

AIB, Women and SDG 5

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The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) launched as a new multilateral development bank (MDB) in early 2016, just a few months after the UN's new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted, including SDG 5 on gender equality.

Gender equality sits at the heart of sustainable development. This briefing, released on International Women's Day, focuses on women and girls' wellbeing.

Women and girls' voices are often absent or ignored in designing, implementing and monitoring development projects. Women represent a high percentage of the world's poor, have less access to and control of goods and services, and are more often than not left out of decision-making than men. Due to discrimination women are also less likely to get equal access to project benefits. Equally, they are often worst affected when things go wrong. For example, displacement and dispossession can have detrimental impacts on women's social and economic roles, and can expose both women and girls to increased risks, such as gender-based violence. Adding to this, the impacts of climate change often hit women hardest due to systemic inequalities.

On the other hand, putting gender equality front and centre when designing and implementing projects can accelerate major improvements for whole households, families and communities. For example, including a focus on energy access for all could lead to women and girls spending less time on tasks such as fuel wood and water

collection, leaving more time for education and income generation activities, and increasing resilience to climate change.

Despite this, AIIB, in contrast to most other MDBs, has not yet developed a specific gender policy or strategy to ensure its projects promote gender equality. AIIB's recently updated Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) elevated the importance of gender equality and included new commitments to address gender-based-violence, but failed to include a specific standalone standard on gender equality. AIIB's Corporate Strategy commits AIIB "to enhance its contribution to gender equality in Asia by increasingly incorporating gender considerations into projects, which can be mapped against SDG 5". But it fails to provide any further detail or targets, apart from one related to AIIB's internal workforce diversity. AIIB's sector strategies - for example, on energy or transport - include few mentions of gender and women, mainly as background information and with no specific gender-related targets.

Forthcoming opportunities to address this gap include the forthcoming Energy Sector Strategy review and the development of AIIB's first Paris alignment methodology. Both must include clear commitments to address gender inequality. But ultimately, AIIB must also fill the void where an overarching institutional gender strategy should sit.



SDG 5 on Gender Equality

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It has nine targets and 14 indicators. Several of these are directly relevant for MDBs, including:



Target 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.



Target 5.4 Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.



Target 5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Climate impacts on women

The impacts of climate change often hit women first and hardest since women play an important role in, for example, small scale agriculture and act as main providers of water for rural households. When extreme weather hits, such as droughts and floods, women tend to spend more time working to secure the household's livelihood, leaving less time for things like money-earning activities and education. But women can also play a key role in helping communities adapt to climate change, building on knowledge and skills around water harvesting and natural resource management.

Putting gender issues front and centre when designing MDB projects can therefore have multiple benefits, including supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation. For example, prioritising energy access for all can free up time women spend on tasks such as fuel wood and water collection. Women also have a critical role to play in facilitating the shift to renewables, in particular off-grid renewable energy solutions.



The absence of clear requirements and guidance regarding gender has led to inconsistent mostly absent gender due diligence in AIIB funded projects. Boxes below summarise a few sectoral AIIB project examples where women have been put at risk of harm and adversely impacted by AIIB's failure to implement protective mechanisms, coupled with lack of proper consultations to ensure gender-inclusive project design.

Transport



In 2017, AIIB invested \$329 million in the Rural Roads Project in Gujarat, India. However, an independent implementation review revealed that the project violated numerous local labour laws and exposed female workers to dangers. Workers suffered poor working conditions, without protective gear, and sanitary facilities were either missing or inappropriate for women. Despite promises of safe living conditions, many workers had to sleep in open fields, with some women reporting sexual harassment. Children, especially girls, were put at risk since there were no childcare facilities or private spaces for children. The project employed fewer women than men, and when women were given jobs, it was generally for shorter-term and lower-paid positions than men, despite in some cases having higher levels of education and work experience. On top of this, due to the lack of proper consultation, the road design failed to account for gender-differentiated use. For example, the roads lack sidewalks, putting women and children who are primary pedestrians at risk.

Energy projects



In 2018, AIIB approved \$60 million for a new 220 megawatt gas power plant in Bangladesh, the Bhola Integrated Power Plant (IPP). Bangladeshi CSO Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action (CLEAN) studied the impacts on local communities and discovered women were particularly badly affected. Land acquisition for the plant resulted in women losing important grazing land for livestock without compensation, forcing them to buy feed instead. Furthermore, the construction company dumped rubbish and sand in the tidal canals running through local communities' land. As a result, the water is no longer safe to drink and women must now collect water for daily needs elsewhere, two to three kilometres away from their homes. Due to waste dumping, the canals have also reduced in depth and now flood during high tide. The flooding, which can last up to six hours twice a day during the monsoon period, makes vegetable growing and chicken rearing - normally the responsibility of women - impossible for those affected. In addition, almost two thirds of the women CLEAN spoke to reported that they were unable to access a toilet during the floods. Almost a third of women reported an increase in sick days since the flooding started, likely due to being exposed to the now polluted canals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

AIIB should adopt and systematically implement a mandatory, robust, and freestanding gender policy, including requirements and targets to:



prevent harmful gender impacts and address the differentiated impacts and needs of all genders



guarantee gender-equal labour protections, hiring practices, and occupational health and safety protocols



incorporate gender issues into all environmental and social risk assessments



provide gender-sensitive resettlement, livelihood restoration and other compensation measures



apply a gender-lens to all climate assessments



systematically collect gender-disaggregated baseline data, followed by regular monitoring and evaluation



actively include women in consultations, including holding sex-segregated consultations



ensure the new Energy Sector Strategy places women's access to energy front and centre

