



CASE STUDY 13

THE ENABLING STATE PROGRAMME, NEPAL

Country: Nepal

Focus: Governance, Civil Society and State building

Donor(s): DFID

Organisation(s): Palladium / Triple Line / HURDEC

Budget: GBP 34m

Timeframe: 2001-2014



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KEY POINTS

- Working at multiple levels in varied contexts to address barriers to gender inequality
- Focusing on gender and social exclusion may itself a politically informed choice
- A gender lens strengthens political analysis, but can also highlight uncomfortable facts

OVERVIEW

The Enabling State Programme (ESP) operated in Nepal for over a decade before ending in 2014. The program targeted female, poor and marginalised citizens from remote rural areas, and pursued four specific aims. Firstly, voice and accountability: strengthening the ability of civil society partners to hold decision makers to account and access their rights and entitlements. Secondly, increasing the capability of selected state institutions. Thirdly, capacity-building for program and partner organisations to measure gender equality and social inclusion, and promote accountability and transparency. Finally, supporting the production of public information, sound evidence and analysis.¹ ESP's partners comprised state agencies, national and local civil society organisations, think-tanks and expert individuals, multilateral agencies and international non-governmental organisations.² The program's

achievements include helping government to deliver more effective and inclusive policies and programs, empowering historically excluded groups to participate in Nepali social and political life, and pushing gender-based violence up the national agenda, as well as contributing to improved government transparency and strengthening democratic processes.³

GENDER AWARE WAYS OF WORKING

ESP's approach to gender emphasises mainstreaming, as well as working at multiple levels and in varied contexts. By operating in this way, the program has aimed to address systematic barriers to gender equality, as well as ensuring that beneficiaries include some of Nepal's most marginalised women.

ESP's dedicated Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy (GESI) and mainstreaming approach covers

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.

gender aware policy and guidelines, institutional structure, programming and budgeting, specific programs, and capacity-building, as well as measurement, evaluation and reports. For example, internally, “we did several rounds of training with ESP staff to help them ensure that partner organisations would address gender and social inclusion, and then we supported partner organisations to develop and revise their own gender and social inclusion policies”.⁴ Externally, ESP supported efforts to, for example, gender aware governance training for civil servants: “We worked with the national institute which conducts the training, and provided the skills to do gender and social inclusion analysis within the political context. This was a way to mainstream gender and the values of accountability at the same time.”⁵ Program documentation notes an important lesson learned from this approach: “For effective gender and inclusion mainstreaming, the partners must lead and own the full GESI agenda. GESI technical support has to be highly skilled in order to maintain conceptual rigor while applying GESI principles to different working contexts and situations and while

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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.

seeking to influence a wide range and variety of audiences.”⁶

In addition to mainstreaming gender throughout its activities, ESP worked simultaneously at multiple levels and paid particular attention to the links between gender and other forms of social inclusion. For example, program documentation notes: “the multiple disadvantages of GBV [gender based violence] survivors from socially excluded groups has to be a regular part of all planning and analysis so that these people are able to receive the kind of support necessary”.⁷ Thus, at the local level, “many of the activities that we supported were about building up the capacities of women from marginalised groups who have previously not had a voice, strengthening their agency to influence local government groups. Practically, this helped them access local leaders and politicians and gain support for their constituencies, eventually influencing local policy”.⁸

At the national level, ESP supported the renewal of the government Gender Based Violence Unit to review and revise relevant legislation. “This support not only contributed to stronger legal protection for women, but has also resulted in regular inter-ministerial meetings focused on improving the coordination and implementation of GBV policies across fourteen ministries; the creation of a

GBV elimination fund; and the drafting of standard operational procedures for GBV shelters”.⁹ The program’s data collection and analysis also contributed to the success of these activities. For example, the qualitative and quantitative data we collected was what we required to secure change through the gender based violence unit”.¹⁰

Addressing gender inequalities in this multi-faceted way, ESP aimed to work, “not through a piecemeal approach, but systematically thinking about all of the different dimensions of how the program might support a more inclusive government and civil service”.

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POLITICALLY INFORMED WAYS OF WORKING

ESP is a highly politically informed program. This is demonstrated by its emphasis on local context and knowledge, focus on and framing of issues of inclusion, as well relationship-building and careful choices about who to partner with.

The program was launched “in the middle of an armed conflict led by the Maoists”¹² driven primarily by “poor governance, social and political exclusion and inequality”.¹³ Therefore, in this context “identifying and giving voice to issues of social inclusion in Nepal was in itself politically informed. This is because these issues are closely linked to many other political and developmental challenges within the country”.¹⁴

However, “at certain points, focusing on inclusion and exclusion was controversial, therefore we had to find ways not to give up on the issues, but to do so without inflaming passions. As a result, we tried to highlight the issue from a development rather than a political perspective. Obviously we were still working on empowerment, but we avoided politically abrasive frames”. Thus, the ESP’s continued success has been bolstered by taking a degree of political risk in terms of the issues it has addressed, as well as partially mitigating that risk by careful framing.

Tackling these issues and framing them appropriately depended heavily on local knowledge. To achieve this, “ESP employed both a full-time Nepali and a part time international governance and strategy advisor to help ensure that the program regularly and systematically monitored broader political developments and risks. ESP has also worked in conjunction with DFID Nepal’s governance team and with the Risk Management Office to explore opportunities and risks”.¹⁵ As a result, “this improved the program’s ability to identify political openings and then make a difference”.¹⁶ For example, capitalising on the political will to re-establish the GBV unit within government.

Emphasis on relationships has also been a crucial aspect of ESP’s politically informed approach: “our strategy has been very relationship intensive because we worked both locally and nationally, connecting local level dynamics to the national level. For example, what goes on in Kathmandu is very isolated from the rest of the country, and you need to connect the two to make a difference”. ESP has also been careful to develop links *between* local partners: “you have to ensure you are strengthening not just the capacity of these groups, but also the bridges between them. Otherwise you are not building a more inclusive political settlement”.¹⁷

Finally, the program has understood itself as a political actor, and as a result has made careful choices about who to partner with: “working on accountability, transparency and inclusion is not just a technical process, it is a political process [...] ESP acknowledges this political reality and has invested in the capacity and systems to understand these political risks and to make informed choices about with whom and how to partner”.¹⁸

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CONVERGENCE OR TENSION?

Because the decision to work on gender and social inclusion in this context was itself a politically informed choice, there are strong synergies between ESP’s application of a gender awareness lens and the principles of politically informed ways of working. In particular, the use of both simultaneously has contributed both the program’s ability to address barriers to gender equality, and to drive sustainable change: “inclusion matters politically for what drove and perpetuated the revolution [...] therefore, if Nepal was going to achieve a sustainable political settlement it needed to fundamentally tackle exclusion”.¹⁹ Mainstreaming gender and working at multiple levels was a way to “systematically address those fundamental bottlenecks to inclusive state and society. Otherwise if you squeeze one part of the balloon the bottleneck moves somewhere else.”²⁰

However, although the combination of both approaches has enhanced the program’s effectiveness, there have sometimes been tensions: “A political analysis without a gender lens will always be weak, so gender is essential. But, although TWP [thinking and working politically] and a gender lens are complementary, gender can be marginalised and therefore there sometimes need to be tough negotiations”.²¹ This is because “gender and social inclusion analysis sometimes brings out uncomfortable facts, which can be difficult to deal with in politically fragile environments. Therefore, there is sometimes a trade-off between short term change and long term change”.²²

EFFECTIVENESS: CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

The factors most critical to the success of ESP’s multi-level strategy have included flexible resources and the ability to mobilise and fund activities quickly when there is a pressing need: “for example, there was a series of events that brought gender

based violence to the forefront of the media agenda, so that led to the development of the GBV unit. The ability to make decisions quickly and respond to real time openings was crucial. This was also possible because of the insights of local staff who were on top of events”.²³

Key challenges to ESP’s ability to mainstream gender in particular have included “government and partner’s capacities; their working culture; the centralised nature of decision-making, programming and budgeting in government organisations; and the incentives, or lack of them, that drive motivation”.²⁴ However, while it has been a challenge to address these issues comprehensively at the national level, there has been “more opportunity to create influence via the civil service and partner CSO’s than through working directly with national ministries”.²⁵ Therefore, although there have been difficulties in *directly* influencing national government, the program has gained indirect influence by “seizing opportunities to also work at the local and district level”.²⁶

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 14.02.2017 and 15.02.2017.

SELECTED RESOURCES

DfID (2103). *Hitting a moving target: Delivering accountability, transparency and inclusion in Nepal*. Available at http://www.tripleline.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Hitting-a-moving-target_27Jan14final.pdf

DfID (2014). ESP: Project completion review 108572. Available at <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-108572/documents>

1. ESP project completion review
2. ESP project completion review
3. *Hitting a moving target: Delivering accountability, transparency and inclusion in Nepal*, DFID, 2013
4. Key informant, 15.02.2017
5. Key informant, 15.02.2017
6. ESP Gender & Social Inclusion strategy document
7. ESP Gender & Social Inclusion strategy document
8. Key informant, 15.02.2017
9. *Hitting a moving target: Delivering accountability, transparency and inclusion in Nepal*, DFID, 2013
10. Key informant, 15.02.2017
11. Key informant, 14.02.2017
12. ESP project completion review
13. ESP project completion review
14. Key informant, 14.02.2017
15. *Hitting a moving target: Delivering accountability, transparency and inclusion in Nepal*, DFID, 2013
16. Key informant, 14.02.2017
17. Key informant, 14.02.2017
18. *Hitting a moving target: Delivering accountability, transparency and inclusion in Nepal*, DFID, 2013
19. Key informant, 14.02.2017
20. Key informant, 14.02.2017
21. Key informant, 15.02.2017
22. Key informant, 15.02.2017
23. Key informant, 15.02.2017
24. ESP Gender & Social Inclusion strategy document
25. Key informant, 14.02.2017
26. Key informant, 15.02.2017

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.

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World Bank, Community discusses the water supply and sanitation project in their villages: Simone D. McCourtie



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