Gender Dimension in Green Jobs in Asia Project

Introduction

As stated in the 1992 Rio Declaration, women play a "vital role in environmental management and development...with participation...essential to achieving sustainable development". This vital role of women and the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development has been reaffirmed recently at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012.

Despite notable progress, traditional societal attitudes towards women, discrimination and gender-inequalities in the labour market stand as barriers to women’s engagement in the workforce in general and the emerging green economy in particular. According to ILO estimates in its 2009 Global Employment Trends for Women report, the share of female employees in sectors with potentially high levels of green employment remains low; for instance, women account for 9% of the construction workforce and at most 20% in the eco-tourism sector. Women may be excluded from jobs related to environmental protection and management due to the mistaken perception that green employment is often more labour intensive and thus more suited to male-dominated professions and occupations. In industrialized countries, although female employees account for as much as 20% of the renewable energy labour force, the large majority of employment profiles are geared towards administration and public relations: only 6% are employed as technical staff.

The Green Jobs in Asia project, supported under the Australian Government-ILO Partnership Agreement (2010-2015), has been active in five countries: Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines and Sri Lanka. The project seeks to deepen ILO constituents’ understanding and commitments to promote gender-sensitive green jobs opportunities and a just transition for workers and employers toward low-carbon, climate resilient, environmentally friendly development.

The promotion of gender equality in the world of work also reflects the aims of ILO’s Decent Work Agenda and its Global Employment Agenda.

Gender as a Cross-cutting Issue

Four sectors have been selected for pilot demonstration under the Green Jobs in Asia project which include the renewable energy sector in Bangladesh, sustainable tourism sector in Indonesia, construction of social housing in the Philippines and the solid waste management sector in Sri Lanka. These sectors are on average subject to low rates of female participation. In this connection, the project has adopted a gender lens to enhance gender equity in sectoral activities. Efforts have been made to mainstream gender considerations in all stages of the project.

Bangladesh

With nearly half of the Bangladeshi population lacking access to grid electricity, the expansion of renewable energy into rural areas has been assigned high priority by Government of Bangladesh. This initiative has generated great demand for solar technicians and entrepreneurs. Under the Green Jobs in Asia project, the installation and maintenance of Solar Home System (SHS) has been identified as entry points for green job creation. Focusing on 10 rural districts, the project has worked to increase employment opportunities for both women and men whilst improving living standards of poor populations in energy-deprived areas.

The participation of women in the sector has positive social and economic implications. Working as SHS technicians, rural women are provided new options for income generation, enhancing their knowledge and empowering them to meet their goals and aspirations. Rising numbers of women in the work force contributes to greater participation in decision-making processes as well as a more equitable sharing of benefits between women and men.

Approach

The involvement of women in the renewable energy sector, while a new concept, is a growing field in Bangladesh, especially within poor rural areas. As such, the project has sought to ensure female participation in all project activities. For example, the project set a target participation rate of 40% women for SHS trainings. This includes the selection of participants for both Training of Trainers and roll-out exercises, where priority status was afforded to female candidates. Female graduates from Training of Trainers activities were encouraged to serve as instructors and deliver roll-out trainings at a later stage. The project has also worked to link service providers and female graduates to facilitate job placement following training.

Project activities in Bangladesh have demonstrated that provided the opportunity, women are equally as capable as men in providing SHS services. In so doing the project has worked to create the enabling conditions for women graduates to locate jobs in Bangladesh’s growing renewable energy industry.

Assessment

In collaboration with the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), Grameen Shakti and other service providers, four Trainings of Trainers on SHS were delivered to 100 master trainers, among which 31 were women. 40 batches of roll-out trainings at 10 BMET Technical Training Centers across the country took place between January and June 2012. Of the 1,500 beneficiaries that were trained, a little more than 400 were women.
Challenges

The low turnout rate of women trainees in the project can be attributed to a number of reasons. For instance, as renewable energy is an emerging sector in Bangladesh, technical skills trainings did not attract as many applications from women trainees as could be expected. However, social and cultural biases continue to pose barriers to female participation in the Bangladeshi workforce, demonstrated by a general lack of willingness amongst many employers to recruit women workers. Nevertheless, some trainees explained that solar technician work was more of a male profession, involving climbing on the roofs of houses which is deemed unacceptable by many Bangladeshi women. Consequently, most of the female graduates chose work preparing and assembling SHS than undertaking the installation and repair of the systems themselves.

Way forward

The participation of women in this new job market has positive socio-economic implications. Working as SHS technician, offers rural women the opportunity to increase their skills, knowledge and financial capacity, contributing to their empowerment and advancement in society. The project has made efforts to link trainees with service providers to facilitate job placement for female graduates after the trainings, with a view to ensure the sustainability of approach. Efforts to mainstream the solar home system training curriculum, competency standards and occupational profiles into the country’s National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework (NTVQF) are also underway. Once integrated into NTVQF, more female trainees will have an opportunity to have their skills and competencies assessed and certified, facilitating their increased participation in the labour market.

Indonesia

Sustainable tourism in Indonesia is expanding and in great demand, highlighting the significant potential green jobs and livelihoods have to offer local communities in terms of pro-poor development. The Green Jobs in Asia project has supported the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy’s (MoTCE) Destination Management Organization programme aimed at revitalizing 15 existing tourism destinations through local development initiatives based on sustainable tourism approaches focused on environmental conservation and cultural preservation in several of these destinations.

Approach

Sustainable tourism provides pathways for women’s employment in the tourism sector as well as their local participation in tourism planning and management. In this regard, project interventions in Indonesia focused skills development, entrepreneurship and financial trainings in selected sub-sectors to assist local communities in establishing sustainable tourism enterprises aimed at reducing poverty and creating productive jobs and livelihoods for women at the local level.

Following this strategy, two sub-sectors - ecotourism and green homestays - were highlighted as project interventions based on assessed green jobs potential and the suitability for scaling up in

Case study 1: Solar Home Systems Lighting the Way to a Greener World of Work

(Adapted from ILO News Feature, A.Dow, 2012)

(Bogra, Bangladesh) - Ms Akhter is one of a growing number of trained solar home technicians installing energy-saving solar panels onto the rooftops of homes in Bogra. She received her initial training through a programme supported by the ILO and Grameen Shakti, a partner organization of IDCOL - a public agency in Bangladesh that promotes renewable energy. Through the Green Jobs in Asia project, more solar technicians are graduating each month following a six-week training programme operated by the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) through its Technical Training Centres across the country.

The move toward greater use of solar energy is being encouraged by the Bangladesh government and is officially endorsed in its current sixth five-year development plan. By rolling-out solar home systems, new jobs are created for the installation and maintenance of solar energy products, while bringing a clean and alternative form of energy to rural areas without power. This win-win situation is further advanced because greater access to energy opens up new opportunities for business and economic growth in rural areas.

The green jobs programme also places a specific emphasis on promoting the role of women who still face barriers of entry into the labour market. “I see no difference between male and female trainees and my teachers here have supported that view,” said 19 year old trainee, Nilafur Yasmin. “I’m doing this work with great interest and I’m encouraging other women to get involved,” added Ms Shahida Khatoon, another of the solar home technicians now on the job. The training results in technicians who not only install the solar panels but also assemble various parts and maintain the systems. In the city of Bogra, Sheema Akhter uses a soldering iron to assemble a control box required to operate the solar panel system. She feels her work is decent, it’s skilled and her skills are in demand. “I’m in a better position now (since the training),” she said. “I can also now give some money to my parents.”

There is great optimism among those already working in this new green jobs sector. Those who have been through the ILO supported training in Bangladesh see nothing but a bright future on the solar home’s horizon.
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other areas. Despite low rates of female participation in the workforce, the project is facilitating entry of women into the tourism industry and is encouraging the expansion of existing women-operated businesses. For example, the provision of training on greening homestays seeks to instruct homestay owners on affordable renovation options to increase revenue through resource-saving measures. The project has also provided skills-based training on culinary techniques, souvenir crafts, production of bio-briquettes for renewable energy, and preparation organic fertilizer to support livelihood development and further expand the value chain in the tourism sector for green products and services. A target female participation was set at 40% to promote gender balance in all project activities. Moreover, women and men were encouraged to take part in activities that are typically subject to gender stereotyping, with a view to mainstream gender sensitivity in project design. For example, women were selected to participate in manually-intensive trainings for the production of bio-briquettes and organic fertilizer. On the other hand, the project also recruited male participants for the culinary training, which is traditionally viewed in Indonesia as a predominantly female pursuit. These initiatives will provide various entry points for women to participate in the local labour market, assisting them in developing necessary skills and contributing towards more productive and equitable communities.

Assessment

A series of trainings for ecotour guides was delivered between November 2011 and May 2012 to beneficiaries in four locations (East Java, North Sumatra, Central Kalimantan and Lombok). 79 master trainers took part in Training of Trainer workshops, and a total of 152 beginner and experienced tour guides participated in respective roll-out training. According to the gender-disaggregated data collected by the project, the percentage of female participation in these trainings stood at 28%.

Skills trainings on tourism related income-generating activities achieved a higher ratio of women participation, as these trainings targeted both semi-skilled and unskilled workers among which women comprise a significant proportion (almost 33%).

Challenges

It is noted that at the demonstration site (e.g the main project target location in Bromo) women remain very interested in the training courses offered by the project. However, dissemination of information about training activities has been limited. Generally speaking, vocational training courses on offer by Provincial government have not been properly socialized among women in Bromo.

Way forward

The project has initiated a process enabling female entrepreneurs to access seed capital through a local bank, specific emphasis on female entrepreneurship has been initiated by the project. Channelled through local cooperatives, the funds are expected to assist women in developing existing businesses in the tourism sector.

Philippines

In the Philippines, the construction of social housing has been identified in the National Labour and Employment Plan and the Philippine Development Plan (2011-2016) as a sub-sector for employment creation, decent work and inclusive growth. Yet, construction work in the Philippines has traditionally been gender-unequal in part due to the stereotype that it is exclusively a male-oriented activity. According to the 2009 Annual Survey of Philippine Business and Industry, the female to male ratio in the construction sector remains low, at approximately 10%.

In this context, project interventions in the Philippines involve providing livelihood enhancement training on sustainable construction to social housing residents of the Southville 8 community in Rodriguez, Rizal, aimed at improving employment prospects for green jobs. The project is designed with a focus on building the capacity of women and out of school youth.

Approach

At the early stage of the project, a feasibility study on green products was carried out, taking into consideration the division of labour and related gender issues faced by women and men in the construction sector. The feasibility study identified two building products for promoting green jobs in social housing: modified concrete hollow blocks using recyclable materials and coco coir nets for erosion control. Technical skills trainings were developed on the production and installation of these environmentally-friendly construction materials, each with a specific emphasis on gender sensitivity, such as awareness raising on the importance of work sharing within the family.

Taken together, training activities were designed and implemented with a view to ensure a well-balanced representation of female and male beneficiaries. For instance, the project sought to ensure a target participation rate of 70% women and 30% men for coco-net production training and vice versa for the modified concrete hollow block production training. While the training on concrete blocks attracted mainly male workers due to the nature of the work, training on the assembly of coco-coir nets involved a higher number of women. Training graduates were provided support towards forming a community-based enterprise, with a view to open further opportunities for women to enter the labour market through the construction sector.
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Assessment

Although steps were taken to ensure a proper gender balance in demonstration project activities, the pilot skills training on the production of modified concrete hollow blocks conducted in April 2012 ultimately involved a low number of female participants. Among the 67 trainees who participated in the activity, 3 were women. Similarly, the pilot training on coco-net production delivered in May 2012 reached a total of 3 men, compared to 34 women.

Challenges

The reason for the low turnout ratio of women in the pilot training on modified concrete hollow blocks can be attributed to several reasons (i) the arduous nature of the work such as the heavy lifting involved, and working outdoors with exposure to the sun discouraged some women from engaging in the training (ii) traditional cultural attitudes that consider it unsuitable for women to enter construction work, and (iii) household responsibilities of many of the women living in the community which precluded their participation as Similarly, while the training on the production of coco-nets can provide women with immediate income, most participants engaged in the activity on a part time basis to balance their caregiving obligations, affecting their productivity and thus, the daily wage they received.

Way forward

Gender Sensitivity trainings conducted by the project serve to raise women’s awareness about the equal right to earn an income and divide work responsibilities between men and women in the family. Training modules used in skills development activities also emphasize gender needs, such as how work routines can be designed to better accommodate women.

Sri Lanka

The solid waste management and recycling sector presents substantial green jobs creation opportunities in Sri Lanka, and on this basis was selected for pilot demonstration activities under the Green Jobs in Asia project. Project activities have focused on promoting good Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) and environmental practices for workers in both the formal and informal waste sector, with a specific emphasis on women. One of the main considerations for project interventions was the degree of gender asymmetry present in the sector. Initial employment surveys indicated that although the number of female workers tended to be equal to their male counterparts, few women were found in supervisory positions. Additional considerations for project design included the informal nature of the work, poor working conditions and lack of standardized training and opportunities for the skills development of women workers.

Approach

Generally in Sri Lanka, female participation in the labour market is much lower than male’s due to the social and cultural norms that discourage women from joining the workforce. This challenge is compounded in the waste management sector as the general population typically views this type of work as having little dignity. Many women consider waste collection jobs as temporary and make efforts to locate better employment opportunities. Other women prefer the option of working fewer hours during the day collecting and sorting waste so that they can spend more time at home for housework.

Taking these issues into account, project interventions in Sri Lanka focused the development of a value chain in the solid waste management and recycling sector following a staged-approach to generation, collection, recycling, and retail. Each stage of the process has impacts on gender relations and equality.

Accordingly, the project has worked with provincial and local authorities to explore incentive schemes and regulations for promoting source separation of waste. These include cash rewards, a points system rewarding active participation, in-kind payment and tax exemptions. As women are typically in charge of handling household waste and play an important role in its disposal, these actions have been identified with a view towards providing women opportunities for earning additional income from household work.

Waste handlers frequently face serious occupational health and safety risks associated with collection and recycling activities, with women often among the most exposed. To address these issues, in April 2012 a Training of Trainers on OSH was delivered to 300 peer educators in collaboration with the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Nearly half of trainees were women, who have since supported NIOSH roll-out trainings to a total of 4,000 waste pickers in the Sri Lanka’s Western province.

These efforts have been further strengthened by capacity building on entrepreneurship and the extension of support to government-led worker registration processes. Trainings conducted on Green Entrepreneurship have aimed to equip women and men with the necessary competencies for starting a plastic recycling enterprise. Entrepreneurship can provide productive work opportunities for women when other options are not available, helping them to balance their family lives and their professional ambitions in the process.

In coordination with the Waste Management Authority (WMA) and local authorities, the regularization of a number of temporary contract employees involved in waste sector - many women workers among them - has been carried out. This will assist women workers to better access social safeguards such as health insurance, whilst strengthening their voices through facilitated social dialogues, representation in associations and taking up of supervisory positions. Expanding opportunities for decent, green and productive work, this approach aims to empower women workers, increasing their awareness and knowledge on social issues, and giving them more autonomy to manage their own lives. Future registration of other precarious workers in the informal sector to make payment systems more regular and transparent is now under discussion.
Assessment

The Training of Trainers on OSH held in April 2012 targeted a high ratio of women participants (46%). Efforts to generate more stable income opportunities for waste pickers in the field sites, including by providing increased attention to safety, hygienic conditions and practices at work, have benefitted women whilst helping to better preserve the environment in Sri Lanka. An increasing number of informal female waste pickers have been registered with the WMA of the Western province. Female plastic recycling entrepreneurs have been certified as master trainers of ILO’s Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) course, opening opportunities for these women to enhance the value-added of business operations and better compete with their male counterparts.

Challenges

Generally in Sri Lanka, women’s participation in the labour market is much lower than men’s due to the social and cultural norms. It is even more challenging to engage women in the waste management sector as the work, especially on the dumping sites, has been considered having little and no dignity. In addition, due to the informal nature of the work, many women find these types of job temporary and try to look for better employment opportunities. Some others prefer the option of working fewer hours during the day so that they can spend time at home for housework.

It is also observed that in some cases, employers prefer recruiting only men working on the sites. As such, they do not need to prepare for separate facilities for men and women employees (e.g. sanitary facilities). To some extends, this displays the sensitivity to the fact that more supervision is always needed for a mixed group of employees.

Way forward

Progressive formalization of waste workers that has begun under the project must continue to promote more secure employment and improvement of working conditions which will ultimately draw more women into the workforce. In much the same way, the project’s advocacy efforts aimed at sharing successful stories of women working in the waste management sector help to raise the dignity of the work.

Conclusion

Through awareness raising, skills and entrepreneurship training, pilot initiatives under the Green Jobs in Asia project have sought to promote women participation in sectors that are often considered to be male dominated. Gender sensitive indicators have been set for all activities, and the gender-disaggregated data has been used to monitor the engagement of women in project interventions.

Case study 2: Introducing Green Jobs to Solid Waste Management in Sri Lanka

(Adapted from ILO News Feature, A. Dow, 2012)

(Western Province, Sri Lanka) – Two dump trucks loaded with garbage trundle precariously to the top a mountain of rubbish at a landfill site on the outskirts of Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. Sensing a fresh opportunity, several freelance waste pickers have gathered nearby. As the trucks release their fetid cargo, the pickers moved in, searching for recyclable materials such as metal, glass and plastic containers. Dodging between the trucks and the other pickers is 32 year old Kumundu Dissanayake, a woman in black rubber boots and protective clothing. She’s been picking through waste here under the hot sun for two years.

Recently, Ms Dissanayake has become the beneficiary of a training programme within the Green Jobs in Asia project, designed to formalize the work of picking and sorting garbage for the purpose of regularizing recycling in the Western province of Sri Lanka. Among other 30 waste pickers at this site, she has now been registered with the Waste Management Authority of the Western province. The project works with the WMA to train its staff – and the registered freelance waste pickers – about the work and their picking and recycling methods. One of the most important outcomes of the project is the formal registration of workers and making the system of payments more regular and transparent. A monthly payment record is kept at the site office.

Ms Dissanayake earns the equivalent of USD 300 each month. “We’re now earning much more than before. The on-site facilities have improved as well. For example, the WMA has introduced shower facilities and we can also change our clothes before we go home. So that’s more hygienic for our family as well as us”.

The workers that received the training from the ILO about occupational safety and health (OSH) have also learned about the importance of their work. “This is the first project that address the working people’s health of these waste handlers”, added the Director General of NIOSH. Prior to the ILO interventions, “the workers in the garbage or sanitary sector were looked down upon”, said the Vice President and Director, International Affairs at the Ceylon Workers’ Congress. “But once it is seen to be a (form of) decent work, then there will be people who will try to get into these jobs because there is some kind of dignity attached to it”.

Promoting gender equality in labour markets requires clear and decisive institutional support at all levels. While gender-responsive policies are necessary to create an enabling environment for equal employment opportunities, the Green Jobs in Asia project demonstrates that focused sectoral interventions can assist in reducing discrimination, providing for a more equitable sharing of revenue and prosperity towards a more just, environmentally-sustainable and inclusive development process for both women and men.