

## **Management Response to IED's Thematic Evaluation on ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality**

On 26 November 2024, the Director General, Independent Evaluation Department, received the following response from the Director General, Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships Department on behalf of Management:

### **I. General Comments**

1. Management welcomes the thematic evaluation of the Independent Evaluation Department (IED) on ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality (the report). This evaluation presents timely and practical insights into how ADB can strengthen its mandate to promote gender equality in its operations, technical assistance, and knowledge work. ADB has been a global leader among the international finance institutions in gender equality but recognizes the need to continuously evolve and raise the level of ambition to deliver better development outcomes on gender equality. In this respect, the recent changes to the gender mainstreaming categorization system, integrated as part of the Corporate Results Framework 2025–2030, and the consolidation of the New Operating Model (NOM) of gender equality expertise within the Gender Equality Division (CCGE) provide an important framework to deepen and scale the gender mandate of ADB in line with the recommendations set out in the report.

### **II. Management Response to the Recommendations**

2. **Recommendation 1: Modernize the 1998 Gender and Development (GAD) Policy to ensure ADB has a coherent and up-to-date policy to guide and inform its gender equality initiatives.**

**Management agrees** that the current policy and strategic framework underpinning the gender equality operations and mandate of ADB require an update to ensure coherence and relevance with current practices and ambitions. The Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships Department and CCGE will collaborate to ensure alignment with the policy architecture of ADB. CCGE will commit to delivery of an updated gender equality policy or equivalent level of document by the end of 2026. This document will complement the Strategy 2030 Midterm Review Resilience and Empowerment strategic focus area and will lead to subsequent updates to relevant sections of the Operations Manual, Staff Instructions for Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in ADB Operations, and other related documents.

3. **Recommendation 2: Promote more gender transformative approaches, ensuring adequate resourcing and incentives are in place for the required changes in collaboration and ways of working, including by revising the gender mainstreaming categorization system and its application.**

**Management agrees.** ADB has already initiated the process to raise the bar on its gender ambition and set incentives for greater attention to gender transformative approaches within its portfolio. In October 2024, revised methodology to the project gender mainstreaming categorization system was included within the forthcoming Corporate Results Framework (CRF) 2025–2030. This revised methodology represents an evolution in the approach to gender equality of ADB, shifting from equitable access to equality of outcomes. It encourages a stronger focus on results and impact and acts as an incentive for innovation with respect to both gender mainstreaming and transformative gender approaches. Under the NOM, CCGE staff work closely with the Sectors Group (SG) and

Regional Departments to ensure that gender equality is integrated throughout the project cycle. Moving forward, it is anticipated that the changes to the gender mainstreaming categorization methodology will encourage further deepening of One ADB collaboration to achieve the corporate gender targets.

It is well noted that additional resources and incentives are required to better meet the gender equality ambitions of ADB. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 transformative gender agenda has received strong support as a thematic strategic area under the Asian Development Fund 13 and 14. Significant grant resources are earmarked to address complex social norm areas, including the elimination of gender-based violence, supporting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls, and reducing and redistributing unpaid care work responsibilities of women. In addition, technical assistance, external donor funds, and other financial resources will continue to support these shifts in the approach of ADB and to comprehensively respond to worsening gender inequalities in the Asia and Pacific region.

**4. Recommendation 3: Adopt a programmatic approach to higher-level gender equality outcomes by more comprehensively framing gender equality objectives in country- and sector-level strategies, which are underpinned by updated diagnostics, analysis, and sex-disaggregated data and complement the existing project approach to gender.**

**Management agrees.** The NOM has opened opportunities for more upstream and programmatic approaches to gender equality, but Management recognizes that this could be improved and further enhanced, and the recommendations of IED provide useful suggestions on how to do so. ADB has already taken some steps under the NOM to address the issues raised by the evaluation report. These include the inclusion of a CCGE gender equality specialist on all Country Management Teams and Regional Management Teams. This allows for upstream engagement which can inform a more programmatic approach to gender equality through the country partnership strategy (CPS). Management recognizes that more concrete measures should be pursued to move from including gender equality as a cross-cutting theme to a more explicit objective which can drive ADB portfolio at the country level. This includes ensuring that at the programmatic level, the Country Gender Assessment and other related gender equality sector diagnostics are conducted in a regular and timely manner to inform the CPS. At the project level, requirements to produce gender analysis within sector diagnostics will also be further explored. As part of the solutions shift, we will be looking closely at future CPSs to push for more strategic and targeted approaches to gender equality including through integration of gender equality strategic objectives in the results framework.

**5. Recommendation 4: Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems for gender equality and place greater emphasis on higher-level outcomes, intersectionality, and transformative impacts.**

**Management agrees.** There is a need to further strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems for the intersectional approaches of ADB to gender equality, which focus on outcomes, results, and transformative impacts. ADB has taken steps to improve evaluations of gender equality projects: for example, there is a requirement for ADF 14 SDG 5 thematic pool projects to include robust evaluations. Another tool that will support improved monitoring and evaluation is the Gender Equality Management System which will cover all stages of the project cycle and be soft launched in December 2024, with fuller rollout in 2025, including a communication and capacity-building program. To respond to

this recommendation, Management will (i) through the Human and Social Development Office, roll out the Poverty and Social Analysis Framework across ADB operations, which will capture how gender equality intersects with poverty and other vulnerabilities and social dimensions; and (ii) encourage the collection and tracking of intersectional gender impacts to better capture intersectional gender inequalities that affect women and girls in all their diversity.

**6. Recommendation 5: Ensure that operations and country staff have sufficient skills in gender analysis and mainstreaming by investing in training and capacity development for staff working in specific contexts and sectors.**

**Management agrees.** There is a need to expand skills and capacities of ADB staff across operational and regional departments to more efficiently and meaningfully innovate and scale up gender mainstreaming in ADB operations. Hardwiring gender equality knowledge and skills within ADB staff will require the adoption of additional incentives and resources to encourage full use of existing knowledge resources, including those prepared and delivered by CCGE (e.g., e-learning modules, sector-specific trainings, and toolkits). This will require an ADB-wide approach, supported by the Budget, People, and Management Systems Department and SG, to incentivize and normalize the uptake of gender equality focused skills and capacity-building as a core expectation for staff working on ADB operations. ADB will also explore how to include gender expertise in routine recruitment criteria to attract new staff who have experience and knowledge of supporting integrated approaches for gender equality alongside sector interventions. In addition, CCGE will collaborate closely with relevant departments to update and expand tailored capacity development programs and tools which deepen understanding and knowledge on key topics related to mainstreaming gender equality in operations. Finally, CCGE will collaborate closely with SG and regional departments to disseminate learning and communication resources on the renewed gender equality ambition of ADB under CRF 2025–2030 for internal as well as external stakeholders.