



Towards a World Bank Group Gender Strategy Consultation Meeting May 18, 2015 Feedback Summary Kabul, Afghanistan

The multi-stakeholder consultation meeting was held on May 18, 2015 in Kabul, Afghanistan. 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: 36.

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 consider as priority the following:

- **Education, including vocational training:** looking not only at access (quantitative aspects) but also at quality of education (qualitative aspects). When looking at progress in education is important to take into consideration the differences in progress at the state, provincial and district level. In the case of Afghanistan, the situation is significantly better in Kabul than in the provinces where the barriers for accessing education are greater. Vocational training programs should also be more inclusive as can serve as a first step for women to become entrepreneurs.

- **Political participation, voice and agency:** ensuring the effective participation of women in decision-making process. At the political level in Afghanistan, each ministry has a gender directory aimed at promoting gender equality but in practice those same directories are isolated from the political decision-making process.
- **Regulatory issues:** addressing legal and regulatory issues that affect women's ability to access land, including inheritance law, marriage, etc. In Afghanistan, laws are not inclusive enough and the most inclusive legal texts are often misused and abused.
- **Access to credit:** in Afghanistan, independently of their skills, women have very limited access to financial resources which often impedes their ability to become entrepreneurs.

The renewed strategy of the World Bank Group should **build skills and awareness for women** in the following areas:

- **Providing financial literacy:** so that women learn how to manage their finances, ask for a loan and make informed business-decisions.
- **Building life skills for women:** learning life skills like developing critical thinking, network building, etc. could help women to build their confidence to get into the labor force, apply to higher positions and even to become entrepreneurs.
- **Raising awareness among the women about their rights.** In Afghanistan women often do not know their legal rights nor the protections the legal system offers them to defend their rights when they are abused.

In developing the strategy the World Bank Group should take into account the underlying factors of gender inequality:

- **Social and cultural norms:** The renewed strategy should acknowledge the impact that social and cultural norms have in gender equality. Despite the limitations to change the existing social norms, the Bank, in its dialogue with governments, should explore possible mechanisms to create enough policy space to increase women's participation in the economy for example by advocating for more inclusive legal frameworks.
- **Security issues:** In Afghanistan, the security situation is a major constrain to greater participation of women in the public arena, both socially and economically – many women do not feel safe to leave their homes.
- **Gender barriers to transport:** the lack of a reliable and safe public transportation system is a major constraint for women participation in the labor force. Women are often harassed in public transport and families often oppose to women using mixed-sex public transport.

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

- In developing the renewed gender strategy the World Bank Group should consider recommending client governments to include set-aside contracts for women in their national procurement policies, as a measure that has increased women's participation in the economy in other countries.

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 renewed gender strategy should consider the specificities of the countries it is intended to reach and be flexible enough to incorporate **country-specific approaches**. At the country level, the strategy should respond to the different realities within the country, including national, provincial and district level specificities. For example, in Afghanistan the differences in access to education as those three levels were named as a major constraint for greater participation of women in the job market, especially at higher levels. In the provinces, unlike in Kabul, women cannot access professional studies – bachelor and master levels – as the schools are mainly in Kabul. The scholarship programs for higher education are usually taken by men because the studies offered are abroad and families often do not let women to leave the country to pursue their studies.
- The strategy should specifically address the serious and different challenges of **fragile and conflict-affected states (FCS)**.
- The WBG, through the renewed gender strategy, should identify mechanisms for greater **engagement with local civil society** organizations at the implementation level. Engagement with the local grass-root organizations can help the WBG have more culturally-appropriate approaches and greater reach to rural remote areas where international NGOs are not working due to security reasons.

4. 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

- To move further the gender equality agenda, the Bank needs to do an **in-depth assessment of the underlying causes** of gender inequality. It is important to have a better understanding of what is keeping women from participating in the formal economy - from structural issues such as social norms or insecurity, to more practical issues like lack of childcare services available for working mothers – and what are the dynamics and processes through which that impediment occurs.

- Need to have a better understanding of the economic cost of **gender-based violence (GBV)**.

5. 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.

- The strategy should underline the importance of having systematic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of projects and programs to have a better understanding of the real impact those projects and programs have on women. The strategy should also **revise the existing M&E systems** and made recommendations about the best methodologies to measure the impact of interventions on gender equality.
- The WBG needs to re-think how it measures progress and success. The renewed strategy framework for results should **add the qualitative dimension to the quantitative**. For example, in education, progress to date is measured by the number of girls enrolled or number of women that graduate. It would be interesting to have more detail about the quality of that education and whether the women and girls that attended schools are really better equipped to enter the labor force and participate in the economy.

6. ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS.

- In Afghanistan, the World Bank should reach out to the local population to gain their perspective of the country situation both in the capital and in the provinces. The Bank Group, and the other so-called development partners, rely heavily on information from third parties and mainly based in Kabul which is skewed. The World Bank staff live in compounds and have movement restrictions due to the security situation which limits their own ability to get the pulse to the country. It should find a way to liaise with local people, especially from outside the capital city, to really understand the needs, the gaps and the possible solutions to the problems.
- **Inclusion of men and boys:** there was significant debate but no consensus on how should the WBG engage with men and boys in the gender equality agenda. On one side, there was a broad acknowledgment that it is important to educate man to respect women's rights. Different options were discussed including public campaigns to sensitize men; men-to-men programs, or having gender focal points. At present, in Afghanistan, for a man to speak in favor of women's rights supposes a security risk for him and his family which limit the possibilities of success of such programs.

- The renewed gender strategy should properly acknowledge challenges related to **gender-based violence (GBV)**.