Giving Voice to Gender in our Work

by
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Introduction by Gobind T. Nankani [Vice President and Network Head, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management]: When Jim first visited Brazil shortly after he'd joined the Bank, we went together to visit a project in the slums in Rio, and Jim took off his jacket, his tie, rolled up his sleeved, waded through the mud, very moved by everything he saw. But what really shook him was when a woman came up to him, thanking him, the Bank, the government of Rio for the water services that the project had provided to her. But the most important thing for her was that little piece of paper in her hand, which was a water bill with her name on it. That was when Jim was really visibly moved. Jim Wolfensohn.

James D. Wolfensohn: Let me first welcome all of you, both my colleagues in the Bank and the representatives of outside institutions that are here. I understand that we have more than 15 partner institutions and friendly institutions from as varying places as the UN, USAID, DFID, Inter-American Development Bank, International Center for Research on Women, InterAction, Women's EDGE, and others. Let me very simply say that I welcome you warmly here, as I welcome my friend Angela King, who, as you know, is the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women to the Secretary-General with the rank of Assistant Secretary-General. It's very appropriate that you're all here today because for us this is an important occasion, and I'm very privileged to be part of it.

I should tell you that my own background on issues of gender goes back some time when I joined the Population Council some 25 years ago and became very much exposed to a range of issues that I had not really understood coming from Australia. As I got into the Population Council work and as I went around the world with them and with the related Rockefeller Foundation, it put in my head the very clear belief, which has been proven to me many times since, that the issue of development and the issue of poverty is very much bound up with the issue of gender and gender equality. Almost everywhere I've turned in my work here at the Bank, that has been something that has come through to me as a truth, a truth in terms of education, a truth in terms of the workings of community level, be it in Brazil or be it in Africa - the way in which family assets can be better used when they're made available to women, where women can take the lead in terms of education of their children. I've seen that in the poorest countries, women have the worst deal, and so it's hardest to advance their cause. But in countries where you have
seen development occur, so frequently the development in a nation is tied in with the development of women itself.

Since the Beijing meetings, which is when I really came in, many women's leaders were keen to point out to me that the Bank was not doing the job that it should and that, in fact, on gender issues, internally in our institution we were not giving an adequate recognition to the quality of women that we had in our own institution. That was a pretty bad signal for what we were doing on the outside.

So I set about trying to help change the culture and most particularly to align myself with the people in the organization who understood that we could not do our job unless we mainstreamed gender. That it simply was not possible not to be aware of the inhibitions placed on the development process by an inadequacy of attention to gender issues.

I have some statistics here that have been given to me which will allow me to convince you of what a terrific job we did because we put $5 billion into girls' education and we are the largest factor in health and all sorts of things. It's important, but it's not good enough.

Those of us that are working in the field and who care about this were very happy that we were able to put together a gender board and an outside consultative group who could actually say to us: "What you're saying sounds fine, but it's really not enough. It's really not mainstreamed. It's not tokenism because it's important, but it's not really in the guts of the organization. And so you'd better, if you're going to be serious, try and do something about engendering development, about making it central to what we're doing."

We come to you, since you're friends, today to say, yes, we've done something over recent years and it's a lot better than we did, but I think most of us here believe that in a way we're at the beginning of a new chapter, which is to recognize how important this issue is. This book which we're launching today, entitled "Integrating Gender into the World Bank's Work," is something that you, I hope, will have a chance to read.

It is a strategy, and the strategy described in the paper. Let me read it to you. It says: "The World Bank will work with governments and civil society in client countries and with other donors to diagnose the gender-related barriers to and opportunities for poverty reduction and sustainable development, and will then identify and support appropriate action to reduce these barriers and capitalize on the opportunities."

That is an important step for us because it's not just the analysis, which we've been doing for years; it's an attempt to come up with programmatic thrusts and then, as we later point out in the document, deal with the setting of the goals and then, most importantly, monitor the implementation and results of what we're doing.

So we're basically going the full cycle. We're saying let's analyze, let's do it not from the lofty heights of Washington, but in the field, in the country, with the country-led programs. Let's develop the plans of action, and then let's monitor it, and let's have a group here whose task
it is to keep us honest. So that you will not get tokenism in what we're doing or even large numbers, which, as we all know, can conceal quite a lot. But we'll have a chance country by country and region by region to try and determine how it is that this issue of engendering development can be carried through.

You'll see in this book that the strategy recommends integrating the gender dimension into our central work, into establishing criteria used to establish our Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers [PRSPs], and for us that's very important, because we have going on in the institution in these very days, a review by more than 200 people of the poverty reduction strategies that are being introduced around the world. The poverty reduction strategies are becoming a template not just for us but for the community and for the countries to try and establish a framework and an action plan for poverty reduction. Candidly, I think we have been underrepresented in those poverty reduction strategies by the gender component. One of the things that we're setting for ourselves is to try and rebalance those poverty reduction strategies with the gender component that we think is appropriate.

This will carry through to our Country Assistance Strategies and our sector strategies and the quality criteria used by our Quality Assurance Group to make sure that we're doing it. We're using all of the tools at our disposal to try and take this idea and make sure that it's carried through. Finally, we talk in the report of training, of the operational tools, of building capacity, and then aligning resources in the budget, the accountabilities, our staff, and, most importantly, our partnerships.

Let me say here that I hope you will now find, those of you that may have spent a lot of time criticizing us, as well as working together with us, that in terms of partnership, I hope you will now find a new and a lot less sensitive effort to try and really build partnerships.

I was just talking to some friends about the meeting I'm going to in Tokyo on Afghanistan. There we start with a primary school enrolment ratio of 3 percent for girls - 3 percent. Mind you, for boys, this figure is 39 percent; but 3 percent for girls. We'll be talking about payment to government - for people that have done government service, many of whom have not been paid for months, but the women have not been paid for years. In the report that has come forward in terms of the reconstruction plan, it's clear that there is inadequate recognition in the report of the issue of gender, even though everybody recognizes and talks about it.

In very simple terms, what we're going to try and do - and we have Karen [Karen Mason, Director, Gender Division, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management] and her team that's ready to do it, and to ensure that we do it- is to walk the talk on gender. That is the purpose of this document. I am very, very proud to be able to help launch it today and to commit to you that we want to be in a leadership role in this issue, and we want to be a good partner in this issue, and that amongst the international institutions, we want to be at the cutting edge.

That gives me a good segue into Angela King, who is now going to, I hope, address us. Angela has been with the UN since 1966, having previously
been with the permanent mission of Jamaica, where she was one of the first two women foreign service officers posted after Jamaica joined the UN.

I don't need to tell anyone in this room of the distinction of Angela King. She is an icon in this business, and she certainly seeks to keep the UN honest and in sort of a way to keep us honest as a relative in the UN family. But she is also a leader that deserves our acclaim and for whom we have nothing but respect, and we're very, very glad that she's here at this launch. So if I can call on Angela King to say a few words to you, and let me thank you all for being here.

Angela King [UN Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women]: Jim, thank you very much. It's indeed a great pleasure to be here and, in fact, quite a delight. When I met Jim earlier, I was thinking about leadership, my own boss, and the head of the World Bank. As you know, over the last few years, the Bretton Woods institutions, headed by the Bank, have come into much closer synch and partnership with the rest of the United Nations. I think this has greatly contributed to the strength of the United Nations as a whole, the fact that we now speak far more than we used to with one voice - although we don't always. I think it comes from the type of assurance that allows Jim to have himself on film, whether it is playing his cello in his house, giving his personal views, or whether it is enhancing a beautiful room like this with his personal paintings from Australia.

Today signals something very important, and Jim said that he hopes to be on the cutting edge and he hopes the World Bank will be. I think with Karen and her team and all of the World Bank, people working together to make what is a truly comprehensive strategy, with goals, indicators, and other aspects, and also very good examples of what has worked, I think that if there is a political commitment - and I think he had already said there absolutely is, but it has to go right down to the bottom. I think field operatives have to be aware of this and people have to monitor that it is indeed so. I fully agree with you that the gender component has to be consulted at every turn.

So whether it's on the PRSPs or on other strategies, I hope there will be gender voice, not after the fact but before. We too, like you, felt that the needs assessment paper [for Afghanistan] was very lacking in gender. On Afghanistan, I think it is extremely important that we work together to make sure that the women have a voice, but not only the women having a voice but that each and every aspect of the work, whether it's building bridges, de-mining, whether it is setting new houses and hospitals, that the women's voice and the gender dimension as it affects both women and men will be taken into account.

I think that this is just the beginning, but it is a great beginning, and Kofi Annan, our Secretary-General, who is very interested in the aspects of gender and, as you know, has brought it up at many of the senior cabinet meetings, will certainly learn of this. I'm sure you'll be hearing from him because this is the first good news on the gender mainstreaming, on a policy strategy, that we have had in 2002. So congratulations, enjoy, and it's a delight to be here. Thank you so much.
Gobind T. Nankani: I'd just like to take a couple more moments to thank a lot of you for all that you've done. But before I do that, let me just reinforce a couple of things that have been said.

I think the work that has been undertaken on gender and development in the last few years in the Bank has been characterized by both care and wisdom. On care, I'd like to refer to the underlying analytical work that preceded this strategy paper, the publication of "Engendering Development", and to recommend it to all of you who have not read it yet, because it's full of wonderful gems about how gender and poverty reduction are related. I'll just mention a couple, just because they impressed me so much.

First, in Sub-Saharan Africa, equal schooling for women and men would have lowered infant mortality by 25 percent in the '90s. In India, the children of literate mothers spend more than two hours per day than the children of illiterate mothers studying. In Brazil, income to mothers has four times the impact on children's growth - i.e., their height for weight ratio - as opposed to income to fathers.

Wisdom, because I think the strategy paper builds on this kind of analysis, but also recognizes the role of country ownership and of partnerships. It talks about the need for the strategy to be country-specific and to be client-led. It talks about the need for gender assessments to build on existing work, and gender assessments could very well be based on work done by countries, by partners, and don't need to have been done directly by the Bank.

So, for these reasons, and many other reasons, I really would like to take a moment and, first and foremost, thank the Gender and Development Board as well as the Gender Development Group in PREM, led by Karen Mason and her team, for the excellent work they've done to get us this far, and the excellent work we expect of them in the next few years as well. May we give them a hand, please?

Let me also thank Jim for taking the time to be with us and for his very perceptive and personal remarks to us on the importance of gender for not just the development process but for us here in the Bank as well. Thanks also go to Angela King for her thoughtful words, and also for her valuable contributions to the events of the entire day, including her comments on ways in which we might conceive of a WDR [World Development Report] on gender and development.

Thanks to all of you for being here with us, to our colleagues from external organizations, and special thanks to Jennifer Klot from UNIFEM and Suzanne Kindervatter from InterAction. Finally, very, very special thanks to Sarah, Susan, and Helene for organizing the events of today. Thank you very much.