World Bank Group Archives Exhibit Series

Women in Development and the World Bank Group

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The World Bank Group Archives Exhibit Series contains exhibits originally published on the Archives’ external website beginning in 2002. When the Archives’ website was transferred to a new platform in 2015, it was decided that older exhibits would be converted to pdf format and made available as a series on the World Bank’s external database, Documents & Reports.

These exhibits, authored by World Bank archivists, highlight key events, personalities, and publications in the history of the World Bank. They also bring attention to some of the more fascinating archival records contained in the Archives’ holdings.

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Women in Development and the World Bank Group

In advance of International Women’s Day 2014, the World Bank Group Archives is taking a look at the World Bank Group’s early initiatives relating to women in development, a topic that became increasingly important for the Bank in the mid-1970s. Coinciding with the United Nations’ “Decade for Women” (1976-1985), the Bank began to investigate how women in developing countries fared in sectors such as education, water, maternal health, food production, and agriculture. Issues related to women’s legal rights and recognition were also explored. Research was increasingly geared towards the topic, and conferences and workshops were organized and attended. Project evaluations also began to include a focus on the effect individual projects had on women.

A key development within the Bank was the creation of the Bank’s Adviser on Women in Development in 1977. The position, first held by Gloria Scott, “focused attention on the subject [of women in development], [and] promoted an understanding of the key issues and ways to address them in the Bank’s operational work and in countries which the Bank assists” (The Bank’s World, Volume 4: Number 9, September 1985, page 11). One important result of this attention, and Scott’s work in particular, was the 1979 publication “Recognizing the ‘Invisible’ Woman in Development: The World Bank’s Experience”.

While an increasing amount of information was being generated with regard to the plight and potential of women in developing countries, the incorporation of women’s issues into the design of Bank projects was tentative throughout the 1980s. The subject continued to grow in importance, however, and in the spring of 1987 a Women in Development Division (PHRWD) was created in the Bank’s Population and Human Resources Department. The Division’s primary function was to support the inclusion of women in development in project development, implementation, and evaluation. Division Chief Barbara Herz said at the time: “We want to get beyond studies and training. We want to show what can actually be done to include women in development programs and how that contributes to economic performance, easing of poverty, and other development activities” (The Bank’s World, Volume 6: Number 11, November 1987, page 9).
But by 1989, World Bank President Barber Conable was still not satisfied with the Bank’s commitment to women in developing countries. In a letter to then Senior Vice President, Operations, Moeen Qureshi, Conable requested a more systematic and operational approach to the issue. In the letter, he tasks individual Country Departments with the preparation of an assessment of women’s role in development and an action program which should be put in place. Conable’s letter to Qureshi, along with an attached “Proposed Bank Approach and Plan of Action” template and a forwarding letter from Qureshi to Bank Regional Vice Presidents, are reproduced in part and linked to below. Interestingly, these records are attachments to a piece of correspondence from Marianne Haug, Executive Assistant to the President, to Mr. Conable’s wife, Mrs. Charlotte Conable who had a special interest in women in development.

Haug’s correspondence is found in the Subject Files series of the Records of Executive Assistant to the President, Marianne Haug (WB IBRD/IDA EXC-11-03-5445S). Along with other Bank reports and memoranda related to the topic of women in development, the series contains the results of Conable’s request in the form of twenty-one summaries of the Country Departments’ Women in Development Country Assessments.

Records related to women in development and gender issues can be found in a variety of fonds in the World Bank Group Archives. If you are interested in this topic or others related to the World Bank Group’s history, visit our list of Finding Aids or visit our Access to Information page to submit a request or to communicate with an archivist. You can also search our Documents & Reports database to view research and project reports related to the topic of Women in Development. Oral histories of former Bank staff are also searchable in the Documents & Reports database or can be found at the Archives’ Oral History page. These interviews are an especially rich resource for investigation into all sorts of Bank-related topics; for example, see Katherine Marshall’s and Catherine Gwin’s oral histories for discussion of the evolution of the women in development sector.
June 9, 1989

Mrs. Charlotte Conable

Mrs. Conable:

I thought you might be interested in some initiatives on women.

Marianne Haug
THE WORLD BANK  
Washington, D.C. 20433  
U.S.A.  

April 12, 1989

Mr. Moeen A. Qureshi

Re: Women in Development

Moeen:

As I mentioned to you last week, I have been concerned for some time about the depth and strength of our commitment to the Women in Development initiative. Women account for 50% of the world's productive human potential. No country can afford to neglect such a high share of its human resources.

My review of major economic reports and country strategy papers leads me to the conclusion that the role of women in the development process has rarely been integrated into the strategic thinking underlying country assistance programs. There are, of course, exceptions to this pattern. But we must raise our sights and work on a broader front in order to be effective -- and we must act soon.

As you know, we have undertaken to report on WID to the Board by the Fall. The report will be put together by PPR, based on the activities of PPR and on the work programs in place in Operations. The Development Committee has also asked for a special report on Women in Development for the Spring meeting in 1990. Finally, the World Development Report for 1990 will deal with poverty and it will reflect the fact that many more women than men live in poverty.

In this context, a more systematic approach is needed. As a first step, each Country Department should prepare, for one or several of its client countries, an assessment of women's potential role in development, the policy framework affecting their welfare and productivity, the institutional bottlenecks standing in the way of progress, the action programs which should be put in place, as well as the future involvement of the Bank. An outline of the type of documentation I have in mind is attached.

I decided to allocate to the specific effort US$35,000 per Country Department, i.e. US$700,000 out of the FY89 Presidential contingency. PBD advised me that Operations may not be able to use more than $350,000 on this work during FY89. Accordingly, I have allocated $50,000 for the WID activities described in this memorandum and $350,000 for other FY89 operational purposes. I will request that you earmark another $350,000 out of the base allocation I will be making to Operations in FY90 in order to complete the task.
It is essential that Country Department Directors take direct charge of WID activities and that they assign sufficiently senior CD managers and staff members to provide leadership for the country dialogue, cross-divisional coordination, economic and sector work oversight and follow-up monitoring of WID action plans.

I plan to review the resulting country reviews with you and your Regional Vice Presidents before the Annual Meeting in September. This time frame (5 months) should allow for a substantial data collection effort and at least one visit to the field, including discussion with country officials.

I realize that some CDs have already undertaken detailed assessments and have operational action plans well in hand. Little work may be required to update these reports for our overall review. In these departments, the $35,000 allocation should, in the first instance, be used for assessment studies in the remaining countries handled by the CD or in the case of single country departments, for funding of specific follow-up activities identified in the action program.

Barber B. Conable

Attachment

cc: Messrs. Hopper, Rajagopalan
    Regional Vice Presidents
Country Assessment of Women's Role in Development

Proposed Bank Approach and Plan of Action

Objective

1. The objective is to prepare a concise assessment of the Bank's current and proposed approach to support for women's role in development in the country concerned. This assessment should address specifically how the Bank's operational strategy for the country takes into account this topic of special emphasis, and how the country strategy could be modified to enhance understanding of and direct support for the development role of women. It would, in most countries, represent a first systematic effort to articulate the Bank's definition of issues specifically pertaining to women, and should thus be seen as a first step. In those countries where systematic work has been undertaken, the review would represent a summary and assessment of experience to date, some additional analysis on major issues, and setting out of priorities and directions for future activities. The primary purpose of the assessments will be to enrich the country strategy and assist future work planning. They will also provide the basis for a report to the Executive Directors on Women in Development activities in FY90.

Scope of Work

2. The scope of each memorandum should thus be focused on assessment of available information and analysis, with additional research work in limited areas. Discussion of issues with Government officials is needed. However, the intent is to develop an assessment and internal strategy document, so formal discussion of the document with Government representatives at this stage is not required. Since it is likely that the memoranda will recommend additional work and discussion with Government officials and entities, a strategy for handling such dialogue should be proposed. Likewise, the exercise should not entail a full scale analytic effort, but should identify areas where analysis is needed, establish priorities among them, and propose a work program for the future. The work involved would therefore depend on advancement of work to date and complexity of country issues, and should in all cases reflect a joint effort of experienced country staff, with support from consultants and PHRDW, if available. An allocation of US$35,000 per Country Department has been made available for the preparation of these country assessments.

Topics

3. The suggested topics for a country assessment may include the following:

   (a) Statement of objectives and context; relate to other strategic exercises (CSP, PFP) etc. and, in relevant cases, aid coordination efforts underway. Brief outline of main lines of country strategy.
(b) Previous and ongoing work on issues related to the role of women in the country's development, through country economic and sector work, Bank research, and in the context of adjustment lending and investment projects. Comment on country dialogue, status and issues, as these pertain to the role of women in the country's development strategy.

(c) Summary status and data on women's economic and social role; focus on pattern and trends specific to country. Information on women's economic role and other contributions, key constraints facing women (e.g., access to information and resources; special impact of poverty problems), education system policy or actual access; and status of health services and indicators, and family planning); generally promising approaches for improving opportunities for women should be summarized and assessed. Comments on legal issues, government policy, and political aspects of women's organizations, NGO activities, and other relevant issues affecting an understanding of the issues and approach on strategy should be included. Analysis should comment on adequacy and accuracy of information available, and any plans for improvement (e.g. household surveys). Data on families should also be covered as an integral part of this discussion; a separate, related issue is the role of women as heads of families. Where appropriate analysis is available, a brief discussion of the economic role of women in key economic sectors should be included.

(d) Assessment of status of analysis and information on these issues, based both on direct Bank work and analysis and experience of other institutions.

(e) Government strategy on issues relevant for women's role in economic development and poverty alleviation. Summary of policy statements and actual practice.

(f) Current Bank strategy: how has the matter of women's role in economic development been handled in country strategy, work program? Review (quantitative and qualitative) or work undertaken to date and assessment of experience.

(g) Issues: Focus on 4-5 issues for development which emerge from analysis of economic and social role of women; might include (for example) education policy and its implementation, focus on women and families in specific poverty programs, delivery of social services, special problems linked to economic adjustment programs, focus of
agricultural research and extension systems, credit access, and special issues for population and family planning policy. Comments on issues should be country specific and linked to overall country objectives and strategy.

(h) Proposed policy stance on issues affecting women in economic development vis-a-vis Government and additional analysis required to pursue this stance. Comment on strategy for dialogue with Government on policy ramifications of issues for women. The discussion should suggest an overall approach for effective handling of this issue in medium term (can include both direct and indirect approaches). The discussion should link overall proposed policy approach to the major issues defined for women's role in development, and relate explicitly to the broader country development and Bank operational strategy;

(i) Information gaps and requirements for analytic work, by Bank, other agencies. Relevant proposals for CESW program, research, and project-financed analytic work.

(j) Possible investment activities and technical assistance, under ongoing and proposed operations. Note any specific links to lending in support of policy reform.

(k) Plan of action and resource implications for next steps for the next two-three years. This plan should include both short-term measures (by the Government and the Bank) and longer term approaches and programs. Explicit discussion of costs and tradeoffs should be included.

April 14, 1989
1. This is further to my memorandum of April 13 on the allocation of the President's FY 89 contingency budget in connection with WID for which Mr. Conable has allotted special funds to the Country Departments to pursue the country assessments (see Mr. Conable's memorandum attached). To facilitate this work program in accordance with Mr. Conable's timetable, we are preparing this note for your guidance. It is our understanding that the Regions have already proceeded in their respective efforts.

2. **Choice of Countries.** The Country Departments choose the countries for which country assessments are to be prepared in time for the fall Board meeting as required by Mr. Conable. The Departments may consult with PHRWD (Women in Development Division at PPR) in working out their strategy and work plans. While the WID assessment may be undertaken in connection with other ongoing ESW, it is expected that a freestanding assessment paper can be developed out of the task.

3. **Coordinators.** It will be helpful if each Region will assign a staff member in the office of the RVP who will facilitate cross-departmental exchange of views in preparing these studies, arrange peer reviews, and who may serve as liaison with OPNSV, through EAS, and with PHRWD.

4. **Budget.** The Departments will keep track of the use of the special funds by providing task numbers for the country assessment in accordance with the MIS.

5. **Timetable**

   - **June 15**
     Departments submit to the RVP's Office with a copy to EAS and PHRWD, work plans for the assessments, briefly stating for the country(ies) selected what the department hopes to achieve, approach to be used, expected outcome(s) and planned staff and budget inputs (including the name of the Task Manager).

   - **August 31**
     RVPs submit draft assessments to EAS with a copy to PHRWD.
September 15  RVP transmits to EAS assessments for transmittal to Mr. Conable's office.

6. PHRWĐ's Draft Board Report. PHRWĐ is preparing a draft Board Report for Mr. Conable on this issue, which will depend to a large extent on timely delivery of the WID country assessments. An outline of this Board report will be circulated shortly through them.

7. Questions regarding this subject may be addressed to Mr. Sicat of EAS, X78054.

Attachments: Mr. Conable's letter to Mr. Qureshi WID Plan of Action

cc: Messrs./Mmes Rajagopalan, Hamilton, Herz; Vergin, Lee, Baudon; Haug Regional Administrative Officers

Gsicat: sb