



Towards a World Bank Group Gender Strategy Consultation Meeting 12 May 2015 Feedback Summary Beirut Lebanon

The consultation meeting with **private sector representatives** was held on **May 12, 2015** in **Beirut, Lebanon**. 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: 8. A participant list is available [here](#).

Feedback from Stakeholders

1. TYPES OF CONSTRAINTS/ BARRIERS THAT WOMEN AND MEN FACE WHEN IT COMES TO OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

- In developing the strategy, the World Bank Group (WBG) should understand the following constraints:
 - **Cultural and social norms.** Despite the fact that women are well-educated in Lebanon, the female labour force participation (FLFP) rate stands at 26 percent. Additionally, a gender gap can be found in entrepreneurship. Norms that dictate women's responsibility for domestic and care work could act as drivers of limited economic participation.
 - **A discriminatory legal framework.** The Lebanese legal framework is complex and often include barriers that disadvantage women, in areas such as, asset ownership. Laws are typically drafted at the religious level and different groups have different laws, therefore legal reform is an ambitious, but essential, next step.

- **Limited job creation.** The Lebanese economy has stagnated with growth of only 1.5 percent, therefore, an overall issue regarding job creation exists in the country. Lebanon creates approximately 3500 jobs per annum compared to the 20,000 jobs that are needed.
- **Lack of flexibility in the workplace.** The lack of flexibility, particularly for working mothers, could be a driver of low female labour force participation. Part-time work and working from home are not considered legitimate forms of work, therefore re-entering the labour force after maternity leave is especially challenging.
- **Gap between education and the job market.** University graduates are not prepared to enter job due to the lack of support system and professional training. Career support opportunities could direct women to less traditional career choices.

2. BEST EXAMPLES OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT COMPANIES HAVE PUT IN PLACE TO ADDRESS QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT FOR MEN AND WOMEN

- **BLC Bank’s Women’s Empowerment Initiative** can serve as an example of a best practice to address the quality of employment for women. Internally, BLC has implemented an internal program that aims to improve workplace conditions for women and to facilitate their mobility. For example, after women return from their 70-day maternity leave, BLC provides 2 months of part-time work to smooth re-entry. Additionally, internal leadership targets have been set to improve women’s representation and the company has also committed to the [Women’s Empowerment Principles](#).

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

- To bring about more sustainable results, the strategy could consider a [“HeforShe”](#) approach, a solidarity movement which engages men as change agents in the advancement of gender equality.
- **Incentives for the private sector** should also be considered, especially to boost women’s participation on corporate boards.
- **The WBG should use its convening power to bring all relevant parties together for discussion on the lack of a law for part-time work.** Consequently, private sector companies pay the same social security for part-time workers as they do for full-time workers. Part-time work could help to reduce unemployment, especially among women and youth.
- The WBG could support the **dissemination of best practices that** boost women’s labour force participation. BLC Bank was provided as an example for other organizations.
- The Bank Group could conduct research on the following issues:
 - **A study within the banking sector** to evaluate the constraints to mobility, especially at the highest levels, such as corporate boards. **Sector-specific studies were also suggested to assess the differential constraints.** For example, the study could examine the banking sector and compare it to other sectors with sufficient data to understand sector-based

barriers.

- **A study on the intersection of sex and religious discrimination.** For example, there is discrimination against women who wear hijabs in certain sectors, such as law enforcement, where they are prevented from performing all the same functions as men.
- **Transition from school to work:** Despite high levels of education at the tertiary level, women's economic participation is limited. The WBG could assess these drivers and constraints, and evaluate the impact on Lebanon's GDP as a way to contribute to the evidence base.
- The Bank Group could support the development of the following program/initiatives:
 - **Transition from school to work:** Another recommendation in this area is to introduce **a training mechanism that can better prepare students for the transition to the world of work** and reduce occupational sex segregation by directing women to less traditional career choices.
 - **A "SheforShe" approach is crucial.** The WBG could form a **network** of female professionals such as lawyers, doctors and policymakers to enhance solidarity and solve gender equality challenges collectively.
 - Companies could benefit from a **specific mid-career recruitment program that helps women to re-enter the workforce** after maternity leave, especially in the banking sector.
- The strategy should include a focus on the prevention and response to **gender based violence**.

4. ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS.

- In developing the strategy, the WBG should consider the following for the public sector:
 - **Quotas.** While more women are participating at the municipal level of government, women only hold 3 percent of seats in national parliament. Therefore, quotas could serve as one way to more sustainable gender equality results.
 - **Awareness-raising among policy-makers.** Policymakers need more information about the ways in which improvements in gender equality can improve development outcomes and economic well-being.
 - The Bank Group should understand the **political deadlock** that is limiting actions in the public sector. For example, the private sector has been pushing for a **public-private partnerships law** for over a decade, however, this has not been passed. Therefore, expectations regarding capacity among lawmakers and government ministries should be adjusted accordingly. Necessary changes will have to come from the private sector.
 - **The definition of work.** The WBG could help to change how work is defined and valued. Work in the household should be considered a form of work and therefore a contributor to economic growth.
 - **The lack of protection in the workplace.** Limited protection for employees could, in fact, be propelling entrepreneurship.

Labour laws need to be improved for individuals, overall. Additionally, more protection for employees could help to increase the number of women in the workplace.

- A more **legitimate and well-funded national women's machinery** is needed.
- There is potential for more **gender-sensitive responses** from the government regarding **religion-based personal status law issues**.
- **Public transportation.** Providing public transportation is critical for increasing women's economic participation.
- It is essential that the WBG understand the impact that the **Syrian refugee crisis** is having on the Lebanese economy. This may impede other development objectives in the short-term, and possibly in the medium-term.