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Evaluation insights on International Financial Institutions' support to gender mainstreaming

For decades, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have supported projects addressing gender gaps, and made efforts to mainstream gender in their operations and put in place tools to enhance results and measure progress. Many evaluations have been published and provide evidence-based findings and lessons that can help IFIs learn from this experience.

From this wealth of information, what can we learn about how IFIs can best support gender and equality of opportunity? What have we learned about how to do this work, how to mainstream it, how to plan and prioritise it, and how to monitor and learn from it?

This paper scanned 12 independent evaluation reports, as well as corresponding strategies, corporate scorecards and diagnostics where available, from 8 IFIs. The report extracted six key lessons for effective gender mainstreaming, looking at both facilitators and barriers.

6 Key Lessons on Gender Mainstreaming

1. A well-grounded and comprehensive strategy that drives the operational gender agenda is critical for effective gender mainstreaming and for sustainable results
2. A country driven approach to prioritisation of instrument and intervention, such as policy dialogue, proves to be more effective in reducing the gender gap
3. Integrating or linking gender policies to corporate strategic plans and results frameworks helps to mainstream gender at the highest levels
4. Portfolio performance ratings can facilitate better institutional performance
5. Gender focal points and gender specialists within operations advance progress in gender mainstreaming, when they are empowered and have clarity of roles
6. All entry points for mainstreaming in the project cycle need to be strategically used for maximum impact

6 KEY LESSONS ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING

1 A well-grounded and comprehensive strategy that drives the operational gender agenda is critical for effective gender mainstreaming and for sustainable results¹

A comprehensive strategy implies that an IFI's country gender profiles (CGPs)/ country-level gender diagnostics should be linked to the country strategy documents. In operations, evidence of gender analysis should be incorporated in the continuum from gender-related objectives to outputs. This can be done by linking country-specific gender analysis to suggested interventions that close gender gaps, and by integrating relevant gender responsive performance indicators beyond sex-disaggregated data (like data on trainings, employment or any other dimension that the project may be addressing). Also, in project logframes there is often limited logical consistency between desired gender outcomes and specified indicators. Furthermore, there is heavy reliance on output-level indicators, usually in line with Gender Strategy monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks at IFIs. In addition, inclusion of custom gender-sensitive output and outcome measurements remains limited.²

The country gender profile/ diagnostic itself should provide a well laid-out and relevant analysis of gender issues across sectors. The IFI methodology for country gender analysis should include in-country data collection, an approach that is often not prevalent among IFIs, and beneficiaries should be consulted during the development of the country gender profile. The main weakness and missed opportunity are the limited comprehensive integration of that knowledge and analysis into country strategy documents (like Country Strategy Papers).

Common weaknesses of strategies for mainstreaming gender

- Missing links between gender analysis, interventions, and M&E mechanisms for gender mainstreaming
- M&E Limitations in project logframes/ theory of change
- Lack of gender indicators and baselines

2 A country driven approach to prioritisation of instrument and intervention, such as policy dialogue, proves to be more effective in reducing the gender gap

The enhanced approach requires that operations, supported by policy dialogue and diagnosis of gender gaps, align with Country Partnership Framework objectives in a coherent manner that helps close gender gaps. In the sample of country programs examined as part of the World Bank Group (WBG) Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review, the approach to addressing gender gaps ranges from stand-alone projects to the collective use of multiple Bank Group instruments, with stand-alone projects being the more common approach. Part of the reason that individual projects are emphasized may be the pressure for a project to be counted toward gender-tagging targets set by World Bank (WB) Regions and Global Practices.³ In 2017, the WBG launched a new gender "tag" to strengthen links between country-level and/or sector gender equality objectives and WBG operations, and identify those operations that meaningfully narrow gaps between males and females in the four key pillars of the WBG Gender Strategy. The gender tag identifies those projects that have a clear results chain (e.g., links analysis, actions, and M&E). Under the Eighteenth Replenishment of IDA (IDA18), the WB has set a new target for at least 55% of operations to fulfill the tag criteria. The tag and target was also planned to cascade to the corporate scorecard in 2017.⁴

Country Partnership Frameworks have reflected the gender gaps among their priorities. However, those priorities are not consistently being translated into operations/projects that address gender gaps. Without prioritization, gender issues in the portfolio can appear to be "sprinkled" rather than strategic. Hence the WB in Bangladesh, the Arab Republic of Egypt, Kenya, Peru, and Vietnam is focusing interventions on specific gender-related areas. In such cases, country directors and managers act as champions for gender and communicate the priorities to task team leaders, project leads, and investment officers. Experience in Bangladesh and Vietnam shows that WB and International Finance Corporation (IFC) country and regional units should have central roles in implementing the gender strategy, with the gender groups providing the leadership and coordination that generate an environment conducive to implementation.⁵

Without prioritization, gender issues in the portfolio can appear to be "sprinkled" rather than strategic.

1 AfDB Gender Evaluation, findings from comparison of 11 IFIs done in the AfDB evaln.

2 ADB Gender Evaluation, pp.22.

3 World Bank Group, Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review, pp.ix.

4 World Bank Group, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/207481489888852225/pdf/Strategy-Update-to-the-Board-2-17-17Final-02172017.pdf>

5 World Bank Group, Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review, pp.ix.

3 Integrating or linking gender policies to corporate strategic plans and results frameworks helps to mainstream gender at the highest levels

Monitoring gender at the corporate level can incentivise an IFI to collect sex-disaggregated data and ultimately ensures that the intent of the strategy translates into the results chains of projects. For example, International Finance Corporation (IFC) plans to report on all capital increase commitments related to gender, including the annual financing dedicated to women and women led SMEs.

It should be noted that just having women as a number of beneficiaries as currently reported in the corporate scorecard of many IFIs does not provide data and detail on the demographic, types, and issues related to gender-focused participation. For example, the data does not tell anything about the demographics of the women (young/ old, rural/ urban etc.), sector (land, water use, fisheries etc.) or the issues (access to resources, decision-making, socioeconomic benefits).

The increasing sector focus contributes to improved capacity and improved recognition of how integrating gender into operations is useful.

4 Portfolio performance ratings can facilitate better institutional performance

Establishing portfolio performance ratings at project entry, implementation, and completion can help in monitoring and assessing change in institutional performance on gender. It can also help assess the contribution of an institution's projects to gender equality results, specially for agencies and financial mechanisms with grant, loan, and/or investment portfolios.⁶ Some gender policies or gender action plans establish portfolio performance indicators and targets within their own results frameworks. Often these indicators are included in and reported on as part of the overall corporate results framework. Several agencies, especially multilateral development banks and climate funds, including the Global Environment Facility (GEF), have introduced such measures to ensure quality in the design and implementation process and in results at project completion.⁷ The International Fund for Agricultural Development uses a project completion report scoring system that also measures changes brought about in, for example, women's economic empowerment, women's representation and decision making, and workload reduction and balance.

At the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the correlation between the overall project success rating and gender success rating is strong. Gender-mainstreamed projects tend to have more rigorous design analysis than non-gender-mainstreamed interventions.⁸

The GEF Gender Evaluation noted a shift occurred in many GEF Agencies from quality-at-entry to better implementation and monitoring to ensure the delivery of projects' intended gender equality results. Some Agencies have revised their tracking and project completion reports to better capture and report gender equality results and to measure gender impacts as part of terminal evaluations.

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6 GEF Gender Evaluation

7 GEF Gender Evaluation

8 The ADB gender evaluation found that of the 72 projects reviewed that were approved during 2005–2015 and had a project completion report and a gender success rating, 47 successfully delivered gender results which is a 65 percent success rate.

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Gender focal points and gender specialists within operations advance progress in gender mainstreaming when they are empowered and have clarity of roles

Gender Focal Points and gender specialists within operations advance progress in Gender Mainstreaming, despite challenges in clarity of roles, availability, and their positioning in the organizational structure. Evaluative findings from several IFIs indicated that increasing the capacity of gender focal points and gender specialists within the organizations led to more robust gender mainstreaming across sectors and regions. These focal point and specialist roles can be full-time or part-time but its important that their gender-focused tasks be clearly defined as part of the staff's work program (or equivalent) and not be 'ad hoc add-on' tasks that carry the risk of slipping through the cracks. Incentives can include IFI business group like health, agriculture, or infrastructure being awarded for incorporating gender-sensitive project design, frameworks and implementation in the field, as well as recognition through team awards for staff teams that have focused on systematic gender integration in both country strategies and operations.

Limited availability and varying depth and breadth of sectoral knowledge were a challenge⁹ to consistently incorporate gender dimensions. For example, a gender specialist may be an expert on the intersection of the gender and transport sector, but that same gender specialist may not be able to provide help on how to integrate gender in irrigation projects or technology projects that close digital gender gaps. Decentralized decision-making has made funding for Gender Specialist positions uneven, left to the discretion of regional management,¹⁰ which can lead to both positive and negative effects on gender capacity in the organization.

Staff designated to support work on gender are critical to connect strategic imperatives to practices in WBG operations. However, staff designated to support work on gender at the WB are constrained in their ability to provide optimal support by the lack of clear selection criteria, insufficient time to complete required functions, limited professional development opportunities, and little recognition within performance management processes.¹¹ The selection and professional development of gender focal points in the WB is ad hoc, partly because a gender specialty is not a recognized career path in the Bank Group.¹² These

constraints are less pronounced at the IFC, though they do occur.¹³ In context of implementation of the WBG Gender Strategy, IFC has taken a more active role in organizing and coordinating gender leads and focal points in comparison to the WB. The WBG takes a less active approach to the coordination of staff designated to support work on gender, even though it organizes a community of practice monthly. IFC's Gender Business Group, in contrast, works through regional and product gender leads who often manage other staff at the global, regional, and country levels and coordinates with focal points in industry groups. IFC has successfully connected country-level advisory services with global programs, such as the Women's Insurance and Tackling Childcare projects. The WB Gender Group has a broader scope to cover, making an approach like IFC's difficult. In the WB, 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 in resourcing and skills.¹⁴

Staff designated to support work on gender are critical to connect strategic imperatives to practices

9 AfDB evaluation, pp.3.

10 AfDB evaluation, pp.3.

11 Page vii. World Bank Group Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review (by the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group).

12 'Not recognized' means there are very few staff that have 'Gender Specialist' titles but rather are called Social Sector Specialists or Infrastructure Specialists etc, and hence gender is not a career track by itself.

13 Page xii. World Bank Group Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review (by the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group).

14 Page x. World Bank Group Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review (by the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group)

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All entry points for mainstreaming in the project cycle need to be strategically used for maximum impact

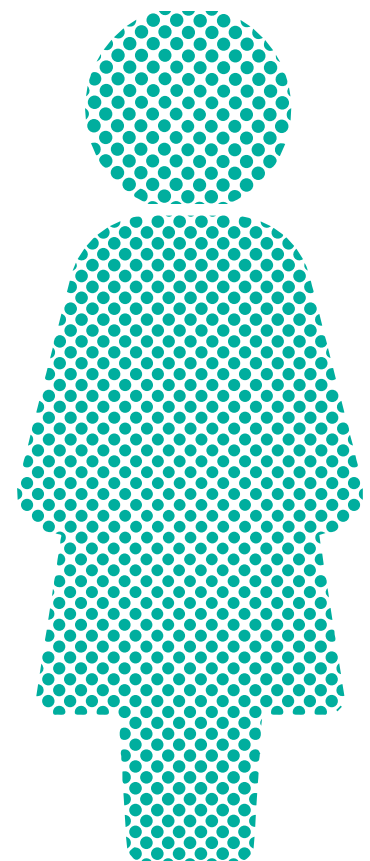
All entry points for Gender mainstreaming in the project cycle need to be strategically used for maximum impact.¹⁵ A clear mapping of all existing gender mainstreaming entry points like including country gender analysis in project design and implementation across the project cycle would enhance the ability to collect, collate and use gender-focused evidence across operations. Furthermore, quality gender-related diagnostics (like country gender profiles, sectorial checklists, comparators' documents and Environmental and Social Impact Assessments/ESIAs) can be used to find entry points that facilitate evidence-based project design and implementation, and subsequently develop evidence-based Theories of Change (ToCs) at the start.

Participatory ToC development would permit the thorough interrogation of the intervention's feasibility and its underlying assumptions. Obligatory involvement of the gender specialist at the Project Concept Note and Project Appraisal Report stage in the development of the ToC and/or project results framework would improve their gender responsiveness.¹⁶

Finally, the GEF evaluation suggests that gender analysis should be a mandatory element of project design.¹⁷

¹⁵ From findings of other IFIs in the AfDB Gender Evaluation, pp.5.
¹⁶ AfDB Gender Evaluation, pp.6.
¹⁷ GEF Gender Evaluation, pp.36.

Integrating or linking gender policies to corporate strategic plans and results frameworks helps to mainstream gender at the highest levels.



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