



**Towards a World Bank Group Gender Strategy
Consultation Meeting with Development Partners: July 22, 2015
Feedback Summary
Colombo Sri Lanka**

The consultation meeting with development partners was held on **July 22, 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: 10. 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:

Endowments

- **Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET).** The focus on TVET has gained traction in Sri Lanka. It has been used as a means to provide further education for students who could not enter mainstream universities because of lacking spaces. This has also been used as a modality to build skills for the Sri Lankan labor force, since there is currently a mismatch between curricula and the needs of the labor market. TVET can also help to reduce youth unemployment. The WBG should continue and deepen its work in this area. The WBG can also help to improve the perception of TVET work, currently working in TVET fields carries some stigma in the Sri Lanka context.
- **Educational streaming.** While Sri Lanka tends to present positive global numbers, these tend to mask regional disparities; therefore, one needs to look closely at the regional, class-based, ethnic and sex-based differences. For example, while Sri Lanka has high rates of education, women often predominate in tertiary education in subjects that limit their options in the labor market. Studying Buddhist Civilization was shared as an example. Women also stream into the Arts and tend to get absorbed by the public sector since they do not develop the relevant skills for employment in the private sector. It is important to note that, while women do stream into certain fields, their participation in higher education has been credited for delays in early marriage in the Sri Lankan context.

- **Unregulated educational institutions.** Many such institutions are mushrooming, however, it is unlikely that they are helping students to meet the demands of the labor market. More regulation is needed in this area.
- **Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH).** A significant number of schools in remote parts of the island do not have sanitation facilities. There are no proper toilets with proper sanitation facilities for the disposal of sanitary napkins. This situation prevents girls from attending school regularly.
- **Sexual and reproductive health.** The need for **comprehensive sexual education** was raised.
- The WBG should also take up the issue of sex segregation in schools.

Economic Opportunities

- **Occupational sex segregation.** After university, women usually take jobs as teachers, or stay home. They stay in culturally defined roles, which manifest themselves in educational streaming and in the job market.
- **Informality.** Women predominate in the informal sector. The WBG should help move women into the formal job market.
- **Care services.** Married women lack access to care services.
- **Transport.** Lack of safe public transport systems also presents a challenge. Sexual harassment is especially problematic.

Voice and Agency

- **Norms.** Until norms are tackled directly, gaps in economic participation will remain “sticky”.
- **Gender-based violence.** Much work is needed in this area. The police do not have a clear understanding of GBV and how to appropriately address complaints. There are large disparities across regions and within districts with respect to how GBV is handled. Additional, language barriers pose a challenge. Often women lack access to a police officer who can communicate in their preferred language when trying to report incidents of violence. Working with the private sector to address GBV could be one entry point. Addressing norms around the acceptability of violence in schools could serve as another entry point. The WBG could help to support a problem on norms and violence that is integrated into the curricula.

The WBG should also consider the following areas:

- **Gender and migration.**
- **Youth unemployment.**
- **Women’s entrepreneurship.**

2. EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR POLICIES, APPROACHES AND PROGRAMS THAT HAVE HELPED REMOVE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN AND GIRLS AND THAT THE WORLD BANK GROUP STRATEGY COULD LEARN FROM

- The WBG could learn from projects such as the one initiated by the **National Institute of Education (NIE)**. Government-issued textbooks are being revised in order to remove images and language that promote gender stereotyping.

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

- A program to offer **National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)** to women who have not had a formal education was launched in the war-affected Eastern part of the Sri Lanka. Participants were housed for the training with a warden from the same area and issues, such as what prevent them from entering certain so called 'unconventional jobs' for women were openly discussed. Moreover, parents of some of the younger participants were also educated to encourage them to take up other vocations that were previously restricted to them.
- A development agency shared that it also had a successful TVET training program; however, the program was unable to get buy-in from employers, so many participants had a difficult time translating those skills into real jobs. Understanding these barriers was also encourage.

4. 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:

- **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.
- **Addressing educational needs.** WBG can create a dialogue with educational authorities in Sri Lanka to develop a strategy to deliver a more 'practical' education that could cater to the needs of a country and also the demanding global job needs. Furthermore, WBG could influence the government authorities to streamline the school curriculum to address gender issues, sexuality, reproductive health and personality development to bridge gender gaps.
- **Harnessing the expertise of media.** As a development partner, engaging closely with media is imperative as media is a powerful tool for shifting norms.
- **Establishing a corporate collective to address GBV.** Engaging the private sector in this area could help to better equip law enforcement to respond to incidents of violence. For example, police stations often lack cars, computers and dedicated spaces for reporting incidents of sexual violence.

The WBG should also:

- Support women's ministries and build their capacity to act as a coordinating and influencing body for the integration of gender issues in other sectors.
- Use its convening power to enhance donor coordination.

5. 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

The WBG should help prioritize knowledge gaps in the following areas:

- **Education.** Identifying interventions in the **education sector** that can have a multiplier effect.
- **Access to formal credit.** After the 2004 tsunami, much attention was paid to this issue; however, the impact is unclear. The WBG should help to assess the impact of microcredit programs in Sri Lanka.
- **Gender-Based Violence.** Enormous data gaps exist in this area. The WBG is trying to develop a system with the support of UNFPA; the WBG could also support these efforts.
- **Data gaps.** Availability differs by sector and location; the WBG could help to promote the availability of data, including sex-disaggregated data. Gender data in the agriculture and water sectors were identified as high priority areas for action. The WBG could also help to assess the state of data availability in Sri Lanka so the specific gaps are better known. Also, female-headed households and widowed households are used interchangeably; more definitional clarity needed in this area.
- Explore the ways in which **big data** can be used to further gender equality goals.
- Conduct research on the **ways in which cultural shifts are affecting gender equality**. For example, progressive messaging in soap operas is credited for advances in gender equality; however, the empirical relationship remains unclear. The WBG could support research efforts in this area.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND/OR EXAMPLES OF BETTER DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS THAT CAN BE USED TO HELP THE UNDERSTANDING OF CONSTRAINTS TO GENDER EQUALITY – BEYOND THOSE CURRENTLY USED BY THE WORLD BANK GROUP, IE. COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH ON GENDER.

- **Power analyses.** Diagnostic tools to analyse power relations are vital in order to understand constraints to gender equality.
- **Social change interventions.** The WBG could help to share/develop tools that promote and bring about social change in the area of gender equality, and also in general.

7. ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS.

The WBG should:

- Engage with religious leaders as an entry point in rural areas.
- Help to improve the understanding of gender equality, i.e., pertaining to both men and women.