Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

UN Peace Fund for Nepal Strategies and Lessons Learned

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is a concept that addresses improving access to livelihood assets and services for ALL, including the women, poor, and excluded. It supports more inclusive policies and mindsets and increases the voice and influence of all including of the women, poor and excluded[1].

The United Nations Peace Fund Nepal (UNPFN) recognised Gender Equality and Social Inclusion approaches as a significant cross cutting issue for the peacebuilding projects funded by this programme. Whilst conflict can affect all people, the experiences and consequences differ according to one's gender, ethnic, sexual, social, economic, religious, cultural and political identity in society. The GESI approach ensured that the targeted vulnerable groups were able to actively participate in and benefit from this fund that was established after the end of a decade long conflict in Nepal.

A. STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

UNPFN emphasized the gender equality and social inclusion approach throughout its strategies for different priority plans, and projects from screening for funding to implementation. This fund incorporated gender considerations into manuals and guidance notes and strongly advocated to the participating agencies to allocate resources and provide special consideration to gender equality and social inclusion issues.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion approach at fund level

UNPFN made clear efforts to enhance the integration of gender in the management and administration of the Fund. The UNPFN reflected a commitment to supporting gender-responsive peacebuilding in its Fund priorities. One of the sub-components of the Funding Round Strategic Outcome was set as, "An inclusive and gender-representative culture of dialogue and conflict transformation is expanded and strengthened, contributing to conflict prevention and social cohesion during Nepal's transitional peace-building process."

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion approach in project development

UNPFN guidelines for concept notes included requirements to address gender in several parts, including the project strategy, under which the guidelines prompted projects to: 'Ensure that the project strategy explicitly identifies how the project will incorporate strategies to address gender equality and social inclusion issues and will reach out and benefit specific female and/or vulnerable groups.' Applicants also needed to explain how an inclusive, conflict and gender sensitive approach was ensured in the selection of beneficiaries.

In addition, each project indicated the extent to which it considered gender, through a gender marker system. Since 2012, all UNPFN projects were instructed to calculate the amount of resources they allocated in their project budgets to addressing women's needs and/or advancing gender equality. To support agencies' capacity for gender-responsive project design, during the concept note phase, an orientation on gender was provided to all agencies interested in drafting concept notes.

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[1] Draft Background paper, Defining GESI Operational Framework, July 2016, p. 24.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion approach at the project level

UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) 1325 and 1820 contributed to the development of localized guidelines and programmes in Nepal by UNPFN and its partner agencies. It strengthened inclusive elements of the Nepal peace process, including the adoption of a five-year National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCRs 1325 and 1820 (the first in South Asia).

Projects approved under the 2nd priority plan organised a 1-day orientation for project staff on gender, UNSCRs 1325/1820 and the UN Secretary General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. The Secretariat supported projects to ensure that results frameworks, monitoring and evaluation of projects included indicators and gender disaggregated data to measure both achievements in addressing the needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups and advancing gender equality, but also how this was done and the success of efforts to integrate gender. The end evaluation of projects reported on overall expenditure for gender equality and social inclusion considering 15% allocation of the total project budget for cross cutting issues.

B. LESSON LEARNED

The following key lessons have been documented from eleven projects funded by the UN Peace Fund Nepal. The project end evaluation reports, mid-term assessments, and annual progress reports were reviewed as references to the experiences, successes and challenges faced by these projects.

a) There is a clear difference between 'women-friendly projects' and 'gender-sensitive projects'. The former advocates for women to become agents of change; the latter addresses issues of equality and equity. Gender-sensitive projects went beyond promoting the participation of women, to taking specific measures to address access to and quality of services for all. For example, providing female counsellors to counsel women is a 'women-friendly' approach; providing 'gender-sensitive counselling'

means building the capacity of counsellors to understand that we are each impacted differently by conflict and trauma and therefore program development needs to take that into consideration when they are being designed.

b) From a gender equality and social inclusion point of view, the efforts to pay attention to and monitor participation of traditionally marginalized and vulnerable groups in projects achieved some success as well. For example, one project realized that child support, often focused on single mother households, and excluded single father households. So, they adjusted the project's focus to single-parent households. In another case, monitoring of training participants showed that a number of intended beneficiaries were not participating due to their illnesses. The project's initiative to provide health support significantly increased participation.

c) Several projects had to address specific challenges to women's participation, such as security concerns, which restricted women's movement or family and child care obligations which made women's participation difficult. It was found that projects needed to incorporate a 'Do No Harm' approach to understand the vulnerabilities of specific groups. Adopting Women's Safety Audit (WSA) at Village District Committee level by a partner UN agency was found useful to raise awareness about women's safety and security in the project districts and increased women's participation in training and dialogues.

In some projects, a community based approach was needed to address some restrictions to participation like language or literary barrier for some rural communities or the elderly that prevented them from accessing information services. One project found that the Help Desk and Information Centre were useful initiatives for accessing information and having services in legal provisions and the court system, for women, marginalized and disadvantaged groups including Dalits, Indigenous and Madhesis.

d) Simultaneously providing capacity building and financial support contributed to motivating women in economic empowerment and peacebuilding. Conflict affected women were given seed-grants to start income generating activities, and also received leadership training to support their participation in the community security planning in Bardia and Kailali districts. Many respondents who had received seed grants felt increased economic security from having their own income, and were found to be more motivated to participate in local decision making and peacebuilding processes.

e) Registration with the government agencies helped many conflict affected girls to receive different public support and being integrated economically. One UNPFN project's focus was to ensure that former female child soldiers were registered with government agencies and thereby eligible for existing forms of support, particularly economic programmes. For instance, around 248 former female child soldiers were incorporated into the credit and savings groups established at the district level by the Department of Women, Children and Social Welfare. By linking them with social services, specifically micro-credit projects, this project laid the groundwork for the girls' continued economic reintegration. By working with children and youths, this project was also able to promote social cohesion, and community acceptance and participation of female participants, which resulted in many girls, formerly associated with armed groups, being active participants and leaders of local children's clubs.