



## A Framework for Rendering Community Development Programmes Socially Inclusive and Gender Responsive – Lessons from RRN's Projects



*Poverty, poor health, unemployment and crime are among the consequences of exclusion. Breaking such a vicious circle requires the development of inclusive policy as well as democratization of development processes based on participation of such gender and social groups that have historically been deprived of developmental opportunities.*



*Men and Women in Nursery Management Training under a Rural Livelihood Project, Sankhuwasabha*

Gender and social inclusion has been a widespread concern in community development programmes in Nepal for a long time. Being pro-inclusive development, RRN has increasingly shown its concerns over the exclusion and inequality issues in its community development programmes not only based on gender, but also other factors such as class, race, ethnicity and ability that limit beneficiaries' full participation in the development programmes and obtaining the benefits of such programmes. It is obvious that exclusion upsets both women and men, and often produces adverse impacts on society as a whole, and so is the case when exclusion happens on socio-cultural grounds.

More often than not, community development project interventions are made without much of deliberate efforts in order to achieve the

intended goals. Drawing upon RRN's experience of implementing community development programmes from social inclusion and gender perspectives, this paper provides lessons that are particularly useful in understanding a gender and social inclusion issues in community development programmes. The paper also presents a number of key features that could be used as instruments for crafting a framework to serve as guides for planning and implementation of development programmes in rural communities in order to render them more social and gender inclusive. As this paper is based on the analysis of the field data collected from RRN's various community development projects implemented across Nepal, it is expected to provide pragmatic insights on strategic inclusion of gender and specific social groups in community development programmes.



*Learning to be inclusive: Training of Trainers under SRLP, Sankhuwasabha*



*Socio-cultural and gender-based discriminations are apparent and evident in the policy design, as people define themselves by a variety of characteristics including their cultural background, gender, race, sexual orientation and socio-economic status.*

### Why is exclusion happening?

Exclusion happens when individuals or groups are denied from the access to development opportunities and activities like education, health care, social services, livelihoods, or housing to live comfortably, and participate in society. We have observed that, by and large, aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, people living in remote rural areas and others who have been historically marginalised have not been able to get through the unwavering net of the social protection. Exclusion therefore reinforces and further widens existing inequalities; as the number of people who are excluded increases and the well-being of society in general decreases. Poverty, poor health, unemployment and crime are among the consequences of exclusion. Breaking such a vicious circle requires the development of inclusive policy as well as democratisation of development processes based on participation of such gender and social groups that have historically been deprived of developmental opportunities.

By and large, socio-cultural and gender-based discriminations are apparent and evident in the policy design, as people define themselves by a variety of characteristics including their cultural background, gender, race, sexual orientation and socio-economic status. Such a policy design tends to segregate rather than integrate diversity considerations. Therefore, the challenge in social policy development is to approach and work with socio-culturally diverse populations both as separate groups in the community, and as a dynamic part of the whole. To promote this perspective, consideration of culturally diverse concerns must be integrated into thinking about the whole community.

### Strategies for gender and social inclusion

Based on the ground reality, we have found the following as appropriate strategy in rendering community development programmes socially inclusive and gender sensitive.

#### (a) Identification of socially excluded

Inclusion encompasses preventing the already deprived segment of the community from further marginalisation, isolation, reduced security, and the inability to participate in decision making, programme implementation and benefit-sharing. In general, the people with these characteristics have limited access to common resources markets and land; and service deliveries such as health care, education, and they are disproportionately exposed to and affected by unhealthy environments. To combat these circumstances, what is required at the outset is to identify vibrant communities that deserve access to developmental opportunities for their viable livelihoods, restore and maintain healthy and sustainable environments in which they live and thrive, and support asset accumulation throughout the life cycle. This is because communities are not homogeneous.

#### (b) Intentional and affirmative action

Our experience from the field implementation demonstrates that social and gender inclusion is very much intentional, it does not happen spontaneously, no matter how well the project is designed to achieve its objectives. This implies a need for laying foundation for over all commitment to the project design and implementation from social and gender inclusion perspectives. To illustrate this, we cite the project entitled 'Preparedness and Relief for the Disaster Affected Communities' implemented under RRN's relief action in ten disaster affected and/or prone districts of Nepal. This project could benefit the marginal groups (Dalits like Kami, Damai, Sarki, Mushahar, etc) and ethnic minority communities such as Tharu, Dhimal, Rai, Limbu, Magar, Darai), who are deprived of most amenities necessary for a decent living and are also excluded from the benefits of development programmes in their communities. Their inclusion has been possible only because the project intentionally targeted them as the direct beneficiaries.

A similar outcome has been obtained from RRN's project on Reproductive Health and Livelihood Support in Rolpa and Salyan districts implemented during 2007. From the

very outset of the conception, the project envisaged gender and social inclusion as its sole strategy with the intension of not just having these marginalised social groups as rhetoric participants. The integration of social and gender concern in the project at all level of operation resulted in the enhancement of Dalit, Janajati and poor women's level of awareness regarding their rights to the health facilities, besides being practically benefited in terms of treatment for reproductive health (particularly the Uterus Proapse) and other general health problems. During the project period, it was observed those women who at first were reluctant to open-up and disclose their health problems, gradually started to articulate and put forward their concerns and queries. The rapport and trust being built through the project's local women staff during the project period facilitated the women beneficiaries' empowerment process which in turn contributed to strengthening their right (including health rights) seeking behaviour.

***(c) Gender and social inclusion responsive budget***

From the livelihood activities, we have found that the exclusion of women from the development programme has consequences for their participation in activities with low productive value within cash economies, thus relegating them to a lower status when viewed from the economic dimension of social stratification. Given the abundance variations in men and women's experience of rural life and living across the range of survival activities with women largely lagging behind their counterpart men, 'gender responsive budget' is the strategy RRN adopted for making the project 'social and gender inclusive', besides being gender sensitive to the entire the project cycle. Explicitly, the gender and inclusion responsive budget analysis was found to be an important instrument in ensuring participation of real target groups to meet the goal of reducing social exclusion.

***(d) Participant management from rights-based approach***

Participant management is ensuring deserving people's appropriate roles in the entire project cycle to the reduction of their social exclusion. This precisely involves assigning various roles to the target beneficiaries in respect of project activities befitting their own potentials and capabilities in a particular location leading to the reduction of social exclusion.



*NFE Center for women and men in Sankhuwasabha*

We found that inclusion of deserving people is more ensured in the projects which were implemented from rights-based approach. Right based approach considers the participants not only as right-holders of development activities but also as duty-performers. Sustainable Rural Livelihood Programme, an on-going programme of RRN implemented in 2002 in Sankhuwasabha district of Nepal is one such programme which is more social and gender inclusive, has the consequences for participation of poor women and socially excluded. One of the end-results of this programme was that it provided the socially and economically vulnerable women, dalits, and marginalised people in productive activities with greater social and economic incentives, besides the opportunities for participation in other community development programmes.

***(e) Comprehensive analysis, and going beyond gender and social exclusion***

The consideration of gender and social inclusion in community development programmes necessitates the analysis of gender disparities in access to and control over the programme and the analysis of the consequences of such disparities. It also necessitates the identification appropriate intervention ways for a project, programme and policy practice to rectify and correct disparities that have adverse social and economic effects.

It is our assertion that inclusion does not happen in vacuum and nor does it simply imply bringing any or all categories of individuals within the boundary wall of the general target groups so as to make the project social and gender representative. What is firmly required is not just to view the target beneficiaries as men and women, but also equally imperative is

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*Youth-friendly Training under a Health Project, Salyan*



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to identify them from social-economic perspectives besides determining them as 'deserving' to providing access to developmental opportunities. This is to articulate that an analysis within a particular gender and social category is required. While the individuals from the same gender often prioritise their needs differently, the women and men from different economic and social groups demand their needs variously.

Apparently, equally important is encouraging men to view the project not as zero-sum game between themselves and women, and vice versa. The commitments are fulfilled only if the actions are designed and implemented based on comprehensive gender and social analyses of the context and content of the project.

### Lessons learned

The specific lessons learned while viewing RRN's various community development programmes from social and gender inclusion perspectives are as follows:

- Inclusion is more possible when projects are designed with specific intentions to include the previously excluded and vulnerable

communities and strengthen their voice in decision-making and other activities. The project which was once exclusive can be made inclusive if the project's services are targeted towards specific groups and needy individuals.

- For the projects to be inclusive, they need to be responsive to the priorities of those groups who are socially and economically excluded.
- To be responsive and effective to gender and social inclusive development projects, budget allocation aiming at the target beneficiaries forms one of the most important aspects.
- Inclusion occurs if the project implementers (staffs) have thorough understanding and skills of the inclusion process.
- Managing the participants according to the nature and objectives of the project and vice versa; giving appropriate roles and responsibilities to marginalised men, women and other excluded groups in the project activities; by structuring the project rules and procedures is a necessary condition to promote inclusion.
- Identification of subgroups of the poor, especially those at risk of exclusion, and overcome the constraints (social, cultural, political, etc.) that restrain these groups from their participation in diverse project activities by strengthening their capabilities to do so is a pre-requisite activity.
- The projects implemented from rights-based approach are more gender sensitive as well as socially inclusive.
- Gender and social inclusion as a strategy must be institutionalised and internalised by the programmes in order to make it responsive, inclusive and produce consequences as per the expectation.

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*Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN), established in 1989, is a Nepali non-government, social development organisation involved in rural development, action-oriented research and policy advocacy focusing on peasants, poor women, dalits and indigenous nationalities, and other vulnerable communities through the process of facilitation, social mobilisation, empowerment and self-organisation. RRN's work is based on the four-fold approach to rural reconstruction covering: education to combat illiteracy and empower people to access their rights; sustainable livelihood to fight poverty; health to prevent disease, and self-government to overcome civic inertia.*