



POLICY BRIEF ON

# MAINSTREAMING GENDER INTO DEVELOPMENT PROJECT PROPOSAL

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## SUMMARY

A joint initiative by the Government of Bangladesh and three UN agencies namely, UNDP, UN Women and UNOPS, the National Resilience Programme, commissioned a review of current practices and application of 'Gender responsive guideline for design and review of development projects'. This guideline was originally developed by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) in 2009 to mainstream gender aspects into development interventions. This policy brief captures findings of the study highlighting challenges and structural gaps of the guideline that limited its use.

This policy brief recommends revision of the gender responsive guideline to make it simple, more practical and user friendly for officials responsible for planning and reviewing projects. It also urges that this guideline be made mandatory for all project proposals. This brief emphasizes on more proactive and supportive role of MoWCA, where it can facilitate gender responsiveness in project formulation. It is expected that recommendations captured through this policy brief will be addressed to promote gender responsive planning process.

## GENDER RESPONSIVE GUIDELINE

The 2009 guideline specifies five areas of a Development Project Proposal (DPP) where gender issues need to be addressed. The first of those areas is the **background** section, which lays out the context and rationale of the project. Then comes the **objective** of the project which must also incorporate gender aspects. While the DPP **strategy**

connects and aligns with global or national planning documents, project planners will have to make sure that this also aligns with gender and women's issues. It would then follow the project, which has already incorporated gender issues in its strategy and objective, would have a



### Partially covered

**Background** – situation analysis, context, priority, rationale, linkages

**Objectives** – overall and specific



### Covered to some extent

**Strategy** – links with planning documents, country programme priorities of development partners and development goals of strategic documents like National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPR) II, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF)



### Poorly covered

**Component-wise annual phasing and procurement plan**

**Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation**

corresponding **annual phasing and procurement plan**. And finally in order to check and measure whether these resources have indeed been able to deliver on the promises that the project made, there will have to be thorough **monitoring, reporting and evaluation** of gender-specific targets and indicators.

A review of nine DPPs found that background and objective sections accommodated gender aspects better than strategy. But component-wise phasing and procurement, and

or linking outcomes with national objectives, which would illustrate actual implementation of the guideline, the DPPs fall short of expectations. However, some good practices have been documented that seem worthy of mention.

- One project proposed social transformative activities to change gender norms and relations at the household and community level which would prove to be crucial and go a long way towards mainstreaming socially excluded groups like transgender persons.

**The 2009 guideline offered 14 standards pertaining to women to identify gender impact targets in designing of DPP. Relevant officials are expected to be mindful of these standards and prioritize them when writing or reviewing the objective section.**



- Access to health care and improved nutrition
- Access to public properties and services
- Access to education and training
- Reduce daily working hours of women
- Participation in labour market and income generating activities
- Enhance social safety and reduce probable vulnerability and risk
- Empowerment
- Participation in various forums
- Ensure safety and free movement
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Increase social status
- Access to law and justice
- Information technology
- Reduce violence and oppression

monitoring, reporting and evaluation performed poorly as regards gender responsiveness. Further, the study found a few contributing factors enhancing gender responsiveness. Such as, the DPPs that centred on women or were from related ministries like the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs fared better. Also, DPPs that fared well in these indicators were those by external experts or those with foreign funds that require gender inclusion as a compliance standard.

**GOOD PRACTICES**

The study finds that seven out of nine DPPs analysed women’s challenges and needs. However, five of them went on to comment about uneven gender relations and specifically mention the expected impacts on women, children and men. However, only three specified targets and data for women, men and children. On the whole, the background section appears to be cognizant of gender needs. They consider gender issues with due deliberation. But when it comes to specifics as regards the number of beneficiaries

Project proposals have also considered gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health and rights when considering benefits for women and girls.

- A project relating to the adaptive capacities of coastal communities included women as women as active agents of change and has a list of transformative indicators while another project includes men as key stakeholders in strengthening women’s productive opportunities.
- Of all the development projects, those under social welfare, women affairs and youth development are more gender responsive. This holds true for three of the nine project proposals reviewed. Further, donor funded projects address gender issues better through all the phases beginning with project design. It is perhaps because of stringent donor requirements. Non-compliance would risk withdrawal of the funds altogether.



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## CHALLENGES IN APPLICATION

### 1. Complex structure

The structure of the current guideline is a bit complex to follow for officials who plan and review project proposals. The guideline offers many gender responsive components that DPP needs to adopt, but components are not clearly explained with practical examples. One official said, “It needs modification. It has to be revised and simplified. And it has to be turned into a one-page document for use in project proposals.”

### 2. Format mismatch

While the guideline specifies five key areas, project proposal formats currently in use do not correspond to such sections. The DPP manual does not explain or have all the elements which the guideline mentions.

### 3. Missing tools

While the guidelines provided instructions about gender responsiveness, there were no checklists or a set of standards that could be used as indicators to assess whether a project is indeed gender responsive. Step by step instructions and explanation are missing in the guideline.

### 4. Lack of awareness

The guideline was not shared with officials who plan and review projects. They were unaware of the guideline and some have never heard anything about it at any stage of proposal development or review. One of the reviewers said, “We have never seen that guideline let alone following it. Nor were we ever given this guideline.”

### 5. Limited capacity

A comprehensive training programme was essential to

operationalize the guideline. Initially some orientation sessions were conducted when the guidelines were distributed. The orientation and training on the guideline was not carried out regularly and sustained beyond initial adhoc sessions, hence officials who plan and review projects said they did not know how to apply the guideline in project proposals. One said, “Users need to become familiar with these guidelines and interpret them for practical use. Training is essential for such skills.”

### 6. Limited leadership

MoWCA was expected to spearhead the implementation of the 2009 guideline since it is the technical agency for mainstreaming gender. But the ministry has not only had a limited role, the study found that MoWCA has had very little contribution at the Project Evaluation Committee (PEC) meetings which are an effective platform to ensure gender responsiveness. One reviewer said, “MoWCA needs to come to the PEC meetings regularly and ensure every project proposal has focus on gender issues.”

### 7. No monitoring

The gender responsive guideline was developed 10 years ago and it has not been placed through any functional monitoring system from where assessment of implementation of this guideline could be assured. One respondent said, “Why was it not monitored whether this guideline is being implemented? It must be followed up!”

### 8. Not mandatory

There is no obligation to apply the guideline in developing project proposals. It was never clarified how much officials should adhere to the guideline when reviewing projects. As a result, it was seldom applied effectively.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Revise the 2009 guideline with these points in mind**
  - a. Short, practical and user-friendly that is easy to apply
  - b. Must provide a clear explanation on information that need to be included for each DPP section
  - c. Step by step instructions with checklists
  - d. Introduce a scoring system of gender responsiveness
  - e. Have sector specific indicators for assessment where needed
  - f. Include a sample project proposal as a practical guide
  - g. Have a Bengali version to better convey the message
- 2. Mandatory use in DPPs**
  - a. Project proposals must include gender responsiveness measures as suggested by the guideline
  - b. The revised gender responsive guideline should be included in the DPP manual.
  - c. A minimum gender responsiveness score should be made mandatory for approval
  - d. Decide on a lead agency to monitor and supervise effective implementation of the guideline
  - e. There must be a mandatory system for review or scrutiny of any DPP by MoWCA before getting final approval
- 3. Effective role of MoWCA**
  - a. MoWCA, as the government's mandated technical agency for mainstreaming gender, needs to be more proactive and play the role of a catalyst
  - b. Lead capacity building of government officials on gender mainstreaming in coordination with the Planning Commission
- 4. Institutional capacity** is absolutely imperative for effective use of the guideline. There should be a concerted plan to build capacity of different agencies depending on their designated roles, be that planning, monitoring or reviewing.
- Both the key agencies - MoWCA and Planning Commission - should collaborate on **wider dissemination** of the gender responsive guideline to make planners and reviewers aware of its importance.
- Need to ensure **engagement of relevant officials and departments** during revision of the current gender responsive guideline.

## REFERENCES

### DPPs reviewed

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Bangladesh, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, *Emergency multi-sector rohingya crisis response project 2020*

Bangladesh, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, *Maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health, 2nd Revised 2019*

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Bangladesh, Ministry of LGRD & Co-operatives, *Strengthening women's ability for productive new opportunities 2014*

Bangladesh, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, *Fourth primary education development programme 2018*

Bangladesh, Ministry of Social Welfare, *Enhancing living condition of transgender people in 8 divisions 2019*

Bangladesh, Ministry of Water Resources, *Flood and river bank erosion risk management improvement program (2nd revised) 2018*

Bangladesh, Ministry of Women & Children Affairs, *Enhancing adaptive capacities of coastal communities, especially women, to cope with climate change induced salinity 2019*

### Other documents

Bangladesh, Ministry of Women & Children Affairs, *Gender responsive guideline for design and review of development projects 2009*

Bangladesh, National Resilience Programme (NRP), *Report on gender review of development project proposals 2019*

Bangladesh, National Women's Advancement Policy 2011

Bangladesh, Ministry of Planning, *7th National Five-Year Plan*

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This policy brief is developed based on findings of the study titled 'Review of current practices in uses of gender responsive guideline for DPP: lessons learned and way forward' by the National Resilience Programme. The analysis and recommendations of this policy brief do not necessarily reflect the views of UN Women. The text has not been edited to official publication standards and UN Women accepts no responsibility for errors.