



Critique:
Gender Equality as Smart Economics: A World Bank Group Gender Action Plan (GAP) (Fiscal years 2007-10)¹

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The World Bank's new Gender Action Plan (GAP), aptly named "Gender Equality as Smart Economics", is tightly framed in the Bank's old economic policy framework. GAP explicitly targets the "economic sectors", where it argues, the Bank has a comparative advantage and it aims to fit the Bank's "core competencies". Calling itself the "business case", GAP promotes increasing women's roles in the economic sectors as good for business and economic growth. GAP concludes, "In sum, the business case for expanding women's economic opportunities is becoming increasingly evident; this is nothing more than smart economics."

GAP's objective to make "markets work for women" is critically important but this business case ignores the moral imperative of empowering women to achieve women's human rights and full equal rights with men.

Responding to civil society critiques that the Bank's endless policy conditionalities have deepened and feminized poverty,² GAP is the first Bank gender guideline to suggest "engendering" policy based loans. However, GAP neither challenges policy based loan conditionalities nor addresses the problem that the Bank's Gender and Development Policy explicitly exempts policy based loans from its purview.

Moreover, the Bank's relentless economic policy reform agenda undermines achieving the Bank's the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that GAP and the Bank as a whole uphold at every opportunity.

These and other contradictions in the GAP are examined in greater depth below:

¹ The World Bank's Gender Action Plan (GAP) was launched at the September 2006 annual World Bank-International Monetary Fund meetings in Singapore.

² See Suzanna Dennis and Elaine Zuckerman. Gender Guide to World Bank and IMF Policy-Based Lending. Gender Action and the Heinrich Boell Foundation. December 2006
<http://www.genderaction.org/images/GA%20Gender%20Guide%20to%20World%20Bank%20and%20IMF%20FINAL.pdf>
; and Vladislavjevic, Aleksandra and Elaine Zuckerman. 2004. Structural Adjustment's Gendered Impacts: The Case of Serbia and Montenegro. Gender Action. <http://www.genderaction.org/images/Gender-SALS-Serbia&Mont.PDF>.
Gender Action 2005, *ibid*.

Women's Rights and Business Case. GAP totally lacks a human rights approach essential for a development institution with a mission to reduce poverty. It entirely neglects the most important argument for empowering women: achieving women's human rights. GAP's business case that smart economics contributes to economic growth befits a bank. This business case prioritizes engendering economic sectors that the Bank designates as motors of development including agriculture, private sector development, finance and infrastructure – energy, transport, mining, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and water and sanitation. The main beneficiaries of Bank infrastructure, especially infrastructure privatization investments have been transnational corporations, not poor men or women. Adhering faithfully to the Bank's decades-old business model, GAP aims to increase women's participation in land, labor, products and financial markets – while privatizing them as much as possible – which benefits corporations the most.

Policy-Based Loans. Although GAP is the first Bank gender guideline to broach "mainstreaming gender" (see Mainstreaming Gender section below) into "policy operations (Development Policy Lending and Poverty Reduction Support Credits)", GAP fails to acknowledge that the Bank's enforceable Operational Policy (OP) 4.20, "Gender and Development", upon which GAP claims to build, contains a critical footnote excluding "development policy loans" from OP 4.20's stated objective to address gender disparities and inequalities in Bank loans. The Bank's OP that takes precedence over the GAP undermines GAP's intention to engender policy-based loans. Mandatory OPs are the only Bank policies to which civil society can hold the publicly-owned Bank accountable.

While GAP wishes to engender policy operations it does not acknowledge their harmful gendered impacts. Since GAP is entirely framed in the Bank's quarter-century old policy reform agenda featuring enterprise and services privatization and price and market liberalization which benefit corporations and elites but not the poor, it is not surprising that GAP fails to acknowledge how these reforms deepen and feminize poverty.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). GAP claims that its economic approach will contribute to achieving the MDGs. As ActionAid and Stephen Lewis so brilliantly demonstrate, the standard economic reforms that the Bank imposes on poor countries – low-inflation and tight spending policies -- sabotage achieving MDGs including (1) universal education in a world where two thirds of the 100 million children not attending school are girls, and (2) combating HIV/AIDS that is devastating Africa's people, particularly young females.³ GAP nowhere acknowledges this contradiction.

IFC and MIGA. In response to Gender Action's and other external critics, GAP is the first Bank gender action plan, strategy and/or policy that claims to apply to the entire

³ Marphatia, Akanksha A. and David Archer. September 2005. Contradicting Commitments: How the Achievement of Education for All is Being Undermined by the International Monetary Fund. ActionAid International and Global Campaign for Education. <http://www.actionaidusa.org/pdf/ContradictingCommit8663C.pdf#search=%22Contradicting%20Commitments%3A%20How%20the%20Achievement%20of%20Education%20for%20All%20is%20Being%20Undermined%20by%20the%20International%20Monetary%20Fund%22>; Rowden, Rick. September 2005. Changing Course: Alternative Approaches to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals and Fight HIV/AIDS. ActionAid International USA. <http://www.actionaidusa.org/pdf/Changing%20Course%20Report.pdf>
Lewis, Stephen. 2005B. Race Against Time. Anansi Press.

World Bank Group. All previous Bank gender guidelines confined themselves to IBRD and IDA, excluding the IFC and MIGA.⁴ GAP states that its gender mainstreaming applies to all World Bank Group member organizations.

GAP articulates the IFC's roles as promoting gender responsiveness in the private sector, increasing the numbers of women participating in and benefiting from private sector development projects, and engendering three Investment Climate Assessments annually. Thus GAP upholds the Bank Group's privatization agenda that enhances corporate profits and undermines the Bank Group mission of reducing poverty. GAP never mentions the Bank Group's Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) -- which constantly guarantees corporate investments with extremely harmful gendered impacts.⁵

Mainstreaming Gender. GAP persists in promoting mainstreaming gender as the Bank's key method to achieve gender equality. Mainstreaming gender is a noble goal, but it has not worked in the Bank or elsewhere. GAP does not acknowledge critiques by highly-regarded women's rights experts arguing that mainstreaming gender has seriously retarded attaining women's rights.⁶

Note for the record that GAP will strategically concentrate mainstreaming gender activities on "a relatively small number of focus countries" to attain measurable impacts. The final selection of focus countries will be made by an internal GAP Executive Committee.

Communications. GAP's implementation includes a large communications campaign. The Bank's awesome External Affairs complex (EXT) is the main executor. EXT manages one of the world's best financed, most effective propaganda machines. One can already imagine the Bank's next series of CNN commercials picturing how the Bank empowers poor women around the world. GAP promises that President Wolfowitz will raise gender issues and discuss the GAP at international meetings.⁷ Undoubtedly, GAP's media exposure is likely to be massive. It is likely to continue misleading the public to believe that the Bank is reducing poverty and empowering women.

Local Ownership. GAP's communication campaign goals include "fostering national and local ownership" of the GAP. But borrower country populations are tired of fictional national and local ownership of anything Bank-created, for example poverty reduction strategies that the Bank mythically insists are country-owned.

Civil Society. GAP's identified implementers include civil society organizations (CSOs) in addition to Bank regions, networks, governments and the private sector. While in reality CSOs encompass many types of groups, the entire CSO community that the Bank

⁴ See "Reforming the World Bank: Will the Gender Strategy Make a Difference? A Study with China Case Examples", 2005. Elaine Zuckerman and Wu Qing. Heinrich Boell Foundation. This Gender Action publication analyzed the World Bank's previous gender guideline, "Integrating Gender in the World Bank's Work: A Strategy for Action". World Bank. 2002.

⁵ To give one example, MIGA is providing political risk insurance to private mining companies operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo that have stimulated conflict, mass rape and sexual slavery:
<http://www.miga.org/sitelevel2/level2.cfm?id=1080>

⁶ For example see Clark, Cindy et al. Where is the money for women's rights? AWID/Just Associates. 2005; Stephen Lewis *ibid*; Paula Donovan. Gender Equality Now or Never: A New UN Agency for Women. July 2006.

⁷ GAP Table 5.

consulted with in creating GAP consisted of the Bank's hand-picked seven-member External Gender Consultative Group. Past Bank partnerships with CSOs critical of the Bank have so disillusioned CSOs about Bank motives, for example, the Joint Facilitation Committee and the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI), that it is unlikely that many critical CSOs wish to collaborate again with the Bank.

Looking forward, GAP identifies one CSO partner – the International Center for Research on Women -- to design and conduct GAP evaluations.

Conclusions. Although GAP is the strongest Bank gender guideline yet, it has serious flaws including neglecting to (1) embrace a human's rights framework; (2) protest policy-based loans and conditionalities that exacerbate and feminize poverty; (3) insist on removing the policy-based loan exemption from the Bank's Gender and Development Policy, the only Bank gender policy to which civil society can hold the publicly-owned Bank accountable; (4) link GAP's goal of attaining the MDGs to Bank conditionalities that undermine doing so; (5) include the Bank Group's Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) among its explicit targets; and (6) acknowledge the shortfalls of mainstreaming gender – GAP's key strategy.

So long as the Bank persists in imposing loan conditionalities that deepen poverty and gender discrimination, GAP's intention to empower women will be seriously impeded.

To improve its record, the Bank must (1) end conditionalities in policy-based and other loans that undermine national sovereignty and deepen poverty and (2) remove OP 4.20's policy-based loan exemption.