

**Policy Brief**

**WHY THE NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK SHOULD HAVE A GENDER POLICY**





**A**t the 2nd New Development Bank (NDB) Annual meeting in Delhi in April, 2017, BRICS Feminist Watch (BFW) and other civil society groups urged the Bank to develop a comprehensive policy geared towards delivering gender-responsive, sustainable, and inclusive development. The policies, operations, and governance structures of the NDB should be enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) principle “No one is left behind” in efforts for social, economic and environmental transformation. **There is no sustainable development without gender equality.**<sup>1</sup>

*Discussions with the NDB management further highlighted three key points to ensure the mainstreaming of gender equality in all structures and operations:*

1

**Set up an external multi stakeholder gender advisory committee;**

2

**Develop a comprehensive, mandatory gender policy to guide all of the NDB’s structure, governance and operations;**

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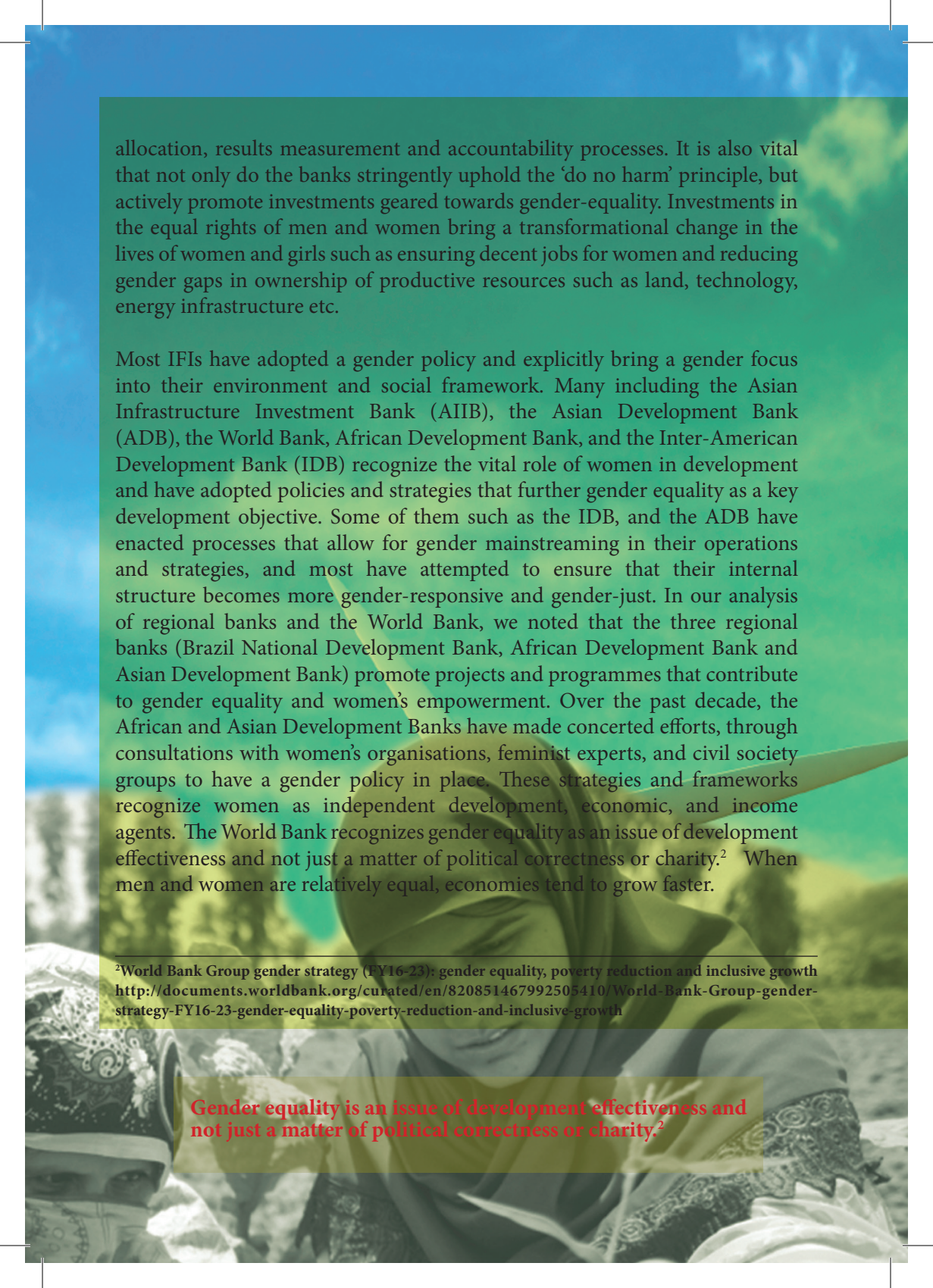
**Establish a gender unit within the NDB, comprised of feminist experts to lead these processes.**

The international development world is increasingly recognizing that gender equality is at the core of sustainable and inclusive growth. The SDGs, adopted in 2015, acknowledge that gender equality is not only a fundamental right, but a prerequisite for a peaceful and prosperous world. Countries that ensure equal access for women and girls to education, health care, decent work, assets and economic resources, promote their political participation and decision making power, and protect them from violence and gender-based discrimination are best positioned to achieve sustainable development and economic growth. As major development actors, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have an important role to play in recognizing women as powerful, independent economic agents contributing to economic growth and development and promoting women and men’s equal rights by placing them at the centre of development. This has far-reaching implications for the Bank’s governance, planning, resource

<sup>1</sup>Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, September 2015







allocation, results measurement and accountability processes. It is also vital that not only do the banks stringently uphold the ‘do no harm’ principle, but actively promote investments geared towards gender-equality. Investments in the equal rights of men and women bring a transformational change in the lives of women and girls such as ensuring decent jobs for women and reducing gender gaps in ownership of productive resources such as land, technology, energy infrastructure etc.

Most IFIs have adopted a gender policy and explicitly bring a gender focus into their environment and social framework. Many including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank, African Development Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) recognize the vital role of women in development and have adopted policies and strategies that further gender equality as a key development objective. Some of them such as the IDB, and the ADB have enacted processes that allow for gender mainstreaming in their operations and strategies, and most have attempted to ensure that their internal structure becomes more gender-responsive and gender-just. In our analysis of regional banks and the World Bank, we noted that the three regional banks (Brazil National Development Bank, African Development Bank and Asian Development Bank) promote projects and programmes that contribute to gender equality and women’s empowerment. Over the past decade, the African and Asian Development Banks have made concerted efforts, through consultations with women’s organisations, feminist experts, and civil society groups to have a gender policy in place. These strategies and frameworks recognize women as independent development, economic, and income agents. The World Bank recognizes gender equality as an issue of development effectiveness and not just a matter of political correctness or charity.<sup>2</sup> When men and women are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster.

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<sup>2</sup>World Bank Group gender strategy (FY16-23): gender equality, poverty reduction and inclusive growth <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/820851467992505410/World-Bank-Group-gender-strategy-FY16-23-gender-equality-poverty-reduction-and-inclusive-growth>

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Following the Delhi meeting, the NDB has been in positive engagement with BRICS Feminist Watch and other civil society organisations. One of the core principles of the NDB's Environmental & Social Framework underlines gender equality:

*“The NDB believes that gender equality is important to successful and sustainable economic development and accordingly considers it imperative to mainstream gender equality issues in all its operations”.*

BFW welcomes this as a promising first step; however, in drawing together recent projects of NDB, it was noted that the concerns for gender equality and women's empowerment have been missed in both the NDB's General Strategy (2017 – 2021) and in key areas of its operations. It seems that the projects were approached without gender selection criteria. The Bank has neither defined gender equality nor integrated gender issues. The lack of explicit commitment to tackle gender inequalities and promote gender justice in the NDB's General Strategy conveys a message that gender is an area that has little relevance to big infrastructure or renewable energy projects despite the fact that women and men are impacted differently by all such projects. The lack of gender-responsive policy in IFI infrastructure and energy investments leads first to an influx of male workers and second loss of land and other assets. These project features trigger harmful gender impacts, for example, some male workers assaulting and raping women and girls and some women and girls turning to sex work out of desperation to make ends meet when they lose their land or livelihoods.<sup>3</sup> These issues catalyzed the World Bank to establish a task force with the objective of their elimination. The NDB can prevent these harmful outcomes a priori through creating a implementing a mandatory gender policy that includes strong safeguard measures. NDB's Strategy plan also undermines women's rights as a core development objective.

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<sup>3</sup>Zuckerman, Elaine & Betty Abah. October 3, 2016. World Bank Project Evictee Becomes Women's Rights Activist - Bimbo Oshobe. Ms Magazine



**A gender-blind development framework will have adverse impacts not only on women and girls, but on the efficacy and sustainability of the NDB's approach.** Analysis from other IFIs extensively highlight the necessity for development projects to incorporate a gender safeguard to prevent potentially harmful gender impacts as well as a gender policy which holds NDB accountable to such impacts. Ground-level realities of women highlight tensions and trade-offs that only a comprehensive gender policy can help address. For example, the challenge between prioritizing food or biofuels in land use, or forests for carbon to mitigate global climate change or to meet local livelihood needs. These decisions directly impact women's lives and therefore the method for addressing such tensions have profound implications for who gains and who loses.

In the light of this, we urge the NDB to remember what it stands for; BRICS is a voice from the South with a promise to challenge hegemonic power and a vision for a more just and equal world. The optimistic assumption is that NDB will lay the foundation for a more democratic world order. The BRICS vision highlights the need for clear definition and integration of the South feminist agenda. The NDB can be more transformative and effective if it not only recognizes women as economic, political, and development agents, but ensures their empowerment as decision-makers and engines of growth rather than a vulnerable population in need of protection.

Additionally, in spite of economic growth in BRICS and other emerging economies, the NDB cannot ignore **growing inequalities**. Women still constitute a majority of the world's poor. By directing its effort towards reducing inequality, including gender inequalities, the NDB could improve their capacity to challenge poverty and ensure a pro-poor and pro-women focus of future growth.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Shubha Chacko, Taking it to the Bank: Gender Issues at the New Development Bank, BRICS Feminist Watch, 2017



Our analysis at the BRICS Feminist Watch reveals two distinct yet inter-related levels of planning in NDB's policies/projects:

- Lack of economic value on women's time: women's time is massively used for non-monetized work such as collecting fuel wood, fetching water, cooking, caring and housework
- Development denial of an individuality, agency and autonomy to women in distribution of productive assets, energy infrastructure and energy benefits, as well as in building women's capabilities.

On-going and future projects of NDB should incorporate a framework to support and strengthen women's ownership, management rights, and skill development by providing institutional credit to women as individuals or collectives and by introducing labour-saving technologies for women both domestically and agriculturally. Furthermore, an adequate number of women should be included as managers and workers in transmission line projects, as well as in governance bodies of energy and productive assets. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are to be built into project designs to assess the gender impacts on enforceability, access, and use of specific energy projects.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NDB'S FUTURE ACTIONS & PLANNING**

We recommend NDB to integrate gender into all aspects of the Bank. The NDB should constitute a gender advisory committee with the objective to advise the bank on the integration of gender concerns in various operations, infrastructure development, and partnership projects and programmes. The role of such a committee should not be just a window dressing; rather, the NDB should give this committee the mandate to influence NDB policies and operations. This committee can be an external consultative body with a 3-5 year term, meeting twice a year to assist NDB in developing a gender policy and road map to guide the policy's execution, and assist in monitoring progress and overcoming challenges. The committee can be composed of government representatives from BRICS countries, the private sector leaders, select members of the BRICS Feminist Watch and other women's organisations, representatives from civil society organisations, and distinguished experts in the field of feminist economics and gender and development studies. The mandate of this **Advisory Committee** will be to help NDB develop **gender policy**.



In addition the NDB should also establish a **gender unit with feminist experts** as a critical component of its structure to ensure that gender policy is mainstreamed and centralized in all structures and operations, with strong gender focal points in different units and teams of the bank. The gender unit should be set at a senior managerial level with associated authority to ensure these goals are met.

*“Right now there is a historic window of opportunity, and it would be a tragedy if this new actor which could leverage for a stronger role of the global South in the field of development finance fails to do so. The NDB could offer the world not only a new way of doing business but could also sow the seed of an alternative framing of the idea of development.”<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup>Shubha Chacko, Taking it to the Bank: Gender Issues at the New Development Bank, BRICS Feminist Watch, 2017





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