



Discussion on Gender Strategy with disability rights civil society representatives The World Bank Offices in New York, June 12, 2023

On June 12, 2023, the World Bank Group (WBG) held a discussion with organizations of persons with disabilities and civil society representatives from many parts of the world including India, Uganda, Vanuatu, Kenya, Rwanda and Lebanon, during the [16th Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(COSP16\)](#). This discussion was co-hosted by the WBG Gender and Disability Inclusion teams and included reflections from UN Women. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss early thinking on the WBG Gender Strategy for 2024-2030 and learn from representatives on opportunities and challenges for gender equality and empowerment, focussing on persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls with disabilities. Key takeaways are summarised below and will be considered in the development of the Strategy.

Key Takeaways

- Setting the context, it was mentioned that the WBG's gender work is linked to other initiatives, importantly the twin track approach to disability inclusive development reflected in the [Environmental and Social Framework \(ESF\)](#) that was adopted in 2018. The ESF recognizes that persons with disabilities are typically more vulnerable or disadvantaged and includes several standards for disability inclusion. The ESF standards mandate nondiscrimination and universal access (beyond physical access to digital access, access to communication and others) and require the WBG to address disability in program design and social assessments.
- It was also mentioned that the **intersectionality of gender and disability** status needs to be considered, as women with disabilities face different barriers compared to men with disabilities. Further they should also be considered as individuals, as women with disabilities are not a homogenous group. It was highlighted that the ESF framework requires consulting persons with disabilities for project design, while ensuring accessibility for meaningful engagement. Lastly it was mentioned that it is the responsibility of governments that the WBG is working with to adopt these standards.
- The WBG's [International Development Association \(IDA\)](#) was highlighted. [IDA 19](#) had six policy commitments that mentioned disability, [IDA 20](#) was further tailored to needs of persons with disabilities including **measures to monitor policy commitments**. Under IDA 20, there are three disability-specific commitments under the areas of Human Capital (HC), Jobs and Economic Transformation (JET), and Governance (GOV). These are important WBG resources to help countries implement inclusive policies.
- Lastly, [the ten commitments on disability inclusive development](#) made by WBG at the Global Disability Summit in London in 2018 were highlighted, which include a commitment to focus

on the **economic empowerment of women with disabilities**. This was followed up by a [new dataset on legal protections for women with disabilities](#), drawn from 190 economies to show existing gaps and identify good regulatory practices, using an intersectional approach. These were used as the basis for a recently published toolkit for [including women and girls with disabilities in WBG operations](#).

- It was reemphasized that the WBG takes **consultations and stakeholder engagement** very seriously and uses inputs as the basis for designing projects.
- Participants mentioned that global frameworks could go beyond a human rights-based approach which considers groups as the unit of action, to also **considering differing needs of individuals**, like those living with disability, within the groups.
- The Strategy's proposed focus on **intersectionality** was mentioned multiple times as an important consideration:
 - A discussant noted that intersectionality remains challenging for multilateral organizations to effectively implement.
 - Another participant suggested that intersectionality could be considered along the lines of gender, disability, age, ethnicity and place of residence, as all of these impact vulnerability.
 - It was also mentioned that intersectionality take into consideration climate change and humanitarian response to develop practical strategies with representation by and accountability mechanisms for women and girls with disabilities.
 - A discussant suggested that the WBG include intersectionality in its engagement with governments.
 - Another participant added that investments be made in trainings for changing social norms, particularly sensitization and de-biasing for disability and capacity building on intersectionality for focal points in governments.
 - Discussants emphasized how the COVID19 pandemic revealed that those marginalized by multiple forms of intersectionality are most vulnerable. Similarly, women with disabilities are among the most marginalized groups in conflict settings. It was recommended that in such settings the needs of women with disabilities be prioritized alongside state building.
- A participant suggested that organizations led by **women with disabilities, with a focus on empowerment, should be prioritized**, to ensure inclusive development.
- It was suggested that when considering the needs of people with disabilities, accessibility be considered **beyond physical accessibility**.
- Participants shared that in some contexts educational qualification did not translate into job opportunities for people with disabilities due to **attitudinal barriers** of employers. They further mentioned that disability rights organizations need more funding for programming.
- It was mentioned that in climate disaster prone areas, women with disabilities are especially vulnerable. An innovation shared for such settings was to **train women with disabilities** to provide services for other women with disabilities. For example, training women as 'weather watchers' and alert other women with disabilities to impending disasters like cyclones.
- Discussants highlighted **six features** of effective strategy and programming for people living with disability – 1) Accessibility; 2) Assistive Devices; 3) Support Services; 4) Community Based Inclusive Development; 5) Social Protection; and 6) Non-Discrimination.
- Participants appreciated the WBG's commitment towards meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities and demonstrated actions in following up commitments with

implementation. They added that gender gaps have narrowed but remain substantial for women with disabilities. They recommended that **investments be made in disability rights organizations**, as they need more resources to meaningfully engage and advocate.

- Regarding **care work** it was mentioned that while advancing the rights of caregivers, the focus stays on the **rights of people with disabilities** who are traditionally seen as the receivers of care. It was mentioned that the discourse around care providers be widened to also **acknowledge and address violations committed by care providers** against people living with disabilities.
- A discussant pointed out that engagement of women and girls with disabilities requires **systematic changes** and continuous multilevel advocacy rather than one-time interventions. They further suggested that **essential services packages for gender-based violence (GBV)** could be considered from the standpoint of women and girls with disabilities. They went on to add that **financial justice** is lagging for women and girls with disabilities as many countries are yet to institutionalize requisite systems.
- Another participant mentioned that women and girls with disabilities struggled to access vaccines and healthcare, often due to lack of information. It was suggested that **sign language be prioritized in education programs** to meaningfully engage and share information with the deaf.
- Further it was suggested that communication materials use terminology, data and statistics in such a manner that is **accessible**.
- Participants also suggested that the strategy consider the **bodily autonomy** of women to achieve its goals of women's leadership, voice and agency, to enhance economic and political participation.
- It was mentioned that young girls are **vulnerable to GBV**, particularly as they reach puberty and lack of **access to menstrual products** can get in the way of their education.
- It was noted that putting women with disabilities in **positions of responsibility** has positive outcomes as they are seen as providers of a service.
- Participants suggested that the WBG consider how **technology can be made accessible** for women and girls with disabilities.
- Another participant shared that weak institutions disproportionately fail to uphold **human rights of minorities**; stronger legal frameworks and access to justice are needed for people with disabilities.
- Discussants also suggested that while formulating the strategy the WBG think about **interlocutors** who will take the strategy to the grassroots.
- Another participant shared that woman living with psychosocial disabilities might not receive **care in rural settings**.
- Lastly a participant stressed the need to support and **strengthen the system of gender focal points** in ministries. It was suggested that a gender focal point could be established to addresses inclusion of women with disabilities in the public sector as well as promoting and advocating for inclusion in the private sector.