

**The Gendered Impacts of World Bank Environment and Infrastructure  
Projects in China**

**The Third Non-governmental Organization Forum on International  
Environmental Cooperation in China  
November 19, 2003**

**Presentation by  
Elaine Zuckerman  
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**Abstract**

Because women are key environmental stakeholders directly managing China's natural resources, they must participate in environment, infrastructure and all development projects. Yet too few development projects including large World Bank projects in China consider gender-specific implications. World Bank investments in China are concentrated almost entirely in heavy infrastructure and environment projects. For example, a representative sample of World Bank projects in China consists of investments named environment (wastewater, air quality, etc), water conservation (irrigation), water supply and sanitation, inland waterways, highways, railways and other transportation, energy, rural development and urban development. Current World Bank projects under preparation focus on developing the western region and addressing the challenges of rapid urbanization. Gender Action's analysis of World Bank projects in China demonstrates that they neglect critical gender impacts. Examples of gender impacts that World Bank projects in China neglect include land ownership and resettlement issues arising during land appropriation from farmers and the need for women farmers to learn about preserving biodiversity as agriculture feminizes. World Bank investments overall fail to target women as natural resource managers who must play a critical role in environmental conservation. Although many World Bank projects in China organize participatory consultations, most do not convene specific meetings for men and women affected. Through analyzing World Bank environment and infrastructure projects in China, this paper demonstrates how World Bank investments neglect to identify and address serious gender impacts and how they must do so to achieve sustainable development in China and globally.

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**Introduction.** There are several important reasons to **engender – that is ensure gender considerations are included in** – World Bank environment and other investments in China. The World Bank's own research demonstrates compellingly that greater gender equality translates into greater economic growth, less poverty and more sustainable development (World Bank 2001). Another reason to engender World Bank investments in China is because they often require policy reforms that have harmful environmental, gender and other social consequences. World Bank investments in China, mainly composed of environmental and infrastructure projects with environmental impacts, sadly have neglected gender considerations.

**Methodology.** This paper updates and draws on research from my presentation at the Second Non-governmental Organization Forum on China-US Environmental Cooperation held in Beijing in November 2001 and is based on monitoring World Bank investments in China for their environmental and gendered impacts since China joined the World Bank in 1980. During the last two and a half decades, my positions included working inside the World Bank as an agriculture and environment project economist on China and as a gender expert. In 2000, I wrote the Bank's first China Country Gender Review that examined the most serious gender gaps in China and through a portfolio analysis demonstrated how little Bank investments address them (World Bank 2002b).

Since founding Gender Action, a nonprofit advocacy campaign dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's rights in World Bank investments in 2002, all three NGO environmental campaign on the World Bank founders have been on Gender Action's Board of Directors and Advisory Council. This is because Gender Action is learning valuable lessons from the NGO environment campaign on the World Bank.

Recently Gender Action prepared a study evaluating the effectiveness of the World Bank Gender Strategy featuring China as the country case (Zuckerman and Wu 2003). For this study, I interviewed World Bank agriculture and environmental division economists during 2003. They had never heard of the World Bank's gender strategy or policy nor had they known that the World Bank has a gender website providing tools for engendering World Bank agriculture and environment projects.

Besides conducting interviews, I analyzed a sample of World Bank operations in China because the real test of its Gender Strategy implementation is the extent to which World Bank investments address gender issues. World Bank investments in China are

concentrated almost entirely in heavy infrastructure and environment projects, in sectors such as water and sanitation, transport, the environment and rural development where men and women play distinct gender roles and often have distinct needs.

**The World Bank Project Gender Track Record.** Although the World Bank has promoted gender equality rhetorically and in its research for many years, it has hardly translated this verbal support into its investments. The World Bank's latest Gender Strategy published in 2002 perpetuates this disconnect (World Bank 2002a). This conclusion emerged from a Gender Action study that evaluated the effectiveness of the World Bank Gender Strategy using China as the case study (Zuckerman and Wu 2003).

The World Bank Gender Strategy centerpiece is the preparation of a country gender review for each borrower country. This review is supposed to feed into World Bank Country Assistance Strategies (CASs) and operations. The reviews are prepared based on the assumption that World Bank projects will address the most serious gender gaps that the reviews highlight. But this sequence is unlikely to unfold because it ignores the fact that World Bank staff consistently respond to mandatory incentives only, above all to getting loans approved that minimally meet required policies. Unfortunately, there is no mandated World Bank gender policy. The World Bank gender policy, like its new strategy, is optional and encouraged, but not mandated. Gender Action is advocating for gender mandates.

Gender Action's analysis of a representative sample of 5 of 24 projects the World Bank approved for China during 2000-2002 found that only one project, a water conservation project, recognized women's important role (Zuckerman and Wu 2003). However, this project and all the others that we analyzed failed to consider the projects' gender differentiated needs and impacts. Table 1 presents further findings of the gender analysis.

**Table 1**  
**Summary Gender Analysis of World Bank Projects in China, 2000 - 2002<sup>1</sup>**

<b>World Bank Projects</b>	<b>Sector/Year</b>	<b>Gender Analysis</b>
<b>National Railway Project</b>	Transport 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides no gender analysis of project impacts especially important in land appropriation from owners.</li> <li>• Makes no effort to interview women and men impacted by the project.</li> </ul>
<b>Third Inland Waterways Project</b>	Water/Transport 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contains no gender analysis of social impacts including resettlement and land lost by inundation although the project aims to indirectly reduce poverty and improve lives of families and especially children.</li> <li>• States local people affected were consulted, but with no separate consultations for women and men nor any gender focus.</li> </ul>
<b>Urumqi Urban Transport Improvement</b>	Transport 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neglects to consider gendered needs and impacts in analyses of present and proposed improved transport system.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Aida Orgocka, a Gender Action gender and development expert, undertook this analysis.

<b>Project</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discusses resettlement strategies without indicating male and female needs and impacts.</li> </ul>
<b>Second Beijing Environment Project</b>	Environment 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contains no discussion of gender disaggregated impacts of project to improve wastewater, air quality and other environmental systems.</li> <li>Neglected to consult men and women separately or explore their differentiated needs during the public hearings.</li> </ul>
<b>Water Conservation Project</b>	Water 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizes women's important role in farm irrigation management.</li> <li>Neglects the different effects on males and females in a project survey of impacted communities that presented the view of "farmers" generically.</li> </ul>

Even post-2000 World Bank projects in China neglect gender despite the existence since 2000 of the World Bank China Country Gender Review (CGR) prepared specifically to ensure investments would become more accountable on gender (World Bank 2002b).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the CGR conducted a gender analysis of a representative sample of 23 out of 97 projects under implementation across sectors during 2000. It also analyzed all 11 pieces of World Bank Economic and Sector Work or analytical research on China completed since 1997.

The CGR analysis demonstrated many lost opportunities to address the gender implications of environment, resettlement, poverty and other major issues.<sup>3</sup> Table 2 presents further findings of the CGR analysis.

**Table 2**  
**Summary Gender Analysis of World Bank Projects in China, 1995-2000**

<b>World Bank Projects</b>	<b>Sector/Year</b>	<b>Gender Analysis</b>
<b>Liaoning Environment</b>	Environment 1995	There are no gender recommendations even for the resettlement component aimed at helping vulnerable groups.
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Rural Water Supply and Sanitation</b>	Rural 1997	Although the All China Women's Federation commendably contributed to the project's health education component, women's role in collecting water is not discussed and project performance indicators lack gender disaggregation.
<b>China. Forward with One Spirit: A Strategy for the Transport Sector</b>	Transport 1998	Gender is not mentioned. It would have been useful to examine how men and women use roads and would benefit differently from projects.
<b>State Farms Commercialization</b>	Agriculture 1998	Gender nor people are mentioned. It would have been valuable to analyze social including gender impacts of project-induced changes in health care, housing contracts, pensions, etc.
<b>East China (Jiangsu) Transmission</b>	Power 1998	There are no gender recommendations even for the resettlement component aimed at helping vulnerable groups.
<b>Rural China:</b>	Rural	Gender is not discussed in this volume addressing

<sup>2</sup> This paper's author drafted the World Bank China Country Gender Review in 2000.

<sup>3</sup> The gender analysis of the World Bank portfolio in China covered all 11 pieces of World Bank Economic and Sector Work, ie analytical and research products, produced during 1997-2000 and a cross-sector sample of one quarter of the investment projects under implementation in 2000.

<b>Transition and Development</b>	1999	investments in natural resource protection, land, water, TVEs and poverty alleviation. The volume states there is no evidence that women are over-represented among the poor despite strong contrary evidence (World Bank 2002b).
<b>Accelerating China's Rural Transformation</b>	Rural 1999	This volume discusses China's farmers generically without discussing feminization of farming. Only migration has a gender analysis. Missed opportunities to address gender-poverty concerns include the analyses of microcredit, land tenure, water resources, agricultural research and extension, rural industry, natural resource management, environmental protection, contraction of rural health and education services etc.
<b>Overcoming Rural Poverty</b>	Rural 2000	Poverty is only analyzed down to the household level although intrahousehold distribution of consumption goods and services are gender unequal. Discussion of targeted poverty programs including microcredit, food for work, extension services, land use rights, and resettlement does not explore differential impacts on men and women.

A remarkable CGR finding was that the many detailed World Bank rural poverty analyses neither acknowledged the well documented feminization of poverty and agriculture in China nor China's record of having the world's highest female suicide rate and one of the most rapidly proliferating patterns of trafficking concentrated heavily among poor young rural females (World Bank 2002b).

The analyses suggest that progress in engendering World Bank projects in China has not yet occurred since the CGR was made available in 2000.

CGRs are designed to feed into World Bank Country Assistance Strategies (CASes). However, the World Bank CAS for China published in 2003 seriously neglects gender issues that the 2000 CGR flags. The China CGR provides an in-depth analysis of a host of gender issues including the legal and regulatory framework, labor market, poverty, and other issues that are very relevant to the new CAS but the CAS missed the opportunity to integrate the China CGR analysis and recommendations. The text of the China CAS only mentions gender once and a short annex summarizing the CGR is clearly an add-on. Since this summary of gender recommendations for China's World Bank portfolio is the 18<sup>th</sup> out of 20 CAS annexes, few are likely to read and use it. The gender annex is neither referenced nor integrated into the text of the CAS.

**Why Engender World Bank Projects in China.** World Bank environment, infrastructure and other projects need to consider the following types of gender issues affecting China's development for the following reasons:

- ◆ Major natural resources at risk of degradation such as water, soils, forests and biodiversity, are increasingly managed by women who constitute the majority of poor farmers as men migrate to urban areas. Farming practices have negative impacts on soils and soils degradation, exacerbating the vulnerability of poor farmers, mostly women. Yet, many decisions about control over these resources are still made by men.
- ◆ Women and children in very poor areas spend several hours per day collecting and carrying water and fuel wood, the primary cooking fuel created mostly from

cutting down trees. The opportunity costs of their water carrying time are high. Women forego the opportunity to work in income-earning activities and girls forego the opportunity to attend school. Yet few World Bank transport and environment projects aim to relieve women and children of their carrying burden or to replace wood as the primary cooking fuel.

- ◆ Women primarily diffuse environment practices in the home and community. Women, as the primary caregivers of children, disseminate environmental messages to children including excreta disposal, hand washing and other sanitation practices. Nevertheless, project environmental education messages mostly target men.
- ◆ Women and children are the main collectors of medicinal plants and herbs. Although medicinal plants and herbs contribute to good health, cutting them may inadvertently harm biodiversity. But few Bank-supported campaigns to protect biodiversity target women and children specifically.
- ◆ Environmental health risks affect women heavily. Farm populations, that are increasingly feminized as more males than females migrate to towns, encounter health risks from chemicals used in farming and in rural industries. Urban workers, including many female migrants, face environmentally dangerous working conditions in factories with significant health consequences. These health risks are compounded by diminished public preventive health and insurance programs.

**Engendered Solutions.** Natural asset and environmental use patterns call for engendered solutions. It will be impossible to redress environmental degradation and reduce poverty without tackling women's and men's engendered natural resource and environmental management roles. Examples of distinct engendered solutions are to:

- ◆ Target environmental education campaigns to women and children given their major role in managing natural resources and biodiversity.
- ◆ Provide time saving infrastructure for water collection and delivery. Such infrastructure would reduce the time burden and opportunity costs of keeping the poorest children out of school and women out of income-earning activities and it would also enhance health outcomes.<sup>4</sup>
- ◆ Supply improved stoves and cleaner fuels for household energy needs to women who are the main fuel consumers.
- ◆ Reduce urban and rural environmental health risks and target access to health services to women farmers, migrant workers and other vulnerable groups.

As agriculture and poverty become increasingly feminized in China, it is critical to target women's predominant role in managing natural resources. The consequences of extreme rural female poverty in China combined with patriarchal values is proving devastating -- evidenced in China's soaring female suicide rate, by far the highest in the world (World Bank 2002b). World Bank and other development projects in China must address their gendered impacts to achieve sustainable development and to reduce poverty.

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<sup>4</sup> Other developing countries could learn from China's past education campaigns emphasizing the relationship between contaminated water, hygiene practices and health outcomes and promoting simple techniques like handwashing and consistently boiling water.

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