

Consultations on the World Bank Group New Gender Strategy - Nordic-Baltic Constituency's comments

- The Nordic-Baltic constituency (NBC) welcomes the Concept Note (*Promoting Gender Equality to Reduce Poverty and Boost Shared Prosperity*) for the World Bank Group's (WBG's) new strategy for gender equality. It provides a strong analytical framework and highlights some key strategic choices of significant value. The strong focus on maintaining a clear country based approach is appreciated. This focus is key for the WBG to translate into commitments on policy level so as to deliver concrete development results on the ground.
- The translation of knowledge into operations to achieve development results through capacity building and learning by doing is important. Successful implementation requires a focus on the role of cultures, norms and incentives within the WBG in working on gender equality, as well as clear accountability structures. The slow progress on gender equality is not only due to lack of knowledge and tools and weak dissemination but to attitudes to and priorities of what is important. To achieve tangible change "on the ground" it is central that there are enough (and the right kind of) human and financial resources available across the WBG, including the Multi-Donor trust funds, that will achieve transformative and structural change. Incentives to bank staff that promote and reward good practice concerning gender equality within the Bank are also crucial. The Strategy needs to be explicit on how the WBG will address these issues.
- In addition to emphasizing that gender equality is smart economics, it should be stressed that gender inequality specifically is very bad economics and has actual negative effects on the economy and on the goal of eradicating poverty.
- The human rights perspective is weak in the concept note. The NBC would like to emphasize the need of a strong link to the international human rights framework in the strategy, including a reference to CEDAW. The WBG has been very outspoken on the important role of CEDAW and gender equality from a human rights perspective for a long time and on the highest level.
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) is an important element in this respect. Respect for these rights remains key to gender equality and to reduce inequalities, combat discrimination and eradicate poverty, and contributes to ensuring that women and girls have access to education, decent jobs and good health conditions. We therefore notice with some surprise and concern that the centrality of human rights as well as SRHR with regard to reaching the set goals of a new WBG Gender Strategy is not reflected in the concept note. This crucial issue has to be properly reflected in the final Strategy. SRHR is particularly important and relevant when it comes to the two focus areas identified by the WBG as levers of change to remove constraints for more and better jobs for women and for women's access to productive assets.
- Young women and girls: Another dimension we find imperative to integrate even more strongly in the strategy, is the importance of investing in young women and girls. Child marriage, early pregnancies, interrupted or no access to education etc. set girls' development opportunities off at a wrong track from the start, with great impact on both individual, household and societal development outcomes.

- The NBC is in general supportive of a stronger strategic focus on the two suggested particular areas, jobs and assets, and we agree that the WBG has considerable comparative advantages here. This focus must naturally include other prerequisite areas of importance (e.g. health and education) in order to ensure that WBG engagements in support of gender equality address key constraints for gender equality in a given context at country level. We welcome the choice of jobs and assets as key aspects of the framework, but it should be emphasized that these choices do not limit working in other areas to promote gender equality. This should be more clearly spelled out in the Strategy. Similarly, we would like to see the concept of strategic mainstreaming defined more clearly. Whereas we appreciate the intention to concentrate more on the two areas where the WBG has a clear comparative advantage, we would like to maintain that there is a need for applying a mainstreaming strategy throughout the WBG's operations. This to ensure that gains won are not lost and to ensure equal opportunities for all.
- Fragile and conflict states: The strategy should pay special attention to the Bank's role in fragile and conflict states. This is because the Bank often can have an impact on the "rules of a society" which in turn dictate who can own what, who can decide on the economy and the society and in which direction they will develop. Countries and areas in fragile situations can build systems that promote gender equality from the very beginning, instead of having to change it afterwards. In its operations, the World Bank should make a special effort to promote gender equality in fragile states and areas. In this, UNSCR 1325 and its following resolutions provide important guidance and we would like to see them referred to in the strategy.
- Role of men: Engaging men as key change agents is crucial to success. The important role of men and boys in addressing gender equality should be highlighted in the Strategy.
- We believe it is of utmost importance that the Strategy includes an environmental sustainability and climate change perspective as (i) impacts of environmental degradation and climate change hit women harder than men; (ii) women have demonstrated unique knowledge and expertise in leading strategies to combat the effects of climate change, as well as natural disaster management, especially at the grassroots level. Women's pivotal role in mitigating climate change is thus key for sustainable development and for the WBG to achieve its twin goals.
- The NBC welcomes that the Strategy will address individual country level data. But, equally important is the *use of* available data. Even without more data the WBG could improve its performance as regards sex-disaggregation. In addition, we would like to see a stronger focus on monitoring & evaluation. Focus must be on the whole project cycle, including implementation and exit. The Strategy must account for how the WBG will make sure that there are follow-up mechanisms to ensure systematic work and promotion of best practices with gender equality in client countries that result in tangible progress for girls and women in the Bank's client countries.
- Cooperation and coordination. We note that the concept note includes a paragraph on aligning the strategy to global initiatives and actors and would like to see this further developed in the strategy. Substantive coordination with UN organizations and regional development banks is key to success. For example, we find the new UN Women Progress of the World's Women report *Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* interesting. Thematically it overlaps with the priorities of the new WBG Gender Strategy and we would encourage a dialogue between the two organizations on this (if not already established). ¹ Similarly, the ILO has a strong mandate

• ¹ <http://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/>

regarding better jobs and we hope to see fruitful collaboration between your organizations regarding this area.

- Lastly, the WBG must lead by example. The Strategy should include information on how the WBG will advance gender equality internally in its own organization, i.e. as regards its commitment to achieve EDGE certification. The NBC would like to see the WBG pledging to achieve the highest level (“EDGE lead”) within a given timeline.
