

EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC REGION

Social Development Notes

INNOVATIONS, LESSONS, AND BEST PRACTICE

Poor Rural Communities Development Project Gender Mainstreaming in China

The Poor Rural Communities Development Project (PRCDP) is a rural development intervention covering some of the poorest communities in **Guangxi, Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces in China**. The project has a strong outreach to ethnic minority areas and aims to improve livelihoods security and achieve sustained participation of rural people in project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. It does this by heavily involving farmers in decisions on the kinds of rural infrastructure and livelihood activities that will be implemented in their communities. A facilitated process brings households together to discuss the key challenges faced by their communities and to identify solutions that can be carried out with strong participation from the farmers' themselves.



Ensuring that local investments are responsive to women and men's priorities is a key feature of PRCDP. As beneficiaries play a substantial role in project implementation, gender analysis carried out by the team focused on how women and men access basic services and on what their respective roles in decision-making at the community and household level were. The analysis was undertaken using qualitative research methodologies such as participant observation, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. These were either separate discussions held with women or consultations with groups with a balanced men/women composition. The aim of the analysis was to **identify entry points for women's participation in the community-based activities promoted by the project**. Gender analysis also focused on how the implementation arrangements proposed by communities would impact men and women differently. The key concern in this case was to ensure that implementation arrangements did not place an undue burden on women who already have a particularly heavy workload of agricultural activities and domestic work. The prepa-



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ratory analysis carried out by the project focused on how women's economic situation and development priorities are often wrongly assumed to be the same as those of other poor groups. It sought to understand how: (i) local customs, beliefs and attitudes limit women's participation, (ii) women's economic and domestic workloads pose important time constraints to their participation in community activities, and (iii) customs, policies and laws limit women's access to resources.

Creating space for women's voices to be heard was the next step in the process. Based on a detailed understanding of gender dynamics within communities, the project then aimed to introduce some key changes in the usual village planning processes. A key change introduced on this front was to ensure that women were present during village meetings and were able to express their preferences in terms of project investments. An analysis of gender relations in the Hongshui Township (Rongshui County), for example, indicated that in the Miao minority community, women customarily do not have equal rights to participate in social affairs and decision making. Community planning processes need therefore to create space for women to voice their opinions regarding sub-project planning. This was achieved through the introduction of separate planning meetings with women in preparation of public discussions. In addition, participatory methodologies were used to highlight how women and men's priorities differ when it comes to the selection of sub-projects for implementation with community funds. In the specific case of the Hongshui Township, an equal number of women and men participants were asked to vote for their preferred sub-project using seeds of different colors (yellow for women and white for men). Women showed a strong preference for the construction of social infrastructure (health posts and schools)



while men focus was integrated agricultural development. By getting men and women to vote separately on their preferences facilitators were able to identify key differences in priorities

In addition, PRDCP **gives women a seat at the table when it comes to decision-making at village level.** The project uses a 30 percent target for women's participation in the village groups created to implement sub-projects. This is intended to make sure that beyond the planning stage women are able to benefit from the additional capacity building activities implemented by the project and are able to participate actively in village organizing, in monitoring construction work and in mobilizing the community for the operation and maintenance of the sub-project investments. In order to support local facilitators in this, a project specific gender-check list was put in place as a step-by-step guide for gender-sensitive community planning. In addition, a strong partnership with DFID, who provided grant resources linked to the project, meant that the gender dimensions of project implementation were systematically reviewed during supervision, discussed with county and provincial counterparts and captured systematically in progress reports.

Finally, a thorough methodology for participatory monitoring and evaluation was adopted by PRDCP with a strong focus on assessing how men and women perceive their participation and ability to engage in community-level decision making processes. Specific interviews and focus groups discussions with women and men participants (as well as with poor and marginalized groups within the community) provided insights regarding the quality of facilitation. In particular, collecting feedback from women during project implementation also enabled them to explain the changes between the project plan and actual implementation. Women were requested to state their satisfaction with the planning process and to rate "how well they were involved in decision making". In addition to the corrective action noted above, data collected by PRCDP also enabled the team to demonstrate how women's participation improved over the years and allowed them to gain a better understanding of the factors that explain better quality of facilitation.

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