



Evaluation of Norway's Support to Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation – *Nepal case study*

This report evaluates Norway's support to women and girls' rights and gender equality through its development cooperation in Nepal between 2007 and 2013. It is one of three country case studies (alongside Ethiopia and Mozambique) that form part of a broader evaluation assessing the results of Norway's support. It considers whether those results are in line with the four priorities set out in Norway's Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (the Gender Action Plan) – political empowerment, economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health rights, and violence against women. The evaluation addressed four broad questions:

1. Effectiveness: To what degree has Norwegian support to women's rights and gender equality produced the intended results?

Commissioning agency: Norad Evaluation Department

Evaluation team: Swedish Institute for Public Administration in collaboration with the Overseas Development Institute and the Chr. Michelsen Institute.

Authors of the Nepal report were Angélica Arbulú (team leader), Shailendra Sigdel and Shubheksha Rana.

2. Alignment: To what degree is Norwegian support to women's rights and gender equality aligned to the Gender Action Plan?

3. Relevance: To what extent is Norwegian support relevant in view of national priorities, needs and possibilities?

4. Sustainability: To what degree has Norwegian support influenced (positively or negatively) national processes to improve women's rights and gender equality, including influencing national ownership of the issues, or the capacity of national institutions and implementing partners?

THE EVALUATION TEAM'S APPROACH

The Nepal case study combined two elements:

(1) a review of documentation on the Royal Norwegian Embassy's programme portfolio relevant to women and girls' rights and gender equality, whether directly targeted interventions or mainstreaming gender in other activities; and (2) an in-depth analysis of two projects, selected in close collaboration with the Embassy in Nepal. The projects selected were:

Political empowerment: Norway's support to the Inter Party Women's Alliance (IPWA), which is dedicated to ensuring women's equal representation at all levels of policy-making and decision-making.



Economic empowerment through gender mainstreaming in the energy sector: Norway's support to the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion element of the National Rural and Renewable Energy Programme (NRREP), which aims to improve rural employment and standards of living while at the same time reducing dependence on traditional energy sources.

The evaluation team gleaned vital information from key informant interviews with government officials and staff from implementing agencies at the national, district and village community levels. Their insights were complemented with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with programme beneficiaries and other members of the community to understand how the projects were contributing to changes in women's lives.

The team sought to identify results at three levels:

Systemic change: Has Norway's support contributed to changes in laws/regulations, funding levels, the national discourse (what the public and politicians talk about, and policy-making processes), or lent more legitimacy to women's rights and gender equality?

Project results: Has Norway's support contributed to the empowerment of women and girls, and to changes in people's attitudes and behaviours around gender equality (including the attitudes of influential people such as community or religious leaders)?

Organisational change: Has Norway's support strengthened the capacity of its partner organisations (including government agencies, non-governmental organisations and civil society groups, UN agencies and private enterprises) to do work to promote women's rights and gender equality?

The evaluation team focused primarily on outcome level changes, as longer-term impacts are more difficult to assess given the complexities of women's rights and gender equality change processes in different contexts.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Nepal is still reeling after a decade-long internal armed conflict. In recent years there have been a number of historic achievements, including the ceasefire and Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2006, elections to the country's first Constituent Assembly in 2008 and an interim Constitution which significantly advances women's rights. For example, it included some reproductive health rights as well as the equal right to property.

The country has also made significant progress on most of its Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets, including achieving increases in literacy and school enrolment, as well as average life expectancy, coupled with reductions in child and maternal mortality. Before the Gorkha earthquake in April 2015, Nepal was on track to achieve six out of eight MDGs.

However, these gains have not been spread evenly across population groups, and the most disadvantaged groups (including those living in rural areas and belonging to certain castes or ethnic groups) still fare worse. For example, poverty among the Hill Brahmins is 10 per cent, while for Hill Dalits (or 'untouchables') the rate jumps to 44 per cent.

In the Gender Inequality Index (GII) Nepal is ranked at number 98 out of 149 countries. Religion and social customs play a big part in determining people's roles and social status. Nepal is still a very patriarchal society in which women are assigned traditional roles and have little decision-making power, at home or in public life.

Women and girls in Nepal are also exposed to different forms of violence. Some studies claim that as many as 48 per cent of women have experienced violence at some point in their lives. An estimated 200,000 Nepali girls and women are believed to have been sex trafficked to India, and 13,000 girls are thought to be suffering sexual exploitation in Kathmandu. In addition, harmful traditional practices such as *deuki*, (where young girls are 'gifted' to the local temple to gain religious merit) or *chaupadi* (keeping girls isolated during

menstruation) – although outlawed– continue to undermine women's capabilities and their full participation in social, economic and political life.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, the evaluation found that Norway has played an important role in promoting women's rights and gender equality in Nepal. It has helped to strengthen national capacities and awareness among government and civil society in a wide range of areas, including advocacy and education, and in promoting a more gender-sensitive energy sector.

It has also played a significant role in support of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. There is however, scope to strengthen the impact of its activities and funding by increasing the strategic use of the Women and Gender Equality Grant, reaching out to a more diverse and less established groups of women and by helping to build stronger gender-specific skills both within its staff and for national partners. The key findings are summarised below.

Relevance

- > The Embassy's approach of working through nationally owned mechanisms ensures alignment to national priorities and ultimately relevance. Their supportive but hands-off approach helps strengthen capacity, while allowing priorities to be defined by national counterparts.
- > The Embassy's support to women's political empowerment during the period under review was particularly relevant given the Constituent Assembly elections in 2008 and 2013, the prospect of local elections and the ongoing negotiations for drafting a new Constitution.
- > The Embassy's support to the National Rural and Renewable Energy Programme was highly relevant in the socio-economic context in Nepal as it focused providing sustained access to rural and poor households and for vulnerable women in particular. In addition, many of the energy technology options offered can help ease the burden of traditionally female chores.

Effectiveness

> In terms of **changes at the systemic level:**

- The Embassy's support has contributed to the national discourse on gender in Nepal by providing civil society organisations the knowledge, tools and increased leverage to raise women's priorities during policy discussions. For instance, by supporting the Inter Party Women's Alliance (IPWA), Norway has helped women advocate for election mechanism that take into account barriers specific to women in the Nepalese context. With increased understanding of options and implications, IPWA have helped to influence electoral law and the nomination process within the major parties.
- The Embassy's support has contributed to the development the first ever national action plan on women, peace and security, launched in 2011. This is the government's mechanism for implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which addresses the disproportionate impact of war on women, but also their pivotal role in conflict management, conflict resolution, and sustainable peace; as well as Resolution 1820, which recognises conflict-related sexual violence as a tactic of war.

- In the education sector, the Embassy is assisting Nepal's government to explore issues around quality of and access to education for the most vulnerable groups, including girls, children with disabilities and children from lower castes.

- In the energy sector, an agreement with the government and other development partners, including Norway, helped to lay the foundations for further energy cooperation with a gender-sensitive lens. In addition, the Norwegian supported National Rural and Renewable Energy Programme has had a positive impact on other government institutions, which are empowering vulnerable citizens with a rights based lens.

> In terms of **changes at the project level**, the Embassy's support was seen as having a positive impact towards the promotion of greater empowerment of women in Nepal:



- The Embassy's support to the Inter Party Women's Alliance has included financing for capacity building and awareness raising, which has served to strengthen the organisation's internal efficiency as well as its outward recognition and legitimacy. This means women politicians are now better able to advocate for women's interests in a more coherent, informed and effective manner, increasing their ability to influence the political process.
- The evaluation team found evidence that the Embassy-supported Sankalpa, a local non-government organisation, was influential in ensuring local-level understanding of Resolutions 1325 and 1820.
- The team found evidence that local women empowered through various Norwegian-supported programmes were able to provide support to survivors of gender-based violence within their communities (such as shelter and access to legal aid), filling an existing gap in the absence of other support systems.
- With support from Norway, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community in Nepal has fought for full recognition of the so-called 'third sex' and the inclusion of 'other' as an alternative to 'man' or 'woman' on ID cards and passports.
- The Embassy's support to the National Rural and Renewable Energy Programme has contributed to increased participation of women in the energy sector and the technologies introduced have contributed to the easing women's domestic work burden, giving them more time to participate in community activities, including income generating activities.

Strengths:

- One of the key strengths of Norway's support is the long-term nature of its investments. This is key to achieving change in areas such as women's rights and gender equality, which are tackling deeply rooted attitudes and behaviours.

- In the energy sector, a key strength is the design of the Norwegian-supported project, which has shown how to effectively integrate gender by ensuring it is built into each component in a concrete, specific and measurable manner. The design includes specific provisions for the most vulnerable groups, such as income-generating activities and subsidies, to ensure they are able to access the services provided by the programme.

Weaknesses and unintended effects:

- Despite the positive impacts of Norway's support, energy continues to be a male-dominated sector, and as such project planning, analysis and decision-making mostly reflects male perspectives. Achieving women's meaningful participation, over and above quotas, remains a challenge that needs to be addressed.
- Both projects appear to have had some unintended effects. In the case of Norway's support to women's participation in politics, this has not addressed the 'double shift' that stems from women taking on new responsibilities while still performing their traditional roles. Nor did it originally seek to reach beyond already well-established politicians such as younger generations or women representing ethnic minorities, which would strengthen both relevance and sustainability of the intervention.
- Responsibility for Resolution 1325 lies with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction in what is a temporary structure. This means that all positive effects linked to institutional strengthening around the Resolution will be short lived. In addition, this arrangement has, in practice, reduced the Embassy's interaction with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare. This lack of interaction with the institution charged with looking after women's interest is perceived by the Embassy as a missed opportunity.
- On a positive note, while not part of the initial objectives, Norway's support for the National Rural and Renewable Energy Programme has provided a valuable platform for women from different ethnic groups to come together and share experiences. While its



Focus group discussion with community members. PHOTO: NICOLA JONES

income-generating activities were originally set out as a mechanism to ensure sustainability for those more vulnerable, it had the positive side effect of helping to increase women's social and economic standing.

> In terms of **changes at the organisational level:**

- The Embassy's work with the government institution Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC) can be expected to have a significant long-term impact. The support to the National Rural and Renewable Energy Programme has contributed to the establishment of a new Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Unit within AEPC, and the development of various energy policies and tools that address gender. This has also helped promote greater transparency and accountability by introducing civil society groups into the monitoring processes of the energy programme.
- As a result of the Embassy's support, the Inter Party Women's Alliance has strengthened institutional capacity. For instance, the Embassy provided funds

for local level IPWA chapters. As a result all national chapters now have a bank account and experience of fund management. In some instance they are now able obtain local level funds to further their efforts. Through the Party's National Conference, the Embassy has helped to strengthened links between local and central levels of IPWA.

Sustainability

- > The Embassy's approach of working through nationally owned processes strengthens ownership and helps guarantee relevance in the national context. In turn, this sense of ownership and relevance – among civil society and government – means the impact of Norway's support is more likely to be sustained. For example, through its support to Inter Party Women's Alliance the Embassy is supporting an institution whose members have proven strong commitment to common goals. As women politicians, it is ultimately in their interest for IPWA to succeed, and are likely to make every effort to sustain the gains.



- > In the energy sector, Norwegian support for the careful incorporation of the gender-sensitive approach into a national single programme has effectively ensured a commitment that gender will be integral to all future energy sector initiatives, whether Norway is involved or not. This will increase the likelihood of further economic empowerment of women.
- > The focus on capacity-building also has an inherent element of sustainability, although this will be very dependent on the quality and adequacy of the training which was not assessed during this exercise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations suggest how Norway could strengthen the impact of its development cooperation on women and girls' rights and gender equality in Nepal.

Increase access to gender training for Embassy staff and staff of implementing partners: The current system relies on individuals being able to apply a gender-sensitive approach to their sector or area of programming, but there are no formal mechanisms to ensure that staff have the know-how to do this. The Embassy should provide sector-specific capacity-building on gender for staff (including those working in non-traditional sectors such as energy, economic development, governance and climate change). This is critical to ensure its ability to strengthen partner's gender lens and to guarantee sustainability of the results achieved. The Embassy would also benefit from a greater emphasis on gender skills during the recruitment process.

Formalise accountability on gender: The Embassy would benefit from a more rigorous and formalised system of accountability for results on gender that does not rely on the personal commitment of individual staff, including more results-oriented and comprehensive reporting linked to identified gender goals.

Share lessons learnt: Nepal is seen as a successful pilot for the introduction of gender into the energy

sector – one that is not traditionally noted for a gender-sensitive approach. The evaluation team recommends that the Embassy finds ways of sharing its experiences and lessons learnt with other embassies where energy forms part of the portfolio.

Expand strategic use of the Women and Gender Equality Grant: This funding stream has the ability to act as a catalyst and help to strengthen the Embassy's focus on gender, especially by providing an incentive to incorporate it into non-traditional sectors. It also allows the Embassy to support new developments for ongoing interventions in a timely manner. The evaluation team recommends greater uptake of the opportunities afforded by this grant, especially in sectors that are not traditionally sensitive to gender issues such as energy or climate change.

Increase support for initiatives that address gender-based violence: The team supports the Embassy's plan to shift its focus towards addressing gender-based violence. This will allow it to address a critical barrier to women's empowerment and full political participation in Nepalese society, as well as to support and strengthen the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare.

Increase the focus on marginalised groups and rural populations: The Embassy could play an important role in helping women from marginalised groups and rural populations enter into political discussions and processes. It could open up training and capacity building for empowerment that reaches people beyond existing elites. This would enrich political dialogue, increase relevance and ensure that there are new generations to continue the process of women's political empowerment.

Go beyond quotas to secure meaningful participation of women: Traditional views about women's role in Nepalese society remain a major barrier to their full participation in social, political and economic life. Norway's supported projects have sought to ensure women participation through quotas. While these have

proven to be a good starting point, the next step is to identify mechanisms that help women go beyond participation 'by number' towards meaningful participation and decision-making. This could be done, for example, by providing technical and leadership training for women selected by the communities to take part in local committees of the National Rural and Renewable Energy Programme.

Address women's 'double shift': The gains for women in Nepal partly resulting from Norway's efforts have, in effect, given way to a 'double shift' – taking on new responsibilities in addition to their existing (traditional) roles and workload. Norway could help to change this by using its own successful experience in advancing women's rights and gender equality – for example, promoting accessible and affordable childcare to help alleviate women's double burden.

Please visit the Norad website to see the full Nepal case study report, the full evaluation report and the case study reports for Ethiopia and Mozambique (in English): <http://www.norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/2015/evaluation-of-Norways-support-to-womens-rights-and-gender-equality-in-velopment-cooperation/>

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Norad
Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
www.norad.no
post-eval@norad.no