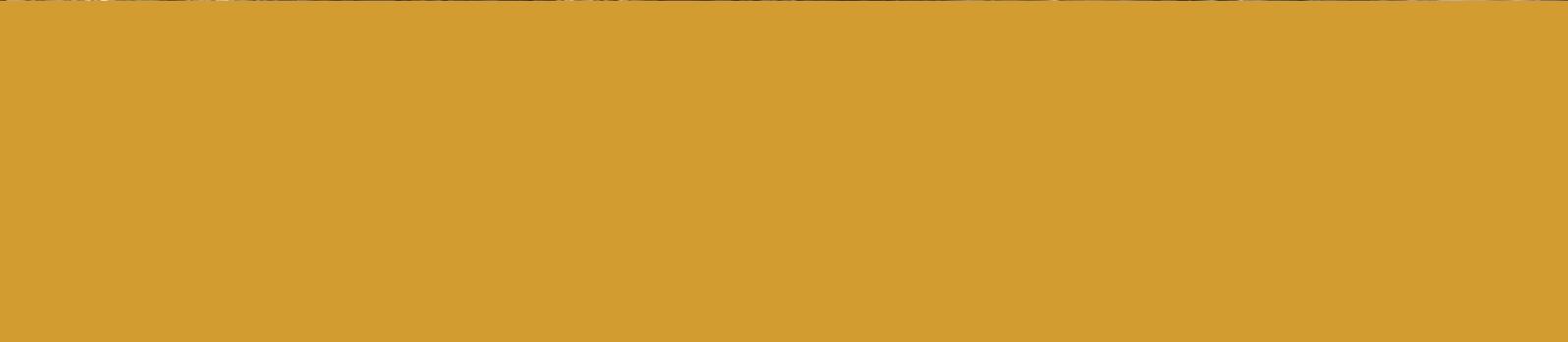


*AllB's Roads to Equality:  
A Gender Case Study from Gujarat*



By Priti Darooka and Sejal Dand



# Introduction

*Rural roads have enormous economic and social benefits to the poor in terms of increased agricultural production, lower input and transport costs, increased school enrollment, increased access to health and other services. In addition, rural roads construction, maintenance, and rehabilitation are an excellent employment and income-generating opportunity for the local population.*<sup>1</sup>

Mukhya Mantri Grameen Sadak Yojana (MMGSY)<sup>2</sup> or the Chief Minister's Rural Road Project in Gujarat in India was selected as a case study to critically assess inclusion of, and impact on, women and girls at all stages of the project. MMGSY is an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) funded stand-alone project in India. This gender analysis report of the project titled '**AIIB's Roads to Inequality: A Gender Case Study from Gujarat**', includes observations, findings, and recommendations from the field with an overview of relevant Indian and Gujarat State laws and policies and an analysis of the gaps and track record of implementation.

## **Women and rural roads:**

*There is no sustainable development without gender equality.*<sup>3</sup> As Ritu Dewan rightly says, the existing prevalence and persistence of gender inequalities rooted in social norms, culture, as well as economic inequalities does not allow gender to be fully integrated in all development projects. However, if gender is not fully integrated in such projects, then the danger is that the project might further perpetuate gender inequalities and gaps.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is important to proactively incorporate gender analysis in all aspects – design, planning, and execution – of AIIB and other development projects. With proper assessment, planning and an integrated gender analysis, roads can contribute towards gender equality. Unfortunately, infrastructure projects such as MMGSY don't take gender components explicitly/implicitly into consideration in their social and environmental assessment and risk mitigation policies. Hence, such projects assume a gender-neutral approach: for instance, "improved roads will benefit everyone equally".

A lack of roads severely impacts local people, especially women, as mobility is restricted, inconsistent, and inconvenient; travel is costly and time consuming, which takes a toll on human capabilities and opportunities.<sup>5</sup> Roads infrastructure is not only for economic growth but also can be a key instrument to address the rural-urban divide and improve quality of life by addressing isolation, resulting in better exposure to opportunities and resources. Rural road connectivity does play a role in improving 'men's economic productive role and women's

economic, domestic and community management roles.'<sup>6</sup> All development projects need to do an in-depth analysis and assessment of women's needs and physical usage of infrastructure. It is equally critical to understand the gendered differences in the impacts and to, especially, have processes to mitigate the negative impacts and risks of development initiatives on women. All infrastructure projects must include both 'do no harm' and 'do some good' approaches towards promoting gender equality by proactively addressing some historical social norms and harmful practices and prescribing specific measures for the empowerment of women, including promotion and protection of women's livelihoods.

Rural road connectivity also needs to go beyond merely taking into account the usual gender sensitive issues of health and education, but to also ensure that women's needs in their roles as economic agents are integrated and addressed. Roads, especially in rural areas, in addition to providing access to health and education services, also impact women's work (paid and unpaid) and livelihood by providing access to markets, employment opportunities, and other resources. In the absence of adequate social infrastructure, rural women spend a lot of time on unpaid work that includes toiling on family farms post-harvest, processing of agricultural products, collection of free goods including water, fuel and fodder, maintenance and care of household. Women are also engaged in several livelihood and income generating activities. Road connectivity impacts women's both paid and unpaid work.

Research shows that men and women use different roads as well as use roads differently. While men mostly use the roads to travel outside of the village, it is women who use the internal village roads for commuting to the fields, markets, schools and public utilities. Women use roads for family, community, and society maintenance tasks. They also travel for livelihood opportunities, for fetching fodder, water, and firewood. Women tend to make frequent and numerous short trips to the fields, schools, and nearby villages. Women are primarily head-load carriers and walk on the shoulders or sidewalks or use free and non-motorised transport. Women also use public transport but rarely take motorised transport for personal use. Due to

<sup>1</sup> World Bank Group,

<sup>2</sup> Mukhya Mantri (Chief Minister) Grameen Sadak Yojana (MMGSY)

<sup>3</sup> *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, September 2015

<sup>4</sup> Dewan Ritu, 2012, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana: Visibilising Gender in Rural Road Connectivity, UN Women

<sup>5</sup> Dewan Ritu, Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Dewan Ritu, Ibid

a gendered dimension, a woman's time has less value, hence, women usually walk or take less expensive means of transport, which are time consuming and tiring. This is a huge time burden that women carry which prevents them from engaging in other productive work.

Without integrating a comprehensive gender analysis and a gender framework, development projects, at best, adopt a formal equality model – same input to get the same output for all - assuming all women from all demographics (Dalit, tribal, rural, urban etc) will benefit in the same manner from a particular project as all men. This assumption is flawed. Feminists globally have emphasised the critical need to use a substantive equality framework which recognises the gendered realities and differences in the lived context of men and women, as well as the various obstacles and disadvantages women face to achieve equality.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, substantive equality requires different inputs and corrective measures – for example, to ensure women's participation in community consultations, to have such meetings at times suitable for women, separate women's-only consultations with women facilitators etc., for the

same output, i.e. women's equal participation or gender equality at all levels – equality of opportunities, equality of access to these opportunities, and equality of getting benefits and results. All infrastructure projects should ensure women gain employment opportunities at all levels and all stages of the project and should take special steps to provide livelihood and asset building opportunities to rural women.

To bridge gender gaps, policy makers and IFIs, funding large infrastructure projects such as roads, should ensure equal access to opportunities (both economic - including work within the project, and social - including health, education), knowledge and information about the project for women and women's full participation in all aspects of the project. The project should have clear gender indicators beyond just mitigating risk to also capture how the project is benefitting women in their day to day life -- in asset building, in livelihood-creation, in procurement, in employment, and in addressing harmful practices. Projects must have a robust grievance mechanism to ensure equal access to justice that women are aware of and, therefore, in a position to address any negative impacts.



<sup>7</sup> **International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific)**, 2014, CEDAW Quick & Concise: Principle of Substantive Equality, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XB3H3FZyjOM&feature=youtu.be>

# Project Description and Research Methodology

## Background: the AIIB-MMSGY rural roads construction project in Gujarat

The Gujarat Rural Roads Project, financed by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), seeks to construct and upgrade rural roads to increase connectivity throughout the State. According to the project document, its aim is to provide all-weather rural roads to about 1060 villages in all of the state's 33 districts, benefitting about 8 million people at an estimated cost of USD 1.5 billion. The project will be carried out in phases. Phase 1, currently being implemented, will involve an outlay of USD 658 million of which USD 329 million is AIIB-funded.<sup>8</sup>

According to the AIIB project document, "The project comprises the following four components<sup>9</sup>:

Construction and maintenance of non-plan roads (NPR)	Upgradation of plan roads (PRs)	Technical assistance	Innovative technologies
Black-top surface of cart tracks, earthen links between villages, and between a village to existing road networks. Additional existing NPR would be upgraded and strengthened.	Repair, resurfacing to black top surface and upgradation to PRs and also widening of existing roads to enhance traffic capacity.	Use of digital technology to map rural roads network and connectivity in Gujarat for better monitoring. Also to build capacity for the Gujarat Road and Building Department.	Use of recycled material in the construction of the road. R&BD shared that no recycled material was being used so far in the roads though there is provision for it.
The project will first provide connectivity to villages with populations of less than 500 and will supplement PMGSY (Prime Minister Gramin Sadak Yojana or Prime Minister Rural Road Scheme). The project, however, will not construct any new roads			
Construction of missing links and missing structures which includes culverts and bridges.			

Only two of these elements - construction and maintenance of 'non-plan' roads and upgradation of 'plan' roads – came under the purview of this study.

## Objective of this case study:

The objective of this study is to highlight the gender ramifications of infrastructure projects such as the AIIB-funded MMSGY (which, in India, is a stand-alone project) and to ensure integration of gender aspects in the design, execution, and evaluation processes.

## Research Methodology:

After a desk review of gender perspectives and issues related to road projects,<sup>10</sup> in-depth field research in Gujarat was undertaken to assess the project on-the-ground. The field observations are also based on an evaluation of the relevant AIIB standards during project preparation and implementation, and an examination of the project's inclusion of, sensitivity towards, and potential and actual impacts on the economic and social rights of women and girls in project-affected communities.

PWESCR (the Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) as the lead organisation on this research invited ANANDI<sup>11</sup> (Area Networking and Development Initiatives) as a local state partner. The research team visited Gujarat twice. The visits included meetings with the following entities:

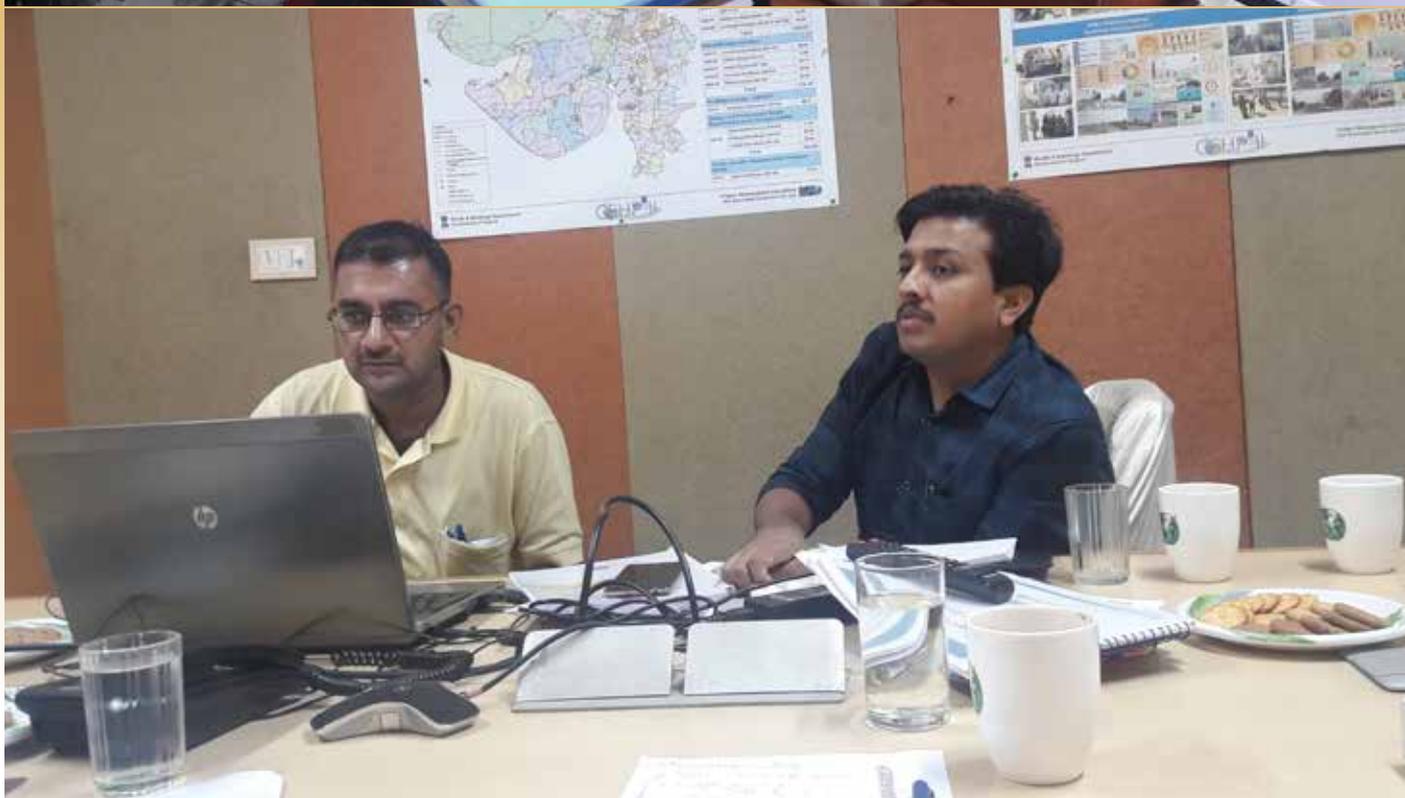
- Government Departments (the main implementation agencies for this project) included:
  - The Gujarat State Road and Building Department** in Gandhinagar (R&BD).
  - R&BD engineers, including a few women engineers involved in the implementation and monitoring of the project
- LEA Associates South Asia Pvt. Ltd (LASA)** – Consultancy firm responsible for the environmental and social assessment and management for MMSGY
  - LASA team in Gandhinagar

<sup>8</sup> AIIB, July 2017, Project Summary Information, Gujarat Rural Roads Project

<sup>9</sup> AIIB, Ibid

<sup>10</sup> In this research, the analysis of roads from a gender perspective was done from a global South context with Indian specificities. It is also applicable to women's reality in most of the global South. However, it may or may not apply to the developed world.

<sup>11</sup> The field research was carried out in partnership with Sejal Dand of ANANDI. <https://anandi-india.org/>



Meetings with R&BD and LASA in Gandhinagar

- LASA training program for R&BD officers and contractors on Implementation of Environmental and Social Safeguards [Provisions of ESMF-ESMP]<sup>12</sup> for the Western region held in Rajkot, Gujarat. The research team attended this training session.
3. **SECON**<sup>13</sup> an engineering consulting company providing engineering, design, and monitoring solutions. Research team met them in Gandhinagar.
  4. Three **Construction companies** (factories) that were given the contract by R&BD to build the MMGSY roads. These factories are the main suppliers of bitumen
    - Fortune Builders at Kalol in Gandhinagar
    - Sathamba to Tajpur Village in Mahisagar (The factory was set up in this area, we did not get the name of the factory)
    - Vimal Construction in Kapadwanj, Kheda
  5. **Two actual road sites** – ( the workers here were those working on the roads being constructed and were different from those from the bitumen factory).
    - Bhavpura Vadu Road in Kalol
    - Antroli Charania Road in Kheda
  6. **One elected Member of the Legislative Assembly of Gujarat (MLA), Brijesh Merja**, at Sarvar.
  7. **Government departments** to get data and status of the roads.
  8. In addition, two districts were identified and visited **-one tribal (Panchmahaals) and one non-tribal (Morbi)** district. Research team also visited one semi urban road construction site in **Gandhinagar**. We studied **six roads** under this project and met with villagers, including women and the Sarpanch (elected head of the village), in each of these villages.

**The following research questions framed this study:**

- Based on what criteria was the road selection done? How did R&BD decide which roads to construct?
- Did women, and village Gram Sabhas (the local governing bodies) play a role in this selection?
- Did the demand for the roads come from the villages, especially with women's engagement?
- Were the villagers (both women and men) given the complete information about the road improvements? Were they given the opportunity to give their informed consent to all aspects of the project or to dispute the changes, especially if these impacted their homes and livelihoods?
- Were community consultations for the initial project assessments conducted?
- Where were the consultations carried out for the initial environmental and social assessments?
- Did these consultations involve women's participation? How many women and men participated in the consultations?
- What are the impacts of these roads on women and girls?
- Does the project employ women workers and, if so, what proportion of the workforce are women and what proportion are men and at what levels of work?
- What were the women's experiences like working on this project?
- Were there any incidents of violence, including sexual harassment?
- Are there grievance mechanisms in place and are they effective?
- Does the project contribute towards achieving gender equality or does it further perpetuate gender inequalities?

**The roads and villages under MMGSY visited:**

District	Description - Tribal/Rural /Peri Urban	Village/s	Status of construction
Gandhinagar	Peri Urban	Kudasan	Completed
Morbi	Rural	Bhavpar-Bagsara	Completed
Morbi	Rural	Nana Dahisara	Completed
Panchmahaals	Tribal	Demli	Completed
Panchmahaals	Tribal	Khojalvasa	Completed
Panchmahaals	Tribal	Chopda	Completed

<sup>12</sup> Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) and Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP)

<sup>13</sup> SECON: <https://www.secon.in/>



Source: LASA Training by Ankur Modi

# AIIB /MMGSY and Women: an Issue of Exclusion or Inclusion

*The AIIB's Environment and Social Framework (ESF), "recognizes the importance of gender equality for successful and sustainable economic development and the need for inclusiveness and gender responsiveness in the projects it supports".<sup>14</sup>*

With the MMGSY, AIIB had an opportunity to integrate gender and women's realities in three ways: 1. by recognising women as important development agents and hence ensuring their equal and engaged participation in all consultations and assessment processes; 2. by recognising women's road use patterns and needs and ensuring the project design aligned with these; 3. and by addressing historical and structural discrimination and the lower status women face and thereby proactively promote gender equality. In Gujarat, unfortunately, AIIB failed to achieve this.

## Implementation of ESF in MMGSY

The project was launched (according to R&BD) on 30th May 2017 and designed without consulting the women<sup>15</sup> whose lives it would directly affect, thereby making it totally gender neutral in design, planning, implementation and monitoring. At the time of the launch, 1150 roads under the AIIB-MMGSY project had already been completed and AIIB financed these roads retrospectively. It is not clear how the pre-assessment of the project was carried out. A year after the project was launched, in May 2018, LASA, a consulting firm, was engaged by R&BD as ESMF and ESMP Implementation Consultants. The Environment and Social Management Framework, the Tribal Population Planning Framework, and the Environment and Social Impact Assessment report, demonstrate no integrated approach to gender.

## LASA training on ESF:

For the MMGSY project in Gujarat, LASA used the AIIB's ESF and safeguards<sup>16</sup> to develop training programs for all the stakeholders (the implementing agency R&BD, engineers, and contractors), assessment tools, reports etc.

At the training session, LASA professionals shared AIIB's ESF in great detail, including examples of how the engineers and contractors were supposed to implement the ESF. The main objective of the training was to disseminate ESMF guidelines/safeguard measures, and provide environmental/social safeguard tools, including the Smart Operations Manual and Land Securing Guidelines, that would help: assess local impact in a comprehensive manner; identify appropriate mitigation measures to address impacts; and guide efforts to address environmental and social dynamics in each specific community affected by road construction.

## The training program included four steps to ensure ESF is implemented:

- Conduct Transect Walk: Checklist of what to look out for during the transect walks and instructions to photograph details.

- Conduct Public Consultations in Villages: Instructions on how to involve women in this process.
- Identify Environmental and Social impacts.
- Design and implement measures to mitigate harm.

The training was comprised of in-depth information on environmental and social issues, including gender, connected to rural roads. The social sensitivity section included discussions on: women; project affected persons (PAP) & community consultations; SC / ST participation (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, as listed under the Indian Constitution); utilities and grievance Redressal Mechanisms. Additionally, a list of vulnerable populations, including scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, households below the poverty line, female-headed households, the disabled, and households in structural-jeopardy owing to road upgradation (residential, commercial, boundary, fence etc) was also provided.

The training provided a list of all the relevant laws and policies around environmental and social legislation. This included the Land Acquisition Act; the Provisions of the Panchayats Act; the Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forests Rights) Act; Gujarat Land Acquisition; the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition and Resettlement and Rehabilitation Act, and others (a total of 49 Acts were mentioned).

## Key observations:

1. The training sessions were initiated as a capacity-building exercise for R&BD staff and contractors. However, these sessions were held after nearly 50% of the work had been completed. **The training was comprehensive but delayed. It should have been done before the launch of the project with follow-up training as the project implementation progressed.**
2. For many of the officials, this was the first training session they attended, and many had not even heard of EMSF/EMSP! This raised questions about how the initial assessment for the project was conducted and

<sup>14</sup> Gender Action, 2018, Gender Scorecard and Analysis of AIIB Projects: A Documentary Review.

<sup>15</sup> The research team did not find any documentation or data to demonstrate that consultations with women were conducted prior to designing of the project.

<sup>16</sup> AIIB, February 2016, Environment and Social Framework, [https://www.aiib.org/en/policies-strategies/\\_download/environment-framework/20160226043633542.pdf](https://www.aiib.org/en/policies-strategies/_download/environment-framework/20160226043633542.pdf)

what happened in the instance of the 50% of the roads that were constructed before the training?

3. The training sessions made it clear that environment management provisions (EMP) were mandatory, which prompted many of the contractors present to voice their misgivings about the costs that would get added on to comply with these environmental and social safeguards retrospectively. Since the contracts were signed before the training commenced, the increase in costs to ensure ESF had not been included in the contracts and budgets. Also, the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) were prepared while finalising the tenders and contracts, often without adequate onsite visits – making it difficult to address social or environmental concerns, incorporate changes suggested by people, or mitigate challenges that come up during construction.

However, the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) clearly states that, "As per the prepared ESMF, the MMGSY project shall have an Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) which will be strengthened with the help of an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) **provided with budget provisions** for effective implementation of the identified mitigation measures". This aspect of ESF is not being implemented in the project.

4. The training sessions did not cover any aspect of workers' rights, nor did they address their work and living conditions over the duration of the project or in the project supply chains.
5. Only about 20% of the attendees at the training hall were women, including women engineers who are employees of the R&BD.
6. The training did not emphasise the need to have women during the transect walk.
7. The training focused on identifying social and environmental risks and how to mitigate these with community engagement, but not on identifying possible economic opportunities, women's transport needs and the gaps therein. The training also did not emphasise the importance of shoulders and pavements for women pedestrians.

**Overall, LASA's training was useful and can be further strengthened by including the gender perspective and analysis more comprehensively. However, we are curious about whether any of this is being implemented by the engineers and contractors on the ground and whether there are monitoring mechanisms in place. The team found gaps on the ground in the implementation and monitoring process in the villages visited.**

### Road selection under MMGSY:

According to R&BD officials, roads under MMGSY were identified and selected based on the following priorities:

- The demand for the roads is raised by the local communities – often through local self-government bodies or political party representatives.
- There is a huge demand for rural roads and the demand is 3-4 times more than what the R&BD can undertake.
- There is a priority list drawn up by R&BD for choosing the roads that will be selected under the project.

In the MMGSY project, women's needs related to access to roads were clearly articulated by the Gujarat Road and Building Department (R&BD), both on counts of the inability of expectant women to reach hospitals in time as well as girls to get to schools and colleges for higher education. Nowhere in the AIIB document, however, is this mentioned either as an area of priority or a desired outcome for the project. How and why then did the project limit women's roles only to reproduction and not include their roles in production as small producers (dairy farmers, for example), as workers (paid and unpaid), and as economic and development agents? Road connectivity takes care of several development challenges and promises the enhancement of economic opportunities. This

#### Setting a winning example

A couple of years ago, a number of pregnant rural women were unable to reach hospitals on time for delivery and, consequently, lost their lives. These incidents pushed the R&BD to ask the state health department for a list of villages that emergency vehicles had difficulty reaching. These roads were given priority under MMGSY and were constructed first, according to R&BD.

R&BD also asked the state transport service for a list of villages that public buses could not reach. Out of the list provided, 64 such roads were improved under MMGSY (43 non tribal and 21 tribal), and 83 were not approved due to various reasons (76 non tribal and 6 tribal).

gap in the project focus and design further perpetuates gender stereotypes and restricts women to their role as reproductive agents.

### Community consultations:

AIIB's ESF, under the section on Assessment and Management Processes, emphasises the importance of meaningful consultations with project-affected people to design the project and to facilitate their informed participation through ongoing consultations during the project implementation process. Such consultations ensure that the voices of all stakeholders are included.<sup>17</sup> It further calls for the client to provide additional support to ensure participation of certain vulnerable groups, including women. Such consultations are important for the timely disclosure of relevant and adequate information that is meaningful for people.

<sup>17</sup> AIIB Environment and Social Framework, February 2016



- Gujarat has many women's collectives, with a large number formed under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission and Mahila Samakhya across the state. R&BD, LASA, and AIIB should always reach out to women's organisations and collectives in the state to ensure that women are not only included, but made active participants at all stages of the project.
- The research team found continued problems of water logging in some of the new upgraded roads visited. The need for culverts was not identified during the assessment process. We wondered whether consultations were actually held with the villagers in these villages.

### Key observations:

- Although LASA conducted some local consultations, these were done after the launch of the project and not, as it ought to have been, before.<sup>18</sup>
- Women's participation in these consultations has not been documented or monitored. Most consultations were attended only by men.<sup>19</sup> According to LASA, only 10% of the participants were women.<sup>20</sup>
- In four out of the six sites visited by the research team, women, as well as the elected representatives including sarpanches (heads of the local self-government bodies), did not recall any public consultation prior to the starting of the construction of the road.<sup>21</sup>
- LASA also admitted that women's participation in the consultations was marginal. To address this gap, additional efforts are needed which should include holding the consultation at a time and venue suitable for the women, having separate women-only meetings, and to have such meetings facilitated by women staff members. LASA has also tried to address this by including women surveyors in the team. The LASA team has six consultants and one of them is a woman, while out of the 20 surveyors, 5 women surveyors have been recruited.
- Lack of women's participation in this project is particularly surprising for a state like Gujarat where women have played a key role historically, especially in the context of roads. There are several examples where women played leadership roles in demanding roads: For example, in Panama Mahila Sanghatan, women demanded, and had roads built; in Khojalvasaa and Namdarva, under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), through sustained action with panchayats and dialogue with community members the women persuaded them to give up their land holdings for road expansion.<sup>22</sup>

### Information disclosure:

Information disclosure about the project with stakeholder engagement in an adequate and timely manner is one of the key objectives of AIIB's ESF.<sup>23</sup> Providing information is also an important purpose of community consultations. Regarding information disclosure, the research team found the following:

- In the villages that the research team visited, although the community per se was aware of the need for roads, neither men nor women, even those residing alongside the road, knew anything about the project prior to the

#### LASA's Lessons from Community Consultations:

- Women's needs for roads differ from that of men. They include, for example, accessing forests for wood, schools to drop off kids, and temples.
- Demand for safety measures including:
  - More lighting near bus stops and foot paths (including informal) and from bus stops to villages. LASA suggested solar lighting to resolve this issue.
  - Safe driving speeds to protect kids, cattle, and women walking on the roads.
  - Speed breakers near settlements to slow-down traffic.
  - Posting road safety signs.
  - Bus shelter signs stating loitering and drinking are not permitted.
- Culverts to prevent water logging and water flow during monsoon season.

These points were included in the LASA training. Although LASA captures women's road use patterns, the use of this information is not fully integrated into the project implementation and design.

<sup>18</sup> Project was launched in May 2017, LASA was hired by R&BD in May 2018. (According to LASA)

<sup>19</sup> LASA's reports and presentation pictures only show men at these consultations

<sup>20</sup> Shared by LASA and also verified under the Environment and Social Impact Assessment reports by LASA, May 2017, for this project.

<sup>21</sup> The research team visited these roads in August 2018. Till then retroactive consultations with the communities also had not happened in the villages visited.

<sup>22</sup> This was shared in a meeting with ANANDI staff and women's collectives (sangathans)

<sup>23</sup> AIIB, Ibid

construction company coming to the village and starting the actual work.

- Once a road project has been sanctioned, tender calls are put out and contractors are given the contracts for construction. Even at this point, no letter is dispatched to the local self-government body giving details of the technical and financial clauses in the contract. As a result, no information that can be used to monitor the quality of the construction is available to these bodies. In Khojalvasa village, although the tribal sarpanch's house is right beside the road, he did not have any details regarding the technical or financial outlays for the road.
- Unfortunately, there seems to be no direct engagement with the local communities or local self-government bodies (panchayats and Gram Sabha) other than receiving demands for the roads.<sup>24 25</sup> On occasion, the community gets to know about some of the roads selected under the project before the local public works

department since the Minister himself approves and information about the roads sanctioned are sent out promptly by WhatsApp or information is circulated over



### Bagsara village: new road but continued water logging

The Bhavpar Bagsara road under MMGSY connects Bagsara village (with a population of 2000) to the Bhavpur railway station and is the nearest connection to reach the block headquarters, hospital, and the high school. Some villagers work in salt pans; however, work is limited with increasing mechanisation, forcing a growing number of villagers to venture out in search of gainful employment. Women tend to livestock and make ghee which they sell in the nearby village of Vavania which attracts a lot of tourists thanks to a temple which has a large number of devotees.

The aforementioned road was urgently in need of repairs, and the village head had repeatedly petitioned the local Member of the Legislative Assembly as well as the state government. The public transport bus had stopped coming to the village since the road was in such poor condition. During the monsoons, water from little the Rann of Kutch floods the village and streams run through the village, cutting off the village for days altogether and making it impossible for pregnant women to reach hospitals for delivery. A few years ago, a child died of a scorpion bite as emergency vehicles could not reach the village in time.

Lack of public transport also resulted in poor connectivity to the high school, reducing the villagers' motivation to send girls to anything beyond primary school. This also makes for high drop-out rates at the secondary and higher secondary level, especially among girls.

It has been over a year since the road has been repaired in Bagsara village under the MMGSY program, but public transport has not yet resumed service. **The focus group discussions conducted by our research team in the village with men and women revealed that they were unhappy that the road repair had been done without consulting them since the road design does not address the problem of water logging in the low-lying areas.** The villagers also complained about the quality of road being poor and that it had already been damaged in a few places.

The Bagsara village Sarpanch, Mehmudbhai Sumara, shared, "We had been pursuing our application for the road repair for a while now. But the local self-government (panchayat) was not informed when the contract was given out. Only when the road repairs started did we know that the road had been sanctioned. I met with the contractor to ask for the design, since the road dips at two points and there is need for a culvert / bridge to ensure that the rainwater does not accumulate. He said that the design did not include any such measure, and his mandate was to repair only the existing road. This will not solve our problem, since the hamlet gets cut off in the rainy season. "

The labourers used for the construction of the roads were migrant workers. Badhuben Mansighbhai is a member of Umang Mahila Mandal (Women's Collective) in a village which has 11 members. She has been involved in village infrastructure planning and has raised concerns about sanitation issues in the Gram Sabha in the past. 50% of the houses in the village now have toilets, thanks to the Umang Mahila Mandal's efforts. However, they were not consulted before the road was constructed. If asked they would have demanded better design to ensure water logging does not cut off the village.

Badhuben asks, "Are we not citizens? Don't our votes count? Why are we not part of consultations?"

social media to the entire local cadre (party workers of the ruling political party).<sup>26</sup>

- The relevant AIIB and Government of Gujarat's MMSGY road project sign boards-detailing the name of the scheme, the length of the road, the number of years these will remain under the maintenance contract, and the total amount spent – are put up only after the project has been completed. The information boards are seen as finishing touches by R&BD as opposed to an important information sharing tool for the villagers. This information should be shared before the project starts and these boards should be installed once the roads are sanctioned. They should include grievance mechanisms and who to contact if there are any issues or if people need information
- These information boards should also be in a language that is women-friendly. Several women in rural Gujarat don't have formal education and may not be able to read and write. We were glad to note, however, that the information boards were in the local Gujarati language with pictorial diagrams to communicate the details about the road.

### Maintenance of the roads:

The MMSGY project mandates that the contractors maintain the roads for five years after the day of completion, for which a sum of 5% is earmarked.<sup>27</sup> However, none of the local self-government representatives nor the villagers knew about this provision. This information should be shared on the information boards, at community consultations, and through Gram Sabhas so villagers can hold contractors accountable.

Some of the roads visited were already showing signs of deterioration. Villagers did not know who or where to complain about this. How is AIIB ensuring that these roads are maintained after completion and that the maintenance clause of the contract with contractors is being followed?

The shoulders on the roads are the only pathways for those who travel on foot, mostly women and children – and so require regular maintenance. However, they are usually not paved, and covered with overgrown grass and trees where they do exist. Regular clearing of the shoulders should be monitored as part of the maintenance clause for contractors. Alternatively, maintenance of shoulders should be given to women's collectives: this would serve to provide a livelihood for many of the women too.

### Grievance mechanisms: best kept secret

As per the project documents, each village is supposed to have a grievance cell which includes grievance committees at the village level that should have at least one female member. We could not find information about these cells or committees in any of the villages we visited. No one knew about them. R&BD and LASA shared that there are grievance cells set up at each panchayat level. However, according to R&BD, they had not received any grievances to date. This is a clear indication that the grievance cells were not working. The reason, we found, was that no one knew about these grievance mechanisms. Information boards about the project are put up only after the road is complete, and even then, do not include information about grievance redressal. R&BD mentioned that the state of Gujarat has put in place several other grievance mechanisms and people are using other channels (Gujarat state grievance mechanisms) to share their grievances. We wondered whether these grievances coming through other channels are being recorded and shared with AIIB for proper monitoring.

#### Demli, Shehera- the case study of a gender-responsive road

In Demli, the research team met with the woman Sarpanch, Gajraben Kalubhai Nana, and spoke to the Taluka Panchayat member, Kalubhai Nana, over the phone.

Gajraben confided, "The road was much needed since our fields lie alongside the road. During the monsoons, the whole area would become slushy and it was difficult to walk with the fodder, agricultural produce, and equipment which we carry as head-loads".

The Gram Sabha passed a resolution and a village meeting was held to get everyone's agreement. The villagers reached out especially to those whose land was affected by the road expansion. Some people wanted compensation, but with dialogue people were convinced and willingly gave their land for the project. Systematic village consultation leads to land acquisition for the greater good without conflict.

<sup>24</sup> This process was confirmed by the Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Brijesh Merja, who the team met in Sarvar village.

<sup>25</sup> The communities were not aware of any details of the road construction. Hence, during the actual construction, the communities - including women - were not at all involved in monitoring of the construction activities.

<sup>26</sup> This process was divulged by R&BD in a meeting with research team.

<sup>27</sup> **Gujarat State Roads & Building Department Water Resources Department:** Percentage Rate Tender and Contract Works, Form B-1 and Form B -2, Clause 17b. <http://www.gandhinagarmunicipal.com/uploads/tenders/19/32File-2%20B-1.pdf> And 1-5; Special Condition of the Contract, shared by LASA.

## The roads to success?

Through rural road connectivity, the project claims to address issues of rural growth, economic integration, and access to essential services.<sup>28</sup> It is also supposed to assist public transport operators, educational institutes, hospitals, and traders. Benefits for the project include<sup>29</sup> increase in agricultural productivity and industrial development, reduction in travel time to health and education facilities, new employment opportunities during the project implementation process, change in travel patterns from bullock carts to use of motorised vehicles, as well as access to administrative services including the district headquarters.

Unfortunately, the project is not monitoring the realisation of any of these benefits and the team did not find any concrete data that demonstrates that women on the ground had really benefited in ways suggested in the project document.

The MMGSY project document states that, once complete, the project will bring new opportunities to 1060 settlements in Gujarat that previously existed in isolation due to poor connectivity. Four percent of these settlements are in Schedule V areas<sup>30</sup> and are inhabited by Scheduled Tribe populations. However, the project document fails to consider the intersection of tribal people's and women's rights.<sup>31</sup>

### Women use roads differently:

Roads have an impact both on women's paid as well as unpaid work including care-giving, subsistence, and domestic chores. Unlike men, women in Indian villages use roads less to travel outside the village but more to commute to fields, markets, schools and public services. Women travel for livelihood opportunities, fetching fodder, water, firewood, and make frequent but short trips to the fields, schools and nearby villages. Women are primarily head-load carriers and use shoulders or sidewalks or free non-motorised transport. Women also use public transport but rarely use motorised transport for personal advantage. Due to a gendered dimension, a woman's time has less value, hence women usually walk or take less expensive means of transport, making the process of getting from one point to another both time

consuming and tiring. This huge time burden that women carry prevents them from engaging in other productive work. This understanding of the way women use roads is not integrated in the MMGSY project design.

### Key observations:

Across the state, **women were carrying large head-loads of fodder, firewood, farm produce etc.** In **Demli village**, where the upgraded road connects the village with the main road, the research team met a young girl who was carrying a huge head-load of fodder. She is from an agricultural family and was returning home from the fields close to the new road. We asked her whether the family owned a bicycle. She said she, and her two sisters, each had a bicycle from a state scheme to promote education for girls. She had completed her higher secondary education and knew how to ride a cycle. Although she makes about four trips on foot daily to cover the distance between her home and the field, she could not think of using a bicycle to carry fodder. Her mother runs a tea shop near the bus stop and also traverses the newly-paved road several times, always on foot when not accompanied by her husband. **Even with the new road, women are still walking and not using motorized vehicles, which shows that not much has changed for these women in terms of reducing their time burden compared to the men. However, with just a**



<sup>28</sup> AIIB Project Summary Information, July 04, 2017

<sup>29</sup> AIIB, Project Document, Gujarat Rural Road Project, May 31, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> The **Fifth Schedule** of the Indian constitution designates **Schedule** areas in large parts of India in which the interests of the **Scheduled Tribes** are to be protected.

<sup>31</sup> **Gender Action**. Ibid

**little investment and some consultation with the women during road construction, this hurdle could have been overcome.**

If the project had introduced short distance public transportation, it would have significantly increased connectivity to fields, sources of water, schools, the local dairy, public health and sanitation utilities etc and, thereby, not only helped make the process of everyday life easier for the girls and women in these villages, but would have also provided better opportunities and enhanced their capacity for inclusive growth.

Short distance transport services such as a three-wheeler service would greatly assist the women in the village in their daily chores, reducing their time burden, and, therefore, ought to be introduced. These can be owned and managed by women's collectives at the local level which would not only provide rural women with affordable transportation across short distances but also generate alternative livelihood options. AIIB should consider providing one or two such vehicles to women's collectives at the village level to help them start their own public transport service. We would also recommend that the Gujarat government subsidise such services to make them affordable for rural women. Such initiatives should be developed in partnership with women's organisations and steps should be taken to ensure that women are given appropriate skills training to make these measures sustainable.

Having local transport services owned and managed by local women in rural and tribal areas will also indirectly help address many negative gender stereotypes such as the widely-held view that women cannot drive motorised vehicles.

### **Support for women's livelihoods**

The ESF of the AIIB encourages its clients to not just reduce the risks of negative impact but to proactively promote equality of opportunity and women's socioeconomic empowerment, particularly with respect to access to finance, services and employment, and to otherwise promote positive impacts on women's economic status.<sup>32</sup>

#### **Key observations:**

- The new road is being used by some of the young women in **Nana Dahisara, Morbi district** who are employed at the ORPAT Clock Factory. Their work-day is long, with the young girls hired for assembly line work starting their day as early as 6 am. Following the road having been repaired under the AIIB- MMSGY scheme, the company bus can now come directly into the village to pick up the girls. They return after 12 or so hours in the evening from the factory, but are happy that their suggestion that bridges be built at the low-lying areas have been taken on board, or else they would have had to give up working during the monsoons – like they did earlier when the road used to get flooded.

- In contrast, women in the **Bagasara village** experienced a loss of livelihood because the road had not incorporated suggestions that a culvert/ bridge be constructed to let rainwater drain. Some of the women/girls from the village worked in factories, others kept cattle and needed to access the local dairy (milk collection centres) to deliver the milk, but with major waterlogging, especially during the monsoons, the road became unusable and with public transport becoming unavailable, many of the women were forced to quit their jobs.
- Agriculture and work in the salt pans are the major sources of livelihood for both men and women in Bagasara. The roads that go into the salt pan are rural link roads (rural roads that connect the villages or places of occupation to other villages, institutions or other roads such as district roads, state and national highways for last-mile connectivity) which have not been taken up by MMSGY.
- After agriculture, as in Bagasara, livestock is a major occupation for women across villages in the region. Hence, access to fields, milk dairy collection points and veterinary services need to be added to the list of priority sectors by R&BD, keeping women's livelihood requirements in mind when selecting roads under this project.
- Large tracts of Gujarat, especially the Kutch region, is very bare and experiences long summers with temperatures soaring as high as 45°C to 48°C. Despite the heat, women continue to walk on these roads whereas the men use motorized vehicles. There is a critical need to have trees planted along the roads to provide shade from the scorching heat for all pedestrians.
- AIIB should consider planting fruit trees alongside these roads and farm out this activity to women's

In **Kudasan** village in Gandhinagar district, a three kilometer road was built from the village connecting it to the main road. This is a semi urban area. The road width varied from 3.75 metres to 5.5 metres. At about 500 metres from the start of the road, a large private school was built which led to a lot of traffic including school buses, private cars etc. Women in the locality living near the main road spoke about the frequent accidents after the road was built as there was no shoulder on the road to walk on. Children from poorer households who cannot afford expensive private schools continue going to the village school. These children now had to be accompanied at all times by their mothers because of the speeding vehicles. Women complained how the new road has added additional responsibility and time burden on them.

<sup>32</sup> AIIB, February 2016, Environment and Social Framework

collectives at the village level. Maintenance of the trees and the selling of fruits will give the women some income, especially since the village women have the necessary skills to plant trees. AIIB confessed that they found maintaining trees alongside the roads<sup>33</sup> a considerable challenge as the planted trees would not survive. However, were women's collectives to take ownership of this work, AIIB would be able to solve this problem as well. If landless women, the aged and disabled were to be given a chance to take up nurseries and the planting of trees, this would contribute towards promoting women's empowerment within, and outside of, the project.

### Pedestrian hazards

The rural internal link roads constructed under the MMSGY have increased the number of motorised vehicles as compared to the time that there were muddy roads. Paving of the roads enables vehicles to travel at increased speeds. Women and children, however, continue to travel on foot. The roads are narrow and the increased speed of the vehicular traffic is seen as an increased risk to the pedestrians, who are mostly women and children. While the design of the roads under the project makes it mandatory to leave spaces for shoulders/ sidewalk on both sides of the road, this is often overlooked, especially if no land acquisition is done for the project. This is also difficult to monitor since there is no specific budget earmarked for sidewalks or pavements, despite the fact that these are internal village roads offering first and second levels of connectivity to the nearest settlement or main road.

The risk increases manifold and several accidents are reported wherever the road connects to the residential areas. The road widths are limited to the right of way available, as there is no provision for additional land acquisition.

### Key observations:

The research team found that many of the newly-upgraded roads **had no room for shoulders any longer**. The shoulders are frequented mainly by women and children. While the road-design strictures make it mandatory to leave spaces for shoulders/ sidewalks on both sides of the road, this is often overlooked and thought of as unimportant. The motorable portion of the road is given importance and in situations where no added land acquisition is done under the project, shoulders are seen as add-on features – provided only if convenient, but not an essential constituent. The project assessment, planning, and design components also do not identify the need for shoulders as a critical social issue for rural roads. By eliminating shoulders and not upgrading

existing shoulders, the project has made road-use for women and children extremely dangerous. By ignoring this important aspect of women's road use pattern, the **project disproportionately benefits users of motorised vehicles and puts pedestrians at risks**. This is a major gender gap in the project.

AIIB and R&BD should be sensitive to women's road use patterns and ensure all roads have adequate and safe shoulders or sidewalks for pedestrians. Development and maintenance of adequate shoulders on either side of the road should be an integral part of MMSGY's design policy.

### Safety and security:

Women generally travel in non-peak hours and do not use roads in the dark. The issue of security is very important for women, underscoring the importance of adequate lighting, restrooms, bus stops etc.

LASA has come up with a detailed plan to ensure safety and security. This emerged from a community consultation and transect walk. After the assessment, LASA has recommended the inclusion of speed breakers, traffic rumbles, lighting, etc. to ensure safety for all road users.<sup>34</sup> During our visit we did not, however, see full integration of these safety measures.

When the research team met LASA (in August 2018), they (LASA) were in the process of implementing safety measures including more lighting, speed breakers etc.

**In conclusion**, AIIB and MMSGY have not gone

*Electric Poles:* The road in Kudasan has a large electric pole carrying high voltage electric current wires just by the side which was not moved during the road construction. The delays in responses from the electricity companies and the disputes over the cost of moving electricity poles which fall on or near the roads being constructed were raised by engineers attending the LASA training program<sup>35</sup> in Rajkot. It seems that the issue of the electricity poles on the edge of the road as in Kudasan has been raised in other places too, but it is left to be decided locally. The Gram Panchayats, under whose jurisdictions these roads fall, will be unable to resolve it after the construction is over, leading to additional security risks for pedestrians and commuters, particularly women.

<sup>33</sup> Conversations with Somnath Basu, Principal Social Development Officer at AIIB

<sup>34</sup> In a meeting with LASA they shared how they will ensure safety measures are followed.

<sup>35</sup> Training program at Hotel Silver Sands, Rajkot held on 6 August, 2018 on environment and social impact (EMSF and EMSP) for the engineers and contractors of the Roads and Building Department of Gujarat implementing the MMSGY project by their lead technical partners LASA India.

**Lighting:** In the roads at village **Demli and Chopda in Shehera** block of **Panchmahaals** district there are several stretches of the road which women reported as being unsafe after dusk, as there is **no lighting** on these roads. The roads built under the MMGSY project are all connector roads between the village and the main road. Several of these roads meet at the junctions where people wait for public or private transport to the nearest villages/block headquarters. Women feel unsafe due to the lack of lighting and covered bus-stops at these junctions. There is no provision for lighting or construction of bus stops in this project. AIIB assured us that they had discussed this critical point with the Indian government and lighting will be included in all the road projects as recommended by us to ensure women's safety.<sup>36</sup>

beyond formal equality or, at best, a few add-on approaches to gender and therefore women are not benefiting in equal measure as men from the project. AIIB does not have a gender policy or a gender expert for the project. In spite of an explicit gender commitment in its ESF, unfortunately and alarmingly AIIB's Gujarat Rural Roads Project is totally gender neutral on paper -- the project documents lack any specific mention of women<sup>37</sup> and have not integrated gender analysis. Women from affected communities were not included in planning consultations neither were women's realities considered while designing the project.

The subtext being, "we (AIIB and Gujarat government) are building roads – which will benefit both<sup>38</sup> men and women". The project objectives claim that these roads will provide economic opportunities and access to services (health and education). However, the gender-blind approach to MMGSY splits the objective along gender lines – economic opportunities for men and access to social services for women and girls. Rural women in Gujarat, before MMGSY, were headload carriers walking on these roads, and after MMGSY, women in Gujarat are still headload carriers and walking perilously alongside high-speed traffic on these 'new and improved' roads. There is no documented evidence to show much improvement

in women's economic opportunities following the construction or improved conditions of these roads.

Although LASA has a fair bit of expertise in this arena, having worked on several ADB, World Bank and other infrastructure projects, their team does not include any gender experts and hence, **gender integration in the project is approached mostly as a compliance issue and is ad hoc and extremely limited. It is left to chance as opposed to being an integral part of the project design, and monitoring. There are no gender indicators used either.**

**The research team found that ensuring women's participation in all aspects of the project was a challenge for AIIB and R&BD.** The ESF strictures call for the mitigation of any social practices that might prevent women participating in an equal and engaged manner. Rather than strategically addressing social stigmas and social practices rooted in patriarchal culture, the project accepted this as 'normal' and unchangeable. Lack of gender experts on the AIIB and R&BD teams also contributed to this gap.

Women and girls gain to health services and higher education access through improved roads, but the new roads have not brought any increase in women's economic development the way it has for men. **On the contrary, the new roads have made it dangerous to walk on the roads.** The project is, thus, indirectly perpetuating gender inequalities. The question to ask is whether the roads under MMGSY include an understanding of women's road use patterns and needs and are they designed to connect a woman to her destinations and make her journey shorter and less tiring or will it add to her burden? AIIB, by not integrating women's realities have missed this opportunity under MMGSY.



<sup>36</sup> Conversation with Somnath Basu, AIIB.

<sup>37</sup> The entire project document mentions 'women' only once along with children as a group that benefited from the similar road project in Gujarat (Pradhan Mantri Grameen Sadak Yojana).

<sup>38</sup> The research team did not find documentation and data on women's participation collected, and there's no evidence that special attention was given to consult with women. The project was design with a limited and stereotypical needs of women and girls in mind – access to health services and education institutions.



# Where the Rubber Meets the Road: MMGSY and Labour Rights

Large development projects create hope that they will generate employment and other economic opportunities in their wake for many, including women. Unfortunately, AIIB's MMGSY in Gujarat did not generate any noteworthy paid employment or skill development opportunities for women, nor did the project result in any procurement benefits for women entrepreneurs.<sup>39</sup> At best, the project provided employment to only a handful of women (16% of the labourers recruited were women), and that too at the lowest levels of unskilled work in abysmal working conditions. The project, in fact, exploited the vulnerability of the poor, tribals and lower castes, migrants, and women. The research team found widespread labour rights violations at the project work site and across the supply chain.

The construction sector is the single biggest non-agricultural industry in the capitalist world. The growth of employment generation in this sector has been noteworthy<sup>40</sup> and it is considered one of the most important industries for national development in Asia. However, this sector is notorious for labour exploitations. In India, construction workers, both formal and informal, are often deprived of their right to life guaranteed to every person under the Indian Constitution.<sup>41</sup> The main issues in this area have to do with poor working conditions, unfair recruitment patterns, migration, cycles of exploitation such as wages being withheld, discriminatory practices, especially towards women workers, and sexual harassment. While there are legal contracts and monitoring mechanisms for medium to large scale projects, in smaller projects such as MMGSY, where labour is hired for no more than a month or so at a time, labourers are taken on in a completely casual basis under extremely precarious working conditions.

In the construction sector in India, practices such as withholding ten days of wages from each labourer and giving them a 'virtual advance' (whereby they are given a weekly payment by the employer, reducing the pay at the end of the month to a mere 400-500 rupees) are common.<sup>42</sup> Without proper contracts, attendance rosters, salary slips etc workers are often denied minimum wages. Moreover, a large number of workers, particularly in the unorganised (informal) sector such as road construction, are not covered by core labour laws and social insurance

schemes.<sup>43</sup> Women are relegated to the lowest levels work.

## Women workers in the construction sector in India:

Women in the construction sector in India are, by and large, confined mostly to unskilled work. Even with many years of experience, they are rarely able to move to the semi-skilled or skilled levels. They do not get an opportunity to upgrade their skills as their ambit is limited to certain types of work and they primarily assist the male workforce.<sup>44</sup> They also face serious problems related to lower wages, discrimination, gender and sexual harassment as well as unhealthy relationships at work. Gender-biased mindsets within this sector further lead to discrimination in work allocation and wage distribution. Women in construction live a tough life, without dignity and with any notion of equality or justice.

## Some facts:

- Almost 90 percent of women workers in the construction sector are in temporary jobs. Women workers are fired routinely for demanding equal wages, leave and other benefits.
- Women construction workers are denied equal remuneration for equal work and are often not paid even the minimum wage.
- Women have to work 10-12 hours in a day. There are no specific rest intervals for them.
- There is no provision of paid holidays for daily wage earners although they work continuously for long stretches of time. Women workers do not get leave. No work, no pay is the system in practice.

## AIIB and worker rights: a paper tiger

The AIIB ESF recognises the significance of workers' rights, which include living wages, safe and healthy working conditions. It stands against forced or child labour and promotes equal opportunity, freedom of association, right to collective bargaining, and access to grievance mechanisms.<sup>45</sup> The research team did not find any child labour in MMGSY. Beyond that, none of the workers' rights elaborated in ESF are being protected, monitored, or addressed.

<sup>39</sup> All International Financial Institutes to promote economic empowerment for women, should ensure at least 30% of all procurement for all projects is from women entrepreneur and/or directly or indirectly benefit women.

<sup>40</sup> **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India**, The National Sample Survey Office, <http://www.mospi.gov.in/national-sample-survey-office-nssso>

<sup>41</sup> Some articles on labour situation in construction sector in India:

- **Centre for Development Policy and Research**, July 2014, Documenting the Lack of Labour Rights in India's Construction Sector, Number 80
- **Verma, Praveen**, 12 June 2013, Informal Labour and Dynamics of the Construction Sector in India, Ritimo Le changement par l'info! available at <https://www.ritimo.org/Informal-Labour-and-Dynamics-of-the-Construction-Sector-in-India>
- **Tomer, Shashi**, 2017, Construction Workers in India, Om Publication

<sup>42</sup> **Verma, Praveen**, 12 June 2013, Informal Labour and Dynamics of the Construction Sector in India, Ritimo Le changement par l'info!

<sup>43</sup> **Verma, Praveen**, Ibid

<sup>44</sup> **Verma, Praveen**, Ibid

<sup>45</sup> **AIIB**, Ibid

## MMSGY Labour Demographics

Labour in MMSGY can be divided into two main groups:

1. Non-professionals hired by contractors: Contractors routinely hire contract-labour to work on worksites and in the project's supply chains – in bitumen factories, stone quarries, sand mines etc. These workers could be unskilled, skilled, or specialized or machine operators.
2. Professionals hired by R&BD include project managers or R&BD staff, engineers, and consultants who are mainly government employees or consultants with professional qualifications.

### Non-professionals—skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled: the invisible workers:

The majority of workers in MMSGY are non-professionals hired by contractors. The workers are mostly men, but sometimes entire families work together. A small number of women were found working only as unskilled workers. This group of workers can further be divided into two categories:

1. Those working on the MMSGY project directly, including workers on the actual road sites.
2. Those working in the MMSGY project supply chain, such as workers at the bitumen factories, stone quarries, sand mines etc.

The workers at the road-site work directly for the AIIB project, whereas those at the bitumen plant are part of the supply chain supplying raw material to the project. The research team only visited bitumen factories and work sites but did not go further down the supply chain—to stone quarries or sand mines—that provide raw material for the project. The team did not find any child labour in the factories and road construction work sites visited.

The workers on the road work sites are referred to as unskilled. They work long hours, are paid below minimum wage, and work in pitiful conditions. None of the factory owners and R&BD engineers know very much about the unskilled labourers at the road sites. Shockingly, even those working directly on the AIIB project helping build the roads, who are the main workers for the project, are not seen as project workers by R&BD. The factory owners and R&BD view them as the responsibility of the labour contractors. The prevalent notion is that labour is notoriously difficult to handle and can only be managed by labour contractors. **There is no concept of decent work.** The general perception among engineers and contractors is that a worker cannot be trusted—they are unreliable. To ensure that the work is completed, employers use force, abuse, threats, exploitation, and withhold salaries, instead of providing decent working conditions. According to labour laws, salary should be paid weekly. All workers should have a contract and should be registered with the Building and Construction Workers Welfare Board. We did not find any of this being carried out.

In contrast, R&BD views the labourers working in bitumen factories as those belonging legitimately to the project. Despite this belief they do not monitor any labour rights in the factories. This is not seen as R&BD's responsibility but that of the state labour department. We also learned that Road and Building Department contractors check bitumen content, thickness of the road etc. on a daily basis but there is no monitoring of labour rights including conditions under which the labourers work. Monitoring is only at the technical level. We did not find any reports to indicate LASA was systematically monitoring labour rights either and the glaring violations were indication enough for this gap. Despite the project document's promise to collect gender disaggregated data on labour participants, LASA did not do so, making labour issues among the most disturbing concerns in the project.

### Professionals:

It is also important to differentiate between the women working as project managers and technical staff and those working as unskilled workers in the project supply chain. A small number of women find work as project managers or technical staff in the R&BD and LASA teams. Approximately 20 to 30% of the R&BD team are women engineers who also face issues related to work and working conditions. Lack of child-care facilities and the demand to visit sites at very early hours of the day, travel long distances with no toilet facilities at factories, and to leave their children behind with in-laws are some of the challenges faced by women engineers. The general work environment is not sensitive or conducive for women to work. Engineering is mainly seen as a male domain and the general perception is that if women want to work in this area then they need "to toughen up". The R&BD male engineers were of the opinion that women engineers 'have it easy' and do not want to go to the factories or visit sites and only want desk jobs. Women engineers, on the other hand, said they found it difficult, given their extended gender roles at home, to conduct site visits. Road construction is a man's world was the indirect message. And if women want to be part of it, they need to be like men. AIIB should encourage R&BD to develop a more gender sensitive work environment for their women engineers. AIIB should also encourage R&BD to address issues of the sharing responsibilities for care-giving and domestic work between men and women as well as measures such as the construction of women's toilets at all factories and worksites to create a more women-sensitive work environment. Gender sensitization should be part of regular trainings at R&BD.

### Labour recruitment:

At construction sites throughout India, labour recruitment is through a long chain of middlemen. Big construction companies or contractors further sub-contract work to smaller contractors. At times a number of small contractors operate at the same work site. These contractors are in

turn dependent on middlemen to source labourers for construction sites, who then find people from their own village, district or state, making them an integral link in the chain. Workers in the construction sector are mostly recruited by labour contractors and are migrant workers from other regions. They enable fellow villagers find work in the city while helping the contractor get access to cheap labour, gaining commissions from both groups. Groups of workers are transported directly to the work sites in big numbers from states where the cost of labour is lower. The labourers are in dire need of employment and are ready to enter into all sorts of exploitative agreements with contractors. It often happens that this migrant labour force, after finishing work at one construction site, stays on and tries to get more work. A long and complicated chain of subcontracting of construction work and recruitment of workers keeps the real employer, the main construction company, conveniently hidden, making it impossible to raise labour rights issues. There are no formal mechanisms for construction workers to lodge grievances about wages, working conditions, living conditions, or social security benefits. Therefore, such workers in the informal sector lack any formal rights.

### Wages:

In the context of wages, AIIB's ESF requires the Gujarat Road Project to comply with the laws of the land and lists the following legislations : <sup>46</sup>

- Workmen's Compensation Act 1923
- Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970
- Minimum Wages Act, 1948
- Payment of Wages Act, 1936

### Building and Other Construction Workers Act (BOCW ACT)

Regulation of employment and conditions of work posted in the Gazette of Gujarat State on March 30th, 2004.

Legally, the Government of Gujarat is committed to implementing the BOWC Act with the following mission and vision:

- To provide immediate assistance to the beneficiary in case of an accident.
- To pay pension to beneficiaries who have completed the age of sixty years.
- To sanction loan assistance and advance for constructing a house as per the relevant conditions to the construction workers.
- To pay the premium for the group insurance scheme for the construction workers.
- To provide financial assistance for the education of the children of construction workers.
- To cover the medical expenses for the treatment of serious sickness of construction workers or any of their dependants.
- To pay for maternity assistance for female construction workers.
- To make provisions and amendments for welfare initiatives and benefits.

The Building and Construction Workers Welfare Board constituted under the said Act is responsible for registration of workers with the Board. It is also liable for designing schemes, receiving applications, and disbursing benefits to construction workers who apply. The board issues a membership card to the workers which needs to be renewed every year. The workers have to register themselves with the board but doing so is a challenge for them since it requires submitting a registration form with proof of age, ration cards mentioning family details, self-certification of working as construction workers for 90 days, copy of bank passbook, authentic income certificate, and three passport size photographs. No fee is charged from the construction workers for their registration with the board.

### Minimum Wages and Frequency of payment in Gujarat as of 1st Oct 2018 <sup>47</sup>

Minimum wages for construction sector in Gujarat as per the state laws includes:

- Skilled – Rs 293 per day + Rs 36.20 Dearness Allowance = Rs 329.20 as the total daily wage per day or INR 8559 per month for 26 days of work.
- Unskilled – Rs 268 + Rs 36.20 Dearness Allowance = Rs 304 as the total daily wage per day or INR 7909 per month for 26 days of work.
- Salaries need to be paid weekly.

- Equal Remuneration Act, 1979

The research team did not find implementation of any of these laws.

### Sexual harassment:

Sexual harassment is a serious problem for women in the construction sector. Studies show that in this sector, about 74% of women reported sexual harassment at the workplace. The insecure nature of their employment creates a vicious trap in which women are forced to please a subcontractor in order to get work .<sup>48</sup>

Women workers at the road site admitted to incidents of sexual harassment and extremely abusive work environments that they face. Rather than addressing the issues of violence, abuse, and sexual harassment, the easy solution that we saw being implemented was to not hire women workers. In the sites we visited, rather than addressing sexual harassment cases, the workers were

<sup>46</sup> AIIB, ESF, Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Gujarat Minimum Wage w.e.f April 1, 2019 to September 30, 201 <https://paycheck.in/salary/minimumwages/gujarat>

<sup>48</sup> Devi, Kalpana Devi and Kiran, U.V., 2013, Status of Female workers in Construction industry in India: a Review, IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Volume 14 Issue 2 (Sept -Oct, 2013) PP 27 to 30



asked to live in plastic tents in the field as the contractors could not provide safe living conditions at the factories.

**Key observations:**

- The Thekedar, or the labour contractor, was subcontracted by the main contractor to recruit labour for the work sites. The Thekedar brought groups of migrant workers from tribal areas in Gujarat or Rajasthan. The main contractor, who receives the government tender, has almost nothing to do with the unskilled workers at the road site. Issues of workers' attendance, payments, benefits, etc are totally left to the labour contractor, who has been subcontracted by the main contractor.
- In Gujarat, on the sites visited, workers were migrants brought from Dongerpur village in Rajasthan. They came from farming families with small landholdings. Severe drought in Rajasthan, and an inadequate harvest, forced them to migrate in search of work in between harvest seasons. Their poverty is their vulnerability which is exploited by labour contractors.
- Of the 20 or so workers at the work sites, only three were women (accounting to a mere 16 to 17%). The women had come with their male family member – husband or father.
- No female worker or, for that matter, none of the workers were aware of the social security benefits under the BOWC Act that all construction workers are entitled to. These workers are not registered under welfare boards.
- None of the workers met were aware of the government cess for construction workers and, therefore, had no social security benefits, even though several government schemes are in place that could benefit them.
- No worker was given any labour contract. None of the workers on this project were registered with the Gujarat Labour Commission, and, therefore, did not have any worker identity cards or legal entitlements. This makes them unable to claim any compensation in case of work site injuries and their families receive nothing if they suffer a fatal injury.
- These workers also rely on private medical practitioners for their health care needs as they are not registered in the state of Gujarat and so cannot access public health facilities.
- An unskilled worker makes Rs 300 per day and machine operator makes Rs 500 per day. Women are only hired for unskilled work. They don't even know how much they will make in a month! None of the workers met on the work site had a labour contract or had clarity about their wages.
- Women workers said that they were promised Rs 270 per day and men were promised Rs 300. This they

saw as discriminatory given that they were working the same hours as the male workers at the site. The minimum wage, according to Gujarat labour laws, in the construction sector is INR329.20 per day which includes dearness allowance . The workers on this site were not promised minimum wages. Also, we could not verify how much they would actually get paid eventually.

- They had to work from 7 AM till 6 PM (11 hours) each day and work for at least 25 days in a month without any overtime.
- **The labour conditions at the work sites were analogous to that of forced labour—workers were forced to work on the project by holding back their wages.** Wages are withheld and workers are only given a 'food allowance' of about Rs 500 per week. Despite having worked for a month or more, all they had received was a weekly food allowance but no salary.
- There was no system of daily attendance records. Workers were totally at the contractor's mercy.
- They did not like the work and found the working conditions extremely exploitative. Once paid, they said they would not wish to return.
- Of the three women, two had passed the higher secondary and secondary examinations, debunking the myth that women are illiterate and hence can't be machine operators or semi-skilled workers. Women also felt embarrassed to reveal that they were doing unskilled work despite being educated because of poverty. Studies show literacy levels among women are increasing in India. However, gender biases still continue and restrict women to unskilled work.<sup>49</sup>
- One woman was more educated than her husband, who was also working on the same work site.
- Workers lived in precarious conditions – in makeshift tents using plastic sheets adjacent to the road with no basic amenities and no toilets and they use open fields with no privacy. The women said they bathed only at night. They had to fetch drinking water from outside or were given a water tanker by the contractor. The project documents promise that gender-distinct rest and toilet facilities will be made available on sites where workers of both sexes are employed, but this is far from the reality on the ground .<sup>50</sup>
- The women said they are poor but have never lived like this (in open fields) before. They have proper houses in their villages. This also debunked the general notion the R&BD engineers had that these workers are used to living in such inhumane conditions.
- Women on the **Bhavpura Vadu Road in Kalol** shared

**incidents of sexual harassments.** Earlier they stayed on the factory site but faced sexual harassment by men in the night, and hence, preferred to stay in the field as they felt they were safe there.

- The workers did not get monthly health check-ups, contrary to what was stated in the project document. Women workers were forced to leave their children with their in-laws back home because of the horrendous conditions. During the extreme summers and winters, it becomes very hard to survive in the open, alongside the road.
- There were no labour unions at the work sites we visited, nor any other form of collective organising.
- **Bitumen Factories had no women workers.** No women were employed in semi-skilled work such as operation of any machine. Only one unskilled woman working in one factory was found. She was engaged in the lowest unskilled level of work – that of picking fallen bitumen pieces from the mixer. The engineers and contractors had gender-biased views and believed that since the work is totally mechanised and automated and women cannot operate machines, no women workers were needed. AIIB has not adopted proactive steps to ensure women's employment at all levels, a major failure of the project.
- The heat and the dust at the bitumen factories visited was unbearable. The workers, including the lone woman worker, wore no protective gear or dust masks. Poor health conditions of construction workers is a known fact. Contractors claim they provide protective gear to workers but wearing this is optional. The workers don't use them as they find it uncomfortable. There are also issues of work targets and wearing protective gear slows the work down and makes it difficult to achieve targets.
- There were no working toilets at the bitumen plants, making it difficult for even women engineers to visit such sites.

AIIB's ESF explicitly prohibits forced or child labour in its projects<sup>51</sup>. However, what is shocking that AIIB's ESF is totally silent on social and environmental issues in its project supply chains. With growing awareness internationally around modern slavery, including child labour in global supply chains, how is AIIB monitoring the entire supply chains in its projects to ensure that there is no child labour, no environmental and labour rights violations and no gender discrimination among all the suppliers that provide raw material, equipment, or services for the project? This would include bitumen plants, stone quarries, sand mines etc. R&BD views only the workers working at the bitumen factories as their workers. On principle, bitumen factory workers are workers in the

<sup>49</sup> **Devi, Kalpana Devi and Kiran, U.V.**, 2013, Status of Female workers in Construction industry in India: a Review, IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Volume 14 Issue 2 (Sept -Oct, 2013) PP 27 to 30

<sup>50</sup> **Gender Action** ibid

<sup>51</sup> AIIB, Ibid

MMGSY supply chain. The actual workers on the project worksite—roads—were considered to be the responsibility of the labour contractor and once the contract was given to the labour contractor, everyone on the project appears to wash their hands off any labour rights responsibilities. This included R&BD and the main contractors (bitumen factory owners). However, these workers are the direct workers for this project. The workers at the bitumen factories are workers at the suppliers of the project. The actual workers in this project are totally invisible.

**Tender to lowest bidder:** Cost estimates for the projects are done two years in advance, after which the procurement process starts. The tender goes to the lowest bidder. Sometimes the contract is given to projects that are 30 to 40% lower than the estimated costs. How are these contractors able to deliver the project at such costs?

The contractors are not able to squeeze raw material or processing costs as these are well monitored, so they squeeze labour costs. The poor, vulnerable, tribal, and landless migrant workers are exploited, with the women being the worst off in these situations.

The construction sector is notorious for its labour rights violations. Therefore, any development project such as the AIIB-MMGSY, which relies on this sector, needs to be very mindful of the dismal working conditions of workers in road construction and should do stringent due diligence on labour rights to avoid common human and labour rights violations. AIIB needs to ensure robust labour monitoring mechanisms for MMGSY. Labour rights should be an integral part of project planning, implementation and monitoring. LASA should include labour rights in a comprehensive manner in all their training programmes.



# Speed Breakers on the Way: Key Findings

AIIB funded MMGSY project fails to integrate women in a systematic manner into the whole project. The project claims that 46% of the beneficiaries from this project will be women. This is an over-ambitious claim. Without integrating a comprehensive gender analysis and a gender framework, the project cannot reach all women from all demographics of the state. We found MMGSY perpetuating gender inequalities directly and indirectly.

- The demand for several roads was raised as women were unable to reach hospitals at the time of delivery and girls were not studying beyond primary schools as they did not have the means to travel to nearby towns for secondary, or higher secondary education. However, women's needs and use for rural roads is not an integral part of the project. Women's role in production as small producers (dairy farmers for example), or as economic and development agents, is completely missing.
- By ignoring women's realities, the project indirectly perpetuates gender inequality. The new roads are more beneficial to men and have not helped women either with reduction of time burden or with access to opportunities in the same way that the roads have helped men.
- The research team also learned that women's groups have historically been very involved in road struggles in Gujarat. Women were also active in the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) where roads were constructed. However, in this project, women are, sadly, not integrated beyond listing pregnant rural women's need to reach hospital at the time of delivery.
- AIIB did admit that what was discussed during the planning stage is not being fully implemented. For example, ensuring women's participation in all aspects of the project continues to be a challenge. Social practices rooted in patriarchal culture being one such challenge. We appreciated AIIB's commitment to resolve this and hope they will make efforts to do so in the rest of the project.
- Women also did not gain employment or other opportunities through this project in any significant way.

## Project design

- The project is expected to provide road access for economic activities and social services, and is also supposed to assist public transport operators, educational institutes, hospitals, and traders. Improved roads have helped school kids to reach schools, and ambulance services to reach remote villages. The new roads have also helped all those, mainly men, who travel by motorised vehicles to **reduce travel time and costs**. Women are still walking on the road, spending a lot of time and not using motorized vehicles. The new roads have not reduced the time burden of daily drudgery or changed much for these women compared to men.
- **Water logging** problems in several villages have not been resolved as local expertise was not sought. The

engineers came in the dry season and had no idea of water flow during the monsoons. In the absence of involvement of the villagers during the planning stage, the new roads that were constructed under the AIIB-funded project have not resolved the water logging problems in several villages we visited.

- There is no provision for providing adequate lighting or construction of bus stops in this project. This was repeatedly highlighted by the women as a **safety issue**.
- Women and children usually traverse the road by foot. The roads are narrow and hence the increased speed of the vehicular traffic is seen as an **increased risk** to the women and children using these roads as pedestrians since the project does not include shoulders or sidewalks as a mandatory element.
- The project has not led to **increase in income** for women and has not provided any additional livelihood options as women's livelihood patterns have not been integrated into the design of the project.

## Implementation

- There were no land or property-related conflicts. The project team, through community involvement, has resolved all such risks systematically.
- Detail Project Reports (DPR) are prepared while finalising the tender and contract without adequate onsite visits. Hence, it is difficult to address social or environmental concerns or incorporate changes suggested by the local populace. It is also difficult to mitigate the challenges that are likely to arise once the actual construction work begins.

## Training

- We observed that since the training sessions conducted by LASA took place after the projects and contracts had already been put in place, there was no provision to implement some of the environmental and social safeguards since there was no budget for it.
- For many officials this was the first training program they attended, and they had not heard of EMSF/ EMSP earlier. This made us wonder how the initial assessment was done for the project.
- In general, we found LASA's training program very comprehensive and useful. However, we wondered how much of it was being implemented by the engineers and contractors on the ground. We did find gaps on the ground in the implementation and monitoring in the villages we visited. The reason for this could be that LASA came into the picture long after the project started.

- The training sessions, however, did not cover any labour rights issues.

### Consultations

- No public consultations were held prior to the sanction and construction of the roads that the Sarpanch, panchayat members or residents living alongside the roads were aware of.
- According to LASA, women's participation in the consultations has been marginal. Effort needs to be made to mobilise women for consultations, such as holding consultations at a time and venue suitable to women.
- In order to include more women participants in community consultations, LASA has included women surveyors in the team. The LASA team has six consultants of which one is a woman, while out of the 20 surveyors, five women surveyors have been recruited.

### Information disclosure

- In all the villages and roads visited, neither men nor women knew anything about the road construction prior to the construction company arriving and starting the actual work.
- The responsibility for the maintenance of the road for the next five years is that of the construction contractor-5% of the total road construction cost was kept aside for this. However, the Sarpanch/ panchayat members we met were not aware of this.
- Gujarat MMSGY sign boards are put up after the construction of the roads is over, mentioning the name of the scheme, the length of the road, the number of years of maintenance, and the total amount spent. This information needs to be shared before the project starts.
- The project doesn't disclose information about its entire supply chain, including sand mines and stone quarries, in a transparent manner. For this study we did not visit any sand mines or stone quarries.

### Grievance redressal

- Project grievance redressal cells or committees were not formed in the villages we visited.
- No one in the villages knew anything about any grievance mechanisms.

### Labour

The AIIB-MMGSY and other development projects that rely on the construction sector need to be very mindful of the terrible working conditions of workers in road construction to avoid common human and labour rights violations. This is exactly what we found in this project.

- There is no child labour.
- In the factories and worksites we visited there were only 10 to 15% women workers on worksites.
- Almost all the workforce at these sites belonged to the lower castes or were tribals, and they all lived in precarious conditions.

- Despite the promises made in the project documents that gender disaggregated data on labour participants would be collected, LASA did not do so, nor is LASA monitoring labour rights or conditions at work. **This is the issue we found to be one of the most disturbing in the project.** We did not find any mention about labour in LASA's training sessions or in our meeting with LASA.

- Legally, the Government of Gujarat is committed to implementing the Building and Other Construction Workers Act (BOCW ACT). This calls for the workers to register themselves with the Board which is a challenge for them since it requires submitting a registration form with proof of age, ration cards for family details, self-certified certificates of having worked as a construction worker for 90 days, copy of bank passbooks, authentic income certificate, and three passport size photographs. No fee is charged from the construction workers for their registration with the Board. We did not find any of the workers at the worksite registered with either the State Welfare Board or aware of any of the benefits under the BOCW ACT.

- The contractors at the Road and Building Department check bitumen content etc regularly (daily) but there is no monitoring of labour and working conditions. Monitoring is only done at the technical level.

- The labour conditions at worksites were like that of forced labour.

- Since the contractor is not able to squeeze raw material or processing costs as these are monitored well, they squeeze labour costs. The poor and vulnerable tribal and landless migrant workers are exploited, with the women being the worst off.

- The heat and dust at the bitumen factories are unbearable. The workers, including a lone woman worker, wore no protective gear or dust masks.

- There were no working toilets at the bitumen plants.

- Women are not hired as workers in most parts of the project and, if hired, their roles are limited to unskilled work only.

- The women told us about the incidences of sexual harassment at the factory sites. Providing safe work conditions free from violence and harassment, especially for women workers, should be a key component of the AIIB project.

- The workers lived in appalling conditions -under plastic tents with no basic facilities, alongside the road or out in the open fields.

- Workers are neither registered nor given any labour contracts.

- We could not verify whether minimum wages were paid.

- Salaries are withheld for over a month. Only a weekly food allowance is paid.

- Workers are not registered with welfare boards and have no contracts or attendance rosters.

- They work long hours (7 AM to 6 PM) every day.

# Lets Get Gender on the Road!

## Recommendations

The findings from the field, and analysis of project documents, demonstrate significant gaps in gender commitments. AIIB, along with R&BD and LASA, need to take steps to significantly scale up efforts to put women at the heart of MMGSY and address gender issues. We agree with the Bank Information Center that *AIIB must improve considerations of gender in the early stages of project design and strengthen implementation of the ESF—particularly the gender-specific aspects —through both publishing guidance and enhancing staff capacity to provide technical advice and support on gender issues, and improve the Bank's capacity to conduct overall project E&S due diligence and monitoring.*<sup>52</sup>

We specifically recommend following:

### Project design:

- AIIB should have a gender policy in place with a team of gender experts to advise on how best to ensure gender equality in their projects.
- A gender framework and analysis should be fully integrated in all aspects of the project. AIIB should seek expertise and technical support from women's organisations to do this.
- It is important to include gender experts as part of the project team. This demonstrates AIIB's commitment to gender and will ensure women are at the centre of all aspects of the projects.
- Women in rural areas are mostly involved in agriculture. AIIB, in all their development agenda, should recognise rural women as economic and development agents – as farmers, workers, producers, growers, and gatherers. MMGSY, unfortunately, limits women's inclusion in the project only as expecting mothers.
- AIIB should recognise that all women work - whether paid or unpaid - and should ensure better infrastructure support for rural women's needs to reduce the day-to-day drudgery of providing for themselves and their families. This should include access to markets (labour and goods), internal roads, and transport subsidies to support rural women's mobility.
- The project team needs to study and make themselves aware of women's road-use patterns and requirements, as well as women's transportation habits.
- Recognising the fact that roads by themselves will not help gender equality, there should be a government transport strategy based on women's reality and needs.
- Accessibility of roads should function in tandem with affordability of transportation. The absence of short distance public transport on these roads

prevents women from being equal agents in accessing the roads.

- Free and safe transport services over short distances such as a three-wheeler service should be introduced. These should be owned and managed by women's collectives at the local level. Such transport facilities would assist women in their daily tasks and reduce the time burden they carry.
- All of the roads under this project should manditorily be required to have proper shoulders/pavements on both sides to allow pedestrians, especially women and children, to walk safely along the road.
- Full information about the selected roads should be shared in a transparent manner with the Gram Sabha in all villages. Special steps must be taken to ensure that women in these villages are also receiving this information.
- The Sarpanchs' should have all the relevant information about the road, including the funds earmarked for the maintenance of the roads.
- There should be at least a biannual clearing and maintenance of the shoulders.
- Women feel unsafe due to lack of lighting and covered busstops. There is no provision for lighting or construction of bus stops in this project. AIIB assured us that they had discussed this critical point with the Indian government and that these would be included in all AIIB rural road projects, as per our recommendation, to ensure women's safety.<sup>53</sup>

### Implementation:

The issue is not just of building the roads but, equally, of maintaining them.

### Training

- LASA should work with women's organisations to strengthen gender dimensions in their training programs. This engagement will also help the

<sup>52</sup> Bank Information Centre, Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Conversation with Somnath Basu, AIIB.

project to go beyond mere risk mitigation or the 'do no harm' approach towards 'do some good' and thereby actively enhance gender equality and women's empowerment.

- Training sessions should be conducted before the start of the project, with regular follow-ups to ensure that the team is implementing the project in accordance with ESF.
- Training sessions should include labour issues, sexual harassment at the workplace issues, and all the laws related to workers in the construction sector.

#### **Consultations and Community involvement:**

- The involvement of women in community consultations, the transect walk, and in planting trees along the roads needs to be sought to ensure that the project allows for the ongoing creation of livelihood opportunities and assets for women.
- The project should be linked to the Gram Sabhas for effective monitoring.
- R&BD and LASA should also reach out to women's organisations and collectives, and identify active women leaders who can be instrumental in women having a greater voice and say.

#### **Information disclosure**

- Information boards need to be put up in each village before road construction starts to inform people about the project, including its grievance mechanisms and who to contact if there are any issues or people need information.
- All information pertaining to the project should be disseminated in the local languages in a women-friendly manner.
- The MMSGY project mandates that the contractors take responsibility for the maintenance of the roads for five years from the day of completion. This information should be highlighted on the information boards, at community consultations, and through Gram Sabhas so villagers can hold the contractors accountable.
- Maintenance of shoulders, planting of trees along the roads should be farmed out to women's collectives at the local level.
- AIIB should publicly (on their website) disclose all information about the project's complete supply chain in a transparent manner. This should include details of all contractors, factories, stone quarries, sand mines, and other suppliers.

#### **Grievance mechanisms**

- Grievance committees should be set up in all villages, and include women's representation.
- Information about grievance mechanisms and contact details should be made available during village consultations and should also be on the information boards.

#### **Labour**

- The construction sector is notorious for its labour rights violations. Therefore, any development project which relies on this sector, such as the AIIB-MMGSY, needs to be mindful of the dismal working conditions of workers in road construction to avoid common human and labour rights violations.
- Labour rights should be an integral part of project planning, implementation, and monitoring. LASA should include labour rights in a comprehensive manner in all their training programmes.
- Use of protective gear should be mandatory for all workers.
- R&BD should ensure that all workers in the entire project supply chain are registered with the State Welfare Boards as set out under the BOCW ACT.
- AIIB should take steps to ensure that workers within their supply chain have their rights protected, are given proper contracts, and paid wages on time.
- AIIB should make special efforts to encourage women to engage in semi-skilled and skilled work within the project.
- Contractors should be held accountable for providing adequate housing with proper facilities to all their workers, including migrant women workers.
- AIIB and R&BD should have a policy of zero tolerance towards sexual harassment. Steps should be taken to ensure there are no incidents of sexual harassment at work. R&BD need to send a clear strong message to all its contractors to take steps to ensure the safety and security of all their workers, especially women. LASA should include awareness around sexual harassment in all its training programmes. Special grievance mechanisms should be set up.
- AIIB should ensure educated women are provided adequate skill development and other opportunities to become semi-skilled and skilled workers, including machine operators. Having

women with higher secondary qualifications doing unskilled work is not empowerment or development, but exploitation of poverty and vulnerability.

### **Monitoring:**

The pressure to deliver misses the nuances of women's lives and the systemic mitigation of various social issues linked to women's lived realities. Regular monitoring of social and environmental issues including labour, impact on women's lives etc should be an integral part of these projects. The project should develop monitoring gender indicators at all levels.

### **Women's equality and empowerment:**

- AIIB should recognise rural women as individual right holders and not just as members of households or dependents of male breadwinners. Rural women should be involved in all aspects of the project as individuals.
- Women should be engaged in decision-making processes at all levels that impact their lives. Towards this, substantial investments and support needs to be offered for encouraging rural women's organisations, collectives and self-help groups. AIIB should connect with the vast network of women's collectives in Gujarat to seek local women's leadership and engagement.
- All States in all their development agenda and economic policies should recognise rural women as economic agents, and development agents – as farmers, workers, producers, growers, and gatherers since women in rural areas are mostly involved in agriculture. States should recognise women as farmers, their role in food production and as guardians of nature.
- Women's collectives and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) should be involved in the procurement of services and goods to increase women's livelihood opportunities. AIIB should commit at least 30% of all procurement for all their projects would directly go to women's entrepreneurs or women's collectives.
- MMGSY should converge with MNREGA and the national rural livelihood mission to enhance women's economic opportunities. For example, maintenance of the road, sidewalks and the planting of trees by the roadside should be responsibilities given to local women's collectives. AIIB mentioned that the contract to maintain shoulders along the roads are being given to women's groups at the local level. For reasons of accountability and transparency, AIIB

should make this information public on their website. Published information should include the names of the women's collectives who have been awarded contracts, and other relevant details.

- Gujarat has numerous women's collectives, including SEWA. Our recommendation to R&BD and LASA and AIIB would be to always reach out to women's organisations and collectives in the State to ensure that women are not only included, but that they are active participants at all levels of the project.

### **Rights of rural women**

All women work - whether paid or unpaid. Women, especially rural women, do a lot of unpaid work within the household and do agricultural work in family farms and enterprises. Despite its obvious economic and social worth, much of the work that women do remains invisible, undervalued, and under-appreciated, and is not included in GDP. Women do most of household and care work. They spend many hours collecting water, fuel and fodder, cooking, cleaning, domestic chores, repair, and maintenance of the house. This work is backbreaking, time-consuming and is not shared by men. It puts an unequal burden on women and prevents them from participating in productive work in the labour market. Lack of infrastructure, poor energy and technology options add to this burden.

### **All development projects should:**

- Recognise rural women as farmers, producers and workers and ensure that there is no discrimination in women's access, ownership, use and control over resource rights.
- Reduce and redistribute the unpaid work that women do. To reduce women's time burden, the provision of basic services – housing, water, sanitation, education, health, fodder, institutionalised child-care facilities, energy (including domestic energy for fuel and fodder) and better technology options are necessary and important.
- Ensure better infrastructure support for rural women's to reduce the day-to-day drudgery of providing for themselves and their families, including access to markets (labour and goods), internal roads, and transport subsidies to support rural women's mobility need to be ensured.
- Raise awareness through campaigns to promote the equal sharing of care-giving and unpaid work between men and women needs to be mounted. These could be hoardings or signs along the roads with gender just messages.



**MUKHYA MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA**  
District : Panchmahal

Name: Strengthening and Widening of Mangalpur, Wadavva, Khatapur, Shekhpur Road  
Total Length: 14.500Km. BT Road: 14.500Km. CC Road: --- Km.  
Culverts - Nos. Causeways - nos.

**Details of Road Pavement**

1. Earthwork in Embankment: 27320 Cum.  
Material and Rollat.

2. Shoulder Bit. Seal: 16883 Cum. Material and Rollat.  
PS Gravel Cum.  
Metal Base Gravel 8.05 Cum. Cum.  
Stone Dust 0.94 Cum.

3. Metal Layer or WBM in 2 layers (each layer 12.5 cm. thick)  
Every layer constructed separately.  
Metal 11871 Cum.  
Stone Screening / Crushable Aggregate Cum.  
Note: Dry Roll, apply Screening agent Roll, add water roll.

4. Bituminous Layer  
200 27.1 cm. Thick - 1000 kg/m<sup>2</sup> With tack coat 2.50 kg/100 cm<sup>2</sup> & Asphalt for Spraying at 10 kg/100 cm<sup>2</sup> by Weight  
100 20 cm Thick - 1000 kg/m<sup>2</sup> With tack coat 1.75 kg/100 cm<sup>2</sup> & Asphalt at 3.50 % by Weight  
200 20 cm Thick - 1000 kg/m<sup>2</sup> With & Asphalt at 1.1 % by Weight

# Gender Equality: the Road Less Travelled

## Conclusion

*Road connectivity and transport facilities, like most other infrastructure investments, are intermediate goods as against final products. Their impact thus remains an indirect one which shadows their massive contribution with respect to provision of amenities and soft-social infrastructure. This also proves to be one of the major factors contributing to their ostensible gender-neutrality.* – Ritu Dewan<sup>54</sup>

The AIIB-funded MMGSY project aims to provide all-weather rural roads in the state of Gujarat. For the most part, especially in the project's implementation and monitoring, the project has a gender-neutral approach and, hence, failed to address women's specific needs in rural road connectivity that ensures equal access to opportunity and resources. Rural women's needs related to access to roads are well understood; however, women's roles in production as farmers, small producers, and as economic and development agents were missing in the project. The dominant focus of R&BD is on technical criteria. Even with LASA's support, the engagement on social and economic issues is limited. Neither AIIB nor R&BD and LASA have a gender expert and AIIB doesn't have a gender policy. With good intentions, in the absence of gender experts and a gender policy, the approach to gender in this project is adhoc and limited with several gaps.

There is a growing awareness around the critical need for infrastructure such as road connectivity for economically poorer communities, especially in rural areas, in development and inclusive growth. However, by just building roads in the name of development, one cannot address the numerous negative social and economic impacts that are faced by poor women, especially in rural areas. There needs to be integrated gender-sensitive interventions. Without such approaches, the dominant and better off communities (men, especially rich men from upper castes and from certain ethnic and religious backgrounds) benefit from such infrastructure much more than poor women and even less so are dalit or adivasi or tribal women.

MMGSY road projects in Gujarat have failed to acknowledge the diverse and multi layered realities of rural communities. Intrahousehold relationships – processes and decision making – do lead to gender differences in the use and control of infrastructure facilities and services.<sup>55</sup> These also impact access to other resources and opportunities. The project did help emergency vehicles to reach remote villages at the time of childbirth and also helped some girls in some of the villages to travel to cities for higher education, but for the most part the new roads have not changed much for these rural women. They still continue to walk on the shoulders with heavy headloads many times in a day, and now face new dangers such as speeding motorised traffic, especially given that there are

no shoulders or pavementsto walk on in several places. In the absence of affordable transport, especially over shorter distances, there is no reduction in work burden or time pressures for these women. Women also did not get any new employment opportunities and the project has not promoted women's livelihoods or asset building. R&BD does not see this as part of their mandate, but AIIB should have integrated this important component in their project design.

With the focus only on technology and efficiency, MMGSY fails to provide equal, safe, decent jobs, especially to women. Building roads relies heavily on the construction sector, which in India is known for its shady, underhand deals and labour exploitation. There are several risks related to labour in this sector. In order to avoid such violations, AIIB should have taken proactive steps to ensure a clean, transparent supply chain where all labour and environment rights are protected. These steps could include making their entire supply chain transparent, right down to where sand, stone, etc. are sourced. MMGSY is able to hire very few women at the low unskilled level. These women workers are totally invisible in the project. No one knows anything about them. There are no records of any kind to show they have been hired, are working, or are being paid. They face sexual harassment but don't complain for fear of losing their jobs. There is no provision for skill upgradation or to create a befitting match between the educational background of the women and the kind/quality of work they are asked to handle. Rather than strengthening the systems and addressing the gaps in the sector, the project takes advantage of people's poverty and vulnerabilities and turns a blind eye to the atrocious labour rights violations and accepts this as 'normal'. The workers are migrants and work only for short periods of time, hence, systems to guarantee their rights cannot be implemented, is the excuse given. AIIB should be very concerned about labour issues in their project supply chain and the fact that women are being hired only at the lowest unskilled levels in AIIB-funded projects. The Bank is not promoting gender equality but perpetuating gender inequalities.

AIIB, through this project, has an opportunity to address some deep-rooted gender stereotypes and create sustainable assets and opportunities for women. This requires a clear commitment and vision at the highest levels for rural

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Dewan Ritu, Ibid

women to benefit in equal measure from development projects such as MMGSY will require supplementary facilities and additional investment. This will also call for collaboration with other sectors and departments such as Rural Development, National Livelihood Missions, and local Gram Sabhas). R&BD should not ignore the potential of the huge network of women's collectives and the work done by the National Livelihood Missions or the Mahila Samakhya in Gujarat. Involving these women-led groups

will provide the project with expertise and leadership from rural women.

Achieving gender inclusion, particularly in rural infrastructure projects such as MMGSY, will require systematically addressing all conceptual, institutional, and physical barriers, as well as enhancing incentives to increase accessibility, affordability, and availability of all resources and opportunities for women. We hope AIIB and other IFIs will take note of this.



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We hope you find the report useful!

Yours truly,  
**Priti Darooka and Sejal Dand**



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