



## Discussion on Gender Strategy with MenEngage Alliance members April 27, 2023 - Virtual meeting

On April 27, 2023, the World Bank Group (WBG) held a virtual discussion with representatives from [Breakthrough](#) -- an organisation with the vision to create a world where discrimination and violence against women and girls is unacceptable, [Shirakat – Partnership for Development](#)-- a non-governmental organisation working on human rights and women’s rights in Pakistan, and the Global Secretariat, [MenEngage Alliance](#)-- a global network of civil society organisations dedicated to transform patriarchal masculinities and working with men and boys for gender and social justice for all. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss early thinking on the World Bank Group (WBG) Gender Strategy for 2024-2030 and learn from these organisations on opportunities and challenges for gender equality and empowerment. Key takeaways are summarised below and will be considered in the development of the Strategy.

### Key Takeaways

#### Social Norms

- The WBG could consider lessons and effective practices for change in social norms among young people. Participants shared that transforming social norms takes a long time, requires deep engagement, and simultaneous work with multiple stakeholders (parents, teachers, local governments, health workers).
- It was suggested that pathways to disseminate behavior change messages could include media messaging, games, and entertainment--especially through pop culture which has a huge uptake among young people. The WBG could consider the possibility of tracking the evidence on effectiveness as well as possible challenges related to the gender stereotypes and biases of AI for future interventions.
- Participants stressed the importance of engaging with mainstream media to see where change can be made. The WBG could consider addressing patriarchal masculinities in media by having more women visible in ways that challenge sexism, stereotypical representations and the sexualization of women's bodies and in producing/directing/writing media content. The representation of men and boys in caring roles can also help advance gender equality by challenging traditional gender stereotypes.
- Schools were highlighted as an important place for transformative orientation and conversations around gender and sexuality. The WBG could consider drawing from evidence, including field-led approaches and knowledge that The MenEngage Alliance has supported, which show the effectiveness of creating a safe environment in schools with no tolerance for sexual bias and discrimination and building the agency of young people. Discussants also emphasised the importance of working with teachers, particularly male teachers, who have

been largely absent from the discourses around gender and masculinities. A “whole-of-school” approach including communities, teachers, school leaders, administrators, curriculum and pedagogy can address norms. can address norms.

- The WBG could consider further supporting concepts like consent and agency in ways that can be gender transformative in the prevention of all forms of violence, in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all, and in comprehensive sex education programs, communications and advocacy efforts.

### **Economic Empowerment and Intersectionality**

- Participants recommended that the Strategy could articulate economic empowerment in an intersectional way by examining who has access to and control over resources.
- Participants stressed that economic empowerment was and continues to be important. However, when bringing women into the workforce, the WBG could consider whether they are being brought into the existing patriarchal system or are enabled to build a more egalitarian system. Participants stressed that efforts around economic empowerment incorporate a transformative lens taking into account existing gender and social norms and challenging the structural barriers for justice and rights for women and gender diverse individuals.
- It was suggested that the WBG review success stories and examine what works, undertaking research to investigate whether economic empowerment changes the position of women in the household and society, and what hinders women’s advancement. Evidence could inform interventions as there are many examples of highly educated women who are employed and earning well yet suffer from violence.
- Gender-based violence (GBV) could be defined and explained in the new Strategy in ways that are intersectional—how it differently affects people based on social roles and characteristics—as well as intersectoral dimensions.
- The WBG could reflect on the context and power dynamics within which it drafts and frames the new Strategy: what is the impact on women at the grassroots in developing countries from actions of capital-rich countries and powerful institutions like the WBG?

### **Conceptual Framework**

- Participants shared that many feminist and human rights organisations and networks perceive that the WBG is a major player within neoliberal economic systems and in many ways reinforces this system. This can be at odds with a vision of gender justice, equality and women’s rights. The WBG could consider making some explicit commitments to conducting intersectional feminist gender analysis and examine how the neoliberal economic and other systems affects gender equality, and what corrective measures the WBG could take.
- Participants suggested that the WBG could consider using its data and expertise to frame the Gender Strategy from an intergenerational lens and be more inclusive of qualitative data and information to inform its work with a human-centred approach.
- It was recommended that the WBG consider using more gender transformative language in the Strategy, avoiding terms like ‘human capital’ and ensuring it is not reinforcing the gender binary.
- The Strategy could better justify the three drivers of change laid out in its early thinking—innovating, financing, and acting collectively--through strong gender analysis that is informed by the current discourses of intersectional feminist analysis.
- Participants mentioned that the WBG has a lot of policy influence, but this influence can be dominated by Eurocentric views. The WBG could consider using decolonial language and frameworks in the new Strategy. They spoke of how Eurocentric framings are often based on a

misunderstanding of local dynamics and called for a more nuanced approach to women's agency.

- The WBG could consider transformative dimensions of leadership. Men in positions of power could be mobilised to transform the systems they are leading. Similarly, women's engagement in peace and security is not just about bringing them into the army and security apparatus but considering how women's participation can transform militaristic institutions and dismantle patriarchal structures in line with the feminist peace agenda.
- It was suggested that the WBG consider a framework that could be accountable to women, girls, gender nonconforming people, as well as feminist movements and people in the global south. These are the people who are disproportionately affected by the WBG's work.

### **Engaging men and boys**

- The focus on engaging men and boys was welcomed. Participants recommended that the WBG not only explore their vulnerabilities but holistically explore men's position within patriarchy, and their multiple roles in reinforcing it, to meaningfully engage in dismantling harmful patriarchal structures.
- Discussants recommended grounding engagement with men and boys in feminist principles, including women's rights perspectives, feminist analysis and paying attention to inequalities in privilege and power rooted in patriarchy.
- Participants suggested that the WBG could consider whether engaging men and boys is a means to gender equality or a goal unto itself by clearly articulating the goal in the Strategy.
- Discussants further suggested that the language in the Strategy not adhere to stereotypical male gender roles but instead support non-violent, equitable and inclusive notions of manhood. It was also recommended that the planning and designing of interventions and advocacy efforts to engage people of all genders could seek to redress structural power imbalances and inequalities, male domination, systemic male supremacy ideologies, and to reform dualistic and sexist gender orders.
- It was highlighted that since work with men and boys is sometimes articulated through a gender binary, the WBG could consider how this can reinforce power hierarchies.
- Fatherhood is often considered an entry point for work with men and boys. Participants recommended the WBG move beyond talking to and about men as fathers towards structural gender analysis. It was also suggested that the gendered challenges of redistributing care work not just be framed within a gender binary and heteronormative family unit.
- Participants shared that engagement with men and boys could use gender transformative and human rights-based approaches in such a way that keeps the focus on women, girls and sexual and gender minorities.

### **Private Sector Engagement**

- Participants suggested some means for engaging private sector actors for gender equality. These included having harassment committees in place, displaying anti-harassment acts in offices, advocating with leaders to break the glass ceiling, making the places of business more women friendly, and training men on norms and masculinities.
- It was mentioned that it will be important for the WBG to remember that corporate regulations alone cannot reach those in the informal sector.