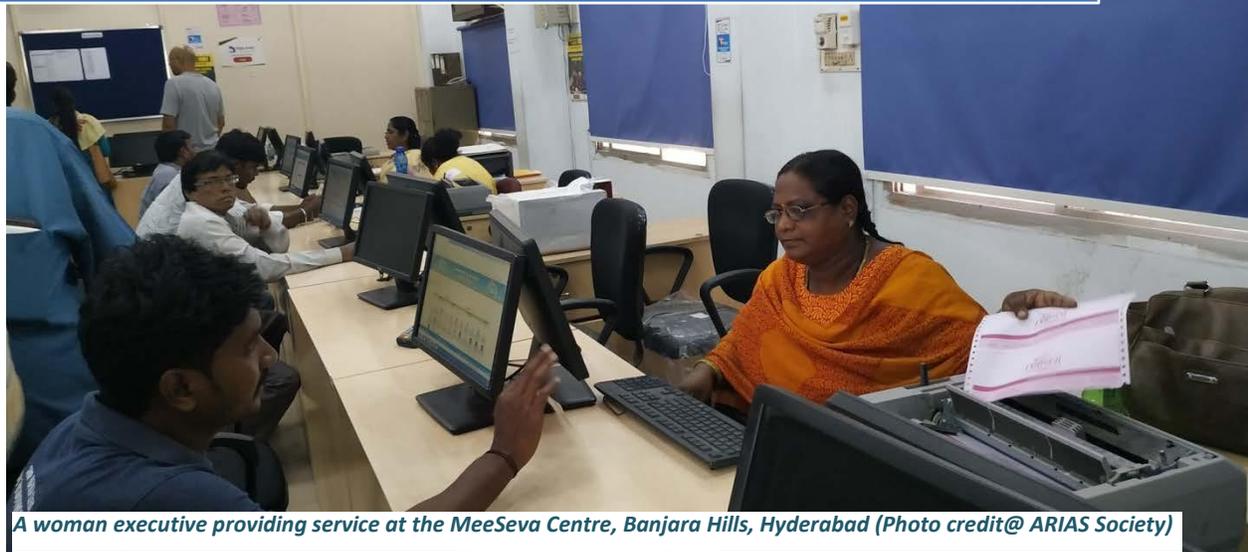


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Gender Strategy Assam Citizen Centric Service Delivery Project



A woman executive providing service at the MeeSeva Centre, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad (Photo credit@ ARIAS Society)

ARIAS Society

Introduction to the Project

The service delivery system in Assam is marked by limited capacity in terms of infrastructure, human resources and bureaucratic procedures of service delivery. Majority of processes at the district and sub-district levels are mostly paper-based; manual processing of applications limits service delivery efficiency with multilevel complex processes, and delays. Alongside, citizen's access to public services is limited by geography, topography and limited transport infrastructure in certain parts of the State, imposing unreasonable costs on citizens for securing Government services. Almost all procedures for public service delivery are provider-centered with limited involvement of citizens in the process. The Government passed the "Assam Right to Public Services Act" (ARTPS) in 2012 to strengthen service delivery in the state. The implementation of the Act is still in a nascent stage and there requires major improvisation of the service delivery system and processes in the State.

Against this backdrop, Government of Assam has take up the Assam Citizen Centric Service Delivery Project (ACCSDP), financed by World Bank with the aim to improve access in the delivery of selected public services in Assam. The project pursues a multi-faceted approach to incrementally improve and expand affordable access the project. Project interventions will (i) strengthen RTPS implementation; (ii) support process re-engineering in targeted services; (iii) develop Public Facilitation Centers (PFCs) to deliver services electronically at the block and circle levels; and (iv) promote citizen engagement. Primary beneficiaries of the project are common citizens, notably the poor who depend on basic services of the government. Adopting an integrated approach, the project addresses the supply-side and demand-side aspects of service delivery, to improve and expand access to 18 targeted RTPS services within Revenue, Welfare of Plain Tribes and Backward Classes (WPT & BC) and Transport Departments as well as the Guwahati Municipal Corporation.

Objective of the Gender Strategy

Gender mainstreaming is an important tool for integrating gender-inclusive actions within a project, leading to gender-sensitive outcomes and empowerment of women. Gender strategy in the ACCSDP will adopt gender transformative approach to programming, and outline actions that address the gaps hindering women from accessing public services; ensuring representation and participation of women in the project; and, accelerating efforts for equitable results. A strategy cohered with gender-sensitive indicators will inform the project, leading to equality in terms of access, opportunities and results and, fulfillment of the project objective.

Challenges faced by Women in accessing basic public services

The 2030 agenda for Sustainable development has placed gender equality and women's empowerment integral to all the 17 SDG goals. While women have made inroads across sectors, there is a huge gap still between the rhetoric and reality. There is a growing need to place women's agenda and inclusivity (leave no one behind) at the centre of all development efforts and programmes. Historical baggage of discrimination augmented with unequal gender relations and power dynamics have barred women from exercising their rights in full capacity. Discriminatory social norms and customs have posed undue restrictions on women, leading to unequal distribution of resources, power-sharing and decision-making. While there are impediments like, limited mobility, financial concerns, unpaid care work and personal security risks posing hindrance to women's access to public services, the major factor which refrains access is the gender insensitivity of the structures and the processes.

The service delivery systems are also witnessing shifts, in terms of infrastructural and technological development. Although this is a positive move, the issue which needs attention is limited access to technology by women.

Principles governing the Gender Strategy

The principles of equality and non-discrimination stated in the India Constitution forms the cornerstone of this Gender Strategy and Action plan. In alignment with United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (UN-CEDAW), Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), National policy for Empowerment of Women, the programmatic responses will be created for engendering the project. The strategy also refers to the Operational and Social Safeguard Policies of the World Bank which promotes gender as a cross-cutting issue in all sectors. The 'World Bank's Gender Strategy (FY 16-23) Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction and Inclusive Growth' provides a narrative of the key development parameters from a gendered point of view, challenges affecting women's growth, and suggesting interventions for equitable outcomes. Affirmative action will be taken to ensure representation and participation of women in the project planning and implementation activities.

Gender dynamics within the ACCSD Project

The ACCSD project has made an attempt to highlight the overall status of women in Assam; development indices of Assam indicate a better picture than the corresponding national figure. However, the State portrays lower representation and participation of women in the political processes and in the government services. Explicit mention has been made about the tribal women in the project document about lagging behind on educational attainment. This project will make an effort to reach out to the vulnerable communities which are diverse in many ways- social,

economic, ethnic, gender and geographically. Although a challenging task, the project will try to look beyond dichotomies, gender will be understood through an intersectionality lens.

During the project preparation phase, a number of consultations were organized with a wide range of stakeholders; women's involvement in different capacities helped in building the project from a gender lens and understanding the public services from a holistic perspective of 'access', 'opportunities' and 'outcomes'. Social analysis of the project was initiated and a Tribal Development Plan prepared in accordance with the Bank's Operational 4.10 (Indigenous Peoples) policy, thus leveraging the mandate to involve women through formal and informal group consultations during preparation and implementation of the project.

The Project Appraisal Document prepared by World Bank has made a deliberate attempt to include Social (including Safeguards) as a major area of intervention. The document explicitly mentions, *"The project will incentivize gender aspects and the use of RTPS services by women in at least three ways. First, it will launch a dissemination campaign explicitly tailored to potential women users of services. Second, it will encourage the engaging of women as staff responsible for operating Public Facilitation Centers being supported by the project. It is expected that at least one-third of all staff to be hired under the project will be women. Third, it will systematically track the use of RTPS services accessed electronically by women at blocks and centers."*

Engendering the broad contours of the project:

- **Strengthening RTPS implementation:** The project baseline report has captured individual perceptions of women from all the districts of Assam on different parameters, thereby making an attempt to make the report gender inclusive. Parameters entailed level of awareness of women on the Assam Right to Public Services (ARTPS) Act, 2012; access to services under ARTPS Act as beneficiaries; and listing of ARTPS notified services demanded by women. The project will encourage women to apply for services.

Actions: Gender-sensitive indicators will be developed to bring more women under the ambit of the public service delivery system. Not just quantitative data, qualitative responses will be captured to measure the positive/ negative impacts of the interventions on women and men. This will include more detailed planning and analysis of the change management interventions; robust outreach strategy and awareness campaigns; and capacity building initiatives targeting women. Quarterly monitoring indicators have been developed to assess the same. It is anticipated that the project's results framework will be strengthened by indicators which gives an indication of the gender-oriented performance of the project. One of the intermediate results-level indicators in the project for tracking gender-related performance is the 'Number of applications for RTPS with women as beneficiaries'.

The table below explains the process of measuring the said indicator:

Indicator	Cor	Unit	Baseline	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Number of applications for RTPS with women as beneficiaries	X [Direct Project beneficiaries (number) of which female (%)]	% of total applications designed	Outreach strategy for women designed	Outreach strategy for women implemented	Baseline established	Increase of 5% over Year 2	Increase of 7.5% over Year 3	Increase of 10% over Year 4

- **Information, Education and Communication (IEC):** In order to improve access in the service delivery of public services in the State, it is important to encourage citizen engagement and participation in the service delivery process. A pragmatic approach to achieve the same is to develop an IEC strategy which is gender responsive in nature; and enhancing the level of gender integration in the process. The Project inception report for *‘Conducting State Wide Citizen Awareness Campaign/ IEC Campaign to publicize provision of the Assam RTPS Act’* has highlighted ‘women’ as one of the target audiences.

Actions: To develop an inclusive IEC strategy, Communication Needs Assessment (CNA) will be done using a gender lens. 50% of the informants reached through both Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will be women. It will specifically articulate how communication channels are used differently by women and men; gender norms and inequalities limiting access to knowledge and technology by women will also be analyzed. This would inform the IEC strategy thereby including specific measures overcoming gender-based barriers in accessing information or participating in activities. IEC strategy will ensure that the communication tools and channels suit the need and preferences of women, enabling greater outreach and maximum participation of women. IEC messages/tools/ materials will be customized based on the target groups.

Key messaging around the provisions of the ARTPS Act and the grievance redressal mechanism will entail efforts for effective participation of the community women, thereby leading to sustainable campaign in the long run.

- **Setting up Public Facilitation Centers (PFC):** Women’s access to public services is hindered by plethora of reasons, and of them being the factor of commuting long distance to reach the specific PFC and the cost and time involved in it. The ACCSD projects aims to bring services closer to local people, thus ensuring speedy delivery of services through technology.

Actions: The Project aims to set up PFCs at the circle and block offices, which are accessible to rural people and mostly importantly women. The project will take affirmative action wherein one-third of all staff hired under the project to operate the PFCs will be women. In compliance with the Tribal

development Plan, intersectionalities will be considered; actions to uplift the capacities of the tribal women will be given due preference.

Enabling environment will be created in the PFCs by promoting actions aimed at preventing sexual harassment of women at workplace.

- **Tribal Action Plan:** Tribal Action Plan has been prepared under the Tribal Development Plan under the project by the 3 Autonomous Councils for improving the governance in the tribal areas; address the specific concerns hindering access to services by tribal people; and, leveraging on partnerships with ARIAS Society for initiating actions for creating responsive service delivery by the Councils.

Actions: Tribal Action Plan will deliberately take into concern 'Involvement and Empowerment of Women' as a specific action area. Participatory approach will be adopted to involve women in all community level consultations. Digital literacy programme will be customised for women, as a measure narrowing 'digital gender gap.' Individual women and self-help groups will be capacitated through training programmes on RTPS Act and Rules and exposure visits; select women will further take on the role of a trainer. Awareness will be created amongst women on the provisions of the RTPS Act, their rights as citizen and, further bridging the gap between citizens and the Government.

Assessment of the Gender Strategy

There will be Proactive disclosure of Gender Strategy in the website of the ARIAS Society. The strategy will be disseminated amongst the project partners and vendors to plan their actions accordingly. The assessment of this strategy will be done on an annual basis and will be an important component of the 'Social Safeguard Implementation Progress Report'. It will be structured assessment; maintaining sex-disaggregated data is one way, broader qualitative analysis will be done to document transformative change process. Social Safeguard Specialist of the ARIASS under ACCSDP will be the nodal point operationalising the gender strategy and documenting the implementation.

In order to monitor the gender aspects, indicators have been formulated as a strategic step, and intended to provide guidance in documenting and monitoring all gender relevant results during project implementation. Some of the indicators developed are gender-differentiated indicators and some gender-specific. Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used to measure the change.

Gender mainstreaming Action Plan with monitorable indicators:

Action Area 1: IEC campaign explicitly tailored to potential women users of services		
<i>Output/ Process Indicators</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Means of Verification</i>
Number of Percent of female participants reached through various IEC activities	Half-yearly	Attendance sheets of the activities
Number and quality of IEC materials and activities developed in consultation with women or approved as gender responsive materials by the Social Safeguard Specialist	Half-yearly	IEC Strategy and Action Plan documents
Action Area 2: Gender inclusive Public Facilitation Centers		
<i>Output/ Process Indicators</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Means of Verification</i>
Number and Percent of women employed in PFC	Annual	PFC Management data
Number and type of awareness initiatives undertaken to create enabling environment at PFC, aimed at mitigating gender-based discrimination and violence against women at workplace.	Annual	PFC Management data, internal reports
Action Area 3: Access and usage of RTPS by women		
<i>Output/ Process Indicators</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Means of Verification</i>
Percent of female citizen applied for RTPS services	Annual	RTPS Portal and M&E midline/endline survey, PFC, PFC data
Action Area 4: Digital literacy interventions for women		
<i>Output/ Process Indicators</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Means of Verification</i>
Number of women enrolled in digital literacy programmes including those targeted specifically from disadvantaged background	Annual	Attendance sheets of digital training program
Number of female students of secondary school reached through digital literacy	Annual	Attendance sheets of digital training program
Evidence of change in attitudes and skills through digital literacy programme	Annual	Pre-Post assessment report
Action Area 5: Capacity building initiatives on RTPS Act and other subjects		
<i>Output/ Process Indicators</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Means of Verification</i>
Integrating gender analysis into assessment, training design, implementation	Annual	Bidding documents and contracts; Training plan, module and reports
Number and percentage of women and men from the Government participating in capacity building programmes	Half-Yearly	Disaggregated data on participation, Pre-Post assessment report
Sex- disaggregated data of the capacity building programmes, disaggregated by other key variables like socio-economic background, age and ethnicity, and data analyzed	Half-Yearly	Disaggregated data on participation, Pre-Post assessment report

Conclusion

Gender strategy will be supported by a team committed to gender equality and social justice and, will be strengthened by efforts of the partners with shared values and vision. Building synergies with the concerned government departments and Autonomous Councils will ensure achieving the goal of gender and social justice. The ACCSD project in all its project interventions, documentation and monitoring will encourage actions that mainstream gender, and cull out tools and best practices from a gender transformative framework.
