



The Gujarat Rural Roads Project: A Case Study on AIIB and Gender

Overview

The Gujarat Rural Roads Project is one of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)'s first stand-alone projects in India, with a stated objective "to improve the road transport connectivity by providing all weather rural roads to about 4,000 villages in all the 33 districts of the state of Gujarat."

In July 2019, the New Delhi-based Programme on Women's Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (PWESCR) published a detailed study of the gender impacts of the project. PWESCR found that adverse impacts on women were not addressed, and that women were unable to take full advantage of the improved connectivity, access, economic benefits, and social services that were the anticipated benefits of the project.

Gaps in Implementation

INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN CONSULTATIONS, INFORMATION DISCLOSURE, AND GRIEVANCE REDRESS

AIIB's Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) requires that consultations be "gender inclusive," but PWESCR's research shows that women were not included in consultations for the project. The project documents do not mention any efforts to ensure that women and girls are included in public consultation processes. The E&S consultant stated that only approximately 10% of

participants in consultations were women. The findings suggest that AIIB should better identify the steps required to ensure women's inclusion in consultations, including measures to address gendered barriers to women and girls' participation (such as timing, location, unpaid care work, and the potential need for separate consultations for women and men); collect data about women and girls' participation; identify gender-specific concerns during consultations; and address these concerns in project design and implementation.

These findings point to a need to strengthen AIIB capacity to monitor a project's implementation, to ensure that all aspects of the ESF are complied with in practice.

Project documents committed to gender-sensitive consultation and information disclosure prior to project implementation, as well as the establishment of a gender-sensitive grievance redress mechanism. However, many project-affected people, regardless of gender, stated

that they lacked information about the grievance redress mechanism. Affected people also reported that, in several villages, consultations never occurred and information about the project was not disclosed, to men or women, until after the road was completed.

IMPACTS ON FEMALE WORKERS

Women working on road construction sites reported experiencing sexual harassment at night in the camps, perpetrated by men in the host communities. As a result, women moved to makeshift tents in the fields, where they lacked access to water and other sanitary facilities. Project documents identify some limited measures to reduce risks to female employees living in the labor camps, but these measures are not comprehensive, and do not address the risks that female workers may face from men in the host communities.

PWESCR's research also highlights significant and pervasive discrimination against women working on the construction of the roads, and the informal nature of their work. Women had been promised wages that were 10% less than the wages of men performing unskilled labor for the same number of hours on the worksite. Furthermore, of the six road construction sites that PWESCR visited, only 10–15% of workers were women, and women were working only in unskilled positions.

ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION OF OTHER PROJECT IMPACTS ON WOMEN

AIB's ESF requires an assessment of a project's gender risks and impacts. PWESCR found that a number of risks to women and girls were not addressed during project implementation. PWESCR emphasizes that women primarily and disproportionately use roads as pedestrians, not as drivers of or passengers in private vehicles. However, the shoulders or sidewalks necessary to protect pedestrians were not always constructed along the new paved roads. Where shoulders and sidewalks were constructed, they were not designed to prevent danger to pedestrians. Pedestrian safety and lighting were not mentioned in the project documents. Gender was not effectively mainstreamed in the assessment of project risks in the project's documents, and only a few gender risks and impacts were considered, in a very limited way.

BARRIERS WOMEN FACED IN ACCESSING PROJECT BENEFITS

PWESCR found that paving the roads alone did not improve women's access to livelihood-generating activities—particularly in the absence of adequate shoulders and lighting that would ensure women's safety. Access to social services is cited as another key benefit of the project. Project

documents highlight the improvements in ambulatory services for pregnant women that have resulted from “rural connectivity initiatives” in Gujarat, including improvements in rural roads. However, these improvements appear to have resulted from previous projects, and there is no systematic analysis of the ways that women and girls might benefit from the Gujarat Rural Roads project specifically.

Recommendations

The findings from field research and an analysis of project documents demonstrate that AIB must significantly scale up its efforts to address gender issues. Specifically, BIC recommends that AIB:

- Improve the AIB Project Document to describe specific steps that the project has taken to address gender issues and support inclusive development;
- Clarify ESF requirements to ensure consistency and compliance;
- Improve assessment of gender impacts to include the risk of sexual abuse, exploitation, and gender-based violence against both community members and workers; as well as assessment of potential barriers to women's equal access to project benefits;
- Enhance the design of consultations by addressing barriers to women's participation;
- Ensure gender-sensitive information disclosure and grievance redress by requiring gender balance on grievance redress committees and documentation of efforts to make information and grievance redress accessible to women;
- Address issues affecting women employed in project construction by assessing the risks of discrimination, sexual harassment, unhealthy working conditions, and informality through gender disaggregated monitoring of job classifications and pay;
- Strengthen assessments of contractor ability to comply with the ESF and national law, particularly labor provisions;
- Hire additional gender experts on AIB staff;
- Improve staff capacity for conducting due diligence and monitoring project implementation.