

Gender and Governance Issues in Local Government



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

South Asia Regional Department
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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

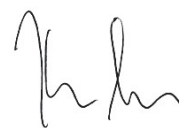
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Assistance Committee
CBO	community-based organization
CCB	citizens' community board
GAD	gender and development
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	nongovernment organization
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
SAP	structural adjustment policies
UNDP	United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

Chapter 1: Introduction

This report presents the activities and recommendations stemming from the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Regional Technical Assistance Project 6008: Gender and Governance Issues in Local Government in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan (hereinafter referred to as the project). The project is unique in its efforts to bring the three pillars of ADB's strategic approach to poverty reduction together and apply them 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. Data and information in this final report were drawn from baseline surveys of women representatives, training needs assessments, quarterly monitoring reports, evaluations of training programs, exposure visit reports, workshop reports on reviews of local government ordinances, the six-month ADB review mission, a mid-term review of the project, and consultants' and participating nongovernment organizations' (NGOs) reports and analyses (see References).

Since 1999, ADB has followed a poverty reduction strategy that has been central in its activities in Asia.¹ It is built around three interrelated pillars: pro-poor, sustainable economic growth; inclusive social development; and good governance. Inclusive social development in this project developed social capital by increasing the opportunities of the poor to participate in society and by promoting gender equity by giving women more opportunities to have a voice and participate in social institutions. The following assumptions were incorporated into the framework that established the project's operational principals.

- Poverty is best fought at the local level.
- The involvement of women in local government can improve the transparency and accountability that are essential to good governance because women are as yet not involved in or benefiting from existing networks of bad management and corruption.
- Building the capacity of elected or nominated women representatives contributes to their technical knowledge and the skills they need to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of their offices and generally improves their confidence and assurance in local government.
- The participation of citizens in local government, particularly that of women and the poor, is essential in promoting good governance.
- Men's acquiescence and support is crucial for women to be effective; therefore, gender sensitivity training should be provided to male representatives of local government and government officers.

There is considerable variation in project implementation among the three countries. Rather than indicating weakness, this variation is indicative of ADB's policy of structuring assistance to meet the needs and capabilities of local societies. The attempt to include women in local government began in 2002 in Pakistan while Bangladesh has had some form of women's involvement in government since the late 1970s. Clearly one would expect differences to emerge in the implementation of the project in each setting, and indeed this was the case. This partially accounts for the differences in the types and extent of data for each country.

¹ ADB. 1999a. *Fighting Poverty in Asia and the Pacific: The Poverty Reduction Strategy*. Manila.

A Framework for Promoting Gender and Good Governance in Local Government

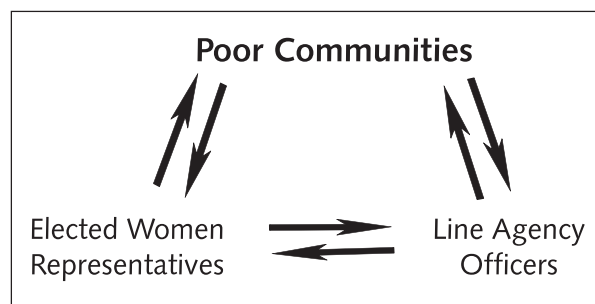
In all three countries, legislative reforms of local government bodies have led to quotas for women. There are approximately 12,000 women representatives in Bangladesh and more than 36,000 in Pakistan. In Nepal, more than 39,000 women were elected in 1997. Despite these significant numbers, women's participation in the operations and decision making of local bodies remains insignificant. Most representatives were poor themselves and many lacked the social and educational resources to adequately do their jobs. The intent of the project was to reduce poverty by increasing the participation of local people, particularly women and the poor, in local governance. Accordingly the framework was designed to assist women representatives to carry out their roles in local government more confidently and to serve their constituents more effectively. This was to be accomplished by focusing on three interrelated project components:

- creation of an interface among key stakeholders that benefits the poor, establishes the credibility and effectiveness of elected women representatives, and involves 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 council leaders, and female community leaders.

Participants in the project included elected women members of local government bodies in Bangladesh and Pakistan and ex-nominated and ex-elected members of village development committees and female community leaders and activists in Nepal as elections have not been held there since 1997. The general terms “women members” or “women representatives” are used interchangeably throughout this report to refer to all participants.

Creation of an Interface

Creating an interface means formalizing routine interactions among key stakeholders delivering services in rural communities. Their relationships and interdependencies form the triangle of elements essential to good governance pictured below.



Past experience with poverty reduction and local development projects suggests that when only one stakeholder in a complex social environment is provided training, assets, or resources, the results are often not effective. For example, line officers are often trained to deliver services more effectively, but reaching their target populations may be hampered because locally elected officials responsible for providing accurate recipient lists are not involved. Moreover, the groups targeted for assistance often are unaware of resources designated for them, miss out on benefits to which they are entitled, and can't act as pressure groups to hold government officials and locally elected members accountable. When key stakeholders have access to information, the capacity to understand and deliver resources, and the ability to monitor and facilitate pro-poor activities, local government is likely to improve, and poor constituents are more likely to be included in programs designed for them. Through the interface, women members were able to mediate the needs of their poorest constituents with government poverty and social sector programs.

Social Mobilization

Key participants were brought together in local forums that provided women representatives visibility and status. The forums were held at monthly ward and *upazila* (subdistrict) meetings in Bangladesh while in Nepal and Pakistan, special women's forums were held to gain recognition from village development committees and to establish roles in union council administration, respectively. The forums established links for women representatives with government line agencies, NGOs, and private sector corporations in all three countries. They also provided support networks and opportunities to discuss experiences, problems, and issues and to plan actions to increase the accountability of both government officers and women members to their poor and other constituents.

The forums made local people aware of various programs like development schemes or the *zakat* (charity funds) and community development projects in Pakistan and the poverty and social protection programs provided by the *union parishads* (local government bodies) in Bangladesh. In Nepal, the forums demanded and received funds for development projects from village development committees (VCDs) and other agencies.

Capacity Building

Capacity building was provided by local NGOs in each country to enhance the knowledge and skills of local women members so that they could be more effective in their roles in local government and forums. The goal was to provide women with basic knowledge about local government (their roles, budgets, meetings, record keeping, agendas, projects, monitoring committees, council project funds); about how to run meetings, mediate disputes, and negotiate for development programs and local resource mobilization; and about gender issues.

It was recognized that without the acquiescence and support of their male counterparts, women representatives would not be able to accomplish very much. Each country created a training program for women and men, but in all cases, training in gender sensitivity was provided to male representatives and in some cases to other male stakeholders.

The combined effects of project activities did a great deal to improve the confidence and ability of the elected women to represent the interests of all their constituents. The women representatives made significant contributions to the well being of the poor in their constituencies. Women's forums in Bangladesh made it possible for 7,511 poor women and children to receive vulnerable group program cards, for 646 widows to get pensions, and for 623 elderly men and women to receive their old age allowances. In addition, through the cooperation of government officers, NGOs, and women

representatives, 2,833 poor women and young people were trained in various government skill development and extension programs. Moreover, 6,128 poor women gained access to income generating activities in various poverty programs of government and nongovernment agencies. The women members were also involved in mediating 628 dowry, 526 early marriage, 677 polygamy, 1,993 land, and 3,254 family disputes. They also mediated in 1,545 instances of woman and child repression, 1,091 divorces, and 30 instances of theft.

In Nepal, the forums were able to mobilize funds from VDC budgets for 55 projects ranging from human resource development to forest and environmental management. Women's forums promoted citizenship certificates and the registration of births, deaths and marriages. Active links were made with government line agencies, with other NGOs, and with community-based organizations (CBOs) in health, education, hygiene, and savings and credit cooperatives. The women's forums also mediated 72 gender and social disputes related to domestic violence against women, polygamy, and witchcraft and were active in campaigns against alcoholism, drugs, and child trafficking.

In Pakistan the women's forums have made links with government departments, with NGOs, and with savings and credit programs. They have been responsible for implementing a total of 49 development schemes including water supply, a telephone exchange, a vocational center for girls, a pipeline, stipends for books, schools for girls, and a graveyard. A total of 1530 poor women were referred to zakat committees by 104 trained women councilors, and 59 councilors referred 1201 poor women to *baitulmal* (social security fund) committees. Fifty-five poor women were provided with income generating opportunities and 285 got jobs through government, private, or NGO sources. Sixty-seven percent of the women members resolved cases of domestic violence and 41% were able to resolve cases of divorce. Women were also involved in cases of land disputes, fights between neighbors, child custody, provision of education for young girls, and waiving school fees for poor students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Extensive debates in the development area continue on the intent, nature, and substance of the terms “gender and development/gender mainstreaming,” “poverty reduction,” and “governance.” Their interrelation, particularly as they apply to women, provides the theoretical justification for the approach of the project, and this literature review formed the basis for the design of its components.

There is no simple definition of development nor is there a clear-cut set of expected outcomes of its processes. The term “development” is variously defined as guided social change, as relating knowledge and power, or as social and economic change over time. This report incorporates elements of each of these definitions. As the project illustrates, the creation and implementation of any project is never a linear process but varies by context and circumstance in each participating country and is influenced as well by the individual reactions and responses of the various participants.

Gender and Development/Gender Mainstreaming

Gender and Development (GAD) and gender mainstreaming are evolutions of the women in development (WID) programs of the 1970s. WID approaches responded to the realization that early development efforts were gender blind and hence male oriented.² Third world women were often portrayed as generally poor, illiterate, and ignorant. Their unequal economic and social status, low literacy levels, poor health, high maternal mortality and disadvantages under the law stemmed from their lack of participation in development. Boserup³ first clarified this position and advocated incorporating women into development projects, particularly into those that would provide them with economic independence and enhanced standing in their families and communities. This was vigorously supported by many other academics and feminists, and major bilateral and multilateral donors added women’s programs to their portfolios and promoted development policies that called for the inclusion of women. While women made gains in health (especially family planning), in literacy, and in income earning, much was left undone. It rapidly became clear that simply adding women to development was a flawed approach.

Female academics and activists from the South and North joined with the female staff of major donor institutions to assess both the problems and the outcomes of WID approaches and to call for new directions in addressing women’s issues. Among the problems identified with WID approaches were the following.

- Relegating third world women to a homogenous category of passive, backward victims denied their extensive diversity⁴ and robbed them of agency and voice.⁵

² Parpart, Jane L., Shirin M. Rai, Kathleen Staudt. 2002. *Rethinking Empowerment. Gender and Development in a Global/local World*. London and New York: Routledge.

³ Boserup, Ester. 1970. *Women’s Roles in Economic Development*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

⁴ Rai, Shirin M. 2002. *Gender and the Political Economy of Development: From Nationalism to Globalization*. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press.

⁵ Pearson, Ruth, Anne Whitehead, and Kate Young. 1984. “Introduction: The Continuing Subordination of Women in the Development Process,” in K. Young, C. Wolkowitz and R. McCullagh (eds) *Of Marriage and the Market: Women’s Subordination Internationally and Its Lessons*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- The belief that simply extending education and employment opportunities to women would solve their problems was an unexamined, problematic assumption.⁶
- Treating women as “add-ons” in development activities meant they were of secondary importance and hence often received token funding.
- Evidence indicated third world women were often marginalized and disadvantaged by development policies and practices. Largely missing in WID approaches was any clear understanding of women’s subordination. The results of women’s government units to promote their incorporation in national development schemes also appeared largely unsuccessful.⁷

Gender and development programs emphasize the limitations of focusing on women only and stress the necessity of realizing that women’s lives are grounded in social relations with men that set parameters for their actions, beliefs, and outlooks.⁸ Moreover, development policies and practices have definite masculine and feminine attributes that are inherent in public/private distinctions,⁹ in definitions and analyses of households,¹⁰ and in interventions such as credit, technological inputs, and the new managerial approach that drives many development projects.¹¹ Solutions range from those calling for women’s empowerment to challenge patriarchal and political-economic inequalities¹² to calling for gender to be used as a “lens through which to understand the dynamics of social and economic change in societies in transition.”¹³

A number of factors encouraged the shift to GAD-based development, among them (i) criticism of WID approaches, (ii) the introduction and impact of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) on developing countries, and (iii) the move by major multinational and bilateral donors to circumvent state governments in favor of NGOs to implement development projects. One result of the combined effects of these factors was recognition of the importance of women as agents and participants in development.

GAD encourages the incorporation of broader conceptual and practical approaches to donor, NGO, and state development efforts. They moved from primarily woman-centered development projects and welfare definitions of women’s needs to a broader focus on gender relations that generate and perpetuates gender inequalities. GAD also recognizes that men must commit and acquiesce to meeting the strategic as well as practical needs of women.¹⁴ Moreover, GAD approaches accept that gender relations are social, historical, cultural, and religious, and as such they can be altered.¹⁵ The GAD perspective is not without its critics, however. Academics such as Maria Mies write that the use of gender has had the effect of, “...virtually excluding women again from the public discourse.”¹⁶

⁶ Rai. Op. Cit.

⁷ Pearson, Ruth and Cecile Jackson. 1998. “Introduction: Interrogating Development” in Cecile Jackson and Ruth Pearson (eds). 1998. *Feminist Visions of Development: Gender, Analysis, and Policy*. London: Routledge.

⁸ Baden, Sally and Anne Marie Goetz 1998. “Who Needs (Sex) When You Can Have (Gender)? Conflicting Discourses on Gender at Beijing,” in Cecile Jackson and Ruth Pearson (eds). *Feminist Visions of Development: Gender, Analysis and Policy*. London: Routledge.

⁹ Baden and Goetz. Op.cit.

¹⁰ Scott, Catherine V. *Gender and Development: Rethinking Modernization and Dependency Theory*. 1995. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

¹¹ Kandiyoti, Deniz. 1998. “Gender, Power and Contestation” in Cecile Jackson and Ruth Pearson (eds). Op. cit.

¹² Scott. Op. Cit.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Moser, Caroline O.N. 1993. *Gender Planning and Development Theory: Practice and Training*. London: Routledge.

¹⁵ Pearson. Op. Cit.

¹⁶ Mies, Maria. 1994. “‘Gender’ and Global Capitalism.” In Leslie Sklair ed. *Capitalism and Development*. London and New York: Routledge.

Many feminists argue that gender inequalities must be viewed from a global perspective¹⁷ and that gender relations have to be, "... understood in terms of specific societies and cultures, but also in relation to dynamic interactions between global and local sites."¹⁸ For many, gender remains a significant indicator of the inequalities built into economic processes and institutions and present in the attitudes that men and women bring to economic activity.

By the Beijing Conference in 1995, it was apparent that GAD had become a primary focus in the development initiatives of major multilateral and bilateral development agencies and institutions and that gender mainstreaming had become a central concern in development agendas. As Baden and Goetz indicate:

*Mainstreaming signifies a push towards systematic procedures and mechanisms within organizations, particularly government and public institutions, for explicitly taking account of gender issues at all stages of policy-making and programme design and implementation. It also represents a call for ... the responsibility for gender issues . . . to (extend to) the range of sectoral and technical departments within institutions.*¹⁹

Currently, GAD approaches find strong support in donor institutions like the World Bank and the ADB. Other donors and academics recognize that as women represent the majority of the world's poor, they must be included in strategies to, "...bring the benefits of growth to the poor."²⁰ This realization supports combining policies for economic redistribution and growth as the most effective poverty reduction strategies,²¹ and reinforces the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) emphasis on human development.²² While there is disagreement whether economic efficiency or empowerment approaches are the most beneficial for women, there is strong agreement that offering opportunity without providing capacity building or skill training deprives women of the knowledge and inputs they need to productively contribute to development activities and to challenge the status quo.²³

Poverty Reduction

In the 1970's, development organizations realized that their policies and practices were not reducing the number of the world's poor but that in fact, the numbers were growing. Furthermore, the economic gaps between developed and developing countries and between income groups in developing countries were expanding. In short, the benefits of development were not trickling down. The "dependency theory"²⁴ and efforts like those of Hollis Chenery were attempting to reorient policy to focus on

¹⁷ Peterson, V. Spike and Anne Sisson Runyan. 1999. *Global Gender Issues*. Second Edition. Colorado: Westview Press.

¹⁸ Stearns, Jill. 2003. "Gender Inequalities and Feminist Politics in a Global Perspective" in Eleonore Kofman and Gillian Young. *Globalization: Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Continuum.

¹⁹ Baden. Op. cit.

²⁰ Dagdeviren, Hulya, Rolph van der Hoeven and John Weeks. 2002. "Poverty Reduction with Growth and Redistribution." *Development and Change*. V 33(3) June. Pg 383-413.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Degnbol-Martinussen, John. 2002. "Development Goals, Governance and Capacity Building: Aid as a Catalyst." *Development and Change*. V. 33(2). April. Pg. 269-279.

²³ Parpart. Op. cit.

²⁴ See for example Samir Amin. 1974. *Accumulation on a World Scale*. 2 vols. New York: Monthly Review Press or Andre Gundar Frank. 1972. "The Development of Underdevelopment," in James D. Cockcroft, Andre Gundar Frank, and Dale L. Johnson, eds. *Dependence and Underdevelopment: Latin America's Political Economy*. New York: Monthly Review Press among others.

poverty.²⁵ Chenery and his associates are credited with introducing the ideas associated with redistribution with growth.²⁶

As a result, donors continued with large infrastructure projects but added and expanded efforts to improve subsistence agriculture by introducing high yielding varieties of rice, corn, potatoes, and wheat and other crops.²⁷ They also stimulated industrial production by promoting exports, and they targeted groups disadvantaged by development for special programs like integrated rural development that linked increased agricultural production to credit, technical inputs, and chemical and fertilizer availability. Special efforts were made to target the “poorest of the poor” by the World Bank including poor women, the unemployed and landless, and the destitute.²⁸ Under the leadership of McNamara, the World Bank expanded its poverty alleviation programs and moved into the realm of a development agency in its operations advocating a redistribution with growth policy that linked poverty alleviation with growth oriented production strategies²⁹ and focused on an income-productivity-output approach aimed at improving the incomes of the absolute poor and the distribution of income increments, not on the redistribution of existing assets or income.³⁰

With the advent of structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, indebted developing countries were under pressure to stay creditworthy, and many adopted policies that integrated market dynamics into their economies. These strictures became known as “conditionalities” that made further loans dependent on policy reforms.³¹ Over time, conditionalities expanded to include curtailing basic social investments, devaluing currencies, removing tariff barriers and opening developing countries to foreign investment and trade, freezing wages, and limiting the reach of labor unions. After these policies were introduced, many people in developing countries were poorer, faced greater unemployment,³² had less money to spend, worked longer hours, had fewer benefits or social support systems, and generally faced bleak and uncertain futures. In Latin America, for example, the 1980s were known as the “lost decade”³³ as the gains of the earlier period were eaten away. Development was not providing better living conditions for people; in fact, poverty eventually came to be seen as inimical to development itself.

In many developing countries hard hit by SAPs, much of the burden of coping with their effects fell on women.³⁴ Often forced to seek work to support themselves and their children, women increased their labor both in the home and as unpaid family help on family farms. Those who lacked education or skills found only agricultural labor or work in the informal sector of urban areas. Others found employment in the formal sector in export industries like flower growing,³⁵ readymade

²⁵ Bardhan, Pranab. 1995. “Research on Poverty and Development Twenty Years after Redistribution with Growth.” *The World Bank Research Observer. Annual Conference Supplement*.

²⁶ Chenery, Hollis B., Montek S. Ahluwalia, Clive Bell, John H. Duloy, and Richard Jolly. 1974. *Redistribution with Growth*. New York: Oxford University Press.

²⁷ Pearse, Andrew. 1980. *Seeds of Plenty, Seeds of Want: Social and Economic Implications of the Green Revolution*. London: Oxford University Press.

²⁸ Ayers Robert L. 1984. *Banking on the Poor: The World Bank and World Poverty*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press.

²⁹ Bardhan, Op. Cit.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ayers. Op. cit.

³² McMichael, Philip. 1996. *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective*. California, London, New Delhi: Pine Forge Press.

³³ Branford, Sue and Bernardo Kucinski. 1988. *The Debt Squads: The US, the Banks and Latin America*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books.

³⁴ UNICEF. 1987. “Adjustment with a Human Face,” as quoted in Roomy Borooah. “Engendering Wealth and Well Being: Empowerment for Global Change.” *NWSA Journal*. V 8 Summer 1997.

³⁵ Talcott, Molly. 2004. “Gendered Webs of Development and Resistance: Women, Children and Flowers in Bogata.” *Signs*. V. 29. Winter. Pg. 465-489

garments,³⁶ or assembly plants.³⁷ Such work tended to be casual and poorly paid and offered no benefits or protection under the law. Additionally, many rural women lacked land or other assets for collateral for loans so were denied access to bank or government credit programs.³⁸ For these rural women and for millions of urban women, the responsibility for caring for the family, meeting domestic needs, and doing household tasks meant the double burden of their labor was intensified.³⁹

During the 1990s, donors, government agencies, and NGOs expanded the scope and reach of their programs to involve women in education and microcredit while continuing projects in family planning, maternal and child health, and income generation. The carryover of the effects of SAPs, the end of the Cold War, and the rise of globalization all contributed to a shift in the orientation of the development community. The persistence of hard-core poverty and the only slowly improving lives of the majority of the world's population encouraged major donors, including the World Bank and ADB shortly thereafter to adopt pro-poor economic policies and poverty reduction as major thrusts. As Mark Brown, the UNDP Administrator, wrote in the Human Development Report of 2000, "Poverty eradication is not only a development goal—it is a central challenge for human rights in the 21st century. . . Human rights in an integrated world require global justice. . ."⁴⁰

Poverty reduction became part of a general pattern in the development community as NGOs both in the South and North became deeply involved and often worked in conjunction with national governments and multilateral and bilateral donors to implement programs and to deliver services to the poor and disadvantaged. For many donors, investing in education, particularly for girls and women; in health; and in employment opportunities would empower women and improve their social, economic, and health status.⁴¹

Donors have also moved to reconstruct the state and its role in planning, mediating, and implementing development objectives. The notion of the minimalist state has been expanded, and efforts have been made to focus on institutional enhancement and capacity building as a means of maximizing the contribution and support of state governments for reform.⁴² Donors such as the Nordic countries and UNDP have shifted from moving resources to developing countries to enhancing capacities and capabilities.⁴³ Transfer payments have been introduced to provide security nets for the absolute poor, the destitute, the infirm, the aged, or those otherwise unfit for work.⁴⁴ Replacing or supplementing conditionalities with country selectivity as the main determinant of assistance⁴⁵ and needs-based versus performance-based criteria as the means of determining the types and recipients of aid continue to influence poverty reduction strategies.⁴⁶

³⁶ Hossain, Hammeda, et. al. 1990. *No Better Option? Industrial Women Workers in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: University Press Limited.

³⁷ Jill Stearns. 2000. "The Gender Dimension," in David Held and Anthony McGrew eds. *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*. London: Polity Press.

³⁸ Agarwal, Bina. 1994. *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³⁹ Marchand, Marianne H., and Anne Sisson Runyan. Eds. 2000. *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sighting, Sites and Resistances*. New York: Routledge.

⁴⁰ Brown, Mark. 2000. *Human Development Report 2000*. Autumn. Lexington: WIN News.

⁴¹ Sadik, Nafis. 1997. "Women, Population and Sustainable Development in South Asia." *Journal of International Affairs*. V. 51(1). Summer. Pg. 147-168

⁴² Degnbol-Martinussen, Op. cit.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Bardhan, Op.cit.

⁴⁵ Boyce, James K. 2002. "Unpacking Aid." *Development and Change*. vol. 33(2). pg. 239-246.

⁴⁶ Emmerij, Louis. 2002. "Aid as a Flight Forward." *Development and Change*. vol. 33(2) pg. 247-260.

Governance

At the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s, major events such as the end of the Cold War, declining aid budgets, and the increased prominence of neo-liberalism combined to alter the nature of development assistance in part because of competition from humanitarian needs for scarce development resources. Moreover, the limitations of SAPs became clear, and consequently conditionalities were expanded to include political policies as part of the reforms required of debtor countries. In some quarters, the failure of SAPs was attributed to government corruption and ineffectiveness. This perception contributed to a growing concern among donors with good governance and its relationship to development, democracy, and economic growth. While there is no direct, proven link between democracy and economic growth, in many donors' minds this connection was made and firmly advocated as a condition of aid.⁴⁷ Democracy was democracy in a Western sense and included competition among political parties, elections, and political and civil rights. Assistance was increasingly tied to recipient countries' commitment to "political pluralism and accountability."⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, this emphasis on democratization was seen by many developing governments as interference in the internal politics of their countries and was heavily resisted.

For other donors, however, the focus on governance was more narrowly directed at improving the administration and management of development. Good governance was the means by which better practices could be instituted. Many donors believed corruption occurred as the result of, "...weak institutions, accountability, rule of law, low levels of participation and so on,"⁴⁹ thus eventually, good governance came to be construed to mean accountability, transparency, and participation in development.

The range of definitions of just what governance means is quite broad. UNDP, for example, states that governance is:

*The exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels: comprising the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, mediate their differences and exercise their legal rights and obligations.*⁵⁰

UNDP and Nordic donors promote a different approach to achieving both good governance and social development.⁵¹ Driving this focus is the assumption that a conscious link needs to be made between economic growth and human welfare and that such connections cannot be left to market mechanisms. These ideas are heavily influenced by the work of Amartya Sen, Paul Streeten and Mahbub ul Huq which questions the sole focus on economic growth and instead proposes a broader concept of development that includes expanding choices in social, political, and economic realms.⁵²

For ADB and the World Bank, in particular, sections of their founding Charters prohibit involvement with politics and with advocating democracy or any political form. In their approaches to development, governance remains an important priority, and is mainly focused on sound development

⁴⁷ Marquette, Heather. 2001. "Corruption, Democracy and the World Bank," in *Crime, Law and Social Change*. Vol. 36. pg. 395-407.

⁴⁸ Robinson, Mark. 2001. "Governance, Democracy and Conditionality: NGOs and the New Policy Agenda." *No Silver Bullet: NGOs and Global Development Issues*. London: Open University.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ UNDP. 1997. *Governance for Sustainable Development*. New York. UNDP Policy Document.

⁵¹ Degnbol-Martinussen. Op. cit.

⁵² As discussed in Degnbol-Martinussen. Op. cit.

management which means. "...the efficiency and effectiveness of the institutional environment within which citizens and corporations interact with their government agencies and individual officials."⁵³ The definition of governance used by the World Bank is, "...the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development and emphasizes economic policy and management."⁵⁴

In development practice, governance is both a determining factor in selecting countries to receive aid and a condition for assistance to continue. This is part of the issue surrounding selectivity versus conditionality as the best way of securing compliance with donor objectives.⁵⁵ Using selectivity as a measure of suitability means that a country must confirm its commitment to donor objectives before any aid is given. This approach leaves countries that don't adhere to donor wishes without assistance when their needs may be greatest and weakens the ability of donors to influence policies. Moreover, while ownership of policies by national governments is theoretically ideal, in reality the variety of views among political forces within countries means it is often difficult for donors to determine just who will own or implement those policies.⁵⁶

Conditionality is also not without its problems. In some cases government officials agree to conditions but lack the actual authority to secure approval of them. In other instances, conditions are agreed to but never implemented due to changing circumstances in national governments and local conditions. Selectivity is, therefore, the currently preferred basis for determining which countries qualify for aid.

At the same time, the donor community has broadened the scope of development objectives from macroeconomic growth and stability to include human rights, gender equality, environmental protection, and other issues. However, the extensive involvement of major financial institutions in these latter endeavors has led to "mission creep" and to a call from some quarters to return to basics.⁵⁷

The overriding concern of the project was to promote good governance at the grassroots level to reduce poverty and to enhance inclusive social development. The project brings together pieces of the literature review in its various components. Capacity building was included to increase the likelihood of success of elected women representatives in their roles in local government bodies. Forums were established to encourage women members to build and sustain networks with government line agencies; local government bodies; NGOs; community leaders; and their constituents to provide services, training programs, and employment opportunities for the poor. Other aspects of the gender and development literature are found in the portion of the project that provided the sensitivity training for male counterparts and other government officials that improved the effectiveness of elected women representatives and contributed to gender equity and to a changing environment for women to become more active in local affairs. A concern with good governance is part of the overall project approach to increase the effectiveness of women members as a means of increasing the effectiveness of local government officials in providing services, training programs, and employment opportunities to the poor. This is also a primary means of reducing poverty. Participation in local conflict resolution panels promoted social justice especially for poor women whose voices have traditionally been excluded from such meetings.

⁵³ Jokinen, Janne 2004. "Balancing between East and West: The Asian Development Bank's Policy on Good Governance," in Morten Boas and Desmond McNeill. *Global Institutions and Development, Framing the World?* London and New York: Routledge.

⁵⁴ Robinson, Mark. Op.cit.

⁵⁵ See the lead article and discussion generated in various issues of *Development and Change* v. 32 and 33. The lead article is by John Pronk. 2001. "Aid as Catalyst. *Development and Change*" v. 32(4) pg. 611-629.

⁵⁶ Boyce. Op. cit.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 3: ADB's Approach to Poverty Reduction and Related Objectives

ADB has realized that poverty in all its many dimensions is the primary deterrent to the growth and well being of its developing member countries and their people. Since 1999, ADB has followed a poverty reduction strategy that has been the “driving force for ADB’s Long-Term Strategic Framework” for Asia.⁵⁸ Poverty reduction became the lynchpin around which other strategic objectives of economic growth, human development, sound environmental management, and improving the status of women were to be pursued.⁵⁹ Combining a focus on poverty with strategic objectives represents a broader view of development and how to achieve it. ADB remains committed to promoting economic development, but the change in emphasis signifies recognition that economic development by itself will not promote sustained growth.

In the past, ADB, “...relied heavily on income level as the basic measure of poverty.” However, in its current iteration, poverty is perceived as, “...a deprivation of essential assets and opportunities to which every human is entitled.”⁶⁰ Assets and opportunities include basic education and health care, the right to sustain life through people’s labor, and the right of individuals to participate in making the decisions that shape their lives.⁶¹ While in practice poverty will likely continue to be, “...measured in terms of the adequate consumption of food and other essentials, it is recognized that more inclusive measures include basic education, health care, nutrition, water and sanitation, income, employment, and wages.”⁶² It is this commitment to addressing dimensions of poverty beyond economic growth that has developed ADB’s emphasis on poverty reduction. ADB and other major donors have accepted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to promote more inclusive development.

ADB has a three-pillar approach to reducing poverty: pro-poor, sustainable economic growth; good governance; and inclusive social development. The link among the three pillars is quite clear. Poverty cannot be treated solely as an economic problem. There must be inclusive social development and good governance to ensure the participation of the poor, of women, and of the disadvantaged in transparent processes of making decisions that affect their lives. This suggests that poverty is best fought at the grassroots level as the majority of the poor live in rural areas and in urban slums.

Reducing poverty requires considerable efforts to improve the participation of women and of the poor in local governance and resource mobilization and to increase the effectiveness of public sector service delivery to them. Effort is also required to enhance the social development of those most likely to be in need of assistance. This includes providing access by the poorest of the poor to social safety nets and income earning opportunities, providing capacity building opportunities for women newly incorporated into local government bodies, and encouraging poor people to be included in village conflict mediation. Each pillar is considered in turn.

⁵⁸ ADB. 1999a.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Good Governance

Good governance is defined by ADB to be “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s social and economic resources for development.”⁶³ Elements of good governance include, among others, accountability, transparency, predictability, and participation.⁶⁴ Governance is a critical feature of any poverty reduction activity, as poverty reduction cannot occur where governance is corrupt, obscure, exclusive, and unpredictable. In other words, development resources are likely to be ill used if they are not properly allocated in responsible, transparent ways to meet the real needs of the people. Moreover, government policies and programs are likely to be ineffective if the people aren’t involved in defining priorities and in influencing decisions that affect their lives.

ADB’s experience in promoting economic growth where strong governance was lacking provided the impetus for redefining its efforts to make governance a top priority in the Asia and Pacific region.⁶⁵ Good governance is to be incorporated into ADB development activities by, “...encouraging legal system reform, institutional development, and capacity building leading to improved service delivery and improving public accountability and by strengthening the participation of local people in ADB project work.”⁶⁶

Governance and gender are the centerpieces of the project. Capacity building for elected female officials, establishing local and regional forums for them, and encouraging local government officers to work with women representatives are all means by which local government can improve the transparency of its processes and the effectiveness of its delivery systems.

Inclusive Social Development

Inclusive social development mirrors many of the objectives of the MDGs established by the United Nations including provision of basic services such as education and health care, reduced child and maternal mortality, and gender issues.⁶⁷ Of these, gender has been highlighted as one of the main cross-cutting themes of ADB’s poverty reduction strategy. This stems from the realization that women represent about 60% of the global poor and that their participation in political processes and mainstream development has been either lacking or subject to systematic discrimination.

Since the 1970s, ADB has responded to the need to improve the status and condition of women in Asia by transforming its approach from WID to GAD. The current strategic emphasis focuses on women’s empowerment and increased participation in development. Its purpose is to, “...support measures that empower women to contribute to setting development agendas, and to challenge the socioeconomic groups that place them at a relative disadvantage to men.”⁶⁸ The GAD strategy also places women in a broad sociocultural environment and redefines them as active instead of passive, as participants and not only recipients, and as decision makers instead of victims in the events and processes that structure their lives.

The project incorporates a GAD approach by directly addressing gender issues in capacity building for elected women representatives and in gender sensitivity training for male counterparts. In addition, the women’s forums are indicative of the care taken to build sustainable support networks

⁶³ ADB. 2000a. *Promoting Good Governance: ADB’s Medium-term Agenda and Action Plan*. Manila.

⁶⁴ ADB. 1999a.

⁶⁵ ADB. 2000a.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ ADB. 2000b. *Policy on Gender and Development*. Manila

after the completion of the project. Participation in local government committees and village conflict mediation meetings is another way women members represent the interests of their constituents.

Pro-Poor, Sustainable Economic Development

ADB has a broad approach to poverty reduction that recognizes the central role to be played by developing member countries with the support of the donor community. The ADB approach links neo-liberal economic policies and support for the private sector with programs, "...aimed at increasing employment and income generating opportunities for women and other groups that may be outside the formal labor force."⁶⁹ Other programs and country plans for reducing poverty focus on targeting interventions to the rural poor or urban unemployed to provide access to key services and opportunities for self-employment.⁷⁰ Additionally, efforts to promote greater access to education, health, and related social services are conducive to a more productive labor force, to improving the employment chances of women, to reducing population growth, and to reducing the number of people living in poverty.

As part of this strategy, ADB emphasizes the need for environmental programs dealing with industrial and water pollution, deforestation, and the depletion of land and natural resources. The focus is on the medium and long term with interventions that, "...help address structural issues affecting delivery of basic services and other targeted poverty interventions" (medium-term) or those that, "...stimulate pro-poor growth and encourage expansion of the private sector."⁷¹ ADB summarizes its approach by saying it will, "...adopt a systematic approach to poverty reduction by promoting policy reforms, assisting the development of physical and institutional capacity, and designing projects/programs to better target poverty."⁷²

The key to the effectiveness of this poverty reduction strategy depends on the integration of the three pillars. Pro-poor, sustainable economic growth will not occur if inclusive social development does not occur in areas such as education and health. In addition, without good governance to allocate, deliver, and monitor resources, poverty reduction will not occur.

In this project, women representatives link government resources such as employment opportunities, training programs, and social programs with the most needy of their constituents. This combats past practices in which friends and relatives of local representatives often received those resources. Encouraging government officers to attend monthly village forums also increases their visibility and encourages them to soundly manage the resources they control. This creates a positive view of government among the villagers and provides an opportunity for local people to hold officials accountable for their actions. Just as important, however, is the fact that delivering resources to those most in need of them improves the economic well being of the poor and reduces poverty.

⁶⁹ ADB. 1999a.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

Chapter 4: The Structure and Implementation of the Project

The project focused on gender and local governance in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. The conceptual framework integrates the three pillars of ADB's poverty reduction strategy by promoting good governance to improve local service delivery, particularly in education, health, and social protection. In addition, the project aimed to mobilize and deliver resources of government line ministries including agriculture, health, and education to those most in need. The majority of the poor are women, so the project focused on them, especially on those who were newly elected or nominated members of local government bodies. The overall objectives were the following:

- to formulate strategies to strengthen local governance for effective delivery of public services and to promote accountability and transparency;
- to develop the capacity of elected/nominated women representatives to local government bodies to perform their roles and responsibilities more effectively;
- to develop mechanisms for the creation and maintenance of an active interface among female representatives of local government bodies, nationally elected/nominated female representatives, and national women's organizations for lobbying and advocacy;
- to increase the understanding within both ADB and the participating countries of the links among gender, good governance, and poverty reduction in local government;
- to identify regional gender and governance issues for policy makers in the context of local government with future ADB loans and technical assistance projects in mind.

Project activities were divided into two major components: (i) capacity building for women representatives; and (ii) policy analysis of local government ordinances in each country that provided for the inclusion of women. The ordinances were often part of a general decentralization or devolution of power and authority from the central government to local government units. The analyses provide valuable information about structural and operational constraints and their implications for women and suggest policies that will improve gender equity in the legal, social, and economic arenas.

The project identified major stakeholders in each country as lead agencies and was implemented by NGOs that worked either in capacity building or in policy. In Bangladesh, the NGOs responsible for capacity building were BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Action Committee) and Sushilan, and the one responsible for gender and policy analysis was the Khan Foundation. In Nepal, Didibahini did the capacity building training and Shtrii Shakti handled policy. In Pakistan, capacity building was done by the Rural Support Program Network and Sarhad Rural Support Program, and gender analysis and policy work was done by the Aurat Foundation.

Variations in national and local conditions meant that the project was implemented in different ways in each country. In Nepal, for example, the fact that elections had not been held since 1997 meant that the emphasis was on female members who had already finished their terms. To supplement the group of women members to be trained, female leaders of CBOs, women from user groups, and local women activists were included.

Visits to India for female representatives from Bangladesh and Nepal and to Bangladesh for women representatives and officials from Pakistan were included as part of training. Selected male chairs of local bodies, local government officials, male members of village development committees, *tehsil* (subdistrict) and district government officers, and NGO leaders were included in these project activities.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Data were collected and regularly reported from each country during the 18 months of the project. These included baseline surveys of women representatives, training needs assessments, quarterly monitoring reports, evaluations of training programs, exposure visit reports, workshop reports, and reviews of local government ordinances. In addition to the six-month ADB review mission, a mid-term review of the Project was conducted. At the end of 18 months, a comparative in-depth assessment of project activities was done in project and in non-project areas. This involved focus group discussions and interviews with female local government representatives, women forum members, male chairs of the local bodies, government officials, and participating NGOs. Data were analyzed on the effectiveness of training, the understanding of women representatives of their roles as elected officials, their understanding of local governance issues, and their involvement in government and forum activities. The last included various development programs to meet local needs and monitoring of village poverty reduction projects. Overall, the data and the assessment were helpful in evaluating the effectiveness of specific project components. In addition, the data provided a general insight into the changing capacity of elected women members to perform their roles.

At the end of the project, a regional workshop was held at ADB Headquarters in Manila for elected female representatives, members of the participating NGOs, government officials, and donors. The workshop included presentations of each country's experience with gender and governance and the results of capacity building and its implications for promoting good governance and poverty reduction at the grassroots level. The findings of the reviews of local government ordinances were also reported and discussed.



Workshop at ADB Headquarters



Chapter 5: Local Government Legislation and Experience

A number of developing member countries in South Asia have decentralized their governments and have included women as elected officials in local governments. As mentioned previously, the Aurat Foundation in Pakistan, the Khan Foundation in Bangladesh, and Shtrii Shakti in Nepal analyzed local government ordinances and their implementation with a focus on structural constraints for women. These NGOs also organized local and national workshops for the development, academic, and civil society communities to discuss women's issues related to governance and development. The following are the findings of the reviews.

The Legal Framework for Local Government in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a long tradition of local government, and the union parishad is its oldest component. As a representative body of an aggregate of 10 to 15 villages (or roughly 100,000 people), it has had recognizable form for more than a hundred years.⁷³ Its functions have varied and include a range of duties from collecting taxes in the early years, to duties related to rates, socioeconomic development, and general administration, to a more active role in government with the decentralization of central government that began in 1982.

The country is divided into six divisions each of which is subdivided into districts; there are 64 in all. In the rural areas, there are theoretically four tiers of local government with the *zilla* (district) parishad at the top. Next is the upazila parishad based on the old *thana* system; it is the lowest level at which the civil bureaucracy and line ministries operate. The upazila represents the police and all ministerial offices, including tax, magistrates courts, and officers dealing with all aspects of economic and social development. Upazilas are to be the link between the district offices and the union parishads or local people. There are 469 upazila parishads. The third tier is the union parishad. There are approximately 4,483 in the country. The fourth tier is the *gram sarker* (village level). It is not active everywhere although there are plans to have 39,768 of them.

In 1973, each union parishad was divided into three wards. Each ward elects one member to represent the ward in the union parishad. In addition, a chair and vice-chair were elected from the general ward population. In 1976, provision was made for two women and a farmer's representative to be nominated. In 1983, the system was altered with the passage of the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance. Subsequent changes have occurred, the most recent being 1997 Act Number 20. Each union is now composed of 13 elected representatives including a chair, 9 members (1 from each ward) and 3 women elected to reserved seats based on 1 female representative for every 3 wards.⁷⁴ Standing committees undertake and execute the various functions of each union parishad. There are 13 committees in all. Women are to head one third of them and are further mandated to head the committee on women's and children's welfare, culture, and sports.

Urban local government is much simpler. It comprises six city corporations and 278 municipalities or *pourashavas*. Urban centers are subdivided into wards. Representatives from each ward and the city mayors are now all elected directly by the people, and seats are reserved for women in local urban bodies.

⁷³ Khan Foundation. 2004. "The Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance 1983: An Analysis and Proposed Recommendations." Dhaka Bangladesh. Pg. 6. Hereafter noted as Local Government Analysis.

⁷⁴ It was only in an amendment to the Ordinance in 1993 that the nomination system was dropped and replaced with the election system for women representatives.

To understand the challenges the 12,000 elected women face, it is important to note the general situation of women in Bangladesh. Although divided by class, location, age, and religion, women are generally guaranteed equal rights with men under the Constitution. However, long traditions of patriarchy, seclusion, and the power of the family to exercise social control over male and female activities mean that most women are unaware of their rights and lack the means to realize them.⁷⁵ Variations in family legislation are based on religion. Hindus and Christians are the principal minority religions, while Muslims are the vast majority. Muslim women can inherit land and property but only half the share of their brothers, and one eighth the property of their husbands.⁷⁶

Women generally are not well protected legally in cases of child support, male desertion, divorce, or adultery. Violence against women in the home, at work, and in public is commonplace, and while women's groups, NGOs, and donor-assisted programs work to ameliorate these realities, women and girls remain subject to abuse, prostitution, and trafficking. Bangladesh is one of four countries in the world where the life expectancy of women is slightly lower than that of men.⁷⁷ Women have less access to modern health care than men do and have higher incidences of malnourishment, chronic illness, and general poor health.

Unlike the situation of women in Nepal and Pakistan, women in Bangladesh have had places in government since 1972 when 30 seats were reserved for them in the national parliament. However, even with 2 women prime ministers in the last 14 years and with 10 women winning contested parliamentary seats out of 35 female candidates in 1996, there is still strong cultural and religious opposition to their participation in politics. The fundamentalist Islamic parties are particularly against women's participation, and while the major political parties may have an item of gender equity in their platforms, they do little in practice to push this agenda. Regardless of this opposition, the tradition of women's involvement in politics allowed women who participated in the project to use their training well and to be effective in their roles as elected members of the union parishads.

The Khan Foundation noted problems with existing laws regarding elected female representatives. Some of the constraints that female representatives faced in the union parishads were: (i) the lack of any job description or clarification of their roles as members, (ii) improper implementation of the local government ordinance related to the allocation of development schemes to the female members, (iii) the lack of work assignments to female members, (iv) the exclusion of female representatives from the 13 standing committees, (v) lack of notification about the time of meetings, (vi) pressure by the chair to sign the minutes of a meeting even if the female members were not present at that meeting, and (vii) verbal abuse from male chairs and representatives.

Under the Local Government Act No. 20 of 1997, three wards are reserved for one female member, but each of those wards is also the constituency of one male member. That means the women have three male counterparts. This situation has created a problem as the males do not want to recognize the women as legitimate representatives of their wards. The fact that women have much larger constituencies than their male counterparts also poses particular problems, for example, the difficulty of meeting the expectations of such a large group. Moreover, women members have little access to union parishad funds for development schemes. This means it is difficult for them to channel resources to their constituencies. It is also harder for them to visit their wards and to meet the transportation costs to make such visits. They must face these constraints in addition to all the other difficulties women face in a predominantly male preserve. Chapter 8 lists recommendations for changes in the Act.

⁷⁵ ADB. 2001. *Women in Bangladesh Country Briefing Paper*. Manila

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

The Legal Framework for Local Government in Nepal

In the early 1990's, the political structure of Nepal changed from a, "...*panchayat* (local government) system with an absolute monarch to a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament, an executive cabinet responsible to parliament, and an independent judiciary."⁷⁸ The constitution approved at that time guarantees fundamental rights and equal application of the law to all citizens without regard to ethnicity, caste, sex, or religion. The enormous diversity in ecological regions, cultures, and languages means that progress in human and social development is often uneven, and resources are not evenly allocated. This is particularly the case for women. They are still subject to strong patriarchal customs and values including early marriage, limited rights to divorce and remarriage, and unequal access to basic, education, health services, economic opportunities, and representation under the law including the right to inherit land, property, and wealth.

In the last decade, the Nepalese government introduced the Eighth (1991–1996), Ninth (1997–2002), and Tenth (2003–2007) Development Plans all of which made the decentralization of government operations and procedures a top priority. Devolving power and authority to local government was seen as a way to fight poverty. In 1999, the Local Self-Governance Act was passed and, "...is the major achievement of the government."⁷⁹ It is this Act that has provided for women's representation in local government bodies by both nomination and election. The Local Self-Governance Act Report notes that numerous tasks are now the responsibility of local bodies: management and delivery of almost all sectoral services; preparation of both long-term and short-term policies, plans, and programs; coordination of and partnership with NGOs and civil society in development; and promotion of the private sector in service delivery and revenue generation.

The country is divided into five regions that are subdivided into 75 districts. The Act establishes a two-tier system of local government with the district as the highest tier. The district development committee is the governing body. The basic tier of local government is composed of the local bodies in villages and municipalities. A village has three local bodies: ward committees, a village development committee (VDC) and a village council. There are nine wards in each village, and each ward has a committee that is composed of five members. One member is the chair, and one must be a woman. All members are elected by adult franchise. That means that in each village there would be a minimum of 9 women out of 45 ward committee members (20%).

The VDC is the executive body of local government and is composed of the chairs of the nine wards. Each VDC in turn elects a chair and vice-chair and nominates two additional members from the ranks of the ward. One of the nominated members must be a woman. That means that out of the total of 13 VDC members, only one must be a woman (roughly 8%).

The village council is the legislative body of local government. It consists of all 45 ward committee members and 6 members nominated from the poor, ethnic, religious, and tribal minorities 1 of whom must be a woman. That means that out of a total of 53 members, 10 must be women (approximately 19%). The councils meet only a few times a year.

In 1997, more than 100,000 women participated in the VDC elections, and 36,000 were elected. However, in other branches of local government, women were only marginally represented. For example, only 289 women were elected ward chairs out of a total of 3,999 wards. Of the 26 women who ran for membership in the district development committees, only 8 were elected, and only 1 woman was elected vice-chair. No elections have been held since 1997 because of the deteriorating political situation. The project therefore invited women whose elected terms had expired, women who had

⁷⁸ ADB. 2004b. *Report of the Review of Local Self-Governance Act in Nepal*: RETA 6008. Nepal.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

been nominated for positions in councils, and female leaders from various community organizations to participate in capacity building.

The NGO Shtrii Shakti and a national consultant reviewed the Local Self-Governance Act and prepared policy recommendations for improving the situation of the elected and nominated women members. The review pointed out that the language and thinking of the act are primarily male oriented. Males have the majority of positions at all levels of government and the Act consistently uses masculine pronouns. One of the major structural problems of the Act is that elected female members are not specifically included in the executive bodies of local government though they are included in the legislative bodies. For example, a woman elected to a ward committee is automatically part of the village council (the legislative body), but the council meets once or twice a year only to approve the budget. The VDCs, on the other hand, are the executive bodies of local government and have control over development activities. The Act includes nominated female representatives in the VDCs, but they are not elected by a constituency which makes it difficult for them to be effective.

Various committees and subcommittees are formed to handle local government responsibilities, but there is no provision in the Act for women to be included on them. This includes membership on the critically important decentralization, implementation and monitoring committee, the accounts committee, the arbitration board, and the coordination committees. There is also no provision that women must be part of the quorums necessary to hold meetings at all levels of local government nor is it compulsory that women or ethnic minorities be present for meetings to be held.

Gender and minority issues are treated under “miscellaneous,” “social welfare,” or under the separate category of “women and helpless people.” Their issues are not mainstreamed into the policies of the local bodies, and there is no provision for gender or minority issues to be included in local projects. The VDC is expected to give priority to projects that provide direct benefit to women as well as backward classes and children. However, there is no mandate to include these segments of the population in project feasibility studies. The Act only indicates that priority is to be given to projects on the basis, “...of the number of the population to be benefited from the project and the type of benefit.”⁸⁰ This means that in reality, few projects are designated for women, backward classes, or children. Chapter 8 lists recommendations for changes in the Act.

The Legal Framework for Local Government in the North West Frontier Province Pakistan

In 2000, the Musharraf government announced a new system designed to devolve power and authority to local government bodies chosen by local electorates. This plan was eventually enacted in 2001 as the Local Government Ordinance and involved four fundamental principals: “devolution of political power, decentralization of management functions, diffusion of the power-authority nexus, and distribution of resources to the district level.”⁸¹ This was an historic modification of the governance structure in Pakistan. The Aurat Foundation reviewed the NWFP Local Governance Ordinance in 2000.

A significant part of the Ordinance was the reservation of 33% of seats for women in all tiers of local government. This provision is the result of a long struggle by women activists and civil society organizations to improve the rights of women who have been systematically discriminated against and oppressed by longstanding patriarchal and feudal customs that limit their mobility and participation in the social life of the country.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ ADB. 2004c. *A Gender Review of the Legal Framework for Local Government in NWFP, Pakistan: RETA 6008*. Pakistan.

Domestic and other forms of violence are common in families, in society, and in the state as a means of controlling women.⁸² The legal rights of women were curtailed with the introduction of *sariat* law and the Muslim Family Law which decrees, "...unequal rights (of women) to inheritance, termination of marriage, minimum age of marriage and natural guardianship of children" among other disadvantages.⁸³ In addition, women are unequally represented in other ways in the legal system both in the courts and under the law, and are largely absent from political parties and governing bodies such as parliament. Their socioeconomic indicators highlight the challenges they face. The United Nations Human Development Indicators for Pakistan finds that women's literacy rates are low, at about 28%, participation in the paid labor force is about 11%, their earned income share is only 20%, and the mortality rate for female children between the ages of 1 and 4 is 12% percent higher than that of males.⁸⁴

The new local government structure has three tiers of representation: 96 district councils at the highest level; 305 tehsil and 30 town councils at the next level; and 6022 union councils at the lowest level. Elections were held for all union councils from December 2000 to July 2001, and over 36,000 women were elected to fill mainly the reserved seats. This represented almost 29% of the 126,462 seats available.

In NWFP, women were elected to 3,963 union council seats representing 69% of the 5742 seats reserved for them. Approximately 1,779 seats were left vacant most of which were in four districts (Upper and Lower Dir, Batagram and Kohistan) where anti-woman campaigning made it difficult to fill them. In the tehsil councils, 175 women were elected to the 201 seats reserved for them (87%) and 26 were left vacant. In the town councils women were elected to all 30 seats reserved for them. At the district level, 278 women (88%) were elected to 315 reserved seats; 37 were left vacant.

While women were eager to avail themselves of new opportunities in government, most were unacquainted with the duties and responsibilities of an elected official. Their lack of public experience and education in many instances also posed significant problems. Especially difficult was the disregard and often disrespect shown to women by male councilors. Such treatment often meant women were denied access to important information, were not informed of meeting times, were denied copies of the budget, and were not appointed to serve on union committees. There was a general feeling among many male councilors that women did not belong in office and that if they were included, they should deal only with social welfare or other "women's issues." Decisions were frequently made without consulting female representatives. In some cases, male family members of the elected female officials attended council meetings in their stead.

While the law provides for the devolution of political power to most areas of NWFP, it excludes the provincially administered tribal areas. This means that women living in these areas are not covered by the Ordinance and, given the prevailing adherence to tribal law, are not covered by the national constitution or by other government legislation. The federal government should extend the Ordinance to include the tribal areas and should add a clause detailing, "...the right of women to vote, to stand as candidates, and to act as public representatives."⁸⁵ The Aurat Foundation and the partner NGO Sarhad Rural Support Program further recommended that the Ordinance be amended to include (i) budget allocations and revenue for development work by women councilors; (ii) council budgets for women councilors; and (iii) reserved seats for women in other government institutions, e.g., the Provincial Local Government Commission.

⁸² ADB. 2000c. *Women in Pakistan: ADB Country Briefing Paper*. Manila.

⁸³ ADB. 2004c.

⁸⁴ According to the UNDP gender empowerment measurement ranking of 94 countries, Pakistan ranks 92nd.

⁸⁵ ADB. 2004c.

In terms of the general definition of obligations and responsibilities of elected officials, no particular mention is made about the rights and responsibilities of women councilors at any tier of local government. In effect, this means women officials are overlooked or are seen as dealing solely with women's issues. This lack of legislative clarity is a, "...serious constraint on women's effective participation in Local Councils on an equal footing with their male colleagues."⁸⁶ 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.

The assessment of the sections of the Ordinance dealing with the district councils noted that a gender-neutral government means that women's special needs and constraints go unrecognized. Decisions made about development activities including budget allocations and project selection serve to reinforce the interests and advantages already enjoyed by males. Women are recognized as users of government only in terms of health, population planning, and education. All other constraints they face are allocated to the realm of social welfare. Additionally, at the district level, power and authority have been assumed by the *nazim* (chairperson). Given that other provisions of the Ordinance have not been introduced, it is likely that local union councils will have difficulty influencing the decisions made by the *nazim* and his officers.



Workshop with women councilors

Problems female officials face in local bodies are (i) the rights and responsibilities of the women members are not designated in the Ordinance (ii) there is no provision ensuring that women (and not male family members) will be present at council meetings; (iii) women are not included on important committees; (iv) women lack information about the budget and do not have access to funds; (v) often the *nazims* spend women's funds without consulting their female councilors; (vi) women councilors are not assigned to assist women in the community to form citizens' community boards (CCBs) which have access to a certain percentage of the development budget; and (vii) female representatives are not included on subcommittees. Women on the union councils, for example, are directly elected and have a

constituency to serve. They are under pressure to perform, but they have little access to council funds.

The review further noted that a number of provisions of the Ordinance had not been introduced effectively. These included (i) the formation of CCBs through which 20% of the funds for development activities are to be raised and allocated and (ii) village and neighborhood councils and *musalihati jrga* (arbitration councils). Financing for local government activities is uncertain, and there is no provision for the equal distribution of funds to men and women councilors. In addition, the Ordinance does not adequately address the relationship of local government councils with the provincial assembly, and while there is provision for a local government commission, no women have been appointed

⁸⁶ Ibid.

to it because of objections from the provincial government. The oversight to be provided by the district ombudsman has not been instituted as no ombudsmen have been appointed.

Clearly, existing provisions of the current Ordinance must be fully implemented and additional legislation or amendments need to be enacted in order to rectify the weaknesses that exist. While legislation itself will not solve the gender problems in local government, it can provide a legal framework that female activists and civil society organizations can use to continue the fight for more equal representation of women. Recommendations for changes in the union councils and other tiers of local government are in Chapter 8.

To summarize, women in all three countries face an uphill battle to become effective members of local government councils. While they have the advantage of legislation to legitimate their presence in local government bodies, there is not much else to aid them in their endeavors.

Chapter 6: Capacity Building for Local Representatives

Project activities in capacity building and social mobilization were designed to provide women representatives with knowledge and training that would increase their effectiveness on local bodies and would become a mediating link to their constituencies. With a greater understanding of their rights and obligations as government representatives, it is also anticipated that women officials will be more active and effective in seeking out local government and NGO resources to meet the needs of the poor, especially poor women, in their areas. The creation of an active interface among female local government representatives, poor constituents, government line officers, and NGO representatives will reduce poverty at the grassroots level.

Capacity building for women and gender sensitivity training for men and women are critical to encouraging the support of male local government representatives and leaders and to improving the skills and abilities that elected representatives need to do their jobs. When women become more effective local government members, government transparency and the delivery of resources improve. Gender sensitivity training for males has begun to alter their perceptions of female representatives. It has also resulted in women serving on standing committees, regularly attending meetings, and participating in the operations of the local bodies. This contributes both to the transparency and inclusiveness of local governance and to the improvement of gender relations among male and female elected officials.

The project established women's forums that are held regularly at the village/local level and at the county or district level. The forums bring together female elected officials, line officers of the government, and the poorest of their constituents to discuss local needs and possible ways to mobilize government resources to meet those needs. As a result of these forums, more coordinated planning for poverty alleviation occurred at the upazila and ward levels in Bangladesh. In all three countries, women used the forums to negotiate resources to provide employment, training, income earning opportunities, small infrastructure, microcredit, and other facilities to poor women and youth. In this way, the project increased the efficiency and transparency of local government operations and the participation of women as decision makers and as recipients of development resources.

It is important to expect differences to emerge over time in the way women from different backgrounds fulfill their roles as members. Especially in Bangladesh before their election, many of the women representatives had been members of local NGOs and CBOs, and poor women from the community helped them to gain their offices. This suggests that women representatives will form alliances with poor women. As women become more seasoned and skilled at their jobs, and provided they are re-elected, they can be expected to act as politicians in the alliances and bargaining strategies they assume. While they may diversify their connections, it does not mean they would necessarily cease to represent women's interests or the interests of the poor. As they become more confident in their roles, they are likely to behave more independently. Some will remain strong advocates for their constituents; others might act more in their own self-interests. In Pakistan there are also women who came from families that have long histories of involvement in local councils. They have been appointed or nominated because of these ties, and in time these may be the basis for new alliances with male councilors.

The account that follows of the various activities undertaken in each country illustrates the considerable variation in progress in implementing the project. The attempt to include women in local government began in Pakistan in 2002. In contrast, Bangladesh has had some form of women's involvement in local government since the late 1970s. Clearly one would expect differences to emerge in project implementation in each setting, and indeed this has been the case. This accounts for the variation in the types and extent of data presented.

Bangladesh

The focal agency was the Local Government Division of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development, and Cooperatives. The NGOs BRAC and Sushilan were responsible for capacity building in 16 upazilas, 1 municipality, and 141 union parishads in the districts of Khulna, Bagerhat, Jessore, and Satkhira. Prior to project implementation, women elected members in most union parishads were systematically discriminated against and could not effectively participate. Project activities included the following.

- A baseline survey of the elected female members was made to develop a profile of members.
- Local resources and the means to mobilize them for the poorest constituents were identified.
- Capacity building training for female representatives and male chairs of union parishads was organized.
- Female representatives and representatives of line agencies were organized into upazila forums.
- Poor and female representatives were organized into ward forums.
- Planning with local stakeholders was established.
- Networking with other women's organizations working with female representatives was encouraged.
- Alliances among female members of the union parishads and women leaders of grassroots CBOs were developed.

A Profile of the Women

A total of 451 women representatives participated in the project. Their average age was 35. Of their husbands and fathers, more than one third were engaged in small businesses while approximately one fourth worked in agriculture as laborers or cultivating their own land. Roughly 70% of the women were from poor socioeconomic backgrounds while approximately 25% were from middle-income households. Only 5% were from the upper income group. Over 80% had less than a tenth grade education. Thirty-two percent belonged to landless women's groups sponsored by BRAC or were members of other NGO organizations. This combination of low socioeconomic condition and prior membership in an NGO suggests that many women members represent a new segment of the social hierarchy in the local government bodies.

The baseline survey also gauged the women's initial understanding of their roles as elected union parishad members. More than 70% indicated that their understanding was poor. More than 80% said that they lacked skills to conduct meetings or *shalish* (conflict resolution meetings). In fact, they said that most of the time they depended on male members present at *shalish* for decisions. More than 80% said they lacked knowledge about the availability of local resources, the condition of women in society, family laws, and other similar topics. They also reported a lack of knowledge about government resources and programs such as the allotment and distribution system for relief, food for work, vulnerable group distribution cards, old age allowances, or union health and agriculture facilities and programs. Over one fifth of the women had communicated with the health department, but only 11% had communicated with the Directorate of Women. One third reported a link with local health workers.

As mandated by legislation, female representatives were to be members of formal standing committees of the union parishads so they could effectively participate in decision making. In actuality few women reported assignments to any committees, and those who had such assignments played marginal roles. Only one tenth reported involvement in three or more committees.

Inventory of the Local Resource Base

One of the important activities of the project was the systematic public survey and declaration of common property resources in the area. Those resources include such items as abandoned or unclaimed land and fish tanks. Most common property is not seen as a resource on which the poor have a legitimate claim, so the inventory provided them with both information and access.

Capacity Building

Capacity building activities were undertaken for the 451 elected women and 145 male chairpersons of union parishads. The women's training lasted 13 days and focused on a broad set of topics. The aim was to provide the specific skills, knowledge, and information they needed to function as members of the union parishads. Topics included (i) the roles and responsibilities of the parishads and the elected members; (ii) the union budget and its allocations; (iii) the responsibilities and functions of sectoral agencies; (iv) information on how to run meetings, read minutes, and make motions; (v) leadership and negotiating skills; (vi) problem solving and decision making skills; (vii) communication skills; (viii) information on government development programs, NGO programs, and resource mobilization; and (ix) planning, implementing, and monitoring of projects targeting poor women. An operational manual was prepared covering the function of the parishad and the role of its members as well as relevant legal information.

In addition, the women were given training in family law, police law, laws governing *kaslands* (government land), and those related to women and children. They were taught about the function of local arbitration courts and mediation in family problems including divorce, violence against women, and other kinds of disputes. They were also taught how to conduct meetings and shalish and how to link NGOs and government agencies to their poor constituents.

Gender sensitivity training was offered to all the elected women and to the male chairs. The goal was to develop better understanding between men and women representatives of their roles in local bodies and local governance and to challenge traditional ideas and modes of behavior men had about women in a way that would provide them with alternatives.



Training of women members of the union parishad

Establishing Forums

Forums were organized in the upazilas and wards to facilitate local decision making and improve women's capacity to influence those decisions, to include the poor in discussions, and to better target the poor for poverty programs and effective service delivery.⁸⁷ The forums also established interaction among

⁸⁷ ADB. 2004a.

women members and their poorest constituents, local representatives of government line ministries, and NGOs. The purpose of this interface was threefold: (i) to create a venue for local people to speak of their needs and interests, (ii) to involve local government and other government agencies in the needs of the disadvantaged and poor and to mobilize resources to meet their needs, and (iii) to place women representatives in positions of visible authority and public influence to strengthen their roles in local government. It was assumed that local governance would remain ineffective and would continue to lack transparency and accountability without new links among elected officials, public sector resources, and local constituents. Women members became the catalysts for change in local council operations; the benefits derived by all stakeholders generated their own support.

Ward Forums

A forum has been established in every ward of all 141 union parishads, and they meet on a monthly basis; in fact, by January 2003 a total of 6557 meetings had been held in all. Every elected woman member chairs the forum meetings. As chair of the meeting, the woman representative keeps records, and decisions at one meeting are followed-up at the next.

Representatives from two ministerial line agencies are also invited to each ward meeting along with poor women from the wards, including heads of households, landless laborers, and abandoned women. In the meetings, accurate lists of the poor and very poor were prepared to ensure that the most needy obtained access to safety net and social protection schemes. In addition, discussions were held with government officials about making training and employment opportunities available for the poor and facilitating microcredit, sanitation programs, and other government resources to needy women and youth.

Upazila Forums

Sixteen forums were formed in each upazila participating in the project to enhance the role of women members in the implementation of upazila development activities. Woman members of the union parishads brought issues that could not be solved in ward forums and met with upazila *nirbohi* officers (the highest ranking government officer at the upazila level) and officers from the line agencies. Significantly the *nirbohi* officers agreed to let women members chair the upazila forum meetings. Over the period of the project, 130 meetings were held.

Including Women in Local Arbitration

Following training and forum activities, female union parishad members became active in handling and participating in the local shalish that usually involve disagreements over dowry, early marriage, polygamy, land, repression of women and children, divorce and even cases of theft. Each party to a dispute gets a chance to present his or her side of the issue, and the member then suggests a solution. The results may be an amicable settlement and awareness building, mediation and resolution of the problem, or a court case. It was the opinion of many village women that the presence of the female representatives in shalish increased their social standing and generated respect among the wider community. In particular, some felt that women who were without recourse to justice before now had a forum in which to lodge their complaints.

Workshops

Workshops were conducted to follow up the capacity building activities, to network with the NGOs, and to disseminate information about project activities to local stakeholders.

Union Parishad Planning Workshop

The main objective was to formulate the annual development plan and to discuss constraints to members' work. The participants included chairs and members of the union parishads, upazilas officers, and officers from social welfare, women's affairs, agriculture extension, fisheries, and other government departments.

Upazila Forum Planning Workshop

An annual work plan for female representatives was developed to help them maintain links with sector agencies, acquire information about various sector programs, and follow up on the implementation of programs in their wards. Another objective of the workshop was to develop an alliance among the elected representatives and the leaders of CBOs to provide female representatives with more leverage for mobilizing development programs for their local communities.

Networking with Women's Organizations

This workshop was conducted with female representatives and 10 NGOs headed by women from 13 districts to disseminate the work of the project, to share experiences and issues, and to discuss future action plans.

District Workshops

Three workshops were held to disseminate information about the project at the district level. They were attended by the deputy commissioner; by district officers of line departments such as agriculture, social welfare, local government engineering, and development; by upazila officers; by chairs of union parishads; by female union parishad members; by NGOs; and by influential local female leaders such as teachers and social workers. The meetings were designed to get the cooperation and assistance of district officers. The objectives of the workshop were (i) to develop partnerships with civil society, district government, and local leaders; (ii) to discuss the problems faced by female union parishad members; (iii) to prepare recommendations on the roles of local female representatives; and (v) to discuss the sustainability of current activities after the project ends.

Exposure Visit

Female and male representatives, NGO partners, and representatives of concerned ministries visited West Bengal to learn about the panchayat system and the role of its female representatives in development activities. The visit increased the understanding of female union parishad members about their roles and about social service delivery.

Nepal

The project was run through the Ministry of Local Development and covered 4 out of 75 districts: Kathmandu, Lalitpur, (near the capital), Parse, and Mao-tai in the *terai* (plains). Thirty-two VDCs were chosen as project sites based on (i) ethnic diversity, including *dalits* (disadvantaged caste and ethnic groups); (ii) geographical representation; (iii) comparative safety and human security in the prevailing tense political situation; (iv) accessibility; (v) new and old settlement areas; and (vi) the presence of other development activities. Didibahini was the NGO responsible for capacity building. Since the return to democracy in the 1990s and the passage of the Local Self



Visiting a panchayat in West Bengal, India



Women representatives from India receive a woman official and NGOs from Bangladesh

Governance Act, women are to be included in local governing bodies. Prior to project implementation in 2002, however, a number of problems reduced the effectiveness of the woman members. For example, women representatives were “manipulated to sign minutes of village development committee council meetings even though the meetings were held in their absence.”⁸⁸ In addition, there was no provision in the Act ensuring the inclusion of elected women members in the council meetings of the VDCs (see Chapter 5).

Many of terms of the women members of the VDCs had expired, and no new elections had been held, so ex-members, whether elected or nominated, were included in the project along with female leaders of various CBOs, such as forest user groups,

savings and credit groups, and mothers’ clubs. Representatives from different impoverished caste and ethnic groups and women who were actively involved in development activities of community based organizations, or who were considered leaders were also invited to participate in the forum.⁸⁹

A Profile of the Women

The baseline survey of the 712 women who participated indicated that over 58% were between the ages of 21 and 40, and 80% were married with household and child rearing responsibilities. About 34% were be-

⁸⁸ ADB. 2004b.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

tween the ages of 41 and 60, and the remainder was evenly divided among those below 20 and over 60. Approximately 6% were unmarried, roughly 9% were widowed, and less than 1% were divorced or separated. About 46% belonged to the *newar* caste, particularly in Kathmandu and Lalitpur, and to merchant/trading castes in the terai. *Brahman/chettri* (upper) castes composed a little more than 42% and dalits and ethnic and indigenous minority groups represented a little over 6% each.

Roughly 29% of the women were literate and had some formal schooling. Forty-six percent could sign their names and were semi-literate, and 23% were illiterate. Over 80% came from agricultural households; 12% were housewives, 4% were small entrepreneurs involved in retail shops and small trading, and 2% were wage earners working in private sector occupations in factories and workshops. The remaining 2% were students.

Before joining the women's forums, 33% had either been elected or nominated to local government bodies, 24% were government health workers, and roughly 30% belonged to savings and credit groups or to other CBOs (forestry user groups, water user groups, and mothers' and other local clubs.) Four percent were activists who had defended women's rights.

Capacity Building

Two training modules were prepared by Didibahini: one focused on good governance and lasted 6 days; the other concentrated on gender issues and lasted 2 days. The governance module included subjects such as (i) the structure and function of the VDCs; (ii) the roles and responsibilities of the VDC chairs, members, and woman members; (iii) how to plan development activities; (iv) the process of budget approval; (v) the types of resources and expenditures of the VDCs; (vi) advocacy and negotiation skills; (vii) planning and mobilization of resources from VDC, line agency, and NGO programs; and (viii) legal rights of women. The gender module included (i) the concept of gender; (ii) control



Women forum members engage in small trade and local crafts



Capacity building activities, training and workshops

of gender issues and access to information; and (iii) roles and responsibilities of VDC members from a gender perspective. All 712 women received capacity building and gender training. A total of 123 males from VDCs received gender sensitivity training.

Establishing Forums

Women's forums were organized to provide. "...a platform for woman leaders to familiarize themselves with each other and with the functions of their respective village development committees."⁹⁰ Each forum was composed of 25 to 30 women: 10 to 11 ex-elected and nominated representatives, 9 potential women leaders from CBOs, and 5 to 10, "...second line grassroots woman leaders."⁹¹ In all, 32 forums were created, 8 in each of the 4 districts.

At monthly meetings women discussed VDC planning, budgeting, general duties, and responsibilities. The women were told of the poverty reduction projects of government line agencies and were taught how to identify problems in their areas and how to seek solutions through dialogue with those agencies. They regularly discussed violence against women, trafficking, and women's legal rights with a view to taking action locally. The ultimate goal was to develop solidarity among local women representatives and leaders so that the forums would negotiate with VDCs on budget allocations and would demand a share of the resources allocated to development. It was expected as well that with greater knowledge and more confidence, women would increasingly become a source of influence on the VDCs.

Village Development Committee Planning Workshop

At the request of the local women's forums, 1- or 2-day workshops were held on program planning and development. They were facilitated by the VDC secretary and officers from ministerial line agencies such as agriculture and health.

Exposure Visit

A group of forum members and representatives from VDCs, line agencies, and NGOs traveled to India to West Bengal to learn about the panchayat system.

Pakistan

The project was implemented in the districts of Abbotabad and Haripur in NWFP. The NGOs Rural Support Programs Network and its representative affiliate Sarhad Rural Support Program implemented activities that included (i) capacity building for woman councilors; (ii) social mobilization; (iii) establishing forums for women councilors, and (iv) developing an interface among woman councilors, local governments, line agencies, NGOs, and local communities.

⁹⁰ ADB. 2004b.

⁹¹ Ibid.

A Profile of the Women

A baseline survey of the 423 participants indicated that 34% were illiterate, 21% had completed primary or middle school, 31% had completed high school, and 14% had a university degree or other qualification. In terms of socioeconomic status, 221 (52%) were poor or dependent, 138 (32%) were working or middle class, 54 (13%) were from the upper-middle class, and 11 (3%) came from the landlord or elite class. It is unusual for poorer women to come forward in a very patriarchal society to represent classes that most often are excluded from politics. It is also important to note the diversity of the female representatives; care must be exercised, particularly in the long run, not to over generalize the shared interests of women members. The survey also found that only 22% reported that they attended union council meetings regularly, only 25% had any knowledge of the agendas of the last two sessions, and only 29% had any knowledge of the council budget.

Capacity Building

Training materials were prepared by Sarhad Rural Support Program and the Aurat Foundation. The modules provided training in gender, human rights and communications, the Local Government Ordinance and the devolution plan, CCBs, and the budget. In addition, gender sensitivity training was conducted for 186 male union council nazims, *naib nazims* (vice-chairs), and secretaries. Specific training topics included the importance of the devolution of power to the grassroots level; introductions to support organizations; the organization of the union, village, and *mohalla* (neighborhood) councils; the structure of tehsil/town councils; district government; the structure of and how to form a CCB; committees and their roles; roles and responsibilities of women councilors and how to be an efficient representative; district administration; review and analysis of a situation and setting priorities; planning processes and planning at the community, union council, tehsil, and district levels; project design and implementation; resource mobilization and budget preparation; project implementation; review and analysis of a situation and setting priorities; and how to translate a project into action.

Establishing Forums

The forums were designed to provide a reference group for the women councilors, an interface with their constituents and government officials and, "...to serve as a structural link between the councils and national-level women leaders and organizations."⁹² Eight forums were organized, but only six are active at present. Each includes the female members from five or six union councils each of which has six female members. This means the forums have between 30 and 35 members. NGO representatives may also attend. Issues are presented and discussed and ideas about how to resolve a problem or issue are shared. When government officers attend, they play an active role in assisting poor people to avail themselves of government income-earning programs, training programs, or work-related income earning projects.

The two forums that are located in remote areas are the ones that have become inactive. It is thought that their remoteness, poor roads, and severe winter weather make it difficult for councilors to travel to attend meetings in these two places.

⁹² ADB. 2004c.

Exposure Visits

Two visits were organized for women representatives. One was to Jhelum to visit the Rural Support Programs Network community physical infrastructure schemes and to learn about the formation and activities of local CCBs. Also invited to participate in this visit were local government representatives and local male councilors. The other visit was for 18 participants to Bangladesh where they were hosted by BRAC. They attended two upazila forum meetings, one ward forum meeting, and a union parishad meeting. This group also included government officers and male councilors.



Women councilors, NGOs, and government officials from NWFP, Pakistan visit a ward forum and a union parishad in Bangladesh

Chapter 7: Project Outcomes

The responsiveness and enthusiasm of the women members to project training and to the new opportunities it afforded them exceeded their expectations and those of the project planners. Although long traditions of gender inequality and patriarchal values placed huge barriers on women's participation in local government in the participating countries, the women representatives nonetheless enthusiastically participated in capacity building. Furthermore, the activities they initiated as a result of their training brought positive change to their constituents and will be explored in depth in each country. The forums were critical elements in their effectiveness. Table 1 shows details of outcomes in relation to social development and governance.

Data for outcomes come from a combination of focus group discussions, reports by consultants, comparisons with base-line data, regular reports by participating NGOs, and interviews with male and female government officers. A control group of elected women members who were not part of the project was identified in each project area in all three countries. Interviews with the control groups and assessments of their skills and effectiveness in local government were contrasted with those of project participants as one measure of the effectiveness of capacity building training.



Poverty program monitoring in a ward forum in Bangladesh

Table 1. Project Outcomes in Relation to Social Development and Governance

Elements	Measure
Human Capital Development	Capacity building of women representatives expands their knowledge of local government operations, budget and finance, their responsibilities and rights as members, understanding of gender, mediation, and related skills to increase their effectiveness as members (B,N,P). Women representatives provide projects in health and sanitation, education, and drinking water schemes to their constituents (P). Forum members undertake cleanup of local areas and health campaigns (N). Skill training, safety net programs for poor (B).
Social Capital Development	Creation of forums at different levels of local government provides support networks for women members enhancing their effectiveness on local bodies. Forums provide a means for the needs of poor to be met relating to inclusion in safety net programs, accessing training and employment (B). Women members' role in local arbitration and conflict resolution brings social justice and voice to poor women at the village level (B,N). Forums accessed funds to build temples, sanitary latrines (N). Forum members actively work to obtain unclaimed land for poor households (B). Forums undertake environmental projects to end sand excavation from the river bank (N).
Gender and Development	Gender sensitivity training of male councilors, chairs, and NGO and line agency officers improves relationships between male and female representatives (B,N,P). Women members given capacity building training and support from NGOs that enhances their abilities and confidence to be active in local government. Women representatives actively support interests of other poor women and men in obtaining microfinance, seeds, and training in animal husbandry from line agencies (B). Forums provide solidarity and support to women members and push women's issues. Forums provide support for women members facing obstructive chairs or male representatives. Participating on local councils increases women members' visibility and status and provides mediators for the poor to line agencies (B,P). Women members' role in village mediation and conflict resolution protects young girls from early marriage, supports women's rape and divorce cases (B). Women members agitate against marijuana cultivation (N).
Social Protection	Women member's intervention in revising and redoing village lists provides safety net protection decreasing vulnerability of the aged and destitute among their constituents (B). Women members facilitated the poor to get Zakat funds (P).
Accountability	Elected women representatives lead and participate in forums where resources for targeted interventions are discussed and allocated. Sector line agency officials attend forums and provide information and access of poor women, men, youth to training, employment, and microcredit opportunities (B). Women members' participation on standing committees directs resources to targeted sectors (B,P). Women representatives checking council minutes, refusing to sign blank pages (B,P). Applied for and received funds from village development committees and mobilized resources from NGOs and government sources (N).
Participation	Support of government officers for women members' activities. Exposure visits to local bodies in other countries and at regional workshop held at ADB, Manila (B,N,P). Inclusion of poorest women, men and youth from women representative's wards in government safety net programs, income earning options, and other interventions (B). Active engagement of women members in operations of local bodies including attending meetings, serving on monitoring committees, participating in forums, and accessing funds for projects for constituents. Active role of women representatives in local arbitration and conflict resolution meetings (B,N,P).
Predictability	Regular attendance of women representatives at local government meetings; regular meetings of forums; consistent follow-up on allocation and implementation of government resources; network support from forums for women members; function of forums to represent interests of local constituencies. Attendance of sector line agency officers at forum meetings (B,N,P).
Transparency	Forum discussions of available programs and means of access to them; line agency officials provide assistance to women representatives in delivering benefits to most needy; support for women members in their interactions with local council chairs; clearly announce details of programs and follow through (B,N,P). Revised lists of most vulnerable, poorest, unemployed in local areas and disclosed all government poverty programs in upazila forum meetings (B).

"B" is for Bangladesh, "N" is for Nepal, and "P" is for Pakistan.

Project outcomes in Bangladesh are more extensive than those in Nepal and Pakistan because of the longer history of women's involvement in local government there. Of crucial importance was the role of the lead NGO BRAC in providing capacity building training and in undertaking social mobilization activities. BRAC is institutionally strong and has been in operation since independence in 1972. It has extensive experience in social mobilization, providing training and services, and assisting rural people to improve their lives. Their experience in analyzing local situations, in developing appropriate strategies for mobilizing key stakeholders, and in providing training to meet local needs was a major factor in the success of the Bangladesh portion of the project.

While the project operated in the same framework in each of the three countries, it was implemented, monitored, and evaluated according to local conditions and the skills and abilities of the NGOs implementing it. This is reflected in the outcomes. It is important to note, however, that substantial progress was made in all three countries in improving the skills and confidence of elected women representatives and grassroots women leaders which in turn improved the operations of their local governments in the project areas. In many cases, the outcomes of the women members' work represents the first time many rural people have ever received the benefits of development programs.

Outcomes are noted in four areas:

- the opinion of the women on the effectiveness of the training they received;
- the change in their understanding of their roles as local government representatives and of governance issues;
- their involvement in development activities of local bodies and women's forums;
- their ability to mobilize development resources for their constituents.

Bangladesh

New Participants in Local Government

The participation of women in local government is even more significant because women members represent a newly mobilized segment of the rural population in terms of both gender and social class. The baseline surveys indicated that most elected women representatives had fewer than 10 years of schooling and were from poor households. Thirty-two percent of the women elected to the union parishads belonged to landless groups of BRAC's village organizations. These data indicate that a different segment of the population has become involved in local government. In the past, local political participation was dominated by men from well-to-do families. The participation of women from poor households is significant in terms of changing the traditional power structure of village society.

Effectiveness of Training

Focus-group interviews with female union parishad members indicated that social mobilization, collective organizing, and training increased their confidence and effectiveness. Eighty percent of them now regularly attend monthly meetings compared with 40% prior to training. Bano Begum stated that she felt before training that she was in the mother's womb and that after she came out into the world. Other forum members expressed similar views. The women now refuse to sign blank

"Before training we were treated like dolls in the union parishad. Now the union parishad chairpersons and the members know that we have knowledge. Before we were not notified about meetings on time, so we could not attend the meeting. Now, (we) get notice of the meeting 4 days in advance." Women from Manirumpur upazila

After the capacity building and gender sensitization training, the overall attitude of the chairmen working with the women has improved. For example, there are 13 standing committees in the union parishad, and there is a provision for women to become the chairpersons of the following: health and family welfare, small and cottage industry, and women's affairs. In the previous years, elected women representatives were not included in these committees. After training, women members negotiated their rights with the union parishad chairman to be included in the standing committees in all the 141 union parishads in the project.



Cooperation among women members, the union parishad chairpersons, and upazilla nirbahi officer

proceedings or resolutions and have a legitimate place to sit in the union parishad meetings. Their names are listed right after the chairman's name. Dipali Charkravarti, chair of the Fakirhat upazila forum said that different sectoral plans are known to them and they can give information to anyone about the various schemes and projects. Before training, 10% reported that they were involved in standing committees of the union parishads whereas after training, 90% were members of them.

This behavior contrasts with reports of women in the control groups. At a meeting of 30 women representatives from 10 union parishads in Tala Upazila, Satkhira district, most felt that they were inactive in union parishad work even though they were somewhat aware of their roles. The government had provided some training, but many women thought there was too much crammed into a short period and that it was confusing and difficult to remember. Most of them had no knowledge of the various standing committees of the parishad and of the requirement that women should chair one third of those committees. The lack of forums to mobilize and create support among elected female members and the lack of established mechanisms for a direct and on-going interface among government officials, the elected representatives, and their constituents (e.g. ward and upazila forums) are all important reasons for the perceived powerlessness of these women representatives.

Gender sensitivity training of male union parishad chairs in the project area increased their awareness of women's roles which in turn led to better collaboration. Nonetheless, some union parishad chairs and male members continue to resist their inclusion and are reluctant to assign their women members development projects, especially in public works. While the women members have made progress in establishing a role for themselves as effective parishad members, this doesn't mean their efforts will be universally accepted by their male counterparts. Male privilege has a long history in Bangladesh that won't disappear

"We are not getting any powers in the parishad at all. Sometimes I feel like taking poison and dying because I am not able to deliver on anything." Vadana Rani Pal.

"There is no end to our problems, no one gives us any importance. Even the watchman ignores us." Shireen Sultan

"If you push the chairman too much he involves you in false cases." Jamine Akhtar

"The rules of etiquette and decorum are only on paper. We have no fixed place to sit. We have a village court every 15 days in the parishad and we are hardly given respect." Mariam Begum

"We have no relationship with the upazila officer." Saira Bano.

"The men meet without us and have a quorum." Halima Begum.

Women from the control group.

When Mariam Begum demanded the chair of the sanitary works committee, the chairman of her parishad refused. She then mobilized the two other women members and three male members to install a sanitary latrine in the mosque and the madrasah (school). This increased her visibility and popularity. She then petitioned the chairman to install sanitary latrines in a poor neighborhood, a petition he ignored. Mariam Begum then mobilized 50 of the poorest households to protest in front of his house. They barged in despite the presence of a watchman and presented a memorandum. When he still did not relent, Mariam Begum obtained approval for the toilets and for 50% of the quota of the vulnerable group feeding program through the upazila forum despite the lack of cooperation from her union parishad.

quickly. Training has nonetheless made women members more courageous in their activities and willingness to challenge chairs of union parishads to deliver resources to the intended beneficiaries as the case of Mariam Begum indicates. Her constituents rallied to her support and were empowered by her bravery and her ability to realize benefits for them. When Mariam reported her chairman's behavior to the upazila forum where line officers and representatives of NGOs were present, she set an example of good governance that other women could follow. Much of the long-term effectiveness of the women members will depend on the continued existence of the forums and the ongoing support of local NGOs that have proved so helpful up to now.

Change in Understanding of their Roles in Local Governance

Anwara is the female representative of Kashimnagar union parishad and a member of the shalish council. Roshanara, a 14-year-old girl, recounts how she was married 6 months earlier to a boy who already had a wife and two children. Her in-laws concealed this before her marriage, and when Roshanara found out, she wanted a divorce. The in-laws wanted Tk. 45,000 to release her. Thanks to Anwara and the village shalish, Roshanara was allowed to leave without paying.

After training, women representatives understood that they have important roles to play in local governance and in dispute resolution. As a result, they are more courageous in their efforts and outlooks which in turn empowers their constituents. Training in legal issues improved their skills in resolving disputes and in representing the cases of women in shalish (local mediation sessions) that are held in the parishad on a regular basis. Prior to the project, women

had not been represented in shalish and seldom benefited from dispute resolutions. Only 16% of women representatives were associated with shalish before training, but afterwards 60% were involved. Women members participated in local arbitration committees that dealt with 1,993 land disputes, 3,254 family disputes, 628 dowry disputes, 1,091 divorces, and 677 polygamy cases and in many instances were able to successfully mediate an amicable solution between the parties. Table 2 below shows the kinds of cases and the types of solutions that were realized. It is important to note that many cases were brought by women and poor people who were encouraged by the presence of women representatives to bring their grievances forward. The courage of the women members in shalish brought social justice to poor women.



Conducting a ward forum meeting to bring issues for Shalish

The union council representative, Jahan Ara Begum along with 37 other female representatives were trained at the BRAC Training Center. On the last day of training, Jahan Ara Begum got a call from her family that her son had been arrested by the police without any warrant against him. All 38 representatives rushed to the Dumuria Upazila Police Station to meet the police chief and ask him to explain the reason for arresting Jahana's son. Initially the chief did not want to discuss the matter with them. The women then sat in the police station and insisted that he do so. Finally, he agreed to review the file and found the allegation against Jahan's son was a mistake and agreed to release him.

At the upazila forum meeting in the village of Bagherhat Sadar, Abida Khanon recounted a case where she successfully conducted shalish in favor of the molested wife of a van driver from her village. The injured victim ran to Abida Khanon with her clothes in disarray. Abida took her to the union parishad chair who refused to hear her complaint. Abida persisted but was told by the chair that all of them (including Abida) belonged to the same political party so she shouldn't make an issue of the case. Abida nonetheless felt her responsibility to seek justice for the victim was greater than her loyalty to her party.

Abida mobilized 21 van drivers (all males) and accompanied them to a meeting with the chair who was still unwilling to help. She then threatened to meet the deputy commissioner of the district. This moved the chair to summon a shalish. The court pronounced a verdict of guilty and punished the accused man with 30 lashes of the cane and a fine of Tk. 5000.

Abida feels that the shalish was sympathetic to the victim only because women were members. It was the unanimous support of her fellow forum members that gave her the confidence to pursue the case.

Union council representative Rezia Khatun learned that a girl in tenth grade was going to be married even though she was not 18 years old. She went to the parents to discuss the matter and convinced them that if the girl could complete high school, the parents could find her a groom with higher education. The girl graduated with high marks, and the parents have now decided that they will not arrange her marriage until she completes her BA degree.

Table 2: Role of Women Representatives in Mediation by Nature of Cases and Type of Solution

Case	Solution	Total
Dowry	Amicable settlement and awareness building	628
Early Marriage	Mediation	526
Polygamy	Mediation/amicable settlement	677
Land dispute	Mediation and court case/village court	1993
Family dispute	Mediation and court case/village court	3254
Women and child repression	Court case and mediation/ amicable settlement	1545
Divorce	Court case and mediation/ village court	1091
Theft of shrimp gear	Court case and mediation	30

Source: Sixth Quarterly Report-January 2004 submitted by BRAC

Involvement in Upazila and Ward Forums and Union Parishad Activities

When women recount their success stories in upazila forums they set examples for others and gain the support and respect of male officials. It is also an important means for them to

"We have asked the chairperson of the union parishad to disclose the names of the chair and members of the 13 standing development committees. We found no women on the committees. There were no women members allocated chairperson or membership positions, even though there is a provision for women members to be chair for three committees and membership in other committees. We negotiated and we became involved in the committee." Jessore representative

gain status and visibility as union parishad members. The upazila and ward forums build support networks for women and enable them to learn of local

people's concerns. They also provide the means for them to regularly meet with government officers and local NGO representatives and to acquire information about development projects and social services in the entire upazila. The forums have also increased the accountability of the upazila government officers to union parishad members, particularly the women

"In my union parishad, a package of garments was allocated for distribution through the union parishad, but the chairman hid them. I convinced him to discuss the aid package with the union parishad members and to distribute the garments to the poor."

Rukhsana Begum, union parishad member from Manirampur upazila.

and the rural poor. Before the project, women representatives had very little access to information about development programs and projects, and government line officers were largely unaccountable to anyone other than their superiors in their ministries. Women members also had little access to infrastructure projects supported by their union parishad development committees. After training, however, women members like Aklima Khatun successfully negotiated rural road projects. Substantial numbers of rural people have benefited from the efforts of women members to mobilize government and other resources for them often for the first time.



Aklima and her road building crew

In the past, female representatives were not allocated infrastructure projects by the union parishad. After training, Aklima Khatun, the female representative of the Ramzan Nagar union parishad, tried to negotiate a rural road construction scheme. The male members opposed the proposal and indicated that road construction projects should be assigned to the male members only. The chairman, Mr. Alamgir Haidar, had received capacity building training from the project and supported her proposal. She accepted the challenge and constructed the rural road. Originally, the road was to be 500 feet long, but Aklima managed the budget so efficiently and saved so much money that she was able to extend it for an additional 200 feet. Her community was very impressed with her work and volunteered their labor in support of the project.

The ability of women representatives to bring government officers to ward forum meetings and to organize and to deliver government resources increases their status and improves the image of the government. The purpose of the upazila and ward forums is to provide a participatory and transparent process for monitoring of poverty programs by various stakeholders

The Fakirhat upazila forum meeting opens with 21 women present and Mrs. Dipali Chakravarti, an elected union parishad member in the chair. The participants of the forum include the chief officer of the upazila, officers from government ministries and the local government engineering department, an officer of the Grameen Bank, and two other nongovernment organizations. As decided in a previous meeting, two lists were submitted to the fisheries officer and the social welfare officer containing the names of those seeking training and loans. The social welfare officer also briefs the group about a new government scheme for the handicapped in rural areas to obtain microcredit. The junior engineer, responding to a query, clarifies that in all project implementation committees, the presence of one woman is necessary and that the chairs of all union parishads have been informed that women must be made chairs of at least one engineering project.

Momeena Begum asks how revenue lands can be distributed to the landless. The chief officer explains that a certificate from the union parishad is required testifying that the applicant is landless. He explains the application procedure in detail and reminds the house that the allotment will be made in the joint name of the husband and wife.

Mumtaz Begum wants to know how to prepare her fishpond to receive seedlings and she is advised accordingly. Haseena asks about the rules for loans for goat units. The livestock officer informs her of the scheme for loans and training.

Binodini relates an incident in her village a few days ago when she intervened to stop the marriage of a 13-year-old girl. She wants the other women to support her in case the boy's side retaliates in any way. The chief officer congratulates her on her initiative and assures her of protection.

Hafiza Begum raises the case of a man who has not divorced but has taken a second wife. The chief officer informs the forum that in this case the man is at fault and must pay one and a half times the dowry to the first wife. The woman is advised to approach the family court in case local arbitration fails.

including the poor. The forums also provided a venue to discuss development programs such as food for work, vulnerable feeding, old age pension, arsenic removal, government land distribution, and those in micro-credit, agriculture, livestock, skill training for youth and poor women. In addition, social issues such as dowry, violence against women, and cases for the village court are discussed. This gives women information on a wide range of activities to which they would otherwise not have access.

Mobilization of Resources from Government and Nongovernment Sources

The monthly ward forum meeting for poor women and men at the community level conducted by the elected woman member of the union parishad has introduced a significant new method of communication and has brought the elected representatives closer to their constituents because they are able to mobilize resources for them. Women leaders and extension staff from the line agencies and social safety net programs also attend to provide information to the poor

"We learned from the training and the upazila workshop about different development projects in Manipur upazila. Through our respective ward meetings we have identified the poor women and youth and have taken them to different agencies for training and employment. We have provided 20 women with agriculture training, 50 youth and women with training in fishing, 20 women with livestock training, and 100 women with training in sewing. Through the nongovernment organization Setu, 20 women received tailoring training. Fifteen women received employment from CARE in road maintenance work, and 96 women were included in the training program for village defense guards. We have organized youth to guard the ward in one union, and we have provided poor women links with the Grameen Bank, BRAC, Samity and Jagarani Chakra for microcredit." Anita Dutta, Razia Begum, and Taslima Begum

Mahmuda Khatun from Ratanpur village in Kaliganj upazila identified poor women through ward meetings and introduced them to micro-credit programs of NGOs. As a result, they undertook goat and poultry rearing, cattle nourishment, and embroidery work. "I wanted to combat trafficking of children and women from our villages and worked hard to provide income earning opportunities to the poor through different income generating projects," she reported.

Abeda Khanam from Ichgati union parishad mobilized the following resources from union parishad and other development programs for the people of her wards: Tk 17,000 for the rehabilitation of 150 feet of roads with bricks; Tk. 12,000 for a woman's association and school; 1.5 metric tons of rice for wages for road maintenance crews; old age allowances for 25 people, allowances for 18 widows; and sanitary latrines for 30 households.

on government and NGO programs. As a result of this grassroots interface, women members have identified poor households and have provided women and youth with training and employment opportunities in various government and NGO programs. In most cases, these are new opportunities that would most likely not have been available without the project.

Social safety net programs are monitored at ward meetings to ensure they reach intended beneficiaries. Women members participated with the union parishad chairs in preparing the lists for the vulnerable



Government resources were mobilized for this poultry project

feeding program, the allowances for widows, and the old age allowances for men and women to ensure they are correct. After training, 90% of women members were associated with the selection of beneficiaries of these programs compared with 16% before training. Regarding education programs, 40% participated in child development activities before the project but 70% did so after training.

Through the ward forums, a total of 7,511 poor women and children were able to get assistance for the first time through the vulnerable group development card. Table 3 shows the number of poor and vulnerable women and children who received benefits from the social safety net programs because of the action of the female representatives in each upazila involved in the project.

Across the project upazilas, the women representatives have mobilized development resources through upazila and ward forum activities and provided approximately 2,833 women and youth with new training opportunities. Before the project, 20% had communicated with upzila health officials and 11% had dealt with upazila officials from the Ministry on Women's and Children's Affairs. After training, however, 80% had established very effective links with several key government and NGO institutions including the Ministry on Women's and Children's Affairs, Youth Development, Agriculture and Social Forestry, Livestock, the Polli Daridra Bimochan Foundation, Fisheries, and the Department of Agriculture Extension.

In addition, women's representatives were responsible for providing access to microcredit and other income earning activities of NGOs, the Bangladesh Rural Development Board, and the public works programs of Local Government and Engineering Department for 6,128 women. Most of the income earning opportunities involve small trade, poultry and livestock rearing, fish culture, horticulture, vegetable cultivation, taking care of road side plantations, routine road maintenance work, tailoring, and embroidery. Table 4 illustrates new employment opportunities for women facilitated by trained women representatives from the project areas.

"I reviewed the list of my union parishad on the vulnerable group program card and found that the list did not include some poor people including disabled people. I negotiated with the union parishad chairperson and revised the list and included the needy people." Piara Begum

Table 3: Number of Individuals Receiving Access to Social Safety Net Programs by Upazila

Name of Upazila	VGD Card Women and Children	Allowances for Widow/ Deserted	Old Age Allowance
Bagerhat Sadar	475	95	108
Rampal	530	105	101
Mongla	303	56	30
Tarakhada	290	42	36
Batiaghata	441	42	36
Dacop	439	27	27
Chitalmari	315	21	21
Fakirhat	480	24	24
Mollahat	357	21	21
Rupsha	255	15	15
Monirampur	658	54	54
Abhoynagar	432	27	27
Koyra	341	21	21
Satkhira	730	45	45
Kaliganj	735	36	36
Shyamnagar	740	36	36
Total	7511	646	623

Source: Fifth Quarterly Report, BRAC, October 2003



Women representatives making a list of poor women for microcredit and income generating projects

Table 4: Poor Women's Access to Income Generating Projects

Institution Offering the Project	Number of Women
CARE, BRAC, BRDB, ASA, Social Welfare and Prodiapon	370
CARE, Proshika, BRAC and LGED, ASA, Grameen Bank, Polli Daridra Bimochan Foundation, BRAC, and BRDB	372
ASA, BRAC, Social Welfare, Grameen Bank, World Vision, and LGED	206
BRAC and LGED, CARE, ASA, Proshikha, BRAC and HEED Bangladesh, and Polli Daridra Bimochan Foundation	296
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, BRAC, CARE, Rupanter, ASA, LGED, HEED, and BRDB	348
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, BRDB, BRAC, CARE, ASA, LGED, and Social Welfare	334
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, Reversal, BRAC, CARE, World Vision, ASA, LGED, and BRDB	370
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, HEED, BRAC, CARE, ASA, LGED, and BRDB	623
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, BRAC, CARE, ASA, LGED, and Social Welfare	598
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, Grameen Bank, BRAC, CARE, ASA, LGED, and Social Welfare	582
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, Jagoroni Chakra, BRAC, CARE, Social Welfare, ASA, LGED, and BRDB	420
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, BRDB, Youth Development, BRAC, CARE, ASA, LGED, and Social Welfare	360
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, Proshika, BRAC, CARE, ASA, LGED, and Prodiapon	246
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, BRAC, CARE, ASA, LGED, and Proshika, Matri Kendra	373
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, BRAC, ASA, LGED, Proshika, Heed Bangladesh, Sushilan, and Matri Kendra	340
Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, BRAC, CARE, ASA, LGED, Proshika, Heed Bangladesh, Sushilan, Uttaran	290
Total	6,128

Source: Sixth Quarterly Report-January 2004 by BRAC DAE = Department of Agriculture Extension; HEED = Health, Education and Economic Development; ASA = Association of Social Advancement.; CARE = Co-operative for American Relief Everywhere; BRDB = Bangladesh Rural Development Board; LGED = Local Government Engineering Department

Nepal

New Participants in Local Government

The accomplishments of the project in Nepal are considerable when posed against the backdrop of national unrest, the postponement of all elections, and the fact that decentralization and democratization only began in the 1990s. In spite of this, all aspects of the project were implemented.

Effectiveness of Training

Trained women ex-representatives and women CBO leaders became active in the forums to enhance their roles in local government activities. Training increased their confidence, improved their leadership, and developed their negotiating skills. Many participants wished the program had been implemented earlier in their tenures on the VDCs. They now understand why women need to be represented at the decision-making level in local bodies. They are also aware of the traditional beliefs and practices that have limited their minds and their

Following her training, forum member Sharmila Ghimire asked for the annual budget in the VDC meeting and discovered evidence of corrupt practices. She found that no bills were produced for expenditures and that money was being siphoned off by some of the male members. She persuaded members of the forum to accompany her to Kathmandu to meet the district development council and lodge a complaint. The VDC secretary was subsequently directed to instruct the VDC members to return the money. The men then threatened the women and the secretary with violence. The money has yet to be returned, but the men are now wary of the women.

Sharmila Ghimire says that earlier she would speak in the VDC but no one would pay attention to her suggestions. Training gave her the confidence to persist as she felt as she was within her rights to ask for something that would benefit other women. Her demand for sewing and knitting training was finally accepted after she raised it consecutively in three meetings. Rs. 0.10 lakhs were sanctioned for a training program.



Role playing during training

After training, forum members in Parsa district became aware of the planning and budgetary process of the village development committee (VDC). They identified the need for a proper toilet in the village especially for women. The current toilets did not have any doors nor did the toilet in the village school. They went to the school and VDC to get the doors built. Furthermore they decided to build two additional proper toilets in the village and submitted a proposal to the VDC and even went to the district development committee (DDC) and the Women's Development Centre with their appeal. They got a budget of Rs. 69,690 approved.

The women took the responsibility to build the toilet themselves instead of contracting it out. They faced lots of problems. The construction materials were stolen from the site and the women had to get police help. They even went to the central development officer to file their complaint. Though the goods were never recovered they somehow managed to complete the toilet.

The women learned that it was expensive to get toilet rings from outside so it would be cost effective if they could construct them themselves. They approached the VDC once again with a proposal to produce pans and rings and sell them in the local market. A budget of Rs. 50,000 was approved by the DDC. The profit from this endeavor will go into the forum fund which already has around Rs. 6000 that they lend to members with interest.

physical mobility and are motivated to overcome these obstacles. The activities they carried out in the forums indicate the effectiveness of the training program. Their increased confidence and enhanced leadership and negotiation skills can all be attributed to it. Their ability to obtain money from the VDC budget for local development projects is another example of their achievements.



Forum meetings

class, they were unable to mobilize anyone to attend. Women in the control group in Mahottari had no idea that women from their area were involved in politics and were not interested in the activities of their ward committees or VDCs. The control group in Parsa did not know what development meant and had never attended VDC meetings. The male members simply sent them minutes to sign. They knew nothing of women's rights and were merely made leaders to fill the seats reserved for women. The women in the active control group in Kathmandu were almost all literate, and some were school teachers. They also had access to television and had watched programs on development. They had arranged adult literacy classes through their VDC.

Data from the project and non-project VDCs were compared in terms of the ability of women representatives to mobilize funds from the VDC budget, to take action on social issues, and to be involved in development work. With the exception of Kathmadu, women from the control groups were not active in development activities or in addressing social problems in their villages. Women in Lalitpur did not know who the elected woman leader was. While they had organized an adult literacy



Forum meetings



Interface with government officers

Understanding Their Roles in Local Governance

The forums have been instrumental in establishing a venue for local women leaders and the members of the VDCs to meet and share experiences, to build networks, and to be involved in activities that address local governance issues. For example, the women of Budhanilkantha VDC publicly voiced

"Three years ago individual women in our village became concerned about marijuana cultivation, but we did not have any means to cooperate and we could not mobilize the community to take any action. Besides we did not know about the legal aspect of marijuana cultivation. Since we formed the forum, all the women leaders started to talk about this marijuana cultivation in the forum meeting and got legal information about it. So we decided go to the community police together. The police responded positively and we made a plan together. We also got cooperation from the National Commission for Women. The police together with the community put pressure on the cultivator and destroyed four truck loads of marijuana plants." Women from Budhanilkantha VDC of Katmandu

their opposition to the cultivation of marijuana and took collective action to stop it.

The forums have enabled an interface with government officers at different levels. With the information they gain as a result, the women representatives are able to marshal support and lobby VDC chairs to share resources, allocate projects more equitably, and better represent the interests of local people. Twenty-four of the 32 women's forums contacted their VDC secretaries to seek details of various programs and budgets. This would never have happened without the formation of the forum of women ex-representatives and leaders and without their capacity building training. Twenty-six women's forums have submitted proposals to VDCs for programs focused on women and children. Twenty-one forums started regular registration of births, deaths, and marriages in their villages to aid in the preparation of accurate censuses for future planning.

Women's forums in Kathmandu used door-to-door visits to disseminate information to householders on cleanliness, hygiene, child education, and other topics. They also plan to campaign about women's health problems. The lack of sanitary facilities in many places means human waste is scattered across

wide areas. This and the lack of public consciousness about depositing garbage in fixed places compromises public health. Another concern has been environmental degradation. The forums arranged a two-day cleaning expedition and stopped sand excavation to prevent land erosion.

The women's forum in Lalitpur district is lobbying for removal of brick factories to prevent environmental degradation. The women of this forum also provided health services in association with Marie Stopes, an international NGO. The forum provided first aid services and negotiated public land for reforestation.

The women's forum in Mahottari district campaigned on cleanliness, sanitation, and diseases like pneumonia and diarrhoea that are widespread due to the lack of health care, to poor housing, and to unsafe water. One of the members was a member of the school committee, and she arranged for the free distribution of books to the students in her village. In coordination with hospitals of their area, the forum has distributed condoms, birth control pills, and other medicines free of cost and has arranged for the health post to give free treatment to pneumonia patients.

The forums are aware of social issues, particularly those of gender. They have

The women's forum of Manamaiju in Kathmandu district was informed about the battering of a household maid in an army officer's home. When the members went to inquire, they found a small child of six, crouched in the corner shivering with fear and crying. She had not only been beaten, she was also burned with a heated knife and her ears were bleeding profusely. She was punished because she happened to misplace a pressure cooker ring.

The officer was immediately called and the child's parents were sought. The girl was from the terai from a poor family. The forum members demanded that the girl's father be fetched and threatened to take the case to the media and police immediately. The officer begged them not to do so saying that it was the mistake of his wife, and in return he was ready to bear any consequences and pay the required compensation. The child's father was flown up the next day and the child was handed over to him. With adequate compensation and clothes for the child, both the father and daughter flew home.

Table 5: Involvement of Women's Forums in Gender and Social Issue Arbitration

Activities	District				Total
	Kathmandu	Lalitpur	Mahottari	Parsa	
Domestic Violence Against Women	5	8	5	6	24
Polygamy	5	1	0	0	6
Witchcrafts	0	1	5	0	6
Campaigning Against Alcoholism	2	8	6	0	16
Citizenship Certificate/Registration (Birth, Death, Marriage etc.)	8	8	3	2	21

Source: Gender and Governance Issues in Local Government, Field Implementation of the RETA, Nepal, March 2004.



Participating NGOs facilitating a forum meeting

undertaken issues of violence against women and children, alcoholism, and polygamy among others. Table 5 illustrates their activities.

It is interesting to note the efforts of the Simardahi forum in Mahottari district to confront issues of caste in their meetings. The members have divided all responsibilities among themselves, and the job of serving refreshments went to a member from a scheduled caste to set an example. In most social situations, women from other castes would refuse to accept food from a member of a scheduled caste. The forum is striving to overcome this barrier.

Involvement in Village Development Committee Activities and Mobilization of Resources

Women representatives have been able to organize development resources from a variety of sources for use by people on VDCs. Projects range from health and education to infrastructure, to potable water systems and garbage collection. Forums have mobilized VDC budgets in physical infrastructure, water and sanitation, agriculture and irrigation, health and family planning, education, environment, and income generating activities. All 32 forums were in contact with their respective VDCs, and all have requested specific budgets for development activities.

The top priority for 12 forums has been to mobilize allocations for human resource development. For nine forums the top priority was to obtain allocations for agricultural projects. Eight women's forums are engaged in forest and environmental projects, while seven undertook income-generating activities. Six forums are involved in infrastructure projects for

CARE Nepal had a sanitation program in Mahottari district for 5 years. They built several toilets, but after the project ended, the area became filthy as people went back to their old habits. Despite an awareness campaign by the forum, the people of the village still littered the area. On the forum's initiative the village development committee (VDC) appointed a sweeper to keep the place clean, but no apparent change was seen as the sweeper was not doing the work. The forum has asked the VDC for the responsibility to keep the village clean and to pay them instead of paying the sweeper. Forum members plan to volunteer and to contribute their earnings to the forum fund.

roads, temples, and latrines, and six are engaged in awareness raising programs. Four forums emphasized gaining funds for girls' and women's education, and three are working with potable water, sanitation, and drainage system projects. This information is summarized in Table 6. Each forum applied for and expected to receive budgetary allocations from their individual VDCs.

Table 6: Village Development Committee Budget Mobilization by Activities and District

Activities	District				Total
	Kathmandu	Lalitpur	Mahottari	Parsa	
Human Resource Development (Training programs)	727	2	0	3	12
Infrastructure Building (Toilets, Roads, Temples)	2	1	2	1	6
Drinking Water/Sanitation/Drainage System	2	0	0	1	3
Agriculture	3	1	3	2	9
Income Generation	4	2	1	0	7
Girls/Women Education	2	1	0	1	4
Awareness Program	1	1	4	0	6
Forest and Environment	0	8	0	0	8

Source: Gender and Governance Issues in Local Government, Field Implementation of the RETA, NEPAL, March 2004.

In addition to links with the VDCs, 13 of the women's forums have also successfully worked with CBOs in health, HIV-AIDS, and microcredit. Twenty-six established links with local health agencies and several worked closely with local officers of government departments to get training for their needy constituents in (i) computers, (ii) taxi driving for women, (iii) nonformal education, (iv) soap making, (v) livestock and agriculture, and (vi) knitting.

A number of women's forums are extremely interested in education and have promoted it in their VDCs by lobbying for women's literacy and children's education. The forum in Bindhabasini in Parsa district provides textbooks and copy books to poor students, especially girls. These materials are supplied from the VDC budget. The forum of Sidhipur has reserved two seats for scholarships for girls' education from the quota of the VDC and the Rotary Club. The forum of Simardahi in Mahottari district has also been instrumental in arranging the distribution of free books in the local school.

The women's forum of the Manamaiju VDC in Kathmandu received Rs. 400,000 from the committee and constructed a temple. Earlier the temple site had been a garbage dump. People are now encouraged to deposit their garbage in specified places. The forum also obtained a budget from the VDC for maintenance work on a water source plan to maintain the sewage system. The forum in Tikathali in Lalitpur district constructed a gabion wall for flood prevention. They have also graveled the roads in some areas. Tree planting to prevent deforestation is another project of this forum, and a proposal for Rs 20,000 to establish a seed shop was recently submitted to the VDC. The committee secretary plans to approve the request. The forum in Simardahi in Mahottari district had a wooden bridge constructed on their own initiative. The forum now wants the responsibility for keeping their village clean as it is not done properly by the person contracted by the VDC. They will save their earnings from this undertaking in their forum.

The women's forum of Dharmasthali in Parsa district spent Rs.140,000 from the district development committee for the construction of the VDC building and plans to obtain funds to construct a road. The women's forum of Manamaiju received Rs. 50,000 from the VDC to construct a road. With

a budget of Rs.10,000, the women's forum of Dharmasthali has maintained the drinking water pipeline. The Bharhwabhata women's forum is proposing a project to provide drinking water in the local school.

In addition to mobilization of government and nongovernment resources, the forums have started their own informal savings and credit cooperatives. Savings are used for loans to members for family expenses and for income generating activities such as poultry farming.

Pakistan

New Participants in Local Government

In general, the women councilors represent a new segment of society first because they are women and secondly because they come from predominantly middle or working class or poor households. In addition, many of them are not well educated or are illiterate; this is also a new phenomenon in leadership in local government bodies. As the initial project outcomes illustrate, women councilors worked diligently to apply what they had learned in the interests of their constituents regardless of their educational qualifications. It is important to have women in local government who are representative of the vast majority of the population, that is, poor, working class, and generally illiterate. It is also important

to remember that including women in local government was bitterly contested in some districts of the country and that women defied convention to participate.

"The training has given us confidence. We rejected a tubewell installation scheme that was not going to be correctly implemented. It had been changed after our input to exclude one of the villages originally covered. We now understand the need for the equitable distribution and utilization of council funds." Rubina Shaheen

Effectiveness of Training

The greater confidence of trained women councilors and their ability to articulate points of view and express themselves clearly was evident. After training, women councilors attended many more meetings, reviewed the minutes of the last meeting, and helped to

set the agenda for the next. Before training, only 22% said they regularly attended the council meetings, and in some cases, husbands and male family members attended in their stead. Only 25% of the women had any knowledge of the agenda of the last two council sessions, 25% indicated they had been provided with minutes, only 11% said their views had been sought regarding the agenda for the next session, and only 29% had any knowledge of the council budget. After training, virtually all of the women attend meetings regularly, and they have started asking for the details of the

Yasmeen Tariq is a well-educated 38-year-old mother who was elected to the union council in Kakul in Abbottabad district. Although elected in a reserved seat, she considers everyone in the community as part of her constituency. She has been actively involved in social welfare work in her area for some time. Her husband is a banker. His support and influence have complemented her dedication to serve the people and made it possible for Yasmeen to formally enter the political arena. Since assuming office, her links with nongovernment organizations and government agencies have been strengthened. As a council member she faced enormous problems in negotiating projects. After training, however, she negotiated a road construction project from the union council and secured gas connections for 40 households through the private sector. She also plans to facilitate road access to a village in her constituency. At present the forum she belongs to is involved in an initiative to develop a directory of skilled workers to enhance their skills and to establish links with the market to expand their economic opportunities. Yasmeen has no doubt that her levels of information and knowledge as well as her acceptability in the community have been enhanced as a result of her council membership and project activities. Her plans for the future include contesting provincial elections. She is a good role model.

budget and for the right to review the minutes. In comparison, the control group of women councilors who did not receive training did not develop this level of confidence and could not effectively articulate points or express their views.

As a result of training, women representatives have facilitated the registration of CCBs which is important as 25% of the district's development funds are to be channeled through them. To date, three CCBs have been registered and three more are in the process of registering.

Change in Understanding of their Roles in Local Governance

In one union council the women were initially asked to sit in a separate room during sessions, but after training they insisted on being in the room while discussions were

conducted and decisions were made. One councilor said that after she was elected she asked for a copy of the budget but was told it was a secret. After the training program, women councilors insisted on having copies. Both the women and the nazims and naib nazims who attended the training are aware now that accurate and legally binding information has to be conveyed to all council members. Prior to training, the nazim and the male councilors could tell the women anything they wished knowing that they could not challenge what was said. After training, the women's understanding of their roles was greatly improved.

Almost every woman the study team interviewed indicated that she had been unable to understand what was being discussed in the council meetings prior to attending the training course. They also did not have any say in budget allocations, and most indicated they were unaware that they were eligible to participate in decisions on allocating council funds.

Some of the nazims interviewed reported that after the training they found it easier to discuss the budget and local development issues with women councilors, which has in turn helped to make the nazims' work easier. Some nazims said that now women councilors participate in preparing the annual development plan for each area. The nazim of the Bagh Union Council remarked, "Women have emerged as partners in development."

In Haripur district, forum activities included visiting the local jail and contacting two women prisoners. As a result, one woman was bailed out and the other woman's case will be pursued. This demonstrates the way committed women councilors can join forces to identify problems, establish links with government departments, and use the union council as a platform for action for the benefit of local people.

Almost all the women council members said they are now in a position to arbitrate domestic disputes including violence against women. In fact, they had already arbitrated 150 disputes on domestic violence, custody of children, and divorce. They thought their presence meant women were more likely to bring their grievances forward for arbitration or for legal action. For example, six women have applied to one forum for legal advice on court cases they are pursuing. As women councilors they were able to enter the homes of women to hear their complaints. Male councilors cannot do this because they are prohibited from visiting women who are not related to them.

Twenty-nine-year-old Farhat Shaheen is a dedicated mother and worker for social welfare and an elected member of the union council in Hattar. She is well educated and belongs to a family with strong ties to a local religious organization. Her husband is a supportive spouse who facilitates her social welfare work and union council duties. When Farhat was due to succeed to the post of vice-chair, the chairman engineered a move to oust her without a no confidence motion and placed the man of his choice in the position instead. Farhat organized a walkout from the council as a protest against that action as she considered it to be unfair. Her leadership potential motivated the Aurat Foundation to select her as a capacity building trainer. The understanding and knowledge she gained as a result empowered her to argue, interact, and communicate with local counterparts, get access to information, and implement activities to benefit women, especially the destitute. Her role as trainer tremendously increased her acceptance in society, especially with male councilors who ultimately nominated and chose her as the first female vice-chair in the council. She has also negotiated approval of three council schemes: a vocational center, the only one of its kind in Hattar; a staff waiting room; and construction of a new street that will help local people travel more easily.

The inclusion of women and their equal participation as elected representatives in council affairs has led to collective action in setting development priorities and debating issues such as budget allocation and service delivery at the local level. The fact that women members have greater access to the basic mechanisms of council operations makes them more vocal in demanding to be included, and their male counterparts are making an effort to accommodate them.

Involvement in Council Activities

The general outcome of the project has been to increase the presence and active involvement of women in council affairs. In many cases this has been an uphill battle as the women members indicated that in the early stages, male councilors did not welcome them. The forums have been useful in helping the women continue to learn about their roles in local development issues. The forums have also provided the means for women councilors to work collectively, to raise and discuss issues, and to share ideas and suggestions for problem solving. They have created ties with local officers from government line agencies. The presence of local government officials at forum meetings enables women councilors to learn about government projects and to negotiate development resources for their constituencies.

The baseline survey found that 30% of the women councilors had at one time or another been asked to identify development plans but that only 10% of the schemes they identified had been implemented. Some of the respondents said that they had been unable to identify or implement development schemes prior to attending the training programs. After training, 65% of the respondents were involved in identifying development schemes. Some councilors said that a percentage of the council budget was now allocated to women's development and some said that they had been responsible for identifying schemes that had been implemented. In Haripur, the Nazim said that, as a result of the project, the tehsil municipal administration had applied for funding for three schemes that would benefit women: a food processing manufacturing unit; the purchase of buses for a post graduate college; and the construction of a women's computer center.

The six active women's forums have promoted and implemented 49 schemes for their constituents. Table 7 shows the details.

Table 7: Specific Schemes Accomplished by Women Councilors

Kind of Scheme	Number
Water supply	7
Telephone exchange	1
Streets/roads	10
Vocational center for girls	9
Community center	4
Sewing machines	3
Gas pipeline	4
Bridge construction and repair	2
School for girls	1
Stipends/books	2
Bathroom and boundary wall for local school	2
Establishing a graveyard	1
Tube lights	1
Total	49

Source: Gender and Governance Issues in Local Government, Field Implementation of RETA 6008, Pakistan, March 2004.

The forums have been useful in helping women councilors make links with sectoral and local agencies to get development projects for their constituencies. In fact, 33% of the women councilors have established links with government line agencies.

In the legislation establishing the union councils, provision was made for each to have 13 monitoring committees responsible for supervising major responsibilities. Part of each committee's work is to oversee budget allocations and the implementation of schemes approved by the council. Currently some women members are on health and education committees but none have been appointed to finance, municipal services, public safety or works, or services committees. In general this suggests that the men tend to see the women's roles on the council as an extension of social work. While this situation may preclude women members from the central and most important committees, it means they can operate more freely in gaining approval for projects dealing with health, education, and other social services. Gaining experience on these committees may help them negotiate membership on other committees as their expertise accumulates.

Mobilization of Resources

Women councilors on a health and education monitoring committee reported to their forum that they lacked funds and medicines to run the local basic health unit which is a government facility. In response, women from other councils generated the necessary resources. They are now in the process of establishing a permanent relationship with the Red Crescent Society to ensure the delivery of these services.

Fehmida Khatoon from Dhamtour union council got one of the poor women in her community trained in embroidery work and then gave her one of the rooms of her home so she could teach others and earn her living. She now supports her family.

Gulzar Bibi of Pandak union council got loans for ten poor women and jobs for six in private schools. She also got money to rent a skill training center where 32 women are currently enrolled and registered two citizens' community boards: one has only female members and the other is all male.

One forum prepared a directory of skilled and poor women that was shared with a local NGO to engage them in income generating projects. The presence of women on the councils has meant better targeting of poor people and poor households for zakat funds and for stipends and books for poor children. A total of 1530 poor women received zakat funds and 1201 received baitulmal funds.

Shahnaz Bibi of Salhad union council has employed seven poor women as teachers in her school. They had matriculation-level schooling but due to limited resources could not continue with further education. When their help was required to support their families, they came to Councilor Bibi and asked for jobs at her school. They now teach primary classes and support themselves and their families.

The fact that women members increased their participation and success in mobilizing resources for local people and became more active in council affairs speaks to their motivation to do well. It also suggests that male councilors may have opened space in the union councils for women to be more effective. This may have been as a result of their inclusion in the training and their participation on the exposure visits to Jhelum in Pakistan and to Bangladesh where they visited local government councils.



Women's forum discussing various government programs

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.

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- 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.

Chapter 9: Approaches to Mainstreaming Governance and Gender in Local Government at ADB

The question of what can be abstracted from the project and applied more broadly in ADB activities is a challenging one. The project emphasizes two of the three pillars of the poverty reduction strategy, good governance and inclusive social development, and also focuses on capacity building which has recently become a new cross-cutting theme. In the project, various initiatives to reduce poverty were undertaken. Creating an interface among local stakeholders including the poor, women representatives, and government officials directly addresses one of the primary concepts of the poverty reduction framework. Moreover, through the social mobilization of women members in the forums, various government employment and training opportunities and social sector programs were made available to the poorest women, men, and youth thereby reducing their economic vulnerability. Because of the training and support they received from the project through participating NGOs, the women members gained confidence in their abilities and became more active in their roles in local bodies and in the local affairs of their communities. These outcomes address the need of poverty initiatives to empower the poor whether as elected members or as constituents, and to expand their opportunities and increase their inclusion in the social life of their communities.

The outcomes of the project suggest that focusing on improving the transparency and accountability of local government and on the more efficient management of government resources can be achieved by creating an ongoing interface through local forums that regularly bring stakeholders together. What makes this project unusual is the effort to make women representatives more effective in their roles in local government bodies and to involve them in mobilizing and negotiating resources for the poor from government officials. The fact that a majority of the women members were themselves poor means that the training and support they received through the project expanded their own social capital in addition to ensuring access to resources for their poor constituents.

Steps for Mainstreaming Gender and Governance in Local Government in ADB Operations

A unique outcome of the project was the support it won from its major stakeholders. At the workshop in Manila, all the participants recommended that ADB extend the project, and in Bangladesh, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development asked the Economic Relations Division of the Ministry of Finance to request that ADB extend the project beyond its time line. The project was accordingly extended through December 2004. BRAC is now planning to use the forums, interface, and capacity building training of the project framework to train female representatives starting in 2005 as part of their ultra-poor program. In Nepal, women's forums are integrated into Didibahini's program in the Parsa and Mahotari districts, and the operational manual developed for the VDCs has been endorsed by the Ministry of Local Development. The forums will be formally registered as CBOs and will be included in VDC planning. A gender and governance committee will be formed in each VDC to address those issues. District development committees are committed to facilitating the access of women's forums to relevant line agencies and to establishing district information resource centers for them. In Pakistan, the National Reconstruction Bureau has approved the training manual, and the Rural Support Program Network plans to share it with other NGOs to train female representatives in all provinces of the country. Furthermore, the Network has worked with the Government on the Local

Government Ordinance since its inception in 2000 and so has the capacity to follow up on the formation of CCBs and women's work in local government bodies. The partner NGO Sarhad Rural Support Program is presently working with the Devolution Trust for Community Empowerment to form CCBs in Mansehra and Abotabad districts in NWFP. Women councilors will be engaged in organizing and assisting women in their communities to form CCBs in their respective union councils. This level of stakeholder support clearly indicates the success of the project's framework and approach and suggests they could be mainstreamed into ADB poverty reduction programs.

Country Poverty Analysis and Poverty Reduction Partnership Agreement

The country poverty analysis creates mutually agreed goals in a poverty reduction partnership agreement between ADB and a developing member country. The analysis is used to guide country strategy and program preparations. This process creates the opportunity to promote gender equity and good governance at the grassroots level.

While the countries in the South Asian region vary in their forms of local government, there are governance and gender issues common to all of them. For example, there is generally a lack of understanding about the systems of government and how they operate. Without such knowledge it is difficult to implement effective governance reform measures or to proceed in ways that will insure success. Moreover, the lack of participation in local governance indicates that one means of insuring accountability of government line officers and locally elected councilors is often missing.

The country poverty analysis should include governance at the grassroots level. This would include how the informal systems of government work; what the local political economy is and how it operates; and the degree to which citizens can exercise their rights, have access to information and government programs, and influence governance processes.

Country Strategy and Program

The importance of governance as one of the main pillars in poverty reduction means it has a central focus in country strategy programs in South Asia. Among the elements of ADB's operational strategy for supporting good governance is the recognition of the importance of institutional development and capacity building aimed at improving service delivery to consumers of government services, particularly the poor. However, the focus of most country strategies is on institutional and capacity development on the macro and meso levels rather than at the grassroots level. More could be done to focus on local governance issues and to plan for the mobilization of citizens and capacity building of local bodies, particularly of elected women representatives and line agency officials. This is one way to establish an environment in which local governance can be more effective. Without transparent, accountable, and efficient local governance, poverty reduction strategies are unlikely to reach their targeted populations.

The inclusion of trained women as elected representatives increases the likelihood that the interests of the poor will be represented and lessens the likelihood of the misdirection of resources. Also essential to improve service delivery is the creation of an interface among local bodies, poor constituents, and line agencies that includes the main stakeholders to increase transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the management of development resources. A third element in developing both institutional and individual capacity at the local level is the inclusion of local NGOs in training and social mobilization of the poor. Part of their inclusion could involve strengthening their own institutional capacities.

The analyses of the local governance ordinances found both strengths and weaknesses. While the ordinances brought women into public office, there remain problems with their structures and implementation. In country programming, emphasis should be given to projects that focus on reforming and effectively implementing these ordinances.

Sector Loans

Projects focused on agriculture, social sectors, and devolution offer great potential to build a framework for improving local governance and gender equity. Feasibility studies, the design of project components, monitoring and evaluation, and results-based outcomes need to be considered in local governance and gender projects.

Step 1: Feasibility Studies

The poverty and social analysis section of feasibility studies should include a local stakeholder analysis with a focus on the following:

- identification of key stakeholders delineating who are most influential and the role and inclusion of women and the poor;
- analysis of the intra-government relations;
- analysis of the context in which local governance operates;
- analysis of citizens' participation in local governance particularly knowledge about and access to government, NGO, and private-sector programs;
- exploration of the channels of communication among local community groups, their elected representatives, and government officials;
- analysis of the political economy that influences the operations of local governance;
- exploration of the roles of women representatives in local governance and the impediments to their effective participation;
- analysis of constraints to poor people's participation in local governance and in obtaining access to development and project resources.

Step 2: Designing Project Components

Project components should identify activities that will incorporate the findings from the poverty and social analysis sections of the feasibility studies. Suggested interventions include the following.

- Provide tailor-made capacity building for key local stakeholders. This includes training and social mobilization activities focused on addressing major issues for each stakeholder group. Key stakeholders include local communities, especially the poor and women, elected representatives of local bodies, and line agency officials.
- Insure that gender-based planning is included in capacity building for locally elected bodies and officials.
- Provide gender sensitivity training for key stakeholders. This training is important in order to enhance better working relations among male and female representatives and male government officials.

- Develop an interface among the key local stakeholders noted above, among NGOs, and among civil society organizations. This interface will provide a mechanism for developing accountability and transparency.
- Create separate forums for women and the poor so they can actively pursue their own interests.
- Select NGOs with institutional strengths to lead capacity building and social mobilization activities.
- Create a process to disseminate knowledge to local communities about government and NGO programs.
- Generate specific monitoring indicators to measure project outcomes on local governance and gender issues. Indicators should include both immediate and intermediate outcomes to enhance results and future action.
- Include indicators that will lead to data disaggregated by gender, governance, and poverty.
- Establish grassroots, participatory monitoring of project activities involving women's and poor people's access to project resources.

Step 3: Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are critical in ascertaining on a regular basis how the project is faring. Monitoring involves checking to insure that local resources are reaching targeted populations and that project activities are running smoothly. Evaluation involves the assessment of how project components have worked and what could be done to improve them. In incorporating gender and governance issues in monitoring and evaluation, the following activities should be pursued.

- Encourage regular reporting about project activities from implementing agencies.
- Assess the effectiveness of project activities. Monitoring should assess the extent to which project resources reach intended targets.
- Evaluate different aspects of project activities to ascertain outcomes related to:
 - (i) capacity building to improve planning, implementation and targeting of intended beneficiaries;
 - (ii) social mobilization to get access to information by women, poor people, and other segments of local communities;
 - (iii) creation of the interface to bring key stakeholders together to pursue project activities;
- Explore the extent to which capacity building has increased the social capital of women representatives, community women, and the poor. Examples are access to information, increased confidence of the poor in their local representatives, and access to local government officers.

Step 4: Results-Based Monitoring

In order to maximize project inputs and to plan future actions for long-term results, a results-based monitoring system should be included in the design of the project at its inception. While not all project outcomes need to be incorporated into activities related to results-based management, some of the most important outcomes need to be selected and then pursued at the next level of project assessment and planning. The move from immediate outcomes to intermediate results should be observed as the selected outcomes continue to be effective over time.

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