

February 2016

**Note to Participants**  
**Consultations on the World Bank Group's**  
**New Gender Equality Strategy**

In December 2015, the World Bank Group (WBG) launched its new [Gender Equality Strategy](#). This strategy builds on progress since the 2001 Gender strategy [add link] and the [2012 World Development Report on gender equality and development](#). It charts an ambitious path toward improving opportunities for women and girls and men and boys.

The strategy was informed by consultations in 22 countries, with governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, and other vital stakeholders. It also benefited from online inputs from interested organizations and individuals across the world.

**The World Bank Group would like to thank all participants for their time, feedback and recommendations, which shaped the objectives and operational pillars of the new gender strategy. This Note reflects on what we heard and what we incorporated into the new strategy.**

The new gender strategy, which covers the period 2016-2023, builds on the accumulated evidence about what works and the progress over the last 15 years in fostering gender equality. It aims to leverage concrete, strategic interventions that achieve tangible, real-world results—transforming lives, tapping new markets and talent pools, and building more resilient, productive economies.

The Consultations validated the focus on the following four strategic areas and the interconnections among them. The sub-issues within each objective also align with thematic feedback from the external consultations.

**Strategic Objectives**

- 1) Closing remaining gaps in **health, education, and social protection** while tackling emerging challenges such as quality of services and the articulation of a life cycle approach spanning from early childhood to school to work transitions and to aging;
- 2) Lifting constraints on **more and better jobs** for women and men, focusing on developing policy frameworks for care services, promoting conditions for women's entrepreneurship, and reducing skill gaps and occupational sex segregation;
- 3) Closing gender gaps in **ownership of and control over assets** such as land, housing, and technology as well as access to financial and insurance services and identification; and
- 4) Enhancing **women's voice and agency** and **engaging men and boys**, with a special focus on fragile and conflict-affected situations.

**Consultative feedback also validated the following operational pillars.**

**Operational Pillars:**

**Deepen the country-driven approach.** The strategy responded to the near unanimous call to factor in differences at the subnational level and tailor responses to various contexts (e.g., urban and rural). This will be done through more robust country-level diagnostics, and better alignment of global, regional and country-level approaches. The Bank Group will also develop and promote the business case for gender equality.

**Develop a better understanding of what works—and build on it.** A strong emphasis on knowledge also emerged during the consultative phase. This is central to the WBG strategy, which has a strong focus on strengthening the evidence base, leveraging lessons from successes and failures, disseminating best practices and spurring innovation. As a part of the strategy, the WBG will scale up its work on impact evaluations across all regions, better train staff on gender-smart solutions, and embed this knowledge in its operations.

**Embed gender equality strategically across the Bank Group portfolio, while deepening our country-driven approach.** Many participants agreed that promoting this more strategic approach aligns with the call for a more results-based approach, as well as more emphasis on outcomes and impact rather than inputs. This should be data and evidence driven. The development of a new monitoring system that better tracks progress and results is also directly linked to this feedback.

**Leverage partnerships.** Many participants in the consultations encouraged the WBG to work in partnership with other key stakeholders on gender equality. The WBG strategy outlines partnerships with the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, and other development partners on thematic issues, such as gender-based violence, clean energy, fragility and conflict, and climate change. At the country level, the Bank Group will also forge key partnerships with stakeholders to inform policy dialogue. Additionally, in the context of the strategy, the World Bank Group is working closely with the United Nations to make its impact on Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

**Additional Issues that Arose in Consultations:**

**Human Rights Issues:** Some participants called for the application of a rights-based approach in World Bank Group policies and programs. Many of the principles important for human rights—such as transparency, accountability, consultation, participation and nondiscrimination—are applied in the Bank Group’s work to end poverty and boost shared prosperity. Through application of these principles in the Bank Group’s development interventions, the World Bank Group supports its members to achieve their human rights aspirations. WBG-supported projects support social development and inclusion. In this regard, supporting women’s economic empowerment or their achievement of property rights or the pursuit of universal health care are a core part of our work.

**Sexual orientation and gender identity issues:** Some stakeholders called for greater consideration of sexual orientation and gender (SOGI) issues in the Gender Strategy. The WBG Global Practice on Urban, Rural, and Social Development is leading the organization’s efforts to address SOGI issues, which is new for the Bank Group. Given the cross-cutting nature of these

issues Global Practice on Urban, Rural, and Social Development has developed an action plan for additional research, evidence collection, and sensitization of staff on these issues, in collaboration with the Governance and Health Nutrition and Population Global Practices and the Gender Cross Cutting Solutions Area.

**Gender and Safeguards.** Some participants called for a “stand-alone” safeguard on gender. An expert focus group on gender and safeguards in 2013 advised, however, that gender issues are best treated throughout the entire project cycle, and should therefore be embedded across the WBG’s portfolio. Issues related to gender equality are also addressed throughout the proposed Environmental and Social Framework (ESF), including through the nondiscrimination provisions, which are designed to include any group that is more likely to be adversely affected by a project, or less able to take advantage of project benefits. This could be for a wide range of reasons, including because of gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Other proposed provisions, including regarding protections for women-led households, also address gender issues.

**Gender Equality and the World Bank.** Some participants expressed interest in seeing the Bank adopt an internal gender equality policy in the strategy. During the consultative process, participants highlighted the importance of the World Bank Group leading by example on gender equality. This feedback echoes parallel on-going work within the institution, including: (1) the first Bank Group Compact, with specific diversity and inclusion goals and actions in the areas of advocacy, accountability, and inclusion; (2) Initial Certification of WBG HQ by Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE), a key global assessment methodology and business certification standard for gender equality; (3) a pay and performance study across the World Bank Group.

### **Moving Forward**

This is just the beginning. We now face the exciting challenge of implementing our new approach and tailoring solutions to suit unique country contexts and building on what works best. We are in the process of developing implementation plans which will require concerted and sustained efforts. We want to target areas in which we can be transformational, leveraging partnerships, and working closely with the private sector. We want to innovate and evaluate.

Gender inequality remains one of the biggest obstacles to shared prosperity. No country, no economy, no company or community can meet today’s challenges or achieve its potential until all its people can achieve theirs. We look forward to raising our game with you for women and men, and girls and boys everywhere.

## APPENDIX A: THE EXTERNAL CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR THE STRATEGY

### Consultation Process

The development of the renewed World Bank Group (WBG) Gender Strategy was supported by a global consultation process (Table A.1) that sought to elicit views and feedback from interested stakeholders in a broad, inclusive, and transparent manner on country and regional perspectives, global lessons learned, and good practices to reduce key gender gaps.

Between April and July 2015, the WBG sought inputs based on a concept note that described the approach and directions toward a renewed strategy. The process helped build a base for dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders, which the implementation of the strategy can continue to benefit from. As part of this consultation process, a dedicated website serves as a platform for all interested parties to provide input and contribute to the development of the Gender Strategy ([www.worldbank.org/genderconsultation](http://www.worldbank.org/genderconsultation)). The website contains all the key consultation documents in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish.

### Stakeholders Consulted

- *In-person events.* A total of 58 in-person and videoconference events and roundtables were held to discuss the strategy, involving more than 1,000 participants from governments, civil society organizations, trade unions, the private sector, and development partners in 22 countries in all regions. An additional four preconsultative meetings were held in the context of ongoing global and regional events.<sup>i</sup> Selection of countries for the in-person meetings took into account the following criteria: (1) balanced coverage of constituencies of the World Bank Group Board; (2) balanced representation of middle, low-income, and fragile economies; (3) a combination of existing WBG portfolios and operations; and (4) opportunities to apply solutions to close gender gaps.
- *Online consultations.* A dedicated consultation web page provided a platform for stakeholders to provide inputs to development of the strategy. The site included a web-based questionnaire in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, and a dedicated email contact point. More than 50 people responded to the online survey, providing essential feedback on the main areas of focus for the new strategy. Finally, detailed comments on the concept note were submitted by 14 organizations via the email contact point.

Figure A.1 Strategy Development Timeline

April 8 Concept Note	End April – Early July Consultations	July–October 2015	Mid-December 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board Discussion – Committee on Development Effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concept Note posted</li> <li>Internal and external consultations: Online and face to face</li> <li>All feedback posted on website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysis of feedback received</li> <li>Drafting Strategy</li> <li>Internal Review Process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full Board discussion of strategy</li> </ul>

## Findings

This section presents a summary of the input collected during the consultations.

### Feedback on the Strategy Framework and Focus Areas

- Broad support regarding the need to be *selective* in playing to the WBG's areas of comparative advantage, as well as a strong appreciation for the identification of more and better jobs and access to key physical and financial assets as the main areas of focus. Some concern was raised, however, about limiting the *scope* of the strategy to these two areas, given the interconnected nature of many of the issues, such as health and education, underlying its goals. Voice and agency of women was widely suggested as a third priority area for the renewed strategy.
- General consensus on the need to have a *multisectoral approach* to respond to the cross-cutting nature of gender equality.
- Overall support for a *country-led approach*, factoring in different territoriality issues including regional, subnational, and rural-urban differences.
- Fragile and conflict-affected situations require different operational approaches to respond to their distinct challenges.
- Unanimous call for *more and better data* given the serious gaps in this area to inform policy making, particularly in the collection of sex-disaggregated data. The WBG can help client countries by generating evidence and collecting and analyzing data to inform policy making.
- General consensus that, in the design and implementation of its programs, the WBG should consider adopting a more *participatory approach*, in particular by engaging with grassroots and civil society organizations and the private sector in client countries.

- General consensus that the WBG should build on existing partnerships and ensure better coordination with other development partners.

## Challenges and Issues

### ENDOWMENTS

- The Bank Group needs to maintain its work on *education challenges* that remain unresolved, including those related to technical vocational education and training, educational streaming, school progression and completion, and increasing the number of girls being educated in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics subjects.
- Access to education remains the greatest challenge, especially in the poorest, more remote areas, mainly because of high poverty rates and lack of affordability, cultural and social norms, and the location of schools, particularly in rural areas.
- The Bank Group also needs to look at the *quality of education*, including the suitability of academic curricula for the labor market and the development of life skills more generally, skills development for teachers and principals, and quality of educational outcomes. In addition to enhancing a person's ability to access economic opportunities, a decent education will have knock-on effects with respect to their voice and agency.
- The school-to-work transition is a key challenge for young men and women. Job-readiness programs can be explored to help with this transition. Additionally, the WBG could prioritize work in this area to help boost women's labor force participation, particularly in countries where women are well educated yet have very low labor market participation.
- *Gender stereotypes* are often embedded in education systems and curricula, affecting the type of professional education pursued by girls and boys. The renewed strategy should address this issue and explore options for changing social and cultural norms that tend to promote inequality, particularly through *early childhood education*.
- The Bank Group needs to continue promoting work on *sexual and reproductive health and rights*, as well as related services.

### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES: MORE AND BETTER JOBS AND OWNERSHIP OF AND CONTROL OVER PRODUCTIVE ASSETS

The WBG should continue to deepen its work in this area. More specifically, it should address the following:

- Constraints to women's full and equal participation in employment, such as sex discrimination in the labor market, gender wage gaps, poor workplace conditions, and the lack of progressive workplace policies, such as paid parental leave, flexi-work, and home-based work.
- The burden of *care*. Care is seen as an important driver of low rates of female labor force participation. It is important to tackle the issue of care across the life cycle from the care of children to the care of the sick and the elderly, and to look at financial aspects of care provision, be it public, private, or mixed, to ensure equitable and sustainable service delivery.
- Deficits in infrastructure, particularly *affordable, accessible, and safe public transport*, which is a key enabler of women's labor force participation. Lack of mobility is a major constraint on women's access to job markets. Accordingly, the renewed strategy should explore ways to provide adequate and safe infrastructure.

- Issues related to employment *informality* and the need to quantify informal employment, have better data and diagnostics, and better understand what triggers the transition from informal to formal employment.
- Female *entrepreneurship*. The WBG should concentrate on policies and programs that promote conditions in which women-owned businesses can thrive.
- Women in many parts of the world, including women entrepreneurs, often have more restricted *access to formal credit*. The renewed strategy should look at the different barriers to accessing financial services that these women face, such as a lack of financial literacy; a lack of traditional guarantees and collateral that would enable them to secure credit, such as title to land or housing; and less favorable borrowing terms compared with men, such as higher interest rates and shorter time frames.
- Consider policies and programs that promote access to *technology and ICT*. Technology can help overcome some of the challenges women face in accessing economic opportunities and in participating more in the labor force, for example, by facilitating access to finance through branchless banks and other mobile banking solutions; facilitating access to agricultural extension services and other productive assets; and even allowing the creation of jobs that may be carried out remotely. The WBG should develop its work in this area.
- *Gender stereotyping* and *occupational sex segregation* and their linkages to cultural and social norms.

## VOICE AND AGENCY

- The need to promote more *participatory approaches to decision making* that include women at all levels—at home, at work, in their communities, and in their societies.
- *Political participation of women*, notably with respect to building skills for women to increase their active political participation, promoting women's participation in local and national governments, and examining the role of quotas.
- The need to address *cultural and social norms* in the WBG's engagement on gender, underlining the importance of a context-specific approach.
- The importance of *working with men and boys* to underline that gender is not about women, but also about men, who need to be better engaged as agents of change. The Bank Group should build the evidence base for work on masculinities.
- The need to properly acknowledge and address challenges related to *gender-based violence (GBV)*. The WBG's strategy on gender should incorporate prevention and response measures, including interventions such as training for medical, judicial, and law enforcement personnel; and service provision, such as hotlines and shelters. School-related GBV should also be a focus. In addition, the strategy should address data gaps in this area and help calculate the economic costs of GBV, which could help sensitize decision makers and the public to the problem.
- The WBG should address *legal and regulatory issues* that affect gender inequality, in particular by promoting reform of regressive legal frameworks.



## Recommendations on the Strategy's Approach

### RESULTS

- Strong support for a *results-based approach*, with practical, gender-smart solutions that can be implemented sustainably; a focus on outcomes and impact rather than inputs; and taking into account the different regional and country contexts.
- Unanimous call for *emphasizing knowledge*, with a particular eye toward strengthening the evidence base and developing a better understanding of what works and what does not; developing better diagnostic tools that are capable of assessing quantitative and qualitative indicators; learning from and leveraging lessons learned on successes and failures, best practices, and innovations.
- Generate demand for practical, gender-smart solutions within client countries and organizations by promoting the business case for gender equality.
- Need for more consistent and robust *monitoring and evaluation* at all levels of engagement.
- Facilitate *more effective dissemination* of best practices.

### STRATEGIC APPROACH TO MAINSTREAMING

- Support for a more *selective approach to mainstreaming* to avoid box-ticking exercises. However, there were differing opinions about the meaning of the concept, its usefulness, its applicability, and how it translates into results. The WBG needs to clearly spell out what it means by a strategic approach to mainstreaming and how it plans to implement it, including in the context of its safeguards policy.
- Specific recommendations for *transitioning from broad to strategic mainstreaming* include ensuring staff have the resources and the expertise for effective implementation, and emphasizing more consistent diagnostics.
- At the time of *implementation*, the WBG needs to ensure that the shift from broad to strategic mainstreaming does not serve as a disincentive for teams across the board to remove the gender lens from their work.
- The WBG should *set an example* for client countries and organizations by ensuring that gender is adequately mainstreamed, not only in its operations, but also internally in its human resources policies.

### COUNTRY-LED APPROACH

- *Strong support for a country-driven approach*. Unanimous call for the Gender Strategy to factor in differences at the country level, and to better tailor responses to national, subnational, and municipal contexts, as well as differences between urban and rural settings.
- *Aligning country-level planning with higher-level objectives*. The strategy should clearly specify how it is going to be implemented and translated from one that is global in scope into more specific regional and country-level approaches. Furthermore, it should spell out what the internal mechanisms will be for including gender in the country-level planning process.
- *Develop robust country-level diagnostics* to better understand key gender gaps, why they persist, and what needs to be changed given a particular country context. The WBG should also provide capacity building in data collection and strategic analysis to governments and clients.



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<sup>i</sup> These include pre-consultative meetings with the Nordic-Baltic Group (Norway, January 2015) and the Commission on the Status of Women (New York City, March 2015).

- The WBG should *use its convening power* to foster and facilitate a more participatory approach by bringing together different stakeholder groups in client countries and organizations to work on relevant issues.

## FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED SITUATIONS

- Unanimous agreement on the need to address gender disparities in fragile and conflict-affected situations, and recognition that doing so can help support peace-building efforts.
- Need to introduce *differential operational approaches* considering the complex and dynamic relationship between gender roles, economic opportunities, and agency; the increasing prevalence and use of gender-based violence; the complex psychosocial effects of conflict on individuals and communities; and the role of masculinities, male identity, and at-risk youth in in fragile, conflict-affected, and violent environments.
- The importance of addressing *shifts in traditional gender roles and dynamics* that occur as a result of conflict and that can pose specific challenges to both women and men within their households and communities.

## Additional Issues the WBG Should Take into Consideration

- The Gender Strategy could benefit from a *rights-based approach*.
- The WBG should recognize that men and women are not homogeneous groups. The differential, and often overlapping, identities—as a result of disability, age, marital status, race, and ethnicity, among others—should receive special consideration.
- The Bank Group should clarify how it will address *sexual orientation and gender identity* (SOGI) issues and where SOGI fits in the context of the Gender Strategy.
- Tools, such as *gender-responsive budgets*, could be used to help support budgetary reforms and promote the implementation of cross-sectoral policies and programs on gender equality.
- The Bank Group should address the *disconnect between progressive legal frameworks and weak implementation*.
- *Climate change, disaster-risk management, and environmental issues*. The WBG should focus on the linkages between gender, environment, and climate change, such as the particular vulnerability of women to environmental degradation, climate change, and disasters, but also their crucial role in developing adaptation and mitigation strategies.