Empowering Rural Women in the East Asia and Pacific Region

Since the early 1990s, the East Asia and Pacific Region has seen remarkable economic growth and a significant reduction in the number of people living on less than 1.25USD a day (more than 50 percent decrease since 1990). However the growth witnessed has not benefited men and women equally. Rural women in particular are still facing barriers in accessing productive assets, such as land, financial capital, and agricultural extension services. The projects highlighted in this Note have used different ways to identify rural women’s needs and introduced various ways to address them. As stated in the WDR 2012 “gender equality is both an important development objective in its own right as well as good development policy.”

This Note discusses how World Bank projects have identified and addressed gender inequality in rural development in the EAP Region. Projects range from agriculture to fisheries and rural finance. It presents planned actions and steps made toward women’s empowerment; and highlights lessons learned that could inform future development interventions.

### Country Project Gender impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Gender impact</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>Gansu and Inner Mongolia Poverty Reduction Project (1999–2006)</td>
<td>Women’s labor intensity was reduced, sanitation conditions improved and the incidence of diseases lowered, while a decline in the gender gap in schooling outcomes was documented.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>Productive Partnerships in Agriculture Project (2010–16)</td>
<td>Aims to increase support to female farmers in coffee and cocoa industries by establishing agricultural partnerships with the explicit participation of women. Of the total number of beneficiary farmers (6,962) in partnerships, 1,028 are women, representing almost 15 percent of beneficiaries.</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Coastal Resources for Sustainable Development Project (2012–18)</td>
<td>Women will be offered skills enhancement training, linking them to the new jobs emerging at landing sites and fishing ports.</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Rural Finance III (2008–13)</td>
<td>Of the 120,000 borrowers who invested in subprojects with a cost of about US$430 million, 42 percent were women. More importantly—40,000 were first-time borrowers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>Rural Development Project (2007–15)</td>
<td>Aims to benefit 110,000 women through small-scale rural infrastructure investments by increasing the capacity of existing agricultural institutions to provide extension services and veterinary services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Second Northern Mountains Poverty Reduction Project (2010–15)</td>
<td>Rural women’s needs in ethnic minority areas are addressed through literacy and numeracy training, providing business development skills. Over 1,000 training courses and workshops were conducted for about 42,000 participants, of which women’s participation was 32 percent.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Through participating in project activities and various targeted training programs, women have enhanced their productive skills and management capacity and they have become one of the main sources of household income.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA — Productive Partnerships in Agriculture Project (PPAP) (2010–16)

Women are responsible for a large share of agricultural production in Papua New Guinea. PPAP, an ongoing project, supports women in cash-crop agriculture and seeks to improve agricultural outcomes for coffee and cocoa farmers. In addition, women participate in developing the targeting systems aimed at ensuring an equitable distribution of project benefits.

This project increases support to female farmers in coffee and cocoa industries by establishing agricultural partnerships with the explicit participation of women (so far in at least 17 out of 35 partnerships). For the cocoa subsector all the partnerships include activities increasing women’s participation in remunerative cocoa production. This may involve income-generating activities targeting women, while in all cases the participating farmers are offered gender-awareness training. In over half the established agricultural partnerships, a women’s group with distinct entity is participating. Of the total number of beneficiary farmers in partnerships (6,962)—1,028 are women, representing about 15 percent of the beneficiaries. Activities aim at empowering women by, among other things, facilitating floriculture by women as an alternative cash-earning activity, establishing backyard farming as an alternative income source targeting women, ensuring women know about associations and potential linkages to markets and delivering awareness and training on HIV/AIDS, gender equality, and domestic violence.

The next steps for the cocoa PMU is to develop indicators measuring changes in women’s income, equality of control over resources and women’s “voice” in family and community decision making. It also aims to increase the number of women in farming households reporting increased access to and use of information on improved farming practices, processing and marketing.

FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

VIETNAM — Coastal Resources for Sustainable Development Project (2012–18)

The project aims to improve the sustainable management of coastal fisheries by, among other things, promoting women’s roles in households that take part in fisheries co-management schemes. Under the project, women and children will be offered skills enhancement training on a demand-driven basis. This will link them to new jobs at landing sites/fishing ports supported by the project that were also identified as important entry points for gender mainstreaming. In addition, an Impact Evaluation will be conducted and the gender aspect will be one factor assumed to influence the fisheries co-management efforts, since women’s participation is expected to enhance the project’s success at household and community levels. Understanding women’s roles in the context of fisheries co-management is not limited to Vietnam, as this knowledge can be replicated in other Asian countries. This project will be a good case study for gender in fisheries co-management and the rural sociology of fishing communities.

RURAL FINANCE

VIETNAM — Third Rural Finance Project (2008–13)

The objective of the Third Rural Finance Project for Vietnam was to increase economic benefits to rural private enterprises and households by ensuring and increasing their access to finance. This was achieved by enhancing access to financial services for rural entrepreneurs, greater capital investment and employment made by the rural entrepreneurs, as well as increased lending, particularly term lending to the rural private sector for capital investment by all participating financial institutions (PFIs) on market-based terms. The project also had a significant gender focus: it was mandated that for the short-term loans for household and micro-enterprises, the share of women in the borrower pool should be at least 40 percent. Of the 120,000 borrowers who invested in sub-projects with a cost of about US$430 million, 42 percent were women. More importantly, 40,000 were first time borrowers. The overdue
amount as a percentage of loans outstanding was less than 0.40 percent, indicating a very high repayment rate.

**RURAL LIVELIHOODS**


The Rural Development Project aims to benefit 110,000 women through small-scale rural infrastructure investments by 2015. This will be achieved by increasing the capacity of existing agricultural institutions to provide extension services and veterinary services, and by revitalizing the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL). It also entails financing, training and technical assistance to rural businesses. Gender disaggregated data will be collected and an impact assessment will be undertaken to evaluate the project’s impact on women. This will inform the second phase of the project which will potentially include women’s training, value chain improvements for cocoa and coffee production and women’s engagement in these commodity crops. As of July 2011, in 70 percent of the villages surveyed, women said that “all” or “most” of the women participated in project selection. Through the outreach program of the MAL, extension staff work with farmers to provide training and research support. To date, 31,654 farmers have participated in training, with nearly half of these farmers being women.

**CHINA — Sustainable Development in Poor Rural Areas (2010–15)**

This project aims to provide public infrastructure to rural communities that are rarely reached by other support programs by using a Community-Driven Development approach. Women participate in selecting and prioritizing project activities, discuss proposals for community-implemented activities, and conceive subsequent management and maintenance systems. These activities empower women to publicly express their views and enhance their chances of benefiting from agricultural training. This is achieved by:

- Holding separate discussions with women before the plenary village meetings to enhance their participation.
- Establishing individual voting for sub-project ideas. Unlike the usual system where each household has one vote and men tend to represent their families in public discussions, this makes women’s priorities known.
- Ensuring a third of the members of village organizations that oversee project implementation are women and offering them access to training on financial management and procurement. This training enables them to supervise contractors and construction work.


NMPRP-2 seeks to address rural women’s needs in ethnic minority areas, barriers they face in local governance participation and lack of representation in decision-making and managing projects. The project supports the financing of specific activities for women, which may include strengthening Common Interest Group structures, literacy and numeracy training, support for livelihood improvement (including business development skills), and support for specific social protection issues. The project’s Component 2 focuses on commune development budget, by providing block grants to communes to finance small-scale sub-projects at the village level for productive infrastructure and activities that are identified through participatory planning processes. About 7 percent of the total project cost is used to support women’s social and economic activities, as well as social protection-type interventions. Women will choose economic activities that will enhance their economic and social status, under the Commune Women’s Union lead. In terms of capacity building activities, over 1,000 training courses and workshops were conducted for about 42,000 participants, of which women’s participation stood at 32 percent. The Gender Action Plan provided financing for enhancing women’s participation in the project, including promoting women’s subproject prioritization and requiring at least one out of two village representatives in the commune development board to be a woman.

**Lessons Learned**

- To increase rural women’s voices, it is important to first understand what prevents them from attending community gatherings and speaking up. The best way to understand why is to ask women themselves and to ask them separately. This was the case in the Sustainable Development in Poor Rural Areas in China.
- One way to ensure women benefit from a project is making sure they are represented in project management committees. For example, in Vietnam under the Second Northern Mountains Poverty Reduction Project the inclusion of quotas seeks to ensure women’s representation in all project committees and decision-making bodies. While quotas are a small first step to ensure women’s participation in decision making, more analysis is needed to prove their impact. A recent evaluation of the Poverty Reduction Fund in Lao PDR showed that building in a mechanism which favors proposals for public services and small scale infrastructure identified by women in poor rural communities can have a positive impact. Around 650,000 poor people in remote areas gained access to basic services between 2003 and 2011, and 91 percent of the projects reflected women’s priorities.
• Under the Sustainable Development in Poor Rural Areas Project in China women and men beneficiaries could each cast their own vote in order to express their preferences for projects, instead of voting as a household unit whereby individual preferences would not be reflected in the final vote.

• Activities focusing on women’s capacity building can yield positive results by increasing their own and their household’s productivity. In the Gansu and Inner Mongolia Poverty Reduction Project women enhanced their productive skills and management capacity by participating in project activities and various targeted training programs (cropping, livestock raising), and started contributing to the household income.

• Collecting gender-disaggregated data and conducting impact assessments focused on gender can inform the project’s next phase by including actions that will equally benefit men and women, as in the Solomon Islands Rural Development Project.

• Likewise, putting in place a gender-sensitive M&E results-based framework helps map improvements in rural women’s and men’s lives. The Third Rural Finance Project in Vietnam collected gender-disaggregated data, including gender-specific indicators for M&E (for example, share of women borrowers), to help assess project performance during implementation and derive lessons to inform other similar interventions.

ENDNOTES


2. AES Note #10 focuses exclusively on land administration projects in the EAP Region and the positive outcomes on promoting gender equality. Women were empowered through land titling in Lao PDR and under two projects in Indonesia, one of which used the post-disaster reconstruction in 2004 as a window to achieve greater gender equality. In the Philippines, legislation was amended in order to remove the gender bias and title registration forms adopted “and/or” between the names of spouses. Likewise, in Vietnam, in the issuance of Land Use RightsCertificates in the names of both husband and wife strengthened women’s access to land and improved their social status. Guidelines and training materials on gender mainstreaming for government staff were developed in Cambodia, the Philippines, and Indonesia in order to ensure gender balance during project implementation.

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