

Institutionalizing Gender Equality at ADB: The Experience of the Bangladesh Resident Mission

By Francesco Tornieri

- **Between 1998-2007, Bangladesh had the highest proportion of projects with significant gender mainstreaming at ADB**
- **The social changes in the country and the increasing commitment of line agencies provided momentum to mainstream gender concerns.**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) recently prepared a report analyzing the factors that contribute to the higher-than-average proportion of gender-sensitive projects (i.e., loan and grant projects) approved for Bangladesh. Adopting a gender mainstreaming approach, as required under ADB's Gender and Development Policy, can be influenced by many factors. The assessment consolidates learning regarding some of the most critical factors, as identified by ADB staff and other stakeholders.

Compared with the whole ADB portfolio of loans and grants approved between 1998—2007, Bangladesh had a higher proportion of projects that either have a gender theme or were considered to be effectively mainstreaming gender issues: 50% for Bangladesh versus 32% for ADB.

Key explanatory factors are: broad-based social changes taking place in the country, providing momentum to efforts to mainstream gender concerns; increasing commitment of line agencies (e.g. the Local Government Engineering Division) provided momentum to efforts to mainstream gender concerns; and Management support in South Asia Regional Department and the Bangladesh Resident Mission.

The ADB BRM Experience

Increasing Opportunities for Women's Involvement in Projects. The portfolio of loan projects in Bangladesh has offered good entry points for integrating gender issues. Although the largest investments are in infrastructure, many projects in both rural and urban development have increasingly required community involvement in designing and maintaining small infrastructure. Thus, it is relatively easy to explore ways for women to participate in this process.

Willingness to Try New Ideas. Some of ADB's partner government agencies have been willing to try new ideas for involving women in project activities. The government's quota for elected female local councilors has also given impetus to making government services meet women's needs more effectively. BRM gender specialist has capitalized on this supportive environment to test and apply new ideas in various projects.



Inclusion of Gender Action Plans in Project Design. With growing evidence that women's participation has increased development results, new tools were tested and introduced across ADB. Among these is the project-specific Gender Action Plan (GAP). Possible entry points for women and special measures to ensure that they can participate are set out during project preparation for all relevant activities. A project-specific GAP pulls together all elements for mainstreaming gender, including required resources and monitoring and evaluation indicators. Further, key aspects of the GAP are incorporated into loan assurances to encourage buy-in from executing agencies and other project partners.

Flexibility in GAP Implementation. GAPs should be designed "hypothetically" and then reassessed on a regular basis throughout implementation. This is important as community resistance to challenging gender inequalities may take different forms or may not occur at all; and, women may come up with new ways to smoothen implementation as they gain confidence and knowledge of expectations from project components.

Willingness to Learn from Success and Failure. A learning atmosphere should be encouraged both within ADB and its partner executing agencies. Learning from gender successes and failures may be accelerated through the use of available documents and tools (e.g., country assessment of gender equality results, case studies of good practices, etc.); and capacity-building (e.g., peer lateral learning events).

Strategic Placement of the BRM Gender Specialist. Mandated to work closely with the Project Management Unit staff, the location of the gender specialist in the Policy and Program Unit of BRM has facilitated the flow of information and availability of timely technical advice to resolve implementation issues quickly.

For further information

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