

WIDE+ Briefing Paper

Critical reflections and key recommendations for the World Bank Group's new Gender Equality strategy, July 2015

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This briefing document presents WIDE+ critical reflections and key recommendations to enhance the new World Bank Group's (WBG) strategy on Gender Equality.

Introduction

14 years after their previous strategy on gender mainstreaming, the WBG has decided to develop a new Gender Equality (GE) Strategy. In this context, from April till July 2015, the WBG initiated a round of consultations, aiming to provide input to the new GE Strategy. The Strategy and initial directions are penned down in the Concept Note titled "World Bank Group, Promoting Gender Equality to Reduce Poverty and Boost Shared Prosperity."¹

The WBG Concept Note outlines the general directions for the new strategy. A major goal in the new strategy is strategic gender mainstreaming at the country level. In order to achieve this, the WBG intends to produce knowledge that facilitates the creation of new diagnostic tools from which best practices can be systematised and eventually scaled up. Gender Innovation labs will be set up, and one is currently operating in Latin America. With the new strategic Gender Mainstreaming Framework, the WBG will prioritise issues and actions that, in their view, can ensure best possible outcomes in terms of impact and efficiency. The new framework identifies two key aspects in this regard: "(1) *removing constraints for more and better jobs; and (2) removing barriers to women's ownership and control of assets, both of which can increase women's voice and agency*" (WBG, 2015, page 10).

In addition, the Concept Note emphasises the WB's concern with building capacity and expertise on gender issues amongst staff (for ex. enhancing staff's capacity to collect sex-disaggregated data, to develop tools and insights that permit to measure and assess the status of women's unpaid work in local economies, and scaling up of initiatives that may lead to empowering some women in local contexts). And, through its new GE Strategy, the WBG intends to address gender equality issues in policy dialogue with stakeholders, such as the private sector.

Even though in its Concept Note the WBG states its intention to do more and better, the general strategy restates the premise put forward in the WB 2012 Global Development Report, namely that promoting gender equality is a matter of smart development and smart economics: "*The WBG's group new operating model...offers greater opportunity to address the multifaceted nature of gender constraints in a coordinated way and strengthen the delivery of gender smart solutions in business lines*" (WBG, 2015, page 4).

WIDE+ critique and constructive proposals

From a conceptual viewpoint, the new strategy outlined in the Concept Note presents important flaws.

First, it relocates economic growth and business promotion as key levers for achieving gender equality. The WB's overreliance on women's economic empowerment recalls the mono-dimensional approach stressed in its 2012 WDR and in the 2013 WDR *Jobs*, where a causal link between macro-economic growth and gender equality is assumed. Contrary to this belief, extant empirical evidence

¹ <https://consultations.worldbank.org>

shows that inclusive growth does not *per se* lead to equitable distribution of assets, wealth and resources. Several scholars have demonstrated that even though globalisation may have brought rapid growth of Gross Domestic Product in some countries and economic prosperity to some people, it has nevertheless jeopardised the achievement of major global development challenges. Moreover, progress towards gender equality has benefitted some women, not all of them, and has been achieved within a context of widening inequality between countries, between social classes, and between women (Jain & Elson 2011: 2). Indeed even countries with sustained economic growth, as is the case with Guatemala,² suffer from institutionalised racism and gender discrimination in labour and financial markets. The multiple discriminations affecting women's lives and livelihoods in local economies highlight the importance of addressing gender equality from an intersectional standpoint. In fact, class, race and gender, amongst other forms of discrimination, will determine who has access and control over productive assets and resources and who does not. Regretfully, this is a fact that the new strategy fails to incorporate in its analytical framework.

Second, the WB Strategy conspicuously avoids any commitment with **women's human rights**, nor does it conceptualise gender equality in connection with the do not harm approach or principle. This is a major drawback, which not only weakens the overall WBG strategy but also runs the risk of jeopardising efforts by national governments worldwide to effectively legislate and enforce gender-just policies at the local and national level. Importantly, lack of engagement with women's human rights by the WBG, and in particular by its financial arm, the IFC, may weaken the WBG's capacity to avoid unwilling involvement in human rights violations due to misguided funding in local contexts.³

Even though the new GE framework reaffirms the WBG's commitment with gender equality as an intrinsic goal in itself and as an instrumental tool, the WB's focus on women's endowments (owning material property, assets, and resources) overlooks the significance of entitlements/rights in development policies and practices. Entitlements are at the core of the human right to non-discriminatory development: the right to control productive assets and resources, the right to water and food security, the right to safe and appropriate housing, the right to social protection are all entitlements that can ensure women's right to dignified and sustainable livelihoods on equal terms with men. As was the case with the 2012 WB Development Report, an in depth-analysis of this important dimension is missing in the new strategy.

Third, the Concept Notes stresses the importance of promoting the creation of "better jobs" for women, overlooking the important issue of **decent work**. The Concept Note accurately argues that in Latin America women have played a pivotal role in reducing inequalities and combating poverty. It also states that women's economic participation increased 7 percentage point for the period 2000-2010 (WBG, 2015, Para. 8, page 3). Importantly, it does not discuss the harsh conditions under which women's incorporation into labour markets has occurred, nor is there any reference to the fact that a great majority of the jobs created for women have been low-skilled jobs.

The new Strategy should also take stock of the important fact that to women, it is not only earning a salary that matters but also enjoying decent working conditions and being able to find a balance between work-related demands and unpaid care work. Research shows that 20 years after the Beijing Declaration women's participation in the labour market has not substantially increased, nor has the unequal unpaid care burden borne by women decreased in a substantial manner. In fact, women are still responsible for two and half time more unpaid care work than men (UN Women, 2015). The key issue for women worldwide is firstly recognition of the unequal care burden imposed on them; secondly, reduction of the care burden, and thirdly, equitable redistribution of care work between men and women. Any strategy aiming to promote gender equality should have these 3 key goals as

² Figures are respectively: 2.9% in 2010, 4.1% in 2011 y del 3.3 % in 2012.

<http://www.bancomundial.org/es/country/guatemala/overview> (retrieved July 2015).

³ Cf. Generating Terror: the role of international financial institutions in sustaining Guatemala's genocidal regimes, Jubilee Debt Campaign 2012; Igualdad sin Derechos humanos? Un análisis crítico del enfoque de género del Banco Mundial en Latinoamérica Muñoz Cabrera, P. Forthcoming 2015; The Suffering of Others: The human cost of the International Finance Corporation's lending through financial intermediaries, Oxfam 2015.

development outcomes. The new WB strategy should gain from including existing proposals to redistribute care work, while at the same time valorising women's contribution to the care economy in ways that are not necessarily monetary or market-driven.

WIDE+ Recommends

The following recommendations are intended to help the WBG enhance the consistency and coherence of their Gender Equality strategy, of its policies and field operations, as well as the effectiveness of their interventions.

a. WBG should Include Human Rights Frameworks in all policies, programmes, field operations

The WBG should include in its analytical framework, monitoring tools and impact assessments, concepts and indicators that take stock of women's human rights, and in particular, their right to a life and development free from all forms of gender violence. It should pay special attention to the forms of violence stemming from trade and investment policies and projects funded by the IFC. In recipient countries, decades of misguided policies and external conditionalities imposed through structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) have been disenfranchising to a great majority of women. As extant research demonstrates, in many cases, misguided investment choices by the IFC have exacerbated already existing forms of violence against women and men, girls and boys, leading to social conflict and forced migration. Honduras and Guatemala are but only two cases in point that demonstrate the need to engage the IFC in a serious commitment not to harm women's human rights through their financial operations.⁴

Therefore, WIDE+ advises the WBG to further develop its goals around Gender Equality and poverty reduction by linking them up to human rights treaties. We believe this will help the WBG at two levels:

- 1) It will contribute to better alignment of the WBG GE strategy with ongoing and new efforts by governments and other international institutions promoting poverty eradication such as UN bodies and CSOs worldwide.
- 2) It will help WB and IFC staff members who are not gender experts to interpret and understand the complex challenges affecting the achievement of GE in sustainable development globally.

There are important human rights treaties and frameworks aiming to assist international financial institutions to improve their work and track record in terms of promoting non-discriminatory models/paradigms of gender equality. Globally, a great majority of states have ratified the UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol. CEDAW offers governments useful proposals on how to enhance gender equality and equity in their respective countries. There are other important human rights treaties and covenants that propose specific insights on how to achieving gender equality and gender equity in sustainable development.

WIDE+ recommends to include the following treaties in policy dialogue and in-house training:

- CEDAW and its optional protocol; <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/protocol/>
- Beijing Declaration & Platform for Action; <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

⁴ cf. Human Rights Watch 2013; Munoz Cabrera forthcoming 2015.

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>
- UN Resolution 1325 and 1820; <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/women/wps.shtml>
- The International Decade for People of African Descent, proclaimed by the UN General Assembly resolution 68/237 and to be observed from 2015 to 2024; http://www.un.org/pga/101214_launch-international-decade-people-african-descent/
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf
- UN Convention for the Rights of People with Disabilities <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>
- ILO Covenant 169 (Indigenous and Tribal People); <http://www.ilo.org/indigenous/Conventions/no169/lang--en/index.htm>
- ILO Convention 189 (Domestic Workers) http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189.

WIDE+ also recommends that indicators measuring the WBG results on enhancing and protecting women's human rights are added to WB's measurement instruments such as the WBG Corporate Scorecard and the Results Measurement System that currently only measure gender inclusion as a process indicator. WIDE+ recommends indicators that focus on results, including short term and longer term impact (qualitative and quantitative measures) and that also measure the amount of funding that is targeted to improving women's human rights directly, thus not only to measure gender mainstreaming. The WBG should encourage its clients to do the likewise. In terms of specific issues, we suggest to include indicators on women's economic status, including the distribution of unpaid care work (between men and women in households, public and private sector) and on violence against women, on an aggregate level and intersected (see point 2).

b. WBG should incorporate an intersectional approach in their gender equality strategy

The WBG Concept Note presents a limited idea of gender equality, for it assumes men and women as homogenous groups or social categories. The strategy overlooks the important fact that in all development contexts, gender inequality intersects with racism, and other forms of discrimination which further disenfranchises women and men who have been socially constructed as subordinated or even inferior to a cultural, economic or social class or caste: *“While historically, gender inequalities have disadvantaged females, [...] gender norms and policies negatively affect boys and men in specific countries and sectors. Thus the approach will also target concrete mail disadvantage in specific areas... It will pursue an inclusive approach in operations, working males and females, regardless of age, disability status, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, HIV/AIDS status, sexual orientation, gender identity, geographic area, migratory status, of forced displacement”* (WB Concept Note, page 11-12). It has been amply demonstrated that women facing multiple discriminations will fall into poverty more often than other women.

The WB categorical approach to gender equality is reductionist in that it presupposes the existence of only two gender identities, thereby excluding the trans-gender condition. Moreover, it assumes heterosexuality as a universal norm. The result is the construction of men and women as fixed categories. This fact contradicts the WB's strategy to promote women's agency and women's right to a voice in development (Connell 2012; Schofield 2004).

For these reasons, it is crucial that the WBG incorporates an intersectional analysis in all its policies, programmes and tools. WIDE+ strongly recommends to focus, in particular, on migrants (refugees, economic migrants, internal migrants forced by large mega projects, etc.), indigenous women and

women from specifically discriminated groups (for ex. black, Afro- descendants, and women belonging to the LGBTQI communities).

c. WBG should include the do no harm principle in diagnostic tools, in policies and in particular, in WB/IFC operations on the ground

The “do no harm” principle, launched by Mary B. Anderson (1999) has developed into an approach for development work in crisis situations, in particular in regions and countries that are deeply affected by conflict, violence and where state's capacity to enforce human rights legislation is weak. Several multilateral and government agencies recommend this approach (DFID and OECD-DAC are good cases in point). This approach is also mentioned in the World Bank WDR 2011 (p. 166).

The do no harm approach helps to reduce unintended harmful consequences of the planned intervention by using analytical tools to understand one’s role in the national or regional change process and to monitor the unintended consequences of aid delivery. International interventions in fragile states require an approach that takes full account of political and social dynamics informing gender inequality on the ground. In particular, aid delivery or investment should take into account the impact on power dynamics among recipient groups. These power dynamics often determine that women and girls are the targets of violence and the last to receive aid, if any at all.

The WBG and the IFC can do a lot to prevent negative impacts of financial aid and investment on women and girls by using the do-no-harm approach. In practice, this entails understanding one’s role in changing political contexts, and building relevant knowledge through continuous context and risk analysis, as well as impact assessment. Grassroots women can be of great help in helping the WBG to develop these knowledges.

For this reason, WIDE+ calls upon the WB to adopt and implement a gender-responsive do no harm approach in its all policies, programmes, and tools (diagnostic as well as impact assessment tools). Above all, we strongly recommend avoiding any policy arrangements or funding that negatively impacts on women's right to a life free from any form of violence and adopt policies that support the endogenous development models that women have been attempting to develop and implement.

Important as it maybe to: *“enable staff and public/private sector clients to better understand underlying constraints and opportunities for gender equality, why some services and markets are less accessible to women and girls”* (Concept Note, 2015, p. 15), we believe that this is not enough. The increasing occurrence of trade and investment-driven violence against women in local contexts calls for urgent adoption of measures so as to ensure that the WB policies and IFC's financial operations on the ground will do no harm to women and girls, men and boys and trans persons.

d. WBG should promote Decent Work, rather than more and better Growth-driven jobs

The current global landscape of social unrest and violence reinforces the need for systemic transformation of the development models that are promoted by international development and financial institutions (IFIs). This is in particular the case for the violence endured by poor women workers in regions disputed by multinational companies.

The Concept Note states that the WBG will focus on two key aspects of the framework. One of them is "removing constraints for more and better jobs" (para. 31, p. 29). The problem with the WB's notion of "better jobs " (already introduced in the 2013 WDR) is that it does not take stock of the impact of trade and financial liberalisation on the structure of national labour markets. In their efforts to open their economies to global trade and foreign direct investment, governments have adopted policies which have been highly detrimental to workers in general and women workers in particular. Emphasis on competitiveness and efficiency has exacerbated women's precarious status in labour markets,

preventing governments from enforcing the decent work directive proposed by ILO. Clearly, there is a gap between the WB's "better jobs" rhetoric and the reality of precariousness and informality affecting a majority of women workers globally.

For this reason, WIDE+ recommends that the WBG reinforces its collaboration with ILO in order to align its new GE strategy to the principles of the ILO directive of decent work. The overall goal of Decent Work is to effect empowering changes in people's livelihoods at the national and local levels. The WBG could greatly benefit from the support provided by the ILO through Decent Work Country Programmes. These programmes are developed in coordination with ILO constituents, are country-specific and reflect needs, resources and priorities as identified by national development frameworks. The ILO also provides support on the kind of institutional changes that are required to meet decent work goals and for measuring progress.

WIDE+ believes that for any strategy on gender equality to genuinely promote women's integral human rights it must be enshrined in decent work approaches to macro-economic and social policy. In this sense, the Decent Work agenda offers the WB and the IFC a solid framework to contribute to the achievement of gender-just development.

e. Promote Caring Economies: Gender-Responsive Social Protection is key to Gender Equality⁵

The growing trend of liberalisation of basic social services and the weakening of governments to ensure equitable access to social protection, has brought into sharp relief the need to find systemic solutions to the serious lack of social protection affecting women workers. Social protection is key in countries with a high demand for unpaid care workers and where there is a high incidence of HIV. In such countries, women constitute a majority of those who are active in the unpaid care sector. To this one should add the fact that women are living longer and that, due to privatisation of health care systems globally, they will have to assume an even greater share of care work (UN Habitat 2013).

To a large extent, development initiatives by the WB have focused on promoting gender equality in the domain of paid work, and supporting women as entrepreneurs, while overlooking the importance of unpaid care work, a majority of which is provided by women. Mukherjee *et al* (2012:3) have proposed a transformative framework of social protection that is holistic, gender-responsive and coherent with a human-rights approach. This approach is designed to proactively redress social inequities through the application of human rights principles to marginalised groups such as unpaid carers and third gender (read trans) persons. More than a programmatic approach, the transformative social protection model that these scholars propose entails changes to the regulatory framework to protect socially vulnerable groups against discrimination and abuse, such as women and girls affected by the HIV epidemic.

WIDE+ believes that the new WB Gender Strategy would greatly enhance its analytical and operational potential by including the issue of women's and men's roles in care economies. We would also like to recommend developing analysis and indicators that can assess progress towards gender equity in the distribution of care work, and towards the transformation of norms and ideas of masculinities that prevent men from assuming equal roles in care responsibilities.

f) The World Bank should critically rethink its economic policies, programmes and field operations

⁵ This section has been adapted from Munoz Cabrera 2015, From the Local to the Global (3rd edition): Key Issues in Development Studies; eds. Gerard McCann, Stephen McCloskey, UK: Pluto Press.

In 2014, a group of United Nations independent experts summoned the World Bank to keep human rights standards, during the review of its environmental and social policies ('safeguard policies'). These policies also apply to project finance.⁶

WIDE+ believes that including these safeguards would greatly enhance the consistency of all activities supported by the World Bank, not only in terms of investment lending but also at the level of the macro-economic policies that it promotes. As UN experts have argued, doing so would not only improve the WB's development outcomes but also strengthen the protection of the 40% world's poorest that the WB purports to empower through its new Gender Strategy.

The WBG should engage in an in-depth analysis of the interrelation between the (macro-)economic policies it promotes and the gender equality strategy that it wants to promote in order to improve its policies and programmes. Research shows that 20 years after the Beijing Declaration, promotion of the growth-driven economic model has not increased women's participation in the labour market substantially, nor has this model reduced the unequal unpaid care burden between men and women, or decreased the gender wage gap (UN Women, 2015). Moreover, access to good quality health services, food security, clean water and sanitation is still a very big problem for many poor women and men worldwide.

So far, liberalisation policies have not resulted in significant improvements to the socio-economic position of all women compared to men. Neither have they been successful in eradicating social exclusion, even where they may have temporarily reduced occurrences of absolute poverty. Many people in the world still lack access to a decent living conditions and dignified livelihoods. WIDE's research has found that neo-liberal policies are causing great harm to women's human rights (Wichterich & Menon-Sen ed., 2009).⁷

Recent research by UN Women shows that *"financial globalization, trade liberalization, the ongoing privatization of public services and the ever expanding role of corporate interests in the development process have shifted power relations in ways that undermine the enjoyment of human rights and the building of sustainable livelihoods. The world is both wealthier and more unequal today..."* (UN Women, 2015, page 11). *"[Current] economic policies have either undermined women's social gains or failed to support them through improved labour market opportunities...entrenched and growing wealth inequalities mean that poorer women are being left behind"* (UN Women, 2015, Page 49).

To conclude, and in the context of a growing body of research that challenges the viability of current economic policies to achieve poverty eradication and gender equality, WIDE+ calls upon the WBG to critically rethink the macro-economic assumptions underpinning its gender equality strategy, its policies and programmes.

Research by WIDE+ shows that women's organisations worldwide have been identifying alternatives to the current growth-driven model affecting the realisation of gender justice in local development agendas. Significantly, their situated knowledges and theoretical insights have debunked the idea that macroeconomic growth is a driver of equitable, gender just, and sustainable development on the ground. Furthermore, they have provided compelling evidence of the linkages between neoliberal policy frameworks and pervasive gender inequality in local development. Moving beyond the resistance standpoint, they have made sound proposals for non-discriminatory development policies and field interventions. These proposals are substantiated by empirical data and theoretical insights, and have enhanced our understanding of gender relations and of the status of women in complex and highly diversified development contexts. Overall, they demonstrate that integrated or holistic

⁶ <http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/12/changes-to-world-bank-safeguards-risk-race-to-the-bottom-u-n-experts-warn/>, retrieved July 2015.

⁷ WIDE+ has published other case studies and analysis that address in more detail the complex relations between economic policies, gender inequality and poverty. See <http://wideplus.org/resources/european-development-and-trade-policy/>. In addition, a collection of tools to raise economic literacy from a GE perspective can be found in: "Economic Literacy across Europe: Exchange and Cooperation to Promote a Feminist Approach in Adult Education, published 2015, <http://www.wide-netzwerk.at/>

approaches that interconnect macro policies to the micro or local level can more effectively take stock of the impact of development aid on individuals and communities (WIDE 2011).

WIDE+ believes that this is the kind of knowledge required to bring about sustainable improvements to women's lives and livelihoods. We therefore call upon the WBG to critically re-examine its development paradigm so as to incorporate the views of women's rights associations, grassroots women, feminist scholars, local communities and social movements.

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