ASSESSMENT OF THE GENDER PROGRAM IN PAKISTAN

1. Despite recent progress, gender inequities in Pakistan remain acute. The country’s ranking on the gender-related development index was 134 out of 135 countries in 2012.¹ The country has the highest rates of maternal mortality and female illiteracy, and some of the lowest rates of female employment in salaried jobs in Asia. There has been slow progress toward gender parity in tertiary education, but national figures mask stark regional disparities. Women continue to be economically excluded, with a female labor force participation rate of only 21%, compared with 70% for men in fiscal year (FY) 2011. Pakistan will not achieve its full potential for economic growth unless women from all classes and social groups are able to take up employment and other income-generating opportunities on a more equitable basis. Nevertheless, the federal government and all provincial governments have adopted gender reform plans to increase women’s participation in public sector employment. A quota of 5% for women in government service has been established, but progress toward fulfilling it is slow, especially in senior categories. In 2000, the National Commission on the Status of Women was created to strengthen the implementation of gender policy commitments. The Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 2001 also provided for a 33% quota for women in local government, resulting in 20,000 women councilors.

2. The Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) Country Strategy and Program (CSP) 2002–2006² targeted gender issues by focusing on the specific needs of women through devolved social service delivery programs, water supply and sanitation projects, integrated rural development interventions, and support for microfinance. It listed several gender indicators, but lacked targets and milestones. The Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) 2009–2013³ includes a gender assessment and outlines progress (or lack thereof) in achieving gender equality. It confirms gender mainstreaming as a feature of all ADB operations in Pakistan, and that there should be links to outcomes and other thematic areas. The CPS also indicates that Pakistan should benefit from regional technical assistance (TA) programs on gender mainstreaming and proposes that the results framework should include the collection of gender-disaggregated data. Gender support in the portfolio is summarized in the succeeding box on gender support for the Pakistan portfolio.

3. Under the Sindh Devolved Social Services Program (DSSP), female representation in the committees was well above the stipulated 20% in all districts, with most district committees reporting a much higher ratio. Furthermore, although not required by the Sindh DSSP, the sector committees of most tehsil municipal administrations (TMAs) had female representation. In consultation with the district governments and TMAs, the Sindh provincial government approved expansion of support to home schools for girls. The Punjab DSSP aimed to achieve progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to poverty, gender, education, health, and water supply and sanitation through more equitable devolved social services. The Punjab DSSP enhanced the role of women in decision-making through the provision that at least two female councilors would be represented on each of the sector monitoring, accounts, and district development committees, which was an eligibility criterion for access to conditional grants. Of the total number of schools constructed under the Earthquake Emergency Assistance Project, about 45% were built for girls, and 41% of the enrolled students were girls. About 282,000 women heads of households received support for livelihood development, and free land was provided to 1,316 women with land titles. ADB made a major contribution in this area.

Box: Gender Support for the Pakistan Portfolio

A gender officer (consultant) was recruited at the Pakistan Resident Mission (PRM), supported by a gender specialist at the headquarters’ regional department. Both gender specialists participate in gender assessments of the Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) interventions, prepare and monitor gender action plans, and work with project officers on increasing the capacity of executing agencies in gender-sensitive policy and program planning, implementation, and monitoring. The Country Development Effectiveness Brief: Pakistan, 2008–2012 states that gender fair recruitment policies have been introduced and implemented under several ADB-funded projects. Gender-inclusive project design and monitoring ensured targeted interventions through the effective implementation of gender action plans. For instance, parts of the community physical infrastructure budgets were spent on schemes with direct impacts on women. This was estimated to be 22% for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) Rural Development Project and 18% for the Sustainable Livelihood in Barani Area Project (SLBAP), and 31 women have been trained on income-generating skills under the SLBAP and Sindh Coastal Community Development Projects, while about 67% of the total microcredit funds were distributed to women under the SLBAP. Under the ongoing Sindh Cities Improvement Program, about 60% of women were deployed as staff at customer care centers. In the Earthquake Emergency Assistance Project, of the total number of schools constructed, about 45% were built for girls, and 41% of the enrolled students were girls. About 282,000 women heads of households received support for livelihood development, and free land was provided to 1,316 women with land titles.

Under the Sindh Devolved Social Services Program (DSSP), female representation in the committees was well above the stipulated 20% in all districts. The provincial government also approved expansion of support to home schools for girls. The Punjab DSSP aimed to achieve progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to poverty, gender, education, health, and water supply and sanitation through more equitable devolved social services, whereby at least two female councilors would be represented in each of the sectors. This was an eligibility criterion for access to conditional grants. Finally, the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has a strong focus on women, since it was directed at female heads of families with a total monthly income of less than PRs 6,000.

In 2005, ADB approved technical assistance (TA) to support the implementation of gender reform action plans. The TA completion report lists several achievements, including support to the National Commission on the Status of Women through analytical studies, the establishment of a resource center at the commission; support to 20 public training institutions throughout Pakistan to revise 40 curricular subjects with gender-based aspects, and development of a pool of 60 gender trainers (45% of whom were women) within the provincial governments. About 130 industrial training centers of the Women Development Department in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were strengthened through new skills and curricula for enhancing the entrepreneurial capacity of women. A Punjab female internship program was also established.

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4. ADB’s program can be commended, but the larger picture is that several gender parity indicators are unlikely to be achieved based on present levels of progress. Maternal mortality ratios have improved over the past few years (from 400 in FY2005 to 250 per 100,000 live births in FY2007), signaling continued poor quality and coverage of maternal and child health services. The updated program framework of the project completion report on the Punjab DSSP reports some progress toward the MDGs for many indicators, with the exception of indicators for infant mortality and family-planning services.