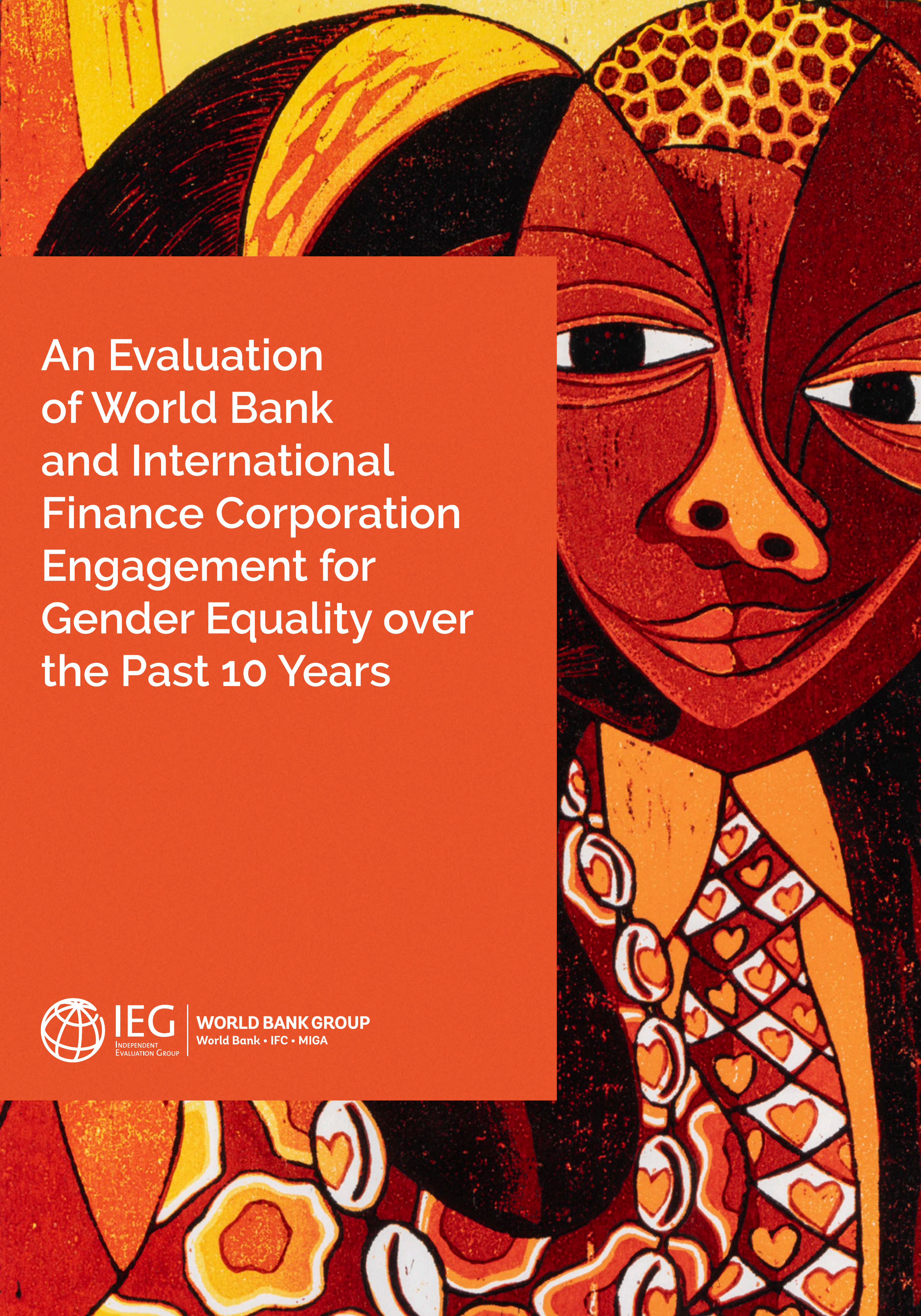

An Evaluation of World Bank and International Finance Corporation Engagement for Gender Equality over the Past 10 Years

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COVER ARTWORK
Fred Kato Mutebi, *One Man One Woman*, 2005
Born in Uganda in 1967, Fred Kato Mutebi is a master in multicolor progressive reduction method of woodcut printmaking.
"Growing up into youthfulness at a time of HIV/AIDS, jealousy, and envy, I witnessed the various moods of the adults who then decided to engage in marital affairs. Some were my uncles, aunties, elder brothers, and sisters. Those who chose to engage in polygamy and infidelity never experienced happiness, and many of them succumbed to HIV/AIDS. Conversely, those who chose to remain loyal to each other (one man, one woman) experienced happiness, and many are old couples now. Only loyalty will create peace, love, and calmness in the family."

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Abbreviations

ALEGRA	Asistencia Legal Gratuita
ASA	advisory services and analytics
CPF	Country Partnership Framework
CSO	civil society organization
DPO	development policy operation
FCV	fragility, conflict, and violence
FY	fiscal year
GBV	gender-based violence
GIL	Gender Innovation Lab
GP	Global Practice
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IDA	International Development Association
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IPF	investment project financing
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PDO	project development objective
SCD	Systematic Country Diagnostic
SOGI	sexual orientation and gender identity
SWEDD	Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend
TTL	task team leader
WDR	*World Development Report*

All dollar amounts are US dollars unless otherwise indicated.

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Overview

The World Bank Group's commitment to support gender equality has been a priority for many years. Gender has been an International Development Association special theme since 2010 and has been reflected in other corporate commitments. This evaluation assesses the evolution of World Bank and International Finance Corporation (IFC) engagement on the gender equality agenda between fiscal year (FY)12 and FY23 and the results achieved. The *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (World Bank 2012) is the starting point of the evaluation period and provides the conceptual framework to assess and interpret the results achieved in advancing gender equality. The evaluation also analyzes the factors that have enabled and constrained this evolution, including the contribution of the Bank Group's FY16–23 gender strategy. In July 2024, the Bank Group launched the 2024–30 gender strategy, with the ambitious goal of "accelerat[ing] gender equality to end poverty on a livable planet" (World Bank Group 2024, 8). This evaluation provides lessons and recommendations to inform the implementation of the new strategy.

More Progress in Breadth Than Depth

In the past decade, the share of gender-relevant projects increased in all World Bank sectors and in most IFC industries. The World Bank and IFC engagement for financing gender equality expanded beginning in 2012 and especially after the adoption of the FY16–23 gender strategy. The share of gender-relevant projects increased based on a measure of "gender relevance intensity" developed by this evaluation. The percentage of projects that scored higher than 15 (up to 100)—considered "gender relevant"—increased in the World Bank from 44 percent in 2012 to 93 percent in 2023, whereas the percentage of projects that scored higher than 25 increased from 13 percent to 39 percent. The International Development Association played an important role in supporting gender-relevant projects. The share of gender-relevant projects among the International Development Association projects was systematically higher than among the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development projects throughout the evaluation period. Thus, more projects' designs accounted for the existence of gender inequalities, promoted better inclusion of women and girls, added activities to address their needs, adopted measures to address gender inequalities, and used indicators to measure gender-related outputs or outcomes. This increase happened in all World Bank sectors and in some IFC industries.

The expansion of gender-relevant projects, however, was greater in quantity than quality. The least gender-relevant projects increased the most, whereas the most gender-relevant projects did not see a significant increase—that is, projects with a 20–25 gender intensity score increased from 5 percent to 27 percent, and projects with a score higher than 55 increased only from 2 percent to 3 percent. This group of projects includes gender stand-alone projects and projects with major gender components. Manual reviews of project portfolios also indicate that relatively few projects had gender-transformative elements, sufficient attention to context-specific conditions and intersectionality, and robust theories of changes—and this group increased very little. For IFC advisory services, the trend was different. The share of the most gender-relevant projects grew exponentially—that is, those scoring higher than 55 increased from 2 percent to 23 percent. At the same time, more than one-third of projects still were not gender relevant (had a score equal to zero) at the end of the evaluation period, and the percentage of projects scoring higher than 25 remained the same at 40 percent. In IFC investments, the increase was more modest, and the least gender-relevant projects increased the most.

The World Bank gender tag and IFC gender flag contributed to enhancing gender engagement. The gender tag and the gender flag generated awareness among staff and management on the importance of addressing gender inequalities and the potential of operations to reduce them. They also represented a powerful incentive for operational and country teams, contributing to a significant expansion in the number of projects addressing gender inequalities. This increased share of gender-relevant projects is a positive development and is a necessary—but not sufficient—condition for progress toward gender equality.

The gender tag and the gender flag incentivized breadth over depth, however, and design over implementation. The increasingly ambitious targets were unrealistic with respect to the resources available to operational teams to adequately address gender inequalities in their projects. As a result, the gender tag, which corresponded to a not-so-stringent level of gender relevance intensity when it was introduced, became increasingly more generous over time and incentivized a disproportionate expansion of projects with low gender relevance. At the end of the evaluation period, almost all World Bank projects were gender tagged, which corresponded to a gender intensity threshold of just above zero. The minimum quality standard increased overall but at a cost—the nonselective gender mainstreaming that the FY16–23 gender strategy meant to overcome was reestablished for the World Bank by the end of the evaluation period, and the gender tag did not identify and did not incentivize projects with high gender relevance. IFC gender flag targets have been recently increased but have not been set as high as World Bank gender tag targets. If the pressure to flag IFC projects increases too quickly relative to the resources allocated, IFC risks abandoning a more focused approach to gender equality.

Challenge of Managing for Results at the Country Level

The Bank Group has made progress in adopting a country-driven approach to its engagement for gender equality, but it has not successfully operationalized this approach yet. The FY16–23 gender strategy highlights that a country-driven approach is essential to reduce gender inequalities. However, the approach to gender equality remains fragmented, with various instruments, sectors, and institutions disconnected at the country level and gender inequalities still being addressed on an individual project basis. The 2024–30 gender strategy commits the Bank Group to approach gender equality more coherently and strategically in its country engagement.

Most country strategies identify relevant gender priorities that align well with country needs, but few propose or implement integrated operational strategies to address them. First, the quality of gender diagnostics from Systematic Country Diagnostics and Country Partnership Frameworks (CPFs) has improved since 2015, when a generic approach to gender as a cross-cutting issue was prevalent. Strong analytics have supported the identification of gender priorities that correspond to country needs expressed by country gender statistics. Second, the approach to gender equality is still not strategic enough, with insufficient prioritization of which projects and activities can best address the gender inequalities identified in the CPF, based on the World Bank and IFC comparative advantages and the opportunities for collaboration and coordination with relevant stakeholders. Third, the approach is fragmented—the various instruments, sectors, and institutions are not coordinated or synergistic toward common outcomes, even though individually they often align with the gender priorities identified in the CPF. The result is often scattered interventions, each pursuing gender goals individually without a unified country program for gender equality bringing them together. Finally, there is limited evidence of the One World Bank Group approach[1] for gender equality—collaboration between the World Bank and IFC is opportunistic and limited to specific activities.

Inadequate attention to implementation is hindering the achievement of gender equality results. First, the quality of implementation is closely related to the availability of gender skills, financial resources, and accountability. There are few dedicated gender experts to support operational teams during implementation, weak capacity and limited accountability of project teams and implementing partners, and insufficient budget for the implementation of gender-related activities. Second, most support for the integration of a gender equality perspective in projects is used at design, mostly for assigning gender tags and gender flags. Corporate incentives are directed to produce a gender-relevant design rather than to ensure effective implementation. The key ingredients to successful implementation are investment in context-specific gender analytic work, strong engagement with local stakeholders to adapt the intervention to the local context and foster its local ownership, and availability of gender expertise for implementation. The evaluation finds cases of poorly designed projects that achieved results because of investment in gender expertise and the adoption of effective approaches during implementation and, conversely, cases of well-designed projects that lost effectiveness because of shortcomings in implementation.

Resources and incentives are not aligned to support country engagement and partner coordination for gender equality. First, the existing incentives, such as gender tags and gender flags, are directed toward individual projects but not at the level of country engagement. Second, and similarly, gender expertise is mostly allocated to support individual projects but not the country engagement. Moreover, gender experts are rarely posted to country offices or recruited locally, and Country Management Units are not adequately supported to operationalize the country-driven approach. Countries that show some progress in country-driven engagement have country gender platforms (often financed by trust funds) or similar mechanisms of support, gender experts, or gender champions sustained by committed country directors and managers. Third, Bank Group coordination and collaboration with key stakeholders in the country are limited and irregular. This includes engagement with development partners, civil society organizations, local governments, and local stakeholders, including women's rights organizations and target groups. IFC engages with industries and private sector clients, but engagement with other key development partners has been less common. The limited engagement has resulted in diminished relevance, efficacy, and sustainability of Bank Group interventions.

Using Knowledge to Advance Gender Equality

Globally, the Bank Group's knowledge engagements have increased understanding of the multiple drivers of gender inequality and improved data and indicators on gender inequality. The *World Development Report 2012* highlighted the need for an integrated approach to gender equality, including the interconnections among formal and informal institutions, access to and control over resources, and women's and girls' agency. The Bank Group's analytic work has been exploring these interlinks, and this framework remains relevant today. The Bank Group's contribution to data on gender equality includes gender data in World Development Indicators and annual publications, such as *Women, Business and the Law*. These global reports can catalyze reforms at the country level—for example, the *Women, Business and the Law 2016: Getting to Equal* report was used to spur policy reforms in the Arab Republic of Egypt that removed hour and sector restrictions on women's participation in economic activities (World Bank 2015).

The Bank Group provides analytic work to examine gender inequalities, inform country strategies and policy dialogue, and support interventions. The World Bank and IFC have produced robust gender diagnostics that have played a critical role in supporting the identification of gender priorities in

CPFs, informing the integration of policy actions in development policy operations, and feeding into the policy dialogue on gender equality.[2] Half the CPFs analyzed for this evaluation explicitly include gender issues in their objectives, and in almost all, the prioritization of gender equality is based on the Systematic Country Diagnostic's sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis or other analytic products. IFC has been increasing its global and country knowledge products and building a solid case for the private sector to address gender inequalities successfully, including in new areas such as housing finance, insurance, leadership, time use, gender-based violence (GBV), ride-sharing, and digital platforms.

The Bank Group has been less successful in operationalizing the knowledge it produces. Country diagnostics often do not identify intervention strategies for country strategies or specific operations. Only one-fourth of CPFs draw on evidence of "what works" to address gender inequalities and develop policy actions. As for operations, only 27 percent of World Bank standalone projects have explicitly used knowledge to inform the relevance and effectiveness of the theory of change, and only 16 percent have conducted and used assessments, studies, surveys, or data to inform implementation. Although IFC knowledge has increased, IFC has been less successful in using this knowledge to design operations tailored to sectoral and local contexts. Reasons for this ineffectiveness include inadequate internal and external dissemination, difficulties in tailoring knowledge to operational needs, lack of capacities in project teams and implementing partners, and shortages of dedicated gender experts with sector- and context-specific expertise to facilitate knowledge uptake by operational teams.

The World Bank pilots and evaluates effective solutions to address gender inequalities through Gender Innovation Labs (GILs). An outcome of the FY16–23 gender strategy is the expansion of GILs in all Regions, which pilot and evaluate interventions to improve gender equality. GILs are increasingly supporting operational teams to better understand and apply what works using a broader range of methods beyond impact evaluations. This effort could enhance the operationalization of knowledge and strengthen the country-driven approach. However, this evolution of GILs is still embryonic in most Regions and is not adequately funded with internal resources. Moreover, there are no systematic mechanisms of coordination among GILs, gender platforms or similar mechanisms of support, and gender experts in Global Practices.

Limitations of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

At the corporate level, the Bank Group does not have a method to classify and aggregate results to measure the impact of its engagement for gender equality. There are two issues. First, Bank Group results are not explicitly defined—the FY16–23 gender strategy defined high-level outcomes, but there is no consensus on how to operationalize these results (that is, how to interpret, measure, and report them) and what success would look like. Staff and management variously define results as more and better processes, improved project designs, increase in gender-tagged and gender-flagged projects, specific outputs achieved by projects, and decrease in country gender inequalities. Second, the Bank Group does not offer guidelines regarding which type of results is important to track and achieve (for example, which outcomes projects should contribute to and where, and which quality of results projects should ensure—whether it be gender transformative, sustainable, scalable, institutionalized, or owned by countries). The lack of explicit definitions and systematic measurement of results makes it difficult for this evaluation to draw strong, generalizable conclusions on the impact of the Bank Group's gender engagement.

At the country level, indicators are poorly used to measure results and are inconsistently used in reporting. Indicators of CPFs, development policy operations, and other instruments often measure project outreach or women's and girls' access to services, less frequently measure changes in women's and girls' empowerment, and even less frequently measure the Bank Group's contribution to reducing gender inequalities. Missing baselines and arbitrary targets also make it difficult to interpret project achievements. Improvements in reporting will require the Bank Group to relent on seeking to measure attribution (which leads to concentrating on measuring outputs or intermediate indicators) and focus more on assessing its contribution to gender equality within the framework of a country-specific theory of change.

Challenge of Achieving Gender-Transformative Results

Most projects do not sufficiently address the multiple constraints on achieving gender equality, which undermines their effectiveness. Recent gender stand-alone projects rely on multisectoral and holistic designs to address the root causes of gender inequalities and produce gender-transformative results. The World Bank's Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend project and IFC's Pacific Women in Business Program in Papua New Guinea and the Waka Mere peer learning platform in the Solomon Islands exemplify this comprehensive approach, despite challenges in implementation. However, these projects are exceptions. Most projects and country programs analyzed in the case studies do not adequately consider the interconnections and complementarities among the three dimensions of the theory of change for gender equality—access to and control of resources, conducive formal and informal institutions, and women's and girls' agency—which has hindered the achievement of gender equality results.

World Bank and IFC interventions focus more on access to resources than control of resources and often overlook the influence of gender norms and gender power relations. Facilitating women's control over resources by promoting asset ownership requires addressing gender power relations and norms that can constrain the achievement of this goal. For example, the World Bank supported land titling, including joint land titling, and women's access to credit for housing or productive assets, with mixed results. World Bank and IFC projects frequently target women and girls as individuals, overlooking the gender power relations and norms in the households, communities, and social networks in which they are "embedded" that strongly influence their choices and empowerment opportunities. Ignoring gender power relations can have negative consequences, such as inadvertently increasing GBV. Recently, the World Bank and IFC have been increasing their engagement with men and boys to advance gender equality (which can be an effective approach when it is part of holistic and long-term interventions).

The Bank Group increasingly recognizes GBV (which results from gender inequality) as a barrier to achieving gender equality. For this reason, the World Bank and IFC have progressively increased their engagement on GBV by both mitigating GBV risk in projects through safeguard policies and addressing GBV to advance gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in countries and industries. During the evaluation period, the number of sectors and the number of investment project financing, development policy operations, and advisory services and analytics that address GBV increased. The evaluation identifies health and transport interventions (for example, in Bangladesh and Peru) as providing opportunities to address GBV through comprehensive approaches aimed at strengthening prevention and response systems while expanding survivors' access to healing and recovery services. IFC has been increasingly focusing on addressing GBV in the workplace to enhance the environment of workers in client companies and industries.

The evaluation finds that World Bank and IFC engagement for gender equality is more effective when it addresses context-specific binding constraints, seizes existing opportunities, and considers women's and girls' aspirations. Setting quotas or targets of female beneficiaries in projects can be effective only when the project also addresses women's and girls' specific needs and removes constraints to allow their full participation and empowerment. The World Bank and IFC are more effective when they establish productive collaborations with partners embedded in the country based on each other's comparative advantage, or when they support gender champions as role models, as IFC did in Mexico's and Viet Nam's peer learning platforms for promoting childcare and addressing GBV. Evidence presented in the literature suggests that projects can successfully contribute to women's and girls' empowerment when the projects give them voice to express their aspirations, expand their aspirations, and ensure that these aspirations are fulfilled.

The evaluation does not find many examples of achieving gender results at scale. The FY16–23 gender strategy aimed to identify successful "gender-smart solutions" (effective solutions to reduce gender inequalities) to replicate and expand. The new strategy also aims to assist countries in delivering outcomes at scale. The evaluation finds examples of sectoral programs of long duration that contributed to large-scale gender equality results but that struggled to produce sustainable results because of a lack of domestic resource mobilization and the weak capacities of partners. Projects can successfully scale up gender results when they feed into countrywide sector reforms, invest in institution strengthening of existing services, and support a long-term gender engagement, such as the justice reform project in Peru. Otherwise, gender-transformative projects, based on a comprehensive theory of change, struggle to go to scale and often do not have a strategy to do so.

Sustainability is enabled by supporting endogenous processes of change. When the World Bank and IFC foster bottom-up and culturally sensitive approaches that support endogenous processes of change, they are more likely to achieve sustainable gender outcomes owned by communities and local stakeholders.

Findings and Recommendations

This evaluation finds that the Bank Group needs to rethink how it operationalizes its approach to realize its ambition in the 2024–30 gender strategy. The challenges presented in this report have been found in other Independent Evaluation Group evaluations, such as *World Bank Group Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review: An Assessment by the Independent Evaluation Group* (World Bank 2021b) and *Addressing Gender Inequalities in Countries Affected by Fragility, Conflict, and Violence: An Evaluation of the World Bank Group's Support* (World Bank 2023a). These challenges suggest that a new approach for strategic and outcome-oriented engagement is needed and requires the following:

» Enhancing strategic country engagement. Country engagement for gender equality can become more systematic and strategic. This will require country gender analytics that go beyond identifying gender priorities to provide insights into how to best achieve change in the country context; more effective prioritization of activities and expected results in CPFs based on a deep understanding of local opportunities and constraints on achieving gender equality with respect to access to and control of resources, formal and informal institutions, and women's and girls' agency; better leveraging of World Bank and IFC collaboration and comparative advantage; an increased focus on adaptive implementation; and stronger collaboration with international development partners and local stakeholders, including women's rights organizations.

- » Focusing on outcomes. Advancing gender equality is a high-level goal that needs to be better defined and tracked at the corporate, project, and country levels based on a comprehensive theory of change and monitoring and evaluation systems at all levels. This requires more than tracking output and access indicators and a few high-level outcomes. Capturing these complex and multilayered results entails combining quantitative indicators and qualitative narratives to monitor both process-related outputs (attributable to the World Bank) and country-level outcomes the World Bank has contributed to, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and development partners. This need for multiple monitoring and evaluation techniques has implications for the implementation of the new World Bank Group Scorecard indicators on gender equality.
- » Realigning incentives, resources, and structures. The incentives and resources devoted to supporting gender equality do not match the level of ambition of the Bank Group. Shifting to a more strategic and synergic focus on achieving gender outcomes will require a shift of incentives and resources (human and budgetary) toward supporting implementation and country-driven engagement, strengthening the gender skills and expertise of Bank Group staff, streamlining and duly financing the Bank Group gender architecture, and revising and complementing the current gender tag and gender flag system to increase focus on the most gender-transformative engagements.

The evaluation's findings underpin three recommendations for the Bank Group to improve its country-driven engagement for gender equality and the achievement of results.

Strengthening Country-Driven Engagement

Strengthen the country-driven engagement model for gender equality, with greater selectivity, prioritization, and coordination of the country portfolio activities supporting gender equality objectives and an increased focus on implementation. This could be accomplished by (i) ensuring that Bank Group core diagnostics and Country Gender Assessments not only analyze gender inequalities but also provide guidance on which gender inequalities to prioritize and key constraints to address; (ii) explicitly integrating those gender priorities in country strategies and setting up criteria and incentives to translate the country strategy gender priorities into expected results and activities, selected based on the World Bank and IFC comparative advantages and in collaboration with development partners and other key stakeholders, such as civil society organizations and women's rights organizations; (iii) identifying the portfolio of activities required to achieve the prioritized goals in country strategy documents and ensuring reporting of progress toward relevant outcomes; and (iv) focusing financial and human resources on the selected gender priorities to ensure that the Bank Group portfolio addressing gender inequalities is effectively coordinated to leverage synergy across instruments, projects, and institutions.

Enhancing Capacity and Monitoring and Evaluation

Develop the capacity of World Bank and IFC monitoring and evaluation systems to track and account for complex gender results; incentivize the achievement of outcomes at the operational, country, and corporate levels; and regularly report on progress. This could be accomplished by (i) introducing a system to distinguish between activities of the World Bank and IFC that are gender sensitive (that reach the minimum standard) and those that aim to be gender transformative and have a strategic impact on gender equality in the countries; (ii) improving measurement of results using appropriate indicators—both quantitative and qualitative—to capture outputs attributable to the Bank Group and outcomes that the Bank Group contributes to; (iii) ensuring that project-level and country-level monitoring systems regularly report on gender-related results and processes during implementation of projects and country strategies; and (iv) establishing outcome-oriented indicators at the corporate level that go beyond outreach and processes to show progress in gender equality.

Redefining the Gender Architecture

Redefine the current Bank Group gender architecture to specify roles and responsibilities; avoid overlaps and replication of functions; strengthen underresourced tasks, especially implementation of gender-related activities and support to country engagement; improve capacities; and enforce accountability. This could be accomplished by

(i) defining a streamlined structure to avoid overlaps and replications of tasks and to clarify roles and responsibilities, reporting lines, and collaboration and accountability mechanisms of gender human resources (the Gender Group, regional gender coordinators, Global Practice and industry gender focal points and advisers, country gender focal points, gender platforms and other gender coordination mechanisms, GILs, and so on) and management at all levels and task team leaders; (ii) strengthening the gender expertise of staff, managers, and task team leaders through capacity building tailored to different functions, sectors, and contexts, including shadowing, on-the-job and peer-to-peer training, coaching, and other forms of learning; (iii) ensuring that gender experts with adequate seniority are available to support each country engagement, including through decentralizing gender skills to local offices, building local gender expertise, and avoiding overreliance on consultants; and (iv) ensuring that tasks are properly funded through the Bank Group budget, with trust funds strategically leveraged to support priority engagements.

[1] The One World Bank Group approach refers to all three Bank Group institutions providing coordinated support to client countries.

[2] Robust gender diagnostics have supported policy reforms through development policy operations in countries such as Bangladesh, Benin, the Arab Republic of Egypt, Mexico, and Viet Nam, sometimes in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation. Specifically, development policy operations with gender actions substantially increased after the fiscal year 2016–23 gender strategy, in support not only of legal reforms but also of implementation of policies and programs and institution strengthening for gender equality.

Management Response

Management of the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) thanks the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) for the report *An Evaluation of World Bank and International Finance Corporation Engagement for Gender Equality over the Past 10 Years*. The evaluation assesses the evolution of the World Bank and IFC engagement to address gender inequalities between fiscal year (FY)12 and FY23 and presents lessons from results achieved over that period. The evaluation is timely as the World Bank Group is working toward finalizing the implementation plan for its newly launched FY24–30 gender strategy. Management thanks IEG for continued collaboration.

World Bank and International Finance Corporation Management Response

Overall

Management welcomes the report's recognition of the commitment to gender equality and the progress made by the World Bank and IFC over the 2012–23 period. By establishing gender as a corporate priority, both institutions raised awareness among staff and advanced actions to better integrate gender equality into projects and programming. Through the new Bank Group gender strategy and its accompanying implementation plan, management will build on the achievements of the last decade. Key areas of focus will include integrating gender analysis in core and country analytics to influence policy and private sector dialogue, prioritizing gender equality outcomes, advancing the strategy's outcomes coherently and holistically as One World Bank Group in alignment with country priorities, and expanding efforts to strengthen the Bank Group gender architecture.[1]

Management appreciates the finding that World Bank and IFC activities have become more "gender relevant" and supports the invitation to further deepen gender engagement. The evaluation focuses on the extreme high and extreme low values of IEG's gender relevance metric; consequently, it does not fully account for the fact that the entire portfolio was significantly more gender relevant at the end of the evaluation period than it was at the beginning. For example, the share of World Bank projects in the medium to high range of the gender relevance metric grew by four to five times, IFC investments in that range tripled, and total IFC investment with a gender lens grew by approximately nine times in the latter part of the evaluation period. The evaluation recognized that IFC advisory services grew tenfold in the share of projects inhabiting the extreme right tail of the distribution.

Management recognizes that measurement of results for gender activities reflects the heterogeneity in country priorities that is inherent in the country-led model yet sees room for further systematization. Institutional differences in business models and instruments and variation in client needs and priorities often yield tailored operational approaches with customized results measurement and standards of success. When tracing Bank Group contributions to country-level outcomes, management aims to work within national data frameworks, rather than setting up parallel structures for Bank Group monitoring and reporting. IEG acknowledges that the World Bank has found success in working with governments to leverage local opportunities to improve gender equality. Reflecting all the aspects of gender equality found in the Bank Group gender strategy may not be appropriate for every project; management reaffirms that the Bank Group will consider it as an overall goal at the country level across relevant Bank Group projects.

Recommendations

Management welcomes the report's three recommendations, which have implications for implementation that will differ by institution. Management appreciates the suggested pathways to achieving those recommendations and notes that the pathways undertaken by the World Bank and IFC may differ by institution and context, according to available resources, needs, opportunities, and support. Management notes that the Bank Group 2024–30 gender strategy and its accompanying implementation plan are well suited to embrace the recommendations of this evaluation.

Recommendation 1: Management agrees with the need to strengthen systematic and strategic country-driven engagement for gender equality. The new Bank Group gender strategy and accompanying implementation plan have a strong focus on achieving more ambitious gender equality outcomes through strategic country engagement as One World Bank Group. An initial focus on Bank Group gender strategy implementation in selected countries will provide valuable lessons on fostering more strategic and impactful country engagement. The strategy implementation plan will also identify joint country-level World Bank–IFC gender collaborative platforms to remove barriers to women's economic inclusion. This will build on significant progress already realized with respect to country strategies that discuss gender inequalities, development policy operations that focus on policies to address them, solutions that target private sector engagement, and knowledge generated on gender equality that leads to better design and implementation of operations. Priority gender entry points identified in core and country analytics, including gender assessments, will inform the prioritization of specific gender equality outcomes and influence how selected Country Partnership Framework outcomes can advance gender equality. This in turn will promote more coherent country programming. Regional gender action plans will provide further guidance on regional priorities and entry points. A new dashboard will facilitate the exchange of good examples of gender outcome results chains in Country Partnership Frameworks. The Bank Group Gender Strategy Results Framework will monitor the share of Country Partnership Frameworks that include results to track gender outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Management agrees with the recommendation to enhance World Bank and IFC monitoring and evaluation systems with the aim to track gender results, incentivize achievement of outcomes, and report on progress. The strategy implementation plan calls for the use of data and analytics to underpin institutional and policy reforms to address gender constraints (including through fiscal and sector reforms, strengthening of national systems, and leveraging the private sector). The strategy and its implementation plan introduce new metrics that incentivize Bank Group teams to prioritize gender outcomes, strive for transformative change, and focus on implementation and results. Furthermore, the World Bank and IFC are planning a "refresh" of the gender tag and the gender flag. This refresh, in conjunction with the Scorecard, will deepen the gender intensity of operations by encouraging replication and expansion of gender transformative evidence-based approaches across sectors. The new Scorecard encompasses gender-related indicators that can help measure progress on the main strategic objectives of the new strategy. Alongside the Bank Group Gender Strategy Results Framework, the gender implementation plan will consider the selection of country actions to facilitate learning and knowledge sharing across country programs, and a reporting framework drawing on the Bank Group Scorecard indicators to track and support implementation, and ultimately help accelerate gender outcomes.

Recommendation 3: Management agrees with the recommendation to redefine the gender architecture and specify roles and responsibilities to improve efficiency, better support country engagement, and improve capacity. The implementation plan highlights the challenge of more clearly defining roles and responsibilities in the organizational setup for gender specialists to provide effective support to task teams and clients and to support strategic country engagement. It also suggests that better alignment of incentives and investment in technical skills and expertise are needed to deliver impact at scale. The World Bank will invest in developing capacity and skills, particularly within Global Practices and at the country level, through trainings that will include gender accreditation and tailoring for specific technical families. It will also build on the new knowledge academies. A working group will be established to elaborate plans to strengthen staff skills and capacity. IFC has expanded regional staff presence over the entire evaluation period and has embedded gender experts within each of the industry teams. Going forward, IFC will continue to build its regional capacity and gender expertise, mainstream and prioritize scalable gender solutions across sectors, advance thought leadership and spearhead innovation on gender equality, and better measure impact. Finally, Bank Group management aims to further strengthen accountability and delivery.

[1] While management welcomes the opportunities for improvement identified by the report, it believes that methodological limitations to provide a comprehensive view of World Bank Group engagement to advance gender equality should be acknowledged. These include triangulation across nonrepresentative samples (for example, eight country case studies and qualitative interviews) and the construct validity (how well a test measures the concept it was designed to evaluate) of the report's innovative "gender relevance" metric.

Report to the Board from the Committee on Development Effectiveness

The Committee on Development Effectiveness met to consider the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) report *An Evaluation of World Bank and International Finance Corporation Engagement for Gender Equality over the Past 10 Years* and the draft management response.

Members welcomed the evaluation as valuable in informing the development of the implementation plan for the new World Bank Group 2024–30 gender strategy. Members expressed support for IEG's recommendations and noted management's agreement and commitment to implementing them. They commended the Bank Group for the progress made toward gender equality and empowerment and called for scaled-up efforts (to enhance strategic country engagement, focus on outcomes, and realign incentives) and resources. Members also underscored the need for the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation to consider the One World Bank Group approach for outcome-oriented engagements.

Members urged management to ensure that the recommendations from IEG's evaluation are well reflected in the implementation plan of the new gender strategy. They welcomed management's proposal to strengthen gender architecture, including through developing the World Bank's operational model that encompasses building regional capacity and gender expertise. Furthermore, members expressed interest in understanding how management plans to refresh the gender tag and the gender flag to deepen the integration of gender equality in operational implementation. They also sought clarity on how the results of IEG's evaluation and the overall emphasis on outcome orientation would be reflected in the Corporate Scorecard indicator methodology.

Members underscored the importance of strengthening collaboration and coordination efforts with development partners, the private sector, and other stakeholders in reinforcing the Bank Group's country-driven engagement model. They called for the One World Bank Group approach to advance the gender equality agenda and supported the unified approach of the new gender strategy.

1 | Introduction

Purpose

This evaluation assesses the evolution of World Bank and International Finance Corporation (IFC) engagement to help countries address gender inequalities and the lessons learned on the results achieved between fiscal year (FY)12 and FY23. The evaluation also analyzes the factors that enabled and constrained this evolution, including the contribution of the FY16–23 gender strategy.

The evaluation's findings will complement the findings of other Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) evaluations and will inform the implementation plan of the 2024–30 gender strategy. *World Bank Group Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review: An Assessment by the Independent Evaluation Group* identified strong commitment to the strategy across the World Bank Group (World Bank 2021b). However, it found that implementation actions did not consistently match this commitment and the level of ambition in the strategy. The Mid-Term Review pointed to shortcomings in implementing the country-driven approach—a finding confirmed by *Addressing Gender Inequalities in Countries Affected by Fragility, Conflict, and Violence: An Evaluation of the World Bank Group's Support* (World Bank 2023a). The latter evaluation showed that, for the Bank Group support to produce deep, long-lasting, and scalable results, it is essential to switch from a project-by-project approach to a strategic country engagement. This evaluation provides additional insights into these issues and contributes to ongoing discussions about realistic goal and target setting in relation to the implementation plan of the Bank Group's 2024–30 gender strategy (World Bank Group 2024) at the corporate, country, and project levels, including operationalization of the Bank Group Corporate Scorecard indicators.[1]

Methodology

Scope

This evaluation defines its scope along five dimensions: reference period, institutional coverage, subject focus, regional and country coverage, and level of engagement and operationalization. The reference period spans from FY12 to FY23. FY12 is the year the *World Development Report (WDR)* on gender equality and development was published. The evaluation covers the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Development Association (IDA), and IFC and excludes the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, which only recently adopted a gender strategy implementation plan and is part of the new gender strategy for 2024–30. The evaluation focuses on gender inequalities[2] under the four strategic objectives of the FY16–23 gender strategy: improving human endowments, removing constraints for more and better jobs, removing barriers to women's ownership and control of assets, and enhancing the voice and agency of women and engaging men and boys. This evaluation spans all Practice Groups, Global Practices (GPs), industry groups, and business lines within the World Bank and IFC that are covered by the FY16–23 gender strategy. The findings of the evaluation are generalizable to all countries and Regions—selected case studies span all seven Bank Group Regions and complement portfolio reviews, corporate interviews, a survey of World Bank and IFC staff, and a review of World Bank and IFC literature, which allows for successful triangulation (see appendix A). Finally, the evaluation assesses the World Bank and IFC performance on gender equality by establishing an analytic strategy at multiple, interconnected levels: corporate, GP and industry group, Region, country, and project or activity levels.

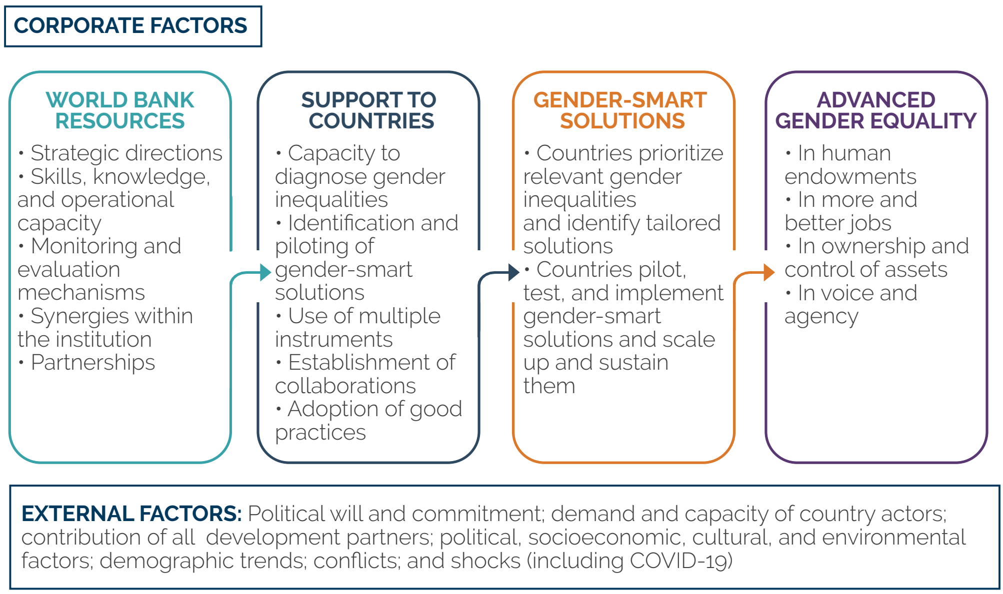
Three gender topics fall outside the evaluation's scope. The topics are (i) gender equality in human resource practices and corporate culture within the Bank Group, (ii) gender equality in procurement, and (iii) gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment action plan. The GBV and sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment action plan will be part of IEG's upcoming Environmental and Social Framework evaluation.

Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) are partially covered in the evaluation as part of the intersectionality analysis.

Theory of Action

The evaluation derives its theory of action from the narrative of the FY16–23 gender strategy. The Bank Group allocates inputs (figure 1.1) to ensure that activities are undertaken at the corporate, Region, country, industry or GP, and project levels. These inputs consist of strategic directions and commitments on gender; technical skills of World Bank and IFC staff strengthened through training and guidance tools; monitoring and evaluation systems; and a gender architecture that refers to the human resources devoted to gender (in particular, gender leads, advisers, and focal points in addition to the Gender Group), guidance and advice to facilitate cross-sectoral and cross-institutional collaborations, and the management and reporting lines that govern the functioning of these resources. These inputs aim to strengthen the Bank Group's capacity to provide effective support to countries in the form of better diagnosis of gender gaps; identification and piloting of gender-smart solutions; coordinated use of multiple instruments, such as strategic plans, knowledge, lending, and technical assistance; and collaboration between the World Bank and IFC and with country stakeholders. The Bank Group's support aims to increase the country uptake of approaches to address gender inequalities and guide them to better prioritize relevant gender gaps and define adequate solutions; pilot, test, and implement gender-smart solutions; and institutionalize those solutions through the scale-up and creation of conditions for sustainability. Eventually, the country uptake of these approaches should result in increased gender equality in countries in the four dimensions identified by the gender strategy. Changes in language notwithstanding, this theory of action aligns with the pre-strategy approach to gender. Its fundamental elements—country-driven approach, centrality of knowledge, and emphasis on identifying, adopting, and enhancing effective solutions—are adopted by the 2024–30 gender strategy.[3]

Figure 1.1. World Bank Theory of Action to Achieve Gender Equality



Sources: Independent Evaluation Group; World Bank Group 2015.

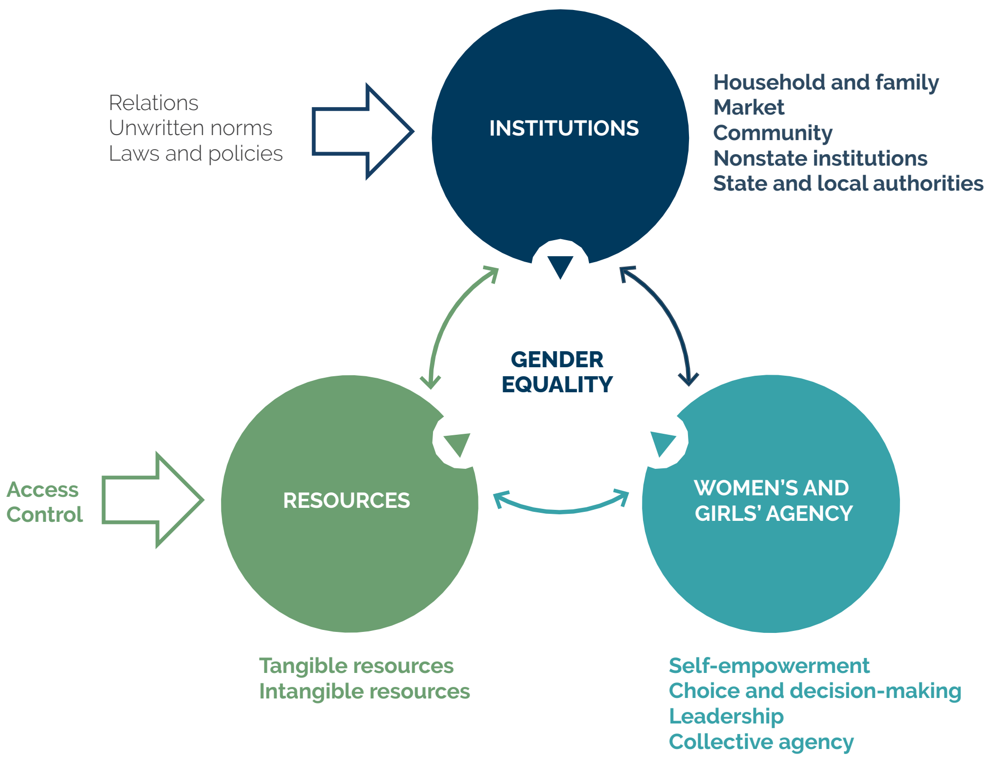
The evaluation assesses how well this theory of action has been implemented. To formulate its recommendations, the evaluation assesses how the Bank Group has internalized and implemented the theory of action and to what extent the inputs mobilized by the institution (corporate factors) have facilitated or hindered the engagement for gender equality and the achievement of results, also accounting for external influencing factors, such as political will and commitment, demand and capacity of country actors, and socioeconomic and cultural factors and trends (figure 1.1).

Conceptual Framework

The evaluation's conceptual framework derives from the *WDR 2012* on gender equality and development. According to the *WDR 2012*, gender outcomes result from the interplay of formal and informal institutions that shape choices and preferences within households, the level of agency of women and girls, and the distribution of economic opportunities and human endowments (World Bank 2012). Each element—institutions, agency, human endowments, and economic opportunities—influences and is influenced by the others. The FY16–23 gender strategy adopted the *WDR 2012* conceptual framework and organized the gender equality objectives under its four strategic objectives. The gender strategy included the change in informal institutions (gender norms) under the fourth objective of enhancing the voice and agency of women and engaging men and boys.

This evaluation's conceptual framework (figure 1.2) adapts the *WDR 2012* framework and draws inspiration from the conceptual model of women's and girls' empowerment that was developed by the KIT Institute in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2017 (Van Eerdewijk et al. 2017) and that was adopted by three World Bank publications (World Bank 2023e, 2023f, 2023g).

Figure 1.2. Conceptual Framework for the Evaluation



Sources: Independent Evaluation Group; Van Eerdewijk et al. 2017; World Bank 2012.

Gender equality can be achieved only by transforming gender power relations. This goal requires women and girls exercising agency and taking action, a more equal distribution of resources, and a shift in the institutional structures or institutions that shape gender roles and power relations (figure 1.2). These changes are closely interrelated. Tangible and intangible resources[4] are unequally distributed between men and women because of unequal gender power relations. Gender equality requires equal access to resources and equal control of resources. Women's and girls' agency encompasses four dimensions: (i) women's and girls' self-empowerment (power within), (ii) women's and girls' choice and decision-making, (iii) women's and girls' leadership, and (iv) women's and girls' collective agency. Women, girls, men, and boys pursue their lives in the context of institutional structures—that is, the social arrangements of formal and informal rules and practices that govern behaviors and expressions of agency, as well as the distribution and control of resources. Institutional structures frame social relations—that is, power relations between different social groups, including gender power relations, resulting in gender inequalities. Institutions operate in five different arenas: household and family, markets, community, nonstate institutions, and state and local authorities. The focus on women and girls is based on evidence that gender inequalities mostly affect women and girls worldwide. However, the conceptual framework also highlights the engagement of men and boys as an essential part of institutional change and stresses the need to empower them to foster the affirmation of culturally relevant forms of "positive masculinity."[5] It further recognizes that men and boys and nonbinary people are also affected by gender inequalities. Appendix B provides additional explanations on the conceptual framework.

Evaluation Questions

The main evaluation question is, What are the main results achieved by the World Bank and IFC in supporting countries to address gender inequalities, and what is the contribution of the FY16–23 gender strategy? This overarching question comprises two questions that are broken down and further explored in subquestions (box 1.1). The questions focus on the "what" (results) and the "how" (processes and modalities of engagement) that characterize the support the World Bank and IFC provide to countries with the aim of closing gender gaps or addressing gender inequalities. The "why" (those factors that affect the achievement of results and elements of the theory of action) is treated as a cross-cutting question.

Box 1.1. Evaluation Questions

What are the main results achieved by the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) in supporting countries to address gender inequalities, and what is the contribution of the fiscal year 2016–23 gender strategy?

1. What progress have the World Bank and IFC achieved in supporting countries to address gender inequalities since the *World Development Report 2012?*

- 1a. To what extent has the World Bank's and IFC's support been relevant to countries' priorities, and how has this changed over time?
- 1b. To what extent have the World Bank and IFC supported country actors' adoption of effective gender-smart solutions to reduce gender inequalities, and how has this changed over time?
- 1c. To what extent have the World Bank and IFC supported country actors' ownership[a] of gender-smart solutions and their capacity to replicate them, make them sustainable, and scale them up, and how has this changed over time?

2. What is the contribution of the fiscal year 2016–23 gender strategy to supporting countries to address gender inequalities?

- 2a. What has been the contribution of the fiscal year 2016–23 gender strategy to improving World Bank and IFC use of knowledge, guidance, partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track and achieve results?

Cross-cutting question: Which factors have affected the achievement of results and elements of the theory of action?

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: a. According to this evaluation, inclusive country ownership means participation of key actors in setting priorities of the development agenda (World Bank 2012). Actors include government leaders, public officials, legislators, civil society actors, private sector, service users and providers, academia, and citizens. Country ownership encompasses participation in defining gender priorities and solutions to address them and buy-in on the solutions as envisaged by the gender strategy.

Research Methods

The evaluation adopted a multilevel and multimethod strategy to assess the evaluation questions. The analysis took place at the corporate, Region, industry, country, and project and activity levels (see appendix A).
The multimethod approach featured a nested design with nine interconnected methodological components, blending qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach enabled addressing complexity, enhanced efficiency, and supported triangulation. Some evaluation activities occurred simultaneously for triangulation purposes, whereas others were sequential, building on emerging results to strengthen external validity.

The evaluation focused on different elements at different levels. At the corporate level, the analysis examined the strategic vision and directions of the institution and the gender architecture (that is, the human resources devoted to gender, such as gender leads, advisers, focal points, and the Gender Group; the guidance and advice aimed at facilitating cross-sectoral and cross-institutional collaborations; and the management and reporting lines that govern the functioning of these resources) through corporate interviews, literature review of the Bank Group corporate documents, and a staff survey. At the global level, the evaluation assessed the Bank Group support to countries through a review of the recent country strategies, literature review of the Bank Group knowledge products,[6] and multiple portfolio reviews of the Bank Group (see appendix A).

At the country level, the analysis assessed the Bank Group support to individual countries through eight country case studies—Bangladesh, Benin, the Arab Republic of Egypt, Mexico, Peru, Tanzania, Uzbekistan, and Viet Nam (see appendix D). The case study countries were purposively selected in consultation with the World Bank and IFC, with the intention of capturing good practices of country engagement and operations ("positive deviants"). Each case study includes extensive desk reviews of Bank Group projects, analytic work, and strategic documents; desk reviews of the Bank Group and external literature on gender inequalities and effective solutions; desk reviews of each country's relevant strategies and policies; and desk reviews of documents on gender agendas and gender-related activities by other relevant actors. Each case study also includes semistructured interviews and focus groups with key informants of the World Bank and IFC, implementing partners, private sector clients, and other relevant stakeholders (governmental institutions, development partners, international nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], civil society associations, women's rights organizations, religious institutions, and academics) on the country engagement for gender equality, its results, and its evolution. At the project and activity levels, the evaluation carried out in-depth examinations of specific gender-relevant projects and activities with potentially transformative elements. This analysis also included field visits in the case study countries and interviews and focus group discussions with target groups and relevant stakeholders at the local and community levels.

Limitations of the Evaluation

The evaluation's main limitation stems from the paucity of information on gender equality results. Although this is primarily a limitation of the World Bank and IFC information systems—a critical finding of the evaluation—it represents at the same time a huge challenge for the analysis. Specific examples of data limitations are paucity of indicators, lack of reporting of indicators, and zero baselines (with the inability to distinguish between true zeros or lack of data at the start of the project). Other limitations are lack of typologies and classifications for analyzing expected and achieved results on reducing gender inequalities. The evaluation had to combine several methods to gather evidence on results, including heavy primary data collection, extensive portfolio reviews, and use of text analysis. Systematic triangulation across multiple sources was required for generalizability, and this increased the complexity of the evaluation.

Another limitation for the evaluation involves attribution of results. The Bank Group introduced the gender strategy in 2016, IFC advisory gender flagging started in 2016, World Bank gender tagging started in 2017,[7] and IFC investment gender flagging started in 2019. At the time this evaluation commenced, only 92 gender-relevant World Bank projects approved after the strategy had a completion report (not necessarily an Implementation Completion and Results Report Review), and only 23 IFC advisory and four IFC investment gender-relevant projects had been evaluated and validated by IEG. Moreover, even at the level of engagement, it is not always possible to neatly separate the impact of the strategy from trends that were already occurring and the contributions of the World Bank and IFC and those of other development partners. Appendix C details the evolution of the Bank Group's gender agenda.

A third limitation derives from key informants' reluctance to provide information and access to other key informants. For example, many IFC clients, for confidentiality reasons, could not release information on beneficiaries, which constrained triangulation of information from staff, clients, and beneficiaries. This lack of data created an asymmetry between IFC projects, for which the perspective of beneficiaries was missing, and World Bank projects, whose beneficiaries were much easier to access. In some countries, governments were also reluctant to provide information and attempted to control the information collected in the field. Appendix A details these challenges and IEG's mitigation strategies.

[1] The Corporate Scorecard provides an overarching view of the results indicators of the four institutions (the International Development Association, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Finance Corporation, and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency), tracking progress toward the World Bank Group's vision to create a world free of poverty on a livable planet. Gender equality is one of the 15 outcome areas tracked by the Corporate Scorecard.

[2] This evaluation refers to gender gaps in keeping with the approach and language of the fiscal year (FY)16–23 gender strategy. However, it favors the concept of gender inequalities because gender gaps are frequently understood as disparities between men and women (or boys and girls)—in access to services, resources, or participation—whereas gender inequality is a more comprehensive concept that includes human rights violations derived from gender differences and relations (for example, gender-based violence) or that are women and girls specific (such as maternal mortality or unwanted early pregnancies). The new 2024–30 gender strategy also prefers gender inequalities over gender gaps. The evaluation investigates gender inequalities more broadly but uses gender gaps when referring to specific aspects of the FY16–23 gender strategy, such as the gender tag and the gender flag.

[3] See the Approach Paper for a discussion on the innovative elements in the Bank Group's conceptual approach to gender equality introduced by the FY16–23 gender strategy (World Bank 2023b).

[4] Examples of tangible resources are land, money, water, food, house, technology, and physical integrity. Examples of intangible resources are information, skills, time, psychological integrity, and social capital.

[5] The definition of "positive masculinity" is reported in appendix B.

[6] The evaluation did not conduct a systematic review of the Bank Group knowledge products but analyzed Bank Group knowledge products in relation to how they are used in the formulation of strategies and in operations (to answer evaluation question 2a). For the case studies, it also assessed knowledge products in terms of their impact on the country engagement.

[7] The World Bank introduced the gender tag in FY17 to systematically track the implementation of the gender strategy and measure the quality and results of World Bank operations. Projects are assessed for the gender tag immediately after the Board of Executive Directors approval and meet the requirements for the tag if the Project Appraisal Document articulates a logical chain addressing a gender gap and encompassing analysis, actions, and indicators.

2 | Engagement for Gender Equality

Highlights

Beginning in 2012 and especially after the adoption of the fiscal year 2016–23 gender strategy, the share of World Bank and International Finance Corporation (IFC) gender-relevant projects increased in all Practice Groups and industries.

However, the expansion of gender-relevant projects involved breadth more than depth—the share of World Bank and IFC investment projects with low gender relevance increased much more compared with those with high gender relevance, and the projects including robust and gender-transformative theories of change only slightly increased. Against the trend in World Bank and IFC investments, IFC advisory work selectively focused its engagement on a subgroup of substantially gender-relevant projects.

The World Bank's increasingly ambitious gender tag targets coincided with the tag becoming less stringent. Specifically, the increase of targets of gender tag incentivized an increase of the minimum quality standard, but gender-transformative projects with robust theories of change were not sufficiently incentivized. Moreover, the gender tag incentivized design more than implementation.

IFC is increasing gender flag targets for advisory services and investments, which risks losing a more selective approach to addressing gender inequalities and could dilute IFC efforts if the level of ambition is not matched by additional resources.

Despite country strategies identifying gender priorities that align with needs, the country-driven approach is not strategic enough and is fragmented, with various instruments, sectors, and institutions weakly coordinated.

The World Bank and IFC are increasingly producing robust gender diagnostics to support the identification of gender priorities in Country Partnership Frameworks, inform the integration of policy actions in development policy operations, and feed into policy dialogue on gender equality. The World Bank and IFC are also increasingly piloting and evaluating activities that can reduce gender inequalities. However, they still struggle to operationalize lessons on "what works" to achieve results.

This chapter discusses the evolution of the Bank Group engagement for gender equality between FY12 and FY23, the implementation of the country-driven approach,[1] and the role of knowledge in supporting these developments. The chapter discusses how the World Bank gender tag and IFC gender flag influenced the evolution of the gender engagement, the role of the FY16–23 gender strategy, and the impact of enabling and constraining factors, including the availability and management of human and financial resources and the incentives for internal and external collaboration.

Evolution of the World Bank Group Engagement for Gender Equality

Over the evaluation period, the engagement for gender equality increased, as demonstrated by the increase of the share of World Bank and IFC projects deemed gender relevant. This evaluation uses an algorithm that combines several project characteristics to create an index of gender relevance intensity (box 2.1 and appendix E) and to assess how the share of gender-relevant projects changed over time.[2] Between FY12 and FY23, the World Bank and IFC lending portfolios became more gender relevant. The share of World Bank projects with the lowest scores (in the 0–15 range) decreased throughout the evaluation period, whereas the share of projects with a 20+ score progressively increased. In IFC, the trend was similar, with the share of projects with the lowest scores decreasing for both IFC investments and IFC advisory projects (figure 2.1). The average score also increased, although modestly for IFC investments.

The share of gender-relevant projects increased irrespective of how stringent the definition of gender relevance is. Alternative score cutoff values—corresponding to more or less generous standards of gender relevance—all suggest an increase of the share of gender-relevant projects throughout the evaluation period (figure 2.2). For IFC advisory projects, the increase started after the approval of the FY16–23 gender strategy, whereas for the World Bank, the share of gender-relevant projects was already following an upward trend. This represents important progress. Increasing the number of gender-relevant projects is a necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition for Bank Group contributions to reducing gender inequality.

Box 2.1. Defining the Gender Relevance of Projects

Many donors have developed criteria for operational teams to assess how well their policies and programs contribute to gender equality. Besides establishing safeguards to ensure that projects do not cause unintended harm (in the form of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and harassment), many organizations also require projects to contribute to addressing gender inequalities, either directly or indirectly, based on their gender policies. Checklists, scores, and targets provide guidelines and incentives to staff and are used for quality assurance, monitoring, accountability, and reporting purposes.

The United Nations gender equality marker (GEM), for example, uses a coding scale from 0 to 3 (UNSDG 2024) to distinguish whether an activity is not expected to contribute to gender equality (GEM 0), contributes to gender equality and the empowerment of women in a limited way (GEM 1), has gender equality and the empowerment of women as a significant objective (GEM 2), or has gender equality and the empowerment of women as the principal objective (GEM 3). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee gender equality policy marker is based on a three-point scoring system (OECD 2016) distinguishing whether gender equality is part of the project objective: not targeted (0), significant (1), and principal (2).

The World Bank Group gender tag and flag mark projects that, at design, clearly articulate how they will contribute toward narrowing specified gender gaps. The flag and tag are expressed as a binary variable, where a 1 is assigned if the project includes an analysis to identify gender gaps relevant to the project objectives, actions to address those gaps, and indicators measuring progress on the proposed actions (IFC 2023; World Bank 2022a).

The implementation of each scoring system requires a judgment by operational teams and validators of "how much is enough" to decide whether a project "identifies," "contributes to," or "addresses" gender gaps. This implicit standard of gender relevance is even harder to gauge for a less granular system, such as the Bank Group one.

This evaluation developed an algorithm to measure different intensities of gender relevance. The algorithm, after being calibrated using a sample of manually reviewed projects, is used to calculate a score by taking discrete values between 0 and 100 that

(continued)

Box 2.1. Defining the Gender Relevance of Projects (cont.)

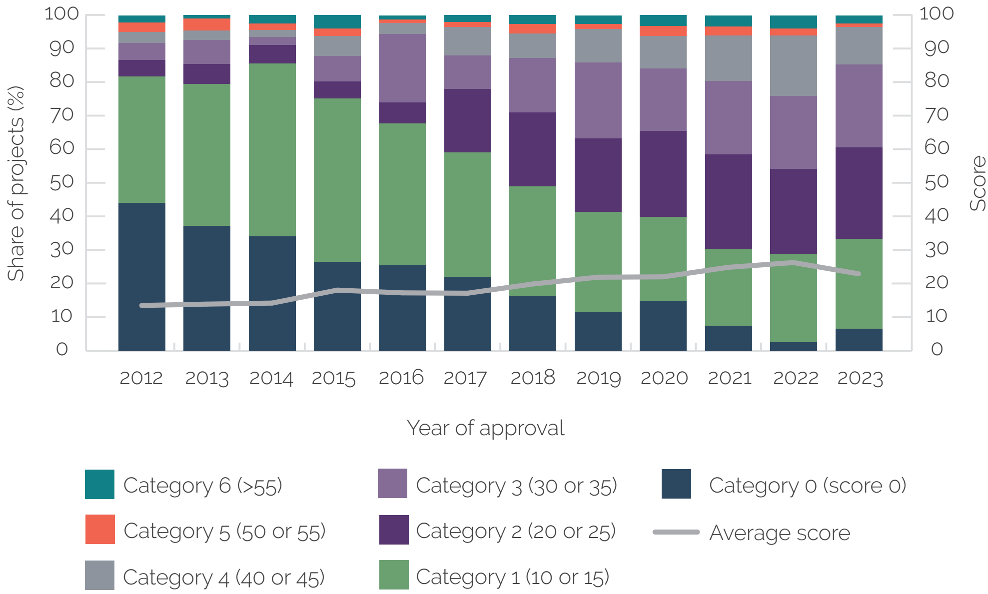
can be considered a good proxy of how gender relevant each project is. The algorithm combines 9 attributes for World Bank projects, 10 attributes for International Finance Corporation (IFC) advisory projects, and 8 attributes for IFC investment projects. These attributes include variables constructed using text analysis of project documents and other project characteristics (see appendix E). Robustness tests were conducted by manually identifying stand-alone projects (based on the project title and project development objective) and comparing this identification with the one generated by the score (for 122 World Bank, 69 IFC advisory, and 14 IFC investment stand-alone projects). We found that the algorithm identified stand-alone projects quite precisely. A strong correlation was also found between the score assigned by the gender algorithm and the manually determined gender relevance of 154 IFC advisory projects, 201 IFC investment projects, and country case study projects.

The evaluation uses the score to define various cutoff values and to show how the share of gender-relevant project changes, based on more or less generous definitions of gender relevance to World Bank and IFC projects. It normally uses a greater than 15 cutoff value for analyses that require a specific definition of gender relevance.

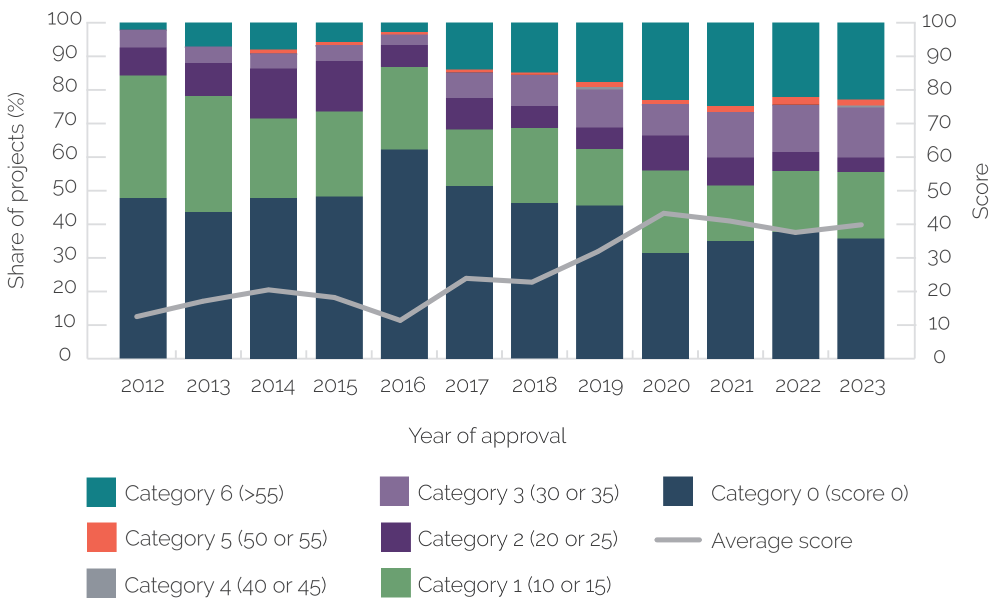
Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Figure 2.1. Distribution of the Gender-Relevant Score, Fiscal Years 2012–23

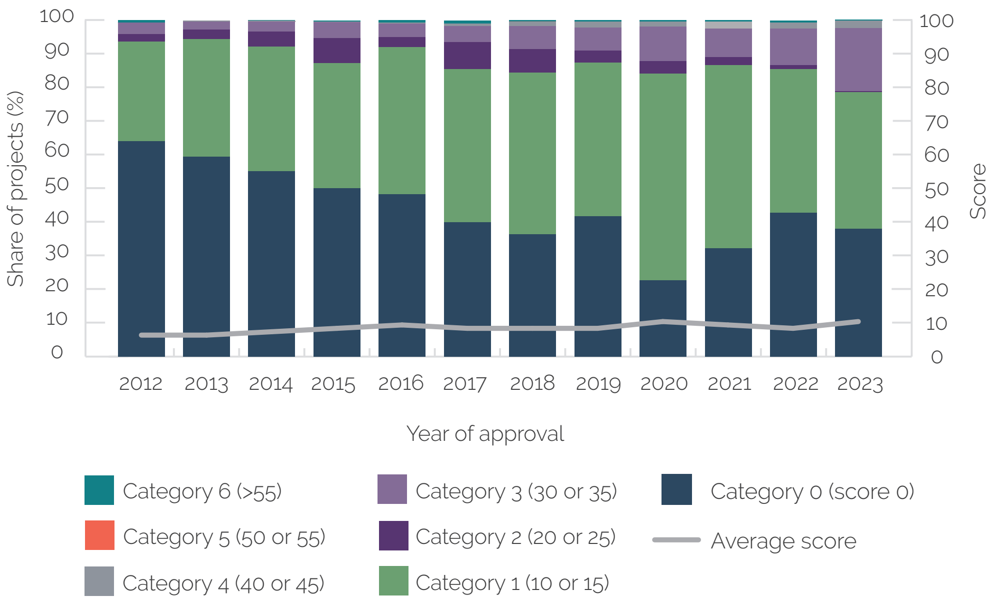
a. Distribution of gender-relevant score and average score—World Bank projects (*N* = 3,836)



b. Distribution of gender-relevant score and average score—IFC advisory projects (*N* = 1,530)



c. Distribution of gender-relevant score and average score—IFC investment projects (*N* = 3,612)

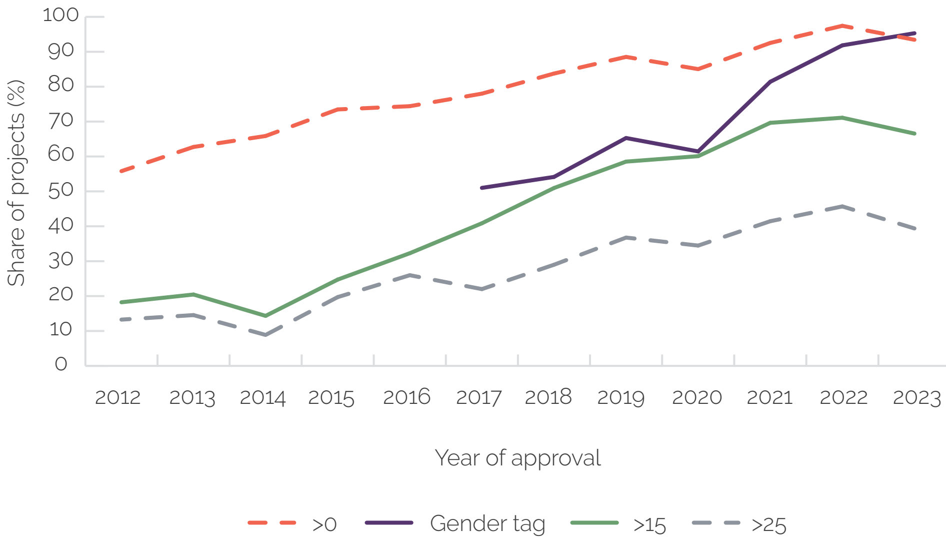


Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

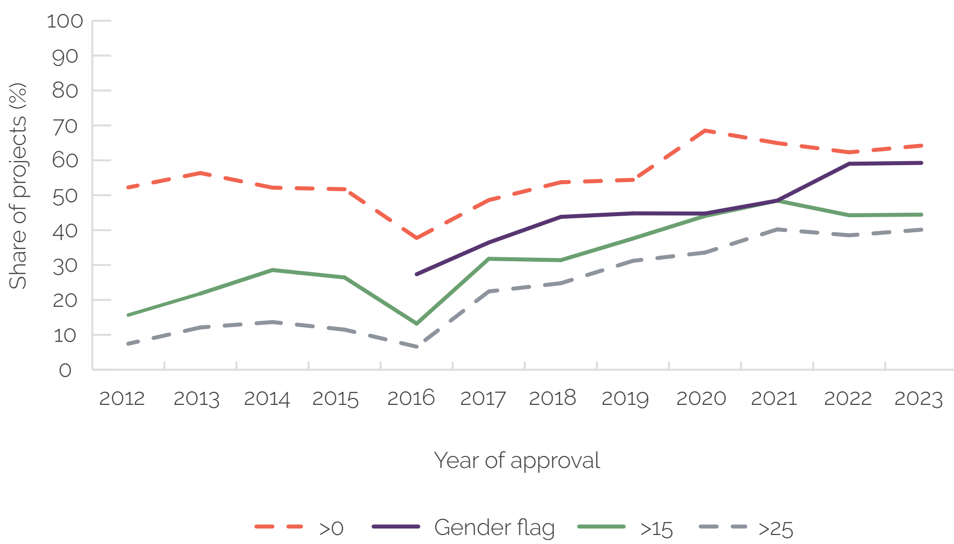
Note: For the World Bank, the entire population of International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and International Development Association projects (investment project financing, Programs-for-Results, and development policy operations) is included. Additional financing is counted separately, but additional financing of parent projects approved before 2012 is excluded. For IFC, all investments committed from fiscal year 2012 to fiscal year 2023 and all advisory services approved from fiscal year 2012 to fiscal year 2023 are included. Category 0 includes projects whose score is 0, category 1 includes projects whose score is 10 or 15, category 2 includes projects whose score is 20 or 25, category 3 includes projects whose score is 30 or 35, category 4 includes projects whose score is 40 or 45, category 5 includes projects whose score is 50 or 55, and category 6 includes projects whose score is higher than 55 (up to 100). IFC = International Finance Corporation.

Figure 2.2. Share of Gender-Relevant Projects Based on Alternative Index Cutoff Values and the Gender Tag and the Gender Flag

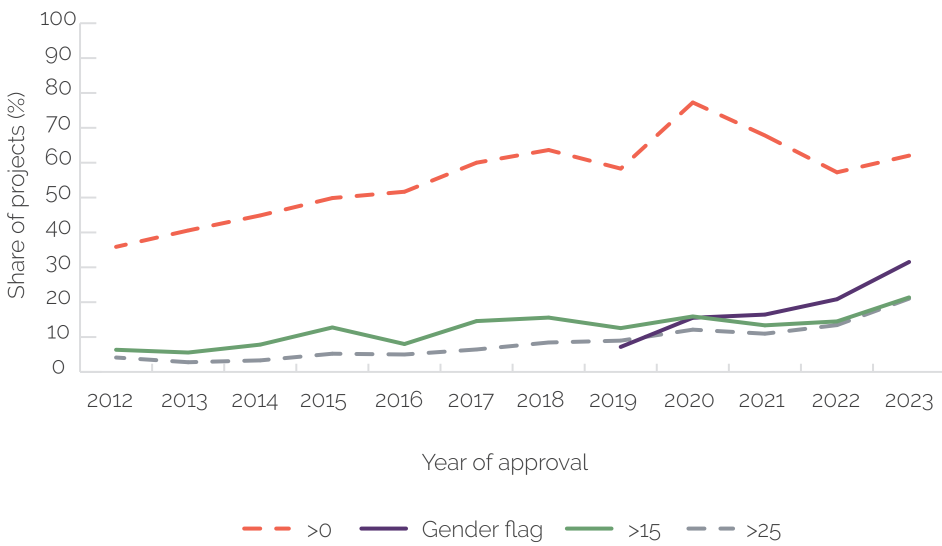
a. Gender-relevant projects according to various cutoffs and gender tag—World Bank projects (*N* = 3,836)



b. Gender-relevant projects according to various cutoffs and gender flag—IFC advisory projects (*N* = 1,530)



c. Gender-relevant projects according to various cutoffs and gender flag—IFC investment projects (N = 3,612)



Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: For the World Bank, the entire population of International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and International Development Association projects (investment project financing, Programs-for-Results, and development policy operations) is included. Additional financing is counted separately, but additional financing of parent projects approved before 2012 is excluded. For IFC, all investments committed from fiscal year 2012 to fiscal year 2023 and all advisory services approved from fiscal year 2012 to fiscal year 2023 are included. World Bank gender tag data were accessed and compiled in May 2024. IFC gender flag data were accessed and compiled in December 2023. IFC = International Finance Corporation.

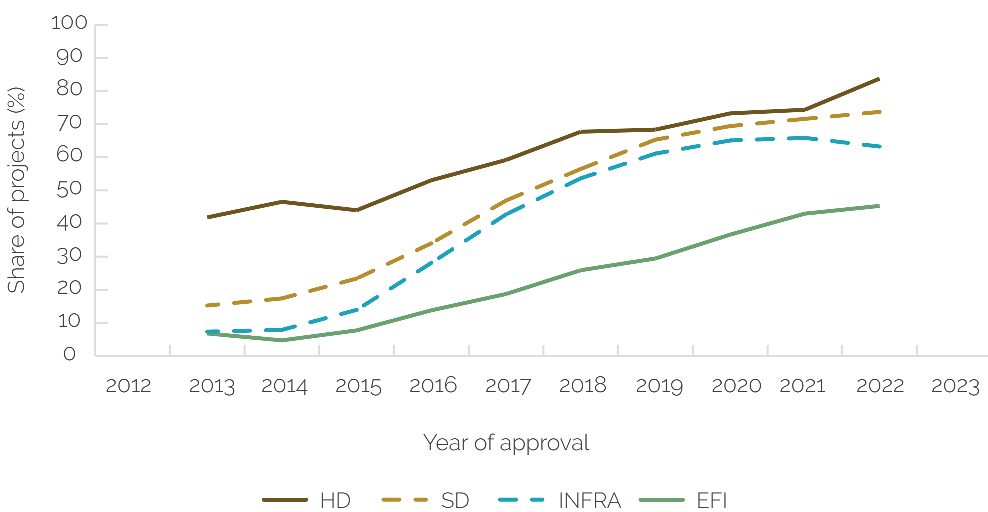
The share of gender-relevant projects increased in all Practice Groups and industries; some Practice Groups and industries had gender-relevant projects for the first time after the adoption of the FY16–23 gender strategy. Before FY16, Human Development was the only Practice Group with a large share of gender-relevant projects (figure 2.3, panel a), mostly in health and education. All other Practice Groups started from much lower levels—especially Infrastructure and Equitable Growth, Finance, and Institutions—but experienced a substantial increase starting from FY16. In the Equitable Growth, Finance, and Institutions Practice Group, part of the increase of gender-relevant projects was due to the increase of development policy operations (DPOs) with gender-relevant actions (as discussed in this chapter). For IFC, before the adoption of the strategy, most gender-relevant projects addressed gender gaps in access to finance; after the strategy, there was a notable expansion in Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services;

Infrastructure for advisory projects; and Disruptive Technologies and Funds for investments, although financial access remained the predominant area.

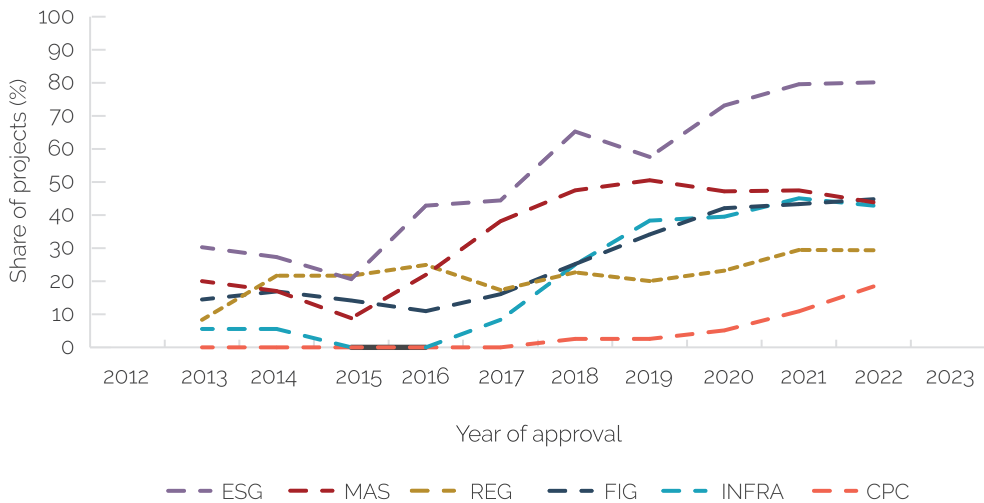
This expansion and entry into new sectors of engagement are confirmed by the manual review of all eight country case study portfolios. The most remarkable improvement among the case studies happened in Tanzania, with the proportion of World Bank gender-relevant lending projects increasing from 23 percent to 70 percent. Furthermore, before the adoption of the strategy, gender-relevant projects were mostly concentrated in Human Development; however, after the strategy, they expanded into other Practice Groups, such as Sustainable Development (seven out of eight operations compared with one out of four in the early period) and Infrastructure (three out of seven operations compared with zero out of four in the early period).

Figure 2.3. Share of Gender-Relevant Projects, Practice Groups, and Industries

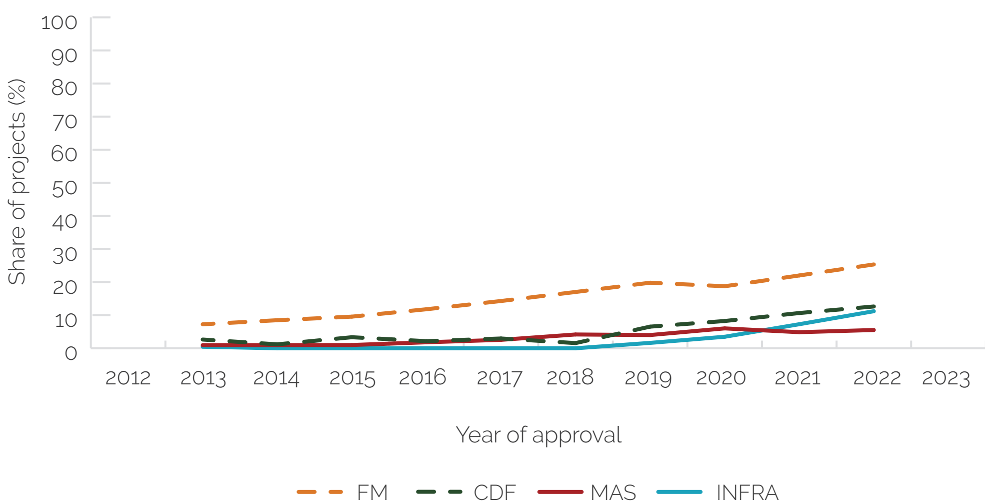
a. Gender-relevant projects by Practice Group, three-year moving average—World Bank projects



b. Gender-relevant projects by business line, three-year moving average—
IFC advisory projects



c. Gender-relevant projects by industry, three-year moving average—
IFC investment projects



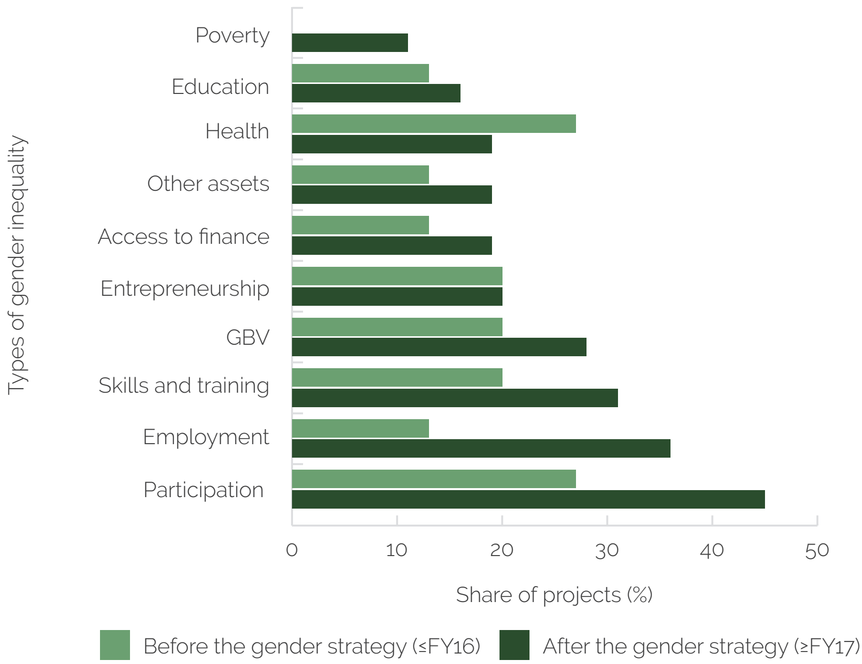
Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: For the World Bank, the entire population of International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and International Development Association projects (investment project financing, Programs-for-Results, and development policy operations) is included. Additional financing is counted separately, but additional financing of parent projects approved before 2012 is excluded. For IFC, all investments committed from fiscal year 2012 to fiscal year 2023 and all advisory services approved from fiscal year 2012 to fiscal year 2023 are included. For both the World Bank and IFC, the gender intensity cutoff of greater than 15 is used to define gender relevance. For IFC, a business line is excluded if less than 5 percent of the gender-relevant portfolio belongs to that business line. CDF = Disruptive Technologies and Funds; CPC = Corporate Portfolio Committee; EFI = Equitable Growth, Finance, and Institutions; ESG = Environmental, Social, and Governance; FIG = Financial Institutions Group; FM = Financial Markets; HD = Human Development; IFC = International Finance Corporation; INFRA = Infrastructure; MAS = Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services; REG = Regional Advisory; SD = Sustainable Development.

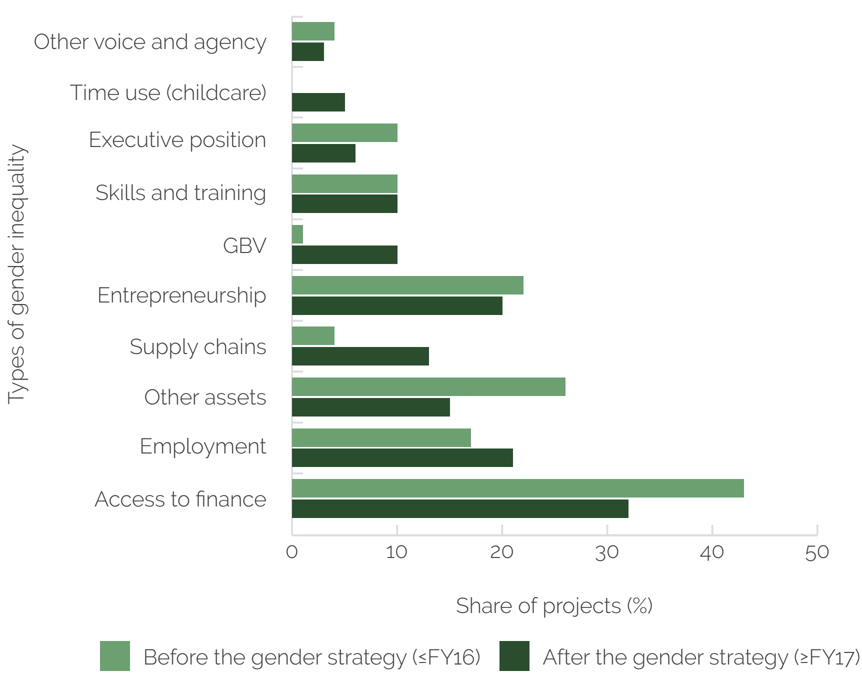
The increase of gender-relevant projects was accompanied by new types of gender inequalities being addressed, especially in IFC. In the absence of a Bank Group taxonomy of gender inequalities, this evaluation developed one using a mixed inductive-deductive approach (see appendix G), which was applied consistently throughout all evaluation tools. After the FY16–23 gender strategy, changes occurred in the types of gender inequalities addressed. In the World Bank, the percentage of projects addressing a specific type of gender inequality increased for almost every type of gender inequality except those related to health; this indicates an increase in projects addressing multiple gender inequalities at once—hence, an increase in the complexity of theories of change. For example, more projects included actions to strengthen women's voice and agency while also addressing other gender gaps. In particular, projects addressing gender inequalities related to skills and training, GBV, employment (including time use and women's double burden),[3] and participation and decision-making substantially increased (figure 2.4, panel a). In IFC, projects began to address new types of gender inequalities that had never before been explicitly considered. In IFC advisory projects, these new types included GBV, time use (with more operations promoting employer-provided childcare), and supply chains (figure 2.4, panel b). In IFC investments, the bulk of projects continued to be represented by access to finance, but new projects addressed access to assets, entrepreneurship, supply chains, and GBV-related issues (figure 2.4, panel c). Moreover, in both IFC advisory and investment projects, the set of gender inequalities addressed became more diversified.

Figure 2.4. Types of Gender Inequality Addressed by Projects before and after the Fiscal Year 2016–23 Gender Strategy

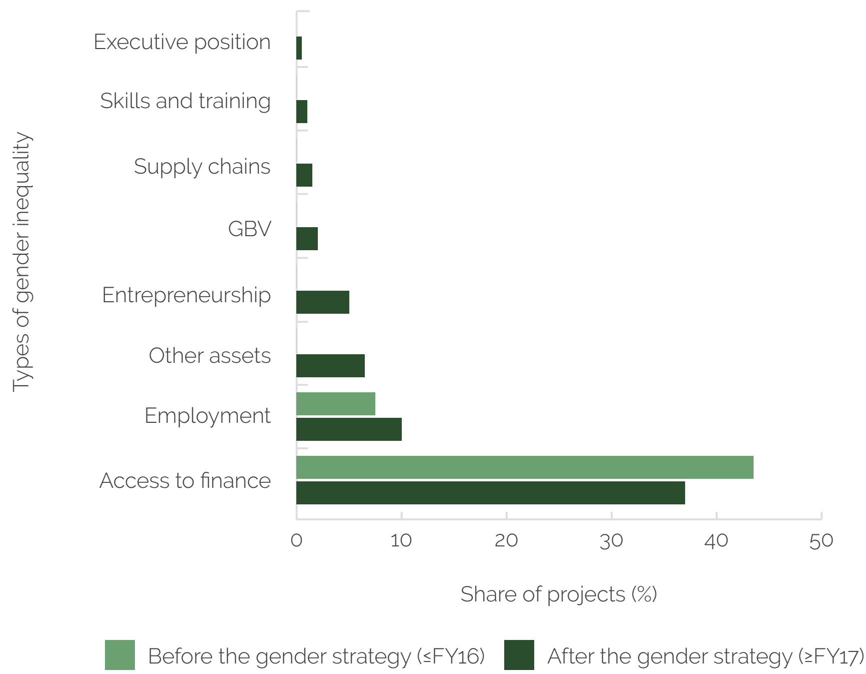
a. Gender-relevant projects addressing specific types of gender inequality—World Bank projects



b. Gender-relevant projects addressing specific types of gender inequality—IFC advisory projects



c. Gender-relevant projects addressing specific types of gender inequality—IFC investment projects

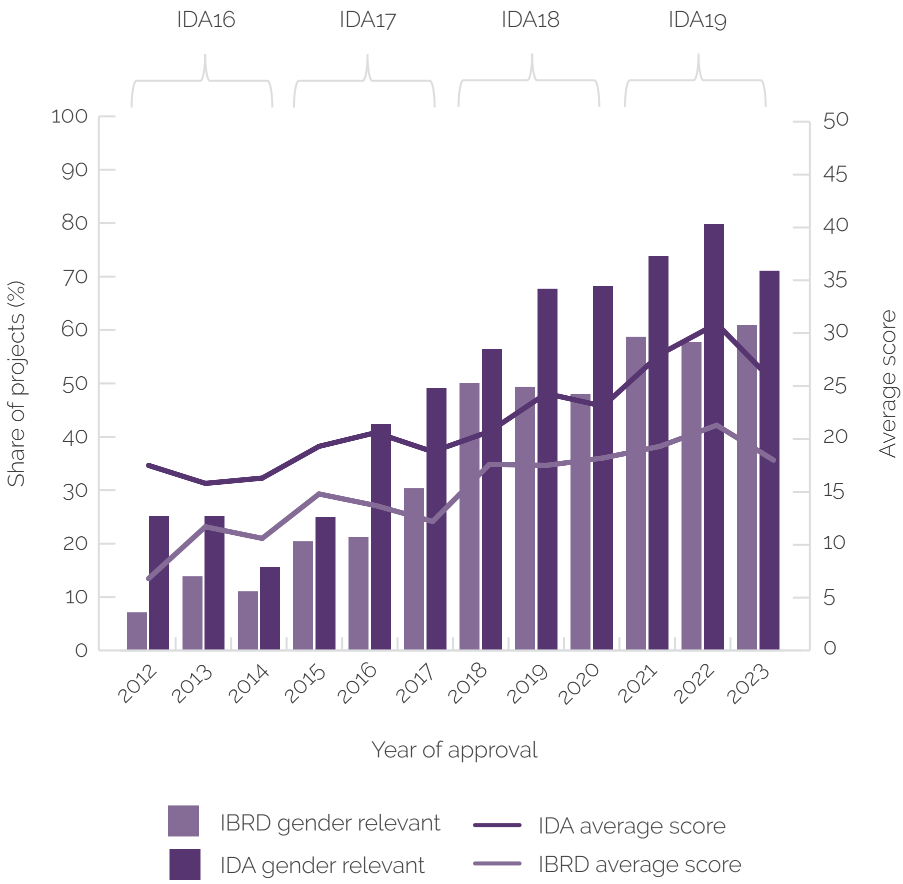


Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: For the World Bank, the gender gaps are calculated for a random sample of 200 parent projects approved from FY12 to FY23 of which 89 are gender-relevant projects using a cutoff greater than 15. For IFC, all gender-relevant (cutoff greater than 15) investments committed from FY12 to FY23 and all gender-relevant advisory services (cutoff greater than 15) approved from FY12 to FY23 are included. FY = fiscal year; GBV = gender-based violence; IFC = International Finance Corporation.

IDA plays an important role in supporting gender-relevant projects. The share of gender-relevant projects among IDA projects is systematically higher than among IBRD projects (figure 2.5) throughout the evaluation period. Moreover, the share of gender-relevant projects increased faster for IDA (especially under the 18th and 19th Replenishments of IDA) than for IBRD. In addition, IDA supports 86 percent of stand-alone projects compared with 71 percent of all gender-relevant projects and 55–60 percent of non-gender-relevant projects. The only countries with more than one active stand-alone project are two IDA beneficiaries—Bangladesh and Benin. In IBRD countries, the instruments used to finance stand-alone operations are mostly advisory services and analytics (ASAs) and DPOs, which are the main instruments supporting gender in these countries.[4]

Figure 2.5. Gender-Relevant Projects for the International Development Association and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Fiscal Years 2012–23



Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: The total number of projects is 3,836. The entire population of IBRD and IDA projects (investment project financing, Programs-for-Results, and development policy operations) is included. Additional financing is counted separately, but additional financing of parent projects approved before 2012 is excluded. Gender relevance is defined based on the greater than 15 threshold. IBRD = International Bank for Reconstruction and Development; IDA = International Development Association; IDA16, IDA17, IDA18, IDA19 = 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th Replenishments of IDA.

The share of projects with low, moderate, and high gender relevance all increased, but with the largest increase in the least gender-relevant projects for World Bank lending and IFC investments and the smallest increase in the most gender-relevant projects. Between 2012 and 2023, the share of World Bank projects—investment project financing (IPF) and Program-for-Results financing—with a 20–25 gender intensity score increased from 5 percent to 27 percent, and those with a 30–35 gender intensity score increased from

5 percent to 25 percent. By contrast, the share of projects with a score higher than 55 increased only from 2 percent to 3 percent (figure 2.1, panel a). By 2023, almost all World Bank projects had at least some gender-relevant element, but those addressing gender inequalities in a more substantial way did not increase much and still represented a small percentage. Projects with a score of 20–25 generally have an indicator that tracks the percentage of female beneficiaries and may include consultations and sensitization activities or training that target women to increase their inclusion, but they do not address gender inequalities more broadly. Projects with the highest scores are either gender stand-alone projects (addressing gender inequalities is part of their project development objectives [PDOs]) or projects that include a gender component. Gender-transformative projects are more likely to have higher scores. Highly gender-relevant projects integrate a gender analysis in the context analysis and rely on a theory of change to address gender inequalities with explicit expected results. They also include gender-relevant indicators to measure the achievement of expected gender results. Figure 2.2, panel a, shows this general trend for the World Bank. As the cutoff defining gender relevance moves from greater than 15 to greater than 25, the trend line still shows an increase over time, but it becomes flatter, indicating that the highly rated projects increased at a slower rate. For IFC investments, the trend is similar: lower-rated projects increased the most (figure 2.1, panel c). The review of projects in the country case studies confirms this general trend of breadth over depth. In all case studies, the proportion of gender-relevant projects dramatically increased after the adoption of the FY16–23 gender strategy, but projects with a high quality of design (that is, with gender-transformative elements, integration of intersectionality, and evidence-based theory of changes) were still a minority at the end of the evaluation period—with differences among countries.

Against the trend in World Bank and IFC investments, IFC advisory work selectively focused its engagement on a subgroup of substantially gender-relevant projects. In IFC advisory services, the share of projects with a 0 gender intensity score did not decrease that much over the evaluation period; however, at the other extreme, the share of projects scoring 55 or higher increased from 2 percent to 23 percent (figure 2.1, panel b). The expansion of gender-relevant projects coincides not only with the FY16–23 gender strategy but also with the IFC Gender Secretariat being assigned to the Economics and Private Sector Development Vice Presidential Unit[5] in 2016 to expand its role and influence and institutionalize gender equality as a core element of the IFC business strategy.

The gender tag likely contributed to the increase of gender relevance of World Bank projects, mostly by raising the share of low-score projects. The gender tag, introduced by the World Bank in FY17, was part of a plan to promote a more strategic and selective approach to addressing gender inequalities, in line with the intent of the FY16–23 gender strategy.[6] The original target was to tag 55 percent of projects. Several Regions, however, independently raised the bar of gender tagging beyond the initial official requirements. For example, the Middle East and North Africa Region set a formal target of 65 percent by FY20 and 70 percent by FY23. Other Regions set even higher targets, if not formally up to 100 percent. According to most key informants, these targets did not match the resources mobilized to help project teams include appropriate actions (based on rigorous analysis) aimed at addressing gender inequalities, which resulted in a substantial effort spent on tagging.[7] According to key informants, such high targets are also unrealistic because they view a proportion of World Bank projects as simply not conducive to reduce gender inequalities. As a result, the gender tag, whose implicit standard was not particularly stringent when it was introduced, became even more generous over time. Figure 2.2, panel a, shows that the percentage of gender-tagged projects initially corresponded to the percentage identified by the greater than 15 cutoff value of the gender relevance score but ended up corresponding to the lowest possible cutoff value in FY23 (score greater than 0). The strong push to tag could be satisfied only by progressively increasing the share of projects with "light" gender relevance. Thus, the minimum standard increased overall, but the share of projects designed to address gender inequalities in a substantial way did not increase to the same degree.

In IFC advisory services, lower gender flag targets and less pressure to meet them likely facilitated the strong focus on increasing the most relevant projects. IFC advisory services had a lower formal target of flagging,[8] at 30 percent of the projects in FY16. As a result, IFC focused on increasing the share of the most promising and meaningful projects, and the share of advisory projects with the highest gender-relevant scores increased substantially.

Key informant interviews highlighted several reasons for this positive trend: the growing importance of the Gender Group within the institution, Gender Group management placing a stronger emphasis on developing fully dedicated gender advisory solutions, and the increased presence of gender experts, particularly in the East Asia and Pacific and the Middle East and North Africa Regions. IFC case studies show that stand-alone projects tend to benefit from the support of gender experts during design and implementation. IFC recently increased the target to 50 percent for FY24. According to key informants, the corporate pressure to flag more projects is only now increasing. This requires hand-holding on gender flagging for industries that have fewer resources allocated to gender equality.

Making IFC investment projects more gender relevant has been challenging. The institutional focus on increasing the share of gender-relevant investments was mainly driven by the capital increase commitments[9] that set up gender indicators; flagging targets for gender-relevant investments was, therefore, not set until recently. Unlike for IFC advisory services, IFC did not set a corporate target for gender-flagged investment projects for most of the evaluation period. The lack of corporate metrics and targets might have contributed to the lower flagging. The analysis of data and interviews also suggests that it has been quite difficult to include gender-relevant investments at the industry level—except for access to finance[10]—which explains why few investments were flagged and most had weak gender-relevant scores. Challenges cited are limited capacity and resources, lack of sex-disaggregated client data, an unclear business case for clients, and uneven management attention. IFC recently introduced a target for the gender flag at 40 percent by FY24;[11] according to key informants, further increases in targets will be challenging to meet for some industries, such as infrastructure and manufacturing, without a corresponding increase in capacity and resources.

According to World Bank and IFC staff, the increased share of gender-tagged and gender-flagged projects helps generate awareness on the importance of addressing gender inequalities and the potential of operations to reduce them. The gender flag and especially the gender tag were not successful in replacing earlier nonselective gender mainstreaming with a more selective and focused approach to addressing gender inequalities. However, 57 percent of World Bank staff who answered the IEG survey consider the gender tag useful or very useful, and 85 percent of IFC staff think the same of the gender flag. Most staff, including those who are more critical of the gender tag and the gender flag, recognize that they are an effective awareness-raising tool that increased the visibility of the gender agenda, foster buy-in at all levels, and "help people think about entry points in projects." Those who express a more positive opinion also stress that these tools supported the articulation of a theory of change for gender equality and identification of specific activities.

At the same time, staff note that the pressure to increase the share of tagged and flagged World Bank and IFC projects beyond the institutions' ability to ensure meaningful gender integration risks diluting the mandate. A World Bank gender expert expresses an opinion voiced by many staff members, "I do not think the [World] Bank should be 100 percent tagged.... The tag was a useful target, it increased [the Bank Group] ambition, and now it needs to be revised again because otherwise we are only ensuring that everyone is doing the bare minimum.... If everyone is getting [the gender tag], then we need to look at the quality of the tag and start setting criteria of whether your project is transformative or just gender aware [and] maybe create some 'level [or] depth' of approach, not just breadth." Another expert adds, "There is 'crazy' gender tagging.... The 100 percent mandate diverts the discussion on seeking solutions that are impactful." Similarly, an IFC gender expert states, "The gender flag is problematic. A push to flag every project... is not very meaningful. We need to rethink and revisit that."

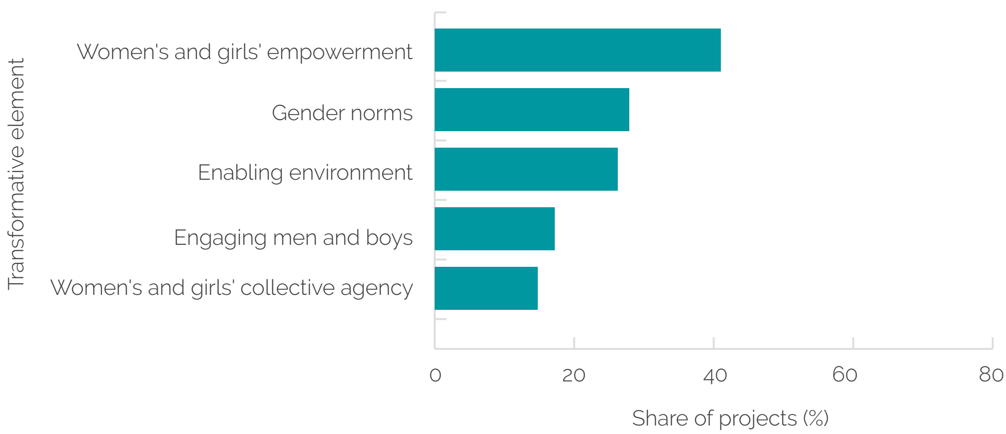
Despite obvious improvements in Bank Group engagement in gender equality since 2012, three main unresolved issues threaten its achievement. First, the greater focus on quantity, as opposed to quality, of the engagement translates into a limited number of projects with gender-transformative elements, attention to context-specific conditions and intersectionality, and robust theories of change. Second, Bank Group incentives focus more on individual projects, with the World Bank maximizing the number of projects addressing gender inequalities. Yet no equally strong incentives or resources are devoted to fostering a country-driven approach. The new 2024–30 gender strategy is aware of the delays in advancing the country-driven approach and makes this a main priority. Third, gender engagement incentives and resources tend to emphasize design over implementation, even though implementation is critical to maintaining the gender relevance of the intervention and achieving results. Chapter 3 explores this issue further.

The gender stand-alone projects only moderately increased in the World Bank lending portfolio and IFC investments. Gender stand-alone projects are defined as those whose PDO(s) explicitly addresses gender inequalities.[12] They include operations that entirely focus on advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and sectoral projects that explicitly address gender inequalities as one of their PDOs, such as an education project addressing gender inequality in schooling. The gender stand-alone projects tend to be those with the highest gender relevance scores. These projects can adopt multisectoral, holistic approaches to advance gender equality. They can be a key vehicle to address root causes of gender inequalities and provide great learning opportunities (see appendix E). The World Bank gender stand-alone operations represented 1.5–5 percent of all projects before the FY16–23 gender strategy and slightly increased to 2–7 percent after the strategy. Most stand-alone projects were found in the Human Development Practice Group (79 percent), whereas Equitable Growth, Finance, and Institutions; Sustainable Development; and Infrastructure had much lower shares (9, 12, and 1 percent). Even without considering maternal health projects, the share in Human Development was 56 percent and in Equitable Growth, Finance, and Institutions; Sustainable Development; and Infrastructure 17, 25, and 2 percent. IFC stand-alone investments are even fewer (less than 1 percent of the total investment portfolio), and all of them are in the Financial Markets industry group. In IFC advisory services, gender stand-alone projects were only 0–2 percent before the strategy, but they increased to 4–13 percent of all projects after the strategy.

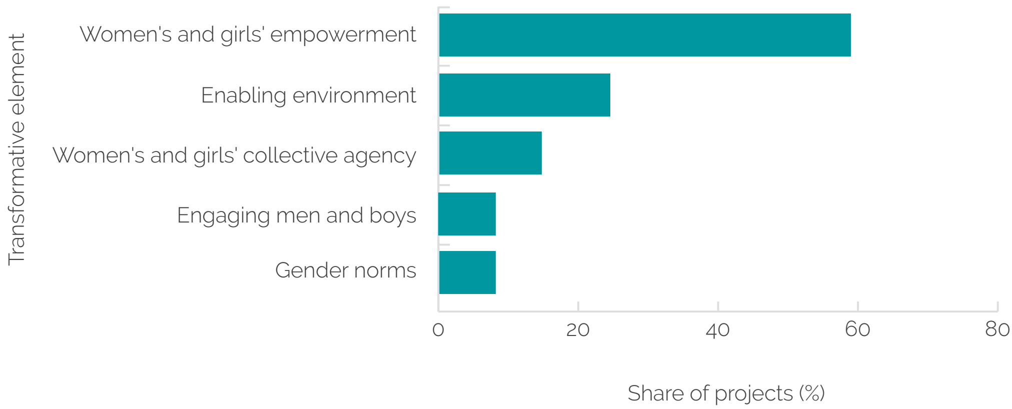
After the adoption of the FY16–23 gender strategy, an increasing but still limited number of operations included gender-transformative elements. Gender-transformative interventions aim to address the root causes of gender inequalities by transforming gender norms, roles, and relations, while working toward redistributing power, resources, and services more equally (UNFPA 2023). Gender stand-alone projects are expected to be more gender transformative than other projects, but almost half of World Bank stand-alone projects do not include any gender-transformative elements, and only 4 percent include all the transformative elements identified through the portfolio review. Only 40 percent of gender stand-alone projects support women's empowerment, and even smaller percentages aim to transform gender norms and improve the enabling environment (formal institutions) for gender equality (figure 2.6, panel a). The gender-transformative projects tend to be recent, especially those supporting improvement in the (formal) enabling environment, engaging men and boys, and promoting women's and girls' collective agency. IFC stand-alone interventions mostly support the empowerment of women and girls but pay limited attention to transforming gender norms, engaging men and boys, and promoting collective agency (figure 2.6, panel b). Country case studies confirm an increase in projects with gender-transformative elements, but they are still a minority.

Figure 2.6. Gender-Transformative Elements in World Bank and International Finance Corporation Gender Stand-Alone Projects

a. Gender stand-alone projects including gender-transformative elements—World Bank projects (IPF and PforRs)



b. Gender stand-alone projects including gender-transformative elements—IFC advisory projects



Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: The figure shows the percentage of World Bank IPF and PforR (*N* = 122) and IFC advisory (*N* = 69) gender stand-alone projects with specific gender-transformative elements. IFC investments were not included because of the low number of stand-alone interventions (*N* = 14). IFC = International Finance Corporation; IPF = investment project financing; PforR = Program-for-Results.

The World Bank and IFC gender-relevant portfolios inadequately address intersectionality issues, resulting in insufficient recognition of the diverse needs and types of discrimination faced by specific social groups of women. The gender-relevant portfolio does not sufficiently consider the intersection between gender inequalities and other types of social inequalities. The needs and constraints of specific social groups of women (women of different ages, ethnic groups, and so on) are frequently not diagnosed and addressed. Only 22 percent of World Bank gender stand-alone projects (IPFs and Programs-for-Results) consider intersectionality issues, with poverty and age (in the case of projects focused on education and sexual and reproductive health) being the two most common characteristics considered. Similarly, IFC stand-alone projects treat women as a homogeneous group—only 17 percent of them adopt an intersectionality lens.

For IFC, the adoption of an intersectionality lens remains limited and primarily focuses on economic or geographic differences, such as income level, rural or urban location, and informal or formal occupation. Considering the intersection between gender and ethnicity, age, or disability is often constrained by lack of sex-disaggregated data. The Latin America and the Caribbean Region stands out for increasing attention to intersectionality in projects. For example, in Colombia and Peru, two financial institutions with support from IFC are redesigning their lending products to address migrant women's needs and constraints. The projects also address the internal socio-cultural bias against migrant women through capacity building. In Mexico, IFC is focusing on LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people) and persons with disabilities (following the model of the Sri Lanka Together We Can Plus initiative) to enhance the employment practices and human resources policies of companies, but it is not paying attention to the intersection between disability and gender.

For the World Bank, case studies show still low but increasing attention to intersectionality. Several projects aim to include women and other disadvantaged social groups—such as youth, persons with disabilities, and disadvantaged ethnic groups—but consider women as a homogeneous group and disregard social inequalities among women or gender inequalities within the other social groups. In the country case studies, the main intersectionality issues considered by the World Bank relate to poverty, marital status (social protection projects target female heads of household), age, and geographic areas (many projects aim to increase access to social services for women and girls living in rural or underserved areas). Other types of intersectionality issues—such as fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV); ethnicity; migration; and SOGI—are successfully addressed in some cases. In Bangladesh, the Health and Gender Support Project for Cox's Bazar District addresses gender inequalities among FCV-affected women and girls—in particular, sexual and reproductive health needs and GBV among Rohingya refugees. Conversely, in Uzbekistan, gender inequalities among the FCV-affected population (in particular, refugees from Afghanistan) are overlooked in the gender-relevant portfolio. A special focus on migrant and Indigenous women was found in the Peru portfolio and, to some extent, in some projects in Mexico. Two good examples of the application of intersectionality are the Saweto Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Peru Project, which adopted a bottom-up and culturally sensitive approach to addressing gender inequalities in Indigenous communities, and the Australian Gender Pillar in Viet Nam, which supports the integration of a SOGI perspective in the new gender equality law.

The Bank Group has been developing a SOGI agenda since 2016, but work in this area is still nascent. This evaluation did not analyze in depth the Bank Group engagement to promote the rights of people with diverse SOGI because this aspect had not been included in the FY16–23 gender strategy. Including SOGI in the engagement for gender equality is still controversial among the World Bank and IFC staff interviewed. For some key informants, the SOGI agenda is part of social inclusion, and it is treated as such in most of the World Bank and IFC initiatives. For some key informants, it should be integrated in the engagement for gender equality. A third group of key informants underscores that including SOGI in the gender equality agenda is not advisable at the moment in many countries, which consider it taboo, and that the World Bank does not have enough knowledge and skills to address SOGI issues. This evaluation finds some good practices in addressing SOGI in some SOGI-sensitive countries—for example, the inclusion of SOGI in the Thailand Country Partnership Framework (CPF), the regional SOGI inclusion in the Latin America and the Caribbean ASA, and the successful collaboration between the World Bank and SOGI associations in policy dialogue to support the integration of SOGI in the new Viet Nam gender equality law. IFC is focusing on increasing awareness and education around LGBT+ inclusion and providing targeted support to industries on accessibility. In IFC, the focus on SOGI is limited to a few interventions that aim to build internal knowledge and guidance for interested clients and to raise awareness through peer learning platforms. In Mexico, an IFC peer learning platform focuses on LGBT+ and persons with disabilities as part of raising awareness to improve workplace environments.

The strength of the theories of change varies across projects. Theories of change have become stronger in some projects (for example, in stand-alone interventions, including in IFC advisory projects) because of an increased use of knowledge. Nevertheless, in many projects, the theory of change is weak, with activities and expected results found not relevant or only partially relevant. This point is developed further in chapter 3.

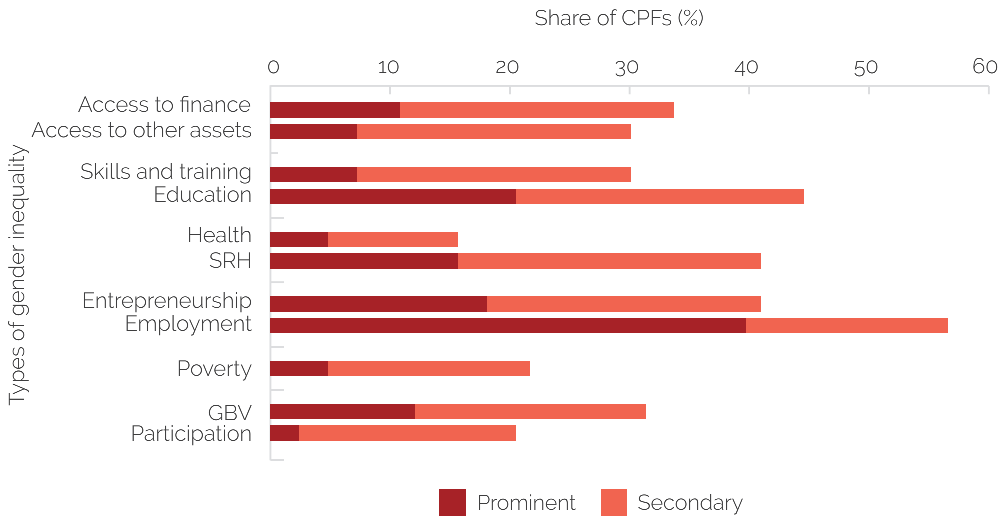
Toward a Country-Driven Approach

The Bank Group identifies the country-driven approach as fundamental to addressing gender inequalities and has made efforts to strengthen it. The

FY16–23 gender strategy aimed to deepen the country-driven approach.[13] According to the strategy, this approach "allows for the agenda to be customized to the specific country situations.... This means that objectives to promote gender equality are set at the country level, rather than globally" (World Bank Group 2015, 62). To achieve this goal, the gender strategy decided to adopt a more systematic approach to the generation and use of data and knowledge at the country level and strengthen the Bank Group's "connective tissue between its gender equality objectives at the country level and the instruments to address these objectives" (World Bank Group 2015, 66). The strategy recognized the role of Country Management Units in framing the contribution of different instruments to the country's gender priorities (World Bank Group 2015). The new 2024–30 gender strategy reiterates that the Bank Group should deepen its country-driven approach to gender equality and ensure that the objectives to promote gender equality are set at the country level (World Bank Group 2024).

Most country strategies explicitly identify and prioritize gender inequalities. Thanks to robust diagnostics, 83 percent of the CPFs reviewed clearly identified at least one gender inequality to be addressed as part of the strategic country-level engagement, although only 49 percent explicitly mention gender inequalities in their objectives. Almost 60 percent of CPFs indicate addressing gender inequalities in the labor market as a priority—40 percent as a prominent one (figure 2.7). This is by far the most common gender priority, followed by addressing inequalities in education, entrepreneurship, and sexual and reproductive health. The increased focus on specific gender inequalities is an improvement with respect to previous IEG analysis. According to an analysis of gender integration in country strategies (World Bank 2016b), before the introduction of the Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD), one-third of country strategies only generically mentioned gender as a cross-cutting issue. Moreover, even the sporadic cases in which gender equality was a strategic objective provided no information on how the gender objectives had been selected based on the diagnostic work and how they related to the other objectives of the country strategy.

Figure 2.7. Country Partnership Frameworks That Address Specific Types of Gender Inequality as Prominent and Secondary Priorities

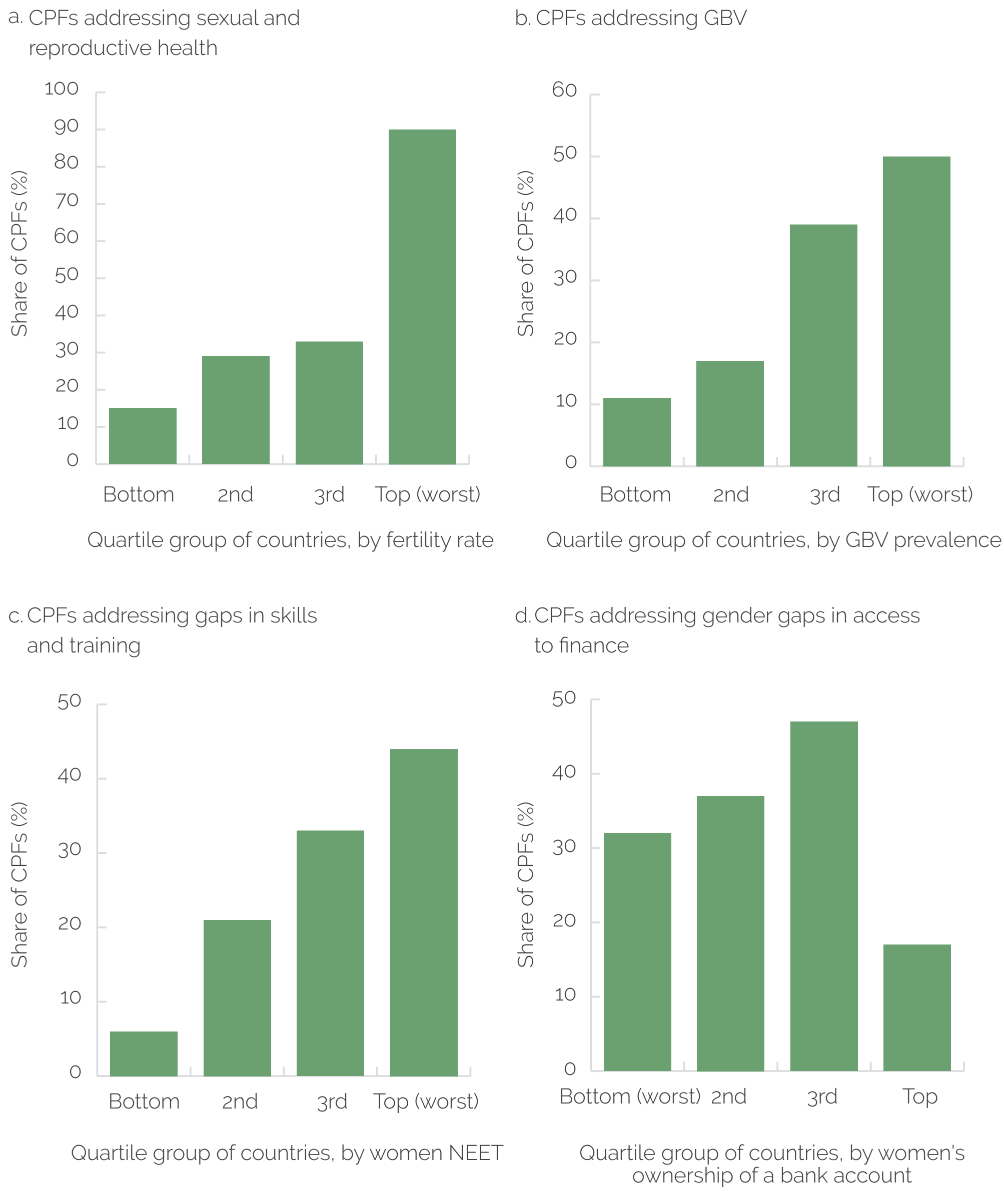


Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: The graph represents the percentage of the 83 CPFs reviewed that address specific gender inequalities. Each CPF can address multiple priorities, either as a prominent or a secondary one. Each bar represents a total percentage; for example, 30 percent of CPFs address gender inequalities in skills and training—7 percent as a prominent priority and 23 percent as a secondary focus. CPF = Country Partnership Framework; GBV = gender-based violence; SRH = sexual and reproductive health.

The gender priorities identified in country strategies align well with country needs. CPFs focus on the most pressing gender issues that the country faces according to relevant country-level gender statistics. Countries that are more likely to select sexual and reproductive health as their focus, for example, are those with the highest fertility rates—90 percent of CPFs that identify sexual and reproductive health as their key priority belong to countries in the top quartile of fertility rate (figure 2.8, panel a). Similarly, CPFs that identify GBV as a priority are disproportionately more likely to be of those countries where GBV is more acute (figure 2.8, panel b). This alignment is detectable for most gender inequalities and gender statistics. Figure 2.8 shows 4 out of 10 pairs of CPF priority-country statistics that the evaluation constructed as part of the analysis of CPF gender priorities alignment with country needs. Access to finance (figure 2.8, panel d) is less aligned than the others, perhaps because promoting access to finance through formal financial institutions requires a certain level of development in financial markets.

Figure 2.8. Association between Country Partnership Frameworks' Gender Priorities and Country Gender Statistics



Sources: Independent Evaluation Group; World Bank Gender Data Portal (accessed January 2024).

Note: Quartiles of GBV prevalence are based on the following statistics: proportion of women subjected to physical and sexual violence in the last 12 months (modeled estimate; percentage of ever-partnered women 15 years of age and older); they cover 72 countries. Quartiles of women NEET are based on the following statistics: share of youth NEET, female (percentage of female youth population); they cover 73 countries. Quartiles of fertility rate are based on the following statistics: fertility rate, total (births per woman); they cover 82 countries. Quartiles of women's ownership of a bank account are based on the following statistics: financial institution account, female (percentage; 15 years of age and older); they cover 75 countries. CPF = Country Partnership Framework; GBV = gender-based violence; NEET = not in education, employment, or training.

Despite a clear improvement in the identification of country gender priorities, most CPFs lack an operational strategy to address them. The CPFs do not typically elaborate on how the stated gender equality objectives should be achieved. Projects are mapped to CPF gender-relevant objectives, but, generally, there is no explanation of how these projects, either individually or collectively, would contribute to achieving the CPF gender goals as part of a coherent country-level theory of change. Moreover, few country strategies include measurable indicators to monitor achievements (as discussed in chapter 3). Most commonly, each project operates based on its own individual theory of change to achieve its PDOs, and the CPFs use project-based indicators to measure achievement of CPF objectives. The achievement of gender-relevant priorities remains assigned to the project rather than to the country program.

Promising practices of country-driven engagement observed in country case studies demonstrate the Bank Group's increasing capacity to coordinate instruments and activities strategically around country gender priorities and the merit of this approach. Bangladesh, Benin, Egypt, Mexico, and Viet Nam are all examples of countries where gender experts and gender champions—supported by managers—contributed to the production and use of robust evidence to underpin policy dialogue, which successfully resulted in the identification of gender priorities for the country and the inclusion of a gender pillar in a DPO. In Viet Nam, for example, the financial resources of the Australian Gender Pillar, continuous support of a World Bank senior gender expert, and strategic production and use of knowledge allowed the World Bank to remain engaged in policy dialogue on gender equality and support relevant law reforms, including the reform of the labor code and the law on gender equality. IFC's country program in Sri Lanka launched in 2017 is a holistic engagement that addresses gender inequalities based on a comprehensive theory of change (box 2.2). These promising practices embed the spirit of the country-driven approach but have limitations—few instruments are coordinated, whereas the rest of the portfolio is still scattered.[14]

Box 2.2. The International Finance Corporation's Sri Lanka Country Gender Program

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) launched its largest country-based gender program in Sri Lanka in 2017. The engagement allowed IFC to adopt a more holistic approach to identifying and addressing gender gaps based on a unified theory of change consolidated across sectors and industries. This approach proved to be effective in influencing the broader private sector ecosystem, which contributed to improvements in the working environment for women employees, leaders, and entrepreneurs.

The program included 12 projects across five of IFC's industries, including Banking on Women, Women's Insurance Program, Tackling Childcare, a peer learning network (SheWorks Sri Lanka), and Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE) certification. By combining different modalities of engagement, such as peer learning platforms and the promotion of regulatory and legislative change, IFC was able to tackle complex problems, such as childcare. The program also influenced the development of other country-level gender programs in Indonesia, Kenya, and Tanzania.

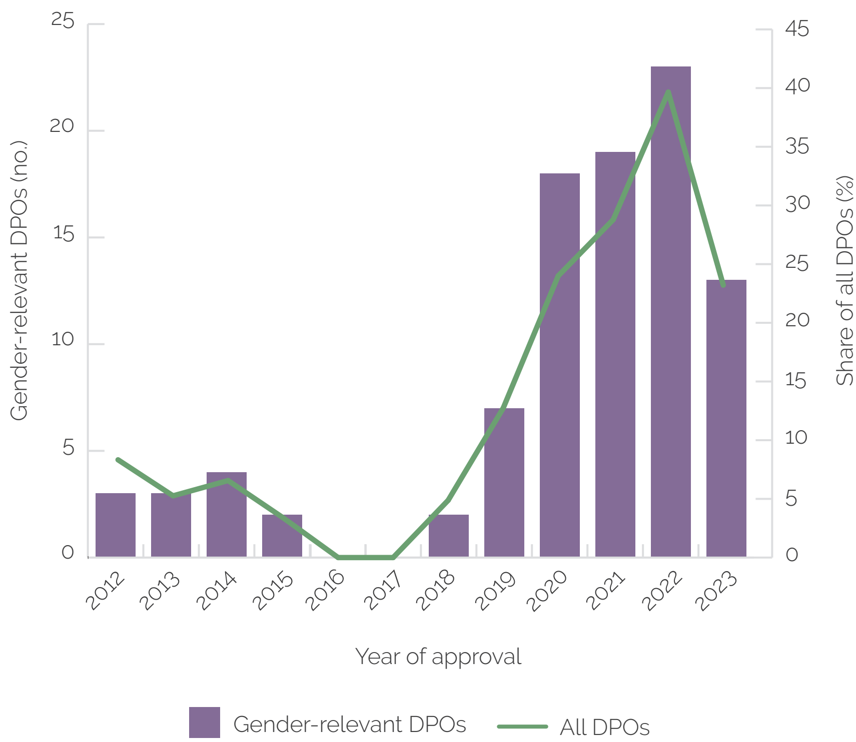
A key enabling factor for the success of the program was the presence of a lead gender expert and team dedicated to managing program implementation. However, this IFC country-level approach was very resource- and labor-intensive, was reliant on donor grant funding, and had monitoring and evaluation frameworks not designed to capture impacts beyond IFC direct engagement.

Source: DFAT 2022.

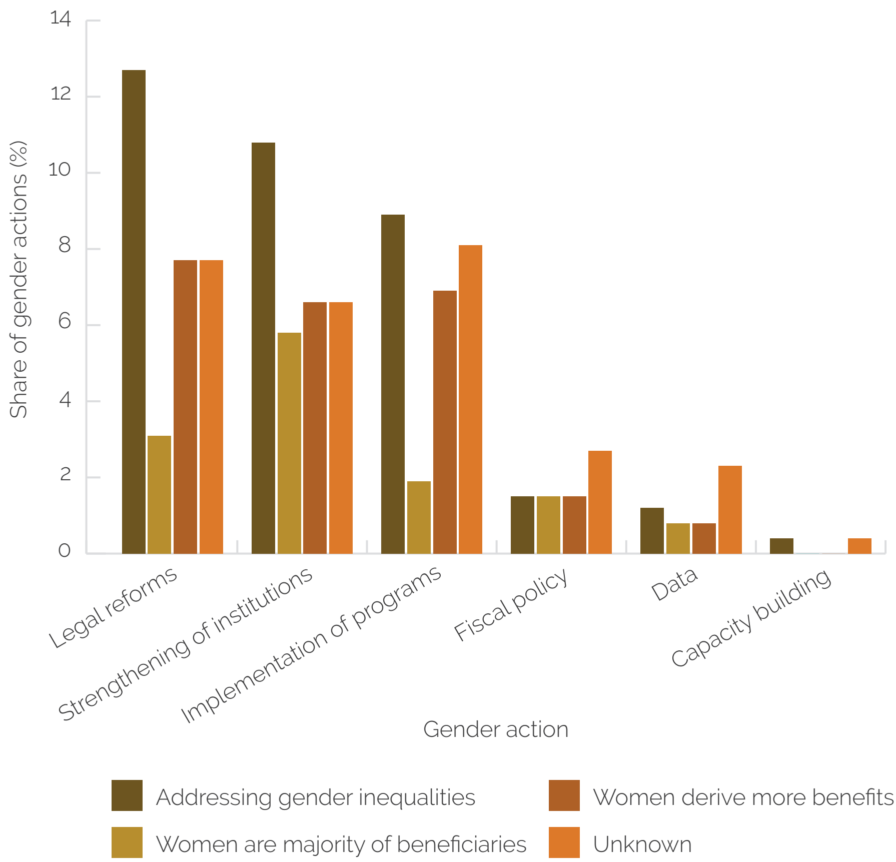
After the gender strategy, DPOs have been increasingly used to promote gender actions that reduce gender inequalities. The 95 gender-relevant DPOs reviewed for this evaluation include 259 gender actions—that is, specific activities to address a specific form of gender inequality (see appendix E). Gender actions were identified based on what the prior actions of the DPO committed the country to do to address gender inequalities. For example, in Colombia, a prior action aimed to enact measures that (i) prohibit discrimination against women's access to employment and (ii) increase the length of paternity leave, introduce shared parental leave, and allow parental leave to be taken on a part-time basis to encourage the sharing of responsibilities for unpaid care work and to support women's economic empowerment. DPOs engage in a broad array of gender actions, mostly legal reforms, institution strengthening, and implementation of programs. The majority of gender actions directly aim to address gender inequalities (for example, reforms that introduce protection services for victims of domestic violence). Other gender actions target specific groups of women (for example, female displaced persons) or adopt "neutral" policies that disproportionately benefit women as they are the majority of the target group (for example, part-time workers). In some cases, it is not possible to determine whether the prior action is gender relevant (figure 2.9, panel b). In addition, there has been an increase in the use of DPOs to intensify engagement with governments on gender issues. Gender-relevant DPOs accounted for only 5 percent of the total DPOs before the gender strategy, but this number increased to 40 percent in FY22 (figure 2.9, panel a).

Figure 2.9. Prevalence of Gender-Relevant Development Policy Operations and Type of Gender Actions

a. Gender-relevant DPOs



b. Type of gender actions included in gender-relevant DPOs



Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: The analysis covers 259 gender actions in 95 gender-relevant DPOs identified based on a greater than 15 cutoff value of the gender-relevant score approved between fiscal years 2012 and 2023. DPO = development policy operation.

Gender platforms play an active role in supporting policy engagement for gender equality. Gender platforms[15] have proven to be critical instruments to foster engagement for gender equality at the country level. They have helped define operational and analytic work under the CPF, monitor and assess the portfolio of activities, identify gaps and opportunities for sharing knowledge internally and externally, and promote collaborations and policy dialogue with the government and other stakeholders. For example, one of the objectives of the gender platform in Bangladesh—a stand-alone ASA—is to foster policy dialogue in the country. The platform benefits from an operational comprehensive view of gender activities, including lending, advisory, and knowledge, which allows for effective coordination with the government.

A DPO, for example, included a trigger to establish grievance mechanisms enabling workers to anonymously report sexual harassment. Subsequently, the gender platform negotiated technical assistance with the Ministry of Labor and Employment to strengthen this mechanism and to ensure that it is implemented effectively. The platform also coordinated with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to align the World Bank portfolio with the government's gender priorities. Despite coordination challenges because of the ministry's low capacity, the current Health and Gender Support Project for Cox's Bazar District and a potential follow-up GBV project demonstrate the continuity of the policy dialogue.

The commitment of gender champions—both task team leaders (TTLs) and management—and the use of knowledge have contributed to the effectiveness of policy dialogue, even in the absence of gender platforms. For example, in Benin, the TTL of the Unlocking Human and Productive Potential DPO series (which includes empowering women and girls among its PDOs), supported by managers, successfully established a collaboration between the Macroeconomics, Trade, and Investment; Health, Nutrition, and Population; and Poverty and Equity GPs for a fruitful policy dialogue with the government and for design of the operation. In Egypt, the presence of a committed and experienced gender focal point, the use of robust country diagnostics on women's economic empowerment, and the strong involvement of the National Council for Women in the negotiation with the government helped enable the integration of a gender pillar in the Egypt Inclusive Growth for Sustainable Recovery DPO.[16]

IFC has increased its efforts to engage with business networks on gender equality. IFC has increasingly engaged in peer learning platforms[17] to complement its client work and expand IFC's reach beyond individual clients. Peer learning platforms are a convening mechanism designed and facilitated by IFC to bring companies together to share knowledge and implement best practices on gender equality to address specific inequalities and share knowledge and best practices among peers. Through the platforms, companies make between one and three commitments to close gender gaps in their operations.

These encouraging examples notwithstanding, the evaluation finds that the approach to gender equality was still fragmented at the end of the evaluation period, with gaps in systems and processes for coordination at the country level. The instruments, sectors, and institutions assigned to operationalize gender priorities remain disconnected. The prevalent Bank Group approach to address gender inequalities is still project-by-project rather than a strategic, focused, and coherent approach—not dissimilar today from what the Mid-Term Review described: "Absent appropriate prioritization of gender in the program, a diverse set of projects tagged and flagged for gender in the portfolio can appear to be 'sprinkled' rather than strategic" (World Bank 2021b, 23). Despite the FY16–23 gender strategy's assertion that deepening the country-driven approach is the way for the Bank Group to take its support to gender equality to the next level,[18] the operating modalities and systems of incentives still center on the project level and not the country level. Although instruments, sectors, and institutions generally align with country gender priorities, they are weakly coordinated (which results in missed opportunities and partial achievements). Examples of effective coordination among different instruments and sectors, driven by multisector gender stand-alone projects and DPOs, represent ad hoc experiences rather than an institutionalized approach. The individual efforts of gender champions primarily drive coordination and collaboration.

Despite the intent to strengthen the One World Bank Group approach, the collaboration between the World Bank and IFC is still limited and opportunistic. The evaluation finds only a few examples wherein a combination of analytic work, lending portfolio, technical assistance, and IFC investments and advisory services worked in sync—and in sync with World Bank activities—to achieve common gender equality objectives. One example is the collaboration between the World Bank and IFC to address the financial inclusion of migrant women from República Bolivariana de Venezuela in Peru, where the World Bank's ASA Venezuelan Migration Policy Dialogue contributed to an IFC intervention targeting microcredit access for migrant women-led small and medium enterprises. The World Bank developed a training on conscious and unconscious bias related to migration and gender that was applied in the IFC project to mitigate its client's staff biases against migrant populations, including women. However, in general, the collaboration between the two institutions is occasional and opportunistic. The analysis of CPFs indicates that a good IFC–World Bank collaboration tends to develop around specific activities that have little to do with the strategic engagement for gender equality.

The World Bank and IFC have collaborated on DPOs supporting legislative reforms and policy measures concerning labor laws, respectful workplaces, and childcare. These examples happened in Bangladesh, Egypt, Fiji, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam. In Egypt, the World Bank and IFC collaborated on policy dialogue during a negotiation of the DPO that aimed at reforming the labor law to increase female labor force participation. In Sri Lanka, IFC's work contributed to the finalization of the National Policy on Child Day Care Centers. In Fiji, IFC supported the government to establish the Early Childhood Care and Education Taskforce and draft an early childhood care services policy and regulation framework guidance.

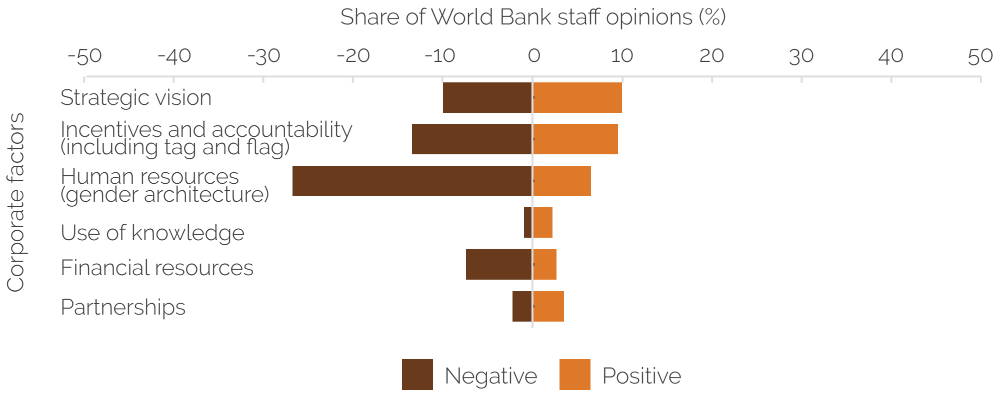
Although good practices of coordination and collaboration with development partners exist, this coordination remains weak overall, constraining the potential of the country-driven approach. Several key informants highlight the importance of partnerships and coordination to leverage each other's comparative advantage and work on gender inequalities, which is essential for an impactful country-driven engagement. External partnerships contribute to advancing the gender agenda—for example, the collaboration between the development partner group and women's rights organizations to criminalize GBV in Uzbekistan, the Bank Group's involvement in the GBV cluster for the Rohingya refugee crisis response in Bangladesh, and the joint development partner effort to create the 2023 Mexico Sustainable Taxonomy.[19] However, most external coordination on gender equality has been sporadic. The World Bank is often absent from the tables of discussion and gender equality forums (which hampers the continuity of policy dialogue on gender issues and has resulted in missed opportunities of collaboration to increase impact). *Addressing Gender Inequalities in Countries Affected by Fragility, Conflict, and Violence: An Evaluation of the World Bank Group's Support* came to a similar conclusion for FCV countries (World Bank 2023a). The new 2024–30 gender strategy recognizes the need to intensify coordination at the country level and identifies collective action as one of the three key elements in its theory of action.

The engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs), women's rights organizations, local actors, and target groups is not systematic, hindering the ownership, effectiveness, and sustainability of Bank Group engagement for gender equality. The Bank Group follows procedures and processes to hold wide consultations for CPFs and projects. However, the actors involved in identifying and discussing the gender priorities, modalities, and results of this engagement are not clearly named. Several IEG evaluations (World Bank 2018, 2019a, 2023a) have highlighted the importance of engaging with civil society to foster inclusive ownership. Yet evidence collected through the case studies indicates that consultations for project design are irregular, with weak involvement of key actors at the national level and only occasional involvement of actors at the local, community, and citizen levels. Meaningful consultations increase the relevance and ownership of World Bank interventions and their potential effectiveness and sustainability (see chapter 3). The 2024–30 gender strategy highlights the need to strengthen partnerships with CSOs.

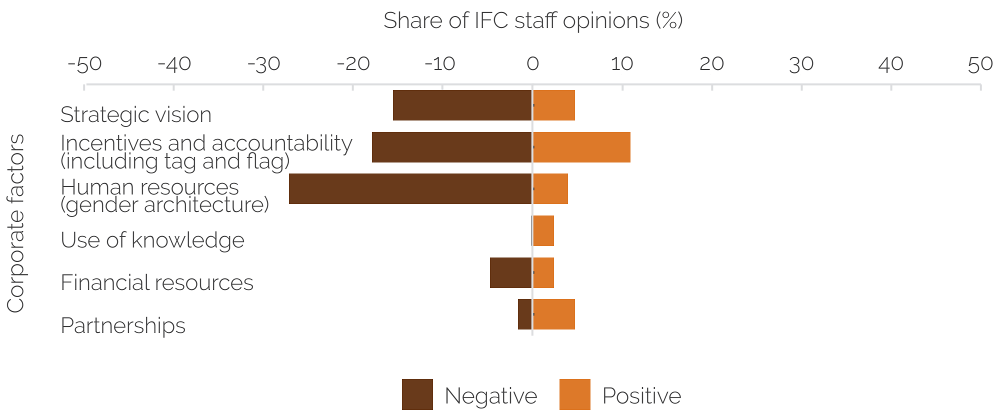
One of the main constraints on the effective operationalization of the country-driven approach is the current organization of the Bank Group's gender architecture. World Bank and IFC staff widely cite shortcomings related to the availability, organization, and management of gender expertise (figure 2.10), and those shortcomings also emerge in country case studies. First, gender expertise in the World Bank is not sufficiently decentralized (during the evaluation period, IFC expanded its regional presence but continues to rely heavily on short-term consultants, which results in high turnover and limits continuity).[20] For both the World Bank and IFC, a strong constraint on an impactful gender engagement is the absence of a gender expert in the country, with the necessary seniority, expertise, time, and knowledge of the context to support the country team in defining the country gender engagement strategy, advise project teams in designing and implementing projects, and support necessary internal and external coordination. The evaluation of gender in FCV raised the same issues for FCV-affected countries (World Bank 2023a). Second, there is no clear accountability for the country gender engagement. Roles and responsibilities regarding the identification and implementation of a country-level strategy of intervention for gender equality are not clearly defined, including who oversees the internal and external coordination activities. Third, the overall gender architecture is not clearly defined. Gender expertise sits at different levels within the Bank Group without clearly assigned tasks and responsibilities and without defined coordination mechanisms among the Gender Group, regional gender coordinators, Gender Innovation Labs (GILs), gender platforms or other similar mechanisms of support, gender leaders in GPs, and country and industry gender focal points. The evaluation finds confusion of roles, overlaps, gaps, and even competition for funds. Fourth, TTLs and country managers who are responsible for supporting the country engagement for gender equality often do not have the necessary knowledge and skills (see chapter 3). Finally, the gender tasks of the gender focal points in countries, Regions, GPs, and industries are often not budgeted—gender is considered a supplementary task. Concerns about the availability and management of human resources for gender equality engagement are cited as the most important by key informants (figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10. Corporate Factors Affecting World Bank Group Engagement for Gender Equality

a. Opinions of World Bank staff



b. Opinions of IFC stafff



Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: The unit of analysis is 232 statements of World Bank staff and 129 statements of IFC staff from 50 (World Bank) and 33 (IFC) corporate interviews. World Bank and IFC staff were purposively selected based on their expertise and roles in gender-related work within the World Bank and IFC. Interviews were categorized using manual sentiment analysis for positive and negative responses to the same question. IFC = International Finance Corporation.

Critical Role for Knowledge

Robust diagnostics are used to produce CPFs that address specific gender inequalities. The FY16–23 gender strategy emphasized the role of knowledge generation and evidence-based approaches to inform operations and underpin policy dialogue. The evaluation finds that 67 percent of the most recent CPFs convincingly derive gender priorities from robust diagnostics of gender inequalities, and this percentage increases to 80 percent for those that rely on an SCD with strong analysis based on sex-disaggregated data. Similarly, in most country case studies, the last CPF identifies country gender priorities that hinge on a strong SCD informed by gender assessments or other knowledge. According to the results of the principal component analysis, after the adoption of the FY16–23 gender strategy, the quality of the gender diagnostic informing country strategies is the factor that has most influenced the overall quality of country strategies. As the SCD gets streamlined, ensuring that robust gender diagnostics are timely channeled into the CPF preparation becomes of paramount importance. The Country Private Sector Diagnostic is a recent joint World Bank, IFC, and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency knowledge product used by IFC to identify and assess opportunities for private sector–led growth. Whereas 68 percent of Country Private Sector Diagnostics approved before the CPF analyze gender inequalities, only 45 percent of them identify specific actions to address gender inequalities within the private sector. The limited use of Country Private Sector Diagnostics in country strategies was also highlighted by the IEG Mid-Term Review (World Bank 2021b).

The World Bank's increasing support to produce gender statistics has reinforced the engagement for gender equality with governments and paved the way to further World Bank and donor investments. The World Bank has, for example, funded data collection on GBV in Bangladesh and Peru, time use surveys in Benin and Viet Nam, and technical assistance on improving gender data production and dissemination of gender statistics in Benin. This increased data production has supported operational work aimed at closing gender inequalities. For example, the time use survey was used in Viet Nam by both the World Bank and IFC to inform policy dialogue and operations focused on childcare.

In recent years, the World Bank and IFC have increasingly used robust gender diagnostics in policy dialogue, most prominently to integrate gender actions in DPOs. The report *2021 Development Policy Financing Retrospective: Facing Crisis, Fostering Recovery* found that rigorous analytic work to underpin DPOs helped influence policy dialogue and reforms (World Bank 2022b). This is confirmed by the DPO review conducted for this evaluation. About 77 percent of all gender prior actions are supported by analytic work. Examples of effective use of knowledge in policy dialogue come from the country case studies. The *10 Messages about Violence against Women in Peru* report (World Bank 2019b) successfully contributed to the national policy dialogue and agenda setting around GBV prevention policies and efforts. In Bangladesh, Benin, Egypt, Mexico, and Viet Nam, robust knowledge produced by the World Bank and IFC supported the policy dialogue leading to the inclusion of a gender pillar or gender priority actions in DPOs. In Benin, for example, the findings of the Country Gender Assessment (World Bank 2021a) were integrated in the Country Economic Memorandum and used in policy dialogue and negotiations with the government for a gender pillar in a DPO series.

Women, Business and the Law in Egypt is a good example of how the World Bank and IFC use knowledge to spur policy reforms. Countries are increasingly using *Women, Business and the Law* to introduce equal opportunity laws and improve their global ranking and request World Bank and IFC technical assistance and support to do so. In Egypt, the publication of *Women, Business and the Law 2016: Getting to Equal* (World Bank 2015) was a turning point in the engagement on gender equality between the Bank Group and the government. It was used to promote reforms removing hour and sector restrictions on women's participation in economic activities and calling for increased safety measures (such as safe transport) to support female labor force participation.[21]

Although the Bank Group has improved its analytic work on gender inequalities and on what works to address them, it has been less effective in operationalizing it—that is, using knowledge to integrate effective strategies of intervention in operations and guide project implementation. GILs have increasingly produced knowledge on what works to address gender inequalities in the different regions, and they have been strengthening their collaboration with project teams to integrate this knowledge in project designs. The evaluation found some good practices of gender-transformative projects that received GILs' support in design. Nevertheless, the analysis of relevant knowledge produced in the country case studies, compared with the assessment of country case project portfolios, shows limited integration of the findings of this knowledge in projects. Several key informants who are project team members also emphasize difficulty in operationalizing knowledge products. The main reason is the gap in capacities and support.

Only one-fourth of CPFs explicitly draw on evidence of what works to address gender inequalities and develop policy actions. As for operations, only 27 percent of World Bank stand-alone projects have explicitly used knowledge to inform the relevance and effectiveness of the theory of change, and only 16 percent have conducted and used assessments, studies, surveys, or data to inform implementation. IFC stand-alone projects demonstrate a significant application of knowledge in both design (90 percent) and implementation (91 percent). However, these figures drop to 48 percent and 38 percent, respectively, for non-stand-alone projects.

An increasing number of IFC global and country knowledge products makes the case for the private sector to address gender inequalities, with uneven success in transitioning from knowledge to operations. IFC has increasingly engaged in addressing new types of gender inequalities and invested in knowledge to build the business case to close gender gaps in, for example, housing finance, insurance, leadership, time use, GBV, ride-sharing, and digital platforms. IFC staff members are often encouraged to operationalize this knowledge into operations, but results have been mixed. In some areas, IFC has effectively transitioned from knowledge to action at the country and client levels through strategy development, guidance, upstream policy work, and advisory services. For example, the IFC Tackling Childcare program set the groundwork for IFC engagement in childcare advisory and exploration of pathways to investments. The program led to the development of guidelines to implement child support in partnership with more than 30 organizations. IFC's knowledge products in Bangladesh and Fiji were instrumental in the development of policy reforms. In housing finance, IFC conducted housing market studies in 2021 that led to a significant increase in IFC's housing portfolio, which was almost nonexistent before 2020. In insurance, the *SheforShield: Insure Women to Better Protect All* report (IFC, AXA, and Accenture 2015) helped define the opportunity for targeting the women's segment of insurance markets, which opened the doors to engaging with insurance companies on gender. By contrast, the operationalization of knowledge produced mixed results. After 10 years of support, the transition into investments is yet to materialize. The challenge is that developing the business case, building client demand, and establishing new insurance markets for women is time- and resource-intensive, particularly in cases where limited evidence is available to highlight women as a profitable market segment.

The reasons the World Bank and IFC have not been successful in operationalizing the knowledge they produce are manifold, with the first being weak internal and external dissemination of knowledge and guidance. The World Bank's comparative advantage in producing robust knowledge is widely recognized not only by implementing partners but also by other development partners and CSOs. However, the dissemination of knowledge is weak, with the possible exception of Country Gender Assessments. Specific knowledge products are frequently not known externally or even internally. Although the FY16–23 gender strategy highlights the role of guidance as a key instrument to support knowledge operationalization (World Bank Group 2015), guidance is insufficiently disseminated and used. Within the World Bank, staff frequently do not know the available gender resources. For example, 53 percent of World Bank respondents to the IEG online survey (almost all TTLs or team members of gender-relevant projects) do not know what the follow-up guidance of the FY16–23 gender strategy of their GP is, or they know it exists, but they do not know the content. Similarly, 56 percent of World Bank and IFC respondents working in country offices do not know the resource package for the Bank Group country team, or they know it exists, but they do not know the content. Otherwise, most IFC survey respondents are familiar with the IFC FY16–23 gender strategy implementation plan and the IFC gender flag guidance. IFC key informants stress that industry and investment staff outside of financial markets are frequently unaware of gender knowledge produced and that more has to be done on market development and outreach outside of the institution.

The second reason for the Bank Group not being able to operationalize knowledge is that it is not always tailored to operational needs. Impact evaluations, which play a key role in the FY16–23 gender strategy theory of action, have been useful to assess the effectiveness of specific interventions and present a strong business case for gender equality to implementing partners and clients. At the same time, impact evaluations focus only on specific aspects of the theory of change. They cannot inform on how the sometimes complex interactions of the various project components work and cannot provide guidance on how the theory of change operates in specific contexts and conditions. This is, however, the type of guidance required to support replicability in different contexts. Several key informants of case studies stress that they lack specific knowledge to adapt lessons learned from analytic work to their specific context and target group and effectively implement the related interventions.

Finally, transferring knowledge to operations requires dedicated gender experts with sector- and context-specific expertise. According to many key informants, gender platforms and other gender coordination mechanisms—where they exist—facilitate knowledge uptake by operational teams and collaboration between gender experts and operational teams. In Bangladesh, the gender platform played a key role in connecting operational teams with the South Asia GIL, which provided systematic review of evidence and access to external knowledge. In Mexico, a peer learning platform enabled IFC advisory services to share and disseminate good practices from case studies at the corporate level. Some gaps remain, however, as the high quality of knowledge produced by the Bank Group does not necessarily translate into project design of corresponding quality.

[1] The World Bank Group's approach to country engagement is country driven if, when preparing a Country Partnership Framework (CPF), the Bank Group starts from the member country's own vision of its development goals, which may be laid out in a poverty-focused national development strategy. In consultation with key stakeholders in the country, including private sector clients, the Bank Group works with the government to draw on the findings of the Systematic Country Diagnostic and the Bank Group's comparative advantage to determine the CPF objectives. Once the objectives are established, the CPF lays out a selective and flexible program of engagement tailored to the country's needs to support the achievement of those objectives (World Bank Group 2014). The Independent Evaluation Group's Mid-Term Review states that "the [gender] strategy defines a country-driven approach as coherent alignment with CPF objectives among operations that are supported by policy dialogue and the diagnosis of gender gaps to achieve sustained outcomes" (World Bank 2021b, 21).

[2] The evaluation did not use the gender tag and the gender flag to identify gender-relevant projects for three reasons. First, assessing the gender tag is part of the evaluation. Second, the gender tag and the gender flag do not distinguish between different levels of gender relevance (see box 2.1). Third, the gender tag and the gender flag as currently defined did not exist before the adoption of the fiscal year (FY)16–23 gender strategy.

[3] The World Bank addresses gender inequalities in time use in different ways, including through the provision of gender-sensitive infrastructure (water facilities, transport, and electricity), childcare and older adult care services, and time-saving technology (for example, mills and water pumps) and, in some cases, through the engagement with men and boys for a redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work. It also supports data production (for example, time use surveys) to make gender inequalities in time use visible. The International Finance Corporation (IFC) focuses on the provision of childcare in the workplace.

[4] In the Arab Republic of Egypt and Mexico, for example, the recent stand-alone lending is a development policy operation.

[5] In 2023, the Gender and Economic Inclusion Group transitioned to an official department, which adds greater ability to push for gender equality, inclusion, and women's economic empowerment across IFC.

[6] The FY16–23 gender strategy intended to promote a more strategic and selective approach to addressing gender inequalities because of the direction provided by the gender tag and the gender flag to reduce well-identified, specific gender gaps; promote the country-driven approach; and increase the focus on monitoring results. As stated in the gender strategy

document, the intent was to raise "the bar on gender equality by focusing on how the Bank Group can move beyond mainstreaming to an approach that identifies outcomes and monitors results of Bank Group–supported interventions in client countries" (World Bank Group 2015, 6).

[7] Many gender focal points spoke of excessive time and resources spent helping project teams tag additional financing of parent projects that originally were not tagged—projects that were, in their words, "untaggable."

[8] The gender flag was created in 2013, but the percentage of gender-flagged projects started to increase substantially after IFC set targets for advisory services in FY16.

[9] The Bank Group made policy and financial commitments in the 2018 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and IFC capital packages. IFC has made four gender-related commitments for 2030 as part of the recent capital increase package: (i) 50 percent share for women among directors whom IFC nominates to boards of companies where it has a board seat, (ii) $2.6 billion in annual commitments to financial institutions specifically targeting women, (iii) quadrupling the amount of annual financing dedicated to women and women-led small and medium enterprises to $1.6 billion, and (iv) flagging IFC projects with gender components (as applicable) by 2020.

[10] Since 2012, IFC's Banking on Women has provided advisory expertise and invested $8.6 billion across 268 financial institutions in 81 emerging market and developing economy countries to provide finance and business solutions to women and women-led enterprises.

[11] The FY24 target for investment projects was exceeded (49 percent) across almost all industries.

[12] This may not be the case for most maternal health projects, which are considered standalone by this evaluation, to align with what the FY16–23 gender strategy considers gender gaps. Most projects that aim to improve maternal health do not contribute to reducing gender inequalities; they just address a specific need of women.

[13] A country-driven approach to the Bank Group gender engagement means that (i) the gender priorities of the Bank Group in the country are identified jointly with the government, private clients, and other key stakeholders based on robust evidence and the comparative advantage of the institution in the country and (ii) the different instruments of country engagement (analytic work, country strategy, policy dialogue, and country operational portfolio) address these priorities in a consistent and coordinated way. The Country Management Unit plays a

key role in implementing the country-driven approach in the country strategy; it integrates the country gender priorities agreed on with partners and stakeholders and frames and coordinates the contribution of the different instruments to these priorities. Finally, the Country Management Unit should support and track the operationalization of what is contained in the country strategy.

[14] The presence of some form of country-driven approach was a criterion for selection of the country case studies, so these cases represent positive deviants.

[15] A gender platform is a World Bank instrument financed by internal resources or trust funds that provides technical and strategic support on gender issues to the Country Management Units and implementing partners. Although gender platforms are mostly established by the Sustainable Development Practice Group, other Global Practices manage other forms of gender platforms. The Mashreq Gender Facility, run by the Poverty and Equity Global Practice in collaboration with IFC, and the recent platforms established by the Africa Gender Innovation Lab in Ethiopia and Nigeria are examples of gender platforms that channel support to gender activities at the country level. The South Asia gender platforms managed by the Social Sustainability and Inclusion Global Practice, for example, provide strategic support on gender and social inclusion issues. The platforms help identify and define key operational, technical, and analytic work for impact on the implementation of the CPF and Country Gender Action Briefs. An IFC peer learning platform is an IFC-led, time-bound (usually 12–18 months), results-focused initiative that brings together private sector companies (IFC 2023).

[16] The development policy operation supported the approval of two ministerial decrees removing barriers to female labor force participation (one decree removing legal discriminations preventing women from working in certain sectors and the other allowing women to work at night) and the development of the standard operating procedures for gender-based violence case management for the public transport based on the Ministry of Transport's Code of Conduct.

[17] Peer learning platforms started in FY17 under the management of the Gender Secretariat, which has since made this approach a key pillar for the Gender Group's engagement at a larger scale.

[18] "There is broad consensus within the Bank Group and within governments, nongovernmental organizations, and private companies that were consulted that the Bank Group's approach should continue to be country driven. This means that objectives to promote gender equality are set at the country level, rather than globally, in line with country plans for implementing

Sustainable Development Goal 5…and other gender targets, and complementary to the activities of other development partners" (World Bank Group 2015, 62).

[19] The Mexico Sustainable Taxonomy is a financial public policy tool that seeks to encourage investment in economic activities that protect the environment and reduce social and gender gaps. Both the World Bank and IFC played a pivotal role in the development of the taxonomy, providing technical expertise and logistical support to Sectoral and Thematic Technical Groups. Several international organizations, including the German Agency for International Cooperation, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the French Development Agency, also contributed to its development.

[20] Gender consultants make up 73 percent of the total gender regional staff, compared with 35 percent of the overall advisory services staff in the regions. The number of consultants has significantly increased in recent years, from 0 in FY20 to 33 in FY24, whereas the number of regular staff has remained unchanged at 13. Key informants acknowledge the increase in gender experts but often highlight that they are overburdened and lack sufficient time to provide the necessary support.

[21] These reforms were supported by the Egypt Inclusive Growth for Sustainable Recovery development policy operation.

3 | Lessons Learned on Results

Highlights

The current model of engagement for gender equality lacks a system to capture, classify, and aggregate results, and there is no consensus on how to operationalize the high-level objectives of the fiscal year 2016–23 gender strategy.

Indicators are inadequately used to measure results and are inconsistently used in reporting, emphasizing more outreach than changes in women's and girls' empowerment and World Bank Group contributions to reducing gender inequalities. Most projects have a zero baseline for gender-relevant indicators.

Weak attention to implementation and drawbacks in the approaches adopted by the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation hinder the achievement of results. The evaluation identifies promising practices, which, if institutionalized, would make World Bank and International Finance Corporation support to gender equality more impactful and sustainable.

The World Bank and the International Finance Corporation are increasing their efforts to address gender inequalities in institutions, resources, and agency. However, most projects analyzed in the case studies do not sufficiently consider the interconnections and complementarities among these three dimensions, which undermine their effectiveness.

Country case studies show that the Bank Group can "internalize"—that is, anticipate and respond to—the external factors that influence the engagement for gender equality and its results, seizing key opportunities and addressing binding constraints to be more impactful.

This chapter discusses the challenges the World Bank and IFC face to track the results of their engagement for gender equality, explains why more attention is paid to design than implementation, and provides insights on results. The chapter discusses the reasons little evidence of results is found while describing the types and examples of results achieved using primary source data collection. The chapter also analyzes factors that enable and constrain the achievement of results.

The lack of a harmonized system to measure and report results of the Bank Group gender equality engagement at different levels is a challenge for the evaluation. Outcomes are not adequately documented, and no system exists to classify and aggregate them at the corporate level. Thus, this evaluation is unable to provide a quantitative account of results by type (process, outputs, and outcomes); areas of gender inequalities; elements of the theory of change; and other dimensions (sustainability, scale, and ownership). Nevertheless, based on the analysis of dozens of projects in eight countries, this chapter provides insights on how the design and implementation of the theory of change for gender equality in projects—influenced by several enabling and constraining factors—can contribute to reducing gender inequalities.

Limitations of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

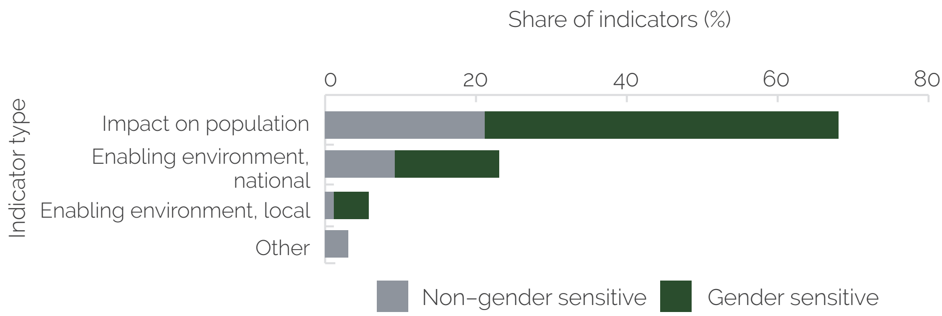
The current model of engagement for gender equality is not able to show results systematically. The Bank Group documents the results of specific interventions[1] and conducts impact evaluations of specific project components, but its monitoring systems do not aggregate, classify, and organize results of the World Bank and IFC engagement in a systematic way. Corporate reporting on achievements in gender equality focuses on tracking gender tags and flags and signaling promising designs. Thus, the Bank Group is unable to assess the type of results achieved in supporting countries to move toward gender equality and determine whether this support generates change. For example, the FY16–23 gender strategy updates to the Board of Executive Directors and the World Bank and IFC 10-year retrospectives,[2] both published in 2023, inform on the evolution of the engagement for gender equality, types of projects financed, and lessons learned from the engagement, without providing evidence of the results achieved because data on results are not available. This similar type of reporting also occurs in the Mid-Term Reviews of the regional gender action plans. A key informant of this evaluation states, “If we take the fact that every single project in the region had to have something on gender, then, yes, we achieved results. If we ask something more concrete, for example, on saying whether there is improved access to more and better jobs for women, this is more difficult to assess.”

Little evidence of gender results exists because the results are variably interpreted. At the corporate level, it is unclear what the results of gender equality engagement should be and how they should be expressed. Key informants define results differently, varying from a decrease in gender inequalities in the countries to specific outputs achieved by projects, to an increase in the proportion of gender-tagged projects, to improvements in design and processes. For example, 64 percent of IFC key informants in corporate interviews define gender results in relation to projects, 30 percent in terms of corporate achievements, and 18 percent in relation to the country or industry. Strategic documents also do not provide a clear and homogeneous definition of results. Moreover, the in-depth portfolio reviews of the eight case study countries find that projects with a robust theory of change supporting a clear identification of gender outcomes are rare. The absence of a robust theory of change makes it difficult to identify appropriate intermediate results. The varying definitions of the results of the gender engagement (that is, what success should look like) do not help the World Bank and IFC teams come to a common understanding of their goals and how to measure change.

Another reason little evidence of gender results exists is the weak capacity to measure and report results consistently. The Bank Group struggles to report country-level gender results of World Bank and IFC engagement. Performance and Learning Reviews and Completion and Learning Reviews generally report gender results as project-specific outputs, outcomes, and activities, rather than contributions to the reduction of gender inequalities in the country. Only 20 percent of the CPFs reviewed include indicators that allow the reduction of gender inequalities to be measured at the level of the CPF objectives and higher-level objectives.

DPO reporting of country-level outcomes also has shortcomings. DPOs report on gender outcomes at the country level in terms of improvements of the enabling environment for gender equality (for example, data, policies, laws, institutional frameworks, budget allocations, and actors' capacities) at either the national or the local level and the impact of the reforms supported by the DPO on female and male access to services, resources, and other benefits. More than one-third of DPO indicators associated with gender actions are not gender sensitive[3] (figure 3.1). Moreover, 81 percent of closed gender-relevant DPOs aimed to achieve and measure outcomes related to the impact of gender-relevant reforms on populations. However, only 52 percent of the indicators measuring these outcomes achieved their target. This raises questions on how these indicators and targets are chosen, how the theory of change of the DPO is developed, and whether the difference between contribution and attribution needs to be clarified.

Figure 3.1. Type of Indicators Associated with Gender Actions in Gender-Relevant Development Policy Operations



Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

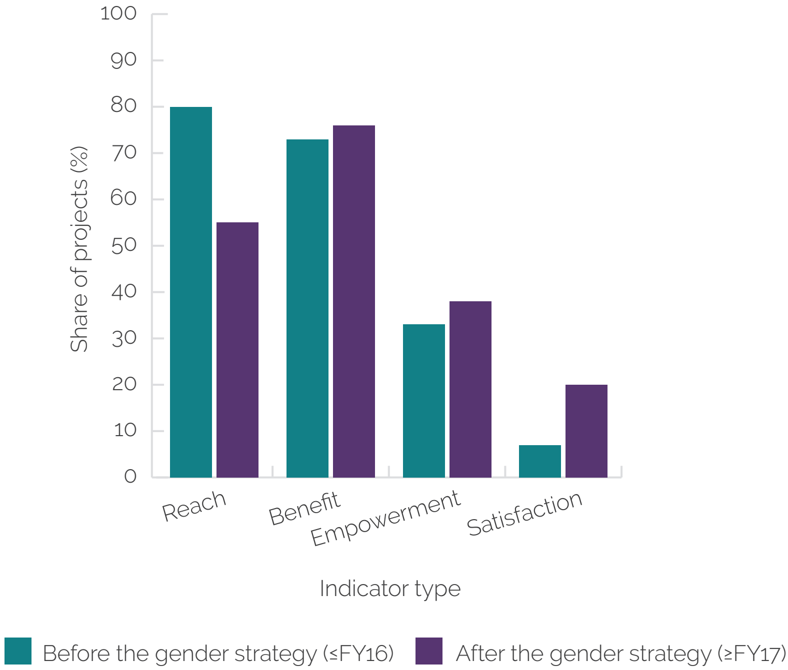
Note: The analysis covers 95 gender-relevant development policy operations identified based on a greater than 15 cutoff value of the gender-relevant score approved between fiscal years 2012 and 2023. These development policy operations had 260 indicators associated with actions that were deemed gender relevant.

Unresolved tension between attribution and contribution makes it difficult to define and measure gender outcomes at the country level. This tension determines which indicators are chosen and then which results are reported and can also influence which activities are selected to achieve gender results (according to key informants). The excessive focus on attribution can foster risk aversion, overuse of output rather than outcome indicators, and an inclination to work in silos as opposed to seeking collaborations. As *The World Bank Group Outcome Orientation at the Country Level* indicates, the strong focus on attribution does not allow capturing of country-level outcomes that the Bank Group contributes to because of the use of multiple instruments and complementarities with other actors (World Bank 2020b). Thus, a mismatch occurs between the long-term goals the institution wants to pursue and the country result frameworks that rely on lower-level indicators. Capturing the Bank Group contribution to country outcomes requires a shift from attribution to contribution and from project-focused results to countrywide outcomes and changing incentives accordingly. This holds especially true for gender outcomes, which result from cross-sector and cross-institution collaborations, external partnerships, and long-term engagement with country actors.

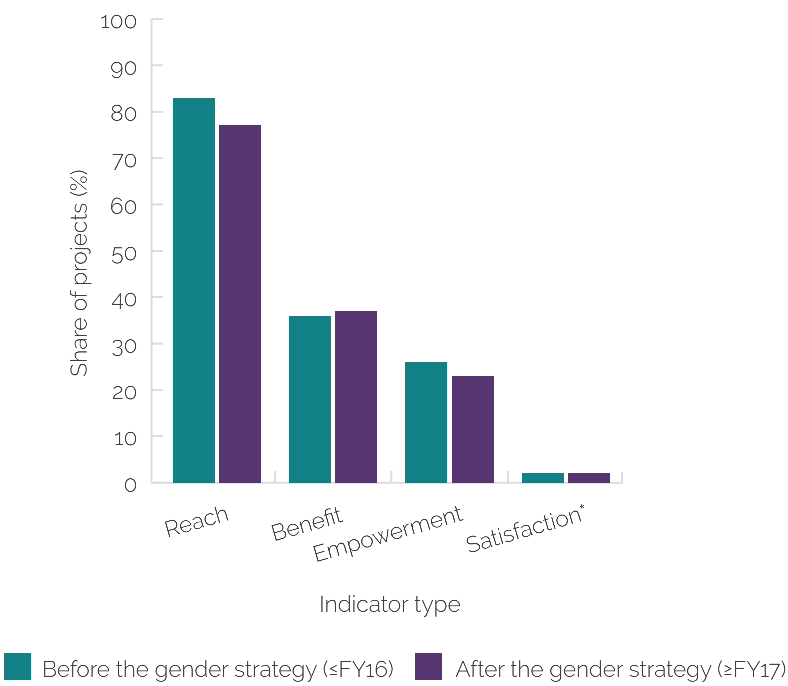
At the project level, completion reports rely on weak indicators that look at outreach numbers more than empowerment. Almost all gender-relevant projects—World Bank lending projects, IFC investments, and IFC advisory projects—include gender-relevant indicators (a precondition for receiving the gender tag and the gender flag), but the nature of these indicators is uneven. Approximately 50 percent of indicators measure only the outreach of the project to women, although for the World Bank, the percentage of projects that used only this type of indicator drastically decreases in the post-strategy period. In the pre-strategy period, 26 percent of World Bank projects used only outreach indicators; this percentage falls to 4 percent in the post-strategy period. For IFC, the share of projects with outreach measures remains the same (approximately 80 percent) for advisory indicators and increases for investment indicators[4] (from 40 percent before the strategy to 70 percent afterward).[5] For both the World Bank and IFC, indicators measuring women's and girls' empowerment are used less frequently than indicators measuring access to or benefits from services provided by the project (figure 3.2). Most empowerment indicators (71 percent) are in projects addressing gender inequalities in labor force participation, including entrepreneurship.

Figure 3.2. Types of Indicators Used in World Bank and International Finance Corporation Gender-Relevant Projects

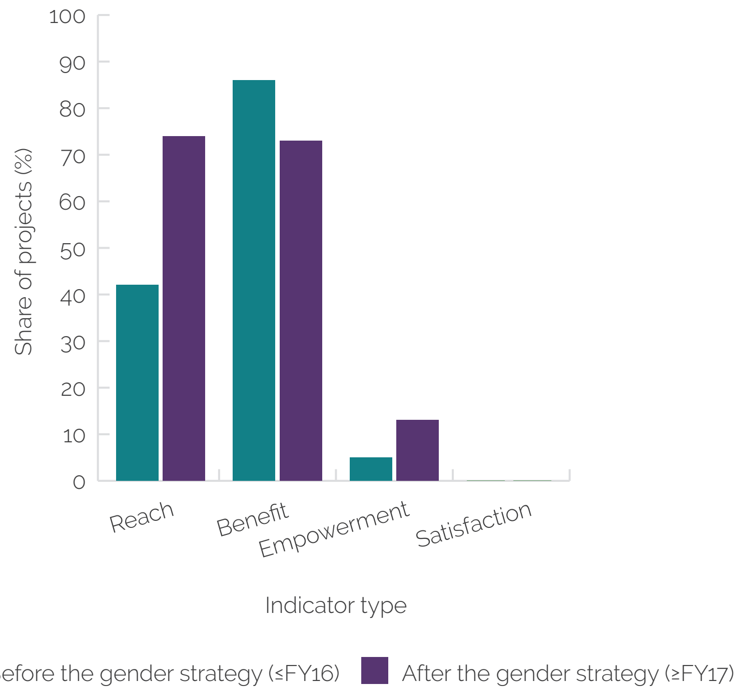
a. World Bank (IPF and PforR)



b. IFC advisory projects



c. IFC investments



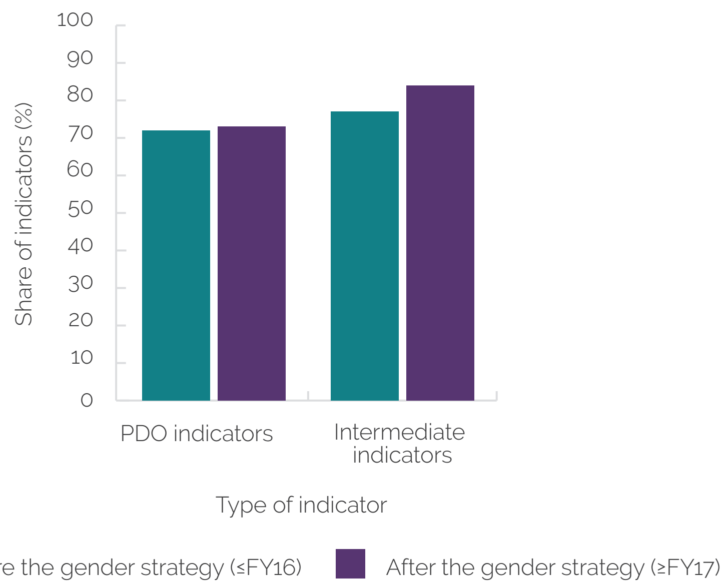
Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: For the World Bank, the analysis covers a sample of 200 randomly selected projects approved between FY12 and FY23, out of which indicator data are available for 195 projects. A total of 435 indicators were analyzed for 89 lending projects deemed gender relevant, identified based on a greater than 15 cutoff value of the gender-relevant score. The review of IFC indicators covers 279 gender-relevant investment projects in selected industries (Financial Institutions Group; Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services; and Disruptive Technologies and Funds) and 248 gender-relevant advisory projects in selected business lines (Financial Institutions Group; Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services; and Environmental, Social, and Governance). IFC gender-relevant projects were identified based on a greater than 15 cutoff value of the gender-relevant score. The indicator category types are not mutually exclusive—that is, a single project could have all four types of indicators. FY = fiscal year; IFC = International Finance Corporation; IPF = investment project financing; PforR = Program-for-Results.
*IFC advisory services projects have client surveys to assess satisfaction, but they are often not part of the monitoring and evaluation framework.

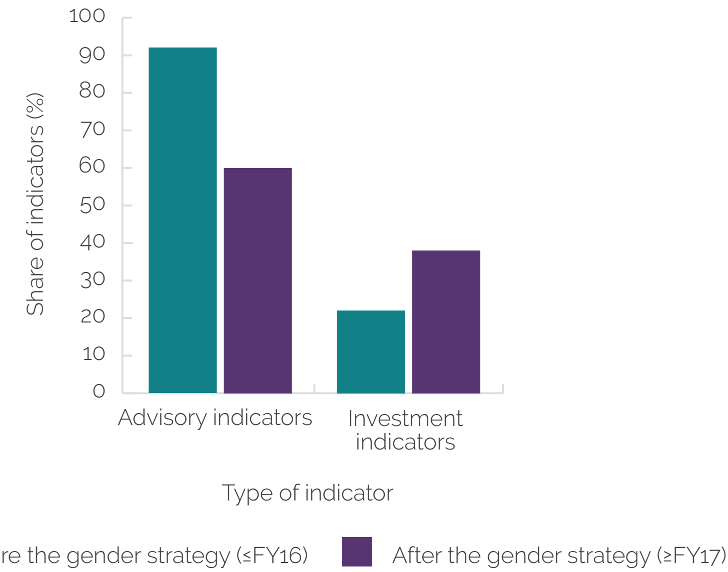
Projects rarely measure the extent to which gender inequalities are reduced because they lack baselines. A decrease in gender inequalities can be determined only by comparing the situation at the start of the project and at project closing, which calls for a baseline. Most gender-relevant indicators of World Bank lending projects have a zero baseline, irrespective of whether they are intermediate or PDO indicators (figure 3.3, panel a). Moreover, the percentage with zero baseline has not changed much in the post–gender strategy period. IFC advisory project indicators with a zero baseline have notably decreased after the strategy; however, approximately 60 percent still lack a baseline (figure 3.3, panel b). The situation is better for IFC investments, despite the percentage of indicators with zero baseline increasing in the post–gender strategy period (figure 3.3, panel b). Zero baselines may be due to lack of data at the start of the project or, more commonly, due to projects accounting only for the outputs they generate as opposed to changes in the context.[6] Project Completion Reports[7] of gender stand-alone projects measure gender results more systematically, but even they often lack robust indicators, with most at the output level; moreover, over half of their PDO indicators have zero baseline.

Figure 3.3. Indicators with Zero Baselines

a. World Bank projects (IPF and PforR)



b. IFC projects (advisory services and investments)



Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: For the World Bank, the analysis covers a sample of 200 randomly selected projects approved between FY12 and FY23, out of which indicator data are available for 195 projects. A total of 145 PDO indicators and 290 intermediate indicators were analyzed for 89 lending projects deemed gender relevant based on a greater than 15 cutoff value of the gender-relevant score. For IFC, the analysis covers all IFC advisory and IFC investment evaluated projects between FY12 and FY23 (identified based on a greater than 15 cutoff value of the gender-relevant score), out of which indicator data are available for 66 evaluated advisory and 21 (out of 23) evaluated investment projects with relevant gender indicators. The review analyzed 140 outcome (and impact) advisory service indicators and 45 investment indicators. FY = fiscal year; IFC = International Finance Corporation; IPF = investment project financing; PDO = project development objective; PforR = Program-for-Results.

World Bank and IFC projects achieve results that the Bank Group does not systematically track. IEG's assessment of country engagement for gender equality in eight countries—corroborated by hundreds of interviews and more than 100 focus group discussions—points to a richer, varied, and sometimes contradictory set of results that escape the Bank Group's current monitoring and reporting systems. These results can be captured only through ad hoc investigation (which greatly limits the ability to learn what works on a systematic basis). For example, in Peru, the Improving the Performance of Non-Criminal Justice Services Project supports Asistencia Legal Gratuita (ALEGRA) centers in providing legal support and information to vulnerable women (including GBV survivors), thus empowering them to understand and assert their rights. Female beneficiaries and ALEGRA centers' staff consulted by IEG report women's increased awareness of their rights, sense of psychosocial well-being, and sense of protection and agency.

Yet the Implementation Completion and Results Report of the previous project (Justice Services Improvement Project II) does not capture this increased empowerment of women (World Bank 2016a), nor do the indicators of the new project, which measure only people's access to ALEGRA services (without distinguishing between men and women) and women's level of satisfaction with services (without capturing the benefits received and changes in women's lives).[8] In Tanzania, IFC's Finance2Equal platform includes only an indicator on the number of female middle- and higher-level management staff in its results framework. One of the clients supported shows gender results that are not captured by indicators—that is, a reduction in the pay gap between men and women and the establishment of mentoring programs for women (which promotes sustainability).

The limited availability of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics constrains the measurement of gender results. IFC has supported clients and partners in setting up sex-disaggregated data systems for investments, for example, through the yearly data collection requirement of gender-specific indicators and direct client support provided by advisory services. However, according to IFC's key informants, establishing gender indicator baselines remains challenging because many clients still do not have sex-disaggregated data. *A Retrospective of IFC's Implementation of the World Bank Group Gender Strategy, 2016–2023* confirms this finding (IFC 2023). The World Bank also lacks sex-disaggregated data. Although many countries increasingly collect sex-disaggregated data and produce gender statistics also thanks to the support of the World Bank, several key informants state that sex-disaggregated data in some sectors are still not available.

Focus on Project Design More Than Implementation

The case studies show that weak implementation of design is one reason why projects are less successful in reducing gender inequalities and fostering women's and girls' empowerment than what is expected. *Gender Equality in Development: A Ten-Year Retrospective* confirms that "significant effort has been made at the design stage; greater focus and systematic effort to support implementation could strengthen results" (World Bank 2023d, 36). IEG's Mid-Term Review of the FY16–23 gender strategy (World Bank 2021b) previously concluded that monitoring commitments and assessing the quality of project design get significant attention while monitoring implementation gets less attention, which raises the risk of missing evidence to assess outcomes. An example of promising design that reduced its transformative potential in implementation is the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project assessed in Benin by this evaluation (box 3.1), the effectiveness of which was undermined by various weaknesses in implementation.[9]

The Bank Group's gender architecture provides insufficient support to operational teams for project implementation. Several Bank Group staff and implementing partners indicate that they would need support during implementation. This support is constrained by a lack of dedicated gender experts in the countries who can follow the implementation of projects. The gender focal points are frequently overburdened because assisting teams on gender issues is an additional task to many other assigned tasks. Moreover, World Bank and IFC project teams have insufficient knowledge and skills to implement gender-related design. According to the staff survey, 54 percent of respondents (most of them TTLs or team members of gender-relevant projects) never received any training on gender issues; 90 percent received some form of support at the stage of project design (either from the World Bank or IFC staff or from ad hoc consultants); and only 17 percent received support or guidance during project implementation. A key informant states, "People do [not] know how to implement the design; they do [not] necessarily have the expertise. The [World] Bank should ensure that they have this expertise. It would be necessary to provide support during implementation, but it is not possible."

Corporate incentives are skewed toward directing Bank Group staff to produce a gender-relevant design. The main incentive to integrate gender into projects—the gender tag or the gender flag—is operating only at design. The human resources that are budget coded for gender support face a trade-off: invest their time in gender tagging or support project teams during implementation. This trade-off has become more acute for the World Bank because of the de facto corporate target of 100 percent gender-tagged projects that is enforced by some regions; it usually gets resolved by using the dedicated expert's time for tagging. A key informant explains, "We need more implementation support to projects. The safeguard specialists are often looking at gender implementation, but they do [not] have the expertise. We need to focus more on implementation. Regions have these 100 percent mandates for design. We are spending a lot of time on design and not on implementation."

Inadequate skills for implementation negatively affect effectiveness. Case studies and World Bank analytic work show that a good gender design does not guarantee achievement of gender outcomes, particularly if the project does not benefit from ongoing support and sufficient adaptation to overcome potential barriers. For example, a pilot training on psychological and socioemotional skills for female entrepreneurs was replicated in Ethiopia after an impact evaluation indicated that, as a result of this intervention, Togolese female entrepreneurs who followed a traditional business training had increased their profits by 40 percent (Campos et al. 2018). In Ethiopia, however, the training was not as effective; the impact on business performance was mixed because the quality of delivery seemed to matter (Alibhai et al. 2019). Similarly, a McKinsey & Company's report highlights that gender diversity initiatives often fail when implementation teams lack training in unconscious bias, gender dynamics, and inclusion strategies. This leads to a lack of buy-in from male employees and ineffective interventions (McKinsey & Company 2023). Several of the project teams and implementing partners interviewed also confirm that one of the main constraints to achieving gender results is the lack of capacities—of the World Bank and IFC project teams or partners—for the implementation of activities to advance gender equality.

The presence of dedicated gender experts during implementation and partnership with knowledgeable and experienced local partners are critical for well-designed projects to maintain their gender relevance during implementation and to achieve results. The Australian Gender Pillar in Viet Nam, the Health and Gender Support Project for Cox's Bazar District in Bangladesh, the Early Years Nutrition and Child Development Project in Benin, the Lima Metropolitano North Extension Project and the Centralized Emergency Response System Project in Peru, and Banking on Women in Egypt are examples of World Bank initiatives analyzed in the country case studies that demonstrate how the strong support of gender or GBV experts during implementation or skilled implementing partners bolster effective implementation of well-designed projects. IEG also observes that some poorly designed projects become more effective in reducing gender inequalities when there is an investment in gender knowledge and expertise and the adoption of effective approaches during implementation. For example, the Saweto Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Peru Project incorporated gender-relevant actions to enable women's participation and leadership only at the implementation stage, which was accompanied and adjusted by the implementing partner who positioned gender high on the agenda, including in local partners' governance. Also in Peru, the IFC Apurimac Mining Agriculture advisory services project did not initially incorporate gender issues, but it reacted to elements that emerged during implementation that called for a gender assessment and specific activities to be integrated into the project. The project succeeded in achieving gender results, particularly in increasing women's economic empowerment (IEP 2018).

The 2024–30 gender strategy highlights the need for stronger attention to implementation and intends to develop an implementation plan. The strategy's stronger focus on implementation was welcomed by several of the World Bank and IFC staff interviewed, who expect to receive greater support. This evaluation provides lessons and recommendations to inform the implementation of the new strategy.

Implementing the Theory of Change of the *World Development Report 2012*

Most gender-relevant projects overlook existing gender inequalities in institutional structures, distribution of resources, and women's and girls' agency and the strong interlinks among them. Advancing gender equality requires that all three elements of the theory of change for gender equality are fulfilled: access to and control of resources, conducive formal and informal institutions, and increased women's and girls' agency (figure 1.2; appendix B). World Bank and IFC operations can intervene on just one dimension, but they need to verify that the conditions attached to the other dimensions are in place and, if not, that other Bank Group, government, or other stakeholder interventions do address those gaps. Although there are notable exceptions, most projects analyzed in the case studies do not sufficiently consider the interconnections and complementarities among the three dimensions. An increasing number of knowledge products stress the importance of combining these three dimensions, but their message is weakly transferred into project designs.

IEG has found good examples of gender-transformative designs—most of them recent—resting on comprehensive theories of change that consider the interlinks among the three elements. One example is the SWEDD project described in box 3.1. Another transformative intervention is IFC's Pacific Women in Business Program in Papua New Guinea and the Waka Mere peer learning platform in the Solomon Islands, which built the business case for addressing GBV in the workplace by estimating the cost of GBV to companies in terms of lost productivity, absenteeism, and turnover. Building on this knowledge, the program targeted both the firms and the industry by partnering with the Business Coalition for Women in Papua New Guinea and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the Solomon Islands to support the implementation of gender policies and programs for promoting gender diversity in participating firms (institutions). Training was provided to staff and managers (institutions) by the peer learning platforms on topics such as women's safety on remote worksites and women's leadership certification, the latter of which contributed to increasing women's promotions and income generation (agency and resources). The program also supported the establishment of a case management and safe house service for victims of violence in the workplace (resources).

Box 3.1. The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project

The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend was launched in 2015 in six countries and subsequently expanded to other countries, including Benin (a case study country for this evaluation). The project aims to increase women's and adolescent girls' empowerment and their access to quality reproductive, child, and maternal health services in select areas of the participating countries and to improve regional knowledge generation and sharing and regional capacity and coordination. The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend project

(continued)

Box 3.1. The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project (cont.)

ultimately intends to help Sahel countries capture the demographic dividend by decreasing their fertility rate and better leveraging women's and girls' potential for development.

The project has a comprehensive theory of change that aims to (i) enhance women's and girls' agency through their participation in safe spaces for life skills development (resources) and increase schooling (resources) and economic empowerment (resources); (ii) shift gender norms (informal institutions) through multichannel communication and engagement with men and boys and with opinion leaders, including customary and religious leaders; and (iii) change formal institutions, including strengthening data production and use, policies, laws, and the quality and coverage of the sexual and reproductive health services system.

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

When providing support to women's economic empowerment, the World Bank and IFC focus more on access to resources than control of resources. Women's access to credit, cash transfers, or skills does not automatically translate into women controlling and benefiting from them. Yet the World Bank and IFC promote women's and girls' access to resources while often neglecting to monitor and support women's and girls' use and control of these resources—that is, women's and girls' agency and the influence of informal institutions, such as gender norms and gender power relations. IEG finds, for example, that some loans provided by the Sustainable Forests and Livelihoods Project in Bangladesh, which supported women's access to finance for income-generating activities, were used by male household members for their own activities. IFC projects that focus on increasing either women's access to finance or income (employment) often do not capture changes in women's decision-making power or use, control, and ownership of resources. An exception is an IFC project in Bangladesh, which supported the provision of mobile financial services to underprivileged women. A postcompletion assessment shows that the women beneficiaries increased control over their income and household resources and their participation in household decisions.

When the Bank Group aims to facilitate women's control over resources by promoting asset ownership, gender norms and power relations can constrain the achievement of this goal. The Bank Group's analytic work recognizes that law reforms aimed at reducing gender inequalities in asset ownership can be difficult to implement. For example, the South Asia GIL finds that legal reforms are not enough to eliminate gender inequality in inheritance and land distribution. The evidence on inheritance is mixed, with some studies suggesting a more gender-egalitarian inheritance pattern after the reform and others finding no impact (Zahra, Javed, and Munoz Boudet 2022). In Tanzania, the World Bank Land Tenure Improvement Project promoted joint land titling by establishing partnerships with local CSOs, which organized information and awareness-raising activities in the communities. Some key informants reported that these activities were not always effective because, in some communities, women feared that joint titling could compromise family harmony or threaten the husband's breadwinner role. A lesson learned from a pilot initiative conducted by the Africa GIL in Uganda is that strong incentives (conditional offer of titling in this case) can notably increase the acceptance of joint titling (Cherchi et al. 2018). Nevertheless, women's ownership of assets does not automatically imply control. An IFC market study on women-owned small and medium enterprises in Indonesia highlights that women would need their husband's permission to use their own assets (especially housing) as collateral or capital (IFC 2016). The World Bank Inclusive Housing Finance Program in Egypt shows that gender norms and power relations can undermine the power of incentives to ensure women's control of assets. The program intended to increase women's access to mortgages by giving priority to female heads of households and providing incentives to joint titling in formal registration processes. The evaluation finds that the project did increase women's homeownership, especially among female heads of household, and the social acceptance of female property. However, key informants reported that some women signed a private agreement with male household members to surrender the property.

The majority of World Bank and IFC projects target women and girls as individuals, overlooking the relations and norms in which they are “embedded” that strongly influence their choices and empowerment opportunities.[10] Despite abundant World Bank and IFC analytic work demonstrating the implications of gender norms and gender power dynamics for advancing gender equality,[11] projects often do not consider these implications. For example, projects promoting women’s economic empowerment rarely monitor or promote women’s decision-making and bargaining power within the household. Two examples are environmental projects supporting women’s income-generating activities and community leadership in Benin and Peru. Based on IEG’s field assessment, these two projects increased women’s income and agency in farmers’ cooperatives and community life but did not change their position in the household. In Tanzania, IFC’s Finance2Equal advisory services project led to a significant increase in women’s middle management positions in financial institutions but not in higher-level management positions. Gender norms and power relations may have prevented qualified women from accepting these positions, which could have required relocations to other branches—a decision generally made by men.

The World Bank and IFC also overlook the influence of gender power relations and norms within communities and social networks. Many Bank Group projects promote women’s community leadership by establishing mandatory quotas of women in community management committees or project activities without considering whether gender norms in the target communities allow women to participate in decisions, speak in front of men, or participate in activities with men who are not their family members. For example, in Egypt, IFC training for women aspiring to be on corporate boards was comprehensive and appreciated, but it did not lead to women’s nominations to boards because even when women qualified for the positions, they were often excluded from business networks. In Bangladesh, the Sustainable Forests and Livelihoods Project fostered women’s participation in forest management by mandating a quota of 33 percent of women involved in villages’ forest management committees. One committee activity involves pairs of individuals patrolling the forest to monitor and report unauthorized tree cutting. Achievement of the female quota in committees did not correspond to women’s effective participation because women refused to patrol the forest with men who were not their family members.

The World Bank and IFC are increasing their engagement with men and boys to advance gender equality, although structured and effective approaches are rare. The World Bank has produced knowledge on this topic (such as Pierotti, Delavallade, and Brar 2023), but few projects include structured interventions to engage men and boys for gender equality. The IEG review of gender stand-alone projects finds that 17 percent of World Bank projects engage men or boys in some way, but only 8 percent promote in-depth engagement that goes beyond sensitization, for example, by targeting men or boys to promote positive masculinity[12] and shared decision-making. Almost all these projects were designed after the FY16–23 gender strategy.[13] For IFC, only 5 percent of stand-alone projects engage with men and boys in some form. Some emerging IFC programs—such as those on women's leadership, GBV, and childcare—engage men and boys as champions and business leaders for gender equality in capacity-building efforts. Evidence on IFC's Women in Work program in Sri Lanka indicates that the involvement of male business owners in workshops and training events on recruiting, promoting, and retaining women and in the implementation of effective anti–sexual harassment mechanisms increased the recognition and formalization of women's role in the business. At the same time, gender stereotypes (such as women's tidiness and ability to multitask) were not addressed and were used to justify women's new roles, and the conflict between paid and unpaid work—which was amplified by women's increased participation in value chains—was also not addressed (DFAT 2022).

Engaging men and boys can be effective only as part of holistic and long-term interventions. Some projects that IEG analyzed in the case studies engaged with men and boys for gender equality using structured approaches but struggled to be effective. In Benin, the SWEDD project engaged with men and boys to support the empowerment of women and girls, their access to sexual and reproductive health, and their protection from GBV. However, its effectiveness was diminished because of the component's limited scale and short duration and weak motivation for the men and boys to take part in the activities without deriving any tangible benefit. An Africa-led GIL impact evaluation of the Engaging Men through Accountable Practice approach to engage men in group discussions to reduce intimate partner violence finds that the attitudes of the participants changed, but intimate partner violence did not decrease (Vaillant et al. 2020). This suggests, in line with other existing literature, that this type of intervention needs to be longer in duration and more holistic.[14] These findings are relevant for the 2024–30 gender strategy that intends to strengthen the engagement of men and boys for gender equality.

Supporting women's and girls' empowerment without considering gender power relations increases the risk of GBV. This risk is well documented in the literature (Bulte and Lensink 2019; Désilets et al. 2019; Edström et al. 2015; Eggers del Campo and Steinert 2022; Kiplesund and Morton 2014; World Bank 2023a), and it materialized, for example, in the Peru Decentralized Rural Transport Project. The project brought positive results in women's agency and access to economic opportunities, but many female workers in road construction projects reported facing severe mistreatment from their spouses, including domestic abuse. Their husbands expressed discontent over the women's prolonged absence from home and, in some cases, felt jealous of their wives' higher income (Casabonne, Jiménez, and Müller 2015).

The World Bank and IFC have progressively increased their engagement on GBV by both mitigating GBV in projects through safeguard policies and addressing GBV to advance gender equality and empowerment in countries and industries. The number of projects that address GBV progressively increased over the evaluation period across all Bank Group instruments. The alarming surge in GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–22) further increased the urgency to address GBV. The World Bank's 10-year retrospective on GBV prevention and response in World Bank operations reported a more than tenfold growth in lending operations (both IPFs and DPOs) focusing on GBV during 2012–22 (World Bank 2023c).[15] The increase of GBV interventions in the Bank Group portfolio coincided with an increase in strategic recruitment of GBV specialists at headquarters and in country offices[16] to provide technical expertise and support at different levels. In Papua New Guinea, IFC has helped clients develop guidance, build coalitions, provide training, and establish safe houses and showed early results in increased productivity and cost savings. This engagement was foundational for IFC's work on gender, and the model has been replicated elsewhere in the region (IFC 2023). Since COVID-19, IFC staff have also received increased requests from operational teams to help mitigate and address GBV in projects to advance gender equality. According to key informants, however, this surge in requests has not been met with a corresponding increase in GBV experts across the institution. Many key informants also stress the need to clarify roles and responsibilities in relation to risk mitigation (safeguards role) and to addressing GBV to advance gender equality (advisory support to GBV).

Health and transport interventions provide crucial opportunities to effectively address GBV and strengthen prevention and response systems. Effective GBV response interventions address both supply and demand—they strengthen institutions' response to GBV while addressing barriers to survivors' reporting and expanding access to services offering healing and recovery. In Bangladesh, the Health and Gender Support Project for Cox's Bazar District achieved positive results in GBV survivors' health service use through a comprehensive approach that strengthened the institutional capacity to deliver quality health services and enhanced communication and community engagement with the refugee population. Yet the project's field visits highlighted shortcomings in implementing the engagement with men and boys component and issues with ensuring the sustainability of results. In Peru, the Lima Metropolitano North Extension Project led to an improved sexual assault reporting and referral system in the capital's transport network through the development and adoption of a new sexual harassment protocol, coupled with the national counterpart's expertise and commitment. In both projects, a robust theory of change, combined with the implementing partner's strong expertise in GBV, World Bank sectoral gender expertise, and collaboration with other skilled actors, proved key for the high design quality and effectiveness.

Some interventions that seek meaningful community engagement and activism are promising efforts to help prevent GBV, although their effectiveness still needs to be proven. The existing evidence shows that GBV can be prevented through solid interventions based on in-depth, multiyear intensive community mobilization to shift harmful gender attitudes, roles, and social norms and highlights that these interventions are highly complex and require considerable intensity, time, skills, and contextual adaptations (Kerr-Wilson et al. 2020; Le Roux and Palm 2021). For example, the SWEDD project foresees the empowerment of women and girls and engagement with men and boys, faith and customary leaders, and overall communities to create conducive environments for gender equality and catalyze shifts in the entrenched social norms underpinning GBV (including child marriage). A field assessment in Benin, however, shows that implementation efforts still need to be intensified and deepened in line with global evidence to be most effective.

World Bank and IFC projects rarely support women's and girls' collective agency for the advancement of gender equality. The *WDR 2012*, FY16–23 gender strategy, and Bank Group's analytic work (Klugman et al. 2014; Zahra, Javed, and Munoz Boudet 2022) highlighted the potential of women's collective agency to achieve gender outcomes, but only a few Bank Group initiatives do so. For example, only 7 percent of World Bank and 15 percent of IFC advisory stand-alone projects support women's collective agency. Bangladesh, of all the case studies, stands out for its support to self-help groups to enhance women's economic empowerment; across regions, a form of support to women's collective agency is the promotion of women's cooperatives in agriculture value chains and forestry projects. In Benin, for example, the West Africa Coastal Areas Resilience Investment Project supported women producers to register their informal groups as cooperatives and also provided training on cooperative management to board members. Women participating in IEG's focus groups consider the registration a benefit because it provides the opportunity to establish partnerships and receive funds (although they have not encountered any opportunity yet). Some of the participants also note that they have "learned how to stay together and organize [themselves]." In India, IFC's partnership with the Self-Employed Women's Association helped an associated housing entity facilitate access to housing for informal low-income female borrowers and expand geographic reach outside Gujarat. The program supported poor women's access to housing through the provision of land rights based on informal land tenure by creating assets in their names and making them shareholders of the start-up. Similarly, in Papua New Guinea, IFC supported the creation of a business coalition for women that led to behavior changes in 45 firms through the implementation of 93 policies and practices. The coalition now operates as an independent business entity.

Institutional change through legal and policy reforms is less effective if the challenges to reform implementation are not adequately accounted for.

The Bank Group's analytic work shows that legal and policy reforms for gender equality are ineffective when weak institutional capacities and adverse gender norms constrain their implementation (Klugman et al. 2014; World Bank 2023a). In Egypt, the DPO gender pillar supported labor law reforms to remove constraints on women's employment in some jobs. However, as a key informant reported, "allowing women to work at night does not mean that women will do it [work at night]." The communication campaign to promote the application of the reform was not implemented. Other challenges included weak government buy-in of the implementation phase, weak coordination of the government institutions involved, slow operational procedures, and lack of domestic resource mobilization. In Mauritania, IFC supported the strengthening of the legal and regulatory framework for property rights to foster women and youth entrepreneurship development. Although passing the first property law was considered an essential building block, there is no evidence of implementation of the law, especially with a gender perspective. For almost half the closed gender-relevant DPOs, their duration and attention to the implementation of reforms appears to not match their ambitions, expressed in outcome indicators.

Addressing Constraints, Opportunities, and Aspirations

Addressing constraints on women's and girls' participation and empowerment—beyond just targeting female beneficiaries—has increased the effectiveness of projects in advancing gender equality. World Bank analytic work stresses the benefit of analyzing and addressing the constraints on women's and girls' participation and empowerment to achieve meaningful results on gender equality. The Africa GIL focuses on the analysis of underlying constraints faced by women in providing analytic support to regional, country, and project teams to develop strategic documents and project designs. Support to female entrepreneurship and employment can be effective when it tailors interventions toward women's specific needs and constraints rather than just target a quota of female beneficiaries. For example, in Peru, IFC supported a microcredit institution to increase the financial inclusion of migrant women entrepreneurs. The project redesigned the lending product to fit the target group's needs, address the root causes of migrant women's exclusion from financial services, and create opportunities to access credit. The intervention also aimed to raise clients' awareness of their unconscious biases to gender financial inclusion. IEG found projects that did not achieve their expected results on women's economic empowerment because they did not address the binding constraints that women faced. In Uzbekistan, the World Bank Rural Enterprise Development Project established a minimum share of 33 percent of female beneficiaries from credit lines. IEG found that few of the women received the credit because of several constraints, including their limited power of choice and lack of collateral.

Seizing opportunities to advance gender equality through partnerships increases the ownership, relevance, and effectiveness of interventions. Recognizing complementarities and others' comparative advantages led the World Bank and IFC to establish collaborations with partners embedded in the countries that contributed specific skills and expertise that boosted the effectiveness of interventions. In Bangladesh, the partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (a United Nations' agency with expertise in GBV interventions) contributed to an effective response to GBV in Rohingya refugee camps. The Saweto Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Peru Project's collaboration with an experienced international NGO that has established partnerships with Indigenous associations contributed to supporting the leadership and economic empowerment of Indigenous women. The Better Work partnership between IFC and the International Labour Organization led to the Gender Equality Program in the garment sectors of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam that successfully supported female garment workers to advance their careers through technical and soft skills training and communication activities to increase the acceptance of female leadership. In Myanmar, IFC worked with partners such as the Business Coalition for Gender Equality and the Myanmar Hydropower Developers' Association on successful initiatives such as Respectful Workplaces and Powered by Women.

Several World Bank key informants call for increased involvement with skilled and strongly embedded NGOs to promote collective action and achieve gender results. One key informant adds that NGOs should be involved not only in implementation (as the World Bank normally does) but also in programmatic and policy work to use their context-specific experience to support sustainable change in gender norms. The 2024–30 gender strategy confirms that consultations "called for widening collaborations, especially with civil society," and commits to promote "wider global, regional, and local stakeholder engagement and partnerships to drive change" (World Bank Group 2024, 9). The new strategy recognizes collective action—defined as "concerted efforts of public and private sector actors, community groups, civil society, global advocacy groups, and international agencies, among others, toward better gender equality outcomes" (World Bank Group 2024, 13)—as one of the three drivers of change toward gender equality.

Some examples of interventions demonstrate that supporting "positive deviants" or "gender champions" to become role models, or role models to become gender champions, can be effective. Some World Bank–financed projects effectively encouraged adolescent girls and young women to enroll in traditionally male-dominated training courses by involving role models for inspiration (World Bank 2023a). In the private sector, women entrepreneurs can increase awareness of gender issues within their businesses and challenge gender norms by serving as role models for younger generations (Quak, Barenboim, and Guimarães 2022). IFC has supported client gender champions as role models and created platforms of exchange to influence other clients, although there is no evidence of results yet. For example, Mexico's and Viet Nam's peer learning platforms include some corporate clients as gender champions for childcare and prevention of GBV, who were invited to share their experiences, raise awareness, and foster change. IFC, however, rarely seized opportunities that may have existed outside of the private sector—for example, engaging with not-for-profit local actors, including women's organizations. Collaboration with business councils in Papua New Guinea is a rare case of engagement with opinion leaders to make them gender champions. SWEDD's extensive engagement with customary and religious leaders to prevent GBV and promote women's and girls' empowerment and sexual and reproductive health is a promising approach because of these leaders' influence in the community, although, in Benin, it has not yet made an impact.[17]

Addressing women's and girls' aspirations positively affects their empowerment and involves three complementary actions: allowing women and girls to express their aspirations, expanding their aspirations, and supporting them to fulfill their aspirations. Community-driven development projects adopt participatory approaches to identify women's priorities and monitor the extent to which the project addresses them.[18] These projects can be gender transformative by expanding women's aspirations, for example, by encouraging them to be leaders, form cooperatives, or innovate their activities to increase their income. For example, the Saweto Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Peru Project successfully supported bottom-up processes to increase Indigenous women's economic empowerment and leadership in Indigenous organizations. Similarly, the Forest Investment Program—Decentralized Forest and Woodland Management Project in Burkina Faso demonstrated the effectiveness of bottom-up approaches in supporting women's economic empowerment and enhancing women's voice and collective agency (World Bank 2023a).

Yet projects often do not seek, expand, or fulfill women's and girls' aspirations, with potentially adverse effects. Many projects plan activities for women and girls without previously consulting them. In some cases, this negatively affects project effectiveness because expanding girls' and women's aspirations without the ability to fulfill them generates frustration. For example, the SWEDD project in Benin and Burkina Faso[19] struggled to fulfill the aspirations raised in the adolescent girls who were consulted.[20] In Benin, the SWEDD project supported vocational training in innovative male-dominated activities (solar panel installation and mobile phone repair) to help out-of-school girls start income-generating activities. Although interested in these activities, the adolescent girls eventually opted for chicken farming—an activity already done by their mothers—because they feared that the new activities had no market in their town and clients would not trust them because they were girls. The project did not influence their family and potential clients or increase the girls' risk propensity and self-confidence. In Burkina Faso, the SWEDD project supported adolescent girls who were already working as apprentices in male-dominated fields. Girls received training and start-up kits for their microenterprises. The project built on existing adolescent girls' aspirations and experience, but it did not address the existing constraints to fulfilling them—above all, lack of financial access. Thus, the girls remained apprentices and did not start their own activity. Similarly, field visits to an IFC advisory peer learning platform in Tanzania revealed that girls were still working as apprentices with their former employers. Not a single girl had started her independent activity because of the lack of start-up capital and no financial institution being ready to offer them loans.

The case studies show that the Bank Group can “internalize” external factors influencing engagement for gender equality and its results, seizing key opportunities and addressing binding constraints to be more impactful. Key external factors affecting engagement for gender equality and results that emerged from the country case studies were the governments’ and private sector clients’ commitment, approach, and capacity; governments’ domestic resource mobilization; engagement of development partners and civil society; insurgence and response to crises; and gender norms. Although these factors are not surprising, the analysis of the case studies finds that the Bank Group’s ability to anticipate and respond to them—that is, internalize them by integrating them within the theory of change—enhances its engagement for gender equality. For example, in Benin, the World Bank proactively seized the opportunity of the president’s political engagement on gender equality to enter into high-level policy dialogue with the government on the interlinks among economic development, demographic pressures, and women’s and girls’ empowerment and was able to negotiate two stand-alone lending projects (SWEDD and a DPO). Tanzania’s first female president, Samia Suluhu Hassan, opened new spaces for the Bank Group’s gender engagement and substantial progress in advancing gender equality, which resulted in a stand-alone operation approved in March 2024. Conversely, the political shift toward a more conservative Peruvian government made the policy dialogue on gender equality harder, but the World Bank succeeded in keeping the engagement for gender equality as a result of several ASAs and sector programs in the justice and transport sectors.

Multiple crises have significantly hindered progress, underscoring the need for a more systematic integration of FCV issues in gender equality efforts, even in non–fragile and conflict-affected countries. In some instances, crises have shifted priorities, leading to a downgrading of gender equality, whereas in others, they have generated specific threats to gender equality for population subgroups affected by FCV. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, aggravated gender inequalities and the vulnerability of women and girls, hindered the implementation of activities, significantly altered all countries' priorities, and temporarily reduced the investment of financial resources for gender equality. Governments negotiated with the World Bank to reallocate funding in project budgets from gender components to emergency funds to address the pandemic, such as in the Digital Rural Transformation Project in Benin. In several of the evaluation country cases (all non–fragile and conflict affected), pockets of FCV called for specific World Bank approaches to address gender inequalities. For example, the massive migration of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh affected the implementation and effectiveness of most World Bank projects in the region, not just gender equality interventions. In response, the World Bank tackled specific gender inequalities in interventions, such as the Health and Gender Support Project for Cox's Bazar District, which addressed GBV and reproductive health needs in refugees and host communities.

Achieving Owned, Sustainable, and Large-Scale Gender Outcomes

The World Bank and IFC pay insufficient attention to the sustainability of gender results—a necessary condition for long-lasting progress in gender equality. Few projects show evidence of being sustainable. First, several projects are too short in duration to achieve long-lasting gender equality results because social change needs time. The duration of IFC advisory projects is generally two years, which several key informants consider too short. The duration of World Bank projects is longer but still insufficient, confirmed by several key informants at the national and local levels. Second, many projects do not include a clear strategy for sustainability. For example, subprojects in the SWEDD project in Benin last two years—a short time to ensure the successful start-up of income-generating activities or girls' completion of secondary school. Moreover, the kits and cash transfers supporting the schooling of vulnerable girls lack financial and institutional sustainability because they are entirely funded by the project and managed by NGOs. The safe spaces for girls' skill development also have no sustainability strategy.

The sustainability of new income-generating activities is more challenging and needs a longer time horizon, higher investments, and more knowledge than required by existing activities. In Benin, the West Africa Coastal Areas Resilience Investment Project financed income-generating activities to build resilience to climate change. The project hired experts and subcontracted local NGOs to support local cooperatives to prepare their financing requests and develop business plans. Two mixed male-female horticulture cooperatives that received funds to expand their activity increased their revenue and were clearly sustainable. By contrast, the sustainability of the new activities supported by the project was in doubt. One cooperative of women was waiting for equipment, technical support, and training to produce coconut oil. However, the price of the raw coconut was high, which threatened sustainability. Another cooperative producing biofertilizers had no market to sell them.

Large-scale gender results are achieved through programs supporting sector systems' strengthening at the national level, but their sustainability is challenging. Sectoral programs of a long duration contribute to large-scale results in gender equality, but they struggle to produce sustainable results because of the lack of domestic resource mobilization and weak capacities of partners. A good practice is the Improving the Performance of Non-Criminal Justice Services Project in Peru, which aimed to support the implementation of Peru's justice reform by improving the delivery of adequate noncriminal justice services. One project component aimed to strengthen the ALEGRA centers in providing information and legal support to vulnerable women (including GBV survivors) through expansion of coverage, increase in quality, and building of staff's capacity to manage cases. The large scale and sustainability of gender results were possible because of their integration in the support to countrywide sector reform, investment in institution strengthening of existing services owned by the government, and continuity of engagement (the World Bank has supported the ALEGRA centers since 2011).

Gender-transformative projects based on comprehensive theories of change struggle to go to scale[21] and often do not have a strategy to do so. For example, half of stand-alone projects[22] are pilot interventions that can be replicated and scaled up. However, among them, only 22 percent indicate in their design a strategy for scaling up. This missing strategy is confirmed by the case studies and IEG's evaluation of gender inequalities in FCV (World Bank 2023a).

Sustainable gender outcomes owned by communities and local stakeholders are produced thanks to the adoption of bottom-up and culturally sensitive approaches that support endogenous processes of change. Using culturally sensitive approaches that respect and build on traditional values and norms to sustain gender equality rather than aiming to "change wrong traditions" helps projects achieve sustainable results. The Saweto Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Peru Project succeeded in increasing women's economic empowerment and leadership within the communities and Indigenous associations in a sustainable way because of a culturally sensitive and bottom-up approach and strong partnerships between the implementing partners and Indigenous associations. The Early Years Nutrition and Child Development Project in Benin adopted a culturally sensitive and community-based approach to promote men's engagement in childcare and nutrition. Previously trained local field-workers organized group discussions with men and women in the targeted communities, involving community leaders, to discuss gender roles from their own experience.

[1] Gender Innovation Labs play a key role in producing knowledge on "what works" to reduce gender inequalities in different sectors.

[2] In preparation for the new 2024–30 gender strategy, the World Bank Group produced three retrospectives: *Gender Equality in Development: A Ten-Year Retrospective* (World Bank 2023d), *Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response in World Bank Operations: Taking Stock after a Decade of Engagement, 2011–2022* (World Bank 2023c), and *A Retrospective of IFC's Implementation of the World Bank Group Gender Strategy, 2016–2023* (IFC 2023).

[3] Gender-sensitive indicators capture gender differences and inequalities—for example, sex-disaggregated indicators and indicators focused on access, benefits, or other outcomes for women or girls (such as the rate of pregnant women's access to at least four antenatal consultations). Gender-sensitive indicators that focus on the enabling environment capture changes in the system—for example, in policies, laws, data system, institutional framework, and budget allocations—to better satisfy women's and girls' specific needs and to advance gender equality (such as the percentage of the public budget allocated for gender-based violence prevention and response).

[4] This analysis includes Anticipated Impact Measurement and Monitoring indicators. Anticipated Impact Measurement and Monitoring is part of the International Finance Corporation's approach to evaluating the expected development outcomes and potential positive effects of projects across multiple dimensions.

[5] For International Finance Corporation advisory, the percentage of projects using only outreach indicators decreased slightly, from 38 percent in the pre-strategy period to 36 percent in the post-strategy period. In contrast, the percentage of International Finance Corporation investment projects with only outreach indicators increased significantly, from 3 percent to 19 percent. This increase was primarily driven by a shift in the portfolio composition—from an overwhelming prevalence of financial market operations during the pre-strategy period, which predominantly use indicators measuring access to credit (a benefit indicator), to the inclusion of other industries that tend to favor outreach indicators during the post-strategy period.

[6] For example, an indicator can measure how many antenatal care consultations the project has delivered in one year instead of measuring the percentage increase of antenatal care consultations in the targeted maternal health services in one year attributable to the project.

[7] Completion reports refer to World Bank Implementation Completion and Results Reports, advisory Project Completion Reports, and Expanded Project Supervision Reports.

[8] The project results framework does not include any indicator capturing the increase in women's access to Asistencia Legal Gratuita centers. The only existing indicator on access measures the number of requests received by the centers, and it is not sex disaggregated, probably relying on the assumption that most access is by women. The project development objective gender indicator is the "percentage of female users satisfied with the services provided at the [Asistencia Legal Gratuita centers]" (World Bank 2020a, 2). The emphasis on women's satisfaction is not indicative of actual increased access or improved outcomes.

[9] Some weaknesses detected in the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project's implementation in Benin are excessively short duration of subprojects aimed at women's and girls' empowerment and men's, boys', and communities' engagement, undermining the achievement of results; insufficient coordination of the different components and actors; top-down and centralized choice of trade areas for the support of income-generating activities, which negatively affects their relevance and effectiveness; insufficient support to women's and girls' economic empowerment and men's and boys' engagement; and weak engagement with decentralized authorities and local branches of involved ministries.

[10] The Independent Evaluation Group found these examples through portfolio reviews of the eight country case studies, the World Bank gender stand-alone projects review, and the International Finance Corporation portfolio review of all evaluated gender-relevant projects (66 advisory and 23 investment projects).

[11] Several World Bank reports explicitly focus on the impact of gender norms on gender inequalities. Two recent examples are reports by Goldstein et al. (2024) and Muñoz Boudet et al. (2023). The International Finance Corporation knowledge products also acknowledge the importance of gender norms (for example, IFC 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2020).

[12] Positive masculinity is the opposite of hegemonic masculinity, frequently defined as toxic masculinity. Positive masculinity promotes more inclusive, empathetic, caring, and egalitarian forms of manhood (Lomas 2013). Positive masculinity "reflects a developmental process towards healthy masculine identities that are supportive of gender equality" (Wilson et al. 2022, 2) and implies the adoption of a perspective that aims to accentuate the strengths and beneficial aspects of a masculine identity.

[13] Two important exceptions, both approved in 2014, are the Great Lakes Emergency Sexual and Gender Based Violence and Women's Health Project in the Democratic Republic of Congo,

which included the pilot on Engaging Men through Accountable Practice approach, and the SWEDD project.

[14] For example, Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms highlights that the main lesson learned from literature analyzing programs that work with men and boys to achieve gender equality is the need to move away from gender sensitization to an approach based on gender transformation (Kedia and Verma 2019). Changes in men's knowledge and attitudes must translate into tangible changes in behaviors (which requires working in depth on masculinity with men and boys and at the same time on women's and girls' empowerment and working with communities by using male role models and engaging with community opinion leaders).

[15] The retrospective also indicates how this growth reflects an increased commitment from client governments to allocate resources toward both preventing gender-based violence and enhancing response mechanisms (World Bank 2023c).

[16] The first gender-based violence expert was recruited in 2017 to join the Gender Group, and five gender-based violence specialists were added to the Social Sustainability and Inclusion team in fiscal years 2017 and 2018.

[17] According to different key informants, in Benin, the engagement with religious organizations and leaders needs to be strengthened to be more impactful. The religious organizations' platform at the national level is weakly involved in SWEDD.

[18] A weakness of these projects is that they did not consider intersectionality—women, youth, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups were consulted separately but considered as homogeneous groups. Gender power relations across these groups and among women were not considered, which hid the voices of groups affected by multiple discriminations (for example, poor adolescent girls belonging to a minority ethnic group).

[19] This evaluation analyzed SWEDD in Benin. *Addressing Gender Inequalities in Countries Affected by Fragility, Conflict, and Violence: An Evaluation of the World Bank Group's Support* analyzed SWEDD in Burkina Faso and Chad (World Bank 2023a).

[20] This finding is based on a deep dive of SWEDD in Benin, including field visits with interviews and focus groups with beneficiaries, local implementing partners, and local and community relevant stakeholders (World Bank 2023a).

[21] This evaluation makes a clear distinction between replication and scaling up of successful initiatives or approaches to reducing gender inequalities (or "gender-smart solutions" as the

fiscal year 2016–23 strategy defines these initiatives or approaches). “Replication” means the repetition, in other countries, of a successful approach to reducing gender inequalities. Successful replication implies new analytic work and the adoption of a learning-by-doing approach (which can take the form of formative research) to adapt the solution to the new specific context and target group and ensure (and monitor) the necessary conditions for a successful implementation. The adaptation should take place during design but also during implementation. “Scaling up” means a significant increase in coverage of a pilot or small-scale project to make it impactful for the target group in a country or industry. The fiscal year 2016–23 gender strategy theory of action includes the buy-in, adaptation, and scaling up of successful approaches to reducing gender inequalities (gender-smart solutions) by the governments and clients. According to the gender strategy, this endogenous scaling up—sustainable and owned by countries and companies—is possible when governments and companies integrate the successful approaches in their own policies and development programs. The strategy provides an example of the Adolescent Girls Initiative, whose approach can be scaled up by governments through its integration in national employment programs.

[22] The review of stand-alone projects included investment project financing and Programs-for-Results; however, there is no Program-for-Results that is a pilot. Pilot projects represent 50 percent of stand-alone investment project financing and Programs-for-Results. When maternal health projects are excluded, pilots represent 48 percent.

4 | Conclusions and Recommendations

Gender equality has been a high-level commitment of the Bank Group for at least two decades. The recently approved 2024–30 gender strategy sets a bold goal for the institution—“consistent with the [Bank Group’s] new mission, it expresses the ambition to accelerate gender equality to end poverty on a livable planet” (World Bank Group 2024, 8). The FY16–23 gender strategy previously committed to “maximize the impact of [Bank Group] efforts to close gaps in key development outcomes between men and women, especially the poorest, as they access socioeconomic opportunities, as well as to steer [Bank Group] activities and their monitoring toward measurable results” (World Bank Group 2015, 12). Gender has been an IDA special theme since the 16th Replenishment of IDA that channeled financial resources to address gender inequalities in IDA countries.

This evaluation finds that progress has happened at the level of engagement but more in breadth (quantity) than depth (quality) and more in design than in implementation, with limited evidence of results. The evaluation recognizes good progress in the Bank Group’s engagement for gender equality since 2012—the starting point for this evaluation. The evaluation finds that the proportion of projects and activities that address gender inequalities has improved; the commitment by management at all levels has increased; the staff has embraced the mandate, with a larger share of World Bank and IFC staff now integrating activities in projects to address gender inequalities; and the amount of knowledge supporting operations has expanded and led to better design. More country strategies discuss gender inequalities, and more DPOs focus on policies to address them. At the same time, progress has been made more in quantity rather than quality—projects with low gender relevance have increased, but operations including gender-transformative elements remain few. In addition, inadequate attention to implementation and an overly narrow focus on women’s and girls’ access to resources and services undermine the achievement of gender equality results. Moreover, the current model of engagement for gender equality is not able to show results systematically through the Bank Group's monitoring and evaluation system.

To realize its ambition, the Bank Group needs to rethink how it operationalizes its strategy to advance gender equality strategy. This report has highlighted challenges that have been found in other evaluations but have not been successfully addressed so far; thus, a new approach is needed.

Enhancing Country Engagement for Gender Equality

The Bank Group's country engagement for gender equality is still fragmented and is not based on an effective prioritization and coordination of activities—it must become more systematic and strategic. The 2024–30 gender strategy commits the Bank Group to adopt a country-driven approach—that is, to approach gender equality more coherently and strategically in its country engagement. This was also the key modality of engagement for gender equality according to the FY16–23 gender strategy. This evaluation finds that most country strategies' gender priorities align well with gender statistics, and the gender priorities were identified using robust diagnostics, especially from SCDs.[1] Different instruments of support—DPOs, IPFs, Programs-for-Results, ASAs, and IFC advisory and investment projects—also often align with the gender priorities identified by the country strategy. However, a limited number of country strategies use knowledge of what works to articulate operational strategies for select portfolio activities to respond to gender priorities. As highlighted by IEG's evaluation of gender inequalities in FCV, addressing gender inequalities requires going to their root causes (World Bank 2023a), which is impossible for an individual project to achieve, especially at scale. This requires coordinating the relevant lending instruments and ASAs of the country portfolio and establishing collaborations with other development partners and local stakeholders based on each one's comparative advantage.

The country engagement approach for gender equality does not work as intended because of misaligned incentives at the country level and insufficient decentralization of capacities and resources. The gender tag and the gender flag incentivize a project-by-project approach (which contributes to fragmentation). Similarly, tools, guidelines, and resource allocation are overwhelmingly aimed at individual projects. Collaboration is essential for achieving country-level outcomes, but incentives are lacking to foster it across operational teams and with stakeholders in the country. Thus, internal coordination between GPs and industries and between GPs and IFC and coordination and partnerships with other development partners do not happen frequently enough. There are also no accountability mechanisms for the Country Management Unit to implement the country-driven approach for gender equality. Best practices in the country-driven approach depend on committed country directors and country managers supported by gender champions or gender experts. The evaluation observes that country engagement works when there are decentralized skills and resources—expert TTLs acting as champions and advisers, skilled gender focal points, and gender platforms or other gender coordination mechanisms—that facilitate cross-sectoral work, adapt gender support to the specific context, orient policy dialogue, coordinate with development partners, and support implementing partners to achieve gender outcomes.

A renewed system could be put in place to strengthen strategic country engagement for gender equality. First, country gender analytics need to go beyond identifying gender priorities to provide insights into how to best achieve change in the country context, including with respect to local institutions and political economy. This will likely entail enhancing gender diagnostics in core country analytics, while identifying knowledge priorities to support adaptive implementation. Second, country strategies should more effectively prioritize activities and expected results based on a deep understanding of local constraints and opportunities to advancing gender equality and define measurable indicators to track these results. Third, country engagements should better leverage World Bank and IFC collaboration and comparative advantage and strengthen collaboration with development partners, local stakeholders, and women's organizations. Finally, country management teams should ensure adequate resources and focus on adaptive implementation, including regularly monitoring progress toward priority gender outcomes.

Focusing on Gender Outcomes

Advancing gender equality is a high-level goal that needs to be better defined and tracked at the corporate, project, and country levels. Beyond the gender tag and flag, there is no system to consolidate and report on results. There is no explicit agreement on which type of gender equality results is important to pursue and track and which indicators to use to measure them. The Bank Group does not have an articulated definition of which type of results the institution is achieving (and should achieve) in supporting countries to move toward gender equality and whether the Bank Group support is prompting change. This does not facilitate a consensus around gender equality goal(s). Key informants give varying definitions for results—as better processes, better designs, higher share of gender tags and gender flags, achievement of project targets, or decrease of specific gender inequalities in countries—and there is no system that codifies, monitors, and appropriately incentivizes results at all these levels.

Indicators rarely measure gender equality outcomes. At the project level, completion reports infrequently report on gender results, often because they rely on weak gender indicators and monitoring and evaluation methods. Many indicators measure outreach, assuming that it corresponds to outcomes achieved. On a positive note, the share of projects that measure only outreach has drastically decreased for the World Bank. Few projects measure women's and girls' empowerment or a reduction of gender inequalities. Indicator baselines are often zero, either because data are not available or because indicators measure only project outputs. Implementation Status and Results Reports rarely track gender-related processes and ongoing advancements of gender results. At the country level, there is no reporting of countrywide gender results. Performance and Learning Reviews and Completion and Learning Reviews report gender results in terms of project-focused results and activities.

Oversimplified theories of change that do not examine the root causes of gender inequalities also lead to limited evidence of results. Achieving gender equality requires that all three elements of the theory of change are fulfilled: more access to and control of resources, more conducive formal and informal institutions, and increased women's and girls' agency. Analysis of case study interventions indicates that most projects do not sufficiently consider the interconnections and complementarities among these three dimensions. For example, women's access to finance may be a necessary but insufficient intervention for reducing gender inequalities in economic opportunities. Access to finance does not guarantee control and ownership for improved women's empowerment. Most interventions also tend to target women as isolated individuals, overlooking men and boys and not considering the implication of strong gender power relations on women's choices and empowerment opportunities. Similarly, projects overlook the influence of the ecosystems in which women and girls and men and boys are embedded, such as households, community and social networks, local governments, and religious and ethnic institutions. Beneficiaries are often oversimplified, with women frequently considered an undifferentiated group. In addition, the lack of consideration of intersectionality may result in widening inequalities among women because some interventions work only for specific social groups of women.

The evaluation's findings present important implications for the implementation of the new Bank Group Corporate Scorecard indicators on gender equality. The new scorecard gender indicator measures the number of people directly benefiting from operations that intentionally seek to advance gender equality. This indicator intends to improve on the previous set of indicators, including sex-disaggregated indicators of Bank Group–supported results (the second tier) and percentages of gender-tagged projects capturing Bank Group performance (the third tier). The new indicator is (like the gender tag) defined only at design. Moreover, it counts populations receiving interventions, assuming they benefit from the support. The evaluation shows that good design does not guarantee achievement of gender outcomes, and the simple inclusion of beneficiaries in the project does not guarantee results. Rather, the reduction of gender inequalities hinges on all the conditions of the theory of change being fulfilled.

Capturing meaningful impacts on gender inequalities at the country level requires a stronger monitoring system of country strategies and portfolios that combines quantitative indicators and qualitative narratives. An improved country-level monitoring system of gender equality outcomes needs to overcome the culture of attribution and embrace the contributions of the

Bank Group to country gender outcomes based on its comparative advantage in each country. Gender equality outcomes can be achieved only through co-ordination and collaboration with all relevant country actors. The new Bank Group Corporate Scorecard contemplates using narratives to capture the World Bank's contribution to gender-relevant policy and law reforms (which requires providing country teams with capacity building, guidance, and tools to ensure harmonization and consolidation of reporting).

The quality of gender equality results is multifaceted and can be captured only by using multiple tools. As results are complex and multilayered, a single scorecard indicator, even well implemented, cannot track results and risks distorting incentives. To understand if the World Bank has contributed to addressing gender inequalities, it is essential to monitor both process-related outputs (attributable to the World Bank) and country-level outcomes the World Bank has contributed to, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and development partners. This requires using multiple monitoring and evaluation techniques. For example, although impact evaluations are an essential tool, they can assess only the impact of an individual component of a project and cannot disentangle the source of the impact. They are better at identifying short-term impacts and are not the right tool to inform on the combined impact of simultaneous and complex factors, including institutional settings and corporate mechanisms. The effort of the GILs to increasingly engage with operational teams to better understand what works using a more comprehensive suite of evaluation instruments contributes to improving measurement and learning and requires stronger and more regular support. More strategic collaboration of the GILs with country teams and gender experts in operations can enhance the operationalization of knowledge and strengthen the country-driven approach.

The Bank Group lacks a deliberate and tested strategy for scaling up sustainable impacts on gender equality. Both the FY16–23 and 2024–30 gender strategies aim to support results at scale. Thus far, the Bank Group has achieved large-scale gender results by supporting the strengthening of sector systems at the national level. However, the FY16–23 gender strategy relied on identifying replicable interventions found to work through impact evaluations. Although this knowledge is an important contribution, replication does not amount to scalability at the country level. Expanding project areas and beneficiaries to attain scale does not necessarily achieve sustainable outcomes beyond the project's duration. Sustainable results require adaptation to the local context, stronger local capacity, and an enabling environment. They require mobilizing financial and human resources, institution strengthening, and opportunistic support to existing processes to ensure that results are owned and long-lasting.

Realigning Incentives, Resources, and Accountability

The incentives and resources devoted to support gender equality do not match the level of ambition of the Bank Group. The incentives caused efforts to try to do too much at the same time with respect to the feasibility of reducing gender inequalities in every project. The gender tag successfully enforces a minimum quality standard—which is an important accomplishment. However, the gender tag is unable to incentivize, identify, and track gender-transformative projects or country engagements, and it focuses only on design and not on implementation. This hinders the allocation of adequate resources for design, implementation, monitoring, and assessment of impact. The FY16–23 gender strategy meant to replace nonselective mainstreaming with strategic mainstreaming, but this intent was not fulfilled. IFC has been more focused and strategic in this area, but the pressure to use the gender flag in more projects risks diluting quality unless additional resources are allocated to meet higher targets for the flag and focus on gender-transformative projects. Consequently, effective strategies for replication and scaling up of successful interventions remain elusive.

Insufficient human and budgetary resources are allocated to support implementation at the country level. First, both this evaluation and *Addressing Gender Inequalities in Countries Affected by Fragility, Conflict, and Violence: An Evaluation of the World Bank Group's Support* (World Bank 2023a) underscore that the presence of gender expertise in a country office is critical to successful gender engagement because it enables support to operational teams and coordination with partners and stakeholders. Conversely, the lack of such expertise undermines the achievement of gender equality outcomes. Second, it is essential to build the skills and knowledge of staff in both leadership and operational positions for gender analytics, policy dialogues, and design and implementation of gender-transformative operations. Third, the gender architecture is not clearly defined, with overlapping roles, unclear lines of reporting and accountability, and unclear coordinating mechanisms. Finally, greater focus on implementation will require a shift of incentives and resources from design to implementation and more systematic tracking of implementation in the country portfolio.

Incentives, resource allocations, and structures in the gender architecture could be realigned to better support strategic country engagement and increase the focus on gender equality outcomes. Shifting to a more strategic and synergic focus on achieving gender outcomes will require a shift of incentives and resources (human and budgetary) toward supporting implementation, strengthening the gender skills and expertise of Bank Group staff, streamlining and duly financing the Bank Group gender architecture, and revising and complementing the current gender tag and gender flag system to increase the focus on more transformative engagements.

Recommendations

The Bank Group finds itself at a favorable junction as the implementation plan of the 2024–30 gender strategy is being prepared and the 21st Replenishment of IDA negotiations are about to begin. The conditions exist for a stronger and more impactful country-driven engagement for gender equality. The evaluation offers three recommendations to advance this goal. The three recommendations are for both the World Bank and IFC, and each institution will implement them according to its operating model.

Strengthening Country-Driven Engagement

Strengthen the country-driven engagement model for gender equality, with greater selectivity, prioritization, and coordination of the country portfolio activities supporting gender equality objectives and an increased focus on implementation. This could be accomplished by (i) ensuring that Bank Group core diagnostics and Country Gender Assessments not only analyze gender inequalities but also provide guidance on which gender inequalities to prioritize and key constraints to address; (ii) explicitly integrating those gender priorities in country strategies and setting up criteria and incentives to translate the country strategy gender priorities into expected results and activities, selected based on the World Bank and IFC comparative advantages and in collaboration with development partners and other key stakeholders, such as CSOs and women's rights organizations; (iii) identifying the portfolio of activities required to achieve the prioritized goals in country strategy documents and ensuring reporting of progress toward relevant outcomes; and (iv) focusing financial and human resources on the selected gender priorities to ensure that the Bank Group portfolio addressing gender inequalities is effectively coordinated to leverage synergy across instruments, projects, and institutions.

Enhancing Capacity and Monitoring and Evaluation

Develop the capacity of World Bank and IFC monitoring and evaluation systems to track and account for complex gender results; incentivize the achievement of outcomes at the operational, country, and corporate levels; and regularly report on progress. This could be accomplished by (i) introducing a system to distinguish between activities of the World Bank and IFC that are gender sensitive (that reach the minimum standard) and those that aim to be gender transformative and have a strategic impact on gender equality in the countries; (ii) improving measurement of results using appropriate indicators—both quantitative and qualitative—to capture outputs attributable to the Bank Group and outcomes that the Bank Group contributes to; (iii) ensuring that project-level and country-level monitoring systems regularly report on gender-related results and processes during implementation of projects and country strategies; and (iv) establishing outcome-oriented indicators at the corporate level that go beyond outreach and processes to show progress in gender equality.

Redefining the Gender Architecture

Redefine the current Bank Group gender architecture to specify roles and responsibilities; avoid overlaps and replication of functions; strengthen underresourced tasks, especially implementation of gender-related activities and support to country engagement; improve capacities; and enforce accountability. This could be accomplished by (i) defining a streamlined structure to avoid overlaps and replications of tasks and to clarify roles and responsibilities, reporting lines, collaboration, and accountability mechanisms of gender human resources (the Gender Group, regional gender coordinators, GP and industry gender focal points and advisers, country gender focal points, gender platforms and other gender coordination mechanisms, GILs, and so on) and management at all levels and TTLs; (ii) strengthening the gender expertise of staff, managers, and TTLs through capacity building tailored to different functions, sectors, and contexts, including shadowing, on-the-job and peer-to-peer training, coaching, and other forms of learning; (iii) ensuring that gender experts with adequate seniority are available to support each country engagement, including through decentralizing gender skills to local offices, building local gender expertise, and avoiding overreliance on consultants; and (iv) ensuring that tasks are properly funded through the Bank Group budget, with trust funds strategically leveraged to support priority engagements.

[1] As the Systematic Country Diagnostic gets downscaled, the World Bank Group will need to guarantee that robust gender analysis continues to be timely channeled to the Country Partnership Framework.

Glossary

Agency. Individual agency is the capacity to make decisions about one's own life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome free of violence, retribution, or fear (Klugman et al. 2014; World Bank Group 2015). Collective agency is women's and girls' ability to speak and act collectively on their interests and participating in governance. It can also be defined as "women and girls gaining solidarity and taking action collectively on their interests, to enhance their position and expand the realm of what is possible" (Van Eerdewijk et al. 2017, 25).

Collective action. It "represents concerted efforts of public and private sector actors, community groups, civil society, global advocacy groups, and international agencies, among others, toward better gender equality outcomes" (World Bank Group 2024, 13).

Empowerment (of women and girls). It concerns women and girls gaining power and control over their own lives. It involves awareness raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources, and actions to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality (UN Women 2024). It can also be defined as "the expansion of choice and the strengthening of voice through the transformation of power relations, so women and girls have more control over their lives and futures" (Van Eerdewijk et al. 2017, 64).

Gender. It refers to the social, behavioral, and cultural attributes, expectations, and norms associated with being male or female (World Bank Group 2015).

Gender-based violence. An umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (that is, gender) differences between male and female persons. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering; threats of such acts; coercion; and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private (IASC 2015; World Bank Group 2015).

Gender equality. It refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born female or male. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men (UN Women 2024).

Gender gaps or gender inequalities. "Gender inequalities" are to be understood as "the gaps between male and female outcomes and opportunities" (Cuberes and Teignier-Baqué 2011, 1) that depend on the social construction of gender identities, roles, and power relations. Men and boys can also be discriminated against because of gender identities, roles, and relations—for example, they can be affected by discrimination and violence if they do not conform to the socially accepted "ideals" of masculinity. "Gender gaps" is used as a synonym for "gender inequalities," as it is used by the World Bank Group gender strategy, which considers "gender gaps" as gaps in gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming. In 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council, in its agreed conclusions 1997/2, 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.... Gender mainstreaming does not replace the need for targeted, women-specific policies and programs or positive legislation, nor does it substitute for gender units or gender focal points" (UN 1999, 24).

Gender norms. Gender norms are a specific subset of social norms that relate to how men, women, boys, and girls are "supposed" to act and behave throughout the various stages of the life cycle, in a given group or society. They are generally implicit and can be part of the invisible social status quo: they are embedded in formal and informal institutions, nested in the mind, and produced and reproduced through social interaction. They play a role in shaping women's and men's (often unequal) access to resources and freedoms, thus affecting their voice, power, and sense of self (Cislaghi and Heise 2020).

Gender power relations. A specific subset of social relations between women and men as social groups, including how power—and access to and control over resources—is distributed between the sexes (EIGE 2016).

Gender transformative. Interventions or approaches that aim to address the root causes of gender inequalities by transforming gender norms, roles, and relations, while working toward redistributing power, resources, and services more equally (UNFPA 2023). A gender-transformative intervention aspires to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and reshape unequal power relations; it "move[s] beyond individual self-improvement among [girls and] women and toward transforming the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce gendered inequalities" (Hillenbrand et al. 2015, 5).

Institutions (or institutional structures). They can be defined as the social arrangements of formal and informal rules and practices that shape social roles and relations (including gender roles and relations), influencing the expressions of individuals' agency, as well as the distribution of resources. Institutional structures can be found in the arenas of household and family, community, market, and state and nonstate organizations. They encompass formal laws and policies, unwritten social norms, and the ways these are practiced in the context of social relations (Van Eerdewijk et al. 2017).

Intersectionality. Intersectionality acknowledges that power relations and discrimination are determined by the intersection between gender and the other social factors that shape social identities in each society (such as age, ethnic group, religion, class, disability, and sexual orientation). An intersectionality approach considers the other social variables (such as age, ethnicity, class, geographic area of residence, and so on) that intersect with gender in shaping social power relations, social discrimination, and vulnerabilities (Crenshaw 1989; Lutz 2015).

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APPENDIXES

Independent Evaluation Group

An Evaluation of World Bank and International Finance Corporation Engagement for Gender Equality over the Past 10 Years

Appendix A. Methodological Approach

Evaluation Purpose and Questions

The overarching goal of the evaluation was to examine (i) the results achieved by the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) in helping countries (understood as governments, the private sector, civil society, and citizens at large) address gender inequalities and (ii) the contribution of the fiscal year (FY)16–23 gender strategy. The evaluation questions were guided by the theory of action of the FY16–23 gender strategy and reflected the strategy's emphasis on a country-driven approach, use of knowledge, and replication and scale-up of gender-smart solutions. The conceptual framework of the *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (for details on the conceptual framework, see appendix B) was used to structure the findings (World Bank 2012). The *World Development Report 2012* framework has guided the World Bank's gender-related work since 2012 and serves as the foundation for the FY16–23 gender strategy. Although the strategy introduces some innovative elements, it is largely based on the preexisting framework.

The first overarching question consisted of three subquestions; the second question consisted of one subquestion (box A.1).

Box A.1. Evaluation Questions

What are the main results achieved by the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) in supporting countries to address gender inequalities, and what is the contribution of the fiscal year 2016–23 gender strategy?

1. What progress have the World Bank and IFC achieved in supporting countries to address gender inequalities since the *World Development Report 2012?*

- 1a. To what extent has the World Bank's and IFC's support been relevant to countries' priorities, and how has this changed over time?

(continued)

Box A.1. Evaluation Questions (cont.)

- 1b. To what extent have the World Bank and IFC supported country actors' adoption of effective gender-smart solutions to reduce gender inequalities, and how has this changed over time?

- 1c. To what extent have the World Bank and IFC supported country actors' ownership of gender-smart solutions and their capacity to replicate them, make them sustainable, and scale them up, and how has this changed over time?

2. What is the contribution of the fiscal year 2016–23 gender strategy to supporting countries to address gender gaps?

- 2a. What has been the contribution of the fiscal year 2016–23 gender strategy to improving World Bank and IFC use of knowledge, guidance, partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track and achieve results?

Cross-cutting question: Which factors have affected the achievement of results and elements of the theory of action?

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation adopted a multilevel and multimethod strategy to assess the evaluation questions. The analyses were conducted at four main levels: corporate, global, country, and project or activity. At the corporate level, the analysis examined the gender architecture that encompasses the human resources devoted to gender—such as gender leads, advisers, focal points, and the Gender Group—the guidance and advice aimed at facilitating cross-sectoral and cross-institutional collaborations, and the management and reporting lines that govern the functioning of these resources; corporate documents framing the strategic vision and directions of the institution; and other Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) evaluations. At the global level, the evaluation assessed the World Bank's and IFC's support for addressing gender inequalities by reviewing recent country strategies and lending portfolios of gender support.

At the country level, the analysis assessed how the World Bank and IFC supported individual countries in addressing their gender priorities. At the project or activity level, the evaluation carried out in-depth examinations of specific gender-relevant projects and activities with potentially transformative elements, including through field visits.

The multimethod approach consisted of a nested design with nine methodological components, which contributed to answering the evaluation questions. Reliance on a single method to measure results can lead to biased results and introduce method-specific bias (Cresswell and Planko Clark 2017; Greene, Caracelli, and Graham 1989; Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey 2015). The multimethod strategy adopted by the evaluation included a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods and allowed addressing complexity, maximizing efficiency, and facilitating triangulation. The evaluation questions had embedded interlinks (figure A.1); although several evaluation activities were conducted concurrently to enable triangulation, others were performed sequentially to leverage emerging findings and enable external validity. Table A.1 lists the evaluation components and the specific evaluation question each component addressed.

Table A.1. Evaluation Components for the Evaluation

Component Number	Evaluation Component	Relevance (EQ 1a)	Effectiveness (EQ 1b)	Ownership Sustainability Scale (EQ 1c)	Factors (Cross-cutting)	Strategy Value Added (EQ 2a)
Corporate level						
Component 1	Corporate interviews		•	•	•	•
Component 2	Literature review of World Bank Group corporate documents	•	•		•	•
Component 3	Staff survey				•	•
Global level						
Component 4	Review of country strategies	•	•	•		
Component 5	IFC portfolio review	•	•	•		•
Component 6	Literature review of knowledge products	•	•			
Component 7	World Bank portfolio review	•	•	•		•
Country level						
Component 8	Country case studies	•	•	•	•	•
Project level						
Component 9	Deep-dive reviews	•	•	•	•	

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: EQ = evaluation question; IFC = International Finance Corporation.

The evaluation components were designed to account for the different levels of analysis, balancing the trade-offs between internal and external validity.

At the corporate level, the evaluation team conducted three key activities. Under the first evaluation component, the evaluation team conducted more than 50 interviews with World Bank and IFC staff. The key informants included country managers, World Bank former and current regional gender coordinators, World Bank Gender Innovation Labs (heads), IFC Gender and Economic Inclusion Department (GEID) focal points (global and regional), IFC non-GEID gender leads and focal points (industries), and IFC investment and advisory services staff. A focus group discussion was also conducted with the World Bank Gender Group. Under the second component, the evaluation team conducted a literature review of World Bank Group strategic documents.[1] The third evaluation component consisted of a survey that was distributed via SurveyMonkey to all World Bank and IFC staff who had experience in gender-related work and who had been interviewed during the case studies. The survey included 12 closed and open questions on corporate mechanisms, including the gender tag and the gender flag; gender trainings and guidance; accountability; and the gender strategy.

At the global level, the evaluation team conducted four key activities (evaluation components 4–7). The fourth evaluation component consisted of a review of the country strategies, which involved a desk review of strategic documents for 83 countries. For each country, the last Systematic Country Diagnostic and Country Partnership Framework (CPF) were analyzed, along with the Performance and Learning Review and Country Private Sector Diagnostic, when available. The documents were evaluated on relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, and scalability of proposed solutions using a structured protocol with 21 questions: 9 binary (1/0) and 12 ordinal variables taking a 0–4 score. Moreover, gender statistics for the 83 countries were mapped to 25 areas using a gender gap taxonomy.[2] Under the fifth evaluation component, the team conducted a literature review of key World Bank and IFC knowledge product comprehensive searches on both the intranet and the internet, encompassing resources such as the Open Knowledge Repository and the Gender Innovation Lab insider pages. In addition, the team used a Microsoft Excel sheet provided by the IFC GEID group with the list of gender-relevant knowledge products.

The sixth evaluation component consisted of several activities to review the Bank Group portfolio. The World Bank portfolio review included (i) a quantitative analysis of all World Bank projects (investment project financing [IPF], Programs-for-Results [PforRs], and development policy operations) that were approved from FY12 to FY23 and were assigned a gender intensity score based on an algorithm developed for this purpose;[3] (ii) an in-depth review of all the 122 stand-alone gender projects (IPF and PforRs) approved during the evaluation period; (iii) an in-depth desk review of the 95 most gender-relevant development policy loans (DPLs); and (iv) a desk review of indicators for 200 randomly selected projects approved during the evaluation period. Under the seventh evaluation component, the IFC portfolio review involved several activities: (i) a quantitative analysis of all IFC investments approved from FY12 to FY23 using the gender intensity algorithm and (ii) an in-depth desk review of 69 stand-alone advisory services, 14 stand-alone investments, 154 gender-relevant advisory services, and 201 IFC investments. The desk review for both IFC and World Bank portfolios employed a structured tool of analysis using descriptive, dummy, and scalar (0–4) variables. Gender gaps were identified using the gender gap taxonomy. The relevant indicators were assessed.

At the country level, the evaluation team conducted eight country case studies (evaluation component 8) to assess the engagement for gender equality in positively selected countries (for details on country selection, see appendix D). The unit of analysis was the country engagement, which included World Bank and IFC portfolios, analytic work, convening engagements (including policy dialogue and coordination with development partners and other stakeholders), and corporate activities (such as gender trainings and technical support). The country engagement was assessed using several activities: (i) a desk review of Bank Group strategic documents covering 2012–23;[4] (ii) a review of Bank Group's knowledge products;[5] (iii) a desk review of World Bank and IFC portfolio between FY12 and FY23; and (iv) semistructured interviews and focus groups at the national level for the World Bank and IFC staff and external key informants, including IFC clients, World Bank–financed project implementation units, development partners, international nongovernmental organizations, civil society associations, women's rights organizations, academics, and religious organizations.

At the project or activity level, the evaluation team conducted 35 deep-dive reviews (evaluation component 9) on individual projects or clusters of projects from World Bank and IFC, nested within the case studies. The deep dives included (i) in-depth document review, which included additional materials obtained from key informants; (ii) interviews with World Bank and IFC staff (task team leaders and staff involved in the activity) and implementing partners and clients; and (iii) semistructured interviews with governmental and nongovernmental implementing partners and IFC clients at the national level. For 18 projects, additional activities were undertaken at the local level. For IFC, interviews were conducted with both female and male beneficiaries, whereas for the World Bank, the approach included field visits. These visits entailed semistructured interviews with local implementing partners and key stakeholders, visits to communities and project-supported facilities and services, and semistructured interviews and focus groups with female and male direct and indirect beneficiaries.

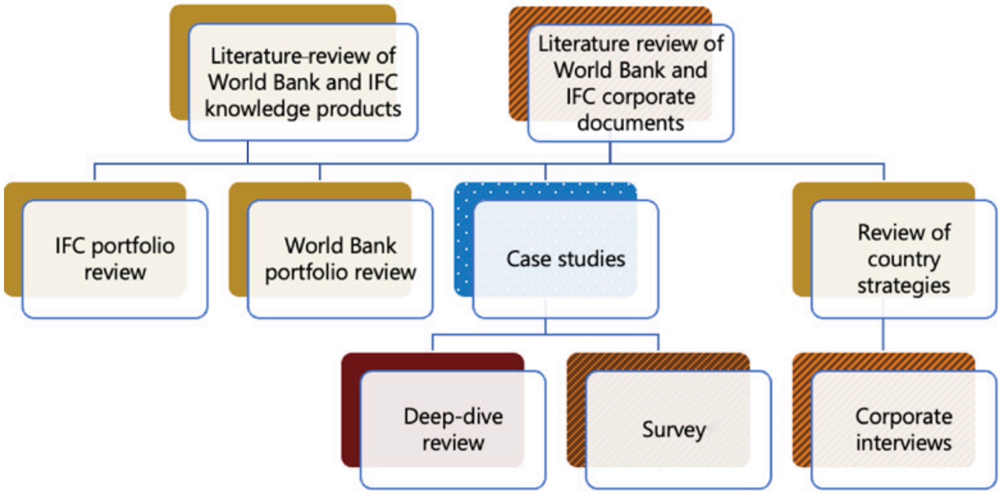
Interlinks among Evaluation Components

The evaluation components were closely interlinked to facilitate a cohesive analytic strategy. Some activities were conducted concurrently to enable triangulation, whereas others were performed sequentially to leverage emerging findings, strengthen the methods of subsequent activities, and enhance external validity. The evaluation structure, as illustrated in figure A.1, showcases the systematic interlinks among the various evaluation components. The literature review of World Bank knowledge products and corporate documents was conducted as a foundational exercise and informed all subsequent evaluation components. The review informed (i) the evaluation's analytic framework; (ii) development of tools of analysis for portfolio reviews, review of the country strategies, interview guides, and staff surveys; and (iii) identification of potential case studies.

The World Bank and IFC portfolio review, case studies, and review of the country strategies were conducted in parallel with shared design principles, which enables triangulation and counteracts the biases of quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell and Plano Clark 2017; Greene and Caracelli 1997; Patton 2015). These four components (figure A.1) included a mix of qualitative and quantitative analyses, allowing for cross-validation, for example, through methods such as principal component analysis of the country strategies and qualitative content analysis of case studies. The deep-dive reviews were strategically nested within the case studies. All projects of the country case studies were reviewed to identify the gender-relevant portfolio. From this, projects with potentially transformative elements were selected for deep-dive reviews. The emerging findings from the case study analysis and the review of the country strategies shaped the development of the survey instrument and corporate interview questionnaire to strengthen external validity.

Connections between the evaluation components were further emphasized through direct links in data collection processes. Bank Group staff interviewed during the case studies, all of whom worked on gender-related projects, were purposefully selected for subsequent surveys to maintain continuity in data collection and analysis. Similarly, findings from the country strategic program review guided the selection of interviewees for corporate interviews, targeting managers from countries situated in the top and bottom tail of the country program "gender quality" distribution (in terms of gender incorporation).

Figure A.1. Interlinks among Evaluation Components for the Evaluation



Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: The colors indicate the level of analysis: orange (striped) = corporate; yellow (light shade) = global; blue (dotted) = country; red (dark shade) = project or activity. IFC = International Finance Corporation.

Sampling

A careful sampling strategy was used for each evaluation component, intended to balance depth and breadth, incorporating both population-wide and targeted sample selection (table A.2). At the corporate level, the corporate interviews (evaluation component 1) were conducted with (i) more than 50 World Bank and IFC staff purposively selected based on their expertise and roles in gender-related work within the World Bank and IFC, such as the World Bank former and current regional gender coordinators (regions), World Bank Gender Innovation Labs (heads), and IFC GEID focal points (global and regional), and (ii) country managers of the countries situated in the top and bottom tail of the country program gender quality distribution (in terms of gender incorporation) based on the review of the country strategies. This approach ensured that the evaluation captured detailed insights from relevant stakeholders and facilitated an examination of constraining and enabling factors among countries with "good" (top tail) and "bad" (bottom tail) incorporation of gender in their strategic approach. The third evaluation component, a survey targeting all 200 Bank Group staff interviewed in the country case studies achieved a 50 percent response rate, yielding 98 responses. The survey participants (63 based in country or regional offices and 29 based at headquarters) were those staff who had direct involvement in gender activities in positively selected countries with known engagement on gender. This selection strategy aimed to ensure that the survey respondents were staff with sufficient expertise and experience to indicate the enablers and challenges of gender-related work.

Table A.2. Sample Selection for the Evaluation Components

Evaluation Component	Population	Sample Analyzed	Sampling Strategy
Corporate level			
Corporate interviews	n.a.	More than 50	World Bank and IFC key informants selected based on their position and expertise on gender-related work. Country managers of countries in the top and bottom tail of the distribution of performance based on gender integration in the CPF.
Surveys	200	100	All the World Bank Group staff interviewed during the case studies were sent a survey (response rate is 50%).
Global level			
Country strategic program review	110	83	Countries with the most recent CPFs.
IFC portfolio review (investment)	3,612	3,612	Population of investments approved between FY12 and FY23 were analyzed for algorithm scoring.
IFC portfolio review (advisory)	1,530	1,530	Population of advisories approved between FY12 and FY23 were analyzed for algorithm scoring.
Stand-alone investments	14	14	Population of stand-alone investments were analyzed.
Stand-alone advisory services	69	69	Population of stand-alone advisory services were analyzed.
Gender-relevant investment	284	201	All investments from MAS, FM, and CFD sectors were analyzed.

(continued)

Evaluation Component	Population	Sample Analyzed	Sampling Strategy
Gender-relevant advisory services	291	154	All advisory services from MAS, FIG, and ESG sectors were analyzed.
World Bank portfolio review	3,836	3,836	Population of World Bank projects (IBRD and IDA) approved between FY12 and FY23 were analyzed for algorithm scoring (additional financing, when available, analyzed as separate unit).
Randomly selected projects	3,086	200	Random selection from projects (IPF and PforR) approved between FY12 and FY23.
Stand-alone projects	122	122	Population of stand-alone projects were analyzed.
Development policy loans	682	95	The DPOs with a gender relevance score above 15 were analyzed.
Country level			
Country case studies	86	8	Positively selected countries with promising gender-relevant engagement according to corporate reports, key informants, and size of gender-relevant World Bank and IFC portfolio.
Project level			
Deep-dive project reviews	133	35	Gender-relevant projects were manually screened, and projects with specific characteristics (including gender-transformative elements) were analyzed in depth.

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: CFD = Corporate Finance Services Department; CPF = Country Partnership Framework; DPO = development policy operation; ESG = Environmental, Social, and Governance; FIG = Financial Institutions Group; FM = Financial Markets; FY = fiscal year; IBRD = International Bank for Reconstruction and Development; IDA = International Development Association; IFC = International Finance Corporation; IPF = investment project financing; MAS = Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services; n.a. = not applicable; PforR = Program-for-Results.

At the global level, the review of country strategies (evaluation component 4) encompassed 83 countries, representing 75 percent coverage. To manage resource and time constraints, the countries with the most recent

CPFs were selected. This approach prioritized recent engagements and provided a broad view of Bank Group engagement. IFC portfolio review (evaluation component 5) included several subcomponents. The overall portfolio for algorithm scoring comprised all 3,612 investments and 1,530 advisories approved between FY12 and FY23.[6] The other subcomponents included the assessment of stand-alone investment and advisories and gender-relevant investments and advisories. The stand-alone desk review encompassed the entire population of stand-alone and advisory services. For the desk review of the gender-relevant investments and advisories, a sector approach was adopted. For investments, Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services; Financial Markets; and Corporate Finance Services Department sectors were included, covering 70 percent of the population. For advisory services, the population of Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services; Financial Institutions Group; and Environmental, Social, and Governance sectors were included, representing a coverage of 52 percent. For the World Bank portfolio review (evaluation component 7), the overall portfolio for algorithm scoring included the population of 3,836 projects approved between FY12 and FY23. For the standalone projects, the population of the 122 stand-alone projects was analyzed. Ninety-five DPLs were selected based on gender relevance as determined by the algorithm score of greater than 15 (for details on algorithm scoring, see appendix E). Finally, a random sample of 200 projects (IPFs and PforRs) was separately evaluated.

At the country level, the team conducted eight country case studies (evaluation component 8). The eight countries were chosen from 86 eligible candidates using a purposive selection strategy aimed at positively selecting countries with effective country engagement and operations on gender. Only low- and middle-income countries, excluding countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence, were eligible, with exceptions for non–fragility, conflict, and violence countries facing subnational fragility, conflict, and violence challenges (which were eligible). The selected countries demonstrated significant Bank Group engagement for gender equality and had notable gender-relevant portfolios, including flagship projects, ensuring diverse representation across seven Regions. The selection covered International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, blend, and International Development Association borrowers, prioritizing those with both World Bank and IFC gender-focused interventions, except for Benin, which lacked IFC engagement. In addition, countries with higher levels of gender inequality were preferred based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Social Institutions and Gender Index and United Nations Development Programme Gender Inequality Index, highlighting the urgency of gender equality efforts to support economic growth and shared prosperity (for details on the case study selection, see appendix D).

At the project or activity level, the sample selection was nested within the case studies. A total of 35 projects were analyzed for the deep-dive review. These projects were selected through a systematic process. For each country case study, a desk review of the World Bank and IFC portfolio between FY12 and FY23 identified gender-relevant interventions. Among the gender-relevant interventions, the potential gender-smart solutions were selected based on project design characteristics—namely, (i) expected relevance to the context and target group; (ii) gender-transformative potential; (iii) expected effectiveness; and (iv) for advanced or closed projects, achieved effectiveness (based on monitoring and evaluation reports). The criteria for selecting a subset of gender-smart solutions for the deep-dive analysis included (i) evidence provided by the task team leaders and project implementation units or clients and (ii) active projects in a sufficiently advanced implementation stage to allow assessing processes and results. The final selection of deep dives was discussed with the World Bank and IFC staff and implementing partners and with the evaluation team. The feasibility, the value added of the deep dive, and logistics issues were the main criteria considered for the final selection.

Analytic Activities to Answer the Evaluation Questions

A multilevel analysis was used to extract, triangulate, and illustrate findings. The following sections provide an overview of the various analytic activities within the distinct evaluation components used to examine the four evaluation subquestions (see also table A.3). Each subsection delves into how the activities were used to evaluate the subquestions on relevance; effectiveness; ownership, sustainability, and scale; and value added of the FY16–23 gender strategy.

Table A.3. List of Analytic Activities by Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Component	Relevance (EQ 1a)	Effectiveness (EQ 1b)	Ownership Sustainability Scale (EQ 1c)	Strategy Value Added (EQ 2a)
Corporate level				
Corporate interviews		» Thematic analysis of questionnaire questions focused on effectiveness	» Thematic analysis of protocol questions focused on ownership, sustainability, and scale	» Thematic analysis of protocol questions focused on value addition of the strategy
Literature review of World Bank Group corporate documents	» Thematic analysis of corporate documents on relevance » Comparative analysis of corporate documents across Regions, GPs, or sectors on relevance	» Thematic analysis of corporate documents on effectiveness » Comparative analysis of corporate documents across Regions, GPs, or sectors on effectiveness		» Thematic analysis of the evolution of corporate documents
Surveys				» Descriptive quantitative analysis of close-ended survey responses » Thematic analysis of open-ended survey responses

(continued)

Evaluation Component	Relevance (EQ 1a)	Effectiveness (EQ 1b)	Ownership Sustainability Scale (EQ 1c)	Strategy Value Added (EQ 2a)
Global level				
Review of the country strategies	» Scoring and coding of country strategy's design and indicators on relevance » Descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of relevance data from scoring and coding » Content analysis of CPFs (gender gaps) » Bivariate analysis of country statistics and gender gaps (alignment)	» Scoring and coding of country strategy's design and indicators on effectiveness » Descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of effectiveness data from scoring and coding	» Scoring and coding of country strategy's design and indicators on ownership, sustainability, and scale » Descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of ownership, sustainability, and scale data from scoring and coding	
	» Comparative quantitative country strategies on gender intensities			
	» Principal component analysis of scoring and coding			
Literature review of knowledge products	» Thematic analysis of key knowledge products on relevance	» Thematic analysis of key knowledge products on effectiveness		

(continued)

Evaluation Component	Relevance (EQ 1a)	Effectiveness (EQ 1b)	Ownership Sustainability Scale (EQ 1c)	Strategy Value Added (EQ 2a)
World Bank portfolio review	» Descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of algorithm scoring to measure gender intensities across Regions, instruments, or GPs » Scoring and coding of World Bank projects' (stand-alone and DPLs) country strategy design and indicators on relevance » Content analysis of project documents (stand-alone and DPLs; gender gaps and design approaches) » Descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of data derived from scoring, coding, and content analysis	» Scoring and coding of World Bank projects (stand-alone and DPLs) on effectiveness » Scoring and coding of closed World Bank projects (stand-alone and DPLs) on effectiveness » Content analysis of results indicators (stand-alone, DPLs, and random sample) » Descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of data derived from scoring, coding, and content analysis	» Scoring and coding of World Bank projects' (stand-alone and DPLs) design and indicators on effectiveness ownership, sustainability, and scale » Descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of data derived from scoring and coding	» Comparative quantitative analysis of algorithm scoring to measure gender intensities before and after the strategy » Comparative quantitative analysis of data derived from scoring, coding, and content analysis before and after the strategy

(continued)

Evaluation Component	Relevance (EQ 1a)	Effectiveness (EQ 1b)	Ownership Sustainability Scale (EQ 1c)	Strategy Value Added (EQ 2a)
IFC portfolio review	» Descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of algorithm scoring to measure gender intensities across Regions or sectors » Scoring and coding of IFC stand-alone and gender-relevant investments' and advisory services' design and indicators on relevance » Content analysis of project documents (stand-alone and gender-relevant investments and advisory services; gender gaps and design approaches) » Descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of data derived from scoring, coding, and content analysis	» Scoring and coding of IFC stand-alone and gender-relevant investments and advisory services on effectiveness » Scoring and coding of closed IFC stand-alone and gender-relevant investments and advisory services on effectiveness » Content analysis of results indicators (IFC stand-alone and gender-relevant investments and advisory services) » Descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of data derived from scoring, coding, and content analysis	» Scoring and coding of IFC stand-alone and gender-relevant investments and advisory services design and indicators on effectiveness ownership, sustainability, and scale » Descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of data derived from scoring and coding	» Comparative quantitative analysis of algorithm scoring to measure gender intensities before and after the strategy » Comparative quantitative analysis of data derived from scoring, coding, and content analysis before and after the strategy

(continued)

Evaluation Component	Relevance (EQ 1a)	Effectiveness (EQ 1b)	Ownership Sustainability Scale (EQ 1c)	Strategy Value Added (EQ 2a)
Country level				
Country case studies	» Case study analysis » Comparative case study analysis			
Project level				
Deep-dive review	» Coding of 35 promising World Bank and IFC activities or cluster of activities » Contextual analysis » Thematic analysis of Bank Group and external stakeholder interviews » Thematic analysis of beneficiary interviews and focus group discussions			

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: The case study analysis was based on a wide set of quantitative and qualitative data (for details on the case study analysis, see appendix D). CPF = Country Partnership Framework; DPL = development policy loan; EQ = evaluation question; GP = Global Practice; IFC = International Finance Corporation.

Analytic Activities to Assess Relevance of the World Bank's and IFC's Support to Country Gender Priorities

In addressing the first evaluation question, the team examined the relevance of the World Bank's and IFC's support to country priorities. Two different types of relevance were considered: gender relevance (that is, the contribution to advance gender equality) and relevance to the context and target groups.

At the global level, the team executed multiple analytic activities to assess relevance. The team reviewed the country strategies using a tool of analysis that scored and coded a country strategy's design and indicators on relevance.[7] The tool included 11 questions on relevance, which were a combination of dummies and scores (for details on the CPF tool of analysis, see appendix F). A descriptive quantitative analysis was carried out for individual questions on relevance and the cumulative relevance score. In a separate analysis, a content analysis applied a 100-category gender gap taxonomy[8] on the country strategies to identify the main gender gaps addressed. Each gender gap was classified as main (central to the strategy) or secondary. In parallel, gender statistics were mapped to the same gender gaps. A bivariate analysis was conducted to see the alignment between country needs (as indicated by gender statistics) and gender gaps addressed by the country strategies. The team also conducted two cross-cutting analyses (across the four evaluation questions): (i) an index[9] was constructed using scores on relevance; effectiveness; and scale, ownership, and sustainability, which was used to generate a distribution reflecting the intensity of country engagement for gender quality, and (ii) a principal component analysis identified the most important factors from the 21 variables referring to relevance; effectiveness; and scale, ownership, and sustainability in predicting the incorporation of gender in country strategies.

The World Bank and IFC portfolio reviews were analyzed in multiple ways to assess the relevance and potential effectiveness of the global World Bank and IFC portfolio. First, an algorithm was calibrated to measure the gender intensities of the World Bank projects (IPF, PforRs, and DPLs) and IFC investments and advisory services (for details on the algorithm, see appendix E). The team conducted a descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis of the algorithm scores with the percentage of gender-tagged projects across Regions, instruments, IFC sectors, and World Bank Global Practices. Second, several analytic tools were constructed to evaluate the World Bank (stand-alone and DPLs) and IFC (stand-alone and gender-relevant investment and advisory services) interventions using descriptive variables (text), dummy variables, and scalar variables (0–4 scoring system).[10] A content analysis was done to identify (i) the gender gaps addressed based on the gender gap taxonomy (for details on the gender gap taxonomy, see appendix G); (ii) approaches used by World Bank (stand-alone and DPLs) and IFC (investments and advisory services) interventions (holistic or multisector and participatory approaches); (iii) gender-transformative elements included in the intervention—support to women's and girls' empowerment, support to women's and girls' collective agency, engagement of men and boys for gender equality, addressing of gender norms, and strengthening of the enabling environment for gender equality; and (iv) gender policy actions supported by DPLs—strengthening of institutions and systems, improvement of data and statistics, facilitation of implementation of specific programs, promotion of capacity through training, legal reforms, and fiscal policy. A descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis was conducted on relevance-related data derived from the coding and content analysis and identification of trends across Regions and Global Practices or sectors.

Case study analysis was conducted for eight countries. The case study analysis entailed pattern analysis (identification and interpretation of patterns and themes that emerge from the data, revealing underlying relationships and insights) and contextual analysis (understanding of how factors influence the gender country engagement in the context). One of the critical elements of a case study analysis is triangulation (Yin 2014). The case study analysis ensured this triangulation by formulating a structured case study approach to collect data in the eight countries (for details on the country case study data, see appendix D). The analysis was guided and recorded in a structured matrix (averaging 80 pages per country). For relevance, the data collected were analyzed to draw findings on (i) internal alignment and coordination in addressing gender inequalities and factors that enabled or hindered the development of an integrated strategy for the Bank Group country engagement, (ii) relevance of country strategies in the case study countries, and (iii) relevance of the World Bank and IFC portfolio and factors that contributed to these designs being more or less relevant to address gender inequalities. Finally, a comparative case study analysis was conducted using a structured tool of analysis to draw overall findings on relevance.

At the project or activity level, 35 projects were assessed in depth. This in-depth review was nested within the case studies, contributing to the overall case study analysis. In addition, the analysis of the projects provided evidence on an individual basis and collectively, highlighting their role as a group of transformative interventions. A tool of analysis was constructed to evaluate the World Bank and IFC activities or cluster of activities to identify the relevance of the activity's approach to the local context and target groups affected by these gender gaps. The analysis was informed by a contextual analysis based on gender statistics, review of the country strategies, and literature review of World Bank and external knowledge. Moreover, the analysis was designed for triangulation, supported by a thematic analysis of Bank Group and external stakeholder interviews working on these 35 projects and by a separate thematic analysis of field observations and interviews and focus group discussions with the local stakeholders and the target groups (direct and indirect beneficiaries) for 18 of the interventions (for details on the case studies, see appendix D).

Analytic Activities to Assess the World Bank's and IFC's Support to Country Actors in Adoption of Effective Solutions to Reduce Gender Inequalities

In addressing the second evaluation question, the team assessed the World Bank's and IFC's support to country actors in adoption of effective solutions to reduce gender inequalities. The analysis of effectiveness faced challenges because of the limited availability of data and weakness of the results framework of Bank Group programs. Moreover, the programs (the World Bank and IFC) with gender-transformative elements were more likely to be recent projects and, hence, not closed, limiting the assessment of their effectiveness. Nonetheless, the team conducted several activities to assess the effectiveness or likely effectiveness of the World Bank and IFC programs. At the corporate level, the semistructured thematic analysis of the corporate documents[11] and the review of World Bank and IFC country- and region-specific knowledge helped identify evidence related to effective solutions, which were also examined for regional variation. In addition, interview transcripts for 50 corporate interviews were analyzed thematically to draw findings on effectiveness.

At the global level, the scoring and coding of country strategies using the tool of analysis included four questions on effectiveness,[12] which were a combination of dummies and scores (for details on the CPF tool of analysis, see appendix F). A descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis was performed for individual questions on effectiveness and on the cumulative effectiveness score. The analysis also recorded the Performance and Learning Review results regarding the achievement of gender objectives. The tools of analysis for World Bank (stand-alone and DPLs) and IFC (investment and advisory services) portfolio reviews included specific questions on effectiveness, which were a combination of descriptive variables (text) and dummy variables. A descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis was conducted on effectiveness-related data derived from the scoring and coding.

The closed World Bank (stand-alone and DPLs) and IFC (investment and advisory services) programs were assessed using a separate tool of analysis to draw findings on results. A content analysis was conducted on the World Bank (stand-alone and DPLs) and IFC (investment and advisory services) portfolio, in addition to a random sample of 200 World Bank projects (IPF and PforRs) to categorize indicators into five possible groups capturing (i) the number or share of female beneficiaries, (ii) a change in the condition of women and girls (fulfillment of a need or access to a service), (iii) a degree of satisfaction with the support provided by the intervention, (iv) a change in any dimension of women's and girls' empowerment, and (v) a reduction of a gender gap. Moreover, the team conducted a bivariate analysis to map the type of indicators by the gender gap addressed for the random sample. Another separate content analysis was conducted to classify the policy actions under the DPLs as classified based on the nature of the indicator, capturing (i) the impact or result of the implementation of reforms supported by the development policy operation on female and male access to services, resources, and other benefits; (ii) the outcome of the reforms in terms of improvement of the enabling environment for gender equality at the national level; (iii) the outcomes of the reforms of the development policy operation in terms of improvement of the enabling environment for gender equality at the local level; and (iv) other (for details on the indicator analysis, see appendix E). A descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis was conducted on effectiveness-related data derived from the content analysis.

At the country level, the data gathered in case studies for the effectiveness analysis were analyzed through a pattern and contextual analysis described in the section on relevance. The findings were specifically drawn through the questions in the case study matrix on the effectiveness of (i) the gender-transformative elements in the portfolio and (ii) the gender-smart solutions. The gender-smart solutions were defined as the activities (or clusters of activities) with the following features: gender relevance, gender-transformative potential, evidence-based relevance to the context and target groups, and evidence of expected effectiveness. The country matrixes (described in the section on relevance) were analyzed comparatively to draw overall findings on effectiveness in analyzed countries (for details on the case studies, see appendix D). At the project or activity level, the in-depth analysis of 35 projects collected evidence on effectiveness through structured desk reviews of knowledge, desk review of the portfolios (including the assessment of the results of closed and advanced projects), and thematic analysis of Bank Group staff and external stakeholder interviews. The field visits were especially central to the analysis of effectiveness by looking at the likely results of the gender-transformative interventions (for details on the deep-dive reviews, see appendix D).

Analytic Activities to Assess the World Bank's and IFC's Support to Ownership, Sustainability, and Scale-Up of Gender-Smart Solutions

The analytic activities described in the sections on relevance and effectiveness included questions in the tools of analysis and questionnaires to assess ownership, scale, and sustainability. At the corporate level, a thematic analysis of responses to questions on ownership, scale, and sustainability by Bank

Group staff (corporate interviews) was conducted. At the global level, the scoring and coding of country strategies using the tool of analysis included six questions on ownership,[13] sustainability, and scale, which were individually and collectively analyzed. Similarly, the tools of analysis for World Bank (stand-alone and DPLs) and IFC (investment and advisory services) portfolio reviews included specific descriptive variables (text) and dummy variables to evaluate ownership, sustainability, and scale, which were again analyzed using a descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis.

At the country level, for the analysis of ownership, sustainability, and scale, the collected data for case studies were analyzed through a pattern and contextual analysis described in the previous sections. The findings on ownership, sustainability, and scale were specifically guided through the questions in the case study matrix on the (i) ownership of the country-driven approach; (ii) country actors' buy-in of gender objectives and solutions; (iii) sustainability of gender results and activities, including factors influencing sustainability; and (iv) scale-up of gender-smart solutions, including gender-smart solutions' coverage, plans for scale-up, and factors influencing scalability. At the project or activity level, the in-depth analysis of 35 projects collected evidence on ownership, scale, and sustainability using the process described in the previous two sections—patterns were drawn from the collected qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the ownership, sustainability, and scale of the 35 transformative projects (for details on the deep-dive reviews, see appendix D).

Analytic Activities to Assess Contribution of the Fiscal Year 2016–23 Gender Strategy

The evaluation of the contribution of the FY16–23 strategy was a cross-cutting activity and drew on the analysis described in the previous sections, in addition to a staff survey. At the corporate level, the thematic analysis of the corporate documents identified evidence on the contribution of the gender strategy. Similarly, the thematic analysis of corporate interviews included analysis of responses to questions on the contribution of the gender strategy. Moreover, a descriptive quantitative analysis was used to assess closed questions and a thematic analysis to assess open-ended questions of the staff survey. These questions were on corporate mechanisms, including the gender tag and the gender flag; gender trainings and guidance; accountability; and most significant changes produced by the FY16–23 gender strategy.

At the global level, specific analytic activities were conducted for the World Bank and IFC portfolio reviews. The team conducted a comparative quantitative analysis of the predictive scores of the gender algorithm before and after the strategy. Similarly, gender gaps and indicator classification from the content analysis were compared before and after the strategy to capture changes in the gender gaps being addressed and types of indicators being used to record results. At the country level, the case study analysis of the FY16–23 gender strategy contribution was guided by questions in the case study country matrix related to the theory of action of the gender strategy: (i) partnerships and coordination by the World Bank and IFC with other development partners; (ii) generation and use of knowledge on gender inequalities and solutions to address them; (iii) supporting staff for project design and implementation; (iv) dissemination and use of gender strategic documents, resources, and tools; and (v) strengths and weaknesses of the gender tag and flag. Moreover, all questions related to the assessment of World Bank and IFC engagement for gender equality included a subquestion on the evolution of the engagement over the last 10 years. This subquestion allowed the changes that occurred after the adoption of the FY16–23 gender strategy to be captured.

Validity of Findings

The evaluation team took several measures to ensure the validity of the findings. Overall, a multimethod approach with distinct evaluation components—such as case studies, global portfolio reviews, literature review, survey, and interviews—facilitated triangulation by enabling different analytic activities contributing to the same evaluation subquestions (for a list of analytic activities, see table A.3). The evaluation team used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, and particular attention was paid to method-related validity.

Measurement accuracy. Evaluation literature states that measurement accuracy refers to measurement validity[14] in the case of quantitative methods and authenticity[15] in the case of qualitative methods (Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey 2015; Trochim and Donnelly 2008). The evaluation team used diverse methods to mitigate for threats stemming from monomethod bias. To ensure clarity, the evaluation team constructed a gender gap taxonomy (see appendix G) and applied it across analyses, such as country strategy reviews, portfolio reviews, and country case studies, to ensure consistency of concepts being measured. The period from 2012 to 2023 was covered to include the impact of the gender strategy introduced in 2016, with 2012–16 serving as a control period. For qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus group discussions, particular attention was paid to affirm that the interview and focus group guides were culturally and contextually sensitive. For example, in the Bangladesh case study, the focus group discussion guide for adolescent girls in the Rohingya refugee camps was vetted by an IEG gender-based violence expert (senior consultant) and gender-based violence experts within the United Nations Population Fund. Similarly, interview protocols were adapted to different types of stakeholders (Bank Group staff, project implementation units, government, local government institutions and civil society associations, service providers, community leaders, and beneficiaries), considering their role and, hence, assumed power relationship within the program. Another measure to increase the accuracy of data collection was designing homogeneous focus groups by social position to capture the different points of view and mitigate the influence of power relations on the conversation. Separate focus groups were held for community leaders, direct beneficiaries, and indirect beneficiaries. Focus groups were also held separately by sex and, when possible, age-groups and marital status (for example, separating elder women, young married women, and unmarried adolescent girls). To avoid interference with data collection, implementing partners and World Bank and IFC staff were not present during interviews and focus groups with local stakeholders, service providers, and beneficiaries. Moreover, women and girls were always interviewed by women to create safe spaces for women's and girls' voices.

Measurement process. The credibility of a measurement process refers to measurement reliability[16] in terms of quantitative methods and auditability[17] in terms of qualitative methods (Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey 2015). The steps taken to ensure measurement accuracy, such as the gender gap taxonomy and culturally sensitive measurement procedures, were also important elements for ensuring measurement reliability and auditability. In addition, the evaluation team adopted several procedures to ensure quality, such as conducting pilot tests, evaluating the intercoder reliability, and performing extensive reviews and quality checks to maintain fidelity. To ensure quality of the case studies, the case study authors were supported during data collection and analysis and were trained on case study methodology and tools at the beginning. A senior gender expert provided regular assistance to all country teams to ensure consistent application of tools of analysis and overall methodological approach. A pilot case study was conducted to test the methodology and tools of analysis and eventually identify and correct any potential methodological issues. Similarly, pilot exercises were conducted for different tools of analysis, including country strategy reviews and portfolio reviews. When possible, these tools were tested by multiple coders to ensure the intercoder reliability. Regular team meetings were held to discuss methodological issues and emerging findings to identify areas of convergence and divergence from different analyses. The local consultants ensured the adaptation of evaluation activities and tools to the local context. Whenever possible, respondents were enabled to respond in their own language, with a translator used to interpret meanings. A wide range of stakeholders was engaged across the case studies (400 semistructured interviews and 100 focus group discussions) and at the corporate level (more than 50 interviews) to reduce reliance on subjective judgments. Moreover, at every level of the analysis, efforts were made to collect data to ensure triangulation. For example, at the global level, corporate interviews were supplemented with reviews of corporate documents and surveys. Similarly, at the case study level, multiple data points were collected to ensure validity, such as observations at program sites in conjunction with interviews and focus group discussions.

Generalizability. Generalizability refers to external validity[18] in the case of quantitative data and to transferability or fittingness[19] in the case of qualitative data (Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey 2015). To ensure generalizability, some analyses covered the entire population; the gender relevance algorithm applied to all World Bank projects and IFC investments and advisories approved between FY12 and FY23 and the country strategy review. In cases where samples were used, a random sample was drawn to ensure representativeness. In terms of case studies and deep-dive analyses, a systematic procedure was followed to favor positive cases; thus, the findings are biased toward the positive, and the findings are translated and caveated with that assumption (for details on the case studies, see appendix D). The studies also used a wide range of systematic tools of analysis, including portfolio review protocols, interview protocols directed at different stakeholders, focus group discussion protocols, and gender gap assignments (see appendix D). Moreover, case study reports, averaging 80 pages, were formulated by the case study task team leaders to ensure a thorough and systematic recording of country engagement procedures and processes to enable an analysis that could illustrate transferability. A structured protocol was used to extract findings across case studies.

Limitations

Limited data on effectiveness. Data on the contribution of the FY16–23 gender strategy to the evolution of the engagement for gender equality are limited because of the relatively short implementation period of the strategy: many of the projects approved after the adoption of the gender strategy are still being implemented and have yet to produce tangible outcomes. Moreover, the evaluation found shortcomings in monitoring and evaluation frameworks that constrained the assessment of results at the aggregated level (see chapter 3 for details). These shortcomings were highlighted by previous evaluations, including *Results and Performance of the World Bank Group 2015* (World Bank 2016), *World Bank Group Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review: An Assessment by the Independent Evaluation Group* (World Bank 2021), and *Addressing Gender Inequalities in Countries Affected by Fragility, Conflict, and Violence: An Evaluation of the World Bank Group's Support* (World Bank 2023). The evaluation team made attempts to mitigate this limitation by assessing likely results of the gender-transformative projects through in-depth reviews and supplementing the evidence with field visits for 18 projects.

Attribution of results. The attribution of results was challenging in some cases. The gender strategy was introduced in 2016, the World Bank gender tagging began in 2017, and IFC gender flagging started in 2016 for advisory services and in 2019 for investments. Few projects approved after the strategy's implementation have closed and can demonstrate results. In addition, even at the level of engagement, it is challenging to clearly separate the strategy's impact from existing trends and to distinguish the contribution of the World Bank and IFC from those of other development partners. The team attempted to mitigate the limitation through triangulation of evidence collected through multiple qualitative and quantitative methods at multiple levels (corporate, global, country, and project or activity).

Access to key informants. In some countries, it was challenging for IEG to collect data on the results of IFC projects. For some projects, it was impossible to interview IFC clients. Moreover, because of confidentiality issues, in all countries, with the exception of Bangladesh and the Arab Republic of Egypt, IFC clients were reluctant to provide access to beneficiaries because of confidentiality issues, which limited the ability to triangulate information from IFC staff, clients, and beneficiaries. This also created an asymmetry between IFC projects, for which the perspective of final beneficiaries was missing, and World Bank projects, whose beneficiaries were much easier to access and interview. In addition, in some countries, governments were reluctant to provide information and attempted to control the information collected in the field.

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[1] Regional gender action plan, Systematic Country Diagnostics, Country Private Sector Diagnostics, Country Partnership Frameworks, Performance and Learning Reviews, Completion and Learning Reviews, and Completion and Learning Review Validations.

[2] A taxonomy of 100 gender gaps was developed using a combination of inductive and deductive approaches (for details, see appendix G).

[3] To evaluate the portfolio's gender relevance, an algorithm was developed and calibrated using projects approved between 2012 and 2023 that had been manually reviewed. Each project received a gender intensity score calculated from the formula Score = X*beta, where X includes relevant variables (for example, gender-related keywords and gender as a project theme) and beta represents weights minimizing classification errors against the manually reviewed projects. This scoring method distinguished gender-relevant (and, among those, gender stand-alone) from non-gender-relevant projects, applied separately across World Bank projects, development policy loans, International Finance Corporation (IFC) advisories, and IFC investments.

[4] Regional gender action plan, Systematic Country Diagnostics, Country Private Sector Diagnostics, Country Partnership Frameworks, Performance and Learning Reviews, Completion and Learning Reviews, and Completion and Learning Review Validations.

[5] Gender assessment, poverty assessment, Country Climate and Development Reports, Country Economic Memorandums, Jobs Diagnostics, and any other gender-relevant analytic work.

[6] To evaluate the portfolio's gender relevance, an algorithm was developed using projects manually reviewed between 2012 and 2023. Each project received a gender intensity score calculated from the formula Score = X*beta, where X includes relevant variables (for example, gender-related keywords and gender as a project theme) and beta represents weights minimizing classification errors against manually reviewed projects. This scoring method distinguished gender-relevant from non-gender-relevant projects, applied separately across World Bank projects, development policy loans, IFC advisories, and IFC investments.

[7] Systematic Country Diagnostic, Country Private Sector Diagnostic, Country Partnership Framework, and Performance and Learning Review.

[8] A taxonomy of 100 gender gaps was developed using a combination of inductive and deductive approaches (for details, see appendix G).

[9] This index was constructed with a weighting system where each of these three main areas carried a 33 percent weight, and each subindex was proportionally weighted.

[10] For IFC, a 0–1 scoring system was used instead.

[11] Gender strategy updates, regional gender action plans, IFC plan for the implementation of the gender strategy, Global Practice follow-up notes, gender resource packages for World Bank Group country teams, and gender tag and gender flag guidance.

[12] Systematic Country Diagnostic, Country Private Sector Diagnostic, Country Partnership Framework, and Performance and Learning Review.

[13] Systematic Country Diagnostic, Country Private Sector Diagnostic, Country Partnership Framework, and Performance and Learning Review.

[14] To what extent are researchers and evaluators accurately measuring what they really intend to measure?

[15] To what extent are researchers and evaluators capturing the voice and meaning of the observed concepts in the way they intended?

[16] To what extent will the way in which measurement occurs be expected to produce similar results on repeated observations of the same condition or event? Are data collected and entered consistently? Would others obtain the same answer if they repeated the question or data collection task?

[17] How clear and transparent are the procedures that researchers and evaluators use to generate data? To what extent do they clearly explain how, when, and in what context they generated data via asking questions and making observations?

[18] To what extent are researchers and evaluators able to generalize from the results to groups or contexts beyond those being studied?

[19] To what extent are findings, such as about processes, deemed relevant to be applicable in other locations and other times?

Appendix B. Conceptual Framework

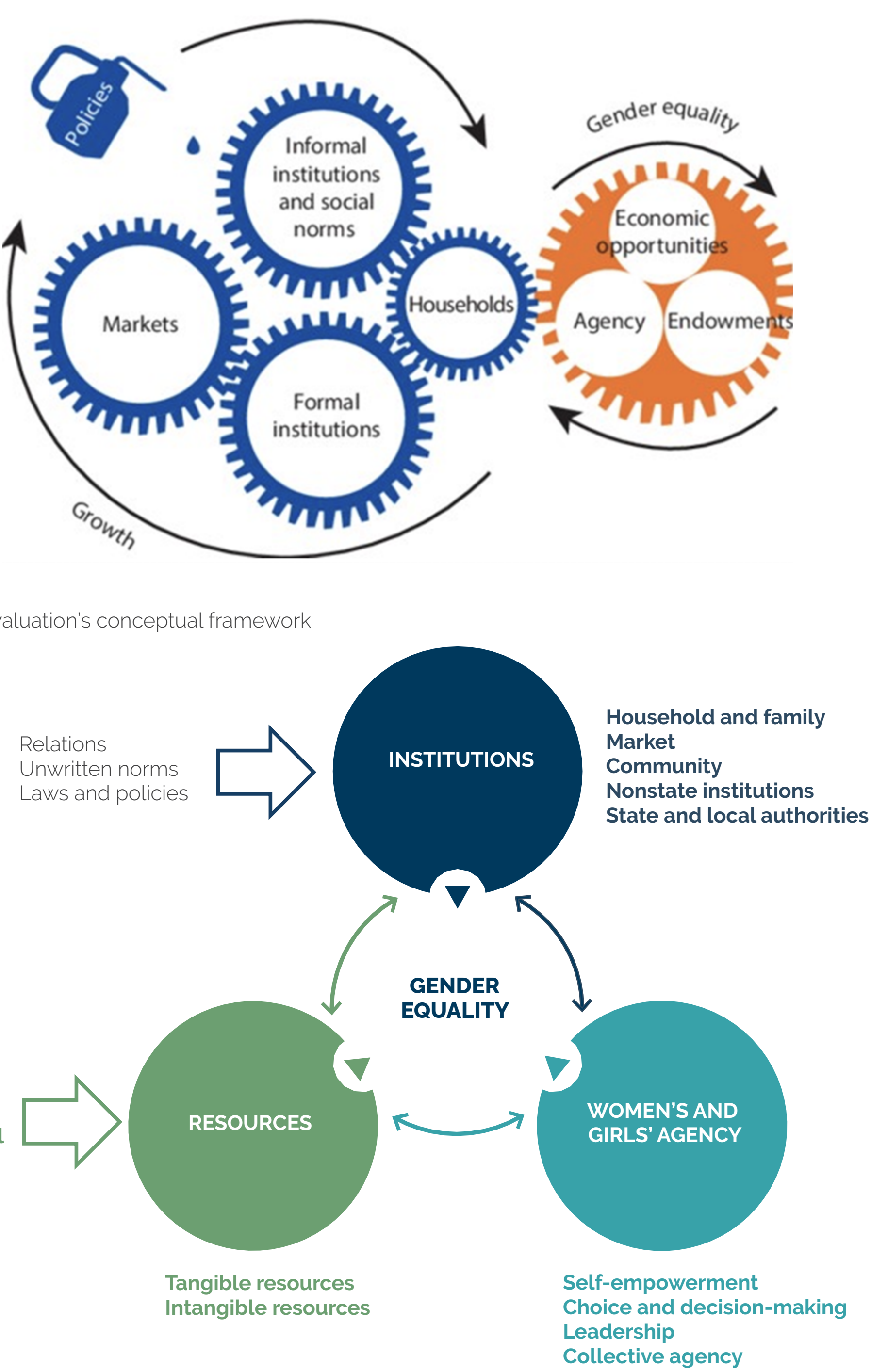
The conceptual framework for this evaluation derives from the *World Development Report (WDR) 2012* framework (figure B.1, panel a). According to the WDR framework, gender outcomes originate from the decisions that households or families make in response to the functioning and structure of markets and formal and informal institutions. These decisions are driven by preferences, incentives, and constraints of the different family members in relation to their relative voice and bargaining power (which, in turn, depend on each household member's ownership and control over resources, ability to leave the household, and social norms). Preferences are mostly shaped by gender roles, social norms, and social networks (informal institutions). Incentives are largely influenced by markets (labor, credit, land, and goods), which determine the returns to household decisions and investments. Constraints arise from the interplay of formal institutions (including all those that pertain to the state), markets, and informal institutions. The interplay of household decision-making, markets, and formal and informal institutions determines gender-related outcomes, which the *WDR* classifies under three key dimensions: the accumulation of endowments (education, health, and physical assets); the use of those endowments to take up economic opportunities and generate incomes; and the application of those endowments to take actions, or agency (World Bank 2012).

The fiscal year (FY)16–23 gender strategy adopts the *WDR* conceptual framework and organizes the gender equality objectives into four strategic objectives: improving human endowment, removing constraints to more and better jobs, removing barriers to women's ownership and control of assets, and enhancing women's voice and agency and engaging men and boys. The gender strategy includes the change in informal institutions (gender norms) under voice and agency.

Figure B.1. Conceptual Frameworks

a. *World Development Report* conceptual framework

b. This evaluation's conceptual framework



Sources: Panel a: World Bank 2012; panel b: Independent Evaluation Group.

The Independent Evaluation Group conceptual framework is based on the *WDR* framework and is also inspired by the conceptual model of women's and girls' empowerment that was developed by the KIT Institute in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2017 (Van Eerdewijk et al. 2017) and was recently used in three World Bank publications (World Bank 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

With respect to the four strategic objectives of the FY16–23 gender strategy, the Independent Evaluation Group conceptual framework merges human endowments and economic opportunities under one priority (tangible and intangible resources) and adds institutional change more prominently as a separate priority to highlight its key role in addressing the root causes of gender inequalities to achieve long-lasting results on gender equality.

According to the evaluation's conceptual framework, advancing gender equality requires changing gender power relations. This involves (i) a more equal redistribution of resources, (ii) an increase of women's and girls' agency, and (iii) conducive formal and informal institutions. These changes are strictly interrelated:

1. Tangible and intangible resources are unequally distributed between men and women because of the unequal gender power relations. Gender equality requires equal access to resources and equal control of resources—that is, it requires that women and girls can make decisions on the use of resources. Examples of tangible resources are land, money, water, food, house, technology, and physical integrity. Examples of intangible resources are information, skills, time, psychological integrity, and social capital.

2. Women's and girls' agency includes four different dimensions: First, women's and girls' self-empowerment (power within), defined as women's and girls' sense of self-worth, self-knowledge and self-confidence, their awareness of their rights and potential, and their capacity to set goals for their lives. Second, women's and girls' choice and decision-making, which encompasses their capacity and possibility to choose, act to achieve a goal, and make and influence decisions; it also includes women's and girls' autonomy and power of influence and negotiation. Third, women's and girls' leadership—that is, women's and girls' ability to effectively participate

in governance and lead social change. Fourth, women's and girls' collective agency—that is, women and girls standing together in solidarity and acting collectively on their interests to enhance their position and expand the realm of what is possible.

3. Women, girls, men, and boys live in the context of institutional structures—that is, the social arrangements of formal and informal rules and practices that govern behaviors and expressions of agency, as well as the distribution and control of resources. Institutional structures frame social relations—that is, power relations between different social groups that have different social positions in the society (for example, between rich and poor people, dominant and dominated ethnic groups, and men and women and gender minorities). Social relations include gender power relations that result in gender inequalities.

Institutions are social arrangements that operate in five different arenas:

1. Household and family—Encompassing both the household and the wider kinship relations, such as extended families and lineage groupings, which have strong influence on the distribution of resources and women's and girls' agency in many countries. Institutional arrangements in this arena include marriage and divorce, the relationships between parents and children, and the relationships with in-laws or extended family relatives.
2. Market—The economic arena, including firms, businesses and corporations, and sites of production, exchange, and trade and related activities. Important subarenas include the labor markets, goods markets and trade (value chains), financial markets, private service delivery, and privately funded research institutes.
3. Community—Consisting of suprafamily arrangements in the proximity of the individual, such as village, neighborhood, and town or city, in which women and men and girls and boys live. It includes the array of social groups, organizations, and networks in civil society, such as nongovernmental organizations, community-based organizations, migrant communities, and the community groups affiliated with religious institutions (mosques, churches, and so on), customary institutions, political parties, and women's grassroots organizations.

4. Nonstate institutions—Nonprofit institutions that operate at both the local and the country and multicountry levels, such as religious organizations, traditional institutions, nongovernmental organizations, trade unions, and political parties.

5. State and local authorities—Including the political organization of a centralized government with a bureaucratic administration (state) and the regional and local governance bodies (local authorities). Local authorities are framed by the state laws and policies but can have significant autonomy (depending on the country) and adopt their own policies and laws and regulations for the territory they govern.

Institutional structures can both enable and constrain women's and girls' agency and the distribution of resources. In turn, women's and girls' decision-making, leadership, and collective action can transform institutional structures and can lead to a more equal redistribution of resources.

The conceptual framework assigns an important role to men's and boy's engagement for gender equality, similar to the *WDR* and the FY16–23 gender strategy (World Bank Group 2015), and underscores the need to empower them to foster the affirmation of culturally relevant forms of positive masculinity.[1] Men and boys can act as gatekeepers maintaining the status quo but can also be important allies in transforming power relations.

This framework also acknowledges that gender inequalities can affect nonbinary people and men and boys (including men and boys with diverse sexual orientation) and that to advance gender equality, it is necessary to address this type of discrimination. This evaluation did not analyze in depth the World Bank Group engagement to promote the rights of people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity because this aspect was not included in the FY16–23 gender strategy. The Bank Group has been developing a sexual orientation and gender identity agenda starting from 2016, but the work of the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation in this area is still very embryonic.

Intersectionality is integrated in the conceptual framework—that is, to recognize that women and girls are not a homogeneous group, and gender is not the only basis on which they are discriminated. Other influent social relations intersect with gender and affect the choice and voice of women and girls and men and boys. Inequalities and marginalization are mostly not experienced in isolation; many women and girls are exposed to multiple deprivations and face constraints in different areas of their lives simultaneously. Ethnicity, race, class, caste, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and location affect the lives and choices of women and girls and those of men and boys. Advancing gender equality implies addressing other types of inequalities at the same time. Intersectionality allows for better understanding of the intersecting needs and inequalities experienced by those groups of women and girls who are particularly marginalized.

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[1] "Positive masculinity" refers to the alternatives to hegemonic masculinity (frequently defined as "toxic masculinity") that promote more inclusive, empathetic, caring, and egalitarian forms of manhood (Lomas 2013). Positive masculinity "reflects a developmental process towards healthy masculine identities that are supportive of gender equality" (Wilson et al. 2022, 2) and implies the adoption of a perspective that aims to accentuate the strengths and beneficial aspects of a masculine identity.

Appendix C. Evolution of World Bank Group Strategic Approach to Gender Equality

In 1977, the World Bank was the first multilateral institution to appoint a Women in Development adviser, two years after the United Nations First World Conference on Women (1975). In 1984, the World Bank issued Operational Manual Statement 2.20, which called for World Bank staff to consider women's issues as part of the social analysis undertaken during the appraisal of an investment project and to assess and address through project design any disadvantageous effects on women. In 1987, the Women in Development Unit was established in the central Population and Human Resources Department, and in 1990, regional Women in Development coordinator positions were created. In 1990, an operational directive on poverty reduction recommended that women's issues be considered when designing poverty reduction programs.

At its 1994 meeting, the World Bank Board of Executive Directors discussed and approved a strategy paper titled "Enhancing Women's Participation in Economic Development" (World Bank 1994). This strategy paper reflected the significant shift in the global agenda for gender equality that would become apparent a year later at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, and marks the switch from the early women in development programs (which treated women as a special target group of beneficiaries in projects and programs) to the gender and development approach (which highlights women's contribution to development while challenging the structures that maintain gender roles, relations, and hierarchies).

The discussion led to World Bank Operational Policy 4.20: The Gender Dimension of Development (OP 4.20), originally established in 1994, revised several times since then, and still operational today. OP 4.20 required staff to "reduce gender disparity and increase the participation of women in the economic development of their countries" (World Bank 2005, ix) as part of its mandate to reduce poverty. OP 4.20 acknowledged that to reduce poverty effectively and in a sustainable manner, development assistance needed to be designed to address the differential impacts of development interventions on women and men. OP 4.20 marked the shift from the women in development approach—focusing exclusively on women, their roles, responsibilities, and needs, without regard to the gendered power relationship between men and women within which these were embedded—to a broader and structural integration of gender issues into World Bank assistance, which would ultimately increase women's empowerment and participation in economic development. OP 4.20 underscored the importance of country ownership and commitment for World Bank support to be effective in helping reduce gender disparities. Two points of entry—one through the country strategy and the other through project appraisal—provided the means to integrate gender considerations into World Bank support for the next few years.

In 1995, the World Bank president participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. In 1996, the External Gender Consultative Group was established. The group comprised 14 members, including representatives of national women's organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and political organizations from around the world. These members were to assist the World Bank in designing and implementing gender policies and help strengthen gender-related dialogue with World Bank partners and interested sectors of civil society. In 2011, this external consultative body was relaunched as the Advisory Council on Gender and Development. The council meets twice a year to consider progress on, and constraints to, gender equality globally and to provide feedback and advice on the World Bank's work in this area.

In 1997, the Gender and Development Unit was created as part of the Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network. The Gender and Development Board—with the Gender and Development Unit as its secretariat—was made responsible for overseeing knowledge management, monitoring and reporting on the status of policy implementation, and building capacity.

In April 2001, the World Bank strengthened the country-level approach through a gender strategy paper—*Integrating Gender into the World Bank's Work: A Strategy for Action*—discussed by the World Bank Group Board; the strategy went into effect on January 1, 2002, and its goal was to "mainstream gender-responsive actions into the development assistance work of the World Bank" (World Bank 2002, ix). This strategy introduced the use of a new diagnostic tool—the Country Gender Assessment—and promised that a Country Gender Assessment for every active borrower would be completed by fiscal year (FY)05. Country Gender Assessments were expected to inform country strategies, which were to include, as relevant, gender-responsive interventions. Sector managers and task teams were to ensure that gender considerations received appropriate treatment in operations in sectors and for themes that the country strategy identified as priorities for gender.

In 2007, the World Bank launched a four-year gender action plan—Gender Equality as Smart Economics—which closed in 2011. Recognizing shortfalls in integration of gender issues at the operational level in selected sectors, the action plan encouraged gender mainstreaming by providing staff with incentives to integrate gender issues into predetermined sectors and activities—in particular, agriculture, infrastructure, the labor market, entrepreneurship, and the private sector.

In 2008, the Women in Business Program was launched at the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

In 2010, gender was chosen as a special theme of the 16th Replenishment of the International Development Association. It has remained a special theme in all Replenishments ever since, including in the current Replenishment cycle (2022–25; the 20th Replenishment).

In 2012, the *World Development Report* topic was gender equality and development, which argued that closing gender gaps is important in its own right but can also enhance productivity and improve development outcomes (World Bank 2012).

In 2013, the IFC Global Gender Team started as the Gender Secretariat with the purpose of driving the integration of gender considerations into IFC's operations and investments. The creation of the Gender Secretariat marked a formal step in enhancing IFC's commitment to gender equality, aligning it with global development goals and the recognition of women as key economic actors. The Gender Secretariat aimed to mainstream gender across all IFC projects and activities to ensure that gender equality was a core part of its investment and advisory strategies. By establishing the Global Gender Team as the Gender Secretariat, IFC aimed to drive a strategic and systematic approach to gender equality, recognizing it as a key driver of sustainable development and economic growth.

In 2013, the Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality was established. It is the only multidonor trust fund dedicated to financing data and evidence to support policy dialogue and identify what works to close gender inequalities.

In 2014, the Gender Secretariat's role expanded and evolved significantly within the Cross-Cutting Advisory Solutions Group created in 2014, where gender was one of the critical thematic areas. In 2015, the Gender Secretariat had a dual reporting to the World Bank and IFC that lasted two years. The Gender Secretariat became the Gender and Economic Inclusion Group under the Cross-Cutting Solutions Vice Presidential Unit. The Gender Group became a part of the Cross-Cutting Solutions Group, alongside other key focus areas, such as climate and fragility, conflict, and violence, aiming to incorporate gender considerations into all aspects of IFC's operations and investments. This group was established to address broad, systemic challenges that cut across sectors and regions.

In 2014, the Bank Group listed gender as a cross-cutting solutions area. Originally a separate unit, gender later mapped under the Equitable Growth, Finance, and Institutions Practice Group and recently moved under the Human Development Practice Group.

In December 2015, the Bank Group presented its new FY16–23 gender strategy to the Bank Group Board. The new strategy identified priority areas for engagement and set up a new methodology to measure results (World Bank Group 2015).

In 2016, IFC developed a gender strategy implementation plan for FY17–19 and, in 2019, a second one for FY20–23 to direct the second phase.

In 2016, the World Bank appointed the first global adviser on sexual orientation and gender identity, with the purpose of integrating sexual orientation and gender identity inclusion and nondiscrimination in all World Bank–financed development projects.

In 2016, IFC's Gender Secretariat became the Gender Business Group remapped to the Economics and Private Sector Development Vice Presidential Unit, reflecting the growing importance of gender issues within IFC and the need for a more structured approach to integrating gender considerations into its operations. The Gender Business Group expanded its role and influence across IFC's investments and advisory services, institutionalizing gender equality as a core element of IFC's business strategy.

At the end of 2017, a gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment action plan was introduced, after those issues were brought to the fore by the Uganda Transport Sector Development Project Inspection Panel case in September 2015. This action plan is now considered part of the Environmental and Social Framework implementation.

In 2020, the Gender Business Group became the Gender and Economic Inclusion Group with a broadened mandate to include economic inclusion and was remapped to the Sustainability, Environmental, Social, and Governance Department, with director coverage and enhanced vision to deepen and expand its efforts on gender and inclusion.

In FY21, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency launched its first gender strategy implementation plan (2021–23), which identified opportunities for increased gender actions aligned with three strategic pillars: corporate, client engagement, and partnerships.

In 2023, the Gender and Economic Inclusion Group transitioned into its own directorship and an official department, with a greater ability to push for gender equality, inclusion, and women's economic empowerment across IFC's global operations, making gender-smart solutions, gender equality, and economic inclusion an even higher organizational priority.

In calendar year 2024, the Bank Group launched its new 2024–30 gender strategy. The strategy builds on the previous one, with an increased focus on gender-based violence, childcare and older adult care, digital solutions, mobility, and engagement of women as leaders. The new strategy plans to cover sexual and gender minorities and expand attention to intersectionality. Its theory of action emphasizes innovation, financing, and acting collectively using partnerships and stakeholder engagement. The new strategy also commits to strengthening the accountability framework by complementing the gender tag and the gender flag with monitoring at implementation and closing and enhancing gender outcome orientation in country engagement (World Bank Group 2024).

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Appendix D. Country Case Studies

The evaluation team conducted eight country case studies to assess the engagement for gender equality of the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and its results. The unit of analysis was the country engagement, which included the World Bank's and IFC's country lending portfolios, analytic work, convening engagements (including policy dialogue and coordination with development partners and other stakeholders), and corporate activities (such as gender training and support and internal coordination). The case studies also included the analysis of country contexts with respect to gender issues; country policy, legal, and institutional frameworks; and role, agenda, and coordination of engaged development partners and other key stakeholders.

Country Selection

Eight countries were selected as case studies, among 86 eligible ones (figure D.1). The evaluation adopted a purposive selection strategy, aimed at capturing good practices of country engagement and operations. The criteria of selection of country cases were as follows:

- Eligibility criteria:
  - Exclusion of high-income countries: Only low- and middle-income countries were eligible.
  - Exclusion of countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV): FCV countries were not eligible for selection because the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) evaluation *Addressing Gender Inequalities in Countries Affected by Fragility, Conflict, and Violence: An Evaluation of the World Bank Group's Support* focused exclusively on FCV countries (World Bank 2023). Non-FCV countries facing FCV challenges at the subnational level were eligible.[1]

- Diversification criteria:
  - Representation of the seven Regions: East Asia and Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and Western and Central Africa (one country per subregion, except in Latin America and the Caribbean, where two countries were selected because of the larger number of countries with respect to the other Regions).
  - Inclusion of the different categories of borrower countries: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the Arab Republic of Egypt, Mexico, and Peru), blend (Uzbekistan), and the International Development Association (Bangladesh, Benin, and Tanzania).
- Programmatic criteria:
  - Significant engagement for gender equality: Countries with promising practices of country engagement and having a significant gender-relevant portfolio, including flagship projects, as identified by strategic documents and key informants. The presence of substantial evidence of country engagement was required for the analysis of the results of the World Bank and IFC engagement for gender equality and their enabling (or constraining) factors—which explains this positive selection.
  - Presence of both World Bank and IFC gender-focused interventions: Only one country (Benin) did not include IFC gender engagement.
- Complementary criteria:
  - Levels of gender inequalities: Countries with higher levels of gender inequalities, all other criteria being equal (the comparison done within the regions). Countries were ranked using two different international gender indexes—the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Social Institutions and Gender Index and the United Nations Development Programme Gender Inequality Index. The rationale to prefer countries, in the same region, with higher level of gender inequality, was that in these countries the engagement for gender equality was more urgent to contribute to their economic growth and shared prosperity.

IEG developed a detailed protocol for the selection of the case studies. The protocol included the following steps:

1. Identification of eligible countries: A total of 86 eligible countries were identified based on the two eligibility criteria explained in this section.

2. Identification of countries implementing a country-driven approach or with significant flagship operations: On the basis of a review of strategic documents (fiscal year [FY]16–23 gender strategy and its annual updates to the Board, regional gender action plans and their updates, and IFC gender strategy implementation plans); *World Bank Group Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review: An Assessment by the Independent Evaluation Group* (World Bank 2021); and World Bank Group guidance (for Country Management Units), IEG identified those countries highlighted for their promising experience of implementation of a country-driven approach for gender equality and those with significant flagship operations. (A data set of flagship operations was developed to this end.)

3. Short list of 36 countries: A data set was created for the 86 eligible countries containing the following information: country, Region, borrower category, income level, total commitment, Social Institutions and Gender Index category, Gender Inequality Index quartile, implementation of a country-driven approach (from previous step), number of World Bank flagship operations (from previous step), and number of IFC flagship operations (from previous step). Countries were ranked based on the selection criteria, and 36 countries were short-listed.

4. Consultations with key informants at the corporate and regional levels: IEG consulted the World Bank and IFC gender teams and regional gender coordinators to verify the positive examples of countries implementing good practices of country-driven approach, collect additional information on relevant activities in the different regions, and assess the feasibility of case studies. These key informants were consulted in two different steps: during the preselection of 16 countries and during the final selection of the eight case studies. For the preselection of 16 countries, most key informants were at the corporate level, whereas for the final selection, all key informants were at the regional level.

5. Preselection of 16 candidate countries: A total of 16 potential countries were preselected based on the information retrieved by key informants and further comparative analysis. A data set was compiled with the characteristics of each candidate, defining the typology of each case. The information was internally discussed.

6. Final selection of eight case studies: The eight case studies were selected based on the following:

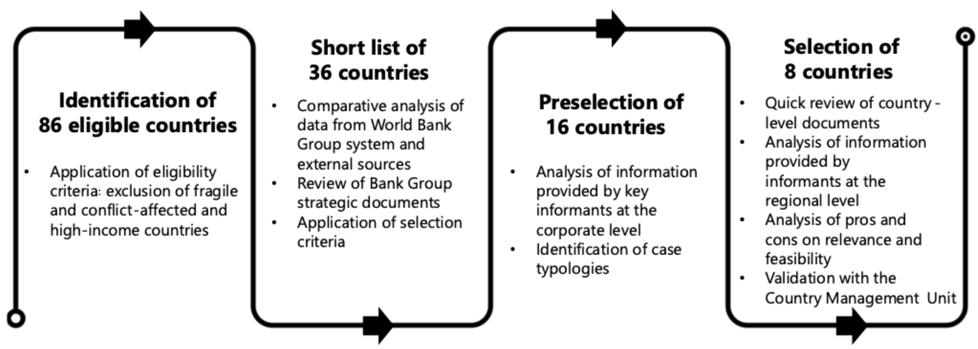
   » A quick desk review (of country strategies, portfolio, and knowledge products);

   » The analysis of information retrieved by consultations with World Bank and IFC key informants at the regional level (as explained in this appendix);

   » The analysis of pros and cons of the choice of each case study based on criteria of relevance and feasibility; and

   » As the final step, the communication with the country director to discuss the feasibility and pros and cons of conducting the case study and to validate the choice (the country directors involved country managers, regional gender coordinators, and gender focal points in the discussion).

Figure D.1. Process for Selection of Case Study Countries

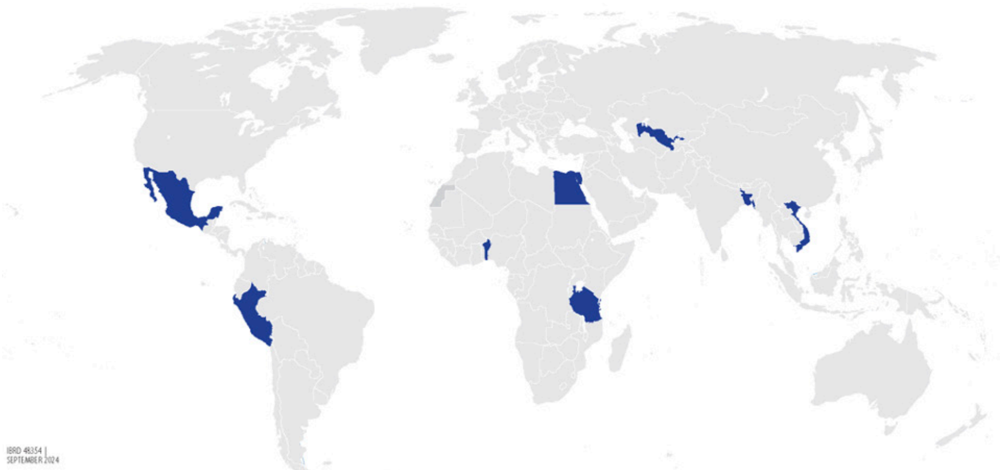


Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Country Case Studies

The case study countries selected were Bangladesh, Benin, Egypt, Mexico, Peru, Tanzania, Uzbekistan, and Viet Nam (figure D.2 and table D.1). Peru, Tanzania, and Viet Nam are fast-tracking countries for the new 2024–30 gender strategy (World Bank Group 2024).[2]

Figure D.2. Case Study Countries



Source: Independent Evaluation Group. This map has been cleared by the World Bank Group cartography unit.

Table D.1. Country Case Studies according to the Criteria of Selection

Criteria of Selection	Bangladesh	Benin	Egypt, Arab Rep.	Mexico	Peru	Tanzania	Uzbekistan	Viet Nam
Diversification: Lending category	IDA	IDA	IBRD	IBRD	IBRD	IDA	Blend	IBRD
Programmatic: Country-driven approach	Yes	Yes	Yes	—	—	—	—	Yes
Programmatic: Both World Bank and IFC gender engagement	Yes	Only World Bank	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Programmatic: Gender-relevant portfolio and flag-ship projects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Level of gender inequalities (SIGI)	Very high	Medium	n.a.	Low	Low	High	n.a.	Low
Level of gen-der inequalities: Quartile (GII)	4	4	3	2	3	4	2	2

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: — not available; GII = Gender Inequality Index; IBRD = International Bank for Reconstruction and Development; IDA = International Development Association; IFC = International Finance Corporation; n.a. = not applicable; SIGI = Social Institutions and Gender Index.

Case Study Data Collection

A pilot country case study was conducted in Benin as part of the evaluation inception exercise. A mission to the country was conducted in June–July 2023.

The pilot country case study allowed IEG to

- Validate the criteria for country case selection;
- Test the methodology and tools used for data collection and analysis;
- Test the main research hypotheses; and
- Assess the evaluability of the various evaluation components.

Benin was identified as the pilot case study because of its diverse portfolio and promising practice of implementation of a country-driven approach (the preparation of a stand-alone development policy operation based on policy dialogue informed by robust evidence and supported by internal coordination).

Because of the absence of gender-relevant initiatives of IFC in Benin, the tools for data collection for IFC were tested in the second case study (Bangladesh), where a mission was conducted in September 2023.

Technical Support and Coordination of Case Studies

Case study teams were trained and received technical support during data collection and analysis, with the purpose of harmonization and quality assurance. A senior consultant, who developed the tools and conducted the pilot case study jointly with the task team leader (TTL), was responsible for the technical support and coordination of the case studies. A detailed guidance document was developed and used to train the case study authors, and tools were provided for data collection and reporting, including the portfolio tool, gender gap taxonomy tool, interviews and focus group guides (to be adapted to the specific context by case study teams), the template to compile the preliminary findings, and the template for final reporting.

Case studies encompassed virtual and in-country activities. Four countries—Bangladesh, Benin, Egypt, and Uzbekistan—entailed country case missions. Three case studies—Peru, Tanzania, and Viet Nam—were conducted through a combination of virtual engagement and work by local consultants. A case study in Mexico was conducted by two local consultants.

Case Study Activities

Each case study involved the following activities (table D.2):

1. Desk review of Bank Group strategic documents covering 2012–23, including Systematic Country Diagnostics, Country Partnership Frameworks, Performance and Learning Reviews, Completion and Learning Reviews, Completion and Learning Review Validations, Country Private Sector Diagnostics, Country Economic Memorandums, and regional gender action plans and updates.

2. Desk review of Bank Group knowledge products, including poverty assessment, Jobs Diagnostics, gender assessment, and any other gender-relevant analytic work produced by the World Bank and IFC.

3. Desk review of gender statistics and external literature, including country gender profiles and reports (including Beijing Platform for Action and Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reports); gender studies relevant for the World Bank and IFC sectors of interventions; government's relevant policies and programs; and development partners' and other key stakeholders' gender agenda (including the agenda of gender coordination mechanisms).

4. Desk review of World Bank and IFC lending and stand-alone advisory services and analytics portfolio between 2012 and 2023. The manual review of the World Bank and IFC lending portfolio was based on a specific tool, which aimed to assess various characteristics of the lending portfolio and allow the selection of the deep dives (activities for in-depth assessment). The unit of analysis was the parent project (additional financing projects were assessed jointly with the parent project). The lending portfolio was assessed under different profiles to identify the promising "gender-smart solutions." The characteristics attributed to the promising gender-smart

solutions were as follows: (i) expected gender relevance; (ii) expected relevance to the context and target group (based on the evidence integrated in design and review of statistics and literature); (iii) gender-transformative potential; (iv) expected effectiveness (based on the evidence included in project design); and (v) for advanced or closed projects, achieved effectiveness (based on monitoring and evaluation reports).

The portfolio review was also used to identify the TTLs (and other project team members) to be interviewed. The TTLs and project team members of four categories of projects were interviewed: (i) promising gender-smart solutions; (ii) gender-relevant projects flagged as promising practices by the corporate, regional, and country strategic documents; (iii) gender-relevant projects flagged by key informants with gender positions at the regional and country levels; and (iv) most significant or promising gender-relevant projects of each Global Practice or industry in the country. The interview with the TTLs provided the information to select the projects for the interview with the project implementation units and IFC clients for interviews. Moreover, the review of the lending portfolio was used to select the deep dives, using a step-by-step process of progressive selection, and the additional information collected through interviews with World Bank and IFC staff, project implementation units, and clients. The activities were preselected for the deep dive if they were promising gender-smart solutions in an advanced phase of implementation (to be able to assess their achievements). Among the potential deep dives, the final selection of deep dives was discussed with the World Bank and IFC staff and implementing partners and with the evaluation team. The feasibility, the value added of the deep dive, and logistics issues were the main criteria considered for the final selection.

5. Semistructured interviews with (i) World Bank and IFC staff: project TTLs and project leaders and team members, regional and country gender leaders, country manager, other key country team staff (operation specialist, social development specialist, and monitoring and evaluation specialist); (ii) project implementation units; (iii) government's representatives; and (iv) focus groups with international nongovernmental organizations

engaged in gender equality, national civil society organizations engaged in gender equality, and women's rights organizations.

6. Light dives for one to three interventions (or clusters of interventions)[3] of the World Bank and IFC, consisting of a more in-depth document review than the standard document review, and a higher number of interviews with World Bank and IFC staff and implementing partners and clients—but without field visits and without consulting beneficiaries.

7. Deep dives for one to four interventions (or clusters of interventions) of the World Bank and IFC, out of the gender-relevant portfolio. The deep dives included (i) in-depth document review (retrieving additional documentation from key informants); (ii) semistructured interviews with governmental and nongovernmental implementing partners and IFC clients at the national level; (iii) interviews with female and male beneficiaries (for IFC) and field visits with semistructured interviews with local implementing partners and key stakeholders (for the World Bank); and (iv) visits to communities and project-supported facilities and services, including semistructured interviews and focus groups with female and male direct and indirect beneficiaries. IEG conducted only two deep dives for IFC interventions—both in Egypt—because in the other countries, it was impossible to meet with the final beneficiaries of IFC.

Table D.2. Case Study Interviews, Focus Groups, and Deep Dives (number)

Case Study	Interviews	Focus Groups	Light Dives	IFC Light Dives	Deep Dives	IFC Deep Dives
Bangladesh	62	34	2	0	3	1
Benin	59	28	1	0	3	0
Egypt, Arab Rep.	32	16	2	2	3	2
Mexico	39	4	2	1	1	0
Peru	109	9	3	1	2	0

(continued)

Case Study	Interviews	Focus Groups	Light Dives	IFC Light Dives	Deep Dives	IFC Deep Dives
Tanzania	41	5	3	1	1	0
Uzbekistan	81	11	2	1	4	0
Viet Nam	50	5	2	1	1	0
Total	473	112	17	7	18	3

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: Interviews include both individual and group interviews. IFC = International Finance Corporation.

Compilation of Findings

The preliminary findings of each case study were discussed with the IEG evaluation team (including the TTL, co-TTL, and all consultants involved in the evaluation) to test their robustness. The preliminary findings of Egypt and Peru case studies were also discussed with the country teams. The findings of each case study were summarized in a structured country report. The case study authors developed the country report using a template to facilitate the cross-country analysis of the findings. The template was structured based on the evaluation questions.

Cross-Country Analysis of Case Studies

The cross-country analysis of the case studies involved an analysis of (i) the evolution and quality of country engagement for gender equality, (ii) the projects contributing to institutional change, (iii) the deep-dive projects, (iv) the recent promising designs, and (v) the factors enabling and constraining the country engagement and its results. The categories of factors were developed using a mix of inductive and deductive methods. The deductive method aimed at harmonizing the categories of factors with those derived from the analysis of corporate interviews.

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World Bank Group. 2024. *World Bank Group Gender Strategy 2024–2030: Accelerate Gender Equality to End Poverty on a Livable Planet.* Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

[1] Indeed, although the topic of gender in countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence was not at the core of this evaluation, we assessed some operations addressing gender inequalities among populations affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (for example, interventions aimed at building populations' resilience to climate changes, deforestation, and natural disasters in Bangladesh, Benin, Mexico, and Peru; projects facing the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh; or projects targeting the conflict-affected areas in Benin).

[2] Fast-tracking countries have been chosen by the Gender Group to track the implementation of the new fiscal year 2024–30 gender strategy. There are not specific funds allocated for this purpose. Fast-tracking countries will allow the Gender Group to test and monitor the implementation of the new strategy by establishing strong interlinks between the country engagement and the overall engagement. Source: interviews with key informants.

[3] These interventions or activities included World Bank projects and advisory services and analytics and International Finance Corporation investments and advisory services. Although most deep dives assessed only one project (lending, advisory, or investment), some deep dives assessed different projects that were coordinated to achieve the same objectives. This is the case, for example, of the development policy operation in Benin that collaborated with one advisory services and analytics of technical assistance and one investment project financing (Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend) to achieve its objectives, or a cluster of projects in Uzbekistan contributing to rural women's economic empowerment.

Appendix E. World Bank and International Finance Corporation Portfolio Reviews

Gender Algorithm and the World Bank and International Finance Corporation Portfolio

To assess the overall evolution of the World Bank and International Finance Corporation (IFC) portfolio, an algorithm was applied to 3,836 World Bank projects (investment project financing [IPF], Programs-for-Results [PforRs], and development policy financing), 3,612 IFC investments, and 1,530 advisory services approved between fiscal year (FY)12 and FY23. An algorithm was used to assign a score of gender intensity to each project as a proxy of gender intensity and separate out the gender-relevant from the non-gender-relevant projects after applying a cutoff value to the score. The exercise was motivated by the decision not to rely on the gender tag and the gender flag to decide which projects were relevant or not (partly because the gender tag and the gender flag were not available before 2017 and partly because relying on the gender tag and the gender flag would have prevented any analysis of them).

Within the gender-relevant projects, a subgroup of stand-alone projects—with a more substantial gender content—was identified. "Stand-alone" projects are defined as those projects that address gender inequalities as part of the project development objectives (PDOs). Stand-alone projects are identified based on a list of gender-relevant keywords appearing in the PDOs.

The Independent Evaluation Group manually reviewed all IFC projects classified as gender relevant (including those stand-alone) and the projects classified as not gender relevant by the algorithm but with a "Y" gender flag.[1]

The score follows the form Score = X*beta, where X is a vector of characteristics including relevant dummies (for example, the presence of a set of gender-relevant keywords in certain attributes, gender being a theme of the project, the Gender Group being a co-leader of the intervention, and so on) and beta is a set of weights that minimize the classification errors against a sample of manually reviewed projects used to calibrate the model. The following steps were undertaken to establish the gender intensity algorithm.

Step 1: Creating Auxiliary Variables

First, the relevant text fields of all projects were screened for keywords, and these variables generated (i) the number of keywords, (ii) dummies for any keywords found, and (iii) dummies for more than three keywords found (this latter variable was used as "intensity bonus"; other thresholds were attempted in calibration, but these three were ultimately chosen). Several combinations of keywords were tried before determining the optimal one (table E.1).

Table E.1. List of Keywords

Type of Keywords	Keywords
Keywords searched as full words (singular and plural)	female, woman, mother, girl, male, man, father, husband, marriage, divorce, widow, parent, abuse, gender, sex
Keywords searched as full words (exact match only)	reproductive, childcare, unpaid, harassment, gbv
Keywords searched as starting fragment	pregnan, matern, lactat, breastfe, childbear, sex
Keywords used only for IFC projects	bow, wefi, weof, wiw, shewin, 2equal

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: All fields were first transformed into lower case and had their punctuation removed. IFC = International Finance Corporation.

Step 2: Defining the Attributes to Be Used

The vector X of dummy attributes for each project was chosen by screening available attributes in the systems and selecting fields that possibly carried information about gender (table E.2). Given that different types of projects have different attributes stored in the World Bank Group data systems and that the structure and content of project documents are specific to the lending instrument, it was necessary to break down the portfolio into three subgroups: World Bank lending projects, IFC advisory projects, and IFC investments.

Table E.2. Attributes Used for Assigning Gender Intensity Score

Attributes That Compose the Vector X		World Bank	IFC Advisory	IFC Investment
A	Dummy for KW in the project name	Yes	Yes	Yes
B	Dummy for KW in the component list	Yes	—	—
C	Dummy for KW in the project development objective or project objective statement	Yes	Yes	Yes
D	Dummy for KW in the indicators text	Yes	Yes	Yes
E	Dummy on whether the number of KWs in the indicators text is greater than or equal to three (note: this can be interpreted as an intensity bonus of the previous attribute)	Yes	Yes	Yes
F	Dummy for Gender GP was a lead or contributing GP to the project	Yes	—	—
G	Dummy for gender included in the project themes classification	Yes	—	—
H	Dummy on whether the gender theme classification marked greater than or equal to 25% as gender content (note: this can be interpreted as an intensity bonus of the previous attribute)	Yes	—	—
I	Dummy for project is identified as 2Equal or SheWINS	—	Yes	—
J	Dummy for project is identified as BoW	—	—	Yes
K	Dummy for project is identified as We-Fi or WEOF	—	—	Yes
L	Dummy for gender is the main business line	—	Yes	—

(continued)

Attributes That Compose the Vector X		World Bank	IFC Advisory	IFC Investment
M	Dummy for gender is a secondary business line	—	Yes	—
N	Dummy for any KW in the project description text	—	Yes	Yes
O	Dummy on whether the number of KWs in the project description text is greater than or equal to three (note: this can be interpreted as an intensity bonus of the previous attribute)	—	Yes	—
P	Dummy for the project was approved before the FY16–23 gender strategy (used only to interact with other attributes—that is, multiplying the other dummies)	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Number of attributes used	9	10	8

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: — = not available; BoW = Banking on Women; FY = fiscal year; GP = Global Practice; IFC = International Finance Corporation; KW = keyword; We-Fi = Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative; WEOF = Women Entrepreneurs Opportunity Facility.

Step 3: Defining the Search and Optimization Strategy for the Set of Weights

For each vector X of attributes to be used in calculating a project gender score, a vector of weights beta had to be assigned. For each of those weights, we first listed three plausible options, which considered our implicit judgment of which attributes were more important. For example, (A), the dummy for a keyword in the project name, had as plausible values 75, 50, and 40. Meanwhile, (P), the dummy for whether the project was approved before the FY16–23 gender strategy, had as plausible values 0, 5, and 10.

The cutoffs for each category also had to be defined, and we also tested three plausible options for each of the cutoffs.

There were many possible combinations of all these options. For example, for the World Bank projects, because there were nine attributes used and two cutoffs, each with three options, there were 177,147 combinations of these parameters (=(9+2)^3). Similar numbers of combinations were tested for IFC projects.

We used the penalty matrix (table E.3) to calculate the penalty for each combination using only the projects that had been manually reviewed—that is, for which the "true" classification was known. Finally, we chose the combination that had the lower total penalty using the lower average gender score as a tiebreaker criterion.

Table E.3. Gender Relevance Categorization

True Classification	Machine Classification		
	Gender stand-alone	Gender relevant	Not gender relevant
Gender stand-alone	0	2	4
Gender relevant	1	0	2
Not gender relevant	2	1	0

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Step 4: Calculation of the Gender Score and Classification Based on Selected Parameters

Calculate the gender score as the sum of the following:

» For World Bank lending projects (the same as for IPF, development policy loans, and PforRs):

a. 50 * dummy for any keyword in the project name;

b. 25 * dummy for any keyword in the component list;

c. 25 * dummy for any keyword in PDO;

d. 10 * dummy for any keyword in the indicators text;

e. 10 * dummy on whether the number of keywords in the indicators text is greater than or equal to three (note: this can be interpreted as an intensity bonus for the previous attribute);

f. 10 * dummy for Gender Global Practice was a lead or contributing Global Practice to the project;

g. 10 * dummy for gender included in the project themes classification;

h. 10 * dummy on whether the gender theme classification marked greater than or equal to 25 percent as gender content (note: this can be interpreted as an intensity bonus for the previous attribute);

i. Extra score of 5 for each of the factors listed in (d) through (h) only if the project was approved before the FY16–23 gender strategy; in practice, this means that the weights of these factors were either 10 or 15, depending on the approval year.

» For IFC advisory projects:

j. 70 * dummy for 2Equal or SheWINS project (identified through the project name or the project objective statement);

k. 70 * dummy for Gender is the main business line [reflected as (*primarybusinessarea* = “ESG-Gen” | “CAS-Gender”) or (*primaryproductinprimarysub* = “Gender” | “Women’s Employment”)];

l. 50 * dummy for any keyword in the project name;

m. 50 * dummy for any keyword in the project objective statement;

n. 25 * dummy for gender is a secondary business line (reflected as whether “Gender” was listed in *businesslineproducts*);

o. 10 * dummy for any keyword in the indicators text;

p. 10 * dummy on whether the number of keywords in the indicators text is greater than or equal to three (note: this can be interpreted as an intensity bonus for the previous attribute);

q. 10 * dummy for any keyword in the project description text;

r. 10 * dummy on whether the number of keywords in the project description text is greater than or equal to three (note: this can be interpreted as an intensity bonus for the previous attribute);

s. Extra score of 5 for each of the factors listed in (o) through (r) only if the project was approved before the FY16–23 gender strategy; in practice, this means that the weights of these factors were either 10 or 15, depending on the approval year.

» For IFC investment projects:

t. 70 * dummy for Banking on Women project (identified through the project name);

u. 50 * dummy for any keyword in the project name;

v. 25 * dummy for Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative or Women Entrepreneurs Opportunity Facility project (identified through the *blendedfinancefacility*);

w. 10 * dummy for any keyword in the indicators text;

x. 10 * dummy on whether the number of keywords in the indicators text is greater than or equal to three (note: this can be interpreted as an intensity bonus for the previous attribute);

y. 10 * dummy for any keyword in the project description text;

z. Extra score of 5 for each of the factors listed in (w) through (y) only if the project was approved before the FY16–23 gender strategy; in practice, this means that the weights of these factors were either 10 or 15, depending on the approval year.

Classifying Based on Gender Score Using Cutoffs

World Bank projects were classified as follows:

» Gender irrelevant if the gender score is ⩽15;

» Gender relevant if the gender score is between 15 and 45;

» Gender stand-alone if the gender score is ⩾45.

IFC projects (both advisory and investment) were classified as follows:

» Gender irrelevant if the gender score is <20;

- Gender relevant if the gender score is ⩾20 and <80;
- Gender stand-alone if the gender score is ⩾80.

Step 5: Final Adjustments

There were two additional adjustments done postcalibration[2] for World Bank and IFC projects:

- The gender score was censored at 100—that is, it is the minimum between the calculated score and 100. This does not affect the classification because such projects were and remained classified as gender stand-alone. This is only a measure to curb the long tail of the gender score distribution.
- World Bank child projects, such as additional financing projects or nonfirst development policy operations (DPOs) in a programmatic series, were assigned the maximum between the parent project score and their own score. This was a measure intended to address a problem of missing fields for child projects (especially indicators). Out of 4,625 World Bank projects, there were 1,088 child projects, and the algorithm assigned the classification of the child project matches the parent in two-thirds of the cases (714 = 516 + 157 + 41 cases / 1,088 total) and differs in one-third of the cases. The direction of the difference was most often the child is marked with lower gender content than the parent (270 out of 374 cases, or 72 percent of times). These were the cases affected by this measure—these 270 cases were "upgraded" to the gender score and gender classification of their respective parent project.

The final score is discrete and takes value 0, 10, 15, 20, 25…95, 100.

Step 6: Robustness Tests

The robustness tests included two key activities: (i) comparison of the algorithm scores for 122 manually reviewed stand-alone projects and (ii) comparison of the algorithm score with manually reviewed projects from the country case studies. The 122 stand-alone projects—projects addressing gender inequalities in one of the PDOs—were reviewed manually. The score derived from the algorithm for this group of projects was assessed against the manual review. The results indicated that the stand-alone projects had the highest score. Moreover, the gender stand-alone projects with the lowest algorithm score were also projects that did not have a strong gender-transformative content. All the country case study projects were manually reviewed. Part of the country case study portfolio of projects was assessed against the score. The results indicated a very strong correlation between the manually determined gender relevance and the score assigned by the algorithm.

For IFC, the robustness tests of the algorithm involved two key activities (i) comparison of the algorithm scores with the manually assigned relevance for 69 stand-alone advisory and 14 stand-alone investment projects and (ii) comparison of the algorithm score with the manually assigned relevance for 154 gender-relevant advisory projects in three business lines (Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services; Financial Institutions Group; and Environmental, Social, and Governance) and 201 gender-relevant investment projects in three industries (Financial Markets, Infrastructure, and Disruptive Technologies and Funds). The results indicate that the stand-alone projects had the highest score and that projects with no or low gender-transformative content had the lowest score.

Stand-Alone Portfolio Review of the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation

Gender stand-alone projects are defined as those that explicitly address gender inequalities as part of their project PDOs. They include operations that entirely focused on advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and sectoral projects that explicitly address gender inequalities in their PDO(s). All selected projects approved between FY12 and FY23 were screened (using the algorithm), and those with a gender intensity score of 45 or higher were short-listed. Manual checks were then performed to remove false positives. The Independent Evaluation Group identified 122 stand-alone projects for the stand-alone desk review of World Bank projects, 14 investments, and 69 advisory services (tables E.4 and E.5).

The portfolio review (figures E.1 through E.5) of the stand-alone World Bank and IFC projects consisted of scoring or coding them using a tool of analysis developed by the evaluation team. The tool was used to capture a set of characteristics through descriptive variables (text), dummy variables, and scalar variables (0–4 scoring system). The evaluator reviewed the project documents and collected information on characteristics of the theory of change, intersectionality issues addressed by the project, production and use of knowledge by the project, internal and external coordination, and engagement with national, local, and community stakeholders. Moreover, a content analysis was conducted to identify (i) specific approaches used by the project in addressing gender inequalities—participatory and holistic or integrated; (ii) the gender-transformative elements included in the project—support to women's and girls' empowerment, support to women's and girls' collective agency, engagement of men and boys for gender equality, addressing of gender norms, or strengthening of the enabling environment for gender equality (one project could integrate more than one gender-transformative element); and (iii) a type of result indicator—capturing the number or share of female beneficiaries, a change in the condition of women and girls (fulfillment of a need and access to a service), a degree of satisfaction with a service provided by the intervention, a change in any dimension of women's and girls' empowerment, and a reduction of a gender gap (analysis of these indicators is provided in the Indicator Analysis: World Bank and International Finance Corporation Portfolio section in this appendix).

Table E.4. World Bank Projects Reviewed for the Stand-Alone Desk Review

Type	Commitment Period	Stand-Alone Active	Stand-Alone Closed	Stand-Alone Total
World Bank projects (IPF and PforR)	Before the gender strategy (≤FY16)	7	34	41
	After the gender strategy (≥FY17)	77	4	81
	Subtotal	84	38	122

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: FY = fiscal year; IPF = investment project financing; PforR = Program-for-Results.

Table E.5. International Finance Corporation Investments and Advisory Services Reviewed for the Stand-Alone Desk Review

Type	Commitment Period	Stand-Alone Evaluated	Stand-Alone Not evaluated	Stand-Alone Total
Advisory	Before the gender strategy (≤FY16)	6	2	8
	After the gender strategy (≥FY17)	6	55	61
	Subtotal	12	57	69
Investment	Before the gender strategy (≤FY16)	0	2	2
	After the gender strategy (≥FY17)	2	10	12
	Subtotal	2	12	14
Total		14	69	83

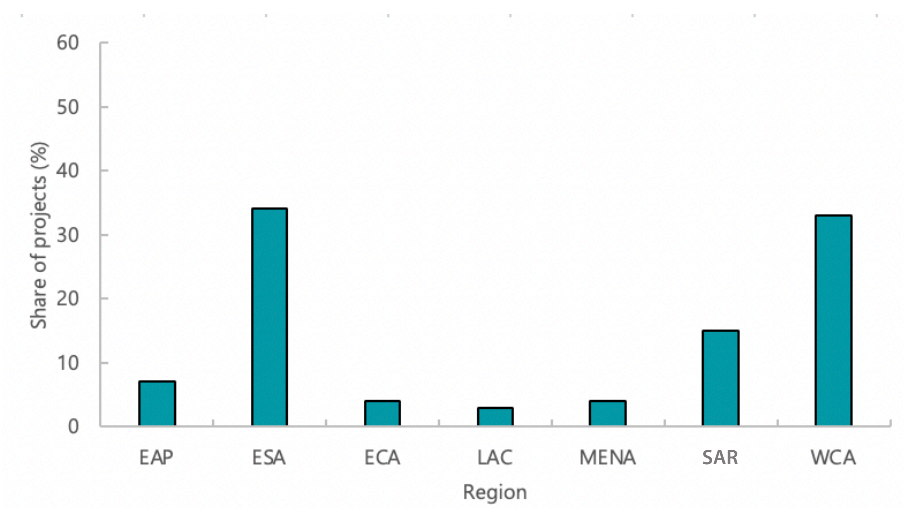
Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: FY = fiscal year.

Figure E.1. World Bank Stand-Alone Projects by Practice Group and Region

a. Stand-alone projects by Practice Group

b. Stand-alone projects by Region

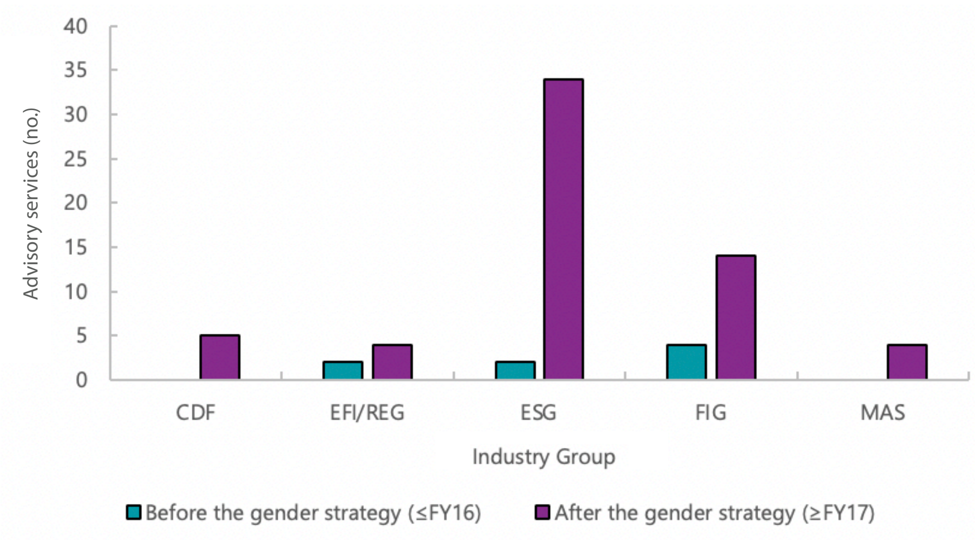


Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

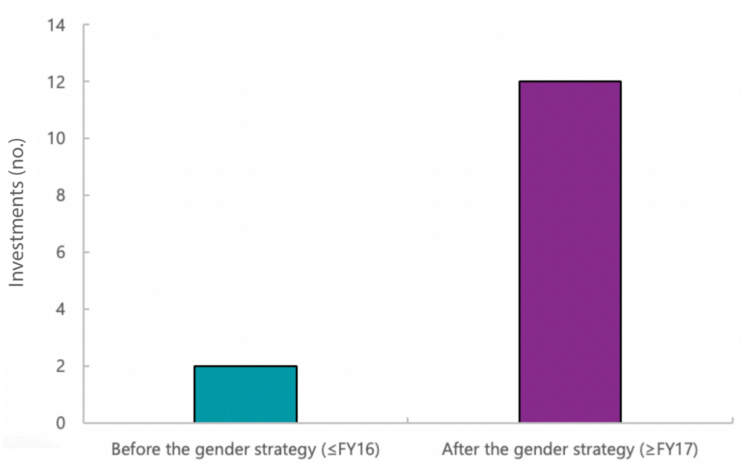
Note: EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; ESA = Eastern and Southern Africa; FY = fiscal year; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; MENA = Middle East and North Africa; SAR = South Asia; WCA = Western and Central Africa.

Figure E.2. International Finance Corporation Stand-Alone Investment Services and Advisory Services by Instrument, Business Line, and Industry Group

a. Stand-alone advisory services



b. Stand-alone investments

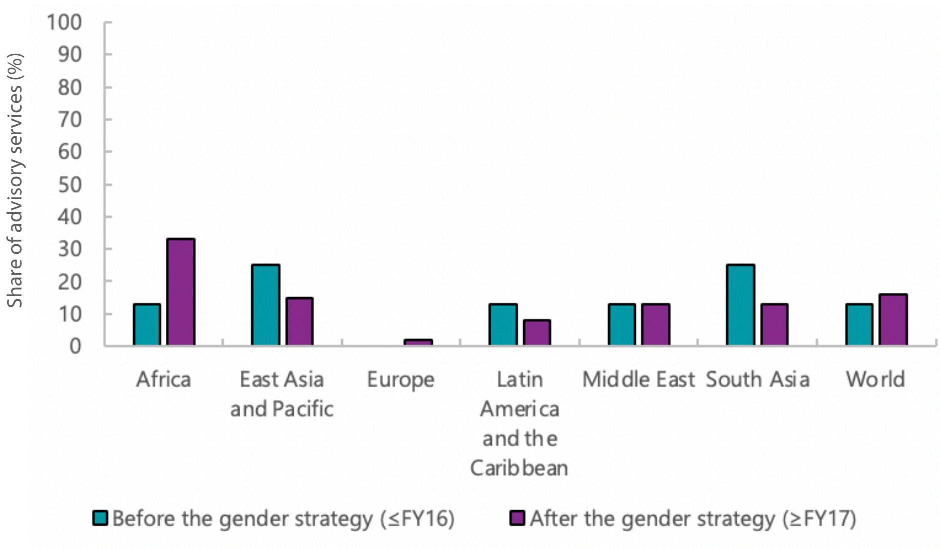


Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

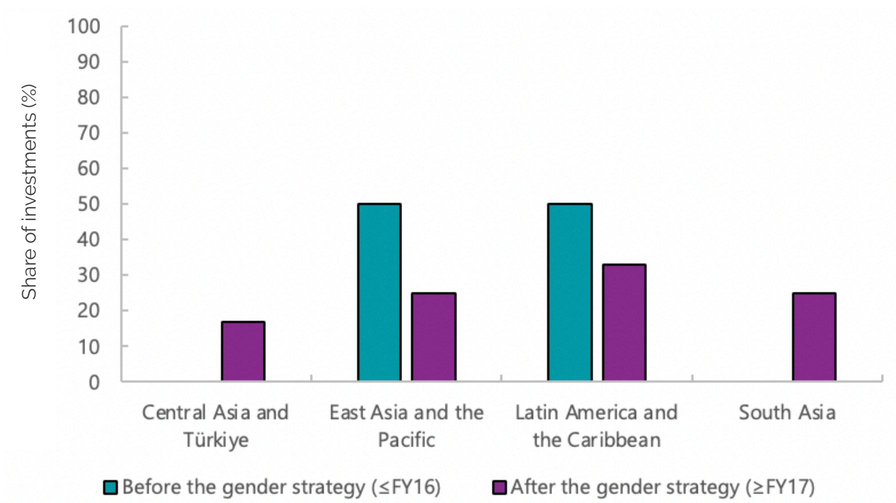
Note: Panel b: All stand-alone investments are in the FM industry group. CDF = Disruptive Technologies and Funds; EFI = Equitable Growth, Finance, and Institutions; ESG = Environmental, Social, and Governance; FIG = Financial Institutions Group; FM = Financial Markets; FY = fiscal year; MAS = Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services; REG = Regional Advisory.

Figure E.3. International Finance Corporation Stand-Alone Investment Services and Advisory Services by Instrument and Region

a. IFC stand-alone advisory services



b. IFC stand-alone investment services



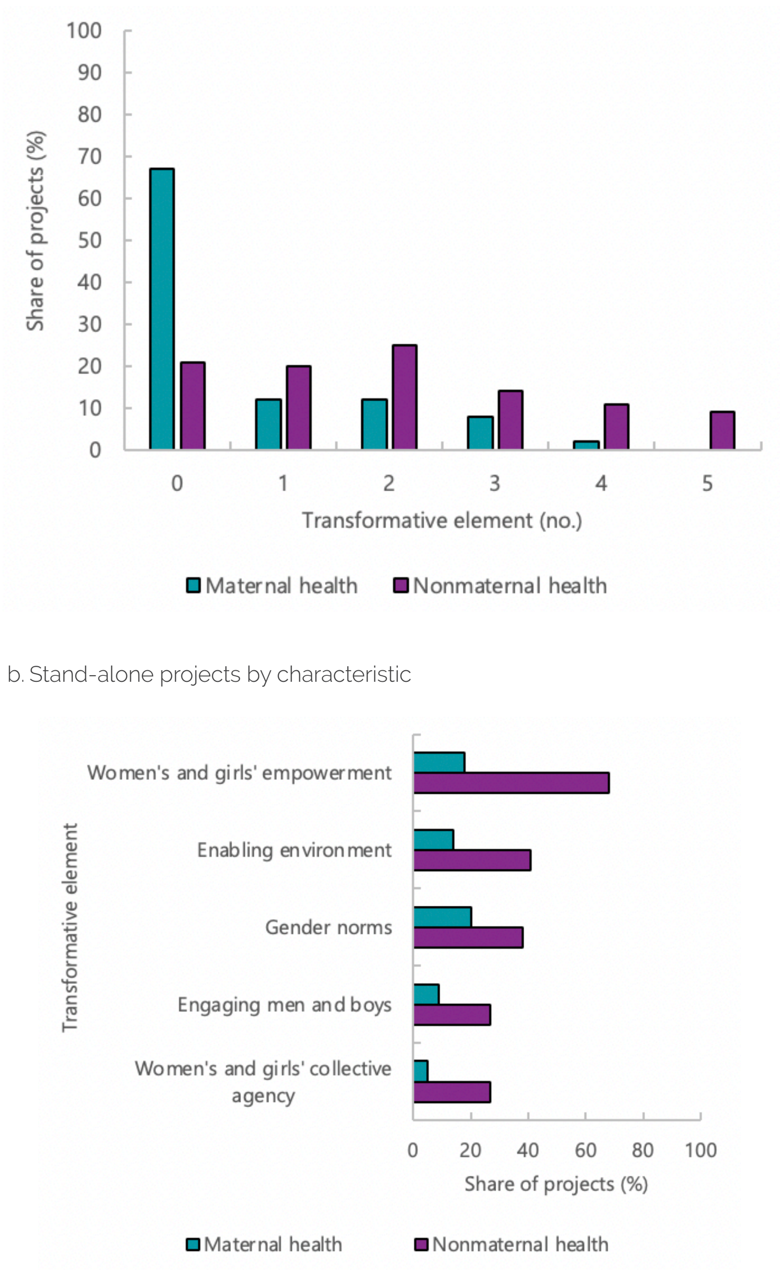
Source: Independent Evaluation Group portfolio review and analysis.

Note: For advisory services, Europe: 0 percent before the gender strategy and 2 percent after the gender strategy. FY = fiscal year; IFC = International Finance Corporation.

Figure E.4. World Bank Stand-Alone Projects by Gender-Transformative Elements

a. Stand-alone projects by number of transformative elements

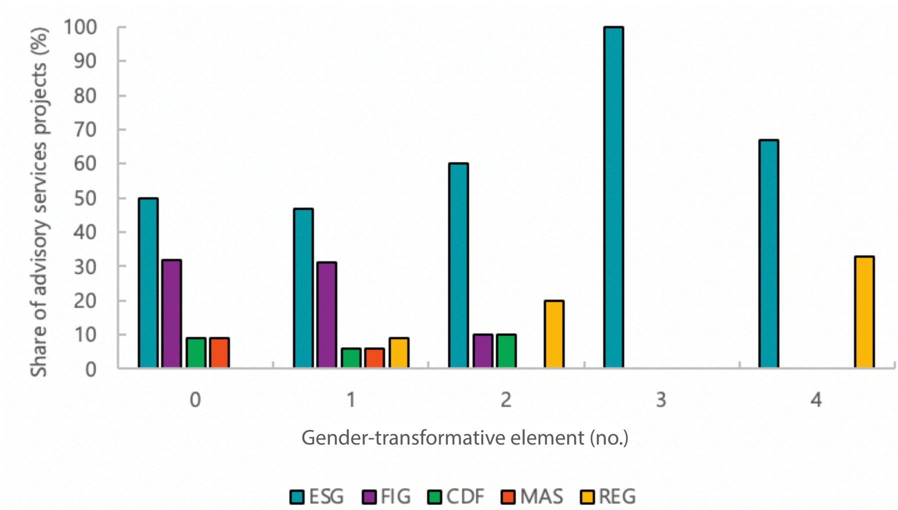
b. Stand-alone projects by characteristic



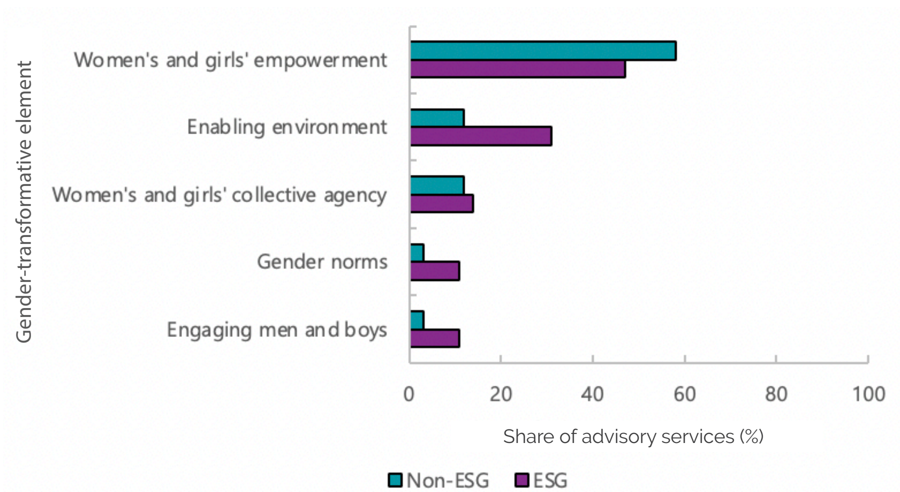
Source: Independent Evaluation Group portfolio review and analysis.

Figure E.5. International Finance Corporation Stand-Alone Advisory Services by Gender-Transformative Elements

a. Stand-alone advisory services by number of gender-transformative elements and business line



b. Stand-alone advisory services by gender-transformative element and business line



Source: Independent Evaluation Group portfolio review and analysis.

Note: The figure shows the percentage of International Finance Corporation advisory (*N* = 69) gender stand-alone projects with specific gender-transformative elements. International Finance Corporation investments were not included because of the low number of stand-alone interventions (*N* = 14). CDF = Disruptive Technologies and Funds; ESG = Environmental, Social, and Governance; FIG = Financial Institutions Group; MAS = Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services; REG = Regional Advisory.

Review of Development Policy Loans

A desk review of DPOs was conducted for 95 “most gender-relevant” DPOs based on the gender relevance algorithm (see the Gender Algorithm and the World Bank and International Finance Corporation Portfolio section in this appendix for details on the gender relevance algorithm). For the desk review, the analysis reviewed the gender gaps, gender actions, and gender indicators. Gender gaps were sourced from the document narrative in the DPO and classified using the 100-category taxonomy (for details on the gender gap taxonomy, see appendix G).

Gender actions, defined as specific activities undertaken to address a gender gap, were identified based on the description of what the DPO prior actions committed the country to do. In some instances, a single prior action included multiple gender actions. Gender actions were categorized based on a taxonomy of actions that identified actions supporting (i) strengthening of institutions and systems, (ii) improvement of data and statistics, (iii) facilitation of implementation of specific programs, (iv) capacity building through training, (v) legal reforms, and (vi) fiscal policy.

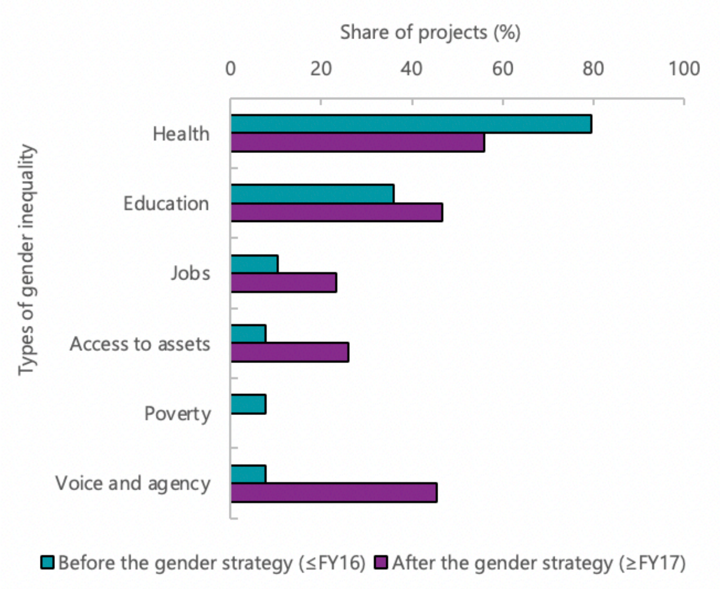
Gender indicators related to the prior actions that had been identified as gender relevant were classified based on the nature of the indicator, capturing (i) the impact and result of the implementation of reforms supported by the DPO on female and male access to services, resources, and other benefits; (ii) the outcome of the reforms in terms of improvement of the enabling environment for gender equality at the national level (improvement of laws, institutional framework, policies, budget allocation, data systems, and actors’ capacities); (iii) the outcomes of the reforms of the DPO in terms of improvement of the enabling environment for gender equality at the local level; and (iv) other.

Gender Gap Analysis of the World Bank and International Finance Corporation Portfolio

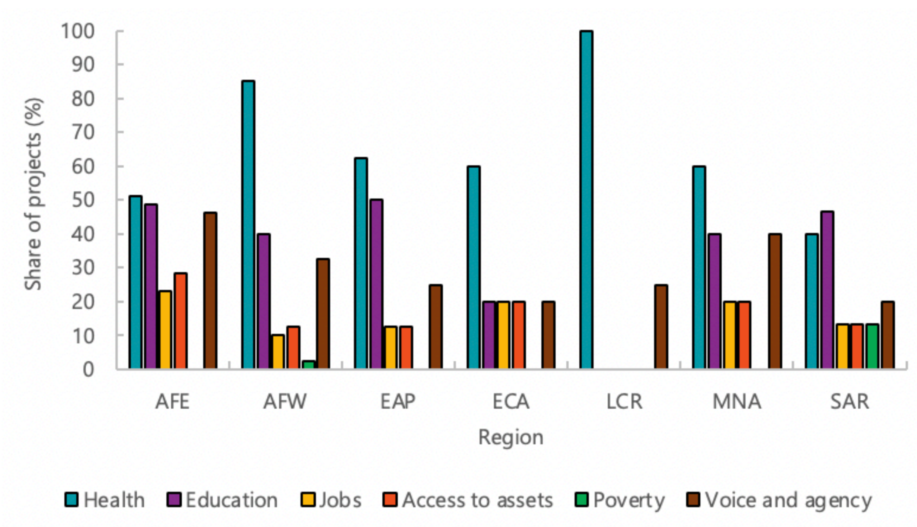
The desk review of the World Bank and IFC portfolios included a content analysis to assign gender gaps to each program using a gender gap taxonomy (for details on the gender gap taxonomy, see appendix G). The taxonomy was used to identify gender gaps addressed by the World Bank projects (stand-alone, development policy loans, and random sample) and gender gaps of all gender-relevant portfolio of IFC investments (N = 298) and IFC advisory services (N = 360) included (figures E.6 through E.10).

Figure E.6. Types of Gender Inequality Addressed by World Bank Stand-Alone Projects by Period and Region

a. Types of gender inequality addressed by stand-alone projects by period



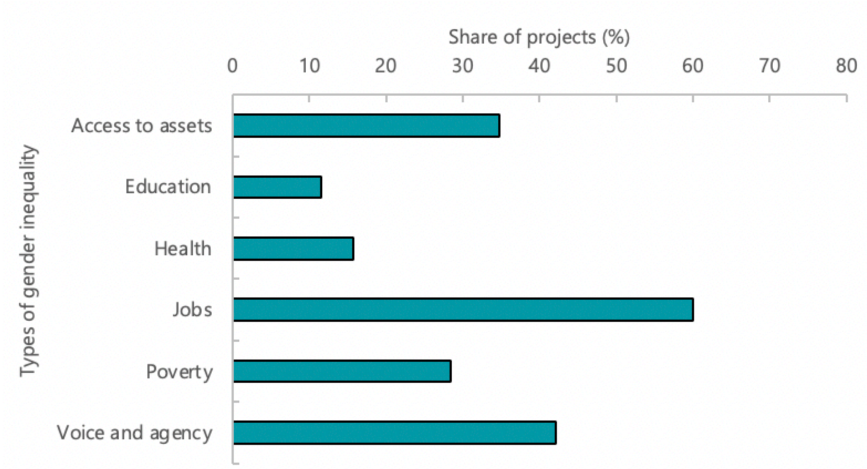
b. Types of gender inequality addressed by stand-alone projects by Region



Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: AFE = Eastern and Southern Africa; AFW = Western and Central Africa; EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; FY = fiscal year; LCR = Latin America and the Caribbean; MNA = Middle East and North Africa; SAR = South Asia.

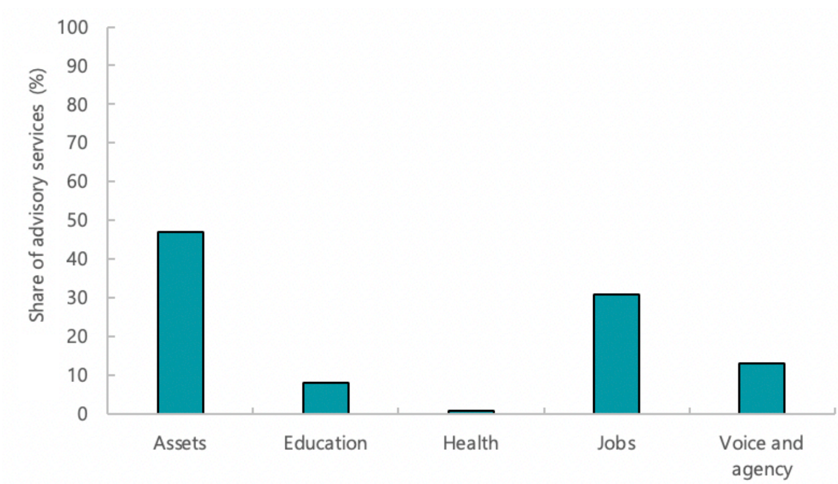
Figure E.7. Types of Gender Inequality Addressed by Development Policy Loans



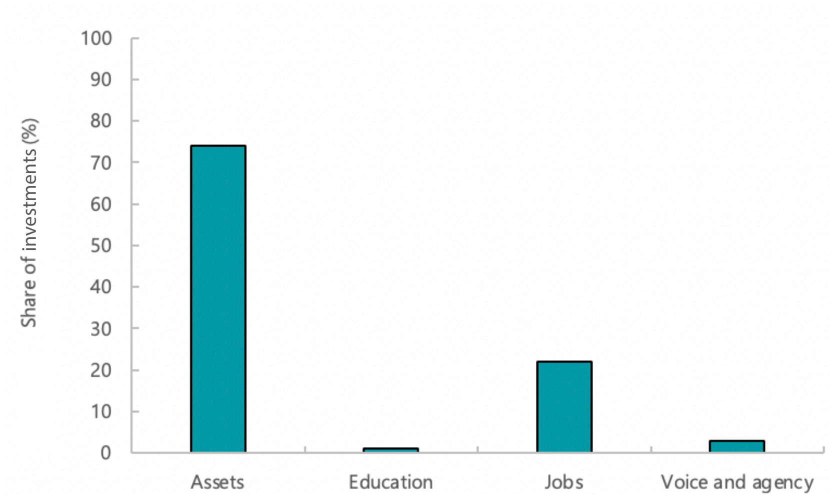
Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Figure E.8. Types of Gender Inequality Addressed by International Finance Corporation Projects

a. Types of gender inequality addressed by IFC advisory services



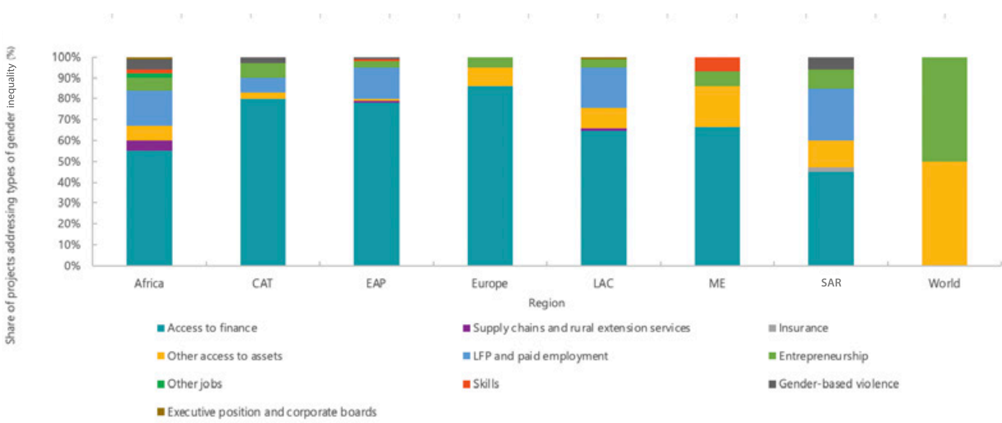
b. Types of gender inequality addressed by IFC investments



Source: Independent Evaluation Group portfolio review and analysis.

Note: IFC = International Finance Corporation.

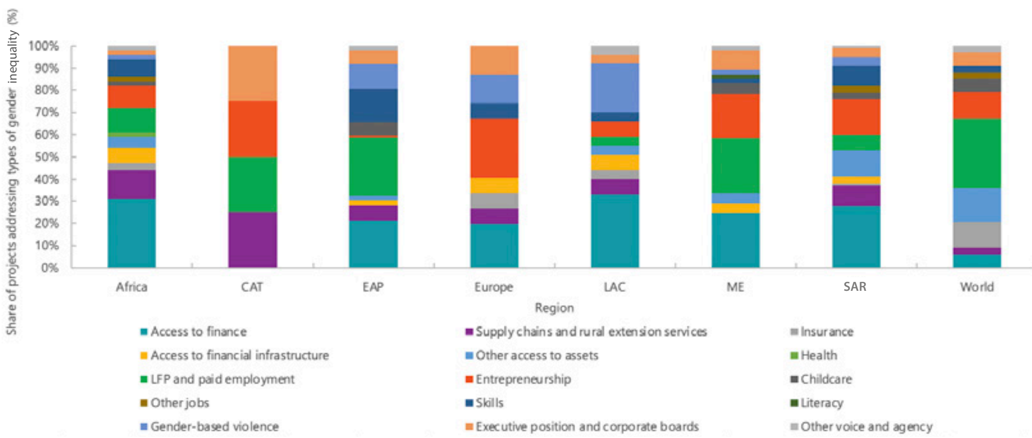
Figure E.9. Types of Gender Inequality Addressed by International Finance Corporation Investments, by Region



Source: Independent Evaluation Group portfolio review and analysis.

Note: CAT = Central Asia and Türkiye; EAP = East Asia and Pacific; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; LFP = labor force participation; ME = Middle East; SAR= South Asia.

Figure E.10. Types of Gender Inequality Addressed by Advisory Services, by Region



Source: Independent Evaluation Group portfolio review and analysis.

Note: CAT = Central Asia and Türkiye; EAP = East Asia and Pacific; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; LFP = labor force participation; ME = Middle East; SAR= South Asia.

Indicator Analysis: World Bank and International Finance Corporation Portfolio

The desk review of World Bank and IFC portfolios included a content analysis to categorize results indicators. World Bank stand-alone projects (IPF and PforR), gender-relevant development policy loans, and a sample of 200 randomly selected IPF and PforR projects approved between 2012 and 2023 were analyzed. Similarly, for IFC, 69 stand-alone advisory services, 14 investments, 154 gender-relevant advisory services (corresponding to three business lines: Environmental, Social, and Governance; Financial Institutions Group; and Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services), and 201 gender-relevant investments (corresponding to three industries: Financial Institutions Group; Manufacturing, Agribusiness, and Services; and Infrastructure) approved between 2012 and 2023 were analyzed. The indicators were classified into four categories: (i) the number or share of female beneficiaries (project outreach); (ii) a change in the condition of women and girls (fulfillment of a need, access to a service, and benefit); (iii) the degree of satisfaction with a service provided by the intervention (satisfaction); and (iv) a change in any dimension of women's and girls' empowerment (women's empowerment; table E.6).

Table E.6. Codebook for Indicator Analysis

Category	Type of Keywords	Examples
Project outreach	Does the indicator capture outreach—that is, the number of project beneficiaries without specifying the benefits for women and men? (Yes = 1; No = 0)	Number of people reached by roads rehabilitated and equipped with solar lighting—of whom women
Benefit	Does the indicator capture a change in the condition of women and girls? (Yes = 1; No = 0)	Percentage of women borrowers in the new Public Credit Registry; percentage of pregnant women receiving antenatal care four or more times from a skilled health provider
Satisfaction	Does the indicator capture the of degree of satisfaction of female beneficiaries?	End users' satisfaction rate toward improved hydrological and meteorological information services (gender disaggregated); percent of sampled community respondents (male and female) satisfied with subproject and grant investments
Empowerment	Does the indicator capture any dimension of women's and girls' empowerment?	Contraceptive prevalence rate; local councils with at least 50% female representation in ward committees

Source: Independent Evaluation Group portfolio review and analysis.

[1] For International Finance Corporation (IFC) investments, all projects machine labeled as stand-alone (12) and gender relevant (348) were manually reviewed. Out of the 3,252 projects machine labeled as not gender relevant, the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) reviewed manually all 187 projects that had a "Y" gender flag. IEG did not review 1,556 projects that IFC had not classified and 1,509 projects that IFC had classified as "N" gender flag. For IFC advisory services, all projects machine labeled as stand-alone (126) and gender relevant (290) were manually reviewed. Out of the 1,114 projects machine labeled as not gender relevant, IEG reviewed manually all 270 projects that had a "Y" gender flag. IEG did not review 844 projects that IFC had classified as "N" gender flag.

[2] The sample of projects manually classified that was used to calibrate the model was relatively small—127 projects or 2.75 percent of the World Bank portfolio; 113 for the IFC portfolio. Another caveat is that there was no out-of-sample validation, and because the manually classified set was small and the stand-alone classification is rare within this set, it was not feasible to reserve part of the sample for out-of-sample validation.

Appendix F. Country Strategy Review

The review consisted of an analysis of Systematic Country Diagnostics (SCDs), Country Private Sector Diagnostics, Country Partnership Frameworks (CPFs), and Performance and Learning Reviews (PLRs)—key documents that defined the strategic engagement of the World Bank Group in the countries reviewed. The goal was to assess the extent to which the strategic documents addressed gender inequalities and incorporated gender issues into the Bank Group's country engagement. To this end, the review addressed a series of questions falling under three dimensions: relevance; effectiveness; and ownership, sustainability, and scale-up.

The team developed a series of questions addressing three dimensions (relevance; effectiveness; and ownership, sustainability, and scale-up) to measure the quality and comprehensiveness of each dimension in addressing gender inequalities. The questions were formulated as statements, and there was a distinct set of questions for each of the document types (SCD, CPF, and PLR). For 12 questions, criteria were applied to assign a score on a scale from 0 to 4, with 4 being the highest, and for 8 questions, a dummy variable was used (0 = absence; 1 = presence). The review of the PLR was intended to assess the extent to which modifications were done to the CPF's approach in addressing gender inequalities.

The evaluation analysis was done in three parts.

Part 1: Assessment of how gender inequalities were diagnosed, identified as priorities, and addressed and measured in SCDs and CPFs.

The criteria of this assessment were aligned with the country gender resource package and with the Independent Evaluation Group's evaluation questions.

The following steps were conducted:

- Focus on the last CPF and SCD for each country, excluding Country Engagement Notes.

» Extract the following information:

  » Information on the relevance of Bank Group engagement to gender equality priorities in the country (evaluation question 1a);

  » Information on the effectiveness of Bank Group policy responses to reduce gender inequalities (close gender gaps; evaluation question 1b);

  » Information on the ownership, sustainability, and scalability (scale-up) of the Bank Group strategic engagement for gender equality in the country (evaluation question 1c).

» Assign a score (0 to 4) to each assessed dimension (score 0 = no integration of the dimension, 1 = very limited integration, 2 = partial integration, 3 = good integration, and 4 = excellent integration). By summing up the score across all categories, each SCD and CPF received a total score of 92. The SCD and CPF were ranked from the best (highest) to the worse (lowest) one.

» Assign a dummy (0/1): (0 = absence; 1 = presence).

Part 2: Analysis of patterns.

The analysis carried out in the second stage revealed the main strengths and weaknesses of SCDs and CPFs. For example, it identified whether the weaknesses of SCDs and CPFs were mostly driven by a lack of good indicators rather than the ability to prioritize and whether some of these characteristics tend to occur together. A principal score analysis was used to identify the factors driving the scores.

Part 3: Analysis of the factors that explain the observed patterns:

» Take the top (best) and the bottom (worst) quintile group of the score distribution of SCDs and CPFs. There may be roughly 20 "top" and 20 "bottom" SCDs and CPFs.

» Interview task team leaders of CPFs and explore the factors that explain the ranking, using some predefined categories (identified in the evaluation about gender in countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence or the Independent Evaluation Group gender strategy Mid-Term Review [World Bank 2021]) and some open questions.

Review Sample

The universe of CPFs from 2015 to 2023 comprised 110 countries (table F.1). Because of time and budgetary constraints, the team started the review with the newest CPFs and worked backward, with the final sample in January 2024 encompassing 83 countries.

Table F.1. Distribution of Country Partnership Frameworks Reviewed

Evaluative Task	Countries (no.)	Share of Countries (%)
Population	110	100
Sample	83	75

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

For countries with more than one CPF available, the latest CPF was reviewed. In addition, when available, the PLR was included as part of the country review. Tables F.2 and F.3 show the universe and sample disaggregation by Region and by CPF fiscal year, respectively.

Table F.2. Reviewed Country Partnership Framework Distribution by Region

Region	Universe		Sample	
	Countries (no.)	Share of total (%)	Countries (no.)	Share of total (%)
Africa	40	36	30	36
East Asia and Pacific	14	13	13	16
Europe and Central Asia	21	19	13	16
Latin America and the Caribbean	21	19	15	18
Middle East and North Africa	7	6	6	7

(continued)

Region	Universe		Sample	
	Countries (no.)	Share of total (%)	Countries (no.)	Share of total (%)
South Asia	7	6	6	7
Total	110	100	83	100

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Table F.3. Reviewed Country Partnership Framework Distribution by Fiscal Year

FY of CPF	Universe		Sample	
	Countries (no.)	Share of total (%)	Countries (no.)	Share of total (%)
2015	2	2	0	0
2016	9	8	0	0
2017	11	10	2	2
2018	10	9	3	4
2019	21	19	21	25
2020	11	10	11	13
2021	9	8	9	11
2022	10	9	10	12
2023	25	23	25	30
2024	2	2	2	2
Total	110	100	83	100

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: CPF = Country Partnership Framework; FY = fiscal year.

Of our sample of 83 countries, 29 had PLRs, all of which were reviewed (tables F.4 and F.5).

Table F.4. Reviewed Performance and Learning Review Distribution by Region

Region	Countries (no.)	Share of Total (%)
Africa	10	34
East Asia and Pacific	6	21
East and Central Asia	5	17
Latin America and the Caribbean	4	14
Middle East and North Africa	2	7
South Asia	2	7
Total	29	100

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Table F.5. Reviewed Performance and Learning Review Document Distribution by Fiscal Year

PLR Disclosure Year	Countries (no.)	Share of Total (%)
2019	1	3
2020	0	0
2021	1	3
2022	13	45
2023	13	45
2024	1	3
Total	29	100

Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: PLR = Performance and Learning Review.

Reference

World Bank. 2021. *World Bank Group Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review: An Assessment by the Independent Evaluation Group*. Independent Evaluation Group. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Appendix G. Gender Gap Taxonomy

The gender tag of the World Bank and the gender flag of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) track operations that meaningfully narrow gender gaps in line with the fiscal year (FY)16–23 gender strategy. The tagging or flagging process was introduced to help practitioners ensure that operations meet the required criteria to promote gender equality. The World Bank Group gender tag and flag mark projects that, at design, clearly articulate how they will contribute toward narrowing specified gender gaps. They are expressed as a binary variable, where a 1 is assigned if the project includes an analysis to identify gender gaps relevant to the project objectives, actions to address those gaps, and indicators measuring progress on the proposed actions. However, there is no tracking of the specific gender gaps addressed by World Bank and IFC operations. Therefore, measuring the percentages of projects addressing specific gender gaps is not feasible with the data provided in the Bank Group systems.

The evaluation required an analysis of gender gaps (or gender inequalities) as part of the analysis of relevance and alignment (evaluation question 1a). As a gap typology had not been developed by the Bank Group, the evaluation constructed one grounded on the four strategic objectives identified in the FY16–23 gender strategy.

The taxonomy was developed using a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. The inductive approach involved analyzing the FY16–23 gender strategy, annual updates of the gender strategy, regional gender action plans and their updates, IFC gender strategy implementation plans, and the World Bank's thematic follow-up notes. NVivo software was used to manually identify the gender gaps defined and discussed in these reports. As a second step, a deductive approach was used. A review of literature and a series of discussions with thematic experts were used to refine the emerging gender gaps. Finally, a definition for each gap was adopted from the literature of the Bank Group, United Nations agencies, and other development partners, which served also as a further validation of each gap. Initially, 100 gender gaps were identified and then grouped into 25 broader categories (or clusters) to simplify the analysis. For the Systematic Country Diagnostic or Country Partnership Framework analysis, the 25 categories were further simplified into 10. The consolidation occurred in two steps. First, some of the initial 100 categories (child nodes in NVivo) were combined into broader categories (parent nodes in NVivo) based on proximity of definition (for example, maternal health, maternal mortality, child mortality, prenatal sex selection, maternal nutrition, child nutrition, and adolescent nutrition were mapped into the category "Maternal and child health"). This first step allowed a first level of simplification from 100 to about 30 categories. Second, the analysis of the correlation matrix generated through a machine learning exercise allowed a further simplification from 30 to 25 categories, by merging highly correlated gender gaps. As Country Partnership Frameworks use broad categories to define the gender inequalities to be prioritized, 10 categories were derived after applying the 25-category classification to the analysis of country strategy and observing that some gaps were typically bundled together (for example, "access to assets" or "gender gaps related to labor force participation, segregation in employment, and wage gaps"). The original 100 and the streamlined 25 and 10 categories can be mapped effectively to the four strategic objectives of the FY16–23 gender strategy and can be meaningfully applied to both the World Bank and IFC (although the occurrence of each gap varies by institution as expected).

The taxonomy was consistently applied at the global level—review of the country strategies, the World Bank portfolio review, and the IFC portfolio review. It was also applied at the country level to the World Bank and IFC portfolio reviews within the case study countries. In addition, the gender statistics derived from the Gender Data Portal were mapped to gender gaps, applying the same taxonomy. This enabled a bivariate analysis to check alignment of country needs (as shown by gender statistics) and country priorities (as shown by the review of the country strategies and country case studies).

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