not have succeeded without the valuable support and guidance of (i) the focal agencies of the project: the Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives in Bangladesh; the Ministry of Local Development in Nepal; the Economic Affairs Division of the Ministry of Finance and Local Government, Elections and Rural Development Division of North West Frontier Province in Pakistan; (ii) the participants in the project: the female representatives elected to local government bodies in Bangladesh and Pakistan and the ex-elected and nominated women representatives and women community leaders in Nepal; and (iii) the participating nongovernment organizations: BRAC, Shushilan, and the Khan Foundation in Bangladesh; Didibahini and Shtrii Shakti in Nepal; and the Rural Support Program Network, Sarhad Rural Support Program, and the Aurat Foundation in Pakistan.

Thanks to the participants at the regional workshop held in Manila in March 2004 for the representatives of government agencies from Bangladesh, Nepal, India, and Pakistan; for elected female representatives to local government bodies; for women community leaders; for partner NGOs; for donor agencies; and for ADB staff.

It is hoped that the report will be useful to governments, to elected representatives of local government and nongovernment organizations, and to individuals working in the field of gender and governance.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

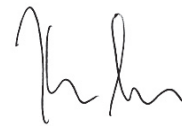
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Assistance Committee
CBO	community-based organization
CCB	citizens' community board
GAD	gender and development
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	nongovernment organization
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
SAP	structural adjustment policies
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VDC	village development committee
WID	women in development

Note: Tk = Bangladesh taka (\$1 = 60.55); Rs = Nepal rupees (\$1 = 72); lakh = 100,000

Foreword

The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Poverty Reduction Strategy adopted in 1999 and updated in 2004 is built on three inter-related pillars: pro-poor, sustainable economic growth; inclusive social development; and good governance. Reducing poverty requires considerable efforts to improve the participation of women and the poor in local governance and resource mobilization and to increase the effectiveness of public sector service delivery to them. In this regional technical assistance project, women elected to local government bodies in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan linked the resources of government and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) with their poorest constituents via a unique framework that applied the three pillars at the grassroots level. Resources included employment opportunities, training programs, and social sector programs. Laws reserve seats for women in local governments in all three countries, but long traditions of gender inequality and patriarchal values have limited the participation and effectiveness of female representatives.

The project framework combined an interface among women representatives, government officials, and poor constituents with social mobilization and capacity building to improve the effectiveness of women representatives and empower them to represent their poor constituents and deliver the services and opportunities they so desperately need. Capacity building provided needed knowledge, skills, and techniques to women representatives, and local resources were mobilized for their poorest constituents. The fact that a majority of the women representatives were themselves poor meant that the training and support they received from the project also expanded their own social capital. The success of the project is underscored by the support it won from its major stakeholders including sponsoring ministries, participating NGOs, and local councils. The participating NGOs in collaboration with women representatives will expand the project in each of the three countries. These outcomes suggest that (i) empowering the poor through good governance will expand their economic opportunities and increase their inclusion in the social life of their communities and (ii) the project's framework and approach could be mainstreamed into ADB's efforts to promote good governance and to reduce poverty at the grassroots level.



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Executive Summary

The project focused on gender and local governance in Bangladesh, Nepal, and the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan and was unique in its efforts to apply the three pillars of the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) poverty reduction strategy at the grass roots level. It was implemented over the 18-month period July 2002–February 2004 and was jointly funded by ADB, the Japan Special Fund, and the Canadian International Development Agency.

Project activities were divided into two major components (i) capacity building for elected and nominated women representatives to local government and (ii) policy analysis of local government ordinances. The analyses provided valuable information about structural constraints and their implications for women and included recommendations for improving gender equity in the legal, social, and economic arenas.

The project designed a framework for promoting gender and good governance to assist women representatives to carry out their roles more confidently and to serve their constituents, who are mainly poor women, more effectively. It consisted of:

- an interface among poor communities, women representatives, and government officials that established the credibility and effectiveness of elected women representatives and involved officers from line agencies in transparent and accountable interaction with community members;
- social mobilization of key stakeholders particularly the poor, elected women representatives and women leaders, and officers of line agencies;
- capacity building of elected women representatives, male representatives and leaders, and female community leaders.

The interface and social mobilization were achieved by creating women's forums that meet regularly and establish links for women representatives with government line agencies, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and the private sector.

Capacity building by local NGOs provided women representatives with basic knowledge about local government (their roles, budgets, record keeping, agendas, projects, monitoring committees, project funds); about how to run meetings, mediate disputes, and negotiate development programs and local resource mobilization; and about gender issues. In all cases, training in gender sensitivity was provided to male representatives and in some cases to other male stakeholders as well.

Although long traditions of gender inequality and patriarchal values placed huge barriers on women's participation in local government in all three countries, the project successfully addressed gender and good governance issues. Project activities varied in each country because of different social conditions and differences in the experience and institutional capacity of the implementing NGOs; nevertheless, the activities the women initiated after capacity building brought positive change to their constituents, improved their own status and visibility in their communities, and made them models for other women to follow. They mobilized resources for employment, health, sanitation, small roads, and educational opportunities. The forums were critical elements in their effectiveness. A unique outcome of the project was the support it won from all its stakeholders. All participants recommended that ADB extend the project until December 31, 2004, which ADB agreed to do. In addition, the NGOs responsible for capacity building plan to continue their activities with the female representatives and leaders in all three countries beyond the current project time line. It is recommended that the project's framework and approach be formalized, replicated, and mainstreamed into ADB activities as an effective means of reducing poverty by promoting gender equity and good governance.

Among the important lessons learned are the following.

- Poverty reduction is best implemented at the grassroots level.
- An interface among elected women officials, government officers, and poor people is an effective means of improving the delivery of public sector resources to the poorest and most disadvantaged, particularly women.
- When elected women representatives link the needs of their constituents with the resources of government and other public sector organizations, local government is more transparent and more effective.
- Regularly held local forums attended by government representatives increase the participation of poor people in governance and involve them in decisions that address their needs.
- Building the capacity of female elected officials enhances the effectiveness of local government and develops the social capital of the women themselves.
- The success of the participating NGOs in building the confidence and ability of locally elected women to operate in predominantly male environments increased their effectiveness and their commitment to gender equity.