

Gender Mainstreaming

The Vulnerable May be Negatively Impacted by Development Assistance; Broaden Focus from Women to Change the Mindsets of Men and Decision-Makers

Gender can be defined within social and cultural contexts, and can refer to the roles of men and women as well as their reciprocal relationship. On a global basis, females are far more likely to be placed in socially, politically and economically disadvantaged positions than men. As such, one of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations is “gender equality and the empowerment of women.”

JICA promotes “gender mainstreaming,” a comprehensive approach to incorporate the perspective of gender in all stages of planning, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in all policies, programs and projects to clarify gender-based development issues, needs and the impacts.

Overview of Issue

The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to achieve “gender equality”^{*1} in all fields of society. It is a process to identify men’s and women’s development issues and needs, as well as the impact on men and women of development policies, programs and projects, at every stage of implementation, monitoring and evaluation, on the premise that all development policies, programs and projects impact men and women differently.

Gender is often unconsciously constructed based on the mentality, culture, traditions and customs of a country. It also affects various policies, systems and organizations, while people may not even be aware of its influences. Consequently, it is essential to support national machinery such as the Ministry of Women’s Affairs to ensure that the policies and systems in partner countries adopt a gender-based perspective.

In most cases, however, statistics, data and indices are not tabulated according to gender. If a philosophy of gender is introduced without fully comprehending the society in a target region, it may in fact produce negative results such as exacerbating gender disparity. It is critical to collect and comprehensively analyze fundamental data needed for plans and projects by gender, age, ethnicity and religious affiliation, and to develop human resources who have this perspective.

Although it is important to promote women’s empowerment as part of efforts to advance gender mainstreaming, focusing solely on women may not achieve the desired results. This also requires changing the consciousness of men, decision-makers and socially influential people such as administrative officials, educators, politicians and religious leaders. In other words, it is necessary to reform the social structure and systems surrounding women.

It is essential to review areas and projects that at first glance may appear not to require a gender perspective and provide support based on the different roles of men and women. For example, one form of support would be developing agricultural equipment that is easy for women to use since they are responsible for the majority of agricultural work. Another example would be encouraging the participation of women in water quality control organizations.

^{*1} According to the “DAC Guidelines for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Development Co-Operation” issued by the OECD Department of Assistance Committee (DAC), “Gender equality does not mean that men and women need to become the same, but that their opportunities and life chances are equal. The emphasis on gender equality and women’s empowerment is not based on a single model of gender equality for all societies and cultures, but reflects a concern that women and men have equal opportunities to make choices about what gender equality means, and work in partnership to achieve it. Because of current disparities, equal treatment of women and men is insufficient as a strategy to achieve gender equality.” (Extract taken from page 13 of the Guidelines)

JICA Activities

For many years, JICA has considered the importance of gender issues and developed a basic strategy for implementing gender-responsive projects. JICA has also established an organizational framework for gender mainstreaming.

Actual assistance includes strengthening organizational capacity and creating policies and systems for gender equality in Afghanistan, Cambodia and Nepal by supporting national machinery such as the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. To promote the empowerment of women, JICA provides support in wide-ranging areas. JICA works to invigorate women’s centers in Nigeria, nurture entrepreneurs, particularly women, in poverty-stricken areas of Mexico and Honduras, and improve education for women in Yemen. Rather than focus solely on women, JICA conducts activities that will take root in society such as encouraging more women to go to women’s centers by advertising on the radio in order to gain the understanding of husbands and other family members, and getting religious leaders to convey the importance of education for females to their fathers.

In this way, instead of projects in which women are the sole beneficiaries, efforts are made to ensure that the perspective of women is reflected in results and actions. In the forestry industry in India, in addition to simply employing women, additional support was provided to generate income so that they don’t have to cut young trees to get wood; they can purchase alternative fuel instead. A plan to develop tourism in El Salvador is being formulated that will benefit both men and women by identifying their differing roles.

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the need to address new issues in gender and development, such as trafficking in persons and other forms of gender-based violence. Trafficking in persons is a serious crime and a grave violation of



human rights that inflicts severe emotional and physical suffering on the victims, who are mainly women and children, but include men as well. It calls for prompt and appropriate response from a humanitarian perspective, as well as from the perspective of putting a stop to international organized crime. The Japanese government is taking measures to address the issue, and formulated Japan's 2009 Action Plan of Measures to Combat Trafficking in Persons originally established in 2004. Trafficking in persons is a complex and broad-ranging issue, and JICA is

providing assistance focused on "prevention of trafficking in persons" and "protection and reintegration of trafficked persons" in Thailand, Viet Nam and Myanmar. It is critical to create a regional framework because trafficked persons move across borders. Regional seminars are held in Thailand and video conferences are conducted regularly that connect JICA headquarters with the three countries in order to share information on the situation as well as the measures being taken in each country.

Case Study

Activation of Women Development Centers

Nigeria: Project on Activation of Women Development Centers

There are over 500 Women Development Centers (WDCs) in Nigeria. However, most of the WDCs are not being run effectively due in main to a lack of funding.

JICA has assisted with the formulation of guidelines for activating WDCs based on experiences through training and providing materials and equipment at six centers in Kano State from January 2007.

A Place of Learning that Enhances the Lives of Poor Women

The proportion of people living under the poverty line on less than US\$1 a day is extremely high in Nigeria at 70%. The impact of a traditional patriarchal society has exacerbated gender disparity in the adult literacy rate and income.

More than 500 WDCs have been established throughout Nigeria since the latter half of the 1980s for the purpose of empowering women at the grassroots level through vocational training and basic literacy education. The National Centre for Women Development, affiliated with the Nigerian Ministry of Women's Affairs, conducted a nationwide study on WDCs from 2001 and found that although the centers improve the lives of poor women, they are not functioning effectively. The study recognized that needs are not being met mainly due to a lack of funding.

JICA started a three-year project in January 2007 to establish a model for the appropriate management of WDCs to ensure their continued utilization as places of learning and

empowerment that contribute to enhancing the lives of poor women. The project activated six WDCs in Kano State through training and by providing equipment and materials, and based on this experience, JICA supported the formulation of guidelines for activating WDCs throughout Nigeria.

As a result, an increasing number of women in the community who previously found it difficult to go out have started using the WDCs of their own accord. Husbands even support their wives going to the centers. The project has also deepened understanding of the WDCs in the community, including religious leaders and village elders. Sewing and knitting

machines are provided to WDC graduates via soft loans. In the future, it is expected that the effects of the projects will spread to other states as the guidelines are implemented.



A Women Development Center