
United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

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Introduction

Gender issues have been on the World Bank's agenda since the early 1980s. The pioneering Engendering Development report was published in 2001¹, at which time the World Bank adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy and an operational policy to support this work; all of which helped set the stage for the 2007 launch of the Gender Action Plan (GAP).

The Gender Action Plan (2007-2011) increased reach and demand in the traditionally difficult economic sectors, using pilots to increase visibility and yield results in the short term. Its clear message, "Gender Equality as Smart Economics" built on the World Bank's comparative advantage and helped gain broad-based support. World Bank staff who had never worked on gender were encouraged to integrate gender into their projects, which in turn contributed to the evidence base of innovations, impact evaluations, research and data.²

In April 2008, World Bank President Robert B. Zoellick announced six new commitments on gender equality—including, for example, better integration of gender equality into agriculture and rural development projects; channeling, through the International Finance Corporation, credit lines at commercial banks for women entrepreneurs; the creation of a Private Sector Leaders' Forum; and an increase IDA investments for gender equality.³

The heightened attention from the GAP and the Presidential Commitments on Gender Equality contributed to a heightened profile for gender and two major steps forward.

First, gender was identified as a special theme of the World Bank's \$49.3 billion fund for the

that the rights of their mothers are fundamentally equal to those of their fathers. What's more, addressing them is the smart thing to do, because inequality is costly.

The World Bank's overall lending is substantial. In fiscal year 2011, the World Bank Group committed \$57.3 billion to middle- and low-income countries. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), serving middle-income countries, committed \$26.7 billion for 132 new operations in 43 countries; and, the International Development Association (IDA), serving the poorest countries, committed \$16.3 billion for 230 new operations in 72 countries.⁶ In a rating exercise last year, the World Bank found that US\$ 65 billion of loans over the preceding five-year period were rated as adequately gender mainstreamed or better

Two recently-approved IDA operations focus on reproductive health, for example, in Mali, where the Strengthening Reproductive Health Project will aim to improve access and use of quality reproductive health services by women of reproductive age; and in Burkina Faso, where the Reproductive Health Project seeks to improve the utilization and quality of reproductive health services.

The Peru Results-Based Initiative provides training in business skills and technical assistance to women microenterprise owners/operators in metropolitan Lima. The project aims to strengthen the entrepreneurial capacity and improve the economic status of women property owners by strengthening their business knowledge, productive capacity, and organizational skills, and by addressing the socio-cultural issues that are often obstacles to women's economic development. Women who received training were more likely to plan and execute innovations, and have shown an increase in sales.

The World Bank is working within the strategic directions outlined in the WDR Implications Paper to increase attention to, and funding for, gender equality. The volume of lending, however, is only part of the picture.

On the policy side, the World Bank is exploring how to better gender-inform Development Policy Loans (DPL) in order to support critical institutional reforms. One example is in Pernambuco, Brazil, where gender disparities continue to impede the social and economic

gender dimensions in project planning and implementation. Senior management attention, along with enhanced tracking of gender targets and indicators, has made it clear to World Bank staff across regions and networks that gender equality is an institutional priority. This is in line with the CSW52 agreed conclusions on financing for gender equality, which underline the need for mainstreaming in operations and throughout institutions.

Improvements in GenderStats, as well as on core indicators and relevant age-disaggregated data, are making gender data and statistics not only more widely available, but harmonized across regions, countries, and organizations. A World Bank-wide working group on gender equality data and statistics has been established to improve coordination and learning internally; and, with international partners, a core list of gender-relevant indicators on economic structures and access to resources, education, health and related services, public life and decision-making, human rights of women and girls, has been agreed upon. A key goal of this list is to focus World Bank and international partner efforts on improving data availability in lagging areas such as women's access to credit and enterprise ownership.

But there is much we do not know about what works. The Bank is seeking to fill knowledge gaps through projects such as the Africa Innovation Lab, which works with project teams to test and evaluate interventions that focus on changing gender roles (e.g. shifting choices of crops, marketing, new job training choices), with the aim of filling knowledge gaps of what works to increase women's economic empowerment. It focuses on new areas, including voice (e.g. access to justice, violence) and endowments (e.g. service delivery, HIV testing).

Partnerships with public and private sector entities have multiplier effects; by convening interested parties and combining funding and expertise, a larger impact and farther-reaching strides can be made.

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