



#AccelerateEquality



WORLD BANK GROUP  
Gender

# WORLD BANK GROUP 2024-2030 GENDER STRATEGY CONSULTATION MISSION FEEDBACK SUMMARY

**October 17-18, 2023**

**Nouakchott, Mauritania**

**Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations**

## MISSION OVERVIEW

On October 17 and 18, 2023, the World Bank Group conducted a series of consultations in Mauritania on the proposed World Bank Group Gender Strategy 2024-2030 with development partners, including United Nations agencies, and civil society organizations. These discussions aimed to engage, learn, get feedback, better understand opportunities and challenges for gender equality and empowerment, and identify potential areas for collaboration. Key inputs from the consultations are summarized below and will be considered in developing the strategy. Detailed meeting summaries are provided in the annexes.

## KEY MESSAGES AND FEEDBACK

- **Education and awareness:** Initiating gender equality education at an early age, whether in preschool, primary school, or within families, is essential. Sensitizing adolescents to gender stereotypes and women's rights is fundamental, making it clear that female emancipation does not conflict with the teachings of Islam.
- **Involving men and boys** in promoting positive masculinity is crucial. Encouraging young men to become allies for gender equality is an important step in changing attitudes and behaviors.
- **Media and digital use:** Media, including social media, can be a powerful tool for educating and sensitizing adolescent girls. It is important to create ethical digital content that tactfully addresses gender issues, aiming to foster harmony within families rather than creating divisions or fractures.
- **Freedom of Speech:** It is essential to encourage adolescent girls to speak out and denounce violence against women. Empowering girls' voices, drawing on examples of movements like [#BalanceTonPorc](#) ([#MeToo movement](#)), can contribute to breaking the silence and raising awareness about violence against women. Sensitizing about cases of rape, including incidents such as the mayor who assaulted two young sisters and the father who raped his two daughters, is crucial to highlight the reprehensible nature of such actions.

- **Vocational training:** Offering short and technical vocational training to adolescent girls who choose this path can help build skills and foster financial independence. It also contributes to alleviating poverty among women and breaking dependency on men.
- **Collective action to strengthen accountability:** It is crucial to exert pressure on the government to adopt gender policies and ensure effective policy management. Civil society organizations and actors play a key role in advocacy. The recent law on the reform of public education is not adapted to Mauritania's realities and poses a risk of exacerbating school dropout rates. Immediate attention is required to address problems related to infrastructure and human resources, including insufficient schools, classrooms, benches, understaffing of teachers, and low pay in precarious conditions. A recent evaluation revealed that only 5% of teachers have the necessary proficiency to deliver lessons.
- **Data collection and access:** Collecting and analyzing disaggregated data on adolescent girls' health, justice, and education is essential to better understand the challenges they face and to inform the design of policies and programs. Currently, existing data are manually transcribed into paper notebooks and registers in hospitals and courts; data are available, but not widely without digital transcription.
- **Tailoring based on geographical, social, and ethnic contexts:** Considering geographical, social, and ethnic disparities in the promotion of gender equality is critical. Policies and programs should be tailored based on local contexts.
- **Sociocultural, institutional, and economic barriers** must be proactively addressed. Areas of needed focus include raising awareness, fostering innovation, and challenging traditions that impede gender equality. At times, aspirations for modernity may conflict with a few Islamic precepts, necessitating careful consideration and trade-offs.
- **Economic inclusion:** It is crucial to encourage the inclusion of adolescent girls in the economy by supporting their access to training, information, and financing. Elevating women beyond micro-projects to more ambitious endeavors and facilitating their access to SMEs or macro-projects will enhance self-reliance and financial autonomy.
- Promoting gender equality in Mauritania, especially among adolescent girls, necessitates a **holistic approach involving actors at all levels of society**. Addressing the roots of gender inequalities, raising awareness, and training and encouraging the active participation of young people in the fight for equality are crucial components of this comprehensive strategy.

# ANNEX 1: FORMAL CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED 2024-2030 WORLD BANK GROUP GENDER STRATEGY WITH DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

**October 17, 2023**

**Hôtel Mauricenter, Nouakchott, Mauritania**

## **Participating organizations:**

- Agence Française de Développement (AFD)
  - AISER
  - Association des Femmes Chefs de Famille (AFCF)
  - Club des Entrepreneurs de Mauritanie (CEM)
  - Ecodev
  - International Organization for Migration (IOM)
  - L'Association de Défense des Droits des Femmes (ADDFM)
  - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
  - Office of UN Resident Coordinator, Mauritania
  - SOS Exclus
  - SWEDD Mauritania
  - Union des Jeunes Entrepreneurs (UJEM)
  - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Mauritania
  - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Mauritania
  - United Nations World Food Programme
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- The low presence of women on the boards of directors of public companies or in managerial positions is influenced by societal pressure, limiting women's ambitions. Collaborative efforts are needed to help Mauritanian women break free from this situation.
  - Girls' education in Mauritania lags significantly behind other countries due to high school dropout rates, early marriages, and precarious household conditions. Families often prioritize the education of boys.
  - Women's lack of agency and a dearth of female elites claiming their rights contribute to a situation where women may hold different views on the concept of emancipation.
  - Household stability in Mauritania is threatened by a record divorce rate, leading to violence at all family levels, including domestic and sexual violence. For instance, the case of a mayor who assaulted two sisters, or a father who raped his two daughters was cited in the discussion. Challenges such as limited access to justice for women, under-representation in judicial positions, and the inability of women to pass on nationality, among other factors, create deep-seated discrimination that destabilizes families and increases poverty among women.
  - Discussants suggested that the World Bank Group should implement a strategy tailored to the context to enhance women's ability to protect themselves. Women's health issues and infant mortality rates are high in Mauritania due to inadequate care quality and a shortage of health posts.
  - Women often marry precipitously in Mauritania for financial reasons (for example, having too many people to feed) and out of fear of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and births. Promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is essential.

- A United Nations initiative empowers women to select their own development projects and fosters collaboration. Examples include women who choose to work on projects related to couscous, veils, and dyeing.
- Despite the prevalent issue of rape in Mauritania, women are often afraid to file a report out of fear of imprisonment or lack of justice. It is imperative to shift this cultural mindset.
- Mainstreaming gender into development policies remains a challenge for both international and national institutions. To address this, it is crucial to support Gender Sector Units, ensuring the integration of a gender perspectives in the development of various national policies and strategies, while also advocating for gender-responsive budgeting. Additionally, promoting favorable working conditions for women, such as flexible working hours, teleworking, and provisions for childcare and paternity leave, is essential. Achieving sustainable development requires the collaborative contribution of all stakeholders with no exceptions. In rural areas, over 15% of women lack access to education and training, highlighting a pressing need for intervention. Effectively combating violence against women necessitates the establishment of accessible legal services, and the training of paralegals across all regions (wilayas), particularly in rural areas, is imperative to empower women to stand up against violence.
- Women's limited access to credit in Mauritania results in reliance on microcredits when macro credits could be more beneficial. Supporting women and providing financial education is essential.
- A comprehensive assessment of the status of women in all sectors is needed, and the state should invest more in gender-disaggregated data to identify obstacles and challenges and enable the design of more effective policies to reduce disparities and achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.
- The key challenge for women is achieving financial autonomy. It's crucial to raise awareness and promote women's entrepreneurship training, implement tailored financial mechanisms, enhance the image of women entrepreneurs, scale-up women led enterprises, and support female entrepreneurship and participation in governing bodies. Additionally, we should highlight that divorced women are often invisible in the political and economic sphere.
- Prioritizing training before granting loans, reforming women's project financing, and encouraging banks to support loans to women are essential to foster women's financial independence.
- Promoting women's emancipation, creating a network of champions, and strengthening call centers are crucial. Urgent attention is needed to address the absence of a national strategy for tackling the issue of child beggars.
- Women's absence in the spheres of justice in Mauritania should be addressed, and UNDP's initiative in this regard should be strengthened.
- Competition among women's associations leads to overlaps and a lack of synergy.
- Establishing a strong advocacy system to liberate women's voices is necessary, even for educated women who remain silent in the face of aggression.
- Farming systems in Mauritania are not suitable for women's needs, leading to the failure of women's farming activities. Training and strengthening their management skills and personal development capacities are necessary to sustain women's efforts.
- Gender strategies often focus on development policies but should be rooted in the community, following the example of the concept of sponsorship called "mbadiane gor" in Senegal.
- Women can play a role in environmental preservation and household self-sufficiency projects but need access to land.
- Agrs [Activités Génératrices de Revenus]: Income Generating Activities are insufficient to increase women's income in Mauritania due to small revenues (not exceeding 20,000 mru or 30,000 mru), limiting progress.
- There is a lack of specialized training tailored to the needs of women.

- The law must protect women, and women must be educated and financially self-sufficient and independent.
- Inclusion of boys in gender issues is often overlooked. For example, in Pakistan, it is crucial to educate men about respecting women to achieve equality. Equality must be pursued through collaborative efforts from both men and women

## ANNEX 2: FORMAL CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED 2024-2030 WORLD BANK GROUP GENDER STRATEGY WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

**October 18, 2023**

**World Bank Group Office, Trarza, Mauritania**

### **Participating organizations:**

- Debbo Consulting
  - Mauritanian Business Center
  - Mutuelle des Associations Féminines d'Epargne et de Crédit (MAFEC)
  - Union des Jeunes Entrepreneurs
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- The proposed World Bank Group Gender Strategy must take into account the expectations of a diverse society.
  - It is important to note the specific challenges that women and girls face, including lacking self-confidence, falling victim to stereotypes, and not knowing where to seek help upon being assaulted.
  - There is a need to communicate with all stakeholders, including village chiefs, associations, and families, to ensure that women's involvement in social and economic progress is well understood.
  - Projects such as "My Project, My Future" by the Ministry of Employment have demonstrated the women's reliability in terms of repayment, but women tend to apply for very limited financial support.
  - There is insufficient mentoring support for women at the state level.
  - Women are underrepresented in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), making it crucial to help them overcome the challenges tied to smaller structures and facilitating their access to more ambitious projects.
  - The number of women registered in the one-stop shop is very limited. Women are more likely to participate in the informal sector and are underrepresented in the formal sector. Facilitating this transition is essential.
  - The "store" concept project aims to unite women for the marketing of their products by bringing together different brands.
  - Sociological studies have shown the dynamism of Mauritanian women in the 1990s, but this phenomenon seems to be declining due to modernization and the tightening of the conditions for success. It is essential to conduct in-depth studies on the disinvolvement of women to formulate meaningful recommendations.
  - It is important to promote women without disrupting social stratification. The issue of intersectionality is crucial, as well as addressing the challenges related to self-confidence and traditions.
  - Emphasizing the importance of research in detecting, observing, diagnosing, measuring, and informing about specific gender inequalities is essential. This knowledge helps in understanding, providing evidence, and making arguments to expose and address these inequalities. These actions are crucial for constructing adequate, reliable, and "scientific" arguments for the development of policies, strategies, and programs, as well as for effective advocacy that is legitimate and successful.

## ANNEX 3: FORMAL CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED 2024-2030 WORLD BANK GROUP GENDER STRATEGY WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

**October 18, 2023**

**World Bank Group Office, Trarza, Mauritania**

**Participating organizations:**

- AISER
  - Art Galle, Nouakchott
  - Association des Femmes Chefs de Famille (AFCF)
  - EDUC Des Filles
  - Femmes Leader pour le Développement
  - L'Association de Défense des Droits des Femmes (ADDF)
  - L'Association Mauritanienne pour la santé de la mère et de l'Enfant (AMSME)
  - Observatoire du Genre de l'Université de Nouakchott
  - SOS Exclus
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- Some questions that arose during the discussion included: How can we work with adolescent girls to cultivate and advocate for gender equality? How best can we address the issues faced by adolescent girls? When addressing these issues, should we initiate efforts in preschools, primary schools, or within families?
  - There is a need to embrace positive masculinity and involve men in addressing these issues. An inclusive approach is crucial for societal progress.
  - In Mauritania, there is a mindset issue regarding gender issues. Society is entrenched in stereotypes that require combatting through awareness-raising. The concept of gender is not universally accepted in Mauritania, and efforts must be made to foster understanding.
  - Behavioral change stems from action. It's crucial to look beyond barriers and exploit hidden opportunities. For instance, encouraging rape survivors to inspire others and foster connections between the community base and leaders. Resignation to fate should be avoided, as it stifles innovation.
  - Implement awareness-raising campaigns in the most remote rural areas of the country on women's rights, aspirations, and the stereotypes affecting them.
  - Education is key to addressing women's problems. Adolescent boys and girls are the main stakeholders in this process.
  - Prioritize the inclusion of girls and boys to achieve meaningful results. Raise women's awareness of violence and women's health, as they often do not know their rights and have limited aspirations for emancipation.
  - Unmarried girls lack access to sexual and reproductive care under Mauritanian law.
  - Empower girls' voices by drawing inspiration from the #BalanceTonPorc movement in Europe. Raise awareness that liberating girls' voices does not contradict Islam. Many women have experienced verbal or sexual abuse, and efforts should be made to help them stand up against violence through social media, workshops, and communication.
  - Key points include positive masculinity, education as a foundation, engaging with young people, fostering open communication, and providing examples of experiences working with adolescent girls. Recommendations should be grounded in real-world experiences to effectively address issues.

- The optimal use of digital technology can address the challenges faced by adolescent girls, enabling them to express themselves freely and accessing ethical educational content. It is crucial to navigate gender concepts tactfully, seeking alignment to prevent any potential disruptions.
- Encourage the establishment of counseling and health call centers, as many young girls who are victims of rape find themselves in situations where reporting can be challenging.
- Partners should focus on value-added actions and avoid confining themselves to budget lines. They must accompany projects to completion.
- The University of Nouakchott has a project for ad hoc studies on the development of gender disparity indicators.
- The recent law on the reform of public education is not suitable in the context of Mauritania. If not amended, it risks worsening school dropout. Infrastructure challenges (insufficient number of schools, classrooms, desks) and human resources issues (understaffing, precarious salaries) are concerning. Addressing infrastructure and human resource needs through recruitment and training is imperative.
- Statistical data on health and justice for adolescent girls exist but are disaggregated. Disaggregated data manually recorded in hospitals and courts logbooks, are accessible.
- Pressure must be exerted on the government to adopt gender policies and ensure proper effective policy management. Consideration should be given to short and technical vocational training for those who choose this option, rather than favoring lengthy studies. Poverty is a problem that divides communities.
- The concept of gender is not universally accepted in Mauritania. Awareness should be raised about the link between economic development and gender to demonstrate that this is not a superficial problem. There are studies in the World Bank's database on women's participation in growth and productivity in the public and private sectors. Rich documents on the World Bank's websites can be used to argue with the Ministry of the Economy and business decision-makers.
- The concept of gender is both an approach to human rights and an inherent economic right. However, it is often unsettling in Mauritania, to the extent that university disciplines do not include the term "gender," and interviews on this subject are avoided abroad.