

Civil Society Calls For 6 Interventions by the World Bank on LGBTQI+ Inclusion

Introduction

Around the world, systematic exclusion and stigma faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people act as barriers to their socioeconomic empowerment, leaving them over-represented among the poor. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has only made this situation worse, increasing existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, worsening food and housing insecurity, negatively impacting health and wellbeing, and pushing many LGBTQI+ people on the poverty line into situational poverty with little hope of escape (Bishop, 2020). Research has shown that discrimination drags down overall macroeconomic growth and inclusion of LGBTQI+ people has a positive economic impact on society (Badgett, 2020). Acknowledging the significant economic vulnerability faced by LGBTQI+ people, some institutions and governments are advancing efforts to address their wellbeing through renewed international efforts and commitments.

The World Bank must do more to meaningfully advance the inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in development initiatives. The Bank aims to reduce extreme global poverty to less than 3 percent by 2030, and to foster income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population in each country. The Bank's twin goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity cannot be achieved without LGBTQI+ inclusion - given that LGBTQI+ communities are over-represented in the economic bottom 40 percent and are consistently excluded from the workforce, public education, health services, and civic spaces.

Although the World Bank has made many public statements on the importance of including LGBTQI+ people in its work to combat poverty and promote economic growth (World Bank, 2020; Gill, 2019), this rhetoric needs to be operationalized so that a sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) perspective and analysis are institutionalized and that LGBTQI+ people are included in Bank projects and programs. In 2016, the World Bank made a significant step forward in addressing inclusion and non-discrimination by adopting binding policies that provide for the inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in its Investment Project Financing (IPF). The [Environmental and Social Framework](#) (ESF) requires that projects look at the disaggregated impacts on "disadvantaged or vulnerable individuals or groups," including LGBTQI+ people, and that there are measures put in place to mitigate harm and allow access to project benefits for LGBTQI+ people. The ESF also requires stakeholder engagement throughout the project lifecycle. Yet, in the three years since the Bank institutionalized these policies, little action has been taken to adequately supervise projects to be in compliance with the ESF nor have there been adequate steps taken to measure the impact of mitigation strategies to prevent harm to LGBTQI+ people. For example, the Bank Information Center examined a sample of 12 Stakeholder Engagement plans (SEPs) of 11 of the World Bank's initial COVID-19 health response projects; only 3 of 12 SEPs mention sexual orientation or gender identity in the consideration of "disadvantaged or vulnerable groups."

This policy brief calls for 6 interventions to move the World Bank to operationalize its commitments to LGBTQI+ inclusion and move towards an inclusive agenda that leaves no one behind. The World Bank can further the operationalization of its twin goals by identifying the reasons for exclusion and measures to address them, sequencing and prioritizing solutions, tracking and monitoring progress and ensuring follow-up and review of the commitment. In light of a global pandemic as well as historical inequalities faced by the LGBTQI+ community, the time is now for the World Bank to truly invest in these economically underdeveloped communities.

Policy Recommendations to Accelerate Inclusion and Impact in Investments

In order for the World Bank's operations to be truly inclusive of LGBTQI+ people and issues, we recommend the following 6 policy interventions:

1. Facilitate culturally sensitive consultations with LGBTQI+ groups and create connections to LGBTQI+ organizations and human rights defenders (HRDs) in-country and regions. Consulting LGBTQI+ populations in the design, development, and implementation of programs and policies can help to address the specific development needs of these populations. The Bank should conduct and moderate discussions with a broad range of LGBTQI+ populations and HRDs, especially national and local organizations. These consultations should be accessible and in appropriate formats that take into consideration the safety of participants, especially when conducted with populations based in countries where LGBTQI+ people are criminalized, subjected to severe violence, discrimination, or stigma, or state surveillance is high. Consultations should also be made with specific population groups within the LGBTQI+ umbrella, with the recognition that LGBTQI+ communities are diverse and their economic needs are not always universal. Specific consultations should be held with LGBTQI+ communities and HRDs, recognizing the intersectional risks and economic violence faced by queer women. The Bank should allocate an appropriate budget to hold these consultations.

Consistent and long term stakeholder engagement in-country throughout the project cycle must be coupled with a strong feedback loop, which is key for the design and implementation of inclusive projects. The Bank should do outreach to and create meaningful relationships with LGBTQI+ civil society organizations and HRDs throughout countries.

2. Collect and disaggregate data by sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC): The Bank should disaggregate data that shows the impact of Bank projects on LGBTQI+ communities. This enables more effective project monitoring and evaluation to see how project benefits are reaching all groups and to close the significant LGBTQI+ inclusion data gap. The Bank should consult community-based and LGBTQI+-led organizations to find sensitive and safe ways to gather these data. Project-specific results indicators should be SOGIESC sensitive.

3. Increase internal knowledge at the Bank and training within project implementation units (PIUs) in countries regarding LGBTQI+ inclusion and issues. The Bank should sensitize Bank and PIU staff involved in consultations with LGBTQI+ groups and HRDs by conducting regular training in coordination with LGBTQI+ organizations. By increasing Bank and PIUs staff capacity to organize and oversee safe environments for LGBTQI+ consultations, they can be more responsive to concerns from the community. The Bank should also train project implementation units on LGBTQI+ issues and inclusion. This could make a significant impact on how Bank projects address LGBTQI+ issues in both project design and implementation.

4. Specifically reference “SOGI” in project and program documents as well as sector and country strategies: The Bank’s [ESF](#) prohibits discrimination against “disadvantaged or vulnerable groups,” including LGBTQI+ individuals. Following the [“Bank Directive Addressing Risks and Impacts on Disadvantaged or Vulnerable Individuals or Groups”](#) and explicitly mentioning “sexual orientation and gender identity” as a “disadvantaged or vulnerable group” in project documents highlights specific risks and mitigation measures to prevent harm for LGBTQI+ people and also helps to enable their participation in consultations when highlighted in stakeholder engagement plans. While the ESF and the Directive apply only to IPFs, it is imperative that there be “SOGI” reference in all project and program documents, including those for Program-for-Results and Development Policy Financing, so that LGTBQI+ people are taken into consideration for the design and implementation of projects, allowing them to benefit from and not be harmed by these projects. The inclusion of specific references to LGBTQI+ people in documents such as the Country Partnership Framework and the Systematic Country Diagnostic also highlights LGBTQI+ inclusion as a priority for the country’s development and can lead to specific interventions, such as projects or programs, designed to address SOGIESC inclusion.

5. Increase the number of both stand alone projects that specifically focus on LGBTQI+ people and also mainstream projects that include a LGBTQI+ component. The operationalization of LGBTQI+ inclusion in Bank projects, either standalone or mainstream, remains limited. This signals that “SOGI” inclusion is not a priority for the Bank nor is there political will within the institution to make LGBTQI+ inclusion a priority because there is not appropriate staffing or funding to make more LGBTQI+ sensitive projects and programs a reality. The Bank must step up and increase its capacity to design and work with governments to implement LGBTQI+ mainstream and standalone projects.

6. Establish and implement reprisal and retaliation prevention and response mechanisms. The Bank should establish effective mechanisms to prevent and respond to reprisals and retaliation against LGBTQI+ communities, HRDs and organizations in line with their [commitments against reprisals](#). Contextual risks analysis to establish the risk of retaliation against LGBTQI+ groups should be conducted ahead of project approval and the project design adapted accordingly. For example, where the client government may pose a risk to LGBTQI+ groups, the Bank should conduct separate engagements with those groups to help to prevent any negative impacts. Grievance mechanisms should be designed in a way that ensures the anonymity of complainants where requested and LGBTQI+ HRDs and organizations should be informed of the existence of the Bank’s Grievance Redress Service and the Inspection Panel so

that they may lodge a complaint directly with the Bank rather than with the client which may increase the likelihood of reprisal. Where reprisals against LGBTQI+ communities, HRDs or organizations occur, the Bank must act rapidly, utilizing their leverage in support. It is important that the Bank establishes a clear internal procedure for how to handle reprisals to LGBTQI+ persons so that the response is consistent and not dependent on the individual will of the staff member. The Bank should provide a guidance note on how to design project Grievance Mechanisms (GMs) that ensure they can be effectively/safely used by LGBTQI+ individuals.

Citations and Additional Resources

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About the Authors

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