



## **Critique of the World Bank's Applying Gender Action Plan Lessons: A Three-Year Road Map for Gender Mainstreaming (2011-2013)<sup>1</sup>**

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The World Bank's "Applying Gender Action Plan Lessons: A Three Year Road Map for Gender Mainstreaming" (the "Road Map"; 2011-2013) evaluates the Bank's implementation of the *Gender Equality as Smart Economics* (GAP) Action Plan (2007-2010), and presents a plan for the Bank to strengthen gender mainstreaming in its operations. The Road Map includes significant improvements compared to the GAP, such as an increased focus on maternal mortality and reproductive health, as well as a more comprehensive plan for gender-focused monitoring and evaluation. However, while the Bank claims that gender "coverage" has increased since the GAP was first implemented in 2007, the Road Map still fails to respond to multiple civil society criticisms, including its lack of a human rights framework, its incomprehensive approach to reproductive health and its lack of robust, transparent gender-related data. In addition, the Road Map almost exclusively focuses on economic empowerment as the sole means to achieve gender equality, and does not include a plan to build gender mainstreaming capacity in Bank country offices.

### ***Women's Rights as Human Rights***

As Gender Action noted in its 2007 critique of the GAP, the Bank seeks to "make markets work for women," but ignores "the most important argument for empowering women: achieving women's human rights." The Road Map also lacks a human rights framework, emphasizing the "need to build and disseminate a solid business rationale for gender equality [which is] the basic incentive for Bank staff to mainstream gender issues and for client countries to demand gender equality work." The continuing lack of a human rights framework illustrates the Bank's clear prioritization of "smart economics" over the human rights of the vulnerable populations it claims to empower, and its failure to promote women and men's equal rights.

### ***Gender Equality and Reproductive Health***

The Road Map's acknowledgement of the critical role that men and boys play in improving women's reproductive health and achieving gender equality is commendable. For example, the Road Map claims that "address[ing] reproductive health needs of adolescent girls and women in low-income households... requires strengthening the role of boys and men in attaining reproductive health goals." As it stands, however, this statement seems to be an afterthought,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2010/05/31/000333037\\_20100531032151/Rendered/PDF/547520BR0SecM2101Official0Use0Only1.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2010/05/31/000333037_20100531032151/Rendered/PDF/547520BR0SecM2101Official0Use0Only1.pdf)

with no discussion of what constitutes a “strengthened role” for men and boys in regard to reproductive health goals.

The scope of “reproductive health,” according to the Road Map, is narrowly confined to issues related only to adolescent fertility and maternal mortality. The Road Map proposes only two indicators to measure its “invest[ment] in reproductive health, in particular adolescent fertility,” in “countries with high fertility and maternal mortality (as defined in the Reproductive Health Action Plan)”: 1) the percentage of health projects that address high fertility and maternal mortality, and 2) the percentage of health projects that address adolescent fertility. While what constitutes “addressing” these critical issues remains unclear, the Road Map completely ignores other critical facets of reproductive health beyond those related to fertility and prenatal health, such as sexual violence.

The International Development Association (IDA) reproductive health priorities for the African region, which appear in draft form, are similarly limited in scope. They include “skilled attendants at delivery (value by country); contraception prevalence rate for modern methods; adolescent fertility rate (age 15-19 years); number of pregnant women with at least two antenatal care visits per pregnancy; number of HIV+ pregnant women receiving ART to reduce risk of transmission to fetus.” These indicators not only reduce women and girls’ reproductive health to issues solely related to childbirth, but also fail to encompass fundamental issues related to women’s sexual and reproductive rights, including women’s ability to negotiate protected sex with their partner(s), and sexual violence. The Road Map should prioritize responding to the gender role complexities of sexual and reproductive health in a comprehensive manner, in order to help girls and women in client countries fulfill their reproductive health rights and achieve full equality with men.

### ***Economic Empowerment as a Means to Achieve Gender Equality***

The Road Map claims that “while solutions to reduce gender inequalities will vary across...countries and demographic scenarios, supporting women’s economic empowerment is common to most situations.” It also emphasizes that “attention to women’s economic empowerment and investments in women have to increase” in order to promote development and meet the gender equality Millennium Development Goal (MDG).

By focusing primarily on women’s economic opportunities as a means to enhance gender equality, the Road Map ignores critical factors that influence girls’ and women’s economic viability and ability to attain full equality with men. These include women’s human rights to freedom from sexual violence and discrimination. The Road Map also fails to mention how climate change burdens poor people, especially women and girls. It is well documented that climate change disproportionately impacts women and girls’ opportunities to engage in income-generating activities, as they are often primarily responsible for producing food, and collecting fuel and water without remuneration. By ignoring these factors, which are based in deeply entrenched, gender-based inequalities, the Road Map undermines achieving its stated mission to help client countries achieve the MDG of gender equality.

### ***Quality and Transparency of Gender-Sensitive Data***

While the Road Map supports the need for more robust monitoring and evaluation, even the Road Map itself fails to provide clear data on the GAP’s gender-focused performance. The Road Map claims that the Bank’s performance on “gender coverage in project design since 2007 in the traditionally less receptive economic sectors [rose from] 58 percent to 71 percent of

projects in agriculture, and from 15 percent to 18 percent in infrastructure.” The term “gender coverage” in this context is not defined, while actual gender coverage data are not presented to support this claim. The Road Map also claims that “90 percent of World Bank projects in the health and education sectors incorporated gender issues in their design” in FY04 and FY05, but does not explain the ways in which undefined “gender issues” were incorporated. While these percentages may reflect the number of projects that meet Bank gender mainstreaming standards, they do not measure the *quality* of gender mainstreaming in Bank operations. This lack of meaningful, transparent data dilutes the Road Map’s assertion that the Bank “seeks to improve[e] the availability and quality of gender-related statistics.”

The Road Map also indicates that “improving gender coverage in sector-specific monitoring and evaluation will be an iterative process of consultations with management of relevant World Bank sectors,” but the Road Map fails to include consultation with local beneficiaries and gender-focused civil society organizations in order to improve the quality and accessibility of the Bank’s gender mainstreaming data.

### ***Gender Capacity Building at the Country Level***

The Road Map states that “the proposed results framework monitors progress at the aggregate level, devolving authority to regions” and “expand[ing] country counterparts’ capacity to design, implement and monitor gender sensitive policies and programs.” Bank countries “specify concrete priorities in reproductive health...with tracking indicators in IDA countries.” While country staff best understand local issues, they may not have the gender training, expertise or time necessary to enhance gender mainstreaming in Bank operations. As the 2005 Gender Action report *Reforming the World Bank: Will Gender Strategy Make a Difference?* revealed, the majority of “gender focal points” or “gender coordinators” often lacked adequate time to devote to gender mainstreaming, and many coordinators lacked a thorough understanding of gender issues. Although this situation may have improved in recent years, the Road Map only refers to country-level capacity building in regard to “making the ‘business-case’ forcefully for gender equality as smart economics, [and] to increase demand in client countries.” Substantial gender capacity building is needed at the country level, while local men and women affected by Bank operations should set reproductive health priorities.

### ***Conclusions***

Although the Road Map includes a greater reproductive health focus than its parent document, the Road Map repeats many of the GAP’s critical failures. In the absence of a human rights framework, a comprehensive approach to supporting reproductive health and a robust monitoring and evaluation system, the Bank’s efforts to achieve gender equality will remain rhetoric rather than reality.