

Recommendations to further strengthen the World Bank Draft Gender Strategy

-based on the recommendations and analyses from Kvinna till Kvinna and partner organisations

November 28, 2023



The recommendations below are a complement to the first round of recommendations discussed at a meeting between Kvinna till Kvinna, partner organisations and the World Bank gender team in February 2023, as well as input from Rwandan women's rights organisations shared in a consultation with World Bank gender team during Women Deliver in Kigali in July. They are based on an analysis of the draft gender strategy, focusing on the main and most important messages that we believe cannot be left out of the final version.

We have made note of and appreciated the efforts made by the World Bank gender team to make the consultation process of the new gender strategy inclusive. We also note and welcome that parts of our input and recommendations in the first round have been incorporated into the draft gender strategy.

Signatories:

Coalition Margins, North Macedonia

CRTD.A, Lebanon

Egnalegna, Lebanon

Feminist Action Development Ambition (FADA), Rwanda

Gender Alliance for Development Centre, Albania

Haguruka, Rwanda

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Banja Luka, BiH

Iraqi Women and Future, Iraq

Kosovo Women's Network, Kosovo

Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation

Reactor, North Macedonia

Rwanda Women's Network, Rwanda

Summary of WB Gender Strategy Analysis

We note that the World Bank Gender Strategy 2024-2030 recognises **gender equality** as an intrinsic human right throughout the strategy, that not only shapes development outcomes but also fosters a stronger commitment to **gender-inclusive development efforts**. We appreciate that inclusion and LGBTQI+ rights is included in the draft strategy, we however strongly believe there is room for more emphasis on **intersectionality** and an opportunity to enhance the references to SOGI, ethnic diversity, the rural-urban divide, and age diversity within the strategy. Understanding the current wave of global anti-gender rhetoric and sentiments, keeping the inclusion of SOGI issues in the strategy is of utmost importance. The strategy has a first attempt to a **rights language**, particularly regarding Sexual and reproductive health and rights and right to house, land and property and descent work need to be underscored and stronger established as critical rights to increase gender equality.

Yet, there is room for more emphasis on **intersectionality** and an opportunity to enhance the references to ethnic diversity, the rural-urban divide, and age diversity within the strategy. The Gender Strategy should delve into intersectionality comprehensively, extending beyond conventional categories. This includes considering the unique challenges faced by refugees and other marginalized groups, making the approach more inclusive.

The World Bank Group must be reminded of the current context of women's rights and the **regression in gender equality, shrinking space and anti-gender movement highlighted in the current global context**. It is crucial to vocally address these issues within the strategy. Acknowledging the ongoing war on gender and prioritizing funding for women's rights organizations, which play a pivotal role in this fight, is of utmost importance. In the current global context of a backlash for women's rights sexual and reproductive health and rights and right to house, land and property and descent work need to be underscored.

We welcome the mentioning **of integrating gender analysis in macroeconomic policies. However, the strategy is still based on a lack of critique of austerity and fiscal consolidation. Research has shown for decades austerity measures undermine gender equality and the women are shock absorbers for austerity**. Relying heavily on micro-level analyses and approaches to tackle structural barriers, and advance gender equality is not a sustainable approach, given the World Bank's macroeconomic impact.

The current approach to understanding **drivers of change** appears somewhat limited, where *innovation* is predominantly centred on data-driven solutions and behavioural analysis, which is overly micro-level and technocratic, and is not a good way to understand social changes. While we appreciate highlighting the need of *acting collectively*, the strategy does not sufficiently highlight the vital importance of supporting civil society. In line with Weldon, S. and Htun, M. (2013), we contend that meaningful change stems from **collective action in civil society**, notably through a robust feminist movement bolstered by civil society support, which can be more influential than a progressive government alone.¹ We recommend a shift in focus towards empowering progressive forces within civil society as drivers of change.

In the World Bank's poly crisis approach Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) are emphasised also in terms of financing. The gender strategy has to be closely corresponding to the FCV strategy. To

¹ Weldon, S. and Htun, M.: 'Feminist Mobilisation and Progressive Policy Change', 2013, p.231–247.

enhance the strategy's effectiveness, we advocate for a closer alignment with the **Women, Peace, and Security Agenda**. During periods of transitioning back to peace, women often face significant losses in economic, labour, and financial opportunities. While the strategy acknowledges the challenges men and boys encounter in social and economic reintegration after conflict, it falls short in adequately addressing the reduction of women's economic prospects to traditional roles in post-conflict settings. It is imperative that the World Bank Group references and integrates the WPS agenda within the Gender Strategy. The omission of this critical framework is a significant concern. Moreover, highlight the need for fiscal and financial strengthening initiatives that link to the private sector and align with the principles of Women, Peace, and Security. The strategy does not **explicitly address conflict analyses, post-conflict reforms, or recovery programs**. However, it consistently underscores the significance of incorporating gender analyses into policy formulation, budget management, climate analytics, project design, and institutional reforms.

We also observe inadequate attention to addressing the prevalence of the **informal sector** as the primary employer of women and the associated barriers to transitioning into the formal sector. The informal sector is unorganised and a vulnerable sector with lack of protection and unionisation. The strategy's solution to gender inequality sometimes looks like increased **female labour participation**. Research clearly show that labour and income is critical for women's increased influence and power. However, that is not enough and structural changes in terms of strengthening the state's role, laws, norms, and the care economy are necessary. Additionally, we suggest expanding the focus **beyond private sector jobs** to encompass public sector opportunities, as these often offer more social protection.

We welcome that **GBV** is appropriately prioritized as an overall objective in the strategy but needs to refer to root cause analysis/ power differentials that cause GBV. We recommend that attention must be given to addressing **structural inequalities and barriers** faced by women, particularly by creating increased opportunities for women in both FCV and post-conflict contexts. Recognizing the importance of addressing GBV, it is also vital to acknowledge its various forms and their impact on macroeconomic efforts for gender equality. Consider revising the language related to gender-based violence (GBV) to a more attainable goal, such as "decrease" rather than "end" to ensure the objectives are realistic and achievable. **Sextortion**, less recognized but significant, often intensifies during and after conflicts. It involves the use of coercive power of authority to obtain sexual favours, rather than through physical violence or force. In conflict-affected areas, sextortion is often so common that no one even takes notice. In post-conflict countries and protracted crises, where rule of law is weak and corruption common, sextortion is often widespread and normalised.²

We welcome the strategy's intent to **broaden engagement with CSOs** including women's rights organisations. However, for this intent to be successful, it is crucial to cultivate an open and supportive environment for women's rights organisations meaningful participation and to provide adequate funding and to facilitate the intended shift from humanitarian to development interventions in FCV contexts. However, more **formal channels for consultations** must be set up to make the country offices accountable.

We appreciate the strategy's consistent emphasis on **integrating gender analysis** into for example, policy development, budget management, climate assessments, project planning, and institutional reforms. We also welcome the intention to enhance the existing gender tag-system with

² <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-they-came-together-not-to-be-silenced-gender-based-violence-in-conflict-the-role-of-womens-rights-organisations.pdf>

mechanisms for internal accountability to address gender disparities. However, there's a need for more **comprehensive implementation planes and guidelines** to be developed including multidimensional result framework, particularly on the nation level along with the **Country Partnership Framework**.

The Mid-Term Review³ of the current Gender strategy from 2021 clearly shows that “operational staff report that this evidence can be difficult to access, overly technical, and of limited operational relevance if not accompanied by staff designated to support work on gender... Staff typically do not read gender-related knowledge products if those products are too technical or do not immediately seem applicable within the country or sector context. Gender-based violence is one specific area where operational teams find it difficult to translate evidence into operations.....In the World Bank, no single unit is responsible for coordinating expertise to support the gender strategy or ensuring the adequacy of capacity and time allocation, which leads to variability. **The World Bank need to resource the implementation of the strategy both in terms of knowledge and with finance.**

Furthermore, we want to emphasize the importance of elevating the **status** of the **World Bank Gender Strategy 2024-2030** to **mandatory** and more clearly interlinked to The Evaluation Roadmap, so that gender equality is integrated to the overall direction for the WBG.

1. Women’s Rights Organisation’s Influence

- The strategy should include provisions on **increased funding and influence for women's rights organisations**. These organisations require support, particularly in financial matters, expenditure, and investments, to enhance their impact.
- Set up **formal channels where CSOs can have a continuous dialogue on country partnership frameworks**. And make sure that gender inequalities are analysed, and measures are taken to decrease these through means such as Country Gender Assessments, Regional Gender Action Plans, and Gender Strategy Implementation Plans. A follow-up system of these tools needs to be put in place. Tracking progress through mid-term and end-of-cycle reviews is important to enhance accountability.

2. Feminist Economy

- Stress the importance of **gender-responsive budgeting** on country level and call for robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the implementation of gender-related initiatives. Continue encouraging and supporting states to institutionalise gender responsive budgeting based on the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Gender Framework. Strengthen the knowledge and capacities related to the PEFA Gender Framework, ensuring it aligns with the objectives of the Gender Strategy.
- Stress the importance of **anti-corruption** efforts within the strategy, ensuring that measures to combat corruption are adequately addressed, especially given the FCV contexts that are especially sensitive, including sextortion that reduce women economic empowerment.
- Include **reference to aligning legislation with ILO labour standards** and place more emphasis on the issue of women's overrepresentation in the informal sector and lack of social protection.
- The importance of accessible and **quality care services**, encompassing childcare, eldercare, and support for individuals with disabilities, in facilitating greater economic engagement, particularly for caregivers, predominantly women, needs to be highlighted stronger. The strategy needs to stronger **emphasise the state's role** in providing these services. Further attention is required to ensure the accessibility and universality of care services.

³ [World Bank Group Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review](#)

3. FCV and Climate Crises

- Recommend the creation of financial programs that foster social cohesion and inclusivity, particularly at the community level, contributing to peace and security, including social protection for the most vulnerable.
- Support feminist activists to be visible and **meaningfully engaged in peace processes throughout conflict and post-conflict situations and in climate** (adaptation and mitigation) decision-making. Demand governments listen to their recommendations and utilise their expertise.
- The strategy should strongly connect with the World Bank's Strategy on Fragility, Conflict, Violence (FCV), or the UN's Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.
- The **nexus of gender, conflict and environment and climate crises** needs to be strengthened. Incorporating climate justice and resilience into the strategy is essential because climate-related challenges exacerbate fragility, which in turn may exacerbate gender inequalities and GBV. Currently, the strategy does not comprehensively address the gender-related aspects of natural disasters and climate change.

4. Strengthening knowledge and capacity on gender and on intersectionality within the World Bank

- The inclusion of funding to **enhance technical knowledge** on gender and on intersectionality within both country offices and headquarters is crucial for the implementation of the Gender Strategy. We recommend hosting and engaging external experts on these subjects to facilitate capacity building.
- There is one mentioning of a **wider ambition to strengthen the technical capacity of WBG staff**. This is mentioned in relation to a new emphasis on ending GBV, expanding “enabling services”, engaging women as leaders as well as including all groups marginalised because of gender. However, as previously noted, the strategy would benefit from a more thorough incorporation of intersectional perspectives to ensure a holistic and inclusive strategy that genuinely addresses the multidimensional nature of inequality.
- The strategy refers to the need to update and create **new guidance notes** to support and monitor the implementation of the strategy. Consultation with the civil society on these notes is important. The strategy does not mention staffing, resources, or accessibility for civil society organisations in relation to the World Bank **Gender Labs**.
- Although the World Bank Gender Strategy does acknowledge the importance of **intersectionality** and the unique vulnerabilities that arise from the interplay of gender, ethnicity, indigenous identity, and disability, the strategy falls short in consistently integrating this intersectional perspective across its framework. Notably, the strategy too often overlooks crucial dimensions like age, rural-urban disparities, refugee status, and other pertinent factors that also contribute to complex layers of disadvantage and inequality. A more comprehensive approach would require a more thorough incorporation of these intersecting aspects to ensure a holistic and inclusive strategy that genuinely addresses the multidimensional nature of inequality.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Encourage alignment between the **global gender strategy and country-level strategies**, emphasizing that the global strategy should inform the development of Country Partnership Frameworks and local strategies.

- The current monitoring framework of gender in WBs operations are “every Country Partnership Framework (CPF) with a **Country Gender Assessment**, established Regional Gender Action Plans to provide strategic direction and accountability for implementation, and developed institutional Gender Strategy Implementation Plans (GSIP) for IFC and MIGA. In many countries, the WBG has complemented CPFs with **Country Gender Action Plans.**” (p. 20) and “enhance gender outcome-orientation on country level”. “The WBG will better integrate gender analysis in its **core diagnostics** such as Public Expenditure Reviews, Poverty Assessments, Country Climate and Development Reports, Risk and Resilience Assessments and Country Economic Memoranda.” (p.22) To be able to live up to the high ambitions there need to be increased funding for staff with knowledge and experience of gender and have dialogue with WROs (paid consultants).
- We welcome the recent introduction of “**High-Level Outcomes (HLO) in CPFs created an opportunity to prioritize and elevate gender outcomes in country engagement....** Identifying gender outcomes as HLOs or standalone objectives that can be measured represents a higher level of ambition for CPFs that previously featured gender as a cross-cutting issue with sex-disaggregated project level results indicators” (p. 26)
- The WB has also high ambitions of “to **strengthen accountability** and create opportunities to learn lessons and inform future operations, project evaluations—including the Implementation Completion Report and the IEG Implementation Completion and Results Report Reviews and Expanded Project Supervision Reports—can report on and assess gender outcomes in all gender-tagged/flagged operations. Other options to support gender results in implementation include regular updates through Implementation Status Reports and requiring Mid-Term Reviews to discuss progress and implementation issues.” (p. 25). Again, this needs resources both with funding and knowledge.
- The WBG **Gender Strategy results framework** will be developed through consultations with internal and external stakeholders to capture the impact of WBG support. It will build on the existing monitoring tools with indicators across the public and private sectors to monitor the outcomes and outputs of WBG operations. **For a stronger focus on outcomes, new mechanisms will be introduced to support internal accountability, including through enhancements to country engagement products that are discussed at the Board.** We underline that WROs must be consulted during this process. We appreciate that “The Evolution Roadmap and revamped **Corporate Scorecard** will complement these efforts to improve gender outcome orientation and monitoring. The WBG will also continue to promote gender equality through its internal processes.” (p. 27)
- The draft Gender Strategy makes references to an **outcome-oriented results framework** to be developed through consultations with internal and external stakeholders. The development of this framework should be done in close **collaboration with women’s rights organisations.**
- The strategy should include the **Independent Evaluation Groups’** need to put stronger emphasis on research and evaluations on gender and women’s rights, and the nexus of climate crises, gender, and conflict.
- **The MTR on the current strategy clearly pointed out many aspects of the lack of capacity of technical staff on gender.**
 - **Senior gender advisors** at national offices will be instrumental to implement the Gender Strategy.
 - **More resources in terms of knowledge and funding.**
- The Gender Strategy Result Framework must **align with the Corporate Score Cards** in the Evolution Road Map.