



Streamlining Versus Substance: Risks and Opportunities for Gender Equality in the IDA21 Replenishment

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Amidst numerous global crises, it is vital that gender is not deprioritized or superficially mainstreamed, especially as there are “can’t miss” opportunities to reinvigorate gender equality. This year’s replenishment of IDA, the World Bank’s concessional lending arm, is a unique moment to increase ambition on gender equality in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). However, due to a push to streamline and simplify IDA (“SimplifIDA”) the [current iteration of IDA21 policy commitments](#) backtracks from the ambition in IDA20, risking a setback for supporting gender equality. Following the [third replenishment meeting](#) this month and looking towards the finalization of the IDA21 policy package at the fourth IDA Deputies meeting in October 2024, it is critical to ensure IDA includes more ambitious gender policy commitments to promote gender equality, wellbeing, and inclusive development.

IDA21 is a critical tool at a critical time for gender equality

The International Development Association (IDA), the arm of the World Bank Group (WBG) which offers much-needed concessional financing to the poorest countries, has increasingly integrated and elevated [gender as a priority over time](#). As [the World Bank describes it](#), “IDA is uniquely suited to support gender equality outcomes, which require integrating work across multiple sectors and sustaining efforts over long periods.” The last replenishment, IDA20, marked another step forward in ambition for the World Bank’s work on gender, with more policy commitments focused on gender and a stronger emphasis on specific areas such as [childcare and gender data](#). It featured eight standalone “[Gender and Development](#)” [policy commitments](#) that covered a wide breadth of core issues, and gender was also cross-cutting within the “Human Capital and Jobs” and “Economic Transformation” thematic areas.

IDA was an [integral part](#) of the implementation of the World Bank's [2016–2023 Gender Strategy](#) by producing detailed policy commitments and shaping thinking around gender within policymaking, such as the IDA20 policy commitment on “implementing fiscal policy and budget systems to close gender gaps.” Setting and monitoring commitments is necessary for ensuring that effective gender interventions remain a focus of management and staff. With the recent release of the Bank's [2024–2030 Gender Strategy](#) and its increased level of ambition, establishing quantified and monitored gender policy commitments in IDA21 will be key to the effective implementation and subsequent achievement of objectives related to ending gender-based violence (GBV), expanding and enabling economic opportunities, and engaging women as leaders.

The World Bank's new measurement and reporting methods undermine accountability

Historically, IDA has had its own [Results Management System](#) (RMS), but the World Bank is proposing that the new Corporate Scorecard, also referred to as the WBG Scorecard, be a proxy for the RMS (see Table 1). This creates rigidity (framed as “increasing greater selectivity”) for what IDA21 can include, as the policy commitments are meant to align with what the Scorecard measures. The WBG have indicated [plans to create a dedicated platform](#) within the WBG Scorecard that shows an IDA-specific view of results and data, which is being referred to as the “IDA21 Scorecard.” The 22 WBG/IDA21 Scorecard indicators will be disaggregated by sex, youth, fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCS), disability inclusion, country income groups, region, and arm of the World Bank (IDA, IBRD, IFC, or MIGA).

Of the 22 total WBG and IDA21 Scorecard results indicators, there are two focused on gender equality: 1) the millions of people benefitting from greater gender equality, of which (%) from actions that expand and enable economic activities; and 2) the millions of people and percentage of women using financial services. The results framework of the recently released World Bank Gender Strategy will build on the first WBG Scorecard gender indicator and track the number of women benefitting from: 1) actions to make progress in ending all forms of GBV; 2) actions to improve sexual and reproductive health; and 3) actions to advance women's participation in decision-making.

While some additional commitments are being added, the “SimplifIDA” approach means there are far fewer than in previous replenishments. In addition, the policy commitments proposed are much less specific and detailed than IDA20 and other prior replenishments. In a departure from the language of past replenishments, IDA21 groups policy commitments into “focus areas” and “lenses.” Focus areas are more sector-specific, whereas lenses are cross-cutting. Gender has been characterized as a lens, consistent with how it is positioned as a cross-cutting theme in the WBG Scorecard.

The [IDA21 policy package](#) proposes only two standalone gender lens policy commitments (versus eight in IDA20): 1) Support countries to institutionalize GBV prevention and response; and 2) Support countries to invest in policies and programs to scale childcare services. These two proposed policy commitments are critical evidence-based areas for gender equality, but they do not capture the full scope of issues needed to make progress on gender equality. The recent [IDA21 paper on lenses](#) notes that gender will drive results in the other IDA21 lenses and focus areas, such that it is mainstreamed across IDA's activities, but it lacks specific gender-based targets and policy commitments to monitor progress. The [new gender strategy](#) indicates that it will translate its strategy into targets, but the timeline and how that would align with IDA21 is still unclear.

Another concern: the World Bank IDA21 reporting arrangements includes a new, simplified binary system that categorizes policy commitments into one of two groups—Group A commitments apply to all IDA countries, and Group B means that the commitment will be targeted at only 25 percent of IDA countries, “where particularly relevant,” considering factors such as fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) status and WBG Scorecard indicator performance. Previously, no such groupings existed, and policy commitments each had individualized targets. For IDA20, many policy commitments were targeted at between 25 and 100 percent of countries. Both proposed gender lens commitments fall into Group B (and thus will only target about 18 countries), while policy commitments in some of the other lenses and focus areas apply to 100 percent of all 75 IDA-eligible countries (Group A), meaning most IDA countries will not have any gender policy commitments applied to them.

A final concern is the measurement methodology. The indicators that will be sex-disaggregated are listed below, and initial efforts at disaggregation can be viewed in the first [WBG Scorecard report](#). However, the WBG Scorecard's first attempt at sex-disaggregation uses the proportion of the female population in each country as proxy data for when specific project results data are not available; this method assumes that the project benefits the same percentage of the female population as their share in the total population. This is a big assumption that makes the resulting numbers reported meaningless or significantly misleading. It is not clear where proxy data will be used in the Scorecard, leaving even more ambiguity about what reported results to trust. While the WBG states that these metrics will be expanded over time and proxy data will be reduced, this interim method is a further dilution for the gender focus, especially as the sex-disaggregated indicators are being considered a substitute for policy commitments.

Table 1. WBG Corporate Scorecard indicators that will be sex-disaggregated

VERTICAL/ CROSS-CUTTING THEME	CLIENT CONTEXT	WORLD BANK GROUP RESULTS
People	Percentage of people covered by social protection and labor programs, of which (%) in the poorest quintile	Millions of beneficiaries of social safety net programs
	Percentage of children who cannot read by end-of-primary school age	Millions of students supported with better education
	Percentage of children under five stunted	Millions of people receiving quality health, nutrition, and population services
	Percentage of people receiving essential health services	Millions of people benefitting from strengthened capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to health emergencies
Planet	Number of people exposed to hazardous air quality	Millions of people with enhanced resilience to climate risks
	Percentage of people with access to basic drinking water, sanitation services, and hygiene	Millions of people provided with water, sanitation, and hygiene, of which (%) is safely managed
	Millions of people facing food and nutrition insecurity	Millions of people with strengthened food and nutrition security
Infrastructure	Percentage of people with access to reliable transport solutions all year-round	Millions of people that benefit from improved access to sustainable transport infrastructure and services
	Percentage of population with access to electricity	Millions of people provided with access to electricity
Digital	Percentage of population using the internet	Millions of people using broadband internet
	Millions of people using digitally enabled services	
CROSS-CUTTING THEMES		
Gender Equality	Number of women that use a financial account	Millions of people benefiting from greater gender equality, of which ^a (%) from actions that expand and enable economic opportunities
	Millions of people and businesses using financial services, of which (%) are women	
More and Better jobs	Waged employment share of working age population, of which (%) are women	Millions of new or better jobs —of which (%) for women —of which (%) for youth
	Percentage of youth not in education, employment, or training, of which (%) are women	
Better Lives for People in FCV	Number of extreme poor living in FCS	Millions of displaced people and people in host communities provided with services and livelihoods
	Number of displaced people in need of protection	

a. The 2024-30 Gender Strategy released in June 2024 includes additional disaggregation of this WBG results indicator around (a) GBV; (b) sexual and reproductive health; and (d) participation in decision-making.

IDA21 needs to go farther for gender equality

What is measured and monitored matters. The proposed policy package demonstrates notable gaps from IDA20 and does not leverage opportunities to expand ambition, including supporting the objectives in the Bank's new gender strategy. The fundamental difference between IDA and the WBG Scorecard is that IDA sets quantified country targets which are then monitored and reported. Though supporting gender equality is **essential** to achieving progress on the full range of major development issues and crises of our time, it is not always conceived as such, and we are unfortunately living in a time with very real resource constraints. Slashing the gender policy commitments from eight to two from IDA20 compromises a powerful tool for goal setting and accountability and has implications for resource allocations for gender equality.

Gaps for gender equality from IDA20 to IDA21

Policy commitments relevant for gender included in IDA20 which are not currently reflected in the proposed policy commitments or WBG Scorecard indicators include:

- Strengthening women's land rights
- Implementing fiscal policy and gender budgeting to close gender gaps
- Supporting medium- and high-skilled employment opportunities for women (the scorecard indicator only looks at overall jobs, not their skill levels)
- Scaling up productive economic inclusion (the scorecard only includes digital and financial services)
- Boosting institutional capacity to improve data for policy decision-making (this includes disaggregation by sex and disability)
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights

These are all important priorities in the quest for gender equality, which IDA21 should build on. Instead, the current proposal drops these issues from the agenda.

How to increase ambition in IDA21

We have identified several areas for adding policy commitments that would help maximize IDA21's impact on gender equality. We list the areas below and offer specific potential language in Table 2.

This includes:

- **Expand the focus on care work:** Building on the IDA20 childcare policy commitment to expand to other aspects of care services, such as eldercare and disability care, and care-related infrastructure, such as water and energy. This expanded approach is essential to effectively address the structural constraint that unpaid care work poses to economic empowerment. This is consistent with the expanded focus on care work in the new gender strategy and how it is discussed in the lenses paper.

- **Commit to gender and climate:** While the lenses paper acknowledges women's role in a more sustainable and resilient future, and the new gender strategy has a stated goal of enhancing women's role in climate action, gender is not explicitly included in climate-related policy commitments. There is an opportunity to take a more inclusive approach by setting specific targets around support for gender-responsive climate policies, programming, and financing.
- **Integrate the FCV and gender lenses:** One of the proposed policy commitments focuses on GBV, but it excludes the previous IDA20 sub-target of FCV settings; such targets are critical since FCV contexts will be home to 60 percent of the world's poorest people by 2030. The FCV sub-target could be added back in, and other FCV sub-targets could be integrated across the policy commitments, including the one on care services.
- **Include of sexual and gender minorities:** Though the gender strategy, the IDA20 Midterm Review, and accompanying Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) note are inclusive of sexual and gender minorities, IDA21's framework completely excludes them. They are mentioned in the IDA21 lenses paper, but thus far, SOGI has not been reflected in the proposed policy commitments, limiting impact for these vulnerable populations. A potential entry point could be a data-related policy commitment (see below).
- **Add more gender lens policy commitments and integrate gender-specific policy commitments across all the other focus areas and lenses:** These should be targeted to fill the gaps from IDA20 discussed above and support the new gender strategy. Additional policy commitments within the other areas, such as those outlined below, and/or integration of gender elements within existing proposed policy commitments would result in a more comprehensive and impactful approach to gender equality in IDA21. Even where there are sex-disaggregated indicators in the WBG Scorecard, such as on access to drinking water, energy, and transport, IDA21 policy commitments could focus more deeply on how this access translates to changes in women and girls' time use and more gender-equal economic outcomes (e.g., the proposed infrastructure commitment in Table 2).
- **Develop corresponding IDA21 Scorecard indicators to report on each policy commitment:** To ensure better monitoring of progress, additional indicators should be added to the IDA21 Scorecard that align with each policy commitment.
- **Do not take a binary approach to setting country targets for IDA21:** A binary approach risks losing ambition from IDA20, as country targets that were set between 26 and 100 percent in the previous replenishment are now reduced to 25 percent, such as commitments regarding early childhood education and climate resilience. Specific country targets in IDA21 that are aligned with the current context and increase ambition beyond past commitments would be a more nuanced approach.

IDA21 gender policy commitment recommendations

Given that IDA21 negotiations will not be finalized until the fall of 2024, there is still time to course correct. We propose inclusion of the following policy commitments. While these do not encompass every area of gender equality or even every area that was included in IDA20, including these policy commitments will translate to increased ambition from IDA20 to IDA21 for important areas of women’s economic empowerment and inclusion of sexual and gender minorities.

Table 2. Potential new IDA21 policy commitments

IDA21 OBJECTIVE	POLICY COMMITMENT
Gender	
Expanding access to quality and affordable care services and supporting women’s economic empowerment	Support at least 30 countries, at least half of which are fragile or conflict-affected states, to expand access to quality and affordable childcare, eldercare, and disability care services. These investments should center women’s economic empowerment, social protections, the wellbeing of care recipients (including early childhood development), and the creation of more and better jobs in care sectors to drive sustainable and inclusive economic transformation.
Jobs	
Supporting gender-inclusive high-quality job creation in high potential sectors, including ensuring a just green transition	Implement intentional interventions to support high-quality medium- and high-skilled job creation and gender-inclusive employment policies in at least 25 IDA countries. Ensure that in sectors where women and other disadvantaged groups such as crisis-affected and displaced persons disproportionately work, programming supports creating greater decent work job opportunities. Increase representation in sectors where they are underrepresented, such as renewable energy and environmental services, to support a just green transition.
People	
Expanding gender-responsive social protections	To develop inclusive economic systems, build resilience, and protect foundational wellbeing, support at least 25 countries in developing gender-responsive social protection programs across the lifecycle. Include measures for workers in the formal and informal sector, old age security, implementing effective response against vulnerabilities to shocks and crises, and protecting rights to promote agency and bargaining power.
Planet	
Driving inclusive climate action in finance, governance, and programming	Support at least 30 countries to integrate goals to reduce inequality, with a focus on supporting gender equality, in their climate policies and governance frameworks on climate change and accompanying development programming, including in their Country Climate Development Reports (CCDRs). Ensure that financing for gender-responsive climate action is scaled up for both adaptation and mitigation measures and includes financing for community- and women-led initiatives, as well as other disadvantaged groups.

Prosperity	
Implementing inclusive macroeconomic policies to reduce poverty and inequality and close gender gaps	Support at least 15 IDA countries to make their macroeconomic policies, including fiscal, taxation, and budgets, more inclusive and gender-responsive. This includes supporting capacity for counter-cyclical fiscal policy in times of shocks or crises, investments in core social services and protections, progressive taxation systems, and context-informed policy interventions to support the most vulnerable.
Increasing capacity for gender and intersectional data collection and use for evidence-based policymaking	Support 40 IDA countries, including those with ongoing statistical operations, to increase capacity for the collection of gender data, as well as intersectional data across other key dimensions of inequality, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), disability, refugee status, and age, and for the use of this data for evidence-based policymaking. Increase data collection on important areas of emerging work on gender inequality, such as FCV, climate, care work, and gender-based violence.
Infrastructure	
Creating gender-responsive transport and energy systems	Expand gender-inclusive transport and energy investments in at least 30 IDA countries. Transport investments should be designed to reduce women's mobility constraints and ensure accessibility and safety, and energy investments should address time poverty and provide clean cooking solutions, removing barriers to their economic independence and full participation in public life.

Conclusion and next steps

This replenishment comes amidst a backdrop of global crises and represents an important opportunity to advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment in LMICs. However, the current limited scope of IDA21 and the WBG Scorecard diminish the ambition seen in IDA20 and the 2024-2030 World Bank Gender Strategy, jeopardizing progress in crucial areas. Adopting policy recommendations that build on IDA20, increase ambition in new areas, effectively integrate gender, and establish indicators to ensure meaningful monitoring will ensure IDA21 supports the new gender strategy and addresses critical gender issues. The upcoming months are pivotal to secure stronger and more gender-transformative commitments, ensuring the World Bank has a strong system of accountability in place to support gender equality.

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