

## CASE STUDY 10

### EMPOWERMENT, VOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR BETTER HEALTH AND NUTRITION IN PAKISTAN

**Country:** Pakistan

**Focus:** Accountability for better health services

**Donor(s):** DFID

**Organisation(s):** Palladium / Centre for Communications Programmes Pakistan

**Budget:** GBP 18.85m

**Timeframe:** 2014-2019



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#### KEY POINTS

- Focusing on gender aware processes as well as outputs can increase program impact
- Empowering women on non-controversial issues may contribute to broader role change
- Using a strong gender lens has improved program effectiveness

#### OVERVIEW

Empowerment, Voice and Accountability for Better Health and Nutrition (EVA) is a five-year program operating across the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces of Pakistan. EVA focuses on enhancing communities' ability to hold local government to account on the provision of reproductive maternal, newborn and child health (RMNCH) and nutrition services. Specifically, it does this by facilitating community groups comprised of volunteers who take citizens' concerns to district and provincial level government. More broadly, the program "seeks to create a culture of accountability within Pakistan's health sector by institutionalising mechanisms that provide opportunities for citizens and the state to monitor and engage duty-bearers at multiple levels of governance."<sup>1</sup>

#### GENDER AWARE WAYS OF WORKING

Despite being conceived as a program which would primarily benefit women through improved RMNCH services, EVA did not initially incorporate a strong gender lens throughout its design. However, as the program has evolved beyond its inception phase it has increasingly adopted a broader gender strategy, focusing not just on specific outputs for women, but also on gender-sensitising the *processes* to achieve those results.

This has been achieved by concentrating on the gender dynamics of the community groups which are at the heart of the program's strategy. Having reflected on the male dominance of these groups in the early stages, greater numbers of women have been recruited by capitalising on existing female members' large family networks, as well as employing male and female mobilisers in every district. The program has aimed to

## POLITICALLY INFORMED

Being politically informed is a way of working that recognises that development outcomes are determined by the dynamics of power and politics. It is not about formal governance reforms, such as elections or civil service reforms. It involves analysing stakeholder interests and incentives to understand what is politically feasible.

recruit equal numbers of women and men. This because although the majority of its beneficiaries are women, facilitators recognise that women-only groups can struggle to make their voices heard, and mixed groups present opportunities to expose male community members to women's needs and viewpoints. This is especially important given that, as an interviewee noted, "the political reality is that it's often the men escalating claims to district level and above".<sup>2</sup> However, cultural barriers have prevented non-segregated groups in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa so this has only been possible in Punjab. To address this and recruit women to leadership positions within groups, separate roles have been created for female and male group coordinators.

By 2016, women's membership of community groups stood at over 40 percent and the election of female leaders to community groups has demonstrably helped improve women's substantive representation within them, raising issues which may otherwise be overlooked. For example, in one district a female coordinator has successfully engaged local government to fund the construction of a separate washroom for women visiting health facilities.<sup>3</sup> In another district, a female coordinator has helped to challenge norms preventing women from casting their vote, and has even secured approval from the local Jirga to encourage women to participate in voting.<sup>4</sup> As a result,

## GENDER AWARE

Being gender aware is a way of working that analyses how women and men, girls and boys, experience an issue differently and/or unequally, and the power relations that sustain these inequalities. A robust analysis also looks at how gender intersects with other forms of diversity, such as race, religion, ethnicity, class and disability, and non-binary gender identities or diverse sexual preferences.

"we are starting to see successful examples that have nothing to do with women's health. The program is doing things at the community level that it didn't set out to do."<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, by shifting the emphasis from female beneficiaries to a gender aware process, EVA has begun to exceed its aspiration to empower women in a specific context: "By focusing on non-controversial issues such as maternal and child health, the program is leading to role change around women raising their voice. Furthermore, they are beginning to speak on more controversial issues such as elections. Therefore, there may be a lesson here regarding raising women's voices around 'safe' issues in order to begin a process of acclimatisation."<sup>6</sup>

## POLITICALLY INFORMED WAYS OF WORKING

While EVA's gender strategy has evolved throughout its term, the program has been highly politically informed from the start. The key facets of its approach include, firstly, mapping the existing landscape of NGOs, CSOs and other actors to avoid creating alternative structures. This was important not just to avoid duplication, but also to avoid aligning with elite-captured organisations and initiatives: "We hired mobilisers from the district and union councils [the

lowest levels of administration] to navigate these networks using their local knowledge, and that way we could identify indigenous grassroots initiatives and programs to align with."<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the program has been careful to avoid monetising its relationship with the community groups it facilitates. All attendance is on a voluntary basis, and the only financial support provided is small amounts of cash—transferred by mobile phone—for refreshments at meetings. Practically, "this means that those not attending for the right reasons will simply attend a different group who is paying people, which means that EVA community groups are populated by ordinary, civic-minded people who come because they hear about and witness the group achieving results".<sup>8</sup>

Thirdly, EVA's approach is informed by regular power and change analyses encouraging staff to consider formal and informal, visible and invisible power in the context of their work. Although this work has initially been undertaken by technical staff based in the capital and province level teams, the approach is increasingly being passed to district level staff via advocacy training: "Although it is admittedly a top-down approach, it is exciting to see that this is finally beginning filter through to community groups who are starting use this kind of analysis for themselves."<sup>9</sup>

Fourthly, the design has emphasised the importance of building relationships with and gaining support from both religious leaders and journalists working within print and television media to "legitimise EVA's activities, amplify the voices of its community groups, and to educate the wider population as to their rights and entitlements".<sup>10</sup>

Finally, although EVA has aimed wherever possible to work on a small scale with a good understanding of context rather than trying to scale up, it has also recognised the limits of empowerment and accountability at the local level for securing concrete

improvements to RMNCH services. Therefore, the knowledge and evidence generated by community groups has also been used to support direct advocacy at the provincial level. For example, local community groups in Punjab districts identified that complaints procedures which relied on citizens' internet access were creating barriers to accountability. These issues were subsequently communicated directly to provincial level government and now physical complaints boxes are available throughout the state. EVA staff are therefore responding to the limits of both empowerment and direct advocacy approaches: "We aim for local level sustainability by taking money off the table, but in the meantime help those places to have less sustainable but still substantial impact at the provincial level while the program is funded, and hopefully change the thinking and the approach of provincial governments while we're at it."<sup>11</sup>

## CONVERGENCE OR TENSION?

There have been both synergies and tensions in using both a politically informed approach and an increasingly strong gender lens in the context of EVA. "If we'd framed this as being all about women's voices then we would have been much less successful. However, if we'd just been politically smart and not had a gendered lens we could have achieved our program outputs and outcomes more efficiently, but we wouldn't have achieved the wider outcomes such as changes to women's roles in their community."<sup>12</sup>

These issues can be characterised as a tension between *process* and *outputs*: "It can be a struggle to justify the process when it takes extra time and effort to improve women's experience of it. But by striking a balance we've been able to achieve the desired logframe outputs, but we've also been able to achieve wider aims."<sup>13</sup> Although EVA has been successful in this respect, it is also important to note that gendered barriers vary from one province to another. Therefore,

while the program is consistently politically informed, this means it has had to vary the degree to which it can prioritise gender-inclusive processes, depending on context. For example, in some districts it simply isn't possible to facilitate mixed gender community groups, and as concerns are escalated to higher levels of government there is less room for women to communicate their point of view directly.

## EFFECTIVENESS: CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Key enabling factors include ongoing democratisation and devolution to local government; the growth and increasing diversity of independent media; and the opportunity to capitalise on political parties' manifesto pledges on health in the run up to the 2018 election. However, interviewees identify the factor most critical to EVA's success as simply "focusing on the achievable and letting everything else happen on its own".<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, a general absence of state responsiveness, and resistance to EVA in Punjab in particular, have proved limiting factors. These have not hindered the program's efforts entirely however. Instead mobilisers and community groups have turned their attention to district level government and the provincial assembly, despite this approach being "a much longer route of accountability".<sup>15</sup> In addition, security threats and attendant government scrutiny of CSOs and NGOs have interrupted EVA activities in some districts. Importantly, this can disproportionately deter women who are especially reluctant to be viewed as engaging in political or pro-Western activity. However, these factors have again impacted the program's efficiency rather than limiting its activities or outcomes more broadly.

## METHODS

A rapid review of select program documentation, combined with confidential interviews with at least two key informants per case. Informants include project staff,

independent reviewers, donors and other stakeholders. Identifying and listening to local and/or female informants has been prioritised. Interviews for this case took place on 01.02.2017 and 04.02.2017.

## SELECTED RESOURCES

Palladium case study: <http://thepalladiumgroup.com/research-impact/Pakistans-health-system---Understanding-the-politics-and-institutionalising-a-culture-of-accountability>

Palladium case study: <http://www.thepalladiumgroup.com/research-impact/Reframing-citizen-state-relations-from-the-bottom-up---EVA-BHNs-model-of-social-accountability-in-Pakistan>

Palladium case study: <http://www.thepalladiumgroup.com/research-impact/Fostering-an-ecosystem-for-accountability-in-Pakistan---The-medias-role-in-the-accountability-of-health-Services>

1. <http://thepalladiumgroup.com/research-impact/Pakistans-health-system---Understanding-the-politics-and-institutionalising-a-culture-of-accountability>
2. Key informant, 04.02.2017
3. Three year annual report, p.10
4. Three year annual report, p.10
5. Key informant, 04.02.2017
6. Key informant, 04.02.2017
7. Key informant, 04.02.2017
8. Key informant, 04.02.2017
9. Key informant, 04.02.2017
10. <http://www.thepalladiumgroup.com/research-impact/Reframing-citizen-state-relations-from-the-bottom-up---EVA-BHNs-model-of-social-accountability-in-Pakistan>
11. Key informant, 04.02.2017
12. Key informant, 04.02.2017
13. Key informant, 04.02.2017
14. Key informant, 04.02.2017
15. Key informant, 04.02.2017

This case study was written by **Orlanda Siow** of UCL as part of the Gender and Politics in Practice (GAPP) research project. It is one of 14 short case studies focusing on development programs that aim to be both politically informed and gender aware. See *From Silos to Synergy* for a synthesis of the lessons that emerge. Explore all GAPP publications at [dlprog.org/gapp](http://dlprog.org/gapp).

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