



International Advocacy Reports and Statements

“The Global Economic Crisis and the Empowerment of Women”

**Special Presentation by Mayra Buvinic, Director of the Gender in
Poverty Reduction Vice Presidency of the World Bank
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In preparation for the Beijing+15 54th Commission on the Status of Women in 2010, the World Bank in Geneva and the CONGO Geneva NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NGOCSW) invited Ms. Mayra Buvinic to present the Bank's strategy and policy in approaching the financial and economic crisis from a women's empowerment and gender equal perspective and to address how gender equality is mainstreamed in the Bank.

She was asked particularly to speak to the NGOs present on how the World Bank is tackling the economic and financial crises from the angle of women's rights, including the right to development, to women in decision-making and capitalising on their creativity and as agents of change, as added value not as welfare beneficiaries or victims in macroeconomic policies to get them out of poverty. She was also asked to describe how the World Bank is strategically mainstreaming gender equality in its policies, programmes and projects that are sustainable, taking into account the asymmetries in power structures of institutions, politics, the labour market, corporate responsibilities, paid and unpaid work, cultures and mind sets.

Introduction

Progress in gender equality and women's empowerment has been uneven. Concerted country efforts have helped raise girls' enrolments significantly in the past decade, reaching gender parity in primary school enrolments in most (83 of 106) developing countries. Yet, in the same period, the increase in women's participation in the economy and in political decision-making has been modest at best. The [2007 Global Monitoring Report: Confronting the Challenges of Gender Equality and Fragile States](#) on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) calls attention of the international community to scale up strategies for reaching the eight Millennium Development Goals. While progress on the first goal of halving poverty is on track everywhere except in Sub-Saharan Africa, efforts to attain goals related to child mortality, disease reduction, and environmental sustainability are falling. The report recommends a stronger role for donors and IFIs in monitoring gender equality and in scaling-up women's access to opportunities, rights, and voice. The report stresses that investing in gender equality is smart economics.

The World Bank's New Approach to Gender Equality and the GAP

In opening her presentation, Mayra Buvinic said that the Bank had admitted it had done a bad job in the past in integrating women's issues in the economic sector, which was relatively low compared to other aspects as education and health. Six years earlier, when Karen Mason, former director of the Gender Department of the Bank, came to Geneva in 2002 at the invitation of the NGO Committee on the Status of

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Women, she informed an audience of over 150 that the Bank had recently introduced gender equality strategic objectives, but had no institutional policy. Now, Ms Buvinic confirmed that the Bank not only had laid out a policy on gender equality, but had also a specific four-year “Gender Action Plan” (GAP) from 2007-2010 and an adequate budget to carry out its mandate over the four years.

The Bank’s former strategy had been on social outcomes, e.g. parity in education or in the health of mothers to reduce maternal mortality, but it sadly lagged behind in opportunities to make women at all age levels participate in the economic growth and development of a country. The Bank staff was therefore sensitised to the importance of providing opportunities to use the comparative advantage of their economic expertise to ensure that the GAP would serve as a tool to increase economic opportunity for adolescent girls and young women. Since statistics have shown that progress in education has not been matched by higher labour force participation, it is critical that more policy attention go to equality in economic opportunity, especially the transition from school to work and building on girls’ and adolescents’ achievements in education and sustaining them in later stages of life.

Besides training and measuring indicators, the Bank now looks at business reports and copying models on how they do business for women. The Bank also cooperates with large private sector leaders to expand gender equal opportunities. Technical staff of the Bank have increased their attention to gender issues from 55% to 72%. The GAP’s aim is to change the way the Bank is doing business on gender equality and to build evidence of accomplishments over the long term through cases in order to have an infrastructure framework, a sustainable policy and a market to work for women.

The World Bank is also lobbying for the next theme of the Development Marketplace (a global competitive grant programme to fund innovation in development) in 2011 to be on “*Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment*”. **Ms-Buvinic asked that NGOs campaign for this to pass the World Bank Board by sending as many messages as we could garner and send it to the World Bank urgently.** She also said that, as GAP is finishing soon in 2010 and was not yet fully institutionalised, the transition plan was for GAP to focus on reproductive health.

Questions and Answers

In answer to the question of how the World Bank looks at gender equality and women’s rights and empowerment, Ms Buvinic confirmed that gender equality to the World Bank means women’s right to economic opportunities that would empower women on the same footing as men and that it was not only a right but a smart business strategy.

Ms Buvinic also called attention to the fact that since Beijing, there has been undue emphasis on rights and on women as victims of violence instead of pushing for women’s empowerment and economic development.

As to the question of conditionality to deal with the GAP, Ms. Buvinic emphasized the importance of government being in the driver’s seat and claiming ownership. As safeguards, however, of misappropriation, the receiving country is required that the use of the loan be results -oriented in its operations; must serve the indigenous needs and that the beneficiaries must be women, as a temporary measure to reach an even level field. Language of rights, a term which the Bank hesitates to use, is nevertheless translated in practical terms for women’s rights and not just rhetoric.