

# Project Gender Action Plans

## Lessons for Achieving Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction Results



### Introduction

This briefing note summarizes evidence on effective approaches used by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for achieving benefits for women and progress towards gender equality. The findings are based on gender assessments of 12 loans in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, and Pakistan and including five rural development loans (agriculture, rural infrastructure, and livestock), four human development and/or social sector loans (two health and two education), and three governance loans.<sup>1</sup>

### Gender action plans help achieve practical benefits and strategic changes in gender relations.

ADB's gender and development policy identified gender mainstreaming as a key strategy for addressing gender equity in all ADB-financed activities. Gender assessments demonstrate that project gender action plans (GAPs) are effective gender mainstreaming tools. Loan projects implementing quality GAPs result in:

- increased participation by women in loan activities, particularly through community-based organizations;
- more equitable access to project and program resources including skills training, technology, and government services;
- improved practical benefits for women such as increased income, greater financial security, and more livelihood options;
- progress toward gender equality, including changing decision-making patterns in the household, membership in and leadership of community-based organizations, and increased mobility.

These findings have a strong basis in evidence. They are demonstrated within sectors, across sectors, and across the four countries included in the study. Rural development projects that designed and implemented GAPs achieved the most comprehensive results. Where the implementation of GAPs was delayed, rural development projects demonstrated fewer results but significant potential. Human development loans aimed to improve women's health and educational status and achieved some practical benefits because of gender provisions. However, without GAPs, they made little progress toward strategic changes in gender relations. Governance policy loans that included significant gender provisions and gender equality tranche release conditions achieved important policy reforms.

### Strategic Interventions Help Achieve Practical Benefits

Often, strategic interventions are needed first to achieve participation, access to resources, and practical benefits for women. For example, in the agriculture and rural development projects studied in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan, women were targeted by supporting their membership in community-based organizations. Through these organizations, women receive training and new technology and have access to financial and other services. They are able to participate in project activities, access resources, and benefit from increased income, savings, and improved infrastructure. In some cases, women are encouraged to participate in community decision making. These are new roles for women that contribute to changing gender relations. Men's approval and support for women's participation is also an important positive change. Sometimes, these interventions lead to other strategic results, such as increased access to political representatives, expanded social and economic networks, increased access to government services beyond the life of the project, greater decision-making power in the household, and increased self-esteem and self-confidence.

### Gender action plans help reduce vulnerability to poverty.

GAPs helped achieve overall project objectives by reducing the vulnerability of women and their families to poverty. For example, in rural development projects in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan, women who previously earned little or nothing had access to cash income, a savings discipline, and new skills. Increased income was spent on essentials such as food, education, and health care. In some cases, women planned to invest income and savings into income-generating enterprises.

### Gender action plans enhance the sustainability of benefits.

GAPs have improved the quality of implementation by identifying constraints to poor participating and benefiting women and men, and by developing strategies that require a balanced approach between hardware and software components. These factors have helped improve the sustainability of benefits for the poor. Sustainability has also been enhanced by establishing women's community-based organizations by linking women with existing government services, by providing skills to women, and by providing greater financial security from savings and group lending structures.

The effectiveness of GAPs at delivering these types of results has prompted executing agencies to replicate GAP strategies in other projects and areas of work. Positive results have reinforced commitments by the agencies to address gender issues and to institutionalize gender mainstreaming approaches.

### The role of gender specialists in resident missions

Loans that achieved the most comprehensive results for women benefited from significant inputs from resident mission gender specialists. This included technical advice for the development of GAPs; capacity building; ongoing support; and follow-up, monitoring, and dialogue with executing agencies on the implementation of GAPs and policy reforms.

Including resident mission gender specialists (or other gender specialists) in preparing and implementing loans is essential to ensure that adequate social and gender analysis is undertaken and that gender equality issues are addressed in loan design, implementation, and review. This is particularly important for project preparation technical assistance or feasibility study work and for loan fact finding, appraisal, inception, review, and midterm review missions.

### Dialogue with executing agencies is essential.

Significant gender equality results can be achieved in very challenging social contexts. Good management and strong leadership from the executing agency are essential. A capacity to innovate, flexibility, a teamwork approach, effective communication patterns, the capacity to learn and the ability to adapt strategies based on experience have all been strong features of the executing agencies with the most comprehensive results.

Commitment to challenge social and cultural obstacles does not develop in a vacuum. Those executing agencies that demonstrate the strongest leadership and commitment have been influenced by long-term dialogue and negotiation with ADB and other funding agencies. Good results also tend to reinforce commitment; for example, the Nepal Department of Livestock Services and the Bangladesh Local Government Engineering Department now acknowledge the importance of software components such as participatory approaches and gender strategies to maximize returns on investments.

### GAPs and project design and monitoring frameworks (DMFs)

Although most of the loan projects assessed had taken some steps to address gender issues in the loan design, it was very rare for key gender provisions to be integrated adequately into project design and monitoring frameworks. Health and education project frameworks included gender sensitive indicators for women's health and the delivery of stipend and scholarship programs. However, indicators for other gender-related targets were overlooked. Structural constraints to improving women's health and educational status were rarely identified as risks or assumptions.

Project design and monitoring frameworks in other sectors generally had no gender-sensitive indicators. Very few included relevant gender-related risks and assumptions that would have an impact on the achievement of project objectives, even where the

project design included a GAP, strategy, or gender provisions and targets. This leads to poor monitoring of differences between men's and women's participation and access to project resources, making it more difficult to assess differences in benefits and impacts for women and men. Failure to incorporate GAPs into project logical frameworks also increases the risk that GAPs and strategies will be marginalized during implementation.

### Guidelines for incorporating gender in reports and recommendations of the President (RRPs)

Project GAPs should be prepared during the design of all projects that provide direct benefits to communities. If a GAP is not prepared, the reasons for this need to be clearly articulated in the summary poverty reduction and social strategy. GAPs must be included as a core appendix of the RRP in compliance with OM-C2/OP (para. 11).

#### Guidelines for Incorporating Gender in RRP

Projects with GAD theme or gender mainstreaming must include the following information in the RRP. These projects must prepare a GAP during design and include as a core appendix in the RRP.

##### Rationale/ Background Section

- Include at least a paragraph in this section explaining women's involvement in the sector highlighting any constraints to their greater participation, access, and/or benefits.

##### Impact/Outcome Statement

- For projects classified GAD theme, the outcome statement should mention gender issues or women's empowerment.

##### Outputs Section

- The outputs section should explain and present data on how the various outputs (preferably under each output) will promote and facilitate women's participation. Any performance targets for women's participation and benefits should be mentioned here—e.g., female quotas for scholarships and training, targets for women's inclusion in water user groups and other design features.

##### Benefits Section

- At least a paragraph preferably under a subheading "Gender and Development" to explain how the project will benefit women.

##### Assurances/Covenants

- Include a loan assurance and/or covenant to ensure implementation of the project GAP, if one was prepared.

##### DMF

- Ensure any targets and quotas for female participation and benefits (from the project GAP) are included in the performance measures and targets column of the DMF.

##### Gender Action Plan

- GAPs must be a core appendix of the RRP as mandated under the GAD OM-C2/OP (para. 11). If space limitation is a concern, a short version (1 page) GAP can be included.

## Lessons for Developing Effective Project Gender Action Plans (GAPs)

Gender strategies and action plans are most effective at delivering results when they incorporate a number of good practices. No single element by itself is a formula for success. Good practices include the following.

- **Undertake quality social and gender analyses.**
  - Identify constraints to participating and benefiting women and men.
  - Develop strategies for each loan component to ensure that women and men participate and benefit.
- **Revisit gender design strategies at inception to develop a detailed GAP.**
  - GAPs are essential roadmaps for project implementation.
  - GAPs need to be tested and reviewed early in implementation.
  - Detailed activities, targets, resources, and responsibilities for implementation need to be identified.
- **GAPs must be fully owned and understood by the executing agency.**
  - Use a participatory and flexible approach to developing the GAP.
  - A strong rationale that is directly linked to overall project objectives is needed for targeting and working with women.
- **Identify realistic targets linked to loan objectives.**
  - Targets and strategies should enable step-by-step progress bringing incremental changes and challenging culture without threatening it.
  - Linking targets to loan objectives helps all stakeholders to understand the rationale for focusing on women.
  - Targets facilitate monitoring of participation and benefits.
- **Include gender capacity building in the GAP.**
  - Both formal training and ongoing support and mentoring are needed for developing skills, ownership, and commitment.
- **Provide adequate skills and resources for GAP implementation.**
  - Long-term gender specialists in the executing agency and/or project team and adequate resources have ensured that GAPs are implemented.
  - Nongovernment organizations contracted to implement project activities should have a demonstrated gender capacity.
- **Monitor and follow up gender-related targets and activities.**
  - Systematic follow up is needed to ensure that policy reforms and GAPs are implemented. Routine monitoring and reporting promotes good results.
  - Gender sensitive indicators and gender-related risks must be included in project logical frameworks.
- **Use loan covenants tranche release conditions in program loans.**
  - Tranche release conditions in program loans helped achieve positive gender equality policy reforms in governance policy loans.
  - Implementation of GAPs and/or strategies should be included as an assurance and/or loan covenant with reference to specific GAP elements such as activities and targets for women's participation and access to project resources.
  - Loan covenants increase the likelihood that executing agencies, project teams, and the Asian Development Bank will monitor the implementation of the GAP and gender-related results.

## Governance Loans Leverage High-Level Support for Gender Equality

Policy dialogue and the incorporation of tranche release conditions have leveraged high-level support for gender equality policy reforms in governance loans.

- Pakistan's Decentralization Support Program and Nepal's Governance Reform Program are good practice examples of high-level policy dialogue and the use of tranche release conditions that should be replicated in other governance sector policy and project loans.
- In Pakistan, a local government ordinance has been passed that reserves 33% of seats for women, and gender reform action plans have been approved in some provinces. In Nepal, the cabinet approved a reservation policy for women in the civil service.
- In both countries, gender equality is increasingly seen as a core issue in good governance and as a legitimate subject for discussion and debate. Policy reforms will help to build an enabling environment for further strategic gains for women, providing that they are implemented.

## Policy Dialogue on Gender Equality

At the project level, dialogue with executing agencies needs to focus on:

- the rationale for targeting and benefiting women;
- how women's participation and benefits contribute to poverty reduction and overall loan objectives;
- capacity building in social and gender analysis and in identifying strategies to address constraints to women's participation and benefits;
- ensuring that gender action plans and provisions are implemented;
- demonstrating results to encourage executing agencies to replicate effective approaches in other projects and sectors.

High-level policy dialogue is needed on:

- including gender equality policy reforms in governance policy loans;
- the need for gender capacity building with executing agencies and project teams;
- public sector reforms to enable the recruitment of more female project staff and more female civil servants, particularly in the health and education sectors and in rural areas.

### About the Briefing Notes

This briefing note is based on gender assessments conducted in 2004 as part of ADB's review of the implementation of the policy on gender and development.

## Loan Project Preparation and Processing

Prepare a gender action plan (GAP) for inclusion in the project design document, or report and recommendation of the President of ADB (RRP).

- **A GAP needs to be prepared in sufficient detail during project design to provide an initial roadmap for implementation.**
  - Identify constraints to women and men participating and benefiting.
  - Develop strategies and targets to ensure that women and men can participate in and benefit from each loan component.
  - Articulate a clear rationale that is linked to the project's objectives for the involvement of women.
  - Identify resources to implement the GAP.
- **Consider the executing and implementing agency's capacity for gender-sensitive planning and implementation.**
  - Include gender capacity-building activities in the GAP.
  - Include gender sensitive selection criteria for nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and implementing agencies and include key GAP activities and targets in their terms of reference and contracts.
- **Include the GAP in the project design document (RRP).**
  - Include major elements of the GAP in component descriptions and in the social impacts and project benefits sections.
  - Include the GAP as a separate core appendix.
  - Ensure that consultants' terms of reference include responsibilities to implement the GAP.
  - Ensure that a gender specialist is included in the project implementation team.
- **Include the GAP in the project design and monitoring framework.**
  - Include activities to ensure women and men participate and benefit.
  - Assure that there are gender-sensitive indicators for each output.
  - Ensure performance indicators include any gender-related targets and quotas,
  - Make sure that gender-related risks and assumptions are included.
- **Include implementation of the GAP and its major elements as a loan assurance and loan covenant.**

## Loan Inception

Review the project design GAP and prepare a detailed implementation GAP.

- **Use a participatory process to ensure stakeholder ownership and understanding during a review of major GAP elements.**
  - Ensure that a clear rationale for the GAP is linked to project objectives.
  - Set realistic step-by-step targets relevant to project objectives.

- Allocate responsibility for implementation, monitoring, and reporting.
  - Ensure resources to implement all GAP elements are adequate.
  - Ensure that the phasing of software and hardware inputs will be complementary.
  - Identify gender capacity-building activities for all stakeholders.
  - Identify gender-sensitive selection criteria for NGOs and implementing agencies.
  - Develop performance-based contracts to ensure accountability for GAP implementation, monitoring, and reporting.
- **Incorporate the GAP into project monitoring and reporting procedures and documents including**
    - the project administration manual.
    - the format for ADB project progress reports.
    - the format for executing agency progress reporting.
    - benefit monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

## Loan Implementation, Monitoring, and Review

Follow up to ensure that the GAP is implemented and that any problems are addressed in a timely manner.

- **During loan review missions the following should be done.**
  - Monitor implementation of the GAP and compliance with loan covenants.
  - Ensure that software and hardware components are appropriately phased to maximize GAP effectiveness and returns on investment.
  - Assess constraints to participating and benefiting women, and the adequacy of GAP strategies to address constraints.
  - Identify remedial actions to review or strengthen the GAP if required.
  - Ensure back-to-office reports and project progress reports adequately report on all the above issues.
- **During midterm reviews, the following should be accomplished**
  - Ensure equal participation of male and female beneficiaries in the review.
  - Assess the implementation of the GAP and compliance with loan covenants.
  - Assess women's participation, access to resources, and benefits from all loan components compared with those of men. This requires the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated information. Where possible, assess progress toward changes in gender relations, including women's participation in decision making in the household and community and in loan implementation.
  - Analyze how results for women will contribute to achieving the overall goal and purpose of the loan.
  - Recommend mid-course corrections where necessary to develop or review a GAP.

<sup>1</sup> Based on Juliet Hunt, Shireen Lateef, and Helen Thomas *Gender Action Plans and Gender Equality Results: Rapid Gender Assessments of ADB Projects*. Synthesis Report, March 2007. Loans included in the study include Loan 1581-BAN: Third Rural Infrastructure Development Project (TRIDP), approved November 1997, \$69.05 million; Loan 1782-BAN: Northwest Crop Diversification Project (NCDP), approved October 2000, \$47.2 million; Loan 1690-BAN: Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project (SESIP), approved May 1999, \$60 million; Loan 1672-PAK: Malakand Rural Development Project (MRDP), approved March 1999, \$41 million; Loan 1671-PAK: Women's Health Project (WHP), approved February 1999, \$47 million; Loan 1935/1936-PAK: Decentralization Support Program (DSP), approved November 2002, \$300 million; Loan 1461-NEP: Third Livestock Development Project (TLDP), approved September 1996, \$18.3 million; Loan 1861-NEP: Governance Reform Program (GRP), approved November 2001, \$30 million; Loan 1840-NEP: Teacher Education Project (TEP), approved September 2001, \$25.9 million; Loan 1862-CAM: Northwest Rural Development Project (NCDP), approved November 2001, \$27.2 million; Loan 1953-CAM: Commune Council Development Project (CCDP), approved December 2002, \$10 million; and Loan 1940-CAM: Health Sector Support Project (HSSP), approved November 2002, \$20 million.