

## SUMMARY

# Three Steps to Help Women Have More Say in Local Government



*Putting resources toward specialized training, mentoring and confidence building is a successful formula for giving greater voice to women in the countryside.*

## Overview

The issue of adequate female representation in government remains a challenge throughout Asia, including in Nepal, as women lack social, political and economic power to influence decision making for the benefit of women, as well as men.

Particularly challenging is the ability to influence the allocation of resources to benefit women, as they are systematically excluded and marginalized from decision-making processes.

In 2010, the **gender equality and social inclusion plan** of the ADB-supported Nepal Governance Support Program (Subprogram I) aimed to respond to the gap in women's influence in the area of community and local governance. It attempted to:

- enhance the meaningful participation of women and disadvantaged groups in decision making;
- increase women's and disadvantaged group's access to state and non-state resources and opportunities; and

- increase women's and disadvantaged group's engagement in leading and managing community-based organizations.

The program included the development and implementation of a gender and social inclusion policy throughout local governance decision making processes. There were special measures such as training and advocacy and targets to increase the number of women in planning processes at community and local government level to at least 33%.

The gender targets covered all levels of decision-making, from the lowest to the highest levels (in ascending order): user groups, ward citizen forums, village development committees, municipal committees and district development committees.

Social mobilizers were to be trained to be instrumental in changing social norms and attitudes about women and other disadvantaged groups, 33% of whom were to be women.

Most critically, there was to be 35% targeted spending for development - 10% for women; 10% for children; 15% for disadvantaged groups; and women were to be involved in determining how local development funds were spent to benefit them and their priorities.

## Key Findings

At the beginning of the program, women's participation in planning processes of local bodies was very low to almost non-existent. The gender and social inclusion targets made a real difference in getting women's voices heard, as a chorus, in the allocation of the 35% of local development funds to meet their specific priorities.

Social mobilizers, 49% of whom were women, were responsible for mobilizing women, sensitizing women and men, and setting up gender inclusive bodies. In line with the gender equality and social inclusion plan, the formation of ward citizen forums was initiated in almost all districts resulting in 44% female membership, a total of 346,489 women, amounting in all to an increase of almost 100% female participation.

As indicated by an executive secretary of a program municipality – the presence of the women on the committee, even if their contribution was passive, was a salutary reminder to the male members that allocations had to be made for women's prioritized projects. This point was also reiterated by some male members of the ward citizen forum. A male municipal committee member also said that "The presence of women in these decision-making groups obligated other members to take account of women's views on funding priorities."

In another village development committee, the women said that they sat quietly at meetings and did not volunteer their views, "but this did not mean that we did not comprehend what was going on at the meetings." Their presence generated a discussion on the 35% targeted spending for women, children and disadvantaged groups.

Another important achievement of the program was the formation and adoption of the gender and social inclusion policy by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development and subsidiary bodies. It placed gender and social inclusion issues firmly on the local governance agenda, even if it was not entirely accepted across all the local governance structures. Most local government staff members are now aware of the requirement for women and disadvantaged groups representatives in all planning committees and their required inputs on project funding decisions. Over 70% of local staff members in all 75 project districts participated in gender and social inclusion awareness raising so that the gender and social inclusion policy and its integration into local government processes was widely disseminated. Overall, how race, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic class intersect, converge and conflict are now better understood.

## Conclusion / Recommendations

Overall, reaching the numerical targets for women's participation in decision-making groups has been successful, and has directly and indirectly influenced the allocation of resources to meet women's needs.

To meet the challenge of increasing the quality of women's influence in decision making in local governance processes, **specialized capacity building, mentoring and confidence building** is needed. This will help women assert their rights and persuade men to work in partnership with women.

## Resources

ADB. 2010. [Nepal: A Chorus of Women's Voices Makes a Difference – Influencing Local Government Spending](#). Manila.

ADB. 2010. Completion Report: [Nepal: Governance Support Program \(Subprogram I\)](#). Manila.

### Related links

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### Meet the expert



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A lawyer by profession, Imrana was a Commissioner with the Fiji Human Rights Commission. She is the author of the Law for Pacific Women, architect of the Family Law Act 2005, and former Chair of the UN Committee on Harmful Practices Against Women, and continues to be a member of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Women Living Under Muslim Law, and the Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development. Ms. Jalal is also a Commissioner on the International Commission of Jurists, Geneva.

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Last updated: May 2017