



Towards a World Bank Group Gender Strategy Consultation Meeting with Government: 21 July 2015 Feedback Summary Colombo, Sri Lanka

The consultation meeting with **government representatives** was held on **July 21st 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: 27. 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:

- **More and better jobs** are needed for both men and women. Other related issues include:
 - **“Flexi-work” and “home-based work”**. While this exists mostly in the private sector, primarily among IT companies, it is lacking elsewhere, particularly among government entities.
 - **Labor market discrimination**. There is also reluctance on the part of certain sectors, predominantly the banking sector, to recruit women. The banking system is hesitant to recruit women due to ‘leave’ issues. Moreover, this reluctance is fueled by the issue of ‘temporary replacement’ in situations when women go on maternity leave.
 - **Care**. Female participation in the labor force is also impacted by a significant proportion of women turning down job promotions in order to facilitate work-life balance.
 - **Labor market information**. Relevant information dissemination mechanisms are lacking.

- **Coordination.** Despite the existence of diverse **government** ministries related to labor and job market issues, there is no proper **coordination** among them. This creates confusion for information seekers, especially those in rural areas.
- **Informality.** The informal sector is believed to account for about 60 percent of economic activity, therefore it must be considered in policymaking efforts.
- **The role of technology.** A technology gap exists in Sri Lanka. It has very little internet penetration and less reliability compared to other countries at similar levels.
- **Gender stereotyping and occupational sex segregation.**
- In the area of **access to finance**, the WBG should prioritize the following issues:
 - Lack of **financial literacy** could act as a driver of limited access to finance.
 - Additionally, lack of **collateral** often acts as a barrier to financial services for women in the Sri Lankan context since men are often the owners of land.
 - Relatedly, access to finance issues are driving individuals to seek informal loans from high-interest money lenders.
 - **Small credit/microfinance programs** are important, especially for women entrepreneurs.
- With respect to **education**:
 - Currently, non-formal education is too traditional. Modernization and a focus on skills are needed. The **dropout rates** in this area are particularly high among men.
 - **Educational streaming** among girls is still very prevalent at all levels. Parents are also a part of this challenge, since their preferences are also reflected in the subjects girls study and the careers they choose. A shift in norms is needed in this area.
 - There is a serious gap in **vocational training** and the promotion of **skills training**. This is a challenge especially in the rural areas and for school dropouts.
- On the topic of **gender-based violence**, the following should be considered:
 - Shifts in mindsets and attitudes.
 - Sensitization efforts among communities in order to better support survivors.
 - Shifts in norms specifically among women, since many women engage in “victim blaming”.
- On the issue of **voice and agency**:
 - The **political participation** of women, especially at the local level. A 30% nomination rule was suggested.
 - Women’s **participation in trade unions**, which currently stands at around 10 percent.
 - Women’s **grassroots representation**.

Other areas for consideration include:

- **Entrepreneurship.** The WBG should help entrepreneurs to scale their businesses and make them profitable.
- **Land ownership.** While there are no structural barriers, cultural attitudes continue to limit women’s access to land through son preference in inheritance, especially in rural areas.

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 financial schemes such as **Samurdhi** initiated by the Ministry of Housing and Samurdhi which has enabled women to be more economically independent, by relaxing collateral requirements imposed by banks.

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

- Information Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) has introduced tele-centres in marginalized areas in the country with the objective of creating more opportunities for women to engage in IT-related jobs.
- Ministry of Housing and Samurdhi has also recruited about 73% of female economic development officers for field work.

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:

- **Promoting participatory approaches.** More specifically, addressing advocacy at grassroots level. Women should be empowered to form strong women groups/networks that can lobby for issues that impact their welfare and progress.
- **Prioritizing awareness-raising. Sharing information at community level** should be prioritized in general. **Information about the job market** should be prioritized as well, for example, non-traditional work, overseas work, and sample salary information according to job. Raising awareness about the types of **skills needed for specific jobs** could be helpful as well.
- **Promoting behaviour change interventions to shift norms.** WBG should integrate gender to projects with the aim of changing mind sets to ensure gender equality.
- **Building dialogue among authorities concerning public transport and sexual harassment.** Harassment in public transport is rampant in Sri Lanka and awareness campaigns are needed to create a harassment-free environment for women and girls. Promoting gender sensitization and awareness among bus/train drivers, conductors, private bus owners and other stakeholders is imperative in this regard. Also developing a mechanism to receive and respond to complaints is essential.
- **Improving the administration of justice with respect to GBV.** Delays in the justice system often re-victimize women, especially when the victim and the offender are released to the same environment in the event of the offender being granted bail.
- **Introducing gender mainstreaming in the world of work.** While the Ministry of Women's Affairs has attempted gender-mainstreaming, political will was lacking. The dearth of data to make the business case for gender equality also limited full gender integration.

The Bank Group should also consider:

- **Focusing on donor coordination.**
- **Encouraging the government to introduce Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB).**
- **Ensuring context-specific and culturally-relevant approaches.**
- **Supporting coordinated policy-making with respect to women's welfare and development.**

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

- To fill data gaps, the WBG could consider increasing the availability of **sex-disaggregated data in agriculture.**

6. ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS.

The WBG should also consider:

- **Inequalities among ethnic groups.**