Evaluation Report

Making Women's Voices and Votes Count

Executive Summary

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The goal of the *'Making Women's Voices and Votes Count'* (MWVVC) project was to strengthen local women's political constituency in 3 districts of India. The project was led by three highly credible and accomplished women's rights organisations viz. IT for Change, Bangalore as the lead organisation and *Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan* as co-lead and ANANDI was the project partner who have worked with Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) over a long period of time, who have worked with community media and who were interested in engaging with ICTs as key influences for gender equality.

The project was supported by a two year grant from UN Women Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) with a budget of USD 2,80,000 for project implementation in 2 sites in Gujarat in Kutch and Bhavnagar and 1 site in Karnataka in Mysore, and for coordination by IT for Change, Bangalore.

The project design comprised the following three key strategies towards the outcome of influencing governance processes to be gender responsive, i.e. enabling women's perspectives and gender equity goals shape governance agendas.

- Using a combination of face-to-face dialogic meetings, and mobile phone-based IVR networking, for strengthening elected women's linkages to their peers, and to women community leaders and women's collectives in their constituencies. The intention was to support the EWRs to represent marginalized women's concerns in local governance processes and claim local media spaces to legitimise women's perspectives on governance.

- Creating a new public information architecture at the grassroots to strengthen marginalised women's individual and collective claims-making on state structures, through the setting up of women-run ICT-enabled information centres rooted in a rights-based entitlements culture, in all 3 sites.

- Catalysing community-media based campaigns and advocacy, and GIS-enabled participatory mapping and social audits, to bring in an alternative discourse on gender and governance, into the local public sphere.

Objectives of the Evaluation

'End of the project' evaluation was undertaken for assessing the robustness of the project design in moving towards the goal of gender responsive governance. The project strategies were evaluated in terms of their pioneering and innovative dimensions and reviewed for their effectiveness in making the desired impact, and for their sustainability. The intersectional dynamics of the three key strategies were also examined for their impact in altering gender power relationships at the individual, community and institutional level. Project and Partnership Management was assessed for its effectiveness to manage the project, levels of coordination between the partners and UN women and leveraging partnerships. The evaluation was also mandated to provide the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations for replication and scaling up to be given for the important stakeholders associated with the project.

Methodology

The standard DAC evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impacts and Sustainability was complemented by Gender@ Work's "Domains of Change" framework of analysis.

Desk review of all the key project documents- proposal, baseline report, progress reports, perusal of records maintained and Project Management Framework (PMF) was followed up with the writing of the inception report which outlined in detail the approach and tools for the evaluation. A reference group and a broad reference group (BRG) were constituted to support and guide the evaluation. In the field, data collection was largely done by using the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews with key groups of beneficiaries and stakeholders during the field visits at all three sites by the evaluation team. The communication products produced in the project period were also reviewed. Participant observation and meetings at the information centres, *panchayat* offices and extensive interactions with EWRs, leaders and members of women's collectives/federations & claimants, *Panchayat* Raj Institution (PRI) representatives and officials from the *Gram Panchayat*, Block/district administration, infomediaries and the project teams, resource persons and trainers, and government officials at the village, block and district level and tele-conversations with the UN Women team responsible for the project were undertaken. For drawing the conclusions and key findings, the evaluation report was corroborated with the process documents and baseline and endline reports.

Most Important Findings

The project has been catalytic in building innovative linkages between gender, governance and technology. Through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the project has caused a disruption in the traditional landscape of male control over information and communication,

positioning women as key interlocutors in the local governance context.

After an initial learning lag, the core group of EWRs have built a comfortable relationship with ICTs and are adept at handling devices and using technology in ways relevant to women's lives breaking the myth that technology is not for women. EWRs and women's leaders have become generators, users and providers of information.

For EWRs in the core group the most significant change is in their self-perception, self-esteem and aspiration to be effective in their political role.

Convening of *Mahila Gram Sabhas,* greater number of resolutions passed including passing of resolutions on women's entitlements and girls' education with the influence of the EWRs in the *gram sabha* meetings were important changes effected towards including women's issues in governance. EWRs have shown an increased commitment to help poor and vulnerable women, paying attention to women's safety and security, addressing maternal health and convene *mahila gram sabhas* to help women articulate their needs.

Their increased competencies as *panchayat* members has exploded the myth that politics is not for women and has increased the credibility and stature of EWR platforms like *Mahila Swaraj Manch* and *Gramshasini.*

The setting up of women-owned and rights-oriented information centres run with involvement of EWRs inside the *panchayat* offices was a major achievement symbolising acceptance of women-led knowledge management enterprise as part of governance. Thousands of women benefited through accessing their basic entitlements of food, shelter, education, employment, social security, sanitation etc. from the state which helped to improve their well being, health, security, nutrition, and dignity. There were some instances of women coming forward to claim their property rights to land and housing.

As a result of increased awareness of entitlements and realization of claims, women perceive themselves not merely as beneficiaries but as an engaged citizen with rights. The claims making process has been an empowering one in demystifying the complexity and opaqueness around governance and one's on relationship as citizens vis-a-vis the government.

A very impressive increase in the number of footfalls of women at the info centres, *gram sabhas, panchayat* offices & Government departments, especially in places where women's mobility is curbed, is a sign that women are moving out of the home and entering public spaces. Taboo topics like cervical cancer, single women's issues, and domestic violence are entering the public arena and health and security are now being talked as rights issues in the PRIs where the project has intervened.

However, the continued hold of men in PRIs and masculine form of politics seems to have acquired more complex forms combined with increasing influence of money and state power, business lobbies,

influence of mainstream, dominant political parties and their ideological discourse on the local governance institutions and their functioning. A significant numbers of the EWRs from the core group have expressed their desire to run the *panchayats* ,*"differently from the way men have".*

Though the PRIs and local service delivery institutions seem to be addressing women's concerns, women's perspectives still do not influence and inform the governance agenda and its functioning. The end line study shows that among the core group of EWRs, there were not many EWRs who saw themselves as women's representatives who could further the political constituency of women. The understanding of the EWRs on the gender responsive agenda was not very clear and strong nor was their position and condition in the PRIs very conducive in building the gender responsive agenda in the *panchayat* processes and functioning.

Despite the project being successful in showcasing increased instances of EWRs managing to get the resolutions concerning women's claims and entitlements and health and education in the *gram sabhas* and *mahila sabhas,* the thematic issues of health, education, PDS, and social security entitlements are predominantly perceived and addressed as women's issues by the EWRs and the other PRI members and functionaries.

Main Recommendations

- The ground work done in the past 15 years and more by KMVS, ANANDI and IT for Change in building and nurturing rights based women's constituency and promoting women's empowerment based on strong feminist principles, needs to be deepened further and supported with projects such as MWVVC. The window of the project period needs to be extended to at least another four years to allow for more time and space for EWRs and the women leaders to use ICT-enabled pedagogies for scripting a transformative agenda. The networks of EWRs such as *Mahila Swaraj Manch* in Bhavnagar and *Gram Shashini Manch* in Kutch and the women's federations in Mysore need longer and sustained investment of time, human, technical and financial resources to enable them in building a critical mass of politically active and gender responsive political constituency of women.

- To sustain the learning and impetus that the project has generated it is recommended to strengthen local level women's alliance building and networking processes and institutions. Further investment also needs to be made in designing of appropriate strategies guided by feminist methodologies and tools for making the triad of gender, governance and ICTs, work in an organic and holistic manner. Solidarity and building associational power of women need to be based on the notion of 'power to' and 'power with' so as to provide an alternate discourse for gender equality.

- The project outreach among the core group of EWRs and women leaders is recommended to be expanded for making a more concerted pitch for a stronger women's political constituency. A

much larger number of networked, assertive and aware EWRs are required to add their voice and perspective for the gender-just and gender-equal polces and agenda to be pursued in the local governance institutions.

- ICT enabled pedagogies need to be continuously reviewed and revisited – i.) to ensure their access, control and use remains with, for and by the women; ii) to ensure their use to create the script of transformative agenda for social justice and gender equality; iii.) To be acknowledged more and more as public goods; and iv.) to build a stronger interface of ICTs with different forms of community media for creating dialogic spaces on understanding and addressing local patriarchies and in terms of its influence on the mainstream media.

- Wherever the state is setting up e- and/ or ICT enabled governance processes, these need to be advocated to be managed and controlled by local collectives and platforms of civil society and women, especially by those women who are inside the PRIs and by those who are part of the local federations/ collectives. An ICT enabled architecture of the PRIs could be designed for addressing the claims and entitlements of the women from the poor and vulnerable sections of the society, based on the learnings from the project in setting up and management of the information centres as a 'good practice' model.

- Sustained inputs for building a stronger gender and women's perspective need to be provided to the EWRs and EMRs to effectively use the platforms of *Gram Sabhas* and *Mahila Gram Sabhas*. The need is to build their capacities and skills for their 'vision building role' and not merely to enhance their administrative efficacy for improved service delivery, increased attendance, knowledge about the rules and procedures.

- A new training model for EWRs and EMRs is needed that moves beyond the current supply-side, classroom based, one-off training modules of the state. The perspective building processes in Rural Development (R.D) and PRI processes should strongly be informed by a social justice agenda and move beyond building role clarity and efficiency.

- Short term, intermediate and long-term advocacy plans need to be drawn up from the local to the national level by civil society – women's rights and human rights organisations – for ensuring the commitment of the state to a free, fair and transparent functioning of local systems of governance as decentralised and autonomous institutions of democracy – thereby allowing for legitimate con-cerns of women and poor to be addressed.

- The PRIs need to be supported to deliver on its social justice agenda and not remain as a mere implementing arm of the government to administer village development activities. For the PRIs to take up social justice and mediation issues, suitable championing and advocacy strategies need to be designed by civil society and women's rights organisations on the ground. Concrete proposals need to be made for strengthening PRIs with adequate human, technical and financial capabilities for the gender responsive architecture of PRIs to be translated into reality.

- The present partnership model of implementation, with the lead and co-lead engaged in a thematic support based collaborative partnership with the third partnering organisation, in which all responsibility is shared, needs to be sustained and nurtured as a good practice. The technical niche provided by IT for Change in broadening the reach and uptake of ICT enabled pedagogies among EWRs and women leaders was strongly augmented by the strong mobilization work done by the women's rights organizations and the local women's collectives in Bhavnagar by ANANDI and in Kutch by KMVS. This partnership model could be made stronger by adding to it the experience of an advocacy based organization.

- It is suggested to build capacities of the *Panchayat* officials, *Sarpanch* and EWRs in gender-budgeting and for EWRs to be able to track budgets and expenditure and to make such information available in the public domain.

- For UNWOMEN, MWVVC can be used as a good example to further promote working on innovative and catalytic ideas in the space of women's political empowerment in a more collaborative approach with, and for, women's rights organizations. This would involve provision of increased financial resources and more flexibility in terms of time, space and resources to invest in collaborative ways of project designing, monitoring and resource mobilisation and its utilisation appropriate to the unique histories and contexts of the women's collectives and women's rights organisations. These entities are working with a diverse spectrum of issues, approaches but in defining ways for the social-political and economic empowerment of women.

- The work in the domain of systemic change and efforts to change harmful gender norms and exclusionary cultural practices need to be focused concurrently along with work in the other domains of enhancing awareness, increasing access to resources and making formal institutions and policies more gender responsive. Changes in the former domain would only lead to long lasting changes for a more equitable and just social order.