



Consultation on the proposed 2024-2030 World Bank Group (WBG) Gender Strategy with Rwandan stakeholders
13 July 2023 | Kigali, Rwanda

On July 13, 2023, the World Bank (WB) held a discussion with representatives from the Government of Rwanda, civil society organizations, and development partners on the WB Gender Strategy 2024-2030. The aim of this discussion was to engage, learn and better understand opportunities and challenges for gender equality and empowerment, and potential areas for synergy and cooperation related to the 2024 WB Gender Strategy. Representatives from the International Development Association (IDA), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the Multilateral Investment and Guarantee Agency (MIGA) gave short presentations on the vision and direction of the proposed WB Gender Strategy in the context of each institution's work on gender equality. Key inputs shared by participants are summarized below and will be considered in the development of the Strategy.

Participating Organizations

- Embassy of Sweden
- Rwanda Green Fund (FONERWA)
- Hope for Single Mothers with Disabilities
- Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
- Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB)
- LUNA
- Ministry of the Environment, Government of Rwanda
- Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), Government of Rwanda
- Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), Government of Rwanda
- Tanga Community

Key Themes

Intersectionality

- Participants emphasized the importance of the concept and approach to intersectionality put forth in the draft WB Gender Strategy. In the emphasis on “empowerment and equality for all,” participants noted the opportunity to examine the underlying structural barriers (such as disability and LGBTQI+ identity) in education programs, jobs programs, and trainings to improve their impact. Participants noted that this type of inclusive lens is often lacking in the Rwandan context, and that there is the opportunity for the Gender Strategy to advance this conversation and broaden the definition of “all.”

- Discussants also outlined how addressing issues of inequality should begin with an intersectional approach that puts the most marginalized individuals at the center of the conversation.
- The importance of recognizing the role of socio-economic status in mediating experiences of gender inequality was highlighted.

Women in the Workplace

- Several participants noted that in their experience, working environments do not accommodate women, exacerbating gender inequalities in work. This lack of accommodation includes a lack of breastfeeding rooms, washrooms, leave, and disability accommodations.
- It was further noted that companies lack a holistic understanding of women’s needs—beyond maternity leave—and especially around sensitive topics like menstruation and menopause.
- Women’s lack of confidence when it comes to employment was acknowledged as a factor that often prevents them from advocating for themselves. Underscoring that this is an issue that begins with education, social and cultural norms, and carries over into the workplace, participants shared that they would like to see the WB Gender Strategy pick up on this.
- Other participants noted that the employment issue is not just one of confidence, but of skill. They highlighted the important role of women’s associations as a place to build skills so that women can take advantage of available job opportunities.
- The United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) [Gender Seal Certification](#) was cited as an example of a promising practice in improving gender equality in the workplace.

Supporting Women-led Businesses and Entrepreneurs

- On the topic of gender quotas in business procurement, participants stressed that this was a critical aspect of promoting gender equality and ensuring that women-led businesses need to have fair opportunities.
- The importance of granting loans or investments to women entrepreneurs was also noted. Participants outlined how such practices can significantly uplift the economic status of women-led businesses, particularly those operating in challenging conditions. Additionally, they noted that addressing taxation policies and regulations for women starting businesses can further encourage entrepreneurship.

Gender and Social Norms

- Participants stressed the importance of addressing gender and social norms, noting that these are the root of many of the inequalities and problems under discussion.
- The importance of supporting women’s spaces was also raised. It was noted that such places that allow women to work collectively to change the conditions under which they are working, and discussants pointed to the role that trade unions have played in ensuring that women have decent wages.
- The need to be clear on language in the strategy was emphasized. Discussants noted that in Rwanda, there are sometimes negative associations with feminism, which creates barriers to further conversations and progress. Challenges were also noted with conflating the terms “gender” and “women.”
- Participants further highlighted the need to invest in gender data to clearly show **who** is being disadvantaged and by how much. Data can also be used to show how issues of gender equality affect men and boys and can be a tool to help change their minds in favor of gender equality.
- Male engagement, a priority of Rwanda’s national gender policy, was underscored as a key component of advancing transformative change in gender norms.

- One example given on engaging men and boys: women may participate in empowerment programs, but men need to learn how to live with “empowered” women, lest it become a source of conflict. Participants highlighted the example of [Gender Action Learning Systems \(GALS\)](#)—a methodology used to address inequality and change mindsets on gender equality.

Structural challenges

- There was a request for more information about how the WB gender strategy was responding to the larger conversation about the perceived role international financial institutions, such as the WB, play in contributing to structural inequalities, especially when it comes to marginalized women in the global south.
- Participants wanted to better understand how the WB can balance between supporting women’s agency and capacity while recognizing the inequality of the structures surrounding them and how the gender strategy addresses this tension.
- Another question arose for more information about how the WB would evolve and reform to reflect a changing world, and how that change could be reflected in the new WB Gender Strategy.

The Implementation Gap

- The gap between gender policies and their implementation was highlighted by participants throughout the discussion. Discussants also noted that part of the implementation gap is the result of a lack of understanding of what the policies are.
- On the topic of representation, participants noted that it is not enough to report numbers of people engaged (e.g. in a training); one must be able to assess the quality of that engagement.

Gender mainstreaming

- Several lessons were outlined that the WB could take from the development and implementation of the European Union’s Gender Action Plan in Rwanda. These included:
 - Aligning gender mainstreaming with development corporate portfolio planning;
 - Allocating financial resources to gender; and
 - Looking internally as part of this process. For example, not just asking that beneficiaries include more women in management, but working to culturally shift one’s own organization on this matter as well.
- It was also noted that the limitations on gender mainstreaming often come from a lack of capacity within institutions. Ownership and accountability for gender equality need to be expanded, and staff need to be involved in mainstreaming efforts.