

Decentralization

This note has been written to provide a starting point to help understand how and why a gender equality perspective is relevant in programming related to decentralization. It is not an all-inclusive guide, rather it sets out initial questions to consider and provides resources to be used in follow-up.

Decentralization -- the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to intermediate and local governments or quasi-independent government organizations and/or the private sector -- is a complex multifaceted concept.¹

Throughout Asia, many countries are experimenting with decentralization to local authorities. Although each case is unique in its process of decentralization, there are some common gender equality issues.

Capacity: The capacity of local institutions to use a gender perspective in their analysis, programmes and initiatives needs to be considered. As the responsibilities of local authorities increase, so do their required capacities. One capacity that should be considered is the capacity of local administrations to integrate the needs and priorities of both women and men in their analysis, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies, programmes and projects.

Local Capacity and Services (Philippines)

One element of a national gender mainstreaming strategy by the National Commission for the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) is to pilot gender mainstreaming in planning processes with local government units. A result achieved has been the establishment or strengthening of organizational mechanisms for gender mainstreaming, for example, provincial and municipal gender and development teams. These changes in turn are resulting in services that are addressing gender equality issues; for example, some communities are able to address gender-based violence with funds they access from local governments. This initiative is supported by CIDA through NCRFW-Institutional Strengthening Project II².

Participation: Women's participation in electoral politics at the local level is an issue across the region. Women's representation in local government in Asia ranges from 2% (Sri Lanka) to 33.3% (India and Bangladesh). While many barriers remain, recent years have also seen important advances in the participation

of women in local politics in, for example, India and Pakistan. There are now experiences to learn from, resources to draw on and expertise in the region. The "reservations" or quotas in some countries have increased the numbers of women which in turn has increased the demand for capacity development and support to these women.

Accountability: The capacity of women's organizations and gender equality advocates to hold local institutions accountable for national commitments to gender equality and women's human rights needs to be strengthened. While women's groups and gender equality advocates possess knowledge and organizing skills, they often lack the technical skills and lobbying experience needed to participate effectively in local policy making processes. A strong grounding in for example economics, public finance, policy analysis and policy/planning processes in their local environment is important in order to propose viable policy alternatives. Gender budget analysis also provides a key means to hold governments accountable for their commitments to gender equality and women's human rights.

Representation: There is a need to question the assumption that local institutions are inherently more democratic or will 'automatically' represent women's interests as well as men's. Although local governments are "closer" to the communities they represent, they often have biases that work against women's equitable participation or the development of gender-responsive policies. Specific actions are required to ensure that the potential gains for gender equality are realized.

Democratic Governance Program (Pakistan)

The program objective is "to promote democratic governance through support for devolution and effective citizen participation, especially that of women." One of the three expected outcomes relates to strengthening citizen participation, and specifically aims to support more effective participation of women in local governance.

Women and local government in India

In 1993 the 73rd Amendment to India's constitution granted constitutional status to Panchayats -- India's units of decentralised self- governance. Among the features of the 73rd Amendment is the reservation for women of at least 33 per cent of the total number of seats at all three tiers of Panchayat institutions.

According to Dr. Bidyut Mohanty of the Institute of Social Sciences (New Delhi), "The Amendment has led to tremendous mobilization of women in the countryside, changing the numerical configuration of local government -- One million women elected representatives and three million women contestants."

The India Linkage Programme is organized around two themes: local governance and human rights -- especially women's human rights. South Asia Partnership will consult with NGOs working in India with women in Panchayats and will build linkages with NGOs in Canada that are also working on human rights and governance.

Gender strategy for a municipal development project (China)

The gender equality strategy (1999) for the *China Integrated Municipal Development Project* focuses on:

- increased knowledge and use of gender analysis in the planning and execution of municipal programs;
- increased capacity of municipal departments to improve gender-equity principles, policies and practices.

Results to date include: use of gender sensitive language in public advertisements by government bodies; integration by city staff of gender sensitive standards into municipal documents.

Resources

- ▶ Beall, Jo (1996). **Urban Governance: Why Gender Matters**, <http://www.undp.org/gender/resources/mono1.html>
- ▶ Corner, Lorraine (1999). **Capacity Building for Gender Mainstreaming**. Bangkok: UNIFEM East & South-East Asia. Bangkok. <http://www.unifem-eseasia.org/TechPapers/mainstreaminghilevel/mainstreaminghilevel.htm#resources>
- ▶ Goetz, Anne Marie and Rob Jenkins (2001) *Gender-sensitive Local Auditing: Initiatives from India to build accountability to women*. **Development Outreach**, World Bank Institute. <http://www1.worldbank.org/devoutreach/article.asp?id=113>
- ▶ Innes, Melissa (ed) (2000). **Accelerating Change: Resources for Gender Mainstreaming**. Proceedings of the Technical Workshop on Gender Mainstreaming, Asia Branch, CIDA.
- ▶ International Union of Local Authorities (IULA). <http://www.iula.org>. Among other information provided, the IULA has a Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government.
- ▶ Torres, Amaryllis T. et al. (1994). **Gender and development - Making the bureaucracy gender-responsive: A sourcebook for advocates, planners and implementers**. UNIFEM (and the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women).
- ▶ Phitsanulok Declaration (2001): A Milestone in the Advancement of Women in Local Governance. The first-ever AP Summit of Women Mayors and Councilors was held on June 2001 in Phitsanulok, Thailand http://www.apgen.apdip.net/roundup/july-sept_2001_story6.htm
- ▶ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Country Reports on the State of Women in Urban Local Government (UN ESCAP) <http://www.unescap.org/huset/women/reports/index.htm>
- ▶ World Bank Institute (WBI). "Gender, Decentralization and Public Finance." <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/publicfinance/gender.htm>

¹ World Bank (nd) What is decentralization?. DecentralizationNet. Accessed 15/11/01. <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/decentralization/Different.htm>

² National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women; Institutional Strengthening Project II. <http://www.ncrfw.gov.ph/aboutus/isp2.htm>