

## **Ireland's input to Consultations on the World Bank Group Gender Strategy 2024-2030**

Overall, the new World Bank Group (WBG) Gender Strategy 2024-2030 embraces positive and appropriate steps to respond to the global context. The strategy's ambition to 'accelerate gender equality for a sustainable, resilient and inclusive future' is commendable, and its strategic focus on tackling Gender Based Violence (GBV), expanding economic opportunities for women and advancing women's leadership are appropriate and align well with Ireland's priorities. Widening the Bank's commitment to non-discrimination so that it includes sexual and gender minorities is a positive step, as is its proposal to actively involve men and boys in tackling gender inequality.

In setting the context, the strategy acknowledges the interconnected factors that have combined to challenge the progress that has been made on gender equality. These include climate change, the Covid 19 pandemic, an increase in conflict in several regions of the world and a backlash in many societies against progressive change on women's rights. It correctly points out that what is at stake is the fundamental human right of gender equality for all people - a matter of fairness and justice - while acknowledging the difficulty and complexity of meaningfully transforming gender relations and empowering women and girls. While we support the proposed gender strategy that is well aligned to Ireland's work on progressing gender equality, we have a few points for your consideration.

- ***Support for Gender Equality in World Bank operations***

Gender equality is fundamental for the transformation needed to reach the furthest behind. Ireland is supportive of the WBG engaging with much greater ambition on gender equality and hopes that this strategy is instrumental in ensuring that there is an overarching focus on gender equality and women's empowerment across all the world bank operations. While there has been progress towards gender equality, it remains insufficient and further efforts are necessary. This commitment to gender equality is crucial for creating meaningful and sustainable change.

- ***Enhancing Strategy's Urgency and Ambition for Gender Equality Progress***

It is of critical importance that the urgency and ambition of progressing gender equality as set out in the consultative draft of the WBG Gender Strategy is formative in shaping corporate commitments and the World Bank's Evolution Roadmap. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment need to be central to the wider reform process. The commitment to focus on gender outcomes across all the group's operations and the commitment to incorporate gender analysis are welcome. Macroeconomic policy and reforms need to be assessed from a gender perspective to ensure they advance gender equality and do no harm.

- ***Recognizing structural inequalities: How does the WBG through the strategy intend to address issues and consequences arising from structural inequalities?***

The proposed gender strategy has largely covered macro level interventions that the WBG intends to make to close gender gaps. The intention or process of how WBG plans to influence and motivate countries to address structural issues by integrating gender into their fiscal policies and budget reforms, alongside mechanisms for collecting and analysing gender aggregated data, is still unclear. In Tanzania, for instance, there remains a challenge of gender budgeting across the Ministries. Gender is still considered as a standalone component at the Ministry of Gender with no or less capacity to

mainstream across the Government. This directly affects resource allocations. Ireland would expect the WBG gender strategy to show commitment to supporting countries to address this challenge.

- ***Enhancing Focus on Women, Peace and Security in the Strategy***

The proposed strategy lacks a discrete focus on Women, Peace and Security and does not sufficiently make the link between democratic governance and women's empowerment. Women's decision making and leadership should extend to clearly highlighting women's true and meaningful participation in peace and security. The strategy should explicitly aim to enhance women's effective involvement in conflict prevention, resolution, and peace-building processes. Additionally, advocating for the development of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security could be a way to ensure women's voice and agency in peace building efforts.

- ***Linking Gender Equality Backlash to Global Governance Trends***

While the strategy references the ongoing backlash against progressive gains on gender equality, it does not adequately explore this dynamic and its connection to broader anti-democratic trends globally. It fails to make a connection between rising authoritarianism and the promotion of 'traditional' gender roles and the othering of sexual minorities. It is important for the WBG to place stronger emphasis on promoting democratic governance, necessarily involving increased women's leadership, and actively pushing back against the current trend.

- ***Recognition and Enhancement of Men and Boys' Roles in Gender Equality***

We welcome references to gender equality as a human rights issue, the need to address multiple intersecting areas of discrimination and support a transformative approach, as well as engaging men and boys. The draft strategy properly highlights that gender inequality extends beyond women and girls, and there are now particular outcomes designed to address issues specific of men and boys. It would be appreciated if the strategy provided some more practical guidance on how those issues could be addressed across the drivers of change and policy arena. Men and boys' engagement on gender equality is highlighted in the draft strategy in several instances as a way for collective action. Securing and investing in the active engagement of men and boys is very critical to changing the patriarchal social norms and system and to change the power dynamics. We would suggest this to be taken as a strategic approach and included at an outcome level under the first strategic objective.

- ***Tracking of expenditure***

While we welcome the work already done with gender tags/flags, we would recommend that this be taken further and that the WBG use the OECD DAC gender marker for reporting. Aligning the WBG system with this well established and extensively used standard would enhance consistency and comparability across different development organisations. It would also contribute to identifying opportunities for cooperation, and to accountability.

#### **Additional Feedback**

- The three strategic objectives and six outcomes are coherent and compatible with Ireland's priorities. In addition to these specific objectives and outcomes it is important/welcome that

gender equality is central to all the operations of the WBG and that a gender outcome accountability framework is in place. While the aspirations in the draft strategy are setting the bar at a high level, if achieved, the collective efforts of the WBG and partners should help to shift the dial on this important agenda by 2030.

- We welcome the expansion of what is understood as drivers of changes and the step up in accountability of gender results in projects and importantly in wider engagement.
- Outcome 4 highlights expanding ownership and use of economic assets. It would be good if this also included access to economic assets - not only in terms of access to services, but rather access to immovable property, agricultural land, etc. Land rights (and issues of inheritance) are often particularly important for women.
- We suggest if the affordable and accessible quality care services indicated under outcome 5 could also include mental health care for all, as the issue of mental health and wellbeing is becoming critical for all across the globe.
- The strategy could be clearer on how it is going to use gender transformative approach and how it can align with the Humanitarian – Development - Peace nexus approach.
- More emphasis could be placed on building strong and inclusive national institutions that would further promote and advance gender equality and women’s empowerment and to ensure better ownership and sustainability.
- The overview mentions crises including the climate crisis but could have an additional sentence about how the unprecedented and ever rising levels of global humanitarian needs, record levels of hunger and displacement, worsened poverty, put equality for women and girls increasingly out of reach.
- It is very positive that the strategy takes GBV as a social problem and embraces a transformative approach to altering social norms and social systems to rebalance power dynamics between men and women.
- The proposed interventions to promote Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment align well with our priorities including social protection, climate justice, Women Economic Empowerment, GBV and reduction of maternal mortality. However, issues of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights are less/not targeted in this strategy.
- Mention the entrenched cultural/traditional belief systems and values (mind set) about gender equality in some societies and the fact that not all countries and communities share the same views or belief systems. The strategy’s approach will have to be sensitive to this and it will be challenging in some contexts (e.g. Afghanistan)
- We welcome the proposed expanded focus in the new strategy and the adoption of intersectional approach i.e.
  - Expanded Focus: Gender Equality and Empowerment as key goals and powerful accelerators
  - Adding women’s leadership and stronger focus on tackling harmful social/gender norms
  - Continued central focus on closing gaps between women and men, complemented by inclusion of intersectionality and gender minorities

- Adopting a GRID approach including to address climate change and other crises and shocks
- Enhanced attention to fragility, conflict, and violence and GBV
- The areas of focus/scaling up investments also resonate with us, including Data, Food Security & Nutrition, Climate Change, SOGI and Care Economy. We support the contribution of the WBG to the evidence base and learning of what works through initiatives such as the Gender Innovation Lab.

### **Questions**

- How will the WBG ensure consistency of the application on the strategy across the constituent organisations of the World Bank Group (for example IFC)? And ensure that gender equality is prioritised across all interventions and not just targeted gender specific interventions?
- While recognising the significant deficit in the gender statistics, how do we ensure there is a coordinated approach between the various initiatives that seek to address this gap, to avoid duplication of efforts?
- How can we work better together to ensure that the evidence based of what works influences policies and programmes?

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