

Catholic Relief Services Feedback - World Bank Group Gender Strategy 2024-2030

Introduction

CRS is pleased to offer its feedback on the World Bank Group's (WBG) proposed Gender Strategy 2024-2030. In reviewing the strategy, CRS noted the complementarity between the WBG's strategy and [CRS' Global Gender Strategy for 2020-2030](#). These overlaps and alignments can be found in many areas, which are detailed in this feedback according to the various sections of both strategies.

Contextual Analysis and the place of gender: The contextual analyses of both strategies are very much aligned, including agreement that there have been hard won gains in gender equality, but that significant challenges remain in terms of women's health and other indicators, and in areas such as business and leadership. The CRS gender strategy speaks specifically of the gender gaps in productivity and growth. Yet the CRS strategy, like the World Bank's, makes a compelling case for gender equality, speaking to the positive outcomes that come from gender equality at the individual, household, community, and higher levels and in business and the private sector (pages 7-8).

Gender equality as a human right: Both strategies focus on gender equality as a key aspect of human rights and recognize that it is at the core of sustainable, resilient, and inclusive development. CRS' strategy speaks of gender equality as "foundational for the realization of human dignity, right relations and the achievement of sustainable development outcomes across all sectors" (page 5). For CRS as a Catholic agency, in addition to the development impact, the commitment to gender equality is central to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, Integral Human Development and social equity and inclusion.

Making a case for gender equality: Both strategies devote a good deal of space to making a strong business case for gender equality. CRS' strategy provides examples such as the case of the Fortune 500 companies, where those with the highest representation of women on their boards of directors were more profitable and more efficient on average than those with the lowest. Another example is that of companies with the highest gender diversity in top management outperformed their sector average with a 10% higher return on equity and 170% higher stock price growth.

Women's empowerment and leadership: The World Bank Gender Strategy's focus on women's leadership is very aligned with CRS' Priority Area 1 of its gender strategy. One of the clear outcomes of CRS' gender strategy focuses on women's social capital, mobility, greater self-confidence, and leadership skills (page 17). The World Bank's gender strategy prioritizes women's mobility as an important aspect of empowerment, more so than CRS' strategy.

Engagement of men and boys: Like CRS' global gender strategy, the World Bank strategy "acknowledges the disadvantages facing men and boys" and "proposes to engage men and boys to address issues specific to them as well as those that affect gender equality." Similarly, CRS' gender strategy acknowledges that "men and boys are also impacted by gender inequality."

Humanitarian focus: Both the CRS and the World Bank gender strategies highlight the different gender impacts of humanitarian disasters, although the World Bank focuses on increasing conflict and state fragility in the global context.

Accountability: The focus on accountability in both strategies is another point of alignment. CRS includes a set of minimum standards that, though not required, Country Programs (CPs) and other

teams are encouraged to try and meet as many of the standards as possible to ensure that these teams are prepared to implement gender-responsive programs. Specific standards on accountability include:

1. Ensuring that any established accountability mechanisms are gender sensitive (e.g., confidential, accessible to women, men, boys, and girls (WMBGs) and using consultations of WMBGs in the design of mechanisms)
2. Ensuring all staff using/promoting accountability mechanism are trained in GBV and necessary referral pathways.

Conceptual frameworks: Both CRS and the WBG' gender strategies include a new conceptual framework. Both acknowledge the important impact of systems and institutions on gender outcomes. CRS' strategy specially proposes that creating an enabling environment within the context of fair and just systems includes activities at multiple levels that promote safety and security of all people, as well as just laws and policies that underpin equal rights for all members of society and strong and equitable institutions and cultural and societal norms that respect and promote equality, freedom, and the dignity of all people. The World Bank strategy speaks to the importance of engagement across informal, formal, and traditional political, social, and economic institutions, and places more emphasis on working in the policy arena than CRS' gender strategy.

CRS' Global Gender Strategy draws on the socio-ecological framework (SEF) and posits that truly transformative programming requires working at different, mutually reinforcing levels of the SEF. Working toward gender equality requires acting across multiple levels, based on evidence that has shown that working simultaneously on distinct levels is more effective than focusing on interventions at one single level.

Both strategies emphasize the importance of data collection and evidence-based decision-making, particularly the use of gender analysis as a basis for gender programming, although the World Bank, in its role as a global policy influencing organization, emphasizes support to institutional and policy reforms.

Strategic Objective #1 – Foundational wellbeing: End Gender-based Violence & Elevate Human Capital

Both the CRS and WBG strategies posit that addressing GBV is foundational to the well-being of all people, particularly women and girls. The WBG's Gender Strategy seeks the elimination of all forms of GBV as its first strategic objective. CRS's gender strategy focuses on prevention, mitigation, and response to GBV. CRS' agency approach begins with a commitment to protecting project participants and staff from harm through robust safeguarding and Do No Harm policies and practices. CRS also places a strong emphasis on building staff and partner capacities. Mitigation of GBV risks is a requirement across all CRS' programming. Decreasing GBV requires a community-based, multi-pronged approach and sustained engagement with multiple stakeholders. The most effective initiatives address underlying risk factors for violence, including social norms regarding gender roles and the acceptability of violence.

Strategic Objective #2 - Economic Participation: Expand and Enable Economic Opportunities

While the WBG strategy focuses explicitly on economic opportunities and participation, CRS' Global Gender Strategy frames this issue within the context of women's economic empowerment. The first outcome of the WBG strategy focuses on women's access to jobs and the second outcome area on access to and ownership of assets. Interestingly, the WBG strategy also highlights the importance of

supporting the “care economy” both to enable women with greater time availability and capacity to participate in the economic sector but also to build the future human potential of young children. These are two areas that the CRS Global Gender strategy did not emphasize but are still critical for us to consider in future iterations of our strategy.

Like CRS’ Gender Strategy, the WBG Strategy correctly links the importance of addressing Gender based violence, another strategy objective, with building the human capital necessary for successful economic participation. Both the CRS and WB gender strategies ably highlight rural livelihoods and the importance of women's active participation and the needs and opportunities of investing in women’s businesses.

Strategic Objective #3 – Leadership: Engage Women as Leaders

In this section, the WBG’s strategy focuses on areas that are like strategies outlined in CRS’ Global Gender Strategy. One aspect that is stronger in the WBG Strategy is the mentioning of women’s pivotal roles in natural resource management and climate change. While CRS’ Strategy does not specifically focus on women and climate change, CRS programming does in several Country Programs. For example, CRS Philippines’ *Climate Resilient Cities* project engaged local government units to ensure women as active agents of change and leaders in advancing local climate change action plans and local disaster risk reduction and management plans were not only recognized but actively integrated. In an upcoming pilot, CRS’ multicounty *STaR* project will actively promote women’s leadership in local natural resource management committees for inclusive and sustainable management of dryland restoration activities using the FMNR (farmer managed natural regeneration) approach coupled with social cohesion and conflict resolution processes. These projects in addition to others are anchored in CRS’ longstanding experience in advancing women’s active participation and leadership using proven approaches and tools. Moreover, CRS’ approach to resilience includes a strong gender equality and social inclusion lens, as CRS believes that to reduce vulnerabilities to shocks and stressors and to promote sustainable development and thus strengthening women, men, boys, and girls’ resilience, it is important to understand and address underlying harmful and inequitable gender norms, attitudes, beliefs, and customs. As CRS strengthens its knowledge base on the intersection of climate change and gender equality, the WBS Strategy can certainly be a good pointer in the right direction.

The WBG strategy proposes under Outcome 6, that to advance women’s leadership and participation, women need to be proactively involved in community structures and in service delivery and governance. CRS has done incredible work in that area and invested in tools and approaches across different sectors. For example, CRS’ Women’s Leadership Curriculum, was designed in the context of a multi-year and multi-sectoral to support women in communities to build and strengthen leadership skills. In addition, inclusion of women in water management committees or supporting women-led SMEs are key areas of CRS programming. While a lot of CRS’ work targets community structures, several CPs have also been working at the system’s level by ensuring governance structures at the regional or national level advocate for and support gender equality. In Burundi, CRS’ *Amashiga* project included the implementation of CRS’ signature approach of SMART Couples which was eventually validated for national replication by the Ministry of Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender. In fact, the Ministry has recommended the extension of the SMART Couples approach into other provinces and the integration of the content into trainings by government and NGO activities.

Last, the WBG strategy highlights the role the private sector can play in advancing “leadership diversity through partnerships, networks, and standards to improve gender diversity and inclusion in companies’

leadership and management structures.” This approach to Private Sector Engagement (PSE) differs from CRS’ approach to working with the private sector. At CRS, we use PSE in programming to increase the integrating, layering, and sequencing of activities to build women’s life and professional skills, to support women led SMEs, and to develop and strengthen women’s professional networks by looking at the market systems, engaging key private sector actors, and understanding how programmatic approaches can complement one another to advance gender equality and social inclusion. For example, a women’s financial inclusion project in Zambia mobilized the private sector to take the risk of piloting a mobile app for tuition fee payment that reduced the vulnerabilities associated with time and distance for mothers to pay tuition fees. As demand by mothers helped the project demonstrate a business case, the private sector scaled up the app beyond the project. CRS’ focus on PSE, thus, is more about creating shared value between the private sector and communities we work with, while the WBG strategy speaks more to efforts of building capacities within the private sector. This approach is more aligned with CRS’ REDI commitments- respect, equity, diversity, and inclusion – as well as the Minimum Standards for Operations in the Global Gender Strategy. For the latter, CRS has defined a set of activities to ensure Country Programs are effectively and systematically addressing unconscious gender bias and inequities in professional development. This has also included engaging our partners more directly.

Additional Areas of Consideration for the WBG Gender Strategy

The historic and ongoing urgent challenges are clearly and convincingly presented in Part I of the WBG Gender Strategy. However, key missing elements are the impact of climate change on gender inequality and the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls, including their safety, resilience, economic productivity, and overall wellbeing. Though section 12 describes the opportunities for and importance of women’s leadership in climate action and resilience, it is important to acknowledge the impact of climate change and connections with gender inequality. As highlighted in the WBG’s Climate and Development Brief, it is necessary to address gender, human capital, and climate priorities together. Likewise, CRS is committed to working jointly with women and men in communities to build resilience, mitigate risks of GBV, which are heightened during crises, and address gender inequality as an integral component to promoting equitable outcomes. One of CRS’ priority programming areas outlined in the agency’s Global Gender Strategy is GBV prevention and mitigation, which emphasizes the importance of identifying and mitigating risks related to our programming, addressing contributing factors for GBV, while working to address the underlying causes of GBV, namely power imbalances and gender inequality.

The WBG Gender Strategy proposes to involve men and boys to address issues specific to them and those that affect gender equality (p. ii) and section 14 describes engaging men and boys as an approach to foster their support and gain buy-in for gender equality. It also describes how gender inequality extends beyond women and girls, including the unique issues impacting men and boys. However, the linkages between harmful gender norms and forms of masculinity that have contributed to negative consequences for the health and wellbeing of men and boys are less clear. It is important to make this linkage and demonstrate how gender inequality harms and hinders the development of men and boys, in addition to women and girls. Further, the anticipated approaches to engaging men could be articulated more clearly for stakeholders to have a better understanding of how men will be engaged to address power imbalances and gender inequality. CRS has prioritized working with men and boys to promote and adopt gender equitable forms of masculinity and to transform harmful gender norms and unequal power dynamics. One of the approaches used by CRS globally is the [Journey Towards a Peaceful Masculinity](#), which is a [curriculum](#) for promoting positive masculinity that supports behavior change,

builds socio-emotional skills, and changes social norms. The [results in Ghana](#) also showed improved attitudes towards gender equity and positive masculinity after participating in the program.

The WBG does laudable work to promote gender equality through legal frameworks, policies, government engagement, and more. It is appreciated how the strategy focuses on policy and institutional levels while also acknowledging the importance of addressing gender equality at other levels, such as the examples shared in section 26 on relationships within the home, as well as some examples of efforts to promote changes at an individual level, such as building the digital skills of women and girls (section 47). CRS works across the socio-ecological model, including substantial efforts to promote changes at individual and relational levels, including addressing power imbalances in the home. CRS recognizes the importance of working across all levels to accelerate and sustain progress on gender equality. The strategy document could benefit from a description of the various levels and the WBG's specific areas of focus and the importance of partnering with other stakeholders, including organizations who work at other levels to promote lasting change and progress towards the outcomes in the strategy.

Section 23 says "Local legitimacy is vital for navigating issues entailing changes in established behavior and for ensuring that the 'losers' from such changes accept them." Though the importance of local legitimacy is not disputed, CRS promotes messages about the promotion of gender equality as a win-win (as opposed to there being losers) to gain broader buy-in and support. The re-framing from losing to winning can be better received and is also in line with the framing of "gender equality for all." The strategy describes some of the planned efforts to support clients to enhance policies, institutions, and practices based on gender analysis (section 66). This section could benefit from some additional information about how the support will be provided and how the WBG will identify any institutional and/or programming gaps clients are experiencing and ongoing support to address them. CRS utilizes a [holistic organizational capacity assessment](#) and corresponding instrument to assess organizations to conduct a self-analysis of strengths and challenges, develop an action plan, and improve organizational functions through capacity strengthening. Gender equality integration is one of the key areas of assessment of both programming and organizational structures.

Box 4.1 includes helpful examples of the internal processes aligned with the WBG's gender equality commitments and progress made. However, it is unclear if/how these processes will be a continued area of focus in the new strategy and the interconnected nature between the WBG's internal processes, policies, procedures, staffing, structures, etc. and the achievement of the new gender strategy. CRS' Global Gender strategy includes minimum standards for both programming and operations in recognition that progress towards our goal of gender equality requires organizational practices, policies, and a culture that is conducive for and aligned with CRS' gender equality commitments.

The strategy describes the substantial progress already made by the WBG and describes the forthcoming areas of focus to advance gender equality. This strategy period will present many opportunities for sharing learning across different agencies, institutions, companies, governments, etc. How learning will be shared and what platforms will be leveraged to promote such learning during the implementation of the new strategy, however, do not come out as clearly. Section 73 mentions the WBG will engage and learn from work with CSOs, women's groups and the private sector. More information on the anticipated mechanisms for promoting that learning would be beneficial. If there are such opportunities, CRS will look forward to engaging with the WBG to share lessons learned and good practices.