

POLICY BRIEF

# WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS AT THE HEART OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



- RESPONSE TO WORLD BANK GROUP'S PROPOSED GENDER STRATEGY

In the proposed 2024-2030 World Bank Group (WBG), We Effect, and partner organisations appreciate the World Bank Gender Team for recognising civil society organisations suggestions and experiences throughout the process of developing the proposed strategy. In dialogue with partner organisations in Latin America, Eastern and Southern Africa, Asia, and Western Balkan, We Effect have reflected the World Bank Group's gender equality and women's rights aspirations, presented in this paper.

Coverpage: Women active in Cagayan de Oro, Women Muslim Christian Housing Project, Phillipines. Photo: Kisha Beringuela.

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## **We Effect**

Globally, there are about three million cooperatives, and ten percent of workers worldwide are either employed by a cooperative or are worker-owners within a cooperative<sup>1</sup>. We Effect is one of the largest cooperative development actors globally supporting over hundred and sixty partner organisations world-wide becoming increasingly inclusive of women's participation and leadership, and advancing gender equality, and women's economic empowerment.

[www.weeffect.org](http://www.weeffect.org)

## Cooperatives Advancing Gender Equality

**Welcoming** - the aspiration to improve equal access to more and better jobs in women-led business through policies, programmes, and investments.

### Recommendation

- Acknowledge cooperatives, not merely the private sector, in advancing job opportunities for women and economic growth contributing to sustainable development. United Nations General Assembly recognises that cooperatives provide decent employment generation, poverty and hunger eradication, education, social protection, financial inclusion, and the creation of affordable housing options across a variety of economic sectors. The economic status of women tends to improve considerably by belonging to a cooperative, by gaining opportunities through the investments cooperatives make in members' human capital<sup>ii</sup>. Furthermore, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) acknowledges the benefits of the collaboration between the care sector and the cooperative movement and having cooperatives expanding care services for specific groups moving beyond child-care. This since cooperatives having innovative solutions that involve active participation to meet their care needs<sup>iii</sup>.

## Inclusion in Dialogue & Partnership

**Welcoming** - the advanced proposal; pinpointing gender equality being an urgent imperative and setting out to accelerate gender equality with a resilient, inclusive future in mind, building upon past efforts and emphasising its fundamental role in global development. This new standard for the WBG encompasses widening of partnership, acknowledging civil society organisations as relevant stakeholder in progressing gender equality and women's rights.

### Recommendation

- Keep up inclusion of local actors by ensuring local leadership of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons. Crucial actors putting sustainable measures in place such as agenda setting, producing local knowledge, and holding decision-makers accountable<sup>iv</sup>.

## Moving Beyond the Gender Tag

**Welcoming** - the increased accountability measures - moving beyond the gender tag - by centralising country orientation, based on intersectional gender analysis and by adding a country partnership framework. Measures that are aiming to materialise greater engagement with a diverse representation of civil society organisations.

### Recommendation

- Aspire for inclusion of civil society actors in monitoring and learning, like aspired for in the intersectional gender analysis, and country partnership framework.



Mariam Cruz, Honduras. Photo: Edward Rodwell Arrazola

## Safeguard Intersectionality in Resistance to Gender

**Welcoming** - the commitment to non-discrimination, inclusion, and equality, encompassing sexual and gender minorities and the recognition that vulnerability arises from an intersectional lens. A commitment that will highlight, deconstruct, and reform structural barriers that hinder women's and LGBTQI+ persons meaningful participation and progress towards gender equality for all<sup>v</sup>.

### Recommendation

- Ensure safeguarding mechanisms for women and gender minorities by strengthened in the analytical framework, allocate resources and prioritise the strengthening of political and civic exercise of women and gender minorities<sup>vi</sup>. The emergence of anti-gender movements has led to gendered resistance, posing significant challenges to any gender equality strategy, aiming at centring heteropatriarchal norms<sup>vii</sup>. The development of attacking gender holds profound implications for the allocation of public resources, especially in authoritarian regimes, potentially diverting funding from crucial sectors such as care, gender-based violence (GBV), and sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR), pivotal for achieving gender equality. Constrictions directly impacting and, subjecting women and gender minorities to a reduced sphere, eroding their rights and undermining democratic principles.

## Profound Changes by Gender Transformative Approach

**Welcoming** - the ambition to address 'norm-aware approaches'. It is essential to address harmful and constraining gender norms to potentially enabling sustainable changes taking place especially since it is no longer education accelerating non biases to gender equality, but social norms<sup>viii</sup>.

### Recommendation

- Build in a set of factors when applying norm-aware approaches. Norm-aware change should aim at localising the profound change in gender norms, including engaging in positive masculinities, this could include Exploring the ambition to champion gender transformative leadership among institutions. Social norms must be carefully woven with long-term commitments within the localities, and changes of norms in communities should match changes in transformative laws and policies. Also, shaping gender equal norms involves changing power dynamics and subsequently creating resistance among actors who fear losing control. Women rights organisations, gender responsive organisations and women-led cooperatives are equipped to manoeuvre this terrain and ought to oversee implementation and monitoring.

## Women's Participation & Leadership

**Welcoming** - the recognition that women leadership and participation have in development. Numerical representation of women (descriptive representation) in parliament leads to substantive attention to women's concerns (substantial representation)<sup>x</sup>. Similar trends have been recognised among We Effect and partner organisations.

### Recommendation

- Acknowledge when women become leaders, changes in social norms can go either towards greater acceptance of women's leadership or towards a stronger backlash against women<sup>x</sup>. In tackling backlash, incorporate mitigation strategies and safeguarding mechanisms at national level.

## Women Feed the World<sup>xi</sup>

**Welcoming** - the affirmation of the importance of women farmers and the aspiration to ensure equal access to inputs, factors of production (labour, capital, land), agricultural technology, livestock and agribusiness, value chains and markets for them.

### Recommendation

- Recognise the role women farmers can have in the transformation of how food is produced, distributed, and consumed. The transformation of power relations, gender inequality, constraining and harmful norms, refraining women from having access to resources and climate injustice that perpetuate the denial of people's right to food.
- Strengthen entrepreneurial systems, that can generate sufficient income and build resilience for women smallholder farmers and ensure functioning markets that make it possible for female smallholder farmers to sell their products for a decent price without exploitation.

**'Due to cultural beliefs, it is difficult for women to own land. However, through gender transformative approaches, the association dismantles patriarchy and delivers justice<sup>xii</sup>'**

## Land Rights

**Welcoming** - the recognition of land formalisation programmes – land titling for women or joint titling – and the need for legal, regulatory and policy reforms as well as women's participation in land governance is pivotal. Land-titling for women is essential since lack of land access and control has a direct impact on women's economic self-reliance, claiming socioeconomic and political rights.

### Recommendation

- Invest resources for land funds that will enable women to access and control more land. This includes ensuring women access information of the land fund schemes.
- Ensure land titling not only by reforming policy but by transforming local customs<sup>xiii</sup>, and by challenging patriarchal norms<sup>xiv</sup>. Local ownership, by civil society, of these processes has proven successful<sup>xv</sup>.
- Safeguard<sup>xvi</sup> and guarantee effective security, integrity and protection for rural and indigenous women fighting for land titling<sup>xvii</sup> and gain access and rights to ancestral domains<sup>xviii</sup>. In Latin America We Effect's study alarmingly address that 30 percent of women has experienced violence while defending their land, and of those who reported only 17 percent felt that they were considered by authorities<sup>xix</sup>.



Lucy Kainu, Meru, Kenya. Photo: Ghathrine Waking



Hanan Al Saadi, Palestine. Photo: Robert Englund



## Environment & Climate Change

**Welcoming** – i) the recently introduced Environment and Social Performance Standards, hence advancing non-discrimination, equal opportunity, inclusive engagement, and community well-being, ii) the commitment for enhanced women’s role in climate action by expanding opportunities to incorporate women’s voices and leadership into green and just transition development, and iii) the commitment for strengthened integration of gender analysis in Country Climate and Development Reports, and Risk and Resilience Assessments.

### Recommendation

- Make stronger efforts in moving from disaster preparedness and response-based approach to prevention-based programming.
- Increase the requirements for addressing environment and gender equality needs and challenges during the process of development of the Project Appraisal Document (PAD), and further improve the set of gender and environment-based indicators while monitoring the implementation.
- Aligned with the strong commitment in climate change mitigation and low carbon development, level up the WBGs interest for increased investment in climate change adaptation and point out the women’s role in agriculture and food security.
- Invest in mechanisms that strengthen resilience of women small-holder farmers such as insurance, energy saving mechanisms, water harvesting, irrigation, and clean fuel.

## Financial Inclusion

**Welcoming** - the recognition that financial inclusion advance women’s economic development and create safety nets during hazards such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Recommendation

- Recognise that saving groups goes beyond the economic gain for the individual woman. In a report soon to be launched We Effect draws the conclusion based on partner organisations experiences that saving groups methodology is a corner stone and an essential sustainable practice, having multiple effects beyond the economic gain by providing security for communities, strengthening female entrepreneurship, ensuring community resilience during COVID-19 pandemic, and establish an organisational structure and communication essential for development<sup>xx</sup>.
- Ensure gender responsive financing mechanisms such as revolving funds and policy frameworks to ease access to financial products, and services, and strengthen capacity building for women and young people to ensure inclusion in value chains and business.
- Invest in positive masculinities within the communities as means to counter backlash. Positive masculinities supporting the transition of women gaining economic power.

## Care Economy

**Welcoming** - the recognition of care economy in women's economic empowerment and gender equality by addressing the strategies to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care services. The importance is paramount with a backdrop of 'countries with higher bias in gender social norms, women spend more time than men - as much as six times as much - on domestic chores and care work'<sup>xxi</sup>.

### Recommendations<sup>xxii</sup>

- Apply a gender transformative approach since de-feminisation of care work is crucial in achieving gender equality and goes beyond providing care service and altering patriarchal gender roles with positive masculinities of care work at household level and co-responsibilities of care work.
- Acknowledge the advancement of care economy foremost as the affirmation of the advancement of women's economic rights and women's roles in society, and not as the benefit of the economic development for the society per se.
- Invest in research in understanding care work as a localised practise and subsequently ensure the correct measure are supported for localised sustainable solutions.

**'Since care does not represent a social demand in the country, it is necessary to first achieve a political understanding of care and the strategic place it occupies, while transforming the traditional vision of care'**<sup>xxiii</sup>

## Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

**Welcoming** – i) the acknowledgement that GBV is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world and a barrier for women's economic rights deeply entrenched in gender norms and interlinked to various forms of hazards, ii) the ambition to ensure protection from GBV through response services is pressing since more than a quarter of the world's people, today, believe that it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife<sup>xxiv</sup>.

### Recommendation

- Acknowledge GBV is beyond an individual exposure to abuse but rather systematically permeated into structures and cultures prevalent in value chains and entrepreneurial enterprises, legitimised by discriminated laws, informal legal systems and harmful and constraining gender norms entrenched into the social fabric.
- Recognise that preventive measures entail of more than messages to the communities, to ensuring organisations being free from violence being a prerequisite for women's economic role and WBG should apply at minimum risk mitigation analysis in all types of programme design and monitor containing and harmful narratives in achieving gender equality.



Cochabamba, Bolivia, Raul, Guiselle, Diana and Yohan Mamani. Photo Edward Rodwell Arrazola

# ENDNOTES

i United Nations 'Cooperatives in social development – Report by Secretary General' A/78, 17 July 2023.

ii Ibid.

iii International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2017. 'Providing Care through Cooperatives 2: Literature Review and Case Studies'. Lenore Matthew

iv Concord, 'The Game Changer: How a Feminist Foreign Policy Could Transform Societies 2023. <https://concord.se/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/the-game-changer-slutversion.pdf> pp. 35–36.

v Krause, J., Krause, W., and Bränfors, P. 2018. 'Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace'. *International Interactions* 44(6): 985–1016.

vi United Nation, "Situation for women human rights defenders – report of the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders", A/HRC/40/60, 10 January 2019. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/004/97/PDF/G1900497.pdf?OpenElement>

vii UNRISID, Haley McEwen and Lata Narayanaswamy, 'The international anti-gender movement', Working paper 2023-06, wp-2023-4-anti-gender-movement.pdf (unrisd.org); UNDP, 'Breaking down gender biases – shifting social norms towards gender equality', 2023

viii UNDP, 'Breaking down gender biases – shifting social norms towards gender equality', 2023 <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/gsni202303pdf.pdf>

ix Wängnerud, L., *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2009. 12:51–69. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.053106.123839>

x UNDP, 'Breaking down gender biases – shifting social norms towards gender equality', 2023 <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/gsni202303pdf.pdf>

xi We Effect, 'Women's right to food', 2021. [we\\_womens-right-to-food\\_hog.pdf](https://weeffect.org/news/we-effect-stands-up-for-womens-land-rights/) (weeffect.org)

xii Realising Womens' land rights - WeEffect Global

xiii <https://weeffect.org/news/we-effect-stands-up-for-womens-land-rights/>

xiv <https://weeffect.org/news/tanzania-access-to-land/>

xv Realising Womens' land rights - WeEffect Global

xvi United Nation, 'Situation for women human rights defenders – report of the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders', A/HRC/40/60, 10 January 2019. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/004/97/PDF/G1900497.pdf?OpenElement>

xvii We Effect, 'Cause of Death: Farmer', 2022. [WE\\_Bonderapport\\_EN\\_2022.indd](https://weeffect.org/news/we-effect-stands-up-for-womens-land-rights/) (weeffect.org)

xviii Briefing Note 1 Gender and Indigenous Peoples: Overview, United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2010; [https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/BriefingNote1\\_GREY.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/BriefingNote1_GREY.pdf)

xix We Effect, 'Women Feed the World', 2021. [we-effect\\_women-feed-the-world.pdf](https://weeffect.org/news/we-effect-stands-up-for-womens-land-rights/) (weeffect.org)

xx Please reach out to [Dorothy.kipsang@weeffect.org](mailto:Dorothy.kipsang@weeffect.org) for the report. Planned to be released in October 2023.

xxi UNDP, 'Breaking down gender biases – shifting social norms towards gender equality', 2023, p.5 <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/gsni202303pdf.pdf>

xxii The recommendations are further outlined in a report to be launched in November 2023. Please reach out to [maria.johansson@weeffect.org](mailto:maria.johansson@weeffect.org) to access it.

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