

2.11 South Asia Region: Gender Reports

Gender issues in South Asia represent a complex challenge. The first round of progress has been significant, with greater recognition of the problem across the region and improved access to services and credit markets in various countries. Yet, dramatic gender inequities persist in the face of these changes and in spite of economic growth. To reverse these inequities will require a deepening of the current focus on service delivery. It also will require greater voice of women in the political decision-making of communities and states.

This focus on the political process demands a more strategic and deft partnership by the World Bank in the gender dialogue with a broad spectrum of key actors. Our challenge is to internalize and prioritize gender issues across all the sectors we work in, guided by the ongoing diagnostic work in knowledge products like the Country Gender Assessments (CGAs).

In addition to identifying determinants of gender inequality, CGAs and other AAA on gender issues offer recommendations that can help the Bank engage governments to undertake policy reforms that provide women greater access and power. In 2005 and 2006, reports were completed for Afghanistan, Nepal, and Pakistan: *National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction – the Role of Women in Afghanistan’s Future* (March 2005); The Pakistan CGA, *Bridging the Gender Gap—Opportunities and Challenges* (October 2005); and *Unequal Citizens: Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal* (2006), a Gender and Social Exclusion Assessment (GSEA). As part of Bangladesh’s gender program, a CGA is underway and scheduled for completion in Spring 2007.

Just as influential as the reports’ content, the **iterative and consultative process** of their preparation has facilitated ongoing debate in client countries and across Bank sectors about how to tackle gender issues. Key process factors include: in-country consultations with stakeholders and country teams at every stage of preparation and dissemination; Country Director leadership; collection and analysis of original data; and use of qualitative data to enrich analysis of gender-disaggregated quantitative data.

Outcomes Influenced by the Flagship Gender Reports

Creation and Dissemination of Knowledge on Gender Issues. Preparation and dissemination activities for the CGAs and the GSEA have ensured widespread readership—particularly among in-country stakeholders in government, academia, NGOs, and civil society—and helped focus debate among stakeholders. The reports have shed light on the ground reality of gender disparities in the region.

- Boys outnumber girls in school enrollment in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Nepal; although in Bangladesh girls have caught up with boys, there are concerns about reverse gender inequality.
- Dropout rates for girls across the region are higher than those for boys.
- Women have insufficient access to basic health care, adequate contraceptive services, care during pregnancy and delivery, and other types of reproductive health.
- Girls marry at a young age and about 50 percent have their first child by age 20. In many parts of the region – notably India and Bangladesh – dowry puts pressure on families of girls to marry them early, leading to preference for sons.
- Though most countries in the region have achieved robust economic growth, women’s labor force participation rate is among the lowest in the world. Relative to men, women’s voice in decision making at all levels – community, provincial and national – is limited. Where seats in elected bodies are reserved for women, their substantive role is limited.
- At the crux of women’s low status is a discriminatory legal system and poor access to justice. Even when laws emphasize equal rights in inheritance of land and property, in practice, these are seldom invoked. Other family law is similarly weighted against women, weakening their position in the family.

- Legal and judicial systems, as well as law enforcement mechanisms, have failed to address the high incidence of violence against women in both private and public domains.

Having identified determinants of these gender disparities, the reports recommend policy interventions to ameliorate them.

Mainstreaming Gender into Country and Sector Strategies: Operationalizing Recommendations. The gender reports have all seen early success in operationalizing recommendations in select sector programs.

- The **Afghanistan** CGA recommends interventions to enhance female education, health, participation in the labor force and micro-credit schemes, entitlements and protections in Family Law, and the collection of gender-disaggregated data across sectors to document women's and men's involvement and monitor outcomes and investment effects. The report has influenced follow-up studies on gender and micro-finance and parental attitudes toward girls' education. *Microfinance and Gender Roles in Afghanistan* (2006) offers insights on how to not only increase women's rates of using micro-finance, but also strengthen their control over micro-loan resources. In *Household Decision-Making and School Enrollment in Afghanistan*, four case studies identify interventions that enhance parents' incentives to invest in the education of their daughters.
- One of the central pillars of the **Bangladesh** PRSP and CAS is actively mainstreaming gender into the preparation process. Preparation of the CGA has involved a series of in-country consultations, promoting ongoing debate about gender issues. Consultations have cemented Bank partnerships with champions of gender equality in the Government of Bangladesh, other donors such as AusAID, local research organizations such as the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), independent researchers, and women's rights organizations. Survey and other data collection activities related to the CGA's study of gender norms and outcomes have yielded new sources of both qualitative and quantitative data.
- Co-funded by the Bank and the Department for International Development (DFID), the **Nepal** GSEA is being followed by joint work supported by a three-year DFID Social Exclusion Action Program (SEAP). Related studies are monitoring the GSEA's influence on formal policy making and sector programs. Gender mainstreaming has occurred in the Midterm Expenditure Framework and in water resources management projects, in part due to the following findings: groups are an effective modality for empowering women, facilitating their greater inclusion, and creating longer-term development outcomes; inclusive pro-poor budgeting more effectively ensures full access for women than do targeted programs; building water collection and distribution systems in villages saves each woman per village household six hours per day.
- It was the **Pakistan** CGA that first used primary quantitative and qualitative data to understand the nexus between social norms, female mobility constraints, and other determinants of gender inequality. Analysis-informed design has improved existing projects, such as programs in Sindh and Punjab that provide stipends to girls enrolled in middle schools. Insights about mobility constraints on middle school attendance have inspired the Gender Network to fund a pilot project response. The report has influenced pre-PRSP discussions, leading to the explicit recognition that PRSP formulation must reflect gender challenges. The CGA was accompanied by a companion volume of background papers by local experts urging amendments to Family Law and law on violence against women. Timely dissemination of both volumes in May 2006 provoked discussion among women's rights groups, whose activism helped effect the National Assembly's passage of the Women's Protection Bill (WPB). Now rape cases will be governed by penal law rather than by the religious-based Hudood Ordinances, one of which requires four male witnesses to prove rape.

Bank Contribution and Key Factors for Success

In addition to providing technical support and funding for the reports, the Bank has facilitated policy/strategy dialogue with stakeholders during the preparation process—itsself a vehicle for focusing debate on the need to enhance women’s voice as well as access to service delivery.

Key among the factors for success are:

- including stakeholders (e.g., in government, civil society organizations, local research and academic institutions) from the earliest phases of preparation
- iteratively consulting stakeholders and country teams to encourage debate, collect data, and ensure stakeholder feedback, buy-in, and ownership throughout preparation and dissemination
- identifying and cultivating government champions at all levels
- ensuring Country Director ownership.

Lessons Learned/Strategy Going Forward

Gender reports will continue to provide cutting-edge analytical work that—in collaboration with clients—can heighten awareness and in-country debate, as well as enhance political will and consensus in policy implementation. For outcomes to be successful, however, analysis findings *must be operationalized*. Bank projects and other policy support lending should be guided by the insights of analysis, and the *preparation process* should continue to fuel debate that helps prioritize interventions.

These efforts require complementary government actions, e.g. creating appropriate institutional frameworks to support women’s training, market linkages, access to credit and child care facilities, and schooling infrastructure. Ultimately, sustainable improvement of women’s welfare requires strengthening their ability to influence decision-making both within and outside the household.

Unless women are integrated into the political sphere as critical actors, progress will remain slow. This integration can occur by 1) facilitating empowerment programs that seek to build women’s networks and solidarity around issues such as micro-credit; and 2) integrating women’s voice into local governments. The region’s work program to improve service delivery by supporting local governments offers great opportunity to build capacity of newly elected women leaders as part of gender mainstreaming efforts.

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