

Gender Mainstreaming in Transport Projects in Nepal

Key policy recommendations

- ▶ **Women's lives can be improved** through safer, better access to services and through income-earning opportunities created by transport projects.
- ▶ **Quotas or reservations are needed as a first step** to provide an opportunity for disadvantaged people (including women) to participate in development plans and programmes.
- ▶ **Continued capacity building and social empowerment** of women and other disadvantaged groups is crucial to enable them to make their participation meaningful in a way that they are able to influence decisions in their favour.
- ▶ Stronger **recognition of women's unpaid care work burden is essential**. Women make massive, undervalued contributions to household social and economic welfare, which limits their time to participate in paid employment outside.
- ▶ There is a need for **redistribution of women's unpaid care-work** if they are to benefit fully from the opportunities opened up to them by the state and other authorities.

Brief problem summary

The Department of Local Infrastructure Development and Agricultural Roads (DoLIDAR) under the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD) is responsible for rural transport and development in Nepal. It has a Local Infrastructure Development Policy (LIDP) which includes due consideration of gender and social inclusion. The Ministry has its own Gender and Social Inclusion Policy, which must be mainstreamed by local bodies - District Development Committees (DDCs), Municipalities and Village Development Committees (VDCs) - in all local infrastructure development projects. Although Nepal is said to be progressive in terms of 'formulating' gender and social inclusion (GESI) policies (mostly based on positive learning experiences from donor-supported projects), the challenge of effectively implementing such policies widely, to bring about gender equality and genuine transformations, remains.

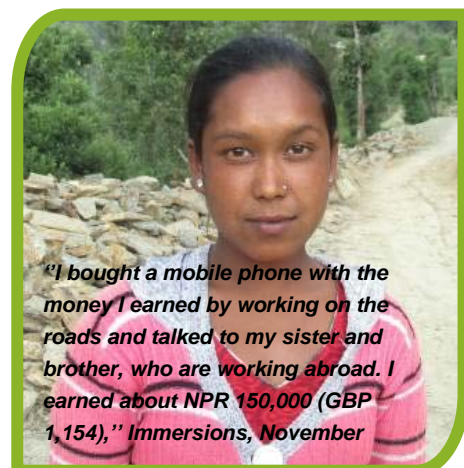
The Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), on behalf of the Government of Switzerland, has been assisting MoFALD and DoLIDAR in the sub-sectors of rural roads, road bridges and trail bridges for many years. A GESI approach is mainstreamed in all SDC supported transport sector projects. The approach is meant to bring about transformative changes by ensuring:

- a) Participation of women and other disadvantaged groups (DAGs) in rural road and bridge programmes;
- b) A conducive working environment (covering safety, insurance and child care) for women;
- c) Women and disadvantaged groups are targeted for employment with equal wages;
- d) Women and disadvantaged groups are proportionally represented in User Committees in decision-making positions; and
- e) Women are trained in construction related activities.

Most relevant evidence: Income earning opportunities for women

Women, if given appropriate opportunities, can participate in paid employment in road and bridge construction. Women recognise that such construction work provides them with an opportunity to earn an income outside the home. For some women, daily life, which was formerly confined to household and agricultural work, has been expanded to include work with income earning potential beyond the domestic sphere.

Figure 1: Kumari Nepali, a female worker in Ramechhap, November 2016



However, such opportunities for construction work do not arise unless there are specific interventions targeting women and DAGs.

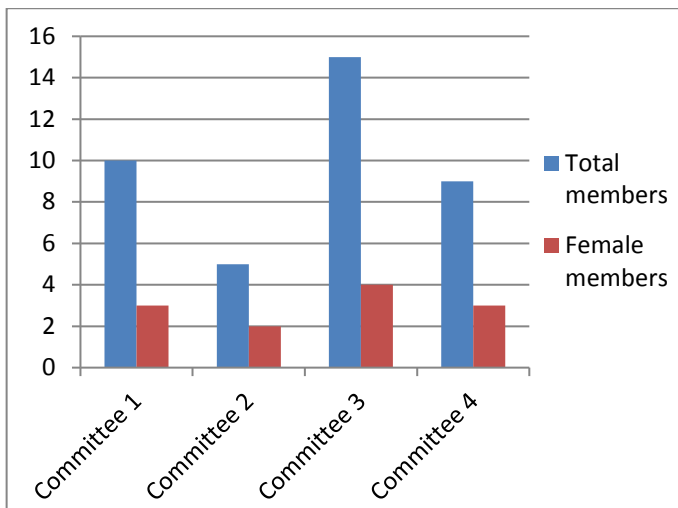
It takes significant effort within projects to identify key target groups and make them aware of the opportunities (available jobs, appropriate provision of facilities for women, equal wages) so that they are encouraged to participate in road and bridge building groups.

"I bought a mobile phone with the money I earned by working on the roads and talked to my sister and brother, who are working abroad. I earned about NPR 150,000 (UKP 1,154)," Recalls Ms. Kumari Nepali during immersions in Ramechhap, November 2016.

Women's participation, quotas and capacity building

Project quotas (at least 33% women labourers) are designed to ensure women and discriminated groups are included in road and bridge User Committees (UCs). Quotas are good as a first step, but women in the UCs often find they are limited to being 'doers' rather than decision makers, by being included in the UCs so as to fulfil project criteria and quotas. This is supported by the data in Figure 2, which shows that a majority of committee members are still men, who are also the decision-makers in the UCs. While female representation in UCs is 30% overall (12 out of 39 total), there were only three women out of 16 total members (19%) in decision making roles in four UCs. Therefore, although female UC members in general fulfil the quota target, they do not proportionally represent the decision makers of the User Committees.

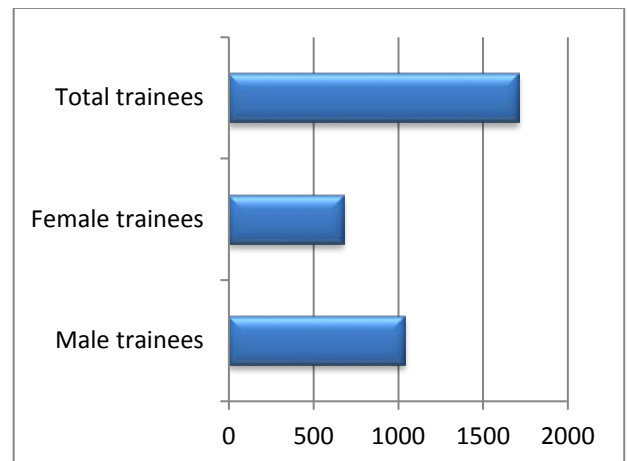
Figure 2: Women's participation in road UCs



Reasons for women not being recognised as decision makers in the UCs include constraints such as illiteracy, lack of record keeping skills and lack of confidence in conducting arithmetic tasks. Arguably, these constraints should be addressed through continuous empowerment and capacity building measures which are budgeted in projects. Lack of adequate recognition of these constraints and the means to address them greatly hampers the transformative changes required. Despite this, a female secretary of a UC in Ramechhap shared that she had benefited from the training on leadership development, and is now confident to keep records and accounts.

Women's participation in training programmes is minimal compared to men's (Figure 3). Although projects included provision for women to earn more through training in construction skills, few women have actually benefited from such training. This is due to women's needs and constraints not being adequately addressed.

Figure 3: Women's participation in training



A revision of project implementation procedures and policies would help to address the key constraints to women's participation. Such measures might include a reduction in the duration of training required (currently 390 hours for basic level) and rebalancing this with on-the-job training, moving training venues to more accessible locations so that it is easier for local women to participate, making child care provision for mothers with small children, allowing flexible working hours, and equal pay for equal work. These are small initiatives which could substantially improve the meaningful participation of women in the road and bridge construction projects.

Figure 4: Women at local market in Rampur, Okhaldhunga, February 2017



Women's time poverty

Although women can be seen doing all types of construction work, the number of women working at individual road and bridge construction sites tends to be relatively low. It was repeatedly reported that women's participation was irregular. Women suggested that domestic work demands were a key issue, given the increase in their overall workload when road construction work during the day had to be combined with their usual unpaid household chores.

These duties still need completing after a full day working at the road/bridge construction site. To ensure that women go to work and earn some cash, few husbands (less than five percent) help their wives with their household chores. Project Managers struggle to meet the target of 40% of female workers because of this challenge. Certainly, in terms of the number of working days they can contribute, and consequent total wages earned, women are benefiting less compared to men as a result of their time poverty. Therefore, continuing with flexible working hours for women (and considering fewer working hours) is important.

Recognition and redistribution of women's unpaid care-work

Women have to manage household chores, take care of their elderly family members and children, and participate in agricultural production, all of which are unpaid. Women's work certainly contributes substantially to the health, economic and social well-being of the family, yet is not economically valued. Where women have adequate family support (either

sons, daughters, husbands, or 'in-laws' substituting for women's work at home and taking care of the household chores), there has been some improvement in women's opportunities to participate in work outside the family setting.

Figure 5: Mainali, women in a local health post, Okhaldhunga, 2016.



This means that, within the household, there is a need for better understanding of what it means to be paid and to be economically active. At the same time, the economic value of unpaid work needs specific recognition.

Figure 6: Mainali, Host household son in Ramechhap, November 2016



"I help my mother when I don't have my home works from school, this has helped my mother to go out to work in road construction and earn money", shares, a host household boy in Ramechhap.

Between members of the household (both male and female), some redistribution of the workload (unpaid household work) is essential. The only alternative is to hire paid helpers as a substitute. Subtle changes in household responsibilities will have a significant impact on women and their ability to work on construction projects and earn cash incomes, which will increase investment opportunities and purchasing power for women, and bring about socio-economic benefits to the household and the wider community.

Conclusions and recommendations

Although rural transport projects in Nepal have positively benefited many people in terms of accessing services, opportunities and resources, the benefits that should have been accrued by women especially have been limited due to various constraints. These constraints, related to women's time poverty, mobility constraints, and capacity constraints, need to be more carefully addressed within the frameworks of policy provision.

Projects need to be more flexible, adaptive and innovative in accommodating the specific needs, constraints and responsibilities of women and other vulnerable people. Unsurprisingly, the roads and bridges project staff are primarily concerned with meeting construction targets and delivering projects to time, cost and quality within allocated quotas. However, there is increasing recognition that by taking gender inclusion into consideration and allowing meaningful participation of women in the planning, design, construction and maintenance of road and bridge works, the beneficiaries of these infrastructure projects will also be fully engaged in their implementation.

Quotas and allocations for women are necessary and a positive step towards equality, but conscious efforts have to be made towards women's continuous empowerment in order to effectively mainstream gender in transport and infrastructure projects in Nepal. Male community members need substantial sensitisation to ensure that women are listened to and given space to meaningfully influence community decisions.

A more conducive environment and better training catering to their specific needs will enable women to take full advantage of these opportunities. Providing child care facilities that are trusted by women labourers, adjusting working hours and providing flexible working time, equal pay, and accessible training venues are just a few examples of affirmative actions that would improve the participation and commitment of women in infrastructure projects.

Summary of Project/Background

WISE Nepal was contracted by ReCAP to conduct research on "Gender Mainstreaming in Rural Transport Projects in Nepal: Case Studies of Transformative Roles of Women and Disadvantaged Groups (DAGs) at Household and Community levels". The research examined whether and how gender mainstreaming activities in selected rural transport projects

implemented by the Government of Nepal have transformed the lives of rural women and disadvantaged groups. The research was carried out in Ramechhap and Okhaldhunga Districts in Nepal, where rural roads and bridge projects have been implemented by the Government of Nepal.

References or further information sources

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'*Immersion*' is a qualitative research method that has been used in some anthropological studies across Asia and has added qualitative value to many quantitative empirical studies. This method together with **Focus Group Discussions** and **In-depth Interviews** with the local stakeholders contributed to building the grounded understanding of local conditions that led to the policy recommendations presented here.

WISE Nepal, a member of International Network of Women Engineers and Scientists (INWES), is a non-profit distributing company, which is committed to promote the role of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in Nepal for Nepal's inclusive social and economic development.