



Towards a World Bank Group Gender Strategy Consultation Meeting 19 May 2015 Feedback Summary Islamabad, Pakistan

The consultation meeting with **private sector leaders** was held May, 19th, 2015 in Islamabad, Pakistan. 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: 5

Feedback from Stakeholders

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

- The **lack of mobility and gender-barriers to transport** are a main reason behind low rates of women's labor force participation rates. In Pakistan, there is no formal public transport system that is affordable and safe, women often depend on private solutions or informal public solutions that are either too expensive or unsafe.
- Need to revise the usefulness of **quotas**. To ensure greater female participation in the labor force many companies have set up their own quotas. However, although the quota system is ensuring a greater number of female employees, it does not reflect the quality and level of employment women are doing, often giving the impression that the level of gender equality within the labour force it is greater than in reality is – women often are in the lowest responsibility, lowest salaries jobs while men retain the managerial positions.

- **Conciliation of work and family life.** The lack of work-life balance is one of the major causes of high rates of women drop-outs of the labor force, especially after motherhood. The lack of sufficient and affordable care provision systems (from childcare to elderly care) together with the cultural perception that woman should be the care takers of the family are two of the main reasons for which women leave the workforce. The Bank Group could share experiences other countries have put in place to ensure female retention after motherhood be it through introducing more flexible working arrangements, like the ability to work-from-home, or to introduce services that facilitate the conciliation of the work and family life.
- **Need to understand better the underlying causes of poor female labor force participation.** In Pakistan, women are the majority in the universities and even in MBA studies, but after graduation, many of them do not enter the workforce. The Bank Group should study what are the socio-economic barriers for women entering the workforce to understand better the reasons behind their decision to stay home.
- **Bias at the recruitment point.** In Pakistan, there only a handful of head-hunting firms and it is a male-dominated sector. Their recruitment practices often reflect traditional beliefs and stereotypes, penalizing women.
- **Access to finance.** In Pakistan women often denounce they are treated unfairly and different than men by financial banks. Women entrepreneur are often asked for a male figure to co-sign the loans they are taking to finance their own business even in cases where they have the collateral to get the loan on their own.

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

- Some banks have put in place re-engagement programs through which they they keep resumes of trained female staff who left the company after marriage or motherhood. Human resources contacts them two or three years later to explore their willingness to return to the labor force and offers them more family-friendly schedules, from part-time options to home-office. Flexible work schedules have proven a great tool in re-engaging women.
- Some companies in Pakistan are adding day-care centers to provide an environment conducive for working mothers.
- In Pakistan, women don't have many opportunities to network in the traditional settings used by men. Some companies are testing different alternatives, including through new technology, to facilitate networking among women and ensure there is an informal network of support amongs female professionals.

3. COMPANIES' WORK ON DISAGGREGATING DATA ON GENDER AND WHY THIS TYPE OF WORK IS IMPORTANT AND IF IT IS USED FOR INTERNAL POLICIES.

- Need for better and more updated data. Pakistan's last census is a decade old, the Bank Group could help update the existing census.
- It would be interesting to improve the labor force survey is a good tool to include information on the informal labor markets where women typically dominate.

4. 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

- It was suggested that the World Bank Group review policies in relation to safety and security. For example projects needs to be gender sentized. It was shared that something as basic as lights for security of women employees should be considered in the design elements.
- In mega instructure projects special consideration should be given to the type of jobs that are being created for both men and women and adequate training for these must be provided.
- At the policy level economic empowerment of both genders must be addressed. For example in negotiations, each Project should highlight systems and policies that have positive direct impacts.
- Access to microfinance for women is much needed. Small loans, without the signatures of men as a guarantor should be reviewed.