

Excluding the poorest of the poor

The leaked draft of the new safeguard policies is disappointing because it fails to address the needs of women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities. World Bank safeguard policies are meant to avoid or minimize negative social and environmental impacts of Bank-financed projects, particularly with regard to the poor and most vulnerable. In countries where the Bank operates, women, girls, and gender and sexual minorities are often among the poorest and most marginalized.

Women and girls suffer from disproportionately high levels of violence, earn on average about 20% less than men and no region is on course to meet Millennium Development Goal 5, aimed at reducing maternal mortality rates $\frac{3}{4}$ by 2015. Similarly, sexual and gender minorities often suffer from violence, pervasive discrimination, and marginalization. Their social and economic exclusion comes at a high price. According to the preliminary results of the study [“The Cost of Homophobia”](#), the economic losses arising from the exclusion of sexual and gender minorities in India could be as high as \$30.8 billion or 1.7% of the GDP. Fully inclusive safeguard policies could ensure that the specific needs of the marginalized are addressed, that they are able to benefit from Bank-financed development projects, and as such are able to participate in the economy.

Safeguards without teeth

In the new draft, women, and sexual and gender minorities are mentioned within a long list of vulnerable groups to whom the World Bank will “give due consideration”. Furthermore, new policies state that the Bank will “ensure that there is no prejudice or discrimination toward project affected individuals or communities”. Despite almost two years of work, the World Bank failed to go beyond superficial references to women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities and vague inclusion declarations. The draft lacks clarity in many ways on how exactly it intends to ensure the needs of marginalized groups are addressed. Even these limited provisions are undermined by the enormous latitude granted to Bank staff and borrowers throughout the draft concerning when, how, and even if the safeguard policies apply. As long as the Bank avoids setting clear standards, accountability measures, and goals, the situation of marginalized groups will not be improved by the proposed safeguard policies.

Keeping up the promise

The World Bank must keep its promise to ensure that women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities can benefit equally from its investments. In order to achieve that, the new safeguard policies must include a stand-alone [Gender & Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression](#) (SOGIE) safeguard with mandatory standards for social assessments, clear supervision and monitoring structures, as well as a detailed implementation plan and budget that consider the specific needs and issues of these social groups.

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