



Towards a World Bank Group Gender Strategy Consultation Meeting, 22 July 2015 Feedback Summary Colombo, Sri Lanka

The consultation meeting with **civil society** was held on **July, 22nd, 2015** in **Colombo, Sri Lanka**. After a presentation by the World Bank Group Gender Team on the background, intended scope and process for the strategy, the floor was open for participants' comments and recommendations. The summary below captures the main points and recommendations raised during the meeting.

Total Number of Participants: 19. A participant list is available [here](#).

Feedback from Stakeholders

1. KEY GENDER GAPS THE WORLD BANK GROUP SHOULD TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION AS PRIORITY TO HELP COUNTRIES REDUCE POVERTY AND PROMOTE MORE EQUITABLE SOCIETIES

The World Bank Group (WBG) should prioritize the following areas:

- **The informal sector.** Women's contribution to the informal sector is undervalued. When looking specifically at the issue of domestic workers, a survey conducted in 2010 revealed that there are 87,000 domestic workers, 60,000 of whom are women. Currently, no laws, except the Industrial Disputes Act, covers their working conditions. It should also be noted that the present labor laws of Sri Lanka are archaic and do not meet contemporary job demands. **The WBG should try to move women into the informal sector.**
- **Transport.** It is challenging for women from rural areas to access jobs in other regions due to transport issues.
- **Care.** The economic value of household work is currently not recognized. The WBG can support efforts to recognize the value of unpaid work, particularly as it relates to care.

- **Creating flexible work arrangements for women.** There is an urgent need for legislation which would recognize part-time work and flexible hours for women. It should be noted that despite the willingness by certain organizations to offer women part time work and flexi hours, they are prevented from doing so by labour laws of the country governing such organizations. Presently there is no mechanism to encourage women to re-join the workforce (those who have given up jobs due to domestic commitments) and upgrade their skills.
- **Access to Finance:** Lack of financial literacy among women poses a particular challenge. Currently, when women access credit they do not receive any training in using the loans productively, therefore, they are becoming indebted.
- **Gender stereotyping.** WBG should also note that despite many **vocational training programs** for women, particularly those from underprivileged or conflict-affected areas of the country, women are still reluctant to take up jobs such as carpentry or mason work as they are labelled as ‘men’s jobs’.
- **Technology.** Women’s access to technology remains limited, especially post-harvest agricultural technology.
- **Land.** Resettlement efforts after the tsunami resulted in women losing their land rights. Families were asked who was the head of the household and that person was given a new house. Therefore, many women who previously owned land lost it because they were not recognized as the heads of their households.
 - In the North, even though women can own land, they are considered minors and need permission from their husbands under customary law to sell land.
 - While co-titling has been implemented in the Sri Lankan context, it has not been especially effective. In the plantation sector, government entities responsible for resettlement, implemented co-titling; however, the norms and practices, rather than the legal framework, are the source of the issues.
- **Water.** Scarcity of water in arid regions of the country, particularly in the North and East, affects women farmers disproportionately.
 - Access to potable water also poses a challenge.
 - Women depend on home gardens, but they are not functional for at least 6 months of each year, due to the lack of water.
 - Women also predominate in the commercial fruit and livestock sectors. While the government provides inputs, such as cattle, lack of water limits women’s productivity in these areas.
 - The linkage between water and time use is also important to recognize. Women in many areas spend approximately 3 hours daily collecting water.
- **Voice and Agency:** The WBG should focus on **social norms**. Negative gender norms are prevalent in most local institutions, including public sector organizations and schools. In addition strict gender roles prevail and dictate that women should be responsible for domestic tasks and care.
 - **Decision-making.** Patriarchal norms still limit women’s decision-making and participation.
 - **Political participation.** Presently the political participation by Sri Lankan women is around 2.7%. Work is needed to shift voter perceptions about women’s leadership.

- **Intimate partner violence.** Domestic violence affects women and children both. Disharmony prevalent at home prevents women from going to work and children's education and quality of life is affected.
- **Working with men and boys** was also encouraged. However, caution was also expressed, since a lot of the funding that used to support women's rights is now going to such programs. **Corporal punishment** was also raised in this area. If a boy faces violence, he is more likely to perpetrate it and corporal punishment teaches you to handle an issue with violence.
- **Education:** Concerns about **quality and access**, especially at the tertiary level were raised.
 - Additionally, even though more women are enrolled, they **stream into subjects** that render them less employable — Buddhist civilization was shared as an example.
 - The **distance** from good educational institutions was also raised. Women often have to ferry children to the city from quite a distance for better education and private tuition (private tuition is common in Sri Lanka owing to the competitive educational set up and lack of teachers) the urban setting offers.
 - Including gender equality in education curricula was suggested. Some modules should also target the mind-sets of teachers.
- **Sexual and Reproductive Health.** The need for **comprehensive sexual education** was raised. **A focus on empowerment** in this area is also needed.
 - Sri Lanka has high rates of unsafe abortions due to criminalization of terminations. Additionally, **access to contraception** is not yet universal. Additionally, the attitude of health workers often limits access to contraception for women.
 - Child and forced marriages pose a challenge in the Sri Lankan context, with poverty and conflict acting as key drivers. Additionally, talks of reducing the age of marriage and the age of consent to below 16 years is especially concerning.

2. EXAMPLES OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS THAT HAVE CREATED ACCESS TO BETTER JOBS FOR BOTH WOMEN AND MEN. ELEMENTS THAT HAVE MADE THESE WORK.

- **Care services.** A few private-owned companies have equipped themselves with efficient and safe **crèches** for the benefit of their female work force with the intention of retaining them, who otherwise would have quit their jobs due to pressures on child care. Moreover, these facilities enable to companies to enjoy tax-free benefits.
- International Water Management Institute has launched **Jalawahini**, an initiative aimed at sharing knowledge about water management and irrigation practices. The **livelihood sustainability program** spearheaded by the same organization for home gardens has helped women save Rs.2500 per month which was earlier spent on manure.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW THE WORLD BANK GROUP CAN BETTER SUPPORT COUNTRIES AND COMPANIES IN THEIR EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS WITH RESPECT TO GENDER EQUALITY TO YIELD MORE SUSTAINABLE RESULTS

The WBG can better support countries in yielding more sustainable results by:

- **Developing public-private partnerships for care.** The WBG could influence both the public and private sectors to provide care services. Many companies lose a considerable percentage of female workforce, due to the absence of crèches in their workplaces. Despite the potential for improvement, the plantation sector was considered to have better childcare services than other sectors.
- **Addressing discriminatory norms in the legal framework.** Additionally, more focus is needed on effective implementation. This is particularly problematic with respect to sexual violence. Delays in the justice system often re-victimize survivors. Moreover, more training is needed for police and members of the judiciary to improve their interactions with survivors. WBG should also note that owing to social stigma, there is very low reporting on the incidents of rape, sexual harassment and other forms of GBV in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, there is a low conviction rate in the country for sexual violence (from 2009 to 2015, an average of 0% to 5% of convictions).
- **Focusing on elderly care.** Elderly women, who are outliving men, are especially at-risk and lack access to social protection services. Many of these women work for most of their lives in the informal sector. WBG can encourage the government to introduce welfare schemes that extend access for those who have engaging in informal employment. This segment of women cannot obtain insurance due to age restrictions, nor can they obtain loans. They also get low priority in the health sector, with respect to medication and surgeries.

The Bank Group should also consider the following:

- **Working with the private sector to develop sexual harassment policies.** It was suggested that these kinds of policies could encourage women who have exited the labor force to return.
- **Sensitizing the media.** More gender-sensitive reporting needed, especially in the area of gender-based violence.
- **Applying a rights-based approach,** with a particular focus on shifting power relations.
- **Boosting women's role in decision-making, particularly around water access and management issues.**
- **Building women's capacity in the area of political participation.** However, caution was expressed in this area, since sometimes women put up as vehicles for men. For example, a husband working through his elected wife.
- Focusing on marginalized groups, such as widows, internally displaced women, and children who are orphaned by war and are at-risk for trafficking.
- Promoting **savings groups**, which provide an effective way to help women manage their money.

6. IMPORTANT KNOWLEDGE GAPS – AREAS WHERE WE DON'T KNOW ENOUGH AND THE WORLD BANK GROUP SHOULD PRIORITIZE IN ITS WORK TO HELP CLOSE GENDER GAPS

Closing data and knowledge gaps in the following areas was recommended:

- Help to clarify the **definition of poor female-headed households (FHHH)**, often widows, unmarried women and FHHH are used interchangeably in national data. The WBG could support current work that is underway.
- Develop **time use data**.
- Develop data on the **quality of education and educational outcomes**.
- Assess the **effectiveness of existing vocational training programs**.
- Analyse existing data on **care** and develop further knowledge.
- Build the evidence base on **gender equality and water access and control**.
 - A mapping on agri-wells is needed.
- **Increase the availability of sex-disaggregated data on land ownership**.
- Conduct a **comprehensive study on GBV**, particularly the drivers in Sri Lanka.

7. ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS.

- **Language** is critical. Often women go to police stations to report incidents of violence and they cannot find a police officer who can communicate to her in the language of her choice. This needs to be addressed in the criminal justice system.
- The WBG should consider including the **LGBT community**.
- An intersectional approach that considers gender and ethnicity is needed.