



FORMAL CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED 2024-2030 WORLD BANK GROUP GENDER STRATEGY

Consultation in collaboration with the Governments of Finland, Norway and Sweden

December 13, 2023
Virtual Consultation

OVERVIEW

On December 13, 2023, the World Bank Group (WBG) held a virtual consultation on the proposed WBG gender strategy 2024-2030. This meeting was co-convened by the secretariats of the World Bank's [Human Rights, Inclusion and Empowerment Umbrella Trust Fund \(HRIE\)](#) and [Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality \(UFGE\)](#), together with [The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland](#), [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway](#), and [The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency \(SIDA\)](#). The discussion aimed to better understand opportunities and challenges for gender equality and human rights, and identify potential areas for collaboration and co-fertilization. Key inputs from the consultation are summarized below, and will be considered in developing and implementing the strategy.

KEY THEMES AND FEEDBACK

The co-conveners explained that the consultation will explore the interlinkages between human rights and gender equality, and how they can be advanced jointly. They expressed appreciation for progress within the WBG, including the content of the draft WBG gender strategy and more explicit human rights perspectives in work towards gender equality and vice versa.

Gender equality as a human right, policy goals and human rights, and transformative gender equality

- A speaker shared the difference between policy goals and human rights, in the context of gender:
 - Policy goals are political commitments measured in quantitative and aggregate outcomes. There is a risk that data can become a proxy for the substantive goal.
 - Human rights are not just political commitments, they are legally binding. The outcome is not only quantitative and aggregate, but also qualitative, as every individual counts.
- It was mentioned that policy goals and human rights can be complementary, as political will is required for respecting and fulfilling legally binding human rights, and both need incentives to succeed.

- The speaker further stated that equality does not imply treating everyone the same, as doing so can reinforce existing disadvantages and patriarchal norms. Equality of opportunity or equality of results was mentioned as a better framework but with some drawbacks. It was proposed to move beyond like treatment and equality of opportunity or results to substantive equality or transformative gender equality, which can be framed along four interacting dimensions:
 - Redistribution: Redress disadvantages associated with gender, especially gendered poverty
 - Recognition: Address stereotyping, stigma, and violence
 - Participation: Facilitate voice (representation) and social inclusion
 - Transformation: Accommodate difference and promote structural change, recognizing that inequality is more than individual acts of prejudice but inheres in the institutions and structures of society

Finally, the speaker mentioned that there is already a widespread commitment to substantive gender equality in international human rights law, but more specificity is needed (such as the four dimensions).

The Maputo Protocol

- The second speaker shared that [The Maputo Protocol](#) is the only regional human rights instrument that focuses on women. It incorporated lessons learned from [The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#). They shared that the Maputo Protocol aligns with existing inputs provided for the WBG Gender strategy, that have been [published online](#). Salient components of the Maputo Protocol that were highlighted include:
 - Speaks to all [Sustainable development goals](#) (SDGs), not just SDG 5
 - Drafted as a human rights-based Protocol, as opposed to a programmatic document
 - Recognizes an asymmetrical approach to equality - women can be treated differently than men in some instances
 - Focuses on women, peace and security
 - Focuses on reproductive rights
 - Recognizes the importance of women's work in their home
 - Mentions informal work, the lack of recognition of the informal sector, the precarity of the informal sector and need for social security
 - Mentions modifying social cultural patterns and behavior
 - Mentions Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), including rehabilitation
- It was mentioned that if states do not implement, having a human right on the paper does not always translate into getting to enjoy it.
- Referencing the work of Sally Engle Merry, the speaker talked about *Venularization* – communicating with people in a way that they understand. María Lugones’ work was invoked to talk about *World Travelling* – understanding the audience’s worldview rather than imposing one’s own. Torild Skaard’s book *Continent of mothers, continent of hope: Understanding and promoting development in Africa today* was also mentioned to recommend that longer reports could be trimmed down and preceded by a summary, to make them more accessible. It was added that human rights could be advanced by having a conversation about them rather than imposing them.
- Finally, the speaker suggested that the WBG could encourage government clients to spend less on defense and more on social spending.

The WBG Gender Strategy

- A representative from the WBG’s gender strategy team shared that global consultations had been conducted to inform the proposed strategy, which will be released in early 2024.

- The proposed strategy makes various references to human rights and a rights-based approach. It recognizes gender equality as a principle of international law mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and strongly aligns with SDG 5, and CEDAW.
- These components of the proposed strategy were highlighted in response to earlier discussions:
 - Elevated focus on gender-based violence (GBV), which is recognized as one of the most egregious manifestations of gender inequality and a very prevalent human rights violation
 - Sexual and reproductive health and rights as central elements
 - Recognition that achieving gender equality requires an increased urgency in the face of sluggish progress, backlash and even reversals on gender equality
 - Attention to working with both formal and informal institutions – not only laws and policies, but also norms, behaviors, mindsets and practices
 - The importance of partnerships and collective action to advance gender equality

Entry points for human rights work at the WBG

- Another speaker shared that although the World Bank Group is not a rights-based organization, the WBG can support its members in advancing human rights and realizing their related obligations through financing or technical assistance.
- Human rights elements are reflected in the WBG’s policy frameworks, especially the [environmental and social framework \(ESF\)](#).
- A few gender equality-focused provisions of the ESF that were highlighted, included the standard on labor and working conditions, the standard on community health and safety, the standard on involuntary resettlement and the standard for indigenous peoples.
- Other instruments linked to human rights work were mentioned, including legal reforms supported by Development Policy operations and Program for Results.
- The speaker said that the links between human rights and gender equality were made but not as thoroughly as needed.

[The Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality \(UFGE\)](#)

- A representative from WBG’s UFGE shared that their work is rooted in human rights and aims to accelerate knowledge and evidence - understanding analytical underpinnings for informed decision making within the WBG, and to promote gender equality externally.
- They further shared that the UFGE has financed a portfolio of 239 projects, 101 in low- and middle-income countries, with over 88 percent of them being either [IDA countries](#) or fragile and conflicted situations.
- Examples of UFGE’s impact included catalyzing more employer support for working parents in Vietnam, contributing to a law that penalizes sexual harassment in Lebanon, and informing policy change in Niger addressing norms on child marriage.
- It was mentioned that the UFGE aims for impact by influencing project design – 300 World Bank projects are being informed by UFGE evidence. Further, evidence is informing policy dialogue in 105 countries and the private sector also changing their policies.

[The Human Rights, Inclusion and Empowerment \(HRIE\) Trust Fund](#)

- A representative from the WBG’s HRIE shared perspectives on human rights and gender equality:
 - [Human rights](#) provide a universal set of norms that enhances the advancement of gender discussion, influencing laws globally. Provisions from the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and other instruments that advance women's rights and gender equality, are incorporated into national constitutions, domestic legislation, and regional instruments.

- The language of human rights provides the moral legitimacy to support gender equality, supporting women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities at grassroots to claim their rights.
- Legal force: Besides moral weight, human rights have legal implications. These are helpful not only when one succeeds, but also if one fails in court, by building awareness and mobilizing.
- State duties as a central part of human rights: Human rights create national obligations to promote women's rights and gender equality.
- The speaker concluded with appreciation that the WBG'S proposed gender strategy has strong and explicit human rights language. They added that it takes time and patience to work with the human rights-based framework, and that such work should happen both from the top down and bottom up, for lasting results.

The importance of gender equality lens

- The next speaker shared that despite international norms protecting human rights, women, especially those in vulnerable conditions, disproportionately face gender-based violence. A gender equality lens is crucial to fully grasp such complex, systemic discrimination, as it brings into focus:
 - Power Dynamics: Unearthing structural inequalities articulated through power relations
 - Policy Impacts: Understanding how some policies may negatively impact women disproportionately
 - Pathways for Action: Formulating robust solutions to empower women and combat persistent discrimination
- They concluded by stressing the importance of partnerships and data, working with governments and other stakeholders to identify gaps, and generating effective solutions to empower women and address compounding forms of discrimination.

The Global Financing Facility (GFF)

- A representative from the GFF shared that they focus on improving health outcomes for women, children, and adolescents, prioritizing sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR). They added that their investments ensure healthcare that includes rights and decision-making. For example, when to have children, how many to have and access to health services and information.
- It was further mentioned that the GFF mainly supports countries with high burdens of maternal mortality. This involves a broader approach to health systems strengthening but includes access to health services and family planning for women and adolescent girls.
- The GFF is also involved in legal reform, advocating and ensuring sexual and reproductive health rights. Examples of GFF'S work included supporting policies and reforms to enable access to safe, evidence based, post-abortion care. Another example was school health clubs for young girls, so they can have access to critical sexual and reproductive health information and can engage in informative discussions with peers.
- Lastly, it was mentioned that GFF is a 'tool' leveraging World Bank financing instruments for increased focus on SRHR. For instance, during the design of projects, adolescents are consulted to ensure that the services are friendly, appropriate, and relevant to their needs.

Women Business and the Law (WBL)

- A representative from the WBG's WBL initiative shared that over the past 14 years their work has been vital in tracking how laws impact women's economic opportunities and identifying gaps in

gender equality. They added that the pace of gender-equal legal reforms has slowed in the last 20 years. Women globally still only have three fourths of the economic rights of men.

- It was shared that the WBL offers technical assistance for legal reforms to various countries. They are also exploring legal barriers for women with disabilities and looking at laws affecting LGBTI people. In 2019, an index was developed to measure laws that impact women's work.
- WBL's focus on measurement and reporting was highlighted, which helps in rigorously tracking progress, while striving for better results and impact.
- WBL has grown from tracking 100 economies initially to over 190 today, offering global coverage.
- The speaker concluded by sharing that the WBL'S data and analysis are available for public use and encouraged its use to fuel policy dialogues around women's rights worldwide.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

- A GBV expert from the WBG stated that they address issues like GBV and human rights through two primary ways:
 - Project design: Due diligence and the corporate mandate help prevent the risk of sexual exploitation, abuse, or harassment within various projects. A survivor-centric approach ensures confidentiality, safety, and upholds the human rights of the survivors. A network of GBV focal points ensure this in each region.
 - Lending operations: Ensuring gender-related interventions based on best practices are incorporated in different development sectors. Specific lending operations addressing gender or GBV have been initiated. Tools and extensive training are provided to specialists who work on these projects to enable them to adopt the best practices on GBV following a gender and human rights approach. Prevention strategies are aimed at tackling the root causes of gender violence, specifically gender inequality and power dynamics, while responding to violence follows WHO guidelines for essential services.
 - It was added that international standards and protocols are followed when providing support to countries in developing and implementing GBV prevention legal and policy frameworks.
- The speaker concluded by mentioning the complexities and need for specialized support in contexts like Fragile, Conflict and Violence affected settings and forced displacement. The work with women and girls in these contexts must recognize their potential for agency, resilience, and partnership.

Conclusions

- The co-conveners of the meeting highlighted the importance of a human rights-based approach (HRBA) that goes beyond looking at macro-results to focus on who is left behind and why, upholding every person's human rights. The human rights-based approach also enhances accountability and transparency, which are key for any development agency's legitimacy.
- It was suggested that gender and human rights analyses be integrated in projects and programs:
 - **Thorough risk analysis** to mitigate potential harm
 - **Early integration of human rights and gender equality perspectives**, including in initial context analysis, planning, implementation and monitoring stages.
 - **Use decisions and guidance from international and regional human rights mechanisms** for project planning and implementation.
 - **Co-operation among World Bank trust funds**: continue collaboration between UFGE and HRIE to strengthen operations.
- Calls were made for early and clear integration of a human rights-based approach and gender-equality perspective in all projects and an institutionalization of the collaboration practices established, including in the context of implementing the WBG gender strategy.

In the closing, it was emphasized that this was a first concrete conversation on this important topic and that there would be follow-up. Throughout the presentations, it became clear that although few needed to be convinced about the inter-linkages between human rights and gender equality, there was room for a more thorough, consistent and explicit approach in making the links in their everyday work.

CO-ORGANIZING ENTITIES

- Human Rights, Inclusion and Empowerment Umbrella Trust Fund (HRIE)
- Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality (UFGE)
- The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway
- The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

- University of Oxford
- School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
- The European Commission
- Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- UFGE and HRIE partners

World Bank Group and affiliates

- Gender Unit
- Environment and International Law Department (LEGEN)
- Women Business and the Law (WBL)
- Global Financing Facility (GFF)