

## FACTSHEET (December 2009)

### Project on Gender and Governance: “Promoting Women’s political leadership and governance in India and South Asia”

Supported by the Royal Norwegian Agency

#### **Project Background**

Women’s political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy. It facilitates women’s direct engagement in public decision-making and is a means of ensuring better accountability to women.

In South Asia, women form more than 50% of the population and yet research suggests that women’s participation in decision-making processes, especially in relation to representation at the different levels of governance is significantly lower in countries such as Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This implies that not only are women being denied their rightful place in a democratic polity, but also their voices remain unheard and their special needs overlooked for the most part within these societies. The project envisages that by 2030, women and men elected representatives have equal influence over political decision making within South Asia.

This project in partnership with the Hunger Project and the National Institute for Rural Development (NIRD) addresses empowerment and capacity building of women and their groups to improve their participation in the political process thereby making governance more gendered and equitable. The project will be implemented initially in India and will then scale up the learning to Bhutan, Nepal Bangladesh and Pakistan. The program will institutionalize the above functions in a South Asia Regional Centre of Excellence for Gender Responsive Governance.

#### **Project Objectives**

This project aims at empowering elected women representatives in local governments in order to make public policy and resource allocation patterns responsive to women’s human rights. The following outcomes will contribute to the program goal:

- *Evidence based advocacy on gender-responsive governance strengthens legal frameworks and policies for women in India and South Asia by 2015.*
- *Elected women and men representatives in local governments have the knowledge and capacity to transform and implement policies, programmes and resource allocations for gender responsive governance in 6 states in India by 2015.*
- *Key capacity development and media institutions and structures in India and South Asia are strengthened to mainstream gender into their policies and programs by 2015.*

#### **Project Information**

**Area:** Democratic Governance

**Budget:** USD 10 Million

**Project Duration:** 36 months (2009 – 2012)

**Implementing Agency:** United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in partnership with the National Institute for Rural Development (NIRD) and the Hunger Project (THP)



## Activities – Phase 0: Implementation planning, context setting and ownership building

NIRD-UNIFEM consultation with selected state government officials and elected women representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions (30th November - 1st December, 2009)

A two-day long consultation in the NIRD campus of Hyderabad was organised to initiate the process of implementation planning, context setting and ownership building. Government officials from 10 states (*officials from ten states were invited with the objective of selecting six states from among them*), representatives of the Hunger Project, members of NIRD and representatives of UNIFEM participated in the consultation. The discussions highlighted:

- The prevailing ground realities and thus the purpose and rationale of the project;
- The objectives of the project along with the planned activities;
- The role of the 10 participating state governments in grassroots polity including driving forces and constraints in effective grassroots governance;
- The preparedness of the state to participate in this project; and finally
- Enunciation of the next steps in operationalizing the project.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, a group of 50 elected women representatives were invited from the 10 states. The discussions engaged these elected women leaders and ensured their proactive participation in the proceedings of the consultation alongside other stakeholders. Through the day the topics discussed were:

- Addressing the difficulties of elected women representatives in terms of division of time between professional and family responsibilities, dominance of men at the work place and lack of access to information to set the context of the project;
- Identifying of the processes that are essential for women's empowerment to build ownership of the women in the project processes; and of course
- The needs and areas in which women require capacity enhancement to engage them in self analysis and assessment.

### Project Location(s):

Starting in India - The project will be implemented in 6 states (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh)

Other countries in South Asia – Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh



Since it was the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, World AIDS Day, in support of those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS in rural India the present elected women representatives resolved on the following:

- “We the elected women representatives to the Panchayats in various states of India jointly affirm our support to men and women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS in India. “
- “We also make our personal pledges to work towards stigma reduction against HIV/AIDS in our villages/blocks/districts.”
- “We will try our best to lobby for special programmes through our Panchayats that improve the health and sanitation facilities in our villages for all. Needless to say facilities such as improved toilets and improved clinics will benefit families affected by HIV/AIDS.”
- “We will serve as motivators and counsellors among the community that we represent and prevail with community leaders to campaign for promoting male responsibility in sexual matters.”

This is the first joint resolution that these women agreed upon and therefore it was evident that in the coming months this project will not only address the issue of good governance in the grassroots, but also act upon other related development issues that women face in rural India.

**NB:** UNIFEM is also in the process of hiring staff members for the successful implementation of this project by January as well as is in the process of signing an MOU with NIRD and the Hunger Project by the end of 2009.