



Discussion on Gender Data and Social Norms with Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) May 11, 2023

On May 11, 2023, the World Bank Group (WBG) met with representatives from the [Self Employed Women's Association \(SEWA\)](#), a trade union in India with over 2.5 million members comprising self-employed women workers working in the informal economy, and the [Global Fairness Initiative](#)— a global organization working on promoting a more equitable, sustainable approach to economic development for the world's working poor. The aim of the discussion was to learn from SEWA's experience on collecting and using gender data and changing social norms. Key takeaways are summarized below and will be considered in the development of the WBG Gender Strategy 2024-30.

Key Takeaways Bottom-up real time data collection and use:

- The WBG could consider how the process of data collection and use can be empowering for local communities. **Building the capacity of communities** around data enables better decisions through increased access to information and creates economic opportunities. For example, farmers can compare input costs and revenue to increase profits next season by deciding which expenses to forego or reduce, whether to withhold or sell produce, and whom to sell to at what price.
- SEWA representatives highlighted the benefits of **technology-aided real time data collection** for faster decision making. An example shared by SEWA was an application for trade union members through which they could view real-time changes in deposits, savings, credit, repayment amount and schedule, allowing better planning and use of resources.
- Discussants made some suggestions for the WBG to consider for empowering communities, informing policy and accelerating decision making through **data frameworks and indicators**. These included:
 - Enabling communities to access and **use data for their development**.
 - Gathering **data on emerging shocks**, like heat waves and market shocks, **disaggregated** by how they affect women in different trades, children, adolescents and elderly people.
 - Gathering data to recognize and **account for climate action work** that women already undertake. It was suggested that this data go beyond information on emissions to **evidence for negotiating better carbon credits**.

- The power of data for **decision making and influence** at multiple levels was highlighted. At the policy level, large-scale real-time data was mentioned as a more effective tool for increasing bargaining power and influencing policy than anecdotes. At the programmatic level, real time data enabled **tracking implementation**.
- A good practice shared was to collect data before embarking on an initiative, and **concurrently updating** it, to appropriately target interventions based on changing needs.

Identifying and changing social norms:

- SEWA representatives shared that it takes time for norms to sustainably change, 7-10 years in their experience. They added that **organizing and creating income generating opportunities** for women has been helpful in changing social norms.
 - Organizing, being part of a collective, helps women feel supported to make change.
 - Income and job security empower women to contend with social constraints. Bringing income into the family can allow women to develop identities beyond the relational, i.e., as someone's daughter, mother or wife. This shift increases women's participation in decision making, changing norms over time.
- Participants shared that backlash to gender equality and changing social norms can be particularly strong when men feel threatened that the power structure may change, and they might lose control. Backlash could be counteracted by making the **mutual benefits of changing norms understood** to those opposing the change. An example is communicating about girls' education as an income generating investment that is productive for the whole family.
- SEWA representatives shared that their approach to economic empowerment and changing social norms considered the **family, under a woman's leadership**, as the unit of change, wherein women were empowered to make decisions with the family's participation.
- Regarding measuring change, participants suggested that when planning interventions to change social norms, the WBG could consider including **participatory measurement** by women themselves.