

## Report launch of WB Report *Voice & Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity*

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Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague, 11 September 2014

### Summary

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, Jeni Klugman, Senior Adviser of the World Bank Group (WBG) and Lucia Hanmer, Lead Economist in Gender and Development of the WBG launched the newest publication by the World Bank on gender equality: *Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity* at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague. The report<sup>1</sup> distills vast data and hundreds of studies to shed new light on constraints facing women and girls worldwide, from epidemic levels of gender based violence to biased laws and norms that prevent them from owning property, working, and making decisions about their own lives. The launch was further enlightened by Mirjam Krijnen, Coordinator of Task Force Women's Rights and Gender Equality, speaking on comprehensive policies for women's empowerment and Annelies Zoomers, Professor of International Development Studies at the Utrecht University and Chair of LANDac (the Netherlands Academy on Land Governance) on women's access to land.

### Comments

The launch was a great opportunity for two communities (land rights and gender) to share information and experiences and by doing so to develop new insights and renewed inspiration for effective action to include women on an equal basis in their development efforts. As stated by Jim Yong Kim, the President of World Bank, in the Report "[...] equality and economic development are inextricably linked. Equality does not only guarantee basic rights but also plays a vital role in promoting the robust, shared growth needed to end extreme poverty in our increasingly competitive, globalized world". For this purpose the audience consisted of internal (MFA) and external experts (NGO's, knowledge institutes) with backgrounds in land rights and gender.

### Message

Jeni Klugman highlighted the different subjects of the report, being: freedom from violence, control over sexual and reproductive health, and rights, control over land and housing and educational participation. She also demonstrated various kinds of data collected in the Report on these subjects and the conclusions based on the data with regard to the subjects. For example, according to the Report fewer women report having housing or land, this contracts women's agency. She ended her presentation emphasizing the positive news, that change is

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Gender/Voice\\_and\\_agency\\_LOWRES.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Gender/Voice_and_agency_LOWRES.pdf)

possible. More women in leadership positions do lead to change of attitudes. Laws are improving, particularly on domestic violence.

Lucia Hanmer zoomed in on women's land rights. She explained the patterns of ownership, the role of laws and norms, and the importance of improving implementation. The three key elements that can help to achieve equal land rights for women are: 1) promoting gender equality in family, inheritance, and land laws 2) harmonizing statutory, customary, and religious regimes 3) ensuring effective implementation of laws and land policies. Female representation on land commissions should for example be obligatory.

Mirjam Krijnen welcomed the analogies between the Report and the Dutch foreign policy stating that the findings of the Report underpin the efforts of the Dutch government to take gender considerations into account in its priority areas, since it argues that even when working in a specific sector, one may need to address multiple disadvantages and not take a narrow sectorial approach. Current overall Dutch policies focus on the synergies between international trade and investment on the one hand and aid, inclusive growth and poverty reduction on the other hand, implying a renewed interest in the role of the private sector in fostering sustainable and inclusive growth, in partnership with governments, civil society and knowledge institutions. Priority areas remain food security, water management, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and security and the rule of law. Dutch gender policy integrates gender equality in these priorities. The ministry of Foreign Affairs supports women's organizations in promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights and their battle against violence against women.

Annelies Zoomers informed participants that she is working on a book on gender and land which is planned to be published in February 2015. She criticizes the fact that gender and land are often presented in an instrumental way, whereas there should also be an inherent argument to secure women's access to land. There is little attention to the current process of masculinization of agriculture; much of the agricultural developments and innovations can be characterized as being mainly masculine, focused on agro-industry, stressing the importance of machinery and large-scale production. But this neglects the fact that nowadays, the majority of farmers are women and steps should be taken to acknowledge this. Male dominance is not only an issue in agriculture or in developing countries alone, also in for example investment agencies or agro-entrepreneurs from the Netherlands are mainly men. These circumstances reinforce the disadvantages position of women.

#### **Q&A**

A vibrant discussion followed, mainly focusing on issues of gender and access to land. Some topics include:

- Women's access to land is very often insecure, and indirect through male relatives. Women are also not involved in the negotiations on the terms of land rights; men

- usually hold these. This leads to cases where land is being sold without the consent and knowledge of women who are the actual users of that land.
- A legal framework is the start, but the implementation of the framework is also very important. We should not limit our views to looking at formal law solely.
  - Looking at agro-business and land grabbing we see that many investors come to more remote areas where they push women farmers from their land. The question is how much women profit from this large-scale agriculture.
  - Both leading positions in investment agencies, and participants of trade missions (also those from the Netherlands) are dominated by men.