

II. Local Governance: Decentralization, Community Planning And Service Provision

What is the Issue? What is the Goal?

Many local government issues overlap with issues discussed in the previous section on governance at the national level. However, certain aspects and issues are specific to local government in terms of gender mainstreaming.

The issue of **decentralization** is one of these aspects. Ideally, decentralization will bring a transfer of resources and devolution of decision-making power regarding issues and areas closest to and best dealt with by local government. This means that local governments need to be particularly **responsive** to the actual needs of the community – which inherently means attention to the particular needs of both men and women at the community level.

On the one hand, this highlights the importance of **gender-balanced representation** in official local government structures. In few places has gender balance actually been achieved. Representation of women in local and national politics vary in the world. Where as in some countries like Turkey and Azerbaijan, female representatives are few in elected local positions, there are some western societies there is a higher proportion of female representation in local governments in comparison to national governments. There may be various reasons for this:

In countries where there is strong patriarchal culture but there are local elections, both men and women tend to downplay the importance of women in their own community. In most societies male and female voters may associate power positions with men only. In small constituencies this becomes particularly a significant hindrance for women candidates. Their families may not want them to run for office, thinking that they will be an outlier and will be an embarrassment. The community may not vote for them because they may be perceived as threatening the boundaries.

On the other hand there is also a counter tendency. Women are very close to local issues, educations, services, etc. They are the primary users and consumers of them. So they may be more interested in local politics and feel more competent and women may want to have “one of them” in power.

On the other hand, this highlights the need for **participatory mechanisms**, i.e. the need for local governance structures to involve both men and women from the wider community in decision-making and policy-making processes, so that both women’s and men’s knowledge can inform these decisions and policies.

Management of **community services and resources** is of particular importance here:

- **Social, Health and Education Services:** Because women are often responsible for caring for children, the sick and the elderly, they often possess unique knowledge about the most efficient and effective ways of providing social and health care services. This knowledge needs to be understood and considered in the formulation of policies.

At the same time, because health and education are often considered “women’s business”, the needs and perspectives of men in the community may not be adequately considered by policy-makers. In some countries refugees for protecting women from

domestic violence and trafficking are run by local governments and municipalities. Women in local council tend to ask for allocation of resources for such activities and pressurize the local authorities towards opening such institutions. Bringing community men into this loop of participatory decision-making and understanding their needs and perspectives might also encourage more male involvement in areas of life connected to social reproduction.

- **Planning, Housing and Transportation:** These services have strong gender dimensions. The rising number of female-headed households in both so-called industrialized and developing countries, combined with the fact that women are generally more active in informal community management, means that women's needs and knowledge must be taken into consideration when making decisions on house design, zoning and site layout.¹ Amongst examples of such women specific needs community centers, easily accessible health centers, crèches and refuges can be cited.

Similarly, because women are often responsible for household management, they have specific needs and unique knowledge when it comes to waste removal, energy, water supplies and other community services. Such a unique knowledge should be used as incentive to integrate them into local politics. As they have expertise in these areas this will improve the standards of services.

Furthermore, men and women often have different transportation needs: while men will more have use private means, including services provided by work, women tend to rely much more heavily on public transport. Furthermore, women often require public transportation at non-peak hours for the completion of parenting and household-related chores. Transportation planning needs to take these issues into consideration.

- Local politics as a stepping stone for national politics. The most important significance of local politics on gender relations, is that the issues at stake are very vital for women and women can indicate interest in these areas. They can express knowledge, opinions and make choices. Some policy problems of National government such as foreign relations may be alienating at first stance for women, but drinking water at home or power cuts or kindergardens for children will be in the interest areas for women. So we can promote them in local politics as a stepping stone for national politics. We also know that in some countries participation in local politics is an important area for gaining political experience and skills at a small scale for men and women alike. So women should be encouraged in local politics besides the national politics.

The **goal** is therefore two-fold:

- to ensure **balanced participation** between men and women in local governance, which includes **removal of structural and systemic barriers** to women's participation
- to ensure that a **gender issues** are **integrated** into decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local governance initiatives.

¹ J. Beall, pg. 19

Why Bother?

Justice: Equal access to political decision-making for community service and resource management is a human rights issue. Barriers to equal participation on the basis of gender need to be removed because they are in violation of human rights obligations to promote equal opportunities for all.

Accountability: Accountability is a two-fold issue for local governments: Local governments are in a very direct way accountable in front of their constituencies, but are equally accountable to central government because of the resources delegated by authorities. Because accountability inherently implies transparency and responsiveness to actual needs, enhancing accountability of local governance can also promote gender equality, and vice versa. Means to do this include budget initiatives, public hearings and consultative/participatory mechanisms (**See Possible Interventions and Entry Points** below).

Furthermore, the International Association of Local Authorities (IULA), for example, has set the goal of not more than 60% of either gender to be represented in local assemblies. Local governments that are unwilling to commit themselves to this same goal should be held accountable by their constituencies: why are local governments so reluctant?

Efficiency: “Women, as prime users of housing and human settlements, often have insights which can improve design and prevent failure and wastage.” For example, while a grid lay-out for housing may be the simplest to design, women in informal settlements may prefer a more communal, circular pattern which allows for collective child-minding, greater sociability and security and reduced isolation.² While this knowledge stems from women’s experience, such designs are also likely to encourage men to make greater responsibility for social reproduction activities.

Quality of Life: Actions of local government affect the quality of life of community members in a very direct manner. If the unique knowledge of both women and men in terms of community planning is explicitly recognized, this could greatly improve the quality of life of all members living in the community, and could ease the reproductive burden of women.

Chain Reaction: Participatory and “gendered” local governance often means strong alliances with community-based organizations – many of which are led by women. It is important to point out that this is an important way for women to gain skills in public sector governance – community work is a common catalyst for women entering politics. Such hands-on, community experience adds value to the work of anybody serving in public office.

² J. Beall, pg. 19-20.

Decentralization: Implementation and Accountability for Gender Mainstreaming

In the context of increasing decentralization of power, accountability is a key concern.

Successful decentralization requires four conditions:

- Local financing and fiscal authorities must be linked to the service provision responsibilities of local government;
- The local community must be informed about the costs of services and delivery options to make meaningful decisions;
- The community must be able to express views that are binding to policy makers;
- A system of accountability must be put in place which relies on public and transparent information for the community to be able to monitor the effectiveness of local government and for policies to be responsive;
- **A system of accountability must be put in place whereby national authorities can monitor the effectiveness of implementation or follow-up by local authorities on decisions or commitments made at a higher level.**

Local authorities must then be in a position to respond to calls for accountability both from those above them (national authorities) and those below them (local communities).

For this reason, adequate mechanisms must be established to ensure this accountability. Local authorities must be transparent about the ways in which gender mainstreaming objectives– both when mandated at the national level or when insisted upon at the community level - are being realized.

* adapted from S. Tadjbakhsh, *Accountability for Good Decision Making: Budgets-Making Processes*. UNDP, 2000.

Measuring Progress

INDICATOR	Level of measurement	What does it measure?	What does it not measure?	Source of information
Male:female ratio on regional councils / local government councils	Regional, municipal	Gender balance at local government level.	Whether women or men in local government have the capacity and will to represent women's interests and needs.	Local government association
% of local governments that have an explicit policy commitment on gender equality.	National, regional	Extent to which local governments have expressed political will to promote gender equality.	Effectiveness of such policy, the degree to which it is adhered to.	Local government association, or survey of local governments.
* women's council ³	Local	Ensure the integration of gender perspective into policies and enable women to participate	Effectiveness of the council	Local Government

³ In some countries e.g Bosnia and Herzegovina, women's councils are mandatory part of local governments. They are composed of civil society, gender experts and local women leaders and professionals. They are expected to represent women's interest and demands.

% of local government expenditure targeted at gender mainstreaming and gender equality initiatives	Local	Financial commitment to attaining policy goals on gender equality.	It is important to note that some important signs of commitment (such as public affirmation by government officials of the importance of gender) do not require large expenditures.	Local budget review
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Possible Interventions and Entry Points

Many of the strategies employed for promoting gender balance in national governance structures can be transferred to local and regional levels of governance as well. Other ideas include:

- Delegation of responsibilities to Gender Sensitive Community-based organizations (CBOs):** Cooperation with CBOs often represents a very efficient and effective means of delivering services to the community (e.g. providing drop-in counselling services, community-based education initiatives, etc.) Moreover, such groups are often in a better position to identify needs of community members. Specific collaboration with gender-sensitive organizations can help mainstream a gender perspective into the provision of such services.

Decentralization works best when it encounters a lively civil society... . If social groups are aware, assertive and well-organized for political purposes, they are likely to keep elected representatives well informed of their problems and hard pressed for responses and for effective, honest government.⁴

- Cooperation with Local Government Association:** The National Local Government Association (or similar body) can be a very useful entry point for the provision of gender-mainstreaming training and awareness-raising on gender issues.
- Collection and Dissemination of Best Practices:** Many local governments have implemented community-based projects that represent excellent examples of gender mainstreaming. Oftentimes these projects are sponsored by local governments in donor countries, yet the bilateral nature of these project relationships mean that best practices are not always shared with other municipalities. Research on best practices or case studies (followed by a seminar or other means of disseminating and discussing the collected information) can help raise awareness about these initiatives and generate ideas for their replication elsewhere.
- Data collection:** As another common problem is the incompleteness of statistical data and analysis⁵, the introduction of systematic data collection (by the local government

⁴ J. Beall, pg.11

⁵ UNDP, “Women’s Political Participation and Good Governance: 21st Century Challenges” pg. 3

association or other body) on gender balance and other gender mainstreaming issues at the local government level would greatly assist monitoring and evaluating progress.

- ☑ **Gender sensitivity training should be targeting men also and try to persuade them that women's votes are very important in local elections and they can be very appreciative and/or critical of local services because they are the primary users of local services.**

- ☑ **Implementation of Accountability-Enhancing Mechanisms:** Increased attention to accountability can promote greater gender equality. These mechanisms can include:
 - starting **budget initiatives**, where expenditures and/or revenues are analyzed from a gender perspective. Cooperation with community groups in the implementation of such initiatives can enhance community participation and the credibility of the local government. (See Gender Brief on **MACROECONOMICS and TRADE** for more details);
 - holding **public hearings** on issues that are of major concern to the community and may affect men and women differently – example, new community development projects, new child-care schemes, etc..