

—Development—

OUTREACH

HELPING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK FOR DEVELOPMENT

Promoting Gender Equality

ALSO
DEBT RELIEF FOR
FOUR COUNTRIES

VOLUME THREE NUMBER

What this issue is about....

Our guest editor for this issue, Jerri Dell, has aptly pointed to the long struggle to bring gender into the mainstream of development work. Although it seems an obvious dynamic, women and, in particular, their economic and political potential has rarely been incorporated into economic models of reform. Those among us who have worked at the grassroots level have known empirically of the vital roles women play in education, income generation, social protection and governance; it is now gratifying to see acknowledgment of women's participation as a crucial process for bringing about effective and efficient development—as defined by economists.

But more important is how to build on these latest findings to advance women's productivity even more. *Engendering Development*, the World Bank's new policy research report featured here, points to three main areas: rights, resources, and voice, which need to be strengthened to ensure the equality of women. In no region do women and men have equal social, economic and legal rights, a fact that constrains the choices available to women in all walks of life. Women continue to earn less than men in the labor market and to have less command over a range of productive resources. Limited political voice limits women's power to influence resource allocation and investment decisions both at home and in the public sphere.

Engendering Development calls for the development community and the world at large to continue to address the fact that women still do not operate on an equal playing field with men, and that leveling that field serves to benefit us all.


Mary McNeil
Editor

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GENDER-SENSITIVE LOCAL AUDITING

INITIATIVES FROM INDIA TO BUILD ACCOUNTABILITY TO WOMEN

BY ANNE MARIE GOETZ AND ROB JENKINS

Participatory planning and budgeting, which are key elements of progressive decentralization programs today, provide opportunities for better local accountability to the poor. But the only way of verifying that both national and local-level budgetary commitments, such as spending in areas of particular concern to women, are actually implemented is through direct auditing by poor communities and service users.

Participatory auditing measures, however, are almost never included in public-sector accountability reforms. As a result, poor people, and particularly poor women, do not normally closely scrutinize government spending at the local level. Financial auditing is seen as the preserve of skilled officials. Equally unusual is the engagement of poor service users in 'social audits' that involve detailed monitoring of public-service delivery and the use of official mechanisms for actionable complaint. And yet, experience suggests that the most effective means of improving the quality of public spending from the point of view of poor women is to ensure that they engage in gender-sensitive processes of monitoring and auditing public services.

Several current state- and civil society-initiated efforts in

India are engaging the poor, particularly women, in closer scrutiny of local spending and policy implementation. What is notable about these initiatives is that they are neither cosmetic gestures towards 'consultation' with the poor, nor do they substitute for poor public services by replacing them with NGO-run alternatives. They are efforts to hold the state accountable for its commitments to gender equity and anti-poverty measures. Ultimately, they aim to enhance public-sector accountability.

The two important arenas in which women and the poor are trying to engage in local budgeting and auditing are decentralized government and the implementation of centrally funded safety-net programs such as food-subsidy

systems and employment-generation schemes. Auditing government spending at the local level enables citizens to witness and comment upon the direct links between revenue generation and expenditure, and between planning and the actual implementation of public policies. Local-level auditing contributes to more gender- and poverty-sensitive planning and policy implementation in that it makes it easier to pin-point both poorly targeted spending and outright corruption.

Monitoring gender-sensitive budgets

Following the passage of the 73rd amendment to India's Constitution in 1993, state governments have not only created multi-tiered systems of elected local government, but some have gone even further, vesting village assemblies with powers to both plan and audit local spending. Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, and lately Rajasthan have gone furthest in legislating for people's audits of local planning and spending, and have also enacted measures to ensure women's participation in these processes. All three states have 'right-to-information' provisions through which villagers can, in theory, have access to documents detailing official expenditures. All three states not only have provisions ensuring that one-third of elected representatives on village councils are women, but also that a minimum

proportion of village assembly participants must be women for the (required) public meeting to constitute a quorum. For instance, Kerala has earmarked 10% of local planning funds for women's development, and women-only sub-committees within the village assembly decide on how this should be spent. This last provision gives women a direct interest in seeing that spending plans are implemented properly.

It is too early to judge the effectiveness of any of these novel measures. Early evidence however, suggests that women's engagement in local accountability systems cannot simply be

legislated into existence. In Kerala women's groups have been rebuffed by local politicians and government officials when they tried to follow up on how the earmarked funds for women's development have been spent. Local power relations obstruct effective use of such provisions, even in Kerala, where the poor and women enjoy comparatively high degrees of literacy and social welfare. When poor people challenge local decision-making and spending patterns, the interests of local elites and officials are profoundly threatened.

Verifying anti-poverty spending in Rajasthan

Given the risks this implies for the poor, as well as the technical difficulties of effective monitoring of public spending, civil society mobilization or social movement support for accountability struggles is critical. Two examples from elsewhere in India reinforce this point. In Rajasthan, a small organization, the Mazdoor Kisan Shakthi Sangathan (literally, the Workers and Peasants Power Association) has pioneered methods for the participatory audit of local spending. Women represent about 60% of the approximately 1000-strong membership of this group, and the MKSS has focused on challenging official corruption on public works programs that provide women with employment during the dry season. These women are routinely denied the statutory minimum wage for their work on rural roads, culverts, and drains, often on the grounds that they were not moving the minimum quantum of earth per day. The MKSS's own research indicated that the actual quantity of work being done by the women was routinely under-measured. False entries in employment registers enabled project foremen to underpay women, and thereby to pad the registers with bogus names whose payments the supervisors then pocket. Other malpractices include inflated estimates for public-works projects, the use of poor-quality materials, and over-billing by suppliers. To combat these forms of fraud, the MKSS sought (and sometimes obtained) access to official expenditure documents – such as employment registers and receipts for the purchase of materials – that could be verified by MKSS workers investigating each of the recorded transactions.

The MKSS's struggle to obtain such documentation became the basis for a national campaign for legislation granting citizens a right to information. Government



accounts are thus submitted to a process of collective verification by the villagers – the very people most likely to know whether funds have been spent as claimed. At public hearings, employment registers are read aloud, and women who were underpaid come forward to contradict official accounts showing them to have been paid the minimum wage.

Surveillance of subsidized food distribution in Mumbai

In the city of Mumbai a coalition of 40 community-based organizations of women from low-income neighborhoods has worked since 1992 to make the government's network of fair-price shops – the Public Distribution System (PDS) – more responsive to the poor. Though a critical resource for the food security of the poor – and women, who manage household food supplies – the PDS suffers from a number of management problems, but above all, from a 'leakage' of subsidized grains by the licensed PDS shopkeepers to the open market, where they are sold illegally at higher prices. The Rationing Kruti Samiti (RKS), or Action Committee for Rationing, sought originally to cut these leakages by working closely with concerned state officials. The PDS is, in theory, monitored and 'performance-audited' by citizens' vigilance committees. In practice, these are controlled by local politicians who, for a fee, shield crooked shopkeepers from prosecution. The RKS has formed parallel informal Vigilance Committees composed of five women consumers for each PDS shop. The women attempt to track the amount and quality of subsidized commodities that arrive in the shops from government warehouses, and to monitor their sale by constantly checking shop ledgers. This system, which flourished in the early to mid 1990s broke down in the latter part of the decade, largely because it relied upon the support of one high level bureaucrat, who was ultimately transferred to another department. The RKS experience showed that women's illiteracy was not necessarily an obstacle to scrutinizing policy implementation. The RKS's bureaucratically had required the shopkeepers to attach sealed samples of the displayed bulk products, such as foodgrain. This allowed the women monitors to compare the quality of the product delivered from the government warehouse, as seen in the sealed transparent bag, against what was on sale for PDS consumers. Any adulteration could be visu-

ally detected, thus providing prima facie evidence for an investigation by the ration inspectors into whether the cause of the discrepancy was 'leakage' of some portion of the original consignment onto the open market.

However, even before the departure of their high-level bureaucratic patron, the women in the vigilance committees lacked another important resource – the time needed for effective monitoring. Keeping track of the arrival and 'leakage' of commodities required constant surveillance over the shops. Although women deployed children to keep an eye on the shops, they could not get around shopkeepers' tactics, like arranging deliveries in the middle of the night to avoid inspection.

Citizens' efforts to audit directly the activities of development programs are an important complement to official monitoring or auditing mechanisms. Our examples show that social movement support is critical in overcoming gender-related constraints (such as illiteracy or intimidation by officials) to women's efforts to improve the functioning of official accountability processes. But, in India and elsewhere, citizens' efforts to hold officials accountable can trigger significant resistance. The MKSS has encountered obstruction from the local administration. The RKS has been forced into retreat. These experiences suggest the importance of seeking public-sector allies for citizen-based monitoring and auditing.

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Gender and Growth:

In the study *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?*,¹

we made the argument

that Africa has enormous unexploited potential.

It has hidden growth reserves in its people, especially its women, who now provide more than half the region's labor but lack equal access to education and factors of production. We concluded that gender equality can be a potent force for accelerated poverty reduction in Africa.

There is increased recognition of the relevance of gender for development work in Africa. In this region, we addressed the linkages between gender, growth, and poverty in the 1998 Poverty Status Report prepared for the Strategic Partnership with Africa (SPA)² This helped to frame the gender debate in terms of economic growth and productivity, i.e. in terms of development effectiveness, and not just in terms of social equity – although equity considerations are important, too.

Men and women in African economies

A distinguishing characteristic of Sub-Saharan African economies is that both men and women play substantial economic roles. Much of African economies is in the hands of women – agriculture and the informal sector in particular. But women in Africa have less access to productive assets, including land, and to such complementary

Africa's Missed Potential



BY ALAN GELB

factors of production as credit, fertilizer, and education. Women farmers receive only 1 percent of total credits to agriculture. Women are less likely

to control the product of their labor than men, reducing their incentives to pursue productive, income-earning opportunities, despite the increasing evidence that income earned by women is more likely to be used productively for family needs: food, clothing, health, and education.

African women work far longer hours than men. On average, their workdays may be 50 percent longer, and their work is closely integrated with household production systems. Indeed, the boundary between economic and household activity is less well drawn in Africa than in other regions. In addition to their prominence in agriculture, women bear the brunt of domestic tasks: processing food crops, providing water and firewood, and caring for the elderly and the sick, this latter activity assuming much