EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While gender was not an explicit goal of the Caracas Slum-Upgrading Project (CAMEBA) during the design stage of the project, achievements with respect to gender have been noteworthy. Women participate significantly in the project through community consultations and training as well as in their roles as neighbor inspectors (neighbor inspectors are community representatives responsible for supervising construction work), construction workers and project staff. Most importantly, the case study demonstrates that women can be key actors/agents in catalyzing urban development projects because of their commitment to solve community problems and their constant presence in the slums. In other words, women's gender roles make them central stakeholders in improving the physical infrastructure of poor urban communities. In the case of CAMEBA, women’s participation in the project is enhancing project performance by: (i) improving the quality of the civil works; (ii) guaranteeing their maintenance and; (iii) making field staff work more efficient. As well as directly enhancing project effectiveness, the gender focus of the project is fostering dynamics that contribute to creating an enabling environment to achieve the project aim of improving the living conditions of slum residents. For example, women's participation has (i) helped build institutional capacity in the slums, which, in turn, is resulting in better receptivity to government programs among slum residents; (ii) contributed to securing families’ livelihoods through employment generation for women, and (iii) improved households' well-being through women's empowerment, more equal household decision making, and changes in gender roles. Overall, the case study illustrates how women's involvement in upgrading projects represents a win-win situation for projects, women, their families and their communities and should be therefore encouraged and actively promoted in World Bank projects. Furthermore, in the case of Community Driven Development (CDD) upgrading projects, the returns of a gender focus are extremely high given that investing in the participation of women represents no significant additional cost to that of investing in community participation, whereas it brings enormous benefits in terms of making possible the work with communities, enhancing project performance and improving household well being.

BACKGROUND

The Caracas Slum-Upgrading project (CAMEBA) aims to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants of a selected number of slums in the Metropolitan Area of Caracas through the development and implementation of a community driven infrastructure improvement.
program. Extensive rural to urban migration over the past fifty years has fuelled the growth of informal settlements on the outskirts of Caracas, known as barrios. Caracas barrios suffer from a chronic lack of services. Problems of lack of rights of way and vehicular access impede proper operation of vehicle-based public services such as police, solid waste collection, firefighting and rescue. Access to water is universal but informal and precarious; waste water coverage, though high, is improvised; and large numbers of barrio residents live on unstable terrain or steeply sloping hillsides. The project was thus established to address these deficiencies in two barrios of the Metropolitan Area of Caracas: Petare Norte and La Vega.

The project – which became effective in 1999 but only began to operate at full capacity in 2000 – currently reaches 15 percent of the barrio population of Caracas. Especially noteworthy are the participatory mechanisms of slum communities in the project. CAMEBA’s community outreach plan establishes formal mechanisms for barrio residents participation across project activities, including the definition of slum upgrading plans, membership on procurement committees and construction, supervision and maintenance of small civil works. During the first two years of operations, the urban upgrading activities, which represent the focus of this case study, have consisted of rehabilitating rights of way (public stairs, pedestrian paths, …etc), construction of sewerage collectors, recovering of urban spaces such as public squares and community centers, and construction of retaining walls to prevent hill slides. FUNDACOMUN, a decentralized government agency specialized in municipal development, is responsible for implementing the project.

**PROJECT GENDER-RELATED ACTIVITIES**

While gender was not considered during the design phase, CAMEBA has addressed gender issues during project implementation, following on the change of president of FUNDACOMUN in 2000. Her commitment to gender and long experience working with women’s organizations spurred gender actions in the project, making up for the lack of gender considerations in project design. The gender work in CAMEBA during the last two years has consisted of: (i) continuous dissemination of messages promoting women’s participation in project activities; and (ii) a series of training workshops for female slum residents on women’s rights, leadership and domestic violence.

The workshops carried out included: (i) six workshops on communication with emphasis on gender for women barrio residents, addressing issues related to gender identity, self-esteem, life projects, gender equality in domestic work, and violence against women; (ii) one workshop addressing violence against women for women barrio residents; and (iii) one workshop for children barrio residents addressing issues related to children’s right and citizenship. At the moment of writing this report several other workshops were planned for the next months (e.g. three replications of the children’s rights workshop; one workshop on violence within the family targeted to project staff; and another one on gender and development policies for project staff too).

Communication has also been instrumental in promoting the gender message in CAMEBA, with three actions being of particular importance. First, FUNDACOMUN’s President has
actively promoted the role of women in the project through speeches both, for staff and
government authorities, and for project beneficiaries in barrios. Second, the presidency has
urged the use of gender neutral language in project documents and in staff dialogue with
communities. A look at project documents corroborates a non-sexist use of the language.
Third, women’s participation in the project has been amply documented. For example, one
of the editions of CAMEBA’s magazine gathers the testimonies of 9 women project’s
beneficiaries including community leaders and neighbor inspectors (community
representatives in charge of supervising construction work), and a video has been produced
based on those testimonies.

The perseverance of the messages and the outreach of the training have generated extensive
participation of women across the project, both as beneficiaries and project staff members.
Female residents comprise the majority of neighbor inspectors in Petare Norte; and men and
women are equally represented among CAMEBA staff, with women outnumbering men in
certain positions such as promoters, supervisors and technical assistants. In terms of non-
remunerated participation in the project, female residents comprise the majority of
CAMEBA meeting attendants, proposal initiators, and project related committee members.

**VALUE ADDED OF A GENDER FOCUS IN COMMUNITY DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT SLUM
UPGRADING PROJECTS**

**Improved project performance.** Women’s commitment to solve the problems of their
communities, as well as their constant presence in the slums, make them ideal agents to
catalyze urban development projects activities. In the case of CAMEBA, women’s
participation in the project is yielding positive results by improving the quality of the civil
works, guaranteeing their maintenance, and facilitating project field-staff work with
communities. Women and men slum dwellers participate differently in upgrading projects.
Men's breadwinner responsibilities outside the barrio free little of their time to engage in
community work, and, according to CAMEBA staff, their involvement in the project is
considerably small when they do not perceive an apparent benefit (such as remunerated
work). By contrast, many women usually stay at the barrio throughout the day carrying out
domestic chores or small-scale informal activities at home, for which they depend on the
barrio conditions and services. Their constant presence in the slums also makes them likely
victims of barrio degradation, and makes them more aware of the danger that barrio
degradation represents for them and their families. Women, therefore, perceive a direct
benefit and have a vested interest in solving slums problems on which upgrading projects
can capitalize. Women's participation in CAMEBA has resulted in more efficient and
sustainable project operations as the following examples illustrate:

**Improved maintenance and guaranteed project sustainability.** Women's participation in
the project guarantees the physical sustainability of the upgrading works and the overall
sustainability of the project. Maintenance committees are responsible for upkeeping
structures and maintaining and operating communal service facilities once they are handed
over to the community. An unusually high proportion of maintenance committee members
—about 75 percent— are women. Project staff claim that women show higher interest in

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3 Especially for children who also spend a great deal of time in the slum.
preserving the new facilities and are particularly good at mobilizing the community to carry out maintenance tasks. During its final period of operations, CAMEBA aims to establish a system of co-management between barrio residents and municipal authorities to guarantee the sustainability of the project. CAMEBA staff consider instrumental the participation of women in the co-management phase. As the operational manager of La Vega put it, “we must target women during the co-management phase, because they are the ones who are in the barrio every single day”.

More efficient project operations. The gender focus of the project is making project operations more efficient in a number of ways. First, the role of women as neighbor inspectors, supervising the upgrading work, is guaranteeing the quality of the micro level work. Second, the participation of women in the project is contributing to cost savings by means of making a better use of materials and staff time. Finally, women's organized actions are complementing CAMEBA upgrading activity in the barrios and improving barrios services beyond the construction of basic infrastructure.

- The participation of women in CAMEBA as neighbor inspectors guarantees the quality of the project's civil works. The neighbor inspector is a full time paid position which involves supervising a particular civil work by among other things overseeing the quality of materials delivered, accuracy of bills, daily performance of workers, etc. and noting all the information on a construction diary. About 60 percent of neighbor inspectors in Petare Norte are women. CAMEBA staff reiterate how diligent women are at this role, how demanding with contractors, and meticulous with work details. They show their satisfaction at how many women inspectors are taking their role beyond the job description. For example, in one occasion, a woman inspector accompanied the constructor to a different public stair he was upgrading outside the barrio, in order to compare both works. It is worth noting that, in communities where irregularities from constructors are not uncommon, the role of inspectors holding constructors accountable has substantial influence over the final quality of the works.

- Targeting women can also facilitate project field staff work, freeing time to devote to other project matters. Promoters and supervisors report that women are instrumental in fostering acceptance of the project in their communities and in mobilizing their families' and neighbors' involvement. Certainly more women than men participate in activities and meetings across the project. Between 60 and 90 percent of project meetings attendants are women; and more women than men participated in ‘dialogue tables’ and ‘itineraries’ to define the neighborhood upgrading plans at the beginning of the project. Women are instrumental in

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**Box 1: Cost saving through women's participation**

We started working at 6:30 a.m. and finished at 5:00 p.m., but during the night, I constantly oversaw the place to make sure that we did not lose even a grain of sand. As soon as the concrete bags, the boards, and the other materials arrived, we took them to my corridor. And when the work ended everyday we kept the tools at my place. When the contractors saw that we hadn't lost any single bit of material, they gave us free sand and concrete to pave another path and they even did some improvements in neighboring houses with the materials remaining.

Irma Diaz, retaining wall neighbor inspector, Petare Norte.
promoting and disseminating information about the project. On the whole, promoters and supervisors consider that women's participation facilitates the logistics of their daily work, freeing time to devote to other project matters.

- According to CAMEBA staff, women's organized actions are leading to improvements in barrio services, beyond the construction of infrastructure. For example, motivated by CAMEBA rehabilitation of an alley in La Vega, women expressed their interest in receiving waste collection services. However, they soon discovered that this service was not made available to alleys because the collection vehicle was too large to go through them. Far from being discouraged by this, they arranged a rotation system among alley residents to collect the waste and take it to the main road, and to clean and keep the dustbins obtained from the municipal waste service. The organized action of these neighbors not only complemented CAMEBA upgrading work and benefited families living in the alley but also had a demonstration effect for other neighbors and boosted their participation in maintenance tasks.

Creating an enabling environment for the achievement of project goals. As well as directly enhancing project performance in a number of ways, the gender focus of CAMEBA has fostered dynamics that contribute to creating an enabling environment to achieve the project's ultimate goal of improving Caracas barrio residents' living conditions. Women's participation has contributed to securing the livelihoods of resident families through employment generation for women, enhanced household well-being through the empowerment of women, more equal household decision making and changes in gender roles, and improved community-level institutional capacity for CDD projects.

Reduced vulnerability and higher household coping capacity. The gender focus of CAMEBA has contributed to reduce households' vulnerability in the slums through employment generation for women. The project is generating employment for men and women in the slums as workers, neighbor inspectors, promoters and supervisors. Women's work as neighbor inspectors and workers is being particularly effective in securing the livelihoods of female headed households – 34 percent of households in Petare Norte and 38 percent in La Vega are headed by women⁴. The high proportion of young women among project promoters is also contributing to higher income security in their households by providing a secondary and sometimes a principal source of income to their families. In addition, the newly acquired skills and new jobs are expected to strengthen households' security in the future by providing the means to diversify households' livelihood strategies.

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Increased household well-being. Increased participation of women in project activities can lead to the empowerment of women and to gradual changes in intra-household dynamics which in turn may improve household members' wellbeing. Firstly, as a result of their extensive participation in upgrading work and training, women report a heightened sense of empowerment and self esteem as well as an increased ability to articulate proposals and demands, that without doubt will have important repercussions for their families' abilities to solve problems and deal with crises. Secondly, women's independent income is contributing to gradual changes in intra-household decision making processes that are likely to favorably affect children and other household members' well being. Finally, their newly acquired construction skills, and their extensive work as neighbor inspectors and to a lesser extent as construction workers, is playing a part in changing gender roles and undoubtedly will serve as a demonstration effect for girls in the slum, leading to higher gender equality and more equitable distribution of resources at the household and community level in the future.

Stronger institutional capacity for community driven development (CDD) projects. Women, and in particular women's organizations, can be an important counterpart for CDD projects. Women's receptivity to government programs and eagerness to participate make them ideal partners in CDD initiatives. In the case of CAMEBA, men's and women's attitudes towards the project seem to be dramatically different. Whereas men bitterly complained about what the project was not doing for them, women's support for CAMEBA actions and positive perspective on the project was overwhelming. Whereas men's disappointment after many unmet promises from public agencies in the barrio in the past precludes them from actively participating, women's newly found opportunity to be heard and have a say in the project makes them eager to collaborate with any activity. Women therefore constitute a solid base for public action in the barrios and a natural partner for CDD projects.

Box 2. Women’s opinions of CAMEBA
- Now we know that we can get better
- We have better quality of life. We don't live in a rubbish disposal anymore
- The money spent is well invested
- After 17 years, CAMEBA has activated everything
- We participate, we are aware of what we get and we take care of the work
- We’ve realized that we can do things, people are motivated because they see that the community is going to progress
- We have better sewage for our community
- Safety, the houses won’t fall anymore

(Focus group participants, Petare Norte)

5 There is ample evidence in the literature supporting the claim that female-controlled income has a direct beneficial impact on children and other dependents' well-being indicators such as nutrition levels or access to education. For concrete examples see Katz, Elizabeth. 1997. ‘The Intra-household Economics of Voice and Exit’. Feminist Economics 3(3):25-46, or Thomas, Duncan. 1990. ‘Intra-household Resource Allocation: An Inferential Approach’ Journal of Human Resources’ 25(4): 635-664
The returns of a gender focus in CDD projects are extremely high. Adding a gender focus to CAMEBA has implied virtually no additional cost to that of implementing the community outreach plan designed for the project during its preparation stage. The focus of the community outreach plan has shifted from targeting the community in general to targeting men and women within the community with no significant additional cost. By contrast, because CAMEBA staff is aware of the difficulties of working with barrio residents, the participation of women in the project and the subsequently smoother and more dynamic project-community relations that they contribute to create are highly valued. Therefore, the returns of a gender focus in CDD projects are extremely high given that investing in the participation of women represents no significant additional cost to the fixed costs of investing in community participation, whereas it brings enormous benefits in terms of making possible the work with communities, enhancing projects performance and improving household well being.

**CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Conclusions. CAMEBA’s pioneering experience illustrates the payoffs to adding a gender focus to CDD urban upgrading projects. Much of CAMEBA’s success is due to its thorough community participation strategy. Nevertheless, aside from general community participation, the participation of women seems to improve the outcomes of CDD upgrading projects:

- Women’s constant presence in the slums makes them direct project interlocutors and crucial agents during project implementation.

- Women’s commitment to solving the problems of their communities makes them an indispensable ally for projects aiming at improving community services.

- In the case of CAMEBA, women’s engagement in the project has translated into better-quality civil works, improved work maintenance, smoother project-community relations and higher project impact.

- At the same time, their participation has benefited women, their families and communities by the means of improving households well being and strengthening community institutional capacity.

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6 The main costs incurred by CAMEBA when applying the gender focus has consisted of the training workshops for women. Nevertheless, the workshops, or at least some of them, would have been run for community members anyway as part of the project outreach plan, had the project not had a focus on gender. The only difference is that, given the project’s emphasis on gender, women’s response to the workshops was massive and this caused the workshops agenda to shift to some extend towards women’s issues and women’s empowerment rather than, as originally planned, community empowerment in general.
Women's involvement in CDD upgrading projects represents a win-win situation for projects, women, their families and their communities and should be therefore encouraged and actively promoted in World Bank projects.

The returns of a gender focus in CDD projects are extremely high given that investing in the participation of women represents no significant additional cost to the fixed costs of investing in community participation, whereas the participation of women brings enormous benefits.

Lessons learned. Other projects considering to apply a gender focus to their operations can look at CAMEBA experience for useful lessons and suggestions. In particular, the CAMEBA example shows the fundamental role that the informal culture of an organization plays in promoting gender; the payoffs of investing time and resources in gender aware project implementation; and the need for choosing the adequate gender message for each project and each project stage.

The role of the project organizational culture. A gender sensitive organizational culture, at the project or/ and the implementing agency, may be particularly effective in mainstreaming gender in project operations. In CAMEBA, the high commitment of FUNDACOMUN, and of its President in particular, to gender issues has been the real engine behind the gender changes. The message of women's participation, conveyed informally through personal interventions, speeches, and dialogues with project staff, rather than through explicit operational procedures, has proven to be very successful in achieving women's participation. Nevertheless, this type of strategy, based on a specific individual's commitment rather than structural changes at the project level, faces real challenges of sustainability, especially now that a new management team is taking over FUNDACOMUN. Other projects may want to complement unwritten gender actions with specific modifications to their operational procedures that reflect the gender focus of their work.

The importance of gender aware project implementation. Although ideally a project would include gender in its design phase, the case of CAMEBA demonstrates that a thorough effort during project implementation is as important to mainstreaming gender in a project and can even compensate for a lack of attention to gender issues during project preparation. In other words, it is never too late to look at project goals through a gender lens and to develop innovative approaches to understanding men's and women's different stakes, roles, benefits and forms of participation. The CAMEBA experience represents the classic example of a process of gender mainstreaming through gender aware project implementation. The intensive training strategy targeted to women, the large gender staffing effort across
project components and the informal mandate on promoting women's participation coming from the implementing agency presidency, are the factors responsible for the outstanding participation of women in the project. Other projects under implementation, which did not consider gender in its design, may want to follow the CAMEBA example and articulate a strategy based on gender training and staffing.

- **The limitations of a "women in development" approach.** While a "women in development" approach, such as the one taken by CAMEBA, can be very effective in bringing about women's participation in development projects, it may also generate opposition among project staff that can jeopardize the continuity and results of a project's gender work. The strong promotion of women's participation during the initial stage of CAMEBA established the foundations for women's presence in the project in the future. Nevertheless, women's central role in CAMEBA, although necessary at the initial stages of the project, may have come at the expense of men engagement in certain project activities. For example, the emphasis on recruiting women for the technical and managerial cadres of the project has created a feeling of awkwardness among male staff who report having felt discriminated by promotion and recruitment policies. The combination of an unusually high number of female staff members, and a strong message, coming from the top of the institution, praising women, appears to be creating reluctance from some men to sympathize with CAMEBA gender work. Consequently, other projects could benefit from a gender approach that highlighted women and men different contributions to a project, and that broadened the spectrum of gender objectives to include men's needs (beneficiaries as well as staff). This would, at the same time, guarantee internal support for sustained gender work in the project.

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7 The "women in development" approach promotes women's rights and emphasizes the role of women as beneficiaries and agents in development projects with a view in empowering women. It is different from the gender approach in which projects tend to consider men's and women's interests in development interventions, emphasize both gender's participation, and are concerned about the impact of projects on men, women, gender roles and relations.