

Feedback on the Draft of the World Bank Gender Strategy 2024-2030: Accelerate Gender Equality for a Sustainable, Resilient and Inclusive Future.

About Orchid Project

Orchid Project is an international NGO with offices in UK and Kenya. It is a single-issue organisation catalysing the global movement to end Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) globally. Orchid Project is the co-host of the Asia Network to end FGM/C, and the technical secretariat of the newly founded End FGM/C Africa Network. It is also the founding member of the Global Platform for Action to End FGM/C and a consortium member of the Girl Generation: Support to Africa-led programme.

Orchid Project would like to commend the World Bank for its commitment to accelerate gender equality and for the ambition embraced by the 2024-2030 strategy. This is particularly important as the world faces increasing global challenges. Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, conflicts and increasing refugee flows compounded the existing inequalities and increased the risk of the gender-based violence threatening to roll back the hard-won progress.

We particularly welcome the new emphasis on ending gender-based violence (GBV) and promoting women's leadership and agency, as well as identifying innovation and acting collectively as the drivers of change towards gender equality. Gender-based violence is one of the worst forms of discrimination and remains the most widespread and pervasive human rights violations in the world. Concerted action by public and private sector actors, civil society, and intergovernmental and international organisations is critical for better outcomes in the journey towards gender equality.

We commend the consultation process launched by the World Bank and are grateful for the opportunity to provide feedback to the draft strategy.

Below we offer a few recommendations that we feel would strengthen the strategy.

General Feedback

Gender Transformative versus Gender Responsive. While the strategy acknowledges the harmful gender norms as drivers of gender inequality, we feel it focuses more on gender-responsive rather than gender-transformative approach. The strategy could be more ambitious and commit to interventions in programming that are designed around a fundamental aim of addressing root causes of gender inequality within society – entrenched power relations and harmful gender norms - and go beyond efforts to mitigate and reduce existing gender inequalities. Orchid Project explored gender transformative approaches to ending FGM/C work in its [policy discussion paper](#).

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Girls' and Youth Voices and Agency

We would have liked to see stronger focus on girls who are one of the most disproportionately affected segments of the population and face double discrimination because of their gender and age. Data currently available on girls is alarming - 129 million girls remain out of school worldwide, 12 million girls under the age of 18 are married every year, 75% of new HIV cases affecting adolescents are girls¹, and 4.1 million girls undergo female genital mutilation/cutting annually. For the strategy to better serve adolescent girls, it needs to incorporate a stronger lifecycle approach to track the progress for girls and women throughout their whole life cycle and ensure girls (who are at the intersection of childhood and womanhood) don't fall through the cracks of prevention, protection and empowerment programmes. We recommend holding a focus group consultation with adolescent girls to receive their feedback on the strategy and to ensure that their lived experiences and priorities are placed at the heart of the strategy design and implementation.

The Strategy also fails to acknowledge the significant role of the youth. At 1.8 billion - the largest generation of youth in history - they act as important development catalysts, disruptors and innovators, and can play a significant role in challenging and shifting the power imbalances and in driving gender equality wins across the strategy's six outcomes.

Enhanced Partnership with Civil Society

We welcome the World Bank's recognition of wider partnership and stakeholder engagement (acting collectively) as the driver of change towards gender equality. In the implementation of the strategy we would like to encourage stronger engagement of and meaningful partnerships with civil society organisations, and in particular with community-based organisations who are at the forefront of leading change in their communities. This also includes modification of funding practices and requirements to allow for resources to directly reach the grassroots.

Specific Feedback: Strategic Objective 1 End Gender-based Violence & Elevate Human Capital

More Prominence to be given to Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

- We would have liked to see more prominence given to FGM/C in the strategy, and inclusion of concrete interventions and approaches to address this under implementation section. FGM/C is not only a severe form of gender-based violence, it is also a precursor to child marriage, a barrier to girls' access to education among other things, and overall is an impediment to achieving gender equality.

FGM/C can lead to immediate serious health complications and even death, and long-term consequences including sexual and reproductive health complications and psychosocial problems. Over 200 million girls and women alive today from 31 countries have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and over 4.1 million girls are

¹ <https://data2x.org/making-adolescent-girls-visible-through-gender-data/>

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undergoing FGM/C annually. This will rise to 4.6 million girls by 2030 due to population growth.² These figures fail to represent the full global picture, as they do not take into account countries, particularly in Asia and the Middle East, which do not have national prevalence data on FGM/C.

- We welcome the recognition of teachers and community influencers in the strategy as key players in persuading parents to end FGM. This approach needs to go further to require teachers, social workers and healthcare personnel to identify girls at risk of FGM/C and have an obligation to report in case they discover that an act of FGM/C appears to have been carried out on a girl.
- We welcome the acknowledgment in the strategy that new emphasis on ending GBV calls for further investments in data and evidence, and that lack of data jeopardizes achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and countries' commitment to "leaving no one behind". It is essential to note the critical lack of national data on FGM/C prevalence in Asia. Only two countries in Asia currently report national data – Maldives and Indonesia, where 15 million girls alone will undergo the practice by 2030. The true scale of women and girls affected by FGM/C in the 11 countries across the region where the practice takes place remains unknown.³ This data and knowledge require not only further investments, but also initiatives to foster government commitments to collect the data.
- We welcome the acknowledgment that financing remains one of the drivers of change towards achieving gender equality. As identified in the strategy, "financing involves securing and allocating resources effectively in and through the public and private sectors". We encourage financing to expand to wider civil society sector, particularly in the fields with critical lack of funding, such as the FGM/C sector. According to [UNFPA](#), \$2.8 billion is needed to avert 20 million cases of FGM/C in 2022–2030, yet less than \$300 million is available creating a gap of \$2.5 billion. ⁴ Supported by the Global Platform for Action to End FGM/C, [Kigali Declaration and the Call to Close the Funding Gap](#) was collectively launched at Women Deliver 2023, calling for increased funding to the sector.
- The World Bank has supported numerous initiatives to end FGM/C, amongst those the development of the "Compendium of International and National Legal Frameworks on Female Genital Mutilation". It would be important to see an example of the WB FGM/C- related work in the strategy.

² <https://www.unfpa.org/press/nearly-70-million-girls-face-genital-mutilation-2030-unfpa-warns>

³ <https://endfgmcasia.org/>

⁴ https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Transformative_results_journal_23-online.pdf