



Roadblocks: Unmet Gender Promises in AIIB's Gujarat Rural Roads Project

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Summary

The Gujarat Rural Roads Project (GRRP), financed by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), constructed and upgraded rural roads to increase transportation access throughout the State. AIIB documents state that the project would specifically benefit women.¹ In 2018, Gender Action analyzed these documents for gender-sensitivity by applying ten indicators.² Gender Action scored the AIIB GRRP documents an 11/20 points (Table 1), noting that while the project documents are not gender-blind, they are not robustly gender-sensitive. A recently released field report compiled by an independent research team led by PWESCR found that few promised gender-sensitive measures are being implemented, and overall the project is benefiting men much more than women.³ The project did not establish mechanisms for women to inform or shape the project. Many fewer women were hired than men to work on the project. Work sites did not have gender-safe bathrooms or housing facilities for women workers. Project road construction reinforced gender inequalities and violated labor and human rights, especially those of tribal peoples. Based on fieldwork findings, Gender Action's project re-scoring has resulting in a score of 3/20 points (Table 1).

Introduction

In 2018, Gender Action published a Gender Scorecard and Analysis of the first 24 AIIB-approved projects, ranking and rating project documents' gender sensitivity.⁴ Among these 24 projects, the Gujarat Rural Roads (GRRP), officially known as the Mukhya Mantri Grameen Sadak Yojana (MMGSY),⁵ received an overall score of 11 out of a possible 20 points. As the fourth highest ranking project, GRRP was not gender-blind in its conception. However, a newly released field report now provides specific information on how the project is being carried out and affecting laborers and Gujarati citizens.⁶ Fieldwork was conducted by PWESCR (the Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), with assistance from ANANDI (Area Networking and Development Initiatives), a local state partner. In our project rescoring based on field findings the overall score plummeted to 3 out of 20 (Table 1). In this report, Gender Action compares its AIIB documents-based GRRP gender sensitivity rankings with PWESCR's fieldwork findings, demonstrating why the project's gender score fell dramatically.

¹ Gender Action. 2018. [Gender Scorecard and Analysis of AIIB Projects: A Documentary Review](#) references four AIIB project documents analyzed.

² Gender Action's ten gender indicators are from: Gender Action. 2017. [Gender Toolkit for International Finance Watchers](#).

³ Darooka, Priti and Sejal Dand. 2018. [Women and Rural Roads: A Case Study from Gujarat](#).

⁴ Gender Action Gender Scorecard *ibid*.

⁵ Mukhya Mantri Grameen Sadak Yojana (MMGSY) or the Chief Minister Rural Road Project in Gujarat, India.

⁶ Darooka, Priti and Sejal Dand *ibid*.

Fieldwork Focus

The PWESCR research team visited Gujarat twice and met with The Gujarat State Road and Building Department (R&BD) engineers, as well as government departments, a member of the Gujarat legislative assembly and consulting firms and construction companies that executed different aspects of the project. Researchers visited three factories contracted to mix bitumen for the project, and spoke with workers at two road work sites. The research team also talked to villagers and *sarpanch* (village-elected heads) in one tribal and one non-tribal district. Questions focused on gender issues involved in the construction, maintenance, and upgrade of roads. The compiled field observations examine the project's inclusion of, sensitivity towards, and potential impacts on the economic and social rights of women and girls in project-affected communities.

Project Documents vs. Fieldwork Findings

The following sections compare PWESCR's fieldwork findings, which vitally contextualize the project's gender sensitivity, to the gender promises Gender Action identified in AIIB Gujarat project documents. Our analysis of the fieldwork is framed within Gender Action's ten gender indicators below. Each indicator is scored between 0 to 2 points, for a total of 20. In the re-scoring, each category lost at least 1 point, and 7 out of the 10 scores dropped to 0. The final fieldwork tally plummeted to 3/20 from our original 11/20 project document score. The original and adjusted scores are listed in Table 1.

Gender and Human Rights: AIIB documents indicated that the project would maintain respect for tribal peoples' rights, but failed to incorporate human rights and gendered frameworks. Field research found that labor conditions at visited work sites resembled forced labor. Construction workers, a majority of whom were of tribal origin and lower caste, systematically had their rights violated. Workers wore no protective gear or dust masks, while working inside of factories with unbearable heat and dust for about eleven hours daily. There were no records of contracts or payments, and workers reported being paid late. Women were paid less than men and below the minimum wage. Workers were not registered with the State Labour Commission, which would entitle them to a worker identity card, labor protections, and insurance in the case of injuries.

Gender Inequality: Project documents failed to acknowledge inequalities between men and women, but they were discussed in practice. The Government's R&BD hired consulting firm LEA Associates South Asia Private Limited (LASA) to develop a gender framework and training for staff such as engineers. The training touched upon women's lived realities and contexts, however, it did not take place until construction was well underway. Since staff were not able to utilize the training in a timely way, project implementation has not been gender-sensitive.

Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV): In development projects globally, high influxes of outside laborers expose local women to increased sexual violence.⁷ Project documents did not acknowledge SGBV but did promise gender-separate toilets with adequate lighting and proper door fastenings at work sites. The research team found no gender-separate toilets and some of the visited sites had no sanitation facilities at all. Women living at some work sites slept in open fields with their families at night and reported that they had better living conditions in their home villages. There were no protections for women and girls at work sites where they reported sexual harassment to the research team.

⁷ World Bank. 2016. 'Managing the Risks of Adverse Impacts on Communities from Temporary Project Induced Labor Influx.'

Gender Data: Despite project documents specifying that gender-disaggregated data would be collected on the number of women workers, this was not completed in the GRRP in practice. The field report also notes that consulting companies did not monitor women's participation in local consultations and meetings.

Gender Context: The absence of information on gender contexts in AIB project documents, such as the proportion of female vs. male (un)employment rates, evokes a project design lacking understanding of local women's situations. Project documents fail to explicitly mention social, historical, cultural, and tribally-relevant processes, which could be utilized to identify and address local barriers to gender-inclusivity. While project documents analyze general socio-economic disparities, they do not consider gender dynamics within local communities. Although the trainings LASA led did touch upon tribal and gender issues, they were offered too late to benefit women during project implementation.

Gender Access: Contrary to project documents promising that both men and women would be hired, women were vastly underemployed. Of the three factories visited, only one employed one woman. At the six visited road work sites, 10 percent or less of those hired were women; and women were automatically hired for 'unskilled' laborers, regardless of education. Unskilled laborers were paid significantly less, and several women with secondary education reported being put into unskilled work regardless. No women were registered with the State Labour Commission. Female workers did not have separate safe sanitation facilities and there were no recorded medical check-ups, which project documents promised.

Gender and Care Work: Project documents stated that "a room of reasonable size" would be provided for children under 6 on construction sites with more than 30 employed women. Most sites were small and did not hire many women, but sometimes entire families worked together. Lacking childcare facilities, many families set up precarious makeshift tents for their children, without access to toilets or drinking water.

Gender Inputs: Project documents stated that women-only consultations would be held for tribal populations during project preparation. However, officials reported that women's participation did not surpass 10 percent in community pre-assessments carried out by R&BD. The research team was unable to verify that any pre-consultations took place. Villagers at the six visited road construction sites were not informed about the project prior to construction and only one received an R&BD invitation to a consultation during construction. After LASA was brought in, it convened consultations but did not monitor women's participation. Women's absent voices are reflected in the lack of protective mechanisms they reported they would have requested, such as adequate lighting near bus stops and footpaths, road safety signs, and safe driving speeds to protect women and children who mostly walk rather than ride vehicles (see Gender Outputs). Grievance processes, proposed in project documents as accountability mechanisms to address project-related harms, were not known to workers and residents in the villages visited. This potential avenue for women and men to provide feedback and seek redress for harm was inaccessible.

Gender Outputs: Project documents presumed that 46 percent of the roads' beneficiaries are female since Gujarat's population is 46 percent female. The documents recognized that women use roads differently from men, but only in regards to pregnant women who need to get to hospitals. In practice, women rarely have access to vehicles (cars, mopeds, bikes, etc.), walk nearly everywhere, and use smaller connecting roads. They use roads to go to temple, take their children

to school, and buy and sell goods at markets. Women also carry headloads, which increases risk while walking along busy roads used by cars.

Although the project roads are busy main thoroughfares, they were constructed narrowly, without shoulders or sidewalks. Because this road design increases pedestrian hazards, more women now must accompany their children to school, diminishing their time available for education, productivity, and rest. According to project documents, expanding road safety with shoulders and sidewalks through private land acquisition is precluded by Indian law. The roads also do not reach many schools and markets that would allow women to pursue opportunities. By ignoring women's realities and not including their inputs, the project missed providing them valuable opportunities and outputs.

Gender Impact: Overall, the project documents' discussion of design and implementation did not fully explore women-specific road needs and use. The field report concluded that the new roads are more beneficial to men since they have not reduced women's time burden or improved their access to schools, markets and safe travel. A specific example is Basgara village, where women experienced livelihood loss due to road flooding. A primary livelihood source for women around Basgara is cattle farming. Women need road access in order to sell dairy products. Because the road failed to incorporate a culvert or bridge to let rain waters drain, several women were forced to quit their dairy work during the rainy season when road flooding precluded road transportation.

Conclusion

By failing to properly research and incorporate the perspectives of women and local leaders, the AIIB missed key opportunities to design and implement a gender-transformative project. Despite historic women's involvement in community responses to road struggles in Gujarat, this project hardly consulted or included women in the project. As the above gender indicators highlight, this project overlooked women's lived realities, violated their labor, sexual and other rights, and minimized their potential economic and educational opportunities. Women faced overt challenges regarding worksite exploitation, sexual harassment, minimal community consultations, and other gender disparities. These conclusions are reflected in Table 1, which compares Gender Action's original score of AIIB project documents' gender promises to PWESCR's field findings. The adjustment from a score of 11 to 3 out of a possible 20 points underlines that while the project design promoted moderate gender inclusivity and consideration, implementation fell flat. The ongoing effects of this conclusion are reflected in the project outcome - roads that are not designed by and with women in mind. It is therefore unsurprising that PWESCR's fieldwork found serious harmful impacts on women.

The Gujarat roads project on-the-ground gender findings, demonstrating a massive gap between AIIB project document promises and implementation, suggest that similar gaps could exist in other AIIB projects. We conclude that AIIB projects cannot expect gender-sensitive implementation that avoids harmful impacts on women and girls without creating and implementing a robust gender policy, hiring gender experts, and training all staff to identify and address gender issues throughout the project cycle.

Recommendation

The Gujarat case underlines that the AIIB, which is rapidly increasing loan approvals, can no longer delay creating and implementing a robust gender safeguards framework. This requires developing and implementing a rigorous rights-based mandatory gender equality policy, hiring gender experts and training all managers and staff to be accountable for avoiding harmful and ensuring beneficial gender impacts throughout the project cycle.

Table 1
Gender Scores: Based on GRRP Project Documents and Field Report Findings

Gender Indicators⁸	Project Document Gender Analysis⁹	Field Report Findings¹⁰
Gender & Human Rights	1	0
Gender Equality	0	1
Sexual & Gender-Based Violence	1	0
Gender Data	1	0
Gender Context	1	1
Gender Access	1	0
Gender and Care Work	1	0
Gender Inputs	2	0
Gender Outputs	1	0
Gender Impacts	2	1
TOTAL:	11 / 20	3 / 20

Table 1: Legend

Numeric Score	Ranks	Color Codes
2	Strong	Green
1	Moderate	Yellow
0	Weak	0

Acronyms

ANANDI	Area Networking and Development Initiatives
GRRP	Gujarat Rural Roads Project
LASA	LEA Associates South Asia Private Limited
MMGSY	Mukhya Mantri Grameen Sadak Yojana (The Chief Minister Rural Road Project in Gujarat, India)
PWESCR	Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
R&BD	State Road and Building Department
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence

⁸ Gender Action Gender Toolkit ibid.

⁹ Gender Action Gender Scorecard ibid.

¹⁰ Darooka, Priti and Sejal Dand ibid.