



## World Bank's Safeguard Policies Review and Update Online Expert Focus Group on the Emerging Area Gender

Online Focus Group  
May 16, 2013

**On May 16, 2013**, an online focus group meeting of international experts was held on the subject of Gender. This focus group was part of the World Bank safeguard policies review and update process, and the topic of gender is one of the emerging areas that stakeholders have asked the World Bank to consider during the review. Other emerging areas include: climate change; disability; free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples; labor and occupational health and safety; human rights; and land tenure and natural resources. More information about this process is available on the safeguards review [website](#). The terms of reference for participants of focus groups for emerging areas are available [here](#).

Participants in the focus group comprised gender experts from a variety of civil society, inter-governmental, and donor organizations from around the world (see [list of participants](#)). It was agreed at the outset that the focus group would be conducted in accordance with Chatham House rules, and that the experts would speak in their individual capacities rather than as representatives of their respective institutions. In addition to the participating experts, four World Bank Group staff members were present.

The focus group meeting began with presentations by World Bank staff to help define the purpose and scope of the meeting. The first presentation described the rationale, objectives and stages of the overall safeguards review process. The second presentation outlined the World Bank's strategy to mainstream gender in its operations and policies. This mainstreaming approach aims to do the following:

- Identify and mitigate the potential risks faced or created by development interventions
- Include measures that enable the World Bank to identify potential gender disparity risks that project implementation may exacerbate
- Identify methods to assess and address potential gender disparity risks found in implementing safeguard policies

The final introductory staff presentation explained the World Bank's continuous efforts to build on the core principles of the current safeguards and strengthen their effectiveness through analysis, specific actions, monitoring, and evaluation.

With these considerations in mind, the focus group turned its attention to the following four questions for discussion:

1. In your experience, what are good examples of effective approaches to mainstream gender in operations, including safeguard policies?
2. What aspects and recommendations of the World Development Report 2012 “Gender Equality and Development” could be reflected in the safeguard policies?
3. How should gender issues be addressed in the environmental and social assessment process at the project level?
4. How could the World Bank use country policies more effectively to affect issues related to safeguard policies?

Following is a synthesis of key observations of expert participants during the day. It should be emphasized that these observations are not reported here as necessarily representing the substantive consensus of the group. They are instead summarized here as key issues put on the table by one or more individual experts that received attention during the consultation and that were proposed for further consideration as the process goes forward.

## **1. General observations**

Focus group experts strongly supported the World Bank’s review and update of its safeguard policies. In particular, the experts responded positively to the idea of evolving an integrated safeguard policy framework inclusive of gender and other emerging issues. As for further general observations:

- One expert stated that mainstreaming gender in all safeguard policies is critical to carrying out the World Bank’s mission of alleviating poverty, as a large majority of the world’s poor are women.
- Experts voiced support for the International Finance Corporation (IFC) approach of integrating gender policies across its Performance Standards, arguing that this mainstreaming approach is more effective than a freestanding gender policy.
- One expert stressed that safeguard policies have a useful role in cases where there is potential risk of harm to a specific group, particularly women (e.g., exclusion from consultation in development projects, involuntary resettlement issues, etc.).
- One expert suggested that safeguard policies work best not as proactive instruments but rather as a complement to proactive operational policies. For example, such operational policies include: developing country strategies in consultation with diverse stakeholders; tracking gender informed lending on a quarterly basis; and conducting regional monitoring of gender informed lending at different stages of project development. Although supportive of this complementary relationship, the expert cautioned that creating too much bureaucracy around gender could negate the World Bank’s efforts to address gender disparities and measure the impact of its work on women more systematically.
- One expert stressed that the World Bank should make the Social Impact Assessment a major focus of its safeguards review. More specifically, the World Bank should ensure that the Social

Impact Assessment is broad enough to capture all human rights impacts, particularly impacts on women's rights, and to protect against any violation of those rights.

**2. In your experience, what are good examples of effective approaches to mainstream gender in operations, including safeguard policies?**

- **Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) approach.** Participants discussed the practice of the Inter-American Development Bank of integrating gender into safeguards. An independent evaluation report on gender integration into IADB safeguard policies suggested implementation challenges in the areas of gender integration and due diligence.
- **African Development Bank (AfDB) approach.** AfDB has maintained positive gender policies for a long time and is currently in the process of finalizing a draft of safeguard policies to be approved by its board during summer 2013.
- **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) approach.** Several experts pointed to EBRD's new Strategic Gender Initiative (SGI) for its investment projects. Using a two-pronged approach, this initiative aims to: 1) mitigate gender disparity risks in keeping with EBRD Performance Requirements and guided by its Environmental and Social Policy and 2) call attention to areas discovered during the project assessment process where the EBRD can enhance its role (particularly by engaging mainly with the private sector) in supporting gender equality.
- **Facilitation of proactive engagement.** The EBRD's SGI team's work is currently limited to certain regions (i.e., Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt, and Central Asia). The narrow geographical scope may allow EBRD to more easily identify projects where it can engage more proactively in support of gender equality. Under this new initiative, EBRD aims to shift away from what one expert called an ad hoc approach to addressing gender inequality toward a proactive approach that emphasizes engagement with clients and helps women gain access to finance, employment, skills, and services.
- **Monitoring tools and assessments.** The EBRD's SGI team is currently developing monitoring tools and methods for assessing project implementation. The SGI team plans to evaluate its approach in 3-5 years when comprehensive data on its progress will be available for analysis.
- One expert noted that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has stipulated labor quotas in some of its loan agreements in order to incorporate more women into its projects. Given the success of this approach in addressing gender inequality in certain ADB projects, the expert argued that this sort of proactive approach should be applied systematically.

**3. What aspects and recommendations of the World Development Report 2012 "Gender Equality and Development" could be reflected in the safeguard policies?**

The World Development Report (WDR) laid out several areas in need of specific action to achieve better results on gender mainstreaming:

- **Voice and agency.** Experts discussed that if people (women in particular) who are affected by investment projects do not have a platform or the skills to articulate the challenges they are facing, it will be difficult for them to ensure their opinions are taken into consideration.
- **Evidence-based analysis and data collection.** Experts agreed that evidence-based analysis and data collection must be emphasized in order to better inform discussions on project implementation and potential impacts.
- **Rural development.** Experts suggested that rural development projects represent opportunities for convergence/synergy between safeguard policies and gender mainstreaming, because most rural development investment operations (e.g., transportation projects) often have large impacts on women and whole communities.
- **Women's economic empowerment.** Experts argued that it is critical to support the economic empowerment of women in order to increase their bargaining power, and by extension, their voice and agency.
- One expert stressed that project consultations should include those who will be affected by the project and not simply the head of household to ensure impacts are felt where intended.

#### 4. **How should gender issues be addressed in the environmental and social assessment process at the project level?**

- One expert suggested integrating gender policies under the social part of the Environmental Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) framework for baseline analysis (e.g., gender differentiated impact analysis). Another expert suggested integrating human rights under the ESIA as well, to ensure that discrimination (based on gender and other criteria) is captured in the impact analysis.
- One expert also suggested that it is important to appreciate the limitations of certain assessments, and that it is imperative to learn what methodologies and instruments work for various sectors and projects.

#### 5. **How could the World Bank use country policies more effectively to affect issues related to safeguard policies?**

- Several experts voiced support for a project-based approach that aims to produce positive impacts to incentivize broad replication and systemic reform. In addition to operating on a project level, one expert suggested the World Bank maintain high-level political dialogue with governments about women's rights through political and human rights assessments.