

Gender Mainstreaming Policies in the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank

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Abstract - Gender mainstreaming emerged as a pivotal strategy to integrate gender perspectives into development, gaining significant traction after the 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing. This approach not only advocates for women's rights but aims to incorporate women into the mainstream of development, necessitating the design of strategic projects that address gender disparities. Since 1995, various stakeholders, including governments and civil society, have worked collaboratively to eliminate discrimination against women and enhance their involvement in the labour force. This paper examines the gender mainstreaming policies of two multilateral development banks viz., the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank. The World Bank operates worldwide, covering developing and emerging economies across Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Whereas ADB operates in Asia and the Pacific region, supporting development in its 68 member countries, including South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and the Pacific Islands.

The ADB has implemented policies that prioritize gender equity, integrating gender perspectives into project designs and establishing Gender Action Plans to ensure systematic monitoring and evaluation of gender objectives. Similarly, the World Bank has evolved its gender policies since the 1980s, emphasizing the economic benefits of gender equality while incorporating gender analysis and responsive budgeting in its operations. Both institutions align their gender mainstreaming efforts with the broader Sustainable Development Goals, recognizing gender equality as essential for achieving sustainable development. This paper highlights the evolution and operationalization of the gender mainstreaming policies.

Keywords: *Multilateral Development Bank (MDB), Gender Mainstreaming, the World Bank (WB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Equality, Development*

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender mainstreaming as a strategy to incorporate gender perspective in the development was adopted in the fourth United Nation World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). The conference led to Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995), considered as a significant global policy document on gender equality. Gender Mainstreaming broadly is a process of addressing and integrating gender concerns into development works as its cornerstone, in addition to increase women participation numerically in development activities. It is not only about women rights but also to bring them in the mainstream of the development from the margins. So, it requires designing of such strategic projects for women and girls which can narrow down gender gaps while promoting rights of women and girls.

Since 1995, governments, civic society, and other stakeholders have worked together to get rid of all type of prejudice and biases faced by females. Women's participation in the labour force and the economy has improved, laws that discriminate against women and girls are being repealed/abolished, and violence and harmful behaviours against them are being addressed. In this research paper gender mainstreaming policies of the World Bank and Asian Development Bank are discussed to understand the efforts made at the highest institutions promoting development in various regions across the globe.

II. BACKGROUND

Gender mainstreaming has evolved from international organizations and development agencies' efforts to promote gender equality and

eliminate discrimination in development. Support surged in the 1990s from agencies like Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and World Health Organization (WHO). The movement began with Ester Boserup's famous work "Women's Role in Economic Development" (1970), which emphasized women's contributions to household and economic development. Boserup argued that gender equality should be central to development strategies, as it fosters prosperity and growth. Her work highlighted systemic barriers sustaining gender disparity and the need for policies that promote inclusive development (Raday, 2019). Key events, including the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) and global conferences in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995), catalysed efforts to abolish discrimination against women and raised awareness of their struggles globally.

Beneria and Sen (2016) argued that "Women in Development" (WID), and "Women and Development" (WAD) approaches to gender equality emerged during 1970s gave way to the more comprehensive approach i.e. Gender and Development (GAD), which was originated in 1980s under the influence of the theoretical feminist theory. The Women in Development strategy developed from the liberal feminism that included Boserup's work on women and development. Whereas criticism of liberal feminism and orthodox development theory gave way to the Women and Development approach. The Women and

Development strategy in contrast to the Women in Development advocates for increasing productivity and income of women but also argued for discussing and analysing the social and economic marginalization which affects both the genders, albeit differently (Sen and Grown, 1987). The emergence of Gender and Development perspective can be attributed to the previous attempts made by the proponents of WID and WAD and other scholars to narrow down the gender discrimination during 1980s. Gender and development considers all facets of women's existence and draws a connection between the women as producer and women's role in the family (Jaquette, 1982).

III. DEFINING GENDER MAINSTREAMING

The agreed conclusions of the 1997 *United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)* defined gender mainstreaming as “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality” (United Nations, 1997). It has subsequently been elevated into a core theme of the global development agenda, especially regarding its mainstreaming in multilateral development bank operations. This transformation has been guided by ‘2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, which acknowledges gender parity as a key issue that will

impact progress in all seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (Panda, 2019).

IV. WORLD BANK AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

The World Bank acknowledges that closing the gender gap has powerful effects on economic growth, reducing poverty and improving the development outcomes. It was in 1980 that the World Bank adopted a policy of gender and continues to deepen its commitment through several frameworks, including the Gender Strategy (2016–2023), which directs focus toward closing gaps in employment, assets, and in other areas. Some of the cross-cutting mainstreaming approaches used by World Bank are gender analysis, gender responsive budgeting, gender action plans, allocation of resources at institutional level for effective policy implementation, capacity building and training, community involvement in program based financial decisions, and monitoring and evaluation.

During 1972 to 1984, lot of deliberations and discussions happened in the World Bank to include women in development which led to the creation of an informal working group of Bank's staff. United Nations also declared 1975 as International Women Year and meanwhile, the World Bank released a brochure/ booklet Integrating Women in Development and the phrase Woman in Development was introduced to endorse activities that can benefit women. It was not until 1977 that first WID, advisor was appointed and assigns role of improving the Bank's and borrowers understanding of the effects of its development efforts on the women. It issued its first gender guidance note in 1984, which was intended to promote women's inclusion in project cycles,

focused on projects that treat women as beneficiaries or recipients (World Bank, 1979, 1985, 2014).

From 1985 to 1994, the Bank expanded its gender framework to include human capital theories along with comprehensive institutionalization of gender. In 1987, a new WID unit was created (World Bank, 2005). The gender was designated among the four areas of particular attention by Bank's President Barber Conable and budgetary support for WID was raised to 2.5 million USD (Murphy, 1995). In the course of 1980s and 1990s, the monetary benefits of investment in women leads to research on gender (Long, 2006) that resulted into the first official paper on gender (World Bank, 1994) and new 'gender and development' approach (Hafner-Burton & Pollack, 2002).

This strategy broadly contended that women need not be studied in isolation but in relation to men. It also discussed the human capital (knowledge, skills, health, and abilities) rationale for investment in women for example, investments that can empower, increases productivity and a more judicious allocation of resources, generate social returns and ultimately decreases poverty (World Bank, 1994, Razavi, 1997). In 1994, the Bank brings a significant change in its approach by renaming its 'Women in Development' division to the 'Gender Analysis and Policy Team' (Murphy, 1995). This reflects Bank's commitment to mainstream gender in its operations. A significant policy that reaffirms Bank's assurance was Operational Procedures (OP) 4.20 having objective of integrating gender into Bank's Country Assessment Strategies. This policy reinforced the requirement of gender sensitive approaches across all the stages of the project cycle (Moser, 1993).

The period from 1995 to 2004 marks a watershed moment in the World Bank's evolution toward a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of gender equality. During said period, the World Bank emphasised gender mainstreaming in its financing operations. While addressing fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the World Bank president James Wolfensohn gave space to gender mainstreaming and it becomes subject of discussion (World Bank, 2005). It drew global attention towards the conception of gender and guided the approach of the World Bank to address the gender issues. Thereafter, in 1996, the World Bank established an External Gender Consultative Group of 14 members who assisted the Bank with gender policies and dialogue (Bamberger & Bischoff, 1996).

To track and reporting on the execution of policy, the World Bank created *Gender and Development Board* within its *Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network* (PREMN) (World Bank, 2005). While to comprehend and assess this gendered aspect of development, the Bank employs several tools including but not restricted to collection of sex (gender)-disaggregated data, gender impact assessments (GIA), track and monitor system to make sure that all gendered features are incorporated in programs financed by the Bank (World Bank, 1997). The strategy of gender mainstreaming was justified as it contributes in reduction of poverty, overall economic growth, effective development, and promotion of gender equality (World Bank, 2002). The Bank also expanded existing operational strategy to cover all foreign direct investment programs to more systematically mainstream gender (beyond the banks social sector programmes).

Most recently from 2005 to 2017, the World Bank brought comprehensive change in its gender mainstreaming policies. The World Bank articulated and championed the notion of “*Gender Equality as Smart Economics*” in 2006 via its *Gender Action Plan (GAP)* for 2007-2010. The Bank looks ambivalent on the issue to frame gender parity as a human right or as a driver of economic growth. According to the *World Development Report 2006*, gender equality is an end and a means for fast economic growth, specifically in the south of the globe (World Bank, 2006). In its subsequent publication ‘*Gender Equality as Smart Economics*’ (2006), Bank views interventions and expenditures on women and girls towards development targets as ‘smart economics’ and mostly excluded its conception as human right (Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Chant, 2012). In its landmark *World Development Report (2012)* the Bank argued for ‘*smart economics*’ and underlined the significance of gender parity as an end (World Bank, 2012).

From time to time, World Bank keep publishing papers, policies and strategies to endorse gender parity in its operations for example “*Enhancing Women’s Participation in Economic Development*”1994, “*Integrating Gender into World Bank operations (2001-2005)*”, “*Gender Equality as Smart Economics: A World Bank Group Gender Action Plan (2007-2010)*” “*Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction and Inclusive growth (2016–2023)*” and latest is “*Accelerate Gender Equality for Sustainable, Resilient and inclusive Future (2024-2030)*”. In the late 2000s, the World Bank started to establish international collaborations with private sector organisations to achieve gender equality (World Bank, 2009). At *Global Private Sector Leaders Forum*, 2009, attended by big corporate houses such as Nike,

ExxonMobil, and Goldman Sachs, the president of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, emphasised the importance of ‘investing in women’ (World Bank, 2010).

The *gender strategy 2024-2030*, reaffirms the obligation to prioritize gender parity as its core policy to narrow down poverty on a livable planet. It recognizes three main objectives: eliminate “gender-based violence” and strengthening human capital; increasing financial prospects and to enabling women to assume leadership roles. These three objectives will be measured against six outcomes, based on the inherent value of gender equality, as well as its impact on alleviating poverty and contribution to development. The strategy will be modified to fit certain situations like vulnerability, and to the targeted population such as teenage females. The plan acknowledges Its conceptual framework, acknowledges innovation, funding, and investment and collective action as drivers of transformation and shift towards gender equality (World Bank, 2024).

V. ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

ADB, in 1985, implemented policy on the ‘Role of Women in Development’ and by 1992, ADB incorporated “Women in Development” as one of the five important development targets, alongside growth in economy, narrowing down poverty, human growth and development, demographic planning, and sustainable stewardship of the environment and natural resources (ADB, 2003). Overtime, new developments and substantial transformations in the Asia and the Pacific region brought new challenges and issues concerning women in the development. ADB recognized the

need to revise its policies to address new challenges faced by women. Consequently, it introduced the Gender and Development policy to reflect contemporary thoughts on gender issues.

To mainstream gender, ADB integrates gender perspective into project designs and it entails establishing gender-specific goals and measures, conducting gender assessments, and creating tailored interventions. ADB funded projects typically sought to enhance women's approach to resources, employment, or skills training. ADB develop *Gender Action Plans (GAPs)* for projects with gender equality as a major goal, detailing specific activities, responsibilities, and performance indicators to attain gender targets. ADB integrates Gender Action Plans in all the stages viz., project planning, implementation, and monitoring processes. These plans provide a structured approach to ensure that gender objectives are not only outlined but also systematically monitored. ADB supports national and local governments to strengthen institutions working toward long-term gender mainstreaming initiatives. To mitigate poverty and ensure equitable growth, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) places strong emphasis on women's economic empowerment (ADB, 2003).

To measure and report gender impacts, ADB includes gender-specific indicators in its project evaluation frameworks so that later it can be assessed that how projects contribute to gender equality. This approach of ADB helps to quantify and understand the results achieved and to refine its future interventions. Gender mainstreaming is an integral part of GAD approach and it calls for integrating gender planning into all development operations and projects. ADB emphasise that the project is designed in such a way that it addresses

gender concerns at all levels from initiation to completion of the project (ADB, 2003).

ADB have a system known as the ADB Gender Mainstreaming Categorization System and is a significant element of the *ADB 2030 strategy and Gender Policy*. It categorizes projects into four gender mainstreaming categories: *Category I: gender equity theme (GEN)*; *category II: effective gender mainstreaming (EGM)*; *category III: some gender elements (SGE)*; and *category IV: no gender elements*. Since 1998, these categories are being used to monitor the Asian Development Bank's performance on gender. It was in 2009 that these policies were updated by the inter-departmental *Technical Working Group on Gender Mainstreaming* (ADB, 2012).

Any project that directly addresses gender parity issues or empowering women by narrowing down gender disparities is categorized as "*Gender Equity Theme*". If it does not directly address the matter of gender parity and empowering women but instead it contributes to address these by reducing gender disparities, it is categorized as "*Effective Gender Mainstreaming*" (EGM). In contrast, when a project has gender equality as its objective and some performance indicators on gender, the project is categorized as "*Some Gender Elements*." It receives "*No Gender Elements*" (NGE) category if there is no gender-based performance indicator in its design and monitoring framework (DMF) that explicitly or implicitly improves women's and girl's access to the project linked benefits, assets and opportunities, or time-saving infrastructure that project will create (ADB, 2021). As per the categorization, ADB guides Executing Agencies to draft a "*Gender Action Plan*" (GAP), which is a crucial gender mainstreaming instrument and tool

for ensuring gender inclusive project designing and its execution (ADB, 2019, 2021).

ADB is keen to speed up with progress towards gender parity in Asia and Pacific as part of its *Priority Operational (PO)* areas. It equally acknowledges that gender parity is not only a necessity but a catalyst too for achieving socio-economic development. The Asian Development Bank's strategy 2030 targets to facilitate the transformation of the region into affluent and prosperous, socially inclusive, adaptable, resilient, and sustainable one. ADB aims to design all its gender-inclusive operations, both sovereign and non-sovereign, to support its gender equality agenda in at least 75 per cent of projects completed by 2030. Furthermore, gender parity and empowering women are fundamental to the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which ADB and its member countries have pledged to take care. It is clear from *Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5—achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* but it also got depiction in the rest of the SDGs as is clear in the text and indicators contained (ADB, 2019).

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, gender mainstreaming has emerged a pivotal strategy and approach in encouraging gender parity within the frameworks of international financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The evolution of gender mainstreaming policies since 1995, Beijing Declaration demonstrates the global commitment to addressing gender inequalities and integrating perspectives of women into programs and initiatives designed for the growth and development. The World Bank's evolutionary strategy, migrating from the "Women in Development" paradigm to a comprehensive gender analysis framework, illustrates the recognition of gender parity as both a fundamental right and a catalyst for economic progress. Its strategies, particularly the Gender Strategy 2024-2030, emphasize eliminating gender-based violence, enhancing human capital, and empowering women as leaders. Similarly, ADB's Gender and Development policy reflects an adaptive response to contemporary challenges faced by women in the Asia-Pacific region. By instituting Gender Action Plans and a robust Gender Mainstreaming Categorization System, ADB systematically integrates gender considerations into project planning, implementation, and evaluation. This structured approach not only facilitates the measurement of gender impacts but also fosters long-term institutional support for gender equality initiatives. Their embracing of the principles of gender mainstreaming within those frameworks provide a clear example that gender equality and social inclusion are not only fulfilment of some compliance checkbox for leaders in multilateral development banks, but an inherent goal to be sought for true, sustainable development goals.

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