



Good Practice Paper in Water  
Closing the Gender Gap:  
Punjab Water Supply and Sanitation Project

*WATER for ALL*



## A. Introduction

“Women are change agents.” We hear it said all the time in development work. But are women naturally change agents, or do they need coaxing into being these change agents? What must projects do to take advantage of the benefits of these change agents? As capable as women are, they can also be reluctant to participate in change. Deeply engrained gender inequalities in traditional societies, as well as modern societies in different ways, limit not just what women can accomplish, but also what they think they can accomplish. With a bit of realization, though, women find a new will and accomplish more than imagined, including shifts in the very gender structure of their households and communities.

This good practice paper<sup>1</sup> looks at how one ADB water supply project developed female beneficiaries into change agents. The paper summarizes the planning, design, and implementation of gender-specific components that made the water supply project the success that it is. The benefits that the women are receiving, and passing on to their households and communities, are not just project bi-products. The benefits were carefully planned and designed for. As a result, it wasn't just their improved access to water that is improving women's quality of life. Water is just a means to a much larger end—an end that is the beginning of more balanced gender relations and higher levels of health, income, and education. With the chance to be change agents, the project women have become leaders and are making their communities a better, more promising place. And the men in their families and communities are starting to give them credit for their role in that change.

## B. Potential in Punjab

The focus of this case study is the [Punjab Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Loan](#). Punjab province is the largest province in Pakistan and is home to 84 million people, with 60% of them living in rural areas. ADB worked with the Government of Punjab's Housing, Urban Development and Public Health Engineering Department as the implementing unit. Half of this large rural population depends on uncovered wells, filthy rivers, and stagnant ponds for drinking water. Only a quarter of Punjab's rural population has access to household latrines, leaving most of them to defecate in open areas, which contributes to the polluted drainage system and environmental health problems.



To address water and sanitation problems in rural Punjab, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) provided the full cost of the project: loans amounting to \$46 million in 1995<sup>2</sup> and \$50 million in 2002 to improve the water supplies and drainage facilities in 1,085 rural communities. The project took special consideration of a significant cultural and social norm in the communities: water collection is considered women's work. The project's holistic, community-based approach and its gender-targeted design caught the attention of the [Gender in Water Partnership](#)<sup>3</sup> for a case study. The methodology for the case study naturally involved a review of secondary data from ADB documents and reports, but the case study writer also visited more than 10 project sites to interview project beneficiaries, project staff and local stakeholders.<sup>4</sup>

*“By fetching water three to four hours a day, carrying pitchers on our heads, we became bald! We carried water even when we were pregnant! Pregnant women carrying water became ill. This has now reduced. We used to bathe once every week or once every 10 days using canal water. The males were enjoying, but we were forced to bring water, cook, look after the children. All the burden was on us.”*

— Bashiran Bibi, Chairperson of Women's CBO DZ Khan

## C. Setting the Gender Agenda

As a part of ADB's way of doing business—business that results in sustainable poverty reduction, economic growth and environmental protection—it has a process and set of policies to guide projects toward development results. [ADB's Policy on Gender and Development \(GAD\)](#) brings gender issues into the mainstream of project work, showing the crosscutting effect women's participation can have on the social, economic and environmental impacts of a project. To bring the GAD policy from paper into practice, ADB suggests three major opportunities to identify and address gender issues in the project cycle:

- **Gender analysis:** A systematic assessment of the potential impact of the proposed project on both women and men and the social and economic relations between them. A gender analysis assesses how a proposed project could contribute to women's empowerment and overall changes in gender relations. It is a specific exercise within the overall social assessment conducted in the project preparatory stage. The gender analysis informs the project design.
- **Policy dialogue:** Discussions with government agencies and the project's executing agency should be ongoing throughout the project cycle. Results of the gender analysis should be shared and agreements made on how the project will be designed and implemented.
- **Project design:** Project components that are designed based on the gender analysis and to specifically benefit women.

The gender analysis accomplished for the Punjab project is notably strong for two reasons:

- The analysis is specific to the water sector and includes a concrete analysis of both the time women and girls spend in fetching water as well as an attempt to estimate the monetary value of that time.

<sup>1</sup> This good practice paper is a summary version of a more detail case study prepared by Reihana Mohideen. The full case study, “Gender Equality Results in the Punjab Community Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project” is available.

<sup>2</sup> The interest-free loan, from the Bank's concessional Asian Development Fund, has a repayment term of 35 years, with a grace period of 10 years, and carries an annual service charge of one per cent. The project was developed as a sector loan under the Government's Social Action Program.

<sup>3</sup> ADB and the Gender and Water Alliance teamed up in 2003 to undertake various research and training activities to improve good gender practices in ADB projects.

<sup>4</sup> The full version of the case study provides a list of people met during the field visit (Appendix 2) and a field study checklist that guided the interviews with stakeholders (Appendix 3).

<sup>5</sup> For further information on methodologies employed for each activity, see ADB's [Gender Checklist for Water Supply and Sanitation](#).



- The analysis extended to the lessons documented from other water supply and sanitation projects in Pakistan. The lessons learned generated information that was directly incorporated into the components designed for the proposed project, such as the knowledge that providing safe drinking water generates a demand for credit and technical assistance for income-generating activities among women due to their time saved by no longer fetching water.

*"For collecting / fetching water, women on average spend three hours a day. The normal wage for women is about PRs60 per day. Assuming 50% of the available time is used in productive employment and applying a shadow wage rate of 0.7%, the value of time saved in a year is estimated as PRs 2,874"*

— Report and Recommendation of the President, November 2002, Appendix 12, pp. 56.

Both the GAD policy and ADB's water policy provided the framework for policy dialogue with the government through the project cycle. Prior to the design, ADB and the government agreed on the general directions the project should pursue, such as using a community-based approach for selecting subprojects and participatory methods and consultations for developing need-based projects.

Based on the results of the gender analysis and policy dialogue, the project was designed with four components that would directly impact women's lives. Table 1 summarizes the advantages of each component for female beneficiaries.

**Table 1.** Female benefits per project component

Project Component	Benefits for Female Beneficiaries
1. Construction of water supply and drainage facilities	Lift the burden of fetching water that women and girls bear. Women would have more free time for income generating activities to augment the family income, and girls would be able to devote more time to their education.
2. Institutional strengthening	Community groups established by the project would have female representation and interface with local governments

*After the project, I started school for the first time. I like school. I don't feel ashamed even if I am sitting in class with small girls. My mother and I were involved in fetching water. We used to make two visits daily—one in the morning and the other in the evening, spending 5–6 hours daily in fetching water from a distance of 2 kilometers one way, which means one woman has to travel 8 kilometers per day to fetch water. I started to fetch water from the age of 5 years. It was a vicious circle of 10 years. I did not think that I could get rid of fetching water. It was a sore aspect of my daily tasks. I used to idealize my brothers and wished that I was a boy. At times, when I refused to go with my mother, my grandmother would abuse me for that and would tell my father that I am disobedient. I cannot forget those words of my grandmother. Sometimes, I insisted that my brother accompany me, but my mother would tell me that my brother does an important job of getting an education, and if he would go with me it would affect his education. It was a laborious job, and I use to live under mental stress, especially to go again in the evening for fetching water ... Better off families in our village either buy water or had donkeys, donkey carts, bull carts or bicycles to carry water. I felt harassed when some boys on bicycles use to laugh at girls in my group and pass comments, but other girls or even my mother never paid attention to them. I will take my education to the highest level and will become a teacher in the village school."*

— Shakeela, 15 years old

To tie together the efforts and intentions of the gender analysis, policy dialogues and design, an action plan is needed. It is one step further in ensuring the GAD policy will be implemented. The gender action plan for the Punjab project was included in the policy dialogue with the government. Table 2 summarizes four strategies and their accompanying gender-specific indicators that make up the action plan.

**Table 2.** Female benefits per project component

Gender Strategy	Gender-Specific Indicators
1. Gender-Sensitive Participatory Processes	Female community-based organizations are established to promote, encourage and contribute to women's empowerment, and to make small but significant changes in gender relations.
2. Concrete Targets for Women's Participation	Women's participation in community meetings reaches 50%; women benefiting from micro-credit programs reaches 60%; at least 50% of all community-based mobilizers are women
3. Monitoring and Evaluation	Important sex-segregated data for monitoring and evaluation purposes are collected
4. Use of Specialists Services	Organizing gender-related activities are included in the terms of reference of specialists for social development, community needs assessment, and micro-enterprise development

Getting communities to participate was critical from the very early stages of the project because agreements with the government in policy dialogue required that the project be demand driven, with communities deciding on their needs. The work began with recruiting community-based mobilizers (CBMs), which was required by project design, to employ 50% women. The primary task of the CBMs was to travel to project villages and mobilize both men and women into community-based organizations (CBOs).

*"We might start with motivating the men in the village, but we prefer to work with women because the project is about water. Men don't see the importance of it. It's not their first need, unlike for women. It's the women who also motivate the men. Women know the technical problems with pipes, leakages, etc. They monitor this and tell us the problems. Men don't care so much about this. Without female participation no scheme can be sustained."*

— Rabia Kauser, CBM, Bahawal Pur

The job of building CBOs was a challenge: there was resistance by both women and men. Women did not believe outsiders could help them or that they could help themselves get water. They believed providing water was the job of politicians. Unconvinced of their capabilities to solve their own water problems, they did not think they had the time to be involved in the project or that their husbands would allow it. Women also believed that community meetings and decisions were for men. True enough, the women are busy as laborers working long, hard days before coming home to hours of domestic chores. Men in many project households opposed their involvement fearing that their wives would become rebellious and stop doing their housework.

### Village Contrasts in Dera Ghazi Khan and Ramdani

Azeema Bibi, in her mid-40s, does not have a household water connection because she simply cannot afford the connection fee. So instead of tapped water, she and her daughter-in-law spend two hours every morning and two hours every evening collecting water. The daily chore takes even longer sometimes hours longer if there is a long queue. It's not uncommon for them to have to transport water after dark.

CBO Chair Gulab Mai, nearly the same age as Ms. Bibi, has a recent home water connection. "I now spend more time weaving mats," she said. "I get cash for my mats in the market. I now complete weaving a mat in 2 to 3 days. Before I had the water connected, it took me about one week. I now have more energy to do my work. I now manage to do everything on time. Next March, when school enrollments begin, I will send my daughter to school."

What a difference a home connection makes.

So how did the CBM's overcome resistance?

- **Gender analysis:** A systematic assessment of the potential impact of the proposed project on both women and men and the social and economic relations between them. A gender analysis assesses how a proposed project could contribute to women's empowerment and overall changes in gender relations. It is a specific exercise within the overall social assessment conducted in the project preparatory stage. The gender analysis informs the project design.
- **Persistence.** Women and project beneficiaries said that CBM persistence in returning to their villages to discuss the project with them demonstrated their seriousness and commitment.
- **Time sensitivity.** CBMs explored several different options to make the CBO meetings more flexible and conducive to women's schedules.
- **Mobilizing men.** Where women lacked the support of men, CBM's held exclusive male meetings to explain the benefits of allowing women to participate in the projects.
- **Creativity.** Where men remained adamant against female involvement in the project, mostly in the northern areas, CBMs had to work much harder in motivating the women and winning their confidence, which led to their insistence that they be allowed to participate in the project. In some instances, such as in a village in Attak, women withdrew from their domestic chores until men relented and allowed their participation.



- **Activists.** CBMs found it critical to identify both male and female local activists who had the trust and respect of the project communities, and could therefore help effectively deliver messages from the CBM and mobilize community support. The activists proved to be usually from the villages, were outspoken and hard working. Male activists were particularly helpful in persuading men who were opposed to the project.

### D. The Benefits of Doing the Gender Homework

With the proper groundwork, the Punjab rural water supply project offered women more than just improved access to water. The community's overall health was improved through reduced incidence of dysentery, cholera, and typhoid. Through the project, the women earned for themselves and their community more time for productive activities, such as sending their children to school and livelihood projects. They gained a more influential political voice in their communities. And they no longer have to fear the same health risks that were once so common. Table 3 summarizes the benefits reported by women as a result of the project.

**Table 3.** Reported Project Benefits

Areas of Development	Project Benefits
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced incidence of reduced incidences of dysentery, cholera, and typhoid.</li> <li>• Reduced incidence of miscarriages, premature births and abortions as a result of safe water and hygienic environment</li> <li>• Reduced monthly medical expenses (between one-third and one-half less)</li> <li>• Reduced incidence of neck pains, backaches, and joint and muscular pains in women as a result of no longer transporting water</li> <li>• Increased available time and money as a result of reduced illnesses, injuries and medical expenses.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved mobility, particularly for women and elderly and during the wet season, as a result of improved drains and newly paved streets.</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School enrollment, especially among girls has increased since water systems were installed. Primary school enrollment in one village increased by 30%; in another area, primary enrollment more than tripled among girls and increased by 40% among boys.</li> </ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women have increased and diversified their income as a result of time saving from the new water system and access to micro credit. They are caring for larger numbers of livestock and poultry and work more hours in the field. More women have also turned to more weaving, sewing, embroidery.</li> <li>• The project itself provided increased employment opportunities for women and at pay rates equal to men. As a result, the number of economically active females has increased by 50%.</li> </ul>

**Table 3.** Reported Project Benefits (continued)

Areas of Development	Project Benefits
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women play a more active role in community activities, decision making and conflict resolution as a result of their involvement in the CBO's established by the project</li> <li>• Female CBOs lead the hygiene education and training program, maintain pipes and check water quality and collect water revenues from users.</li> <li>• Female and male CBOs work together to construct latrines and settle community and family disputes regarding the water system.</li> </ul>

*In Faisalabad, there was evidence of women's strengthened voice and negotiating power in the community being reflected in women's successful participation in the Union Council elections. Two women candidates from the village were elected to the Union Council. One on a farmers' ticket and the other on a laborers' ticket. Women CBO members organized house-to-house door knocking in support of their candidates and also staffed the polling booths on election day to encourage people to vote for these candidates.*

*According to a woman CBO member: "After the formation of the female CBO, we are in a better position to solve the problems on our own. Now we also contribute politically. Some women have been elected as councilors. We negotiated with the men: 'If you give us the vote we will give you the vote.' Before only men solved the problems of the village. Now women CBOs are also involved. We also solve disputes within and between houses. The female CBO decided the candidates. These women won uncontested."*

### E. Remaining Challenges in Closing the Gender Gap

Two major challenges remain to closing the gender gap in Punjab. The first is the number of women not taking advantage of the microcredit program. The project has not achieved its 60% target for women as beneficiaries of microcredit, yet this is a covenant of the loan document. This is largely because of two reasons: the restricted mobility of women and the cultural practice of men making financial decisions. Men also deal with local banks. The demand for the project's microcredit access has come more from men than women. It is understandable then, why more must be strategically done to draw women into the microcredit program.

The second challenge is the sustainability of some of the CBOs, particularly the smaller ones. In establishing and building these CBOs, CBMs must also ensure that the CBOs become increasingly independent of them and the project staff in order to continue to sustain the project's benefits. The ability of some CBOs to be self-sustainable is of concern, yet CBMs are under time pressure to move into new project communities and startup new CBOs.

One emerging solution, though, is developing strong partnerships between female CBOs and female nongovernment organizations at community, district and provincial levels. Registration of these CBOs with the local government and providing support for dispute resolution is essential for the sustainability of CBOs and community-based schemes.

### F. Hopeful Future for Rural Punjab

Women in the project communities are determined to sustain the project, which also represents a form of increased confidence and empowerment. As an example, when their own connections to the new water system were threatened with being disconnected because their husbands had failed to pay the bill, women reportedly refused to clean or cook until the men paid the bill. In village after village, the case study reports women pledging to raise funds through their own resources not only to sustain the projects schemes but also to do other social development works using the CBO platform.

Interestingly, in one village in Gahawl Pur, the female CBO drew up a chart of project benefits, listing each benefit in order of priority. At the top of their list, ahead of increased income and improved health benefits, were their sense of increased confidence and awareness. Men also attested for the benefits of increased female confidence and empowerment. Male CBO members repeatedly said women's participation in the project had been important to the improvements seen in their community since the project started. The attitudes of young men toward female empowerment also registered change.

*"Once the female CBO was formed, we realized that women can do better work and can participate in the elections. Our elders did not like women to participate in the elections. But with the help of the younger generation of males in the CBOs, the elders started to realize that this was possible."*

— Munawar Hussain, Chair of a male CBO in Faisalabad

Through the Punjab rural water project, it should be clearly evident what has happened. Both men and women are realizing and unlocking the hidden potential of women to be change agents.

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