

Increasing Gains for Women, Not Just the Economy: The UK Gender and Development Network Submission to the World Bank Gender Strategy Consultation

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Earlier this year the World Bank Group (WBG) launched the concept note for its new gender strategy, '[Promoting Gender Equality to Reduce Poverty and Boost Shared Prosperity](#).' It was developed to launch and inform the global consultation which ran until late July. Whilst welcoming the proposed strategy the [UK Gender and Development Network's submission](#) challenges the WBG to go further in its ambition and address deep structural inequalities and gender discrimination.

The WBG's existing gender strategy was adopted in 2001 so an updated strategy is long overdue and highly anticipated. The new strategy promises to recognise the multiple drivers of gender inequality and the relationships between markets, formal and informal institutions, households and gender equality. Building on its 2014 report *Voice and Agency, Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity*, the concept note acknowledges the link between poverty and agency constraints arising from gender-based violence, unfulfilled sexual and reproductive health and rights and political inequalities. This understanding of the deep layers of discrimination and marginalisation is very welcome.

However, the emphasis of the proposed strategy does not reflect this new understanding. It focuses upon closing gender gaps in the labour market, integrating women into the market economy and raising incomes of individual women. The emphasis is on what this could mean for productivity gains rather than gender equality in and of itself. Whilst important, in order to be transformative women's economic empowerment requires an increase in control over their income and household finances, greater influences in economic decision making, access to essential services and macroeconomic policies that enable the realisation of women's rights. The strategy presents the WBG with an opportunity to understand and address the challenges to achieving women's economic empowerment by these means.

In practice this means paying attention to the gender inequalities which constrain women's participation in the economy, such as the disproportionate burden of unpaid care borne by women. The WBG is in a unique position to measure the contribution made by women to the economy through unpaid care work and reduce the burden of such work through care sensitive infrastructure, time-saving technologies and quality public services. Investment in public services such as health also has the potential to expand decent work opportunities for women and meet their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The WBG continues to recognise the importance of addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG) including through challenging social norms. Nonetheless as one of the most pervasive human rights abuses and a key barrier to economic equality, it is vital that the WBG also identifies any risks of exacerbating violence arising from its policies and programmes. Depending on the context, increased income or participation in the labour market can increase women's risk of violence both in the home and in public spaces such as on transport or in the workplace.

The WBG has a unique position and capacity to fill knowledge and data gaps and its commitment to develop and strengthen tools to understand barriers women face to jobs and ownership and control of assets is appreciated. However, the UK Gender and Development Network urges the WBG to raise its ambition and develop a strategy committed to doing more than identifying what the constraints on women's economic inequality are but also understanding why they exist and how best to address the causes. Only then can the strategy effectively strive for meaningful economic empowerment for women.

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