

Bangladesh : Women's Economic Empowerment Through Rural Transport and Markets

Nilufar Ahmad, Senior Social
Scientist, SDV/SASSD.

Country Challenges (80s)

- Segregated society, women working within HH, 13% literacy for women.
- 50% below poverty level, but unequal burden on women, 15% female headed HH, 96% within hardcore poverty. Mostly working as domestic helpers paid in kind
- With limited skill and existing segregation, women did not have access to formal labor market.
- Women receiving micro-credit, were forced to buy input and sell products to middlemen, making negligible profit.
- Women workers received 50% of men's wage

Innovations in the rural transport and market project (1996-2003)

- Social and gender assessment by govt (LGED), assisted by WB, consultations with village women, women leaders of LG, NGOs, women's movement.
- Demand for mechanisms for women's access to labor and product markets; equal wage, participation and decision-making.
- Mechanism: 30% of construction worker, 30% of MMC, 30 of shops; and 100% of tree plantation & maintenance reserved for women
- Facilitating women's traders associations, labor contracting society, micro-enterprise for tree plantation and maintenance, savings, SHG and RLF.
- Partnership with LGI for scaling up and strengthening
- Gender sensitive infrastructure design

Institutionalizing gender in project implementing agencies

- **Within LGED**

1. Recruitment of women community mobilizers, social scientists, gender specialists and women engineers
2. LGED's Gender Forum, helps with advocacy, training and monitoring
3. Partnership with NGO and microfinance institutions for social mobilization, group formation and microfinance services.
4. LGED developed gender strategy and action plan, on-going training of all staff in gender and participatory process, monitoring results.
5. Training of contractors and LGI leaders on gender issues
6. LGED scaled up mainstreaming social and gender issues in their other projects – water resource management, urban development
7. Other donors – ADB, DFID, GTZ have followed Bank and scaled up.

- **External:** compulsory primary education, female stipend for secondary school, large NGO movement.

Impacts

- Social empowerment, enhanced skills, increased mobility, access to information, services, labor, product and financial markets led to sustainable economic empowerment of women.
- 50% increase in women's employment and equal wage.
- Women's Labor Contracting Society (LCS) and traders associations formed, bargaining power increased.
- LCS and road maintenance formed legal associations, saved money and established RLF and increasing their income and asset in a sustainable manner. In one market, nearly 90% shops are owned by women.
- Women entrepreneurs able to buy and sell products themselves, increasing their profit.
- Enrollment in primary school 98%, girls and boys ratio in secondary 117:100
- Increased Women's voice in decision making and local governance.
- Demonstration effect, increased awareness on gender issues at all levels and efforts underway for scaling up.
- Strengthened institutional and policy level support for women traders.