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ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality

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NOTE

In this report, "\$" refers to United States dollars.

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Abbreviations

ADB	–	Asian Development Bank
ADF	–	Asian Development Fund
ANR	–	agriculture, natural resources, and rural development
CCSD	–	Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department
CPS	–	country partnership strategy
CRF	–	corporate results framework
DLI	–	disbursement-linked indicator
DMC	–	developing member country
DMF	–	design and monitoring framework
EGM	–	effective gender mainstreaming
COVID-19	–	coronavirus disease
GAD	–	gender and development
GAP	–	gender action plan
GBV	–	gender-based violence
GEN	–	gender equity theme
GESI	–	gender equality and social inclusion
IED	–	Independent Evaluation Department
IFAD	–	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ISGA	–	inclusive and sustainable growth assessment
M&E	–	monitoring and evaluation
MDB	–	multilateral development bank
NGE	–	no gender elements
NGO	–	nongovernment organization
NOM	–	new operating model
NSO	–	nonsovereign operations
OP	–	operational priority
PBL	–	policy-based lending
PSOD	–	Private Sector Operations Department
PVR	–	project completion report validation report
RBL	–	results-based lending
SARD	–	South Asia Department
SDG	–	Sustainable Development Goal
SGE	–	some gender elements
TA	–	technical assistance
TVET	–	technical and vocational education and training
UNICEF	–	United Nations Children’s Fund
WUS	–	water and other urban infrastructure and services

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Foreword

Gender equality is central to sustainable and inclusive development. The target year for achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, is 2030, but, while the Asia and Pacific region as a whole has made significant strides towards gender equality, the pace of advancement has been uneven both across and within countries. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic exacerbated disparities and vulnerabilities. In some cases, progress is not just stagnating—it is being actively undermined. The targets of SDG 5 remain distant.

This evaluation provides an in-depth assessment of the approach of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to gender equality, examining the strategic relevance of its strategies and policies, the effectiveness of their implementation, and ADB's institutional readiness for supporting transformative change.

ADB's longstanding commitment to gender mainstreaming has built a strong foundation, as indicated by the high level of achievement in reaching corporate targets for gender mainstreaming across ADB operations.

The institution must now focus on deepening the impact of its work. The evaluation emphasizes the importance of transformative approaches that address the root causes of gender inequality, moving beyond process-based achievements toward measurable and lasting outcomes. It recommends that ADB update the Gender and Development (GAD) Policy, 1998, to recognize the operational realities within ADB and to align it with current approaches to tackling gender inequality. As ADB continues to position itself as a leader in climate action and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, gender equality should be integrated more comprehensively into all areas of ADB's operations. The evaluation calls for bold and strategic action, noting that ADB's new operating model presents an opportunity to align the institution with the demands of a rapidly changing region. Ensuring that ADB's efforts lead to tangible improvements in women's lives, especially for those in the most vulnerable communities, is essential.

The evaluation underscores the importance of stronger interdepartmental collaboration within ADB to create coherence and coordination across gender-related efforts, especially where gender intersects with other forms of discrimination or social exclusion. This includes updating definitions and frameworks so they are more inclusive. Another critical recommendation is that ADB needs to improve its monitoring and evaluation systems and to move beyond reliance on quantitative metrics. While ADB has been recognized for establishing a comprehensive gender mainstreaming system, this alone is insufficient for achieving the deeper, more meaningful outcomes necessary for transformative change. The report advocates for a more programmatic approach, integrating gender equality into country-level strategies and sectoral interventions so ADB can address the scale and complexity of these issues more effectively.

As the Asia and Pacific region faces continued and emerging challenges, including climate change and rising inequality, the need for transformative gender approaches is more urgent than ever. The insights and recommendations presented in this evaluation will be essential in guiding ADB's future efforts to ensure that its gender equality initiatives are not only effective but genuinely transformative.



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Executive Summary

This evaluation assessed the gender equality approach of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in terms of the strategic relevance and implementation of ADB gender strategies, their contributions to gender equality outcomes, and ADB's institutional capacity for delivering gender transformative change. The evaluation employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods and involved country evaluation missions to Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Tajikistan. The Independent Evaluation Department's (IED) previous evaluation of ADB's support for gender and development was in 2017. The current evaluation provides an update on its findings, but also places greater emphasis on assessing ADB's positioning to deliver potentially transformative support for accelerating progress in gender equality in Asia and the Pacific under its current institutional, policy, and operational frameworks.

Gender Equality Progress and Setbacks

Economic development, government measures, technological advancement, and concerted efforts have driven gains in gender equality in Asia and the Pacific. However, there are wide disparities in progress across and within countries. Gender gaps in education, health, employment, and decision-making persist, particularly among poor and rural populations. Deep-rooted structural inequities, exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the climate crisis, and geopolitical tensions all present substantial and complex challenges to efforts to reach the targets under Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5): achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. In some instances, a backlash against women's rights and gender equality risks exacerbating discrimination and hindering progress.

Outdated Policy Shapes ADB Support

Gender equality has been a strategic and operational priority of ADB for decades. The 1998 Gender and Development (GAD) Policy remains the overarching framework for ADB's support. It reflects the concepts and language on gender in

use at the time of its approval. It has a strong focus on the process of introducing and rolling out gender mainstreaming, but treats this as an end, rather than a means to achieving gender equality. The policy lacks an acknowledgement of diverse and intersecting identities and does not frame the specific objectives that ADB now seeks to achieve.

Over the years, ADB has updated its operational plans to maintain their strategic relevance in its support for gender equality. The current operational plan for priority 2: Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, 2019–2024 (OP2) contains five strategic operational priorities: women's economic empowerment increased, gender equality in human development enhanced, gender equality in decision making and leadership enhanced, time poverty and drudgery reduced, and women's resilience to external shocks strengthened. The operational plan introduced the concepts of intersectionality (how multiple and/or different social identities intersect to amplify inequality and experiences of discrimination) and the transformative gender agenda, both of which are closely aligned with SDG 5 targets. Retaining the outdated 1998 GAD policy creates misalignment with current practices.

Gender Mainstreaming is Deeply Embedded

ADB was a leader among multilateral development banks (MDBs) when it introduced gender mainstreaming categories in 2001, earning ADB recognition from development partners and government counterparts. Over time, ADB has used diverse modalities, instruments, and funding sources to support gender mainstreaming in its operations. The near 100% level of achievement in reaching corporate targets for gender mainstreaming in ADB operations indicates that the practice of gender mainstreaming across operations is well established. However, the depth of gender mainstreaming in project designs varies significantly, and in many cases is not substantial.

ADB has taken important steps to implement at-exit assessments of gender equality results and has

built a gender architecture that has become deeply embedded in institutional and project processes. Still, current monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems do not fully capture gender equality outcomes and fall short of measuring gender transformative change. The existing emphasis on quantitative metrics in the corporate results framework (CRF 2019–2024), such as the number of women reached and the percentage share of projects which promote gender equality, and are gender mainstreamed, does not measure the achievement of meaningful intermediate outcomes.

Uneven Contributions to Outcomes

Conclusive data on outcome achievement are unavailable due to M&E constraints and the fact that most projects designed under OP2 are still ongoing. Through country case assessments and portfolio analysis, the evaluation noted a greater focus on empowering women economically and on addressing gender-based violence, with continued strong support for gender equality in human development. In contrast, outcomes in reducing women's time poverty and drudgery are often assumed and are not fully measured, despite this being ADB's most likely area of contribution given its substantial investments in time-saving infrastructure. Water sector projects have been successful in involving women in water users' committees, thereby increasing women's decision-making and leadership. However, the targets for women's participation in leadership roles have not been ambitious enough. Overall, contributions to women's resilience to crises have been limited, although initial steps have been taken to increase the emphasis on climate change and related topics.

Strengthening Institutional Capacity

ADB is well regarded for its gender equality expertise by internal stakeholders and other MDBs, with country partners commending its proactive role in setting standards and providing guidance. However, although ADB has increased its resources for gender mainstreaming, its gender expertise is stretched thin.

The capacity of sector staff and their knowledge of gender mainstreaming approaches is currently insufficient to fully support the achievement of gender transformative objectives. While staff

show strong support and commitment to gender equality initiatives, the lack of mandatory training and conceptual clarity has led to an inconsistent application of gender approaches, with many staff expressing confusion and a lack of awareness of key concepts and approaches for gender mainstreaming. This has led to a over-reliance on gender experts to drive all aspects of gender mainstreaming. Additionally, inconsistent management support has undermined staff motivation.

ADB's new operating model presents an opportunity to support gender mainstreaming by consolidating staff gender experts in the Gender Equality Division at ADB headquarters, but ADB must carefully manage the potential risks and trade-offs in disconnecting gender experts from operations departments. Early feedback on ADB's response to the new operating model has been positive, with respondents noting improved integration in project design and consultations, but concerns remain about potential collaboration challenges and loss of institutional memory due to the staff reorganization.

Recommendations

ADB should: (i) modernize the 1998 GAD Policy to ensure ADB has a coherent and up-to-date policy to guide and inform its gender equality initiatives; (ii) promote more gender transformative approaches, ensuring adequate resourcing and incentives are in place for the required changes in collaboration and ways of working, including by revising the gender mainstreaming categorization system and its application; (iii) adopt a programmatic approach to higher-level gender equality outcomes by more comprehensively framing gender equality objectives in country- and sector-level strategies, which are underpinned by updated diagnostics, analysis, and sex-disaggregated data and complement the existing project approach to gender; (iv) strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems for gender equality and place greater emphasis on higher-level outcomes, intersectionality, and transformative impacts; and (v) ensure that operations and country staff have sufficient skills in gender analysis and mainstreaming by investing in training and capacity development with certification for staff working in specific contexts and sectors.

Linkage between Findings and Recommendations

Recommendations	Supporting Findings
<p>1. Modernize the 1998 Gender and Development (GAD) Policy to ensure Asian Development Bank (ADB) has a coherent and up-to-date policy to guide and inform its gender equality initiatives.</p>	<p>The 1998 Gender and Development Policy remains the overarching framework document for ADB's support for gender equality in its operations. The policy is largely women-focused; and does not cover gender inequalities that affect men or the need to adopt gender transformative approaches. It neither addresses how gender intersects with other forms of discrimination or social exclusion, nor recognizes gender diversity and/or sexual and gender minorities. It reflects the needs of a smaller ADB with a different structure and set of mandates (paras. 14, 17, 18).</p> <p>ADB operates with a gender policy that uses outdated concepts and which refers to implementation mechanisms and diagnostic tools which no longer reflect ADB operational practices (para. 16).</p> <p>This creates a confusing picture of ADB's overarching framing and approach and undermines ADB's reputation as a leader in promoting gender equality when engaging with DMC governments, private sector clients, external peer organizations, and civil society organizations (para. 22).</p>
<p>2. Promote more gender transformative approaches, ensuring adequate resourcing and incentives are in place for the required changes in collaboration and ways of working, including by revising the gender mainstreaming categorization system and its application.</p>	<p>ADB's current four-tier gender categorization system no longer reflects the evolving needs and objectives in the region. While corporate at-entry targets for gender mainstreaming have been well exceeded, this has been achieved without incorporating comprehensive and sustainable approaches to gender issues. The near 100% attainment rate for gender mainstreaming at-entry suggests a need to raise the bar so ADB can maintain relevance and prioritize meaningful gender transformative outcomes (paras. 39, 52).</p> <p>Misinterpreting the gender categories as a scorecard rather than as a neutral basis for categorizing projects has created an incentive to add meaningless indicators or project components lacking context-specificity (para. 41), with the aim of securing project approval and categorization as effective gender mainstreaming (EGM) or gender equity theme (GEN).</p> <p>Portfolio analysis showed that the number of GEN projects had increased but few of these projects addressed discriminatory social norms or root causes of gender inequality (para. 46); while most EGM projects exhibit a low level of gender mainstreaming (para. 50).</p>
<p>3. Adopt a programmatic approach to higher-level gender equality outcomes by more comprehensively framing gender equality objectives in country- and sector-level strategies, which are underpinned by updated diagnostics, analysis, and sex-disaggregated data and complement the existing project approach to gender.</p>	<p>ADB has numerous instruments and modalities that can be used for a programmatic approach within the framework of the country partnership strategy (CPS) (paras. 58–59, 61, 62), or in partnership with other development agencies and actors (para. 66).</p> <p>Most CPSs recognized gender equality either as a driver of change or a corporate-level objective, but many lacked concrete and actionable plans (para. 69). Additionally, the integration of gender analysis in CPSs was inconsistent and constrained by outdated analysis. The quality of gender outcome indicators in CPS results frameworks was variable (para. 70).</p> <p>CPSs often fail to fully integrate gender within a broader programmatic framework which limits the transformative potential of ADB's gender initiatives (para. 71).</p> <p>ADB has primarily adopted a project-by-project approach in country operations. Given the scale, complexity, and longer timeframes required to achieve gender equality outcomes, relying on a single project to bring about transformative changes is unrealistic. Realizing ADB's transformative vision of accelerating progress in gender equality requires a coordinated and</p>

Recommendations	Supporting Findings
<p>4. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems for gender equality and place greater emphasis on higher-level outcomes, intersectionality, and transformative impacts.</p>	<p>multifaceted approach, leveraging ADB instruments, modalities and development partnerships (para. 158).</p> <p>ADB has taken important steps to improve monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of its gender mainstreaming efforts, and is currently the only multilateral development bank applying an at-exit assessment for the achievement of gender actions for EGM and GEN projects. However, the current approach does not effectively capture and measure the achievement of gender equality outcomes (para. 82).</p> <p>The gender at-exit rating relies on the achievement of gender performance indicators that mainly reflect output targets and lacks clarity on how qualitative aspects such as changes in attitudes, social norms, and long-term impacts may be integrated into the rating. As a result, it is difficult to assess whether projects have achieved meaningful gender results or transformative change (para. 85).</p> <p>At the project level, most gender-related indicators in design and monitoring frameworks (DMFs) and gender action plans focus primarily on counting the number of women and girls reached, a limited evidence base on which to base an assessment of the effectiveness of projects in achieving gender outcomes (para. 73).</p> <p>At the country level, gaps in M&E of CPS gender actions have persisted. Many interventions' intended outcomes are not being adequately tracked or monitored according to the evaluation's review of CPSs (para. 74).</p> <p>At the corporate level, while the corporate results framework (2019–2024) references gender-related indicators, it primarily quantifies outputs such as the number of women and girls reached without assessing the effectiveness in closing gender gaps (para. 75).</p>
<p>5. Ensure that operations and country staff have sufficient skills in gender analysis and mainstreaming by investing in training and capacity development for staff working in specific contexts and sectors.</p>	<p>Gender expertise remains thinly stretched, particularly at the country level in resident missions and in the Pacific subregion (para. 136). Gender staff at resident missions are often overstretched, focusing on project-specific support rather than strategically monitoring gender equality commitments within the CPS across the country portfolio (para. 139).</p> <p>Other peer organizations have gradually expanded their skills base and staff composition in their gender equality divisions to respond to more complex and intersectional issues (para. 21); or have more clearly articulated accountability mechanisms involving management at all levels and drawing on external expertise (para. 138).</p> <p>Concerns about changes in collaboration between project teams and gender staff under the new operating model reflect a heavy reliance on gender experts to drive all aspects of gender mainstreaming. However, an overdependence on gender experts, rather than broadly disseminating skills and responsibilities across the organization, may reinforce the perception that responsibility for achieving meaningful gender results lies solely with the Gender Equality Division (para. 137).</p> <p>The lack of mandatory training and conceptual clarity on the transformative gender agenda and intersectionality results in inconsistent internalization and application of gender approaches beyond basic requirements. In contrast, peer institutions mandate gender training, ensuring that all their new staff are familiar with gender mainstreaming concepts (para. 143).</p>

Evaluating ADB's Gender Equality Support in a Changing Context

A. Gender Equality Progress in the Region is Slowing and Setbacks Persist

1. Achieving gender equality is fundamental for sustainable and inclusive development. It is also a basic human right, as underscored by Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms every individual's entitlement to all rights and freedoms without distinction of race, sex, religion, origin, or other status.¹ Pursuing gender equality is not only a core human rights obligation but also a strategic imperative. Gender equality helps boost economic growth, improves governance, promotes social cohesion, and improves well-being for all. It is an essential factor in a country's security and stability.² Reducing barriers to women's participation in the labor force enhances economic performance by increasing productivity and economic output. Advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment in Asia and the Pacific over a decade could add \$4.5 trillion to the region's annual gross domestic product (GDP).³

2. Despite impressive strides toward gender equality in Asia and the Pacific—driven by economic development, government measures, technological advancements, and concerted efforts—challenges persist. While countries as diverse as Cambodia, India, Nepal, and Solomon Islands have improved education outcomes and reduced maternal mortality, progress varies widely across the region.⁴ Notable improvements in reducing maternal, child, and infant mortality coexist with disparities in health outcomes among the poorest and rural populations.⁵ While some countries have introduced legal reforms on equal pay, parenthood and workplace protection, in many developing member countries (DMCs), women continue to face legal barriers to their economic participation.⁶

3. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the climate crisis, geopolitical tensions, and inflation have exacerbated inequalities.⁷ An additional 70 million people have fallen back into extreme poverty, threatening to reverse previous gains in human development across the region. In some instances, a backlash against women's rights and the concept of gender equality risks exacerbating discrimination and hindering progress (Box 1). Gender gaps in education, health, employment, and decision making persist. Women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work,

¹ United Nations General Assembly. 1948. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*. United Nations General Assembly.

² United Nations and World Bank. 2018. *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*.

³ McKinsey Global Institute. 2018. *The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 trillion to Global Growth*.

⁴ UN Women. 2023. *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2023>.

⁵ UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). 2024. *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report: Showcasing Transformative Actions*. Bangkok; McKinsey Global Institute. *The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific*.

⁶ For instance, in terms of the legal landscape for women's economic inclusion, women in South Asia are provided less than half (45.9) the legal rights enjoyed by men; with a gap in score between highest and lowest scoring countries of 42.5. In East Asia and the Pacific, women have 56.9 of men's rights, with a gap of 45 points between highest and lowest scoring countries. Women in Central Asia possess 72.1 of men's rights, with a 12.5 gap between highest and lowest scoring countries. The global average is 64.2. Source: Figures are for ADB DMCs only using World Bank Women, Business and the Law Data accessed on 20 September 2024.

⁷ S. Tagle. 2024. *In a cost-of-living crisis, young East Asians scale back their dreams - ICWA*. Institute of Current World Affairs.

limiting their economic engagement.⁸ Rapid advances in innovation and technology are reshaping social structures and economic opportunities, yet, unless women are given equitable access and inclusive ownership of such opportunities, they could increase gender disparities further.

Box 1: Worsening Gender Inequality in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has seen a sharp reversal in gender equality gains since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Previously, despite widespread and severe gender inequity across the country, particularly in rural areas, the 20-year period of democratic rule between 2001 and 2021 saw significant progress achieved on women's rights, especially in establishing laws and policies to protect and advance women's rights and gender equality.^a However, Afghanistan now ranks last among 146 countries in the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index.^b According to one estimate, since September 2021, 1.1 million girls over age 12 have been unable to attend school, and the subsequent suspension of university education for women affected an estimated 100,000 students.^c A 2022 review by UN Women concluded that one year following the Taliban takeover, women were "systematically excluded from public and political life" and restricted in their access to education, humanitarian assistance, employment, justice, and health services, largely confining women and girls' "lives and prospects" to the home.^d An updated assessment in 2024 found that the discriminatory policies and practices of the de facto government continue to curtail women's and girls' independent mobility, limit their educational and employment opportunities, and exclude them from influencing decision-making on issues critical to their well-being at the household, community, provincial and national levels.^e Taken together, this increases their vulnerability to the complex web of overlapping crises, sets back their economic and social resilience, and ultimately disempowers them in all spheres of decision-making. Since 2022, ADB, through financing directly to United Nations agencies, has provided essential services support to mitigate the adverse impacts of humanitarian crisis, which integrates cross-cutting gender interventions to promote women's economic resilience.^f

^a C. Albrecht, B. Rude, and T. Stitteneder. 2022. *Women in Afghanistan: Developments over the Last 20 Years and the Return of the Taliban*.

^b World Economic Forum. 2023. *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*.

^c Amnesty International. *Women in Afghanistan, the Backstory*. Available: [Women in Afghanistan: The Back Story \(amnesty.org.uk\)](https://www.amnesty.org.uk).

^d UN Women. 2022. *Gender Alert No. 2: Women's Rights in Afghanistan One Year after the Taliban Take Over*.

^e UN Women. 2024. *Afghanistan Gender Country Profile 2024*.

^f ADB placed on hold its regular assistance to Afghanistan effective 15 August 2021.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

4. Significant challenges related to gender equality remain. Women in Asia and the Pacific are disproportionately affected by climate change due to socioeconomic inequalities, including limited economic opportunities, burdensome domestic responsibilities, and restrictive social norms. Their dependence on natural resources for livelihoods, particularly in rural areas, heightens women's vulnerability to environmental degradation. These factors reduce their ability to adapt to climate shocks, increasing the risk of marginalization and exacerbating existing inequalities.⁹ Gender-based violence (GBV) remains prevalent, with 37% of women in South Asia, 40% in Southeast Asia, and up to 68% in the Pacific reporting having been a victim of such violence.¹⁰ Violence against women is driven by patriarchal attitudes and strict social norms, among other factors. Women's participation in leadership roles remains low, with women occupying only 6% of the seats on corporate boards and 18% of positions in legislatures.¹¹ Fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCAS) and small island developing states (SIDS) face additional challenges that exacerbate gender inequalities, particularly due to their vulnerability to external shocks such as climate-related and natural disasters, conflict, and economic instability. These contexts often limit women's access to economic opportunities, education, and healthcare, while also increasing their risk of GBV. Tailored solutions are essential to address the diverse gender constraints across different contexts.

⁸ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). *Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment*.

⁹ UN Women. 2024. *Progress on the sustainable development goals: The gender snapshot 2024*.

¹⁰ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). *Measuring Prevalence of Violence Against Women in Asia-Pacific*. Retrieved from UNFPA Asia-Pacific.

¹¹ ADB's Work in the Gender and Development Sector. <https://www.adb.org/what-we-do/topics/gender>

5. To achieve gender equality, deep-rooted discriminatory social norms need to be tackled through transformative approaches that consider the intersecting needs of different subgroups. Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5)—“achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”—affects other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those on poverty eradication and economic growth.¹² However, lack of data hampers tracking progress toward SDG 5.¹³ Governments must invest substantially to reduce wage gaps, increase labor force participation, end violence against women and harmful practices, and to address unpaid care work if they are to achieve SDG 5 by 2030. Economic development alone is insufficient; continuous policy commitment is necessary if gender equality outcomes are to be achieved.

B. Evaluating ADB's Support for Advancing Gender Equality

6. This evaluation assesses the positioning and contribution of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for accelerating progress in gender equality in Asia and the Pacific from 2016 to 2023. It follows the 2017 evaluation of ADB support for gender and development (Box 2).¹⁴ This is the fourth thematic evaluation by the Independent Evaluation Department (IED) of ADB's support for gender and development.¹⁵ In addition, gender equality has been covered as a cross-cutting theme in various IED corporate, thematic, sector-wide, and country evaluations.

Box 2: ADB Implemented its Proposed Actions to the Previous Gender Evaluation Recommendations

The Independent Evaluation Department (IED) 2017 evaluation of ADB's Support for Gender and Development examined the relevance and results of Asian Development Bank (ADB) gender priorities at the corporate, country, and project levels. The evaluation found that ADB's 1998 Policy on Gender and Development had led to a greater focus on mainstreaming gender content in projects but that less attention had been paid to specifying the broader gender results that ADB should pursue. The number of gender-mainstreamed projects increased in all sectors. However, support for projects with a gender equity theme —aiming for outcomes directly addressing gender inequality—had declined since 2010.

The evaluation recommended that (i) at the policy level, ADB should specify the types of gender results to be supported in Strategy 2030, and that ADB should report the achievement of gender results more systematically based on the five dimensions of gender equality (economic empowerment, human development, reduced time poverty, voice and decision making, and resilience to shocks); (ii) at the country level, ADB should (a) conduct regular country gender assessments updates and develop gender knowledge products, and ensure that their findings are reflected in country partnership strategies and results frameworks; and (b) increase the number of gender equity themed projects in the ADB portfolio; (iii) at the project level, ADB should design projects that use gender analysis, build on lessons learned and rigorously monitor results; and (iv) ADB should strengthen the technical capacity of ADB staff to support the integration of gender work into projects.

Management actions on the recommendations were assessed to have been fully implemented by 2020. ADB's Corporate Results Framework, 2019–2024 included results framework indicators on the gender equality operational priority; corporate targets were met on the preparation of country gender assessments and strategies, the number of gender-mainstreamed projects, women's participation in skills training and leadership programs; and the number of ADB gender staff positions increased.

Source: IED. 2017. *Thematic Evaluation: Asian Development Bank Support for Gender and Development (2005–2015)*.

¹² United Nations. 2015. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. 42809, 1–13.

¹³ Of the nine indicators for SDG Goal 5, only two have sufficient data: 5.5 (ensure full participation in leadership and decision-making) and 5.1 (end all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere). ESCAP Asia and Pacific Gender Portal.

¹⁴ Independent Evaluation Department (IED). 2017. *Thematic Evaluation: Asian Development Bank Support for Gender and Development (2005–2015)*.

¹⁵ IED has conducted three previous evaluations of ADB's support for gender and development: (i) IED. 2001. *Special Evaluation Study on Gender and Development*; (ii) IED. 2009. *Special Evaluation Study on the Asian Development Bank's Support to Gender and Development. Phase 1: Relevance, Responsiveness, and Results to Date.*; and IED. 2010. *Special Evaluation Study on the Asian Development Bank's Support to Gender and Development. Phase 2: Results from Country Case Studies.*; (iii) IED. 2017. *Thematic Evaluation: Asian Development Bank Support for Gender and Development (2005–2015)*.

7. The evaluation addressed an overarching question: How well positioned is ADB to deliver effective and potentially transformative support for accelerating progress in gender equality in Asia and the Pacific? Three strands of enquiry support this assessment: the relevance of ADB's corporate policies and strategies in providing a coherent and inclusive vision for ADB's efforts to accelerate progress in gender equality; the effectiveness of ADB's operations in achieving gender equality outcomes and gender transformative change; and ADB's institutional positioning for delivering transformative gender results. The evaluation employed qualitative and quantitative methods, including consultations with ADB staff, executing and implementing agencies, private sector clients, and staff from peer development organizations. Evaluation missions were conducted in Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Tajikistan, and a staff perception survey was conducted. The evaluation also compared gender mainstreaming approaches in other multilateral development banks (MDBs) and reviewed ADB's corporate documents and previous evaluation reports. Appendix 1 elaborates on the evaluation's design.

8. The evaluation was guided by a theory of change (Figure A1.1, Appendix 1) that assessed ADB's support for gender equality against five broad outcomes, based on the pillars of ADB Strategy 2030's operational priority 2 (OP2) pillars: increased economic empowerment, enhanced gender equality in human development, enhanced decision-making and leadership, reduced time poverty and drudgery, and strengthened resilience to external shocks. ADB's support is provided through various instruments for DMCs, including country engagement, policy dialogue, sovereign operations, nonsovereign operations (NSO), and partnerships. The evaluation explores the causal linkages between ADB's activities and the achievement of outcomes, examining underlying assumptions and the extent to which gender transformative approaches have been applied.¹⁶

9. The following five chapters detail the strategic relevance of ADB's approach to promoting gender equality in the region, implementation of ADB gender strategies, ADB's contributions to achieving gender equality outcomes, ADB's institutional capacity for delivering gender transformative change, and conclusions and recommendations to ADB.

¹⁶ For the purposes of the evaluation the term "gender transformative approaches" are those that seek to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and challenge unequal power relations with a view to transforming structures, institutions, and social norms.

ADB Support Shaped by an Outdated Policy

10. This chapter outlines the evaluation’s assessment of the relevance of ADB’s corporate policies and strategies in providing a coherent and inclusive vision for ADB’s efforts to accelerate progress in gender equality in Asia and the Pacific. The assessment shows that incoherence between the outdated 1998 Policy on Gender and Development (GAD) and ADB’s current ways of working has created confusion and revealed a lack of strategic clarity.¹⁷ A clearer strategic vision is needed to frame ADB’s support for gender transformative change.

A. Gender Equality as a Long-Standing Strategic and Operational Priority for ADB

11. The current GAD Policy was approved by the Board of Directors in May 1998 as the organization shifted its gender approach from a focus known as “women in development” to gender and development. Unlike the earlier policy on the Role of Women in Development (adopted in September 1985), which promoted individual interventions to improve the well-being and empowerment of women,¹⁸ the GAD Policy viewed gender as a cross-cutting theme influencing all social and economic processes. To operationalize the gender mainstreaming ambitions envisaged in the GAD Policy, in 2001 ADB began categorizing projects according to the extent to which gender was mainstreamed throughout project design. Over the years, ADB has revised the guidelines for assigning projects to different categories, although the categories themselves have remained largely unchanged.

12. Gender equality has remained a strategic corporate priority. ADB’s Strategy 2020, adopted in 2008, identified gender equity as one of five “drivers of change” for promoting and achieving inclusive and sustainable growth, reducing poverty, improving living standards, and attaining the Millennium Development Goals.¹⁹ Subsequently, ADB’s Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Operational Plan, 2013–2020 set out the strategic directions and guiding framework for ADB’s gender mainstreaming efforts.²⁰ In 2018, ADB’s Board of Directors approved Strategy 2030, which integrated the SDGs adopted in 2015,²¹ and identified seven operational priorities (OPs), including accelerating progress in gender equality (operational priority 2).²² To operationalize Strategy 2030, ADB adopted an operational plan for priority 2: Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, 2019–2024, which outlined five strategic operational priorities (also called “pillars”): (i) women’s economic empowerment increased; (ii) gender equality in human development enhanced; (iii) gender equality in decision-making and leadership enhanced; (iv)

¹⁷ ADB. 1998. *Policy on Gender and Development*.

¹⁸ ADB. 1985. *Policy on the Role of Women in Development*.

¹⁹ ADB. 2008. *Strategy 2020. The Long-Term Strategic Framework of the Asian Development Bank, 2008–2020*.

²⁰ ADB. 2013. *Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Operational Plan 2013–2020*.

²¹ The SDGs comprise 17 goals and 169 targets aimed at ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for all.

²² ADB. 2018. *Strategy 2030 Achieving a Prosperous, Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Asia and the Pacific*. The operational priorities are: (i) addressing remaining poverty and reducing inequalities; (ii) accelerating progress in gender equality; (iii) tackling climate change, building climate and disaster resilience, and enhancing environmental sustainability; (iv) making cities more livable; (v) promoting rural development and food security; (vi) strengthening governance and institutional capacity; and (vii) fostering regional cooperation and integration.

women's time poverty and drudgery reduced; and (v) women's resilience to external shocks strengthened.²³

1. ADB's 1998 Gender and Development Policy Reflects Outdated Approaches

13. The 1998 GAD Policy reflected the concepts and language on gender in use at that time. It has a strong focus on the process of introducing and rolling out gender mainstreaming to create a "shift in emphasis, from addressing women only in projects in the social sectors, to considering gender implications in all aspects of ADB operations" (footnote 17). Emphasis was placed on the number of projects into which gender was mainstreamed, which was also reflected in the corporate targets linked to the gender mainstreaming categorization system (Chapter 3). IED's 2017 thematic evaluation of ADB's support for gender and development was critical of the policy's emphasis on gender mainstreaming as an end in itself rather than as a means to achieve gender equality, and the policy's lack of a clear articulation of what gender equity entails or the specific outcomes should achieve (footnote 14).

14. On the framing of gender equality, the 1998 GAD Policy recognized gender as the socially and culturally constructed social differentiation between women and men and defined gender mainstreaming as "...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels." The 1998 GAD Policy was largely women-focused and did not address how to capture intersectional perspectives. It did not cover gender inequalities that affect men and boys disproportionately (as in the education sectors of some DMCs) and did not recognize gender diversity nor sexual and gender minorities.²⁴ Peer organizations have since revised their gender policies and institutional strategies to incorporate more inclusive framings of gender equality. The World Bank Group's Gender Strategy 2024–2030, for example, acknowledges the centrality of investing in women and girls while recognizing the disadvantages facing men and boys and the vulnerabilities arising from the intersection of gender with poverty, ethnicity, disability, and other characteristics, encompassing sexual and gender minorities, in line with advances in DMCs (Box 3).²⁵ The World Bank Gender Strategy recognizes the need to tailor responses to specific contexts, such as fragility, and to the needs of specific groups, such as adolescent girls.

Box 3: Recognizing Minority Gender Identities in Law

Across the world, people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics continue to advocate for legal recognition. The way gender identities are defined in law greatly affects how people with minority gender identities participate in society, access services, and engage in employment. Notably, South Asian countries—including Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan—have made progress in legal gender recognition, allowing transgender and gender-diverse individuals to change their sex or gender markers and names on official documents. For instance, in Pakistan, a historic bill passed in 2018 allows self-perceived gender recognition on official documents. In Bangladesh, the Hijra community was officially recognized as a third gender in 2014. Third gender individuals have been hired in public service jobs in India and have successfully run for office in Bangladesh, enhancing representation and visibility. However, legal mechanisms alone are insufficient, and efforts to protect minority gender identities and reduce social stigma remain crucial.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department); and Asian Development Bank. 2024. *Assessment of the Legal Status of Sexual and Gender Minorities in 17 Countries in Asia and the Pacific*.

²³ ADB. 2019. *Strategy 2030. Operational Plan for Priority 2. Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality 2019–2024*.

²⁴ The term "sexual and gender minorities" is used to describe people whose sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions, and sex characteristics differ from those of heterosexual cisgender people. The term is often used for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals, recognizing diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

²⁵ World Bank. 2024. *World Bank Group Gender Strategy 2024–2030. Accelerate Gender Equality to End Poverty on a Livable Planet*.

15. The ADB staff perception survey undertaken for this evaluation, as well as key informant interviews, indicated that ADB staff are either unaware of the 1998 GAD Policy, or disregard it.²⁶ Despite its diminished relevance, the 1998 GAD Policy remains the document of reference for the Operations Manual guidance on gender equality and women's empowerment in ADB Operations.²⁷ It is still referred to as providing the backdrop for the work of ADB's Gender Equality Division, and it is often referenced in project documents.

16. A majority of internal stakeholders acknowledged that having the 1998 GAD Policy still in place and actively referenced, despite its significant variance from the Strategy 2030 operational plan for priority 2: Accelerating Progress on Gender Equality (footnote 23), was problematic. ADB operates with a GAD policy that uses outdated concepts and refers to implementation mechanisms and diagnostic tools that are no longer ADB operational praxis.²⁸

2. Policy and Strategic Incoherence Has Implications for Promoting Gender Equality

17. Internal implementation and accountability mechanisms referenced in the 1998 GAD Policy differ from those set up under ADB's Strategy 2030, and more recently under ADB's new operating model (NOM).²⁹ The 1998 policy reflects the needs of a smaller ADB with a different structure and set of mandates. For example, it refers to departments that no longer exist or have since been renamed, and calls for a limited central pool of gender specialists to implement the policy, estimating that only two new staff positions would suffice to complement the two part-time positions working on gender in ADB's Social Development Division at the time.³⁰ By contrast, the Gender Equality Division contained 51 gender positions across the organization (headquarters and resident missions) at the time of the evaluation.³¹ Whereas gender equality support was previously provided by ADB's Social Development Division, it is now a thematic, cross-cutting function; the Human and Social Development Sector Office is part of the sector group that administers and directly manages projects.

18. The 1998 GAD Policy does not address how gender intersects with other forms of discrimination or social exclusion (intersectionality), or with the need to adopt gender transformative approaches, both of which are more recent developments under ADB Strategy 2030's operational priority 2 (OP2). This has led to an institutional role division, with the Gender Equality Division supporting gender mainstreaming using the 1998 GAD Policy and OP2 with a focus on women's empowerment, and the Human and Social Development Sector Office which focuses on ensuring (a) greater inclusiveness and equity in access to services, resources, and opportunities; (b) greater empowerment of poor and marginalized groups to participate in social, economic, and political life; and (c) greater security to cope with chronic or sudden risks, especially for poor and marginalized groups.³² Social inclusion is covered under the Strategy 2030 operational plan for priority 1: addressing remaining poverty and reducing inequality.³³ The Human and Social Development Sector Office currently also leads the work on discrimination based on sexual

²⁶ The survey results showed that 40% of respondents (488) had neither heard of nor read ADB's 1998 GAD Policy. This was an increase from 31% in 2017 at the time of the last ADB gender and development evaluation and is indicative of the policy's declining relevance (Figure A5.5, Appendix 5).

²⁷ ADB. 2023. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in ADB Operations. *Operations Manual*. OM/C2.

²⁸ For instance, some actions mandated in the GAD Policy (such as carrying out a country gender assessment prior to each CPS) are no longer required.

²⁹ ADB. 2022. *Organizational Review: A New Operating Model to Accelerate ADB's Transformation Toward Strategy 2030 and Beyond*.

³⁰ The policy mandates the Office of Environment and Social Development with "overall responsibility for coordinating and monitoring ADB-wide gender and development activities (...) whose views and guidance will be solicited on... in all ADB activities." (p. xii), p. 44

³¹ Data provided by the Gender Equality Division.

³² The Human and Social Development Sector Office promotes new initiatives and policies that aim to reduce poverty, inequality, and vulnerability among poor and marginalized groups by transforming social institutions toward inclusive and equitable social development.

³³ This operational priority comprises three interconnected focus areas: (i) to enhance human capital and social protection for all; (ii) to generate quality jobs; and (iii) to reduce inequality in opportunities. ADB. 2019. *Operational Priority 1: Addressing Remaining Poverty and Reducing Inequalities*. Manila

orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, intersecting dimensions of gender and aging populations, work on inclusion of persons living with disabilities, and social protection, among others.

19. While addressing remaining poverty and reducing inequality (OP1) and accelerating progress in gender equality (OP2) are clearly complementary, ADB does not have a comprehensive policy framework that binds these different dimensions together against higher objectives and guiding principles, and which spells out how institutional arrangements should complement each other. Instead, an internal institutional "split"³⁴ appears to have emerged between gender mainstreaming approaches that focus primarily on women's empowerment and gender equality across sectors, and social inclusion approaches which deal with minority inclusion linked with gender inequalities. This complicates the implementation of intersectional approaches to gender equality.

20. Similarly, ADB's Safeguard Policy Review has highlighted the need for a more cohesive and inclusive framing of gender equality considerations. The Revised Environment and Social Framework places greater emphasis on sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment risks and GBV, and recognizes that some individuals, by virtue of, for example, their gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity, may be more at risk of being adversely affected by project impacts, and/or more limited than others in their ability to take advantage of a project's benefits, excluded from or unable to participate fully in consultation processes and benefit sharing. This framing is given further prominence in the forthcoming Road Map for the Inclusion of Sexual and Gender Minorities in ADB Operations, 2025-2030.

21. At present, the way in which ADB focuses narrowly on women's empowerment in its gender mainstreaming efforts, while applying a more inclusive definition of gender equality in its work on social inclusion, sets it apart from comparator MDBs. Instead of separating these issues, both the World Bank Group and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) have gradually expanded their skills-base and staff composition in their gender equality divisions so they can respond to more complex and intersectional issues. Importantly, the empowerment of women remains the primary focus of their respective gender units, an approach that is in line with SDG 5 and responds to existing gender barriers and inequalities in client countries.

22. ADB's outdated 1998 GAD Policy also creates a lack of clarity for ADB when it engages in policy dialogue with external peer organizations, partners and country counterparts and tries to communicate clearly to country counterparts what ADB expects. For external stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation, the existence and circulation of a policy from 1998 that differs substantially from ADB's current operational plans creates a confusing picture of ADB's overarching framing and approach, and undermines ADB's reputation as a leader in promoting gender equality when engaging with DMC governments and civil society.

23. Interviews and the staff perception survey show that there is broad internal agreement that the 1998 GAD Policy needs to be updated, although there are concerns that the process could take up considerable staff time and would therefore need to be adequately resourced. Many noted that, for the ADB Board, the current GAD Policy provides weak guidance as to what principles and standards ADB's management should be held accountable for as it tries to accelerate gender equality across sectors and themes (Box A5.2, Appendix 5). Ultimately, although ADB management's operational plans are more up to date and relevant in their framing of approaches and strategies for accelerating gender equality, and thus are more frequently referred to internally, it is the Board-approved 1998 GAD Policy that remains the official framework for ADB's Operations Manual section on gender equality and women's empowerment (footnote 27).

³⁴ Noted both in in-depth staff interviews at headquarters and case countries and in comments provided through the staff survey.

B. Important Steps Forward under Strategy 2030's Operational Priority 2

24. Aside from the 1998 Policy, ADB has sought to maintain strategic relevance and guidance in its support for gender equality by updating its operational plans. The most recent of these, ADB's Strategy 2030 OP2, lays out five strategic operational priorities (also called pillars) for ADB's support: women's economic empowerment increased, gender equality in human development enhanced, gender equality in decision-making and leadership enhanced, women's time poverty and drudgery reduced, and women's resilience to external shocks strengthened.³⁵ These priorities reflected the five outcomes identified by IED's 2017 evaluation as it reconstructed ADB's theory of change for promoting gender and development based on the prevailing challenges identified in the preceding Operational Plan 2013–2020 (footnote 14, Figure 1). These five pillars remain relevant today for framing ADB's operational response to gender equality challenges in the region, and they align with the priority areas and objectives of comparator MDBs and other international development organizations.³⁶

1. Operational Priority 2 aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 5 and the Principle of "Leave No one Behind"

25. OP2 aligns closely with SDG 5 in its framing and strategies for accelerating gender equality and introduces the concept of intersectionality (Box 4). Overall, OP2 is considered relevant and useful by ADB staff and is thus more frequently referred to internally, as confirmed in the evaluation's staff perception survey. In contrast to the low level of awareness of the 1998 GAD Policy, most respondents to this survey had heard of (36%) or read (55%) OP2, with only 9% having neither heard of it, nor read it (Figure A5.5, Appendix 5). Most respondents (77%) found OP2 to be relevant or highly relevant to their work. Many (45%) also found the previous gender operational plan covering the 2013–2020 period still relevant (Figure A5.6, Appendix 5).

2. Steps Toward Integrating Gender Transformative and Intersectional Approaches

26. OP2 introduced the concept of the "transformative gender agenda." The concept of "transformation" and gender transformative change has a rich history in feminist scholarship and in development theory (Box 4). Many international development organizations with a gender equality mandate have moved toward framing their objectives around gender transformative change, and gender transformative approaches.³⁷ A transformative approach to gender equality seeks to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and to challenge unequal power relations with a view to transforming structures, institutions, and social norms.

27. ADB has placed great emphasis on explicitly framing OP2's definition of the transformative gender agenda in the context of the targets of SDG 5: eliminating violence against women and girls; recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work; promoting women's sexual and reproductive health and rights; encouraging women's participation in decision making and leadership; and creating access to economic and productive resources, information and communication

³⁵ This responds to recommendation 1 of the 2017 IED gender and development evaluation to identify the specific gender outcomes that ADB's gender and development agenda aims to support (footnote 14).

³⁶ For example, the 2024 World Bank Group's Gender Strategy prioritizes three strategic objectives: end GBV and elevate human capital, expand and enable economic opportunities, and engage women as leaders.

³⁷ Including the World Bank Group; IADB; UN agencies including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, UNICEF, International Labour Organization (ILO); international NGOs including CARE international, Save the Children, Plan International; bilateral development agencies such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit; and others including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

technology (ICT), and legal or institutional reforms for protecting women's rights and changing gendered social norms.³⁸

Box 4: Understanding Gender Transformative Change and Intersectionality

The concept of gender transformative change emerged in the early 1990s and is focused on transforming social systems that embed and perpetuate gender inequalities. Many international development organizations have since adopted the term "transformative" to describe their gender equality initiatives, with varying definitions and interpretations. The common feature of gender transformative approaches is that they aim to address the root causes of gender inequality and to transform social norms, power dynamics, and institutional structures to achieve lasting change.^a Several institutions have argued that different dimensions of change need targeted approaches for the individual, household, community, organization, and for larger societal structures. Working with men and boys to embrace gender equality is commonly presented as a core component, engaging men and women together as agents of change.

Intersectionality refers to how multiple and/or different social identities (such as those based on gender, race, age, culture, religion, geographic location, class, disability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, and ethnic identity) intersect to shape experiences of discrimination and oppression, thus exacerbating inequality. Viewing gender equality through an intersectional lens acknowledges that the experiences of individuals are not homogeneous within a given gender.

^a E. Hillenbrand et al. 2015 Measuring Gender-Transformative Change: A Review of Literature and Promising Practices. *Working Paper*. CARE USA <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12348/248>; J. MacArthur, et al. 2022. *Gender-Transformative Approaches in International Development: A Brief History and Five Uniting Principles*. Women's Studies International Forum, Vol. 95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2022.102635>; K. Crenshaw. 1989. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*. No. 1. Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

3. Unclear Pathways to Achieving the Transformative Gender Agenda

28. OP2 takes a more transformative approach that includes eliminating harmful gender norms and practices, but it does not specifically demonstrate how ADB will tackle societal structures that discriminate against women and girls, nor how the transformative gender agenda will be operationalized beyond some sector-specific project interventions. Moreover, the framing of the 'transformative gender agenda' in OP2 stands apart from the five OP2 strategic operational priorities or pillars, and OP2 does not explain how discriminatory social norms, for instance, can be tackled under each of the five pillars of OP2.

29. On achieving more transformational outcomes through addressing social norms and root causes of gender inequality, the OP2 framework does not reflect the complex, multidimensional, and context-specific interventions required to achieve gender transformative change. Many other development institutions' framings of gender transformative approaches outline the inherent complexity and the different types of interventions required within different spheres of influence (from the individual up to the national or international level), in order to address unequal power relationships, promote women's and girls' individual and collective agency, and tackle discriminatory norms within formal and informal social institutions.³⁹ Other aspects not realistically reflected in OP2's framing of the transformative gender

³⁸ This framing may have its roots in a 2018 knowledge product prepared by ADB in partnership with UN Women that identifies four "transformative policy areas" viewed as having the potential to catalyze change across the SDGs and in the lives of women and girls (i) realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights; (ii) recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work (iii) eliminating violence against women and girls and (iv) empowering women to build climate resilience and reduce disaster risks. ADB and UN Women. 2018. *Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: Baseline and Pathways for Transformative Change by 2030*. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/461211/gender-equality-sdgs-asia-pacific.pdf>

³⁹ For example, FAO, IFAD, WFP, and CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform. 2023. *Guidelines for Measuring Gender Transformative Change in the Context of Food Security, Nutrition and Sustainable Agriculture*. Rome, FAO, IFAD, WFP and CGIAR.

agenda are the long time frames required for transformative changes to take effect and the scale of the interventions that are required. Moreover, given real-world complexities, there may be feedback mechanisms (positive or negative), and possible backlashes that may hinder, or accelerate, the pace of change.

30. The Asian Development Fund (ADF) 13 Thematic Pool, established in 2020, has helped operationalize certain aspects of the SDG 5 transformative gender agenda (discussed in Chapter 3). However, many survey respondents called for additional training on how transformative change can be promoted as an integral part of gender mainstreaming efforts and through additional gender-targeted programming. The lack of training appears to be a notable gap, with only 12% of staff having received training on implementing ADB's transformative gender agenda (Figure A5.10, Appendix 5). Even among those who work primarily with gender, the level of training on transformative approaches is low, with only slightly more than one third indicating that they had either been trained on or worked on putting gender transformative approaches into practice. While clarity, guidance and training were frequently called for, comments also underlined the need to tailor and adapt approaches to local contexts. Only about one-third of survey respondents reported familiarity with the concept of intersectionality (about the same as for awareness of the transformative agenda), with newer staff demonstrating higher levels of awareness than those who had been with ADB longer (Figure A5.11, Appendix 5).

CHAPTER 3

Deepening Gender Mainstreaming

31. This chapter assesses the gender mainstreaming architecture that has been established at ADB. It covers the system for categorizing individual operations based on the extent to which gender has been mainstreamed in their designs, the systems in place for tracking and monitoring achievement of gender equality outcomes, and the framing of country-level objectives in the country partnership strategy (CPS). The chapter also outlines the different modalities, instruments, and funding sources that enable gender mainstreaming in ADB operations. The evaluation finds that ADB's strength is that it has had a well-established system in place for decades, with multiple modalities and funding sources to support gender-focused interventions. However, while there has been a high level of achievement in reaching corporate targets for gender mainstreaming in ADB operations, in many cases the depth of gender mainstreaming in project designs has been shallow, and CPSs and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems should be used more effectively to set and monitor the achievement of transformative gender outcomes.

A. ADB's Gender Mainstreaming Categorization System is Well Established

32. In terms of gender mainstreaming at the operations level, ADB was at the forefront of MDBs when it introduced gender mainstreaming categories in 2001 to track performance at the project entry stage. Other development partners and government counterparts have recognized ADB's gender mainstreaming efforts at the country level. For instance, the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank have modeled their gender categorization systems on ADB's approach. ADB established a four-tier gender categorization system for measuring and reporting on the integration of gender equality in project designs that is still being applied. The categories are gender equity theme (GEN), effective gender mainstreaming (EGM), some gender elements (SGE), and no gender elements (NGE)—Box 5.

33. The gender mainstreaming categorization system is the main accountability mechanism in ADB for tracking progress toward ADB's gender commitments and for corporate performance assessment. In 2008, ADB set a target of 40% gender mainstreaming in projects, which was incorporated into the Corporate Results Framework (CRF), 2008.⁴⁰ Official guidelines for gender mainstreaming categories were adopted in 2010, providing a structured approach for integrating gender considerations. These guidelines were updated in 2021, and for the Corporate Results Framework, 2019–2024 under Strategy 2030, ADB aimed for 55% of its sovereign and NSO to be categorized as GEN or EGM.⁴¹

⁴⁰ ADB. 2008. *ADB Results Framework*.

⁴¹ ADB. 2019. *ADB Corporate Results Framework, 2019–2024*.

Box 5: ADB's Project Gender Mainstreaming Categorization System

ADB uses a four-tier system to measure and report on project designs' integration of gender equality issues. The system reports ADB's "at-entry" gender mainstreaming commitments against corporate results targets under OP2.

1. **Gender equity theme (GEN).** The project outcome directly addresses gender equality and/or women's empowerment by narrowing gender disparities, including under OP2's five pillars: (i) women's economic empowerment increased, (ii) gender equality in human development enhanced, (iii) gender equality in decision-making and leadership enhanced, (iv) women's time poverty and drudgery reduced, and (v) women's resilience to external shocks strengthened. For nonsovereign operations, where a project invests in a woman-owned or woman-led client^a this will be considered as one of the gender additionality features contributing to the gender categorization, even if this is not reflected as a gender performance indicator in the project design and monitoring framework. An outcome-level gender performance indicator is required, and in addition, the combined total of project outputs with a gender performance indicator with this additionality must be equivalent to a majority of project outputs.
2. **Effective gender mainstreaming (EGM).** The project outcome does not explicitly address gender equality or women's empowerment, but project outputs contribute to addressing gender equality and/or women's empowerment by narrowing gender disparities, including under OP2's five pillars. For nonsovereign operations: for a project to be categorized as EGM, the combined total of project outputs with a gender performance indicator and a "gender additionality" must constitute the majority of project outputs. An investment in a woman-owned or woman-led client will be considered a gender additionality feature for gender categorization, even if it is not reflected as a gender performance indicator in the project design and monitoring framework.
3. **Some gender elements (SGE).** The project uses some gender performance indicators that directly or indirectly improve women's and girls' access to project benefits, resources, opportunities, and/or timesaving infrastructure, and/or mitigate potential risks to women and girls beyond environmental and social safeguard measures, but these are included in less than 50% of project outputs.
4. **No gender elements (NGE).** The project does not include a gender performance indicator that directly or indirectly improves women's and girls' access to project benefits, resources, opportunities, or timesaving infrastructure in the project's design and monitoring framework.

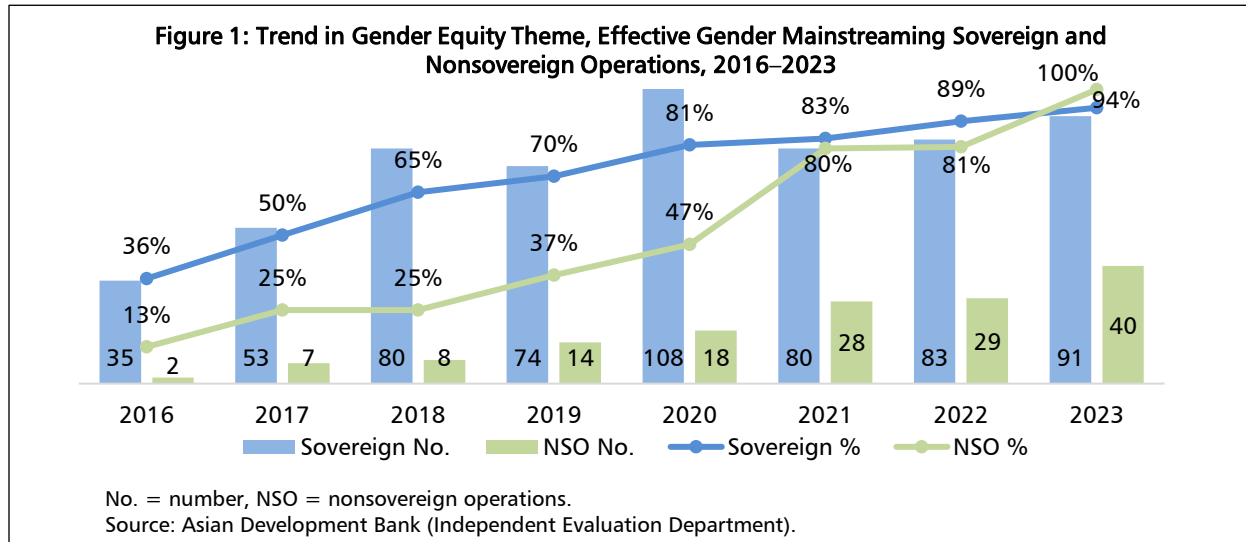
^a A woman-owned or woman-led enterprise is defined as: (i) $\geq 51\%$ of the enterprise is owned by a woman or women, or (ii) $\geq 20\%$ of the enterprise is owned by a woman or women, and the enterprise has ≥ 1 woman as chief executive officer, chief operating officer, president or vice-president and $\geq 30\%$ of the board of directors are women, where a board exists.

Sources: ADB. 2021. *Guidelines for Gender Mainstreaming Categories of ADB Projects.*; ADB. 2023. *Staff Instructions for Preparing the Country Partnership Strategy and Managing the Country Program* (internal document).

34. Attention to gender mainstreaming in project design and implementation at ADB has increased since 2016. The introduction of gender mainstreaming has heightened internal awareness and accountability, making gender equality a mandatory consideration in nearly all projects. Interviews with project staff indicated that it was much easier to carry out more substantial gender mainstreaming in sovereign grant projects and technical assistance (TA), than in loan projects, because of a general reluctance by governments to borrow for gender activities. Nonsovereign operations, meanwhile, present different challenges and are likely to incorporate gender outcomes only when these are aligned with the business objectives of private sector clients. In 2023, 78% of sovereign projects were categorized as EGM, reflecting the increased attention to gender considerations in project designs. Additionally, projects focusing on gender equity (GEN) saw their share double from 7% in 2016 to 15% in 2023, while the proportion of projects lacking any gender elements (NGE) declined sharply from 33% in 2016 to just 1% in 2023 (Figure A2.1).

35. Nonsovereign operations are critical to achieving the SDGs and gender equality goals. ADB's strategic commitment for at least 75% of nonsovereign project designs to be gender-inclusive by 2030 has already been surpassed, with gender-inclusive projects (i.e., categorized as SGE, EGM, or GEN) now constituting 99% of NSO over a 3-year period ending in 2023. Since 2019, when NSO gender targets were included in the CRF targets, the share of EGM NSO increased sharply, from 6% in 2016 to 85% of all NSO in 2023. During this time, a dedicated gender team was created within the PSOD, facilitating the incorporation of gender themes into NSO transactions. In 2023, all committed NSO were tagged as either

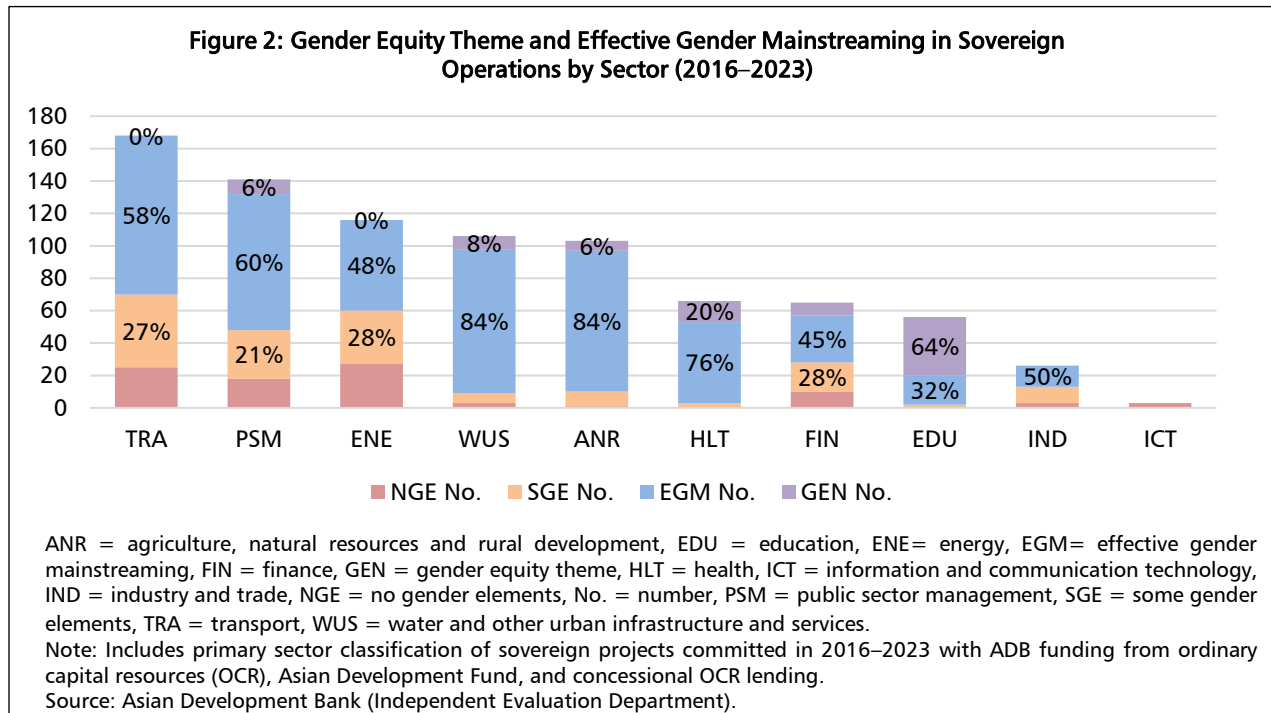
GEN or EGM (Figure 1). SGE projects have steadily declined since 2019 and in 2023 no NSO was tagged SGE (Table A2.9, Appendix 2).⁴²



36. Traditionally, social sectors have contained the highest proportions of GEN and EGM sovereign projects, a trend evident in 2016–2023. Of the 56 sovereign education sector projects in this period, 54 (96%) were categorized as GEN or EGM, including 36 (64%) categorized as GEN (Figure 2). In the health sector, 66 projects (96%) were categorized as GEN or EGM, 13 (20%) of which were GEN. These social sector projects have the potential for positive impact. In contrast, infrastructure projects in the water and other urban infrastructure and services (WUS) sector (90% categorized as EGM) and in the agriculture, natural resources and rural development (ANR) sector (92%), significantly lower proportions of GEN projects were found (8% for WUS and 6% for ANR). Meanwhile, 48% of energy and 58% of transport (TRA) investment projects were tagged EGM, but none was categorized GEN (Table A2.2, Appendix 2). The limited share of GEN projects in infrastructure investments underscores the ongoing challenges of identifying ambitious yet achievable and measurable gender equality targets at the outcome level in these sectors.

37. In addition to the gender mainstreaming categorization system, project teams are tasked with “tagging” projects to the seven OPs with which the operation is aligned, and with identifying “subpillar indicators” to which the operation will contribute. Operational priority 2 (OP2) was the second most frequently tagged Strategy 2030 operational priority during 2016–2023, next only to OP 6 (governance) (Table A2.13, Appendix 2).

⁴² ADB. 2024. *Private Sector Operations in 2023: Report on Development Effectiveness*.



38. OP2 is frequently tagged in conjunction with other OPs, as a cross-cutting priority. The evaluation team assessed the relationship between OP2 and the other operational priorities for the portfolio of sovereign operations by testing the correlation between different operational priorities being tagged for the same projects. The results showed that there was a significant correlation between projects tagged OP2 and those also tagged OP1 (poverty), OP3 (climate), and OP5 (rural development), suggesting that many projects tagged to these operational priorities were also tagged as contributing to OP2 (Table A2.16, Appendix 2). This highlights the cross-cutting nature of gender equality and OP2, and the extent to which gender has been mainstreamed across ADB operations. OP2 was most weakly associated with OP 4 (livable cities), OP6 (governance), and OP7 (regional cooperation and integration).

B. Further Scope for Deepening Gender Mainstreaming Efforts

39. The high degree of achievement of the EGM and GEN categorization across projects is notable. However, the current gender categorization system no longer reflects the evolving needs and objectives in the region. While the number of gender-mainstreamed projects, i.e., projects tagged GEN and EGM, has indeed increased sharply and corporate at-entry targets have been well exceeded, this has largely been achieved without incorporating more comprehensive and sustainable approaches to gender issues. In particular, the EGM category has become broad, encompassing a wide range of project approaches and activities. Although the categorization system has increased the number of gender-mainstreamed projects, it is focused more on outputs and women's participation rather than on meaningful gender transformative outcomes. ADB's Gender Equality Division is in the process of updating the gender categorization system.

40. The current categorization system and the related guidance are reflected in the gender-related indicators in project design and monitoring frameworks (DMFs).⁴³ ADB's approach of including a large number of gender-related indicators in the DMF encourages a broad extent of gender mainstreaming across project outputs, ensuring gender indicators are integrated in the project's overall M&E system. Yet

⁴³ ADB's Gender Equality Division does scrutinize the quality of gender-related indicators, involving through peer reviews, and GAPS are approved by the director of the Gender Equality Division as a measure of quality assurance.

such an approach means that there is little distinction between substantive and superficial indicators, while the emphasis on the quantity of the indicators commits staff time to following-up and monitoring activities (particularly as the number of projects categorized EGM and GEN has increased). The World Bank's updated gender tag system, in comparison, pays less attention to the quantity of gender-related indicators, and instead applies explicit criteria that emphasize the quality of the indicators, with a gender tag being assigned to a project even if it has a single high-quality indicator. There are trade-offs in each approach. The World Bank's approach is currently being evaluated by the Independent Evaluation Group.⁴⁴

41. Misinterpreting the gender categories as a scorecard has distorted incentives. For instance, staff reported the pressures that they face in ensuring that projects are, at a minimum, categorized EGM, which risks rendering the SGE and NGE categories redundant. One respondent commented "management pushes us to categorize EGM at entry, even when it is unlikely we can obtain EGM." Another gender specialist noted that "project officers try to go for the GEN category and come up with attached project components that don't necessarily make sense in the context of the project and are solely done for the purpose of getting a GEN categorization." This was reiterated both in survey comments and during interviews in which staff expressed their frustration at how ADB management and Board interpretations of the gender categories as a ranked "scorecard" have created an incentive to add superficial indicators just to push projects "over the line" to get a project approved as EGM or GEN.⁴⁵ Some staff called for a more strategic use of GEN projects to push boundaries, pilot innovations, and provide good practice models that could be scaled up or replicated in projects categorized as EGM or SGE. Additionally, staff suggested that ADB management could shift the current emphasis on departments to meet gender targets at-entry, to instead focus on their ability to implement gender transformative projects successfully.

42. For NSO, ADB's categorization system emphasizes non-financial gender additionality, which is reflected into ex ante assessments. Engaging private sector clients in gender equality efforts often requires demonstrating their business value, making it essential to tailor gender mainstreaming approaches to sector-specific contexts such as infrastructure and energy. Challenges such as shorter project durations and limited TA resources further constrain the integration of gender goals, affecting both the project's scope and design. An analysis of NSO gender action plans (GAPs) shows that, in many cases, gender-related indicators focused on internal corporate issues, such as developing a corporate gender strategy or appointing a woman to the company board, rather than on external gender impacts related to the client's operations. While internal gender policies such as promoting women's leadership are crucial and can potentially contribute to changes in corporate power structures, it is equally important to complement these efforts with actions that promote shifting culture toward inclusivity and diversity. The evaluation's country case assessments found that, when private sector initiatives had significant community impacts, especially in altering attitudes toward women's roles in the local economy (in the Philippines, for example), these difficult to quantify outcomes were often under documented and underutilized for internal learning.

43. Regarding motivating factors for staff to ensure gender mainstreaming in ADB operations, 66% of survey respondents and 83% of those who work primarily with gender issues indicated that an important motivating factor was satisfying Board expectations on the gender categorization of projects, specifically that more projects should be EGM or GEN (Figure A5.15, Appendix 5). The same share of respondents indicated that a key motivating factor was to comply with ADB guidelines and get projects approved. This was also reflected in staff interviews. This incentive is further underscored by the existence of corporate targets for specific gender categories.

⁴⁴ World Bank. 2023. *Approach Paper: An Evaluation of World Bank and International Finance Corporation Engagement for Gender Equality over the Past 10 Years*.

⁴⁵ An evaluation of the World Bank Group's gender strategy noted the same phenomenon, where targets of 100% for the gender tag resulted in "force-fitting" of gender gaps within operations. World Bank. 2021. *World Bank Group Gender Strategy Mid-Term Review: An Assessment by the Independent Evaluation Group*. Independent Evaluation Group.

1. Notable Increase in Gender Equity Theme Projects with Potential to Address Root Causes of Gender Inequality

44. Gender equity theme (GEN) projects include targeted gender actions to address gender gaps. They can also be used as important complements to other gender mainstreaming actions in order to address the root causes, social norms, or other systemic issues of gender inequality. These projects have the potential to leverage transformative gender change by creating an enabling environment for gender mainstreaming. They can provide a window for innovation in context-specific gender transformative approaches. The share of GEN projects decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, as ADB's COVID-19 Pandemic Response Option (CPRO) operations and its support through the Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility were categorized as EGM. The share of GEN projects has increased again, however, in recent years since COVID-19 (Figure A2.1, Appendix 2). This is a positive development in line with the recommendation of the 2017 evaluation to increase the number of GEN projects in ADB's portfolio.⁴⁶ In terms of sector distribution, the share of GEN infrastructure sector projects (ANR and WUS) has increased from 1% during 2016–2019, to 5% during 2020–2023 (Table A2.2, Appendix 2).

45. The evaluation reviewed all projects categorized as GEN (sovereign and NSO) approved in 2020–2023 to assess the extent to which GEN projects were optimally used, particularly with regard to incorporating transformative approaches and intersectional analysis. Each project was examined to identify those elements contributing to gender transformative change. The applied criteria for this assessment are detailed in Box A3.1, Appendix 3.

46. The analysis showed that, while most GEN projects (62%) articulated and partly addressed a defined gender gap, this was often described in general terms, using available statistics. The relevance between the identified gender gap to the overall project and how it would be addressed was often unclear. Only 10% of projects outlined a clear alignment between the identified gender gap, and the proposed gender actions to be undertaken, with clear links to project objectives. Likewise, while root causes of gender inequality were often referred to in background project documentation, the majority of projects lacked a clear pathway and connection between the analysis of the root causes of gender inequality (often social norms and systemic inequalities) and the proposed interventions. Few GEN projects addressed discriminatory social norms or engaged men and boys. The most common focus areas were related to women's access to economic resources, included in over half of the projects. Section A, Appendix 3 details the methodology and results of the analysis of GEN projects.

47. Only 15% of GEN projects applied an intersectional analysis and approach, with another 27% partially incorporating such an analysis in project design features. More than half of the GEN projects did not address intersectionality at all. Here, the evaluation draws a distinction between intersectionality and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI): intersectionality examines how various identities and characteristics (e.g., gender, class, ethnicity, indigenous status, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, religion, age, and migration) intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination, while GESI addresses gender equality and broader social inclusion issues together but may not fully capture how identities intersect in any individual to create compounded marginalizations. GEN projects that had adopted a GESI approach, or that included GESI action plans, were not more likely to apply an intersectional analysis. Instead of clearly specifying which actions target specific subgroups to close identified gender gaps, references to a "GESI-inclusive" design or "GESI elements" often failed to clarify whether the proposed actions or indicators focused on gender equality or social inclusion (and which population group), or the intersection of both. In such cases, GESI action plans risked identifying women as one homogeneous, "vulnerable" group, alongside other vulnerable groups (including persons with disability, ethnic minorities, disadvantaged castes, and sexual and gender minorities), rather than applying a truly intersectional approach. The recently published framework for integrating GESI in the operations of the South Asia Department (SARD) and its accompanying guidance notes emphasize the

⁴⁶ The 2017 evaluation highlighted the limited number of GEN projects, particularly the notable decline from 2010 onwards.

importance of applying an intersectional lens to project design and targeting, with particular attention to the inclusion of vulnerable groups, but it is too early to assess its implementation.⁴⁷

48. None of the 16 NSO GEN projects committed during 2020–2023 contained potentially transformative elements or had conducted an intersectional analysis. The challenges of gender integration in NSO are different from those in sovereign projects, as NSO DMFs emphasize financial and economic viability, with gender outcomes incorporated when they are aligned with business objectives. For example, in some NSO the emphasis was often on the clients' ability to serve women better, most often in relation to increasing their lending portfolio to women-owned or women-led micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSME). Microfinance projects, meanwhile, offer more potential for transformative change when they focus on upskilling and women's financial literacy. These initiatives, when paired with mechanisms to empower women's decision-making at the household and community levels, can have long-term implications for changing gender norms, particularly in rural areas, where women's financial independence can shift perceptions of their economic roles.

49. The evaluation country cases revealed that resident mission gender officers had limited involvement in managing gender actions in NSO, as these were primarily handled by the gender specialists in the Private Sector Operations Department (PSOD), with the Private Sector Portfolio Management division often acting as the main liaison with clients for debt and guarantee transactions, and the Equity Investments Unit and Private Sector Investment Funds and Special Initiatives Division retaining portfolio management responsibilities for direct equity investments and private equity fund investments, respectively. This approach limits the ability of the project to benefit from country contextual knowledge and grasp possibilities for synergies with the rest of the country portfolio. Integrating private sector gender specialists more closely with other gender support undertaken by the Gender Equality Division may help overcome such differences in approach.

2. Shallow Gender Mainstreaming in Effective Gender Mainstreaming Projects

50. For both sovereign and nonsovereign projects, there has been a dramatic increase in the share of projects categorized as EGM and a corresponding decrease in the share of projects categorized as SGE or NGE. While this represents an apparently impressive expansion in the breadth of gender mainstreaming across ADB's portfolio, in many cases the depth of gender mainstreaming in project designs has not been substantial. The evaluation reviewed a sample of EGM projects approved in 2020–2023 to assess the range and depth of gender actions undertaken, with projects grouped into categories of "high EGM" and "low EGM" based on specific characteristics. (Table A3.1, Appendix 3 presents the criteria used for assessing EGM projects). Of the 105 sovereign projects reviewed, 78 (74%) were considered "low EGM," characterized by low-impact or gender components that appeared to be "add-on" activities that did not clearly align with project objectives (Figure A3.2, Appendix 3). Of the 25 NSO EGM projects reviewed, 19 (76%) were considered "low EGM," primarily due to gender components being treated as supplementary or peripheral rather than integral to the project's core objectives. The analysis highlighted the degree of variation in the depth of gender mainstreaming among projects categorized as EGM.

51. The most common reason for projects being rated "low EGM" was their focus on inputs, such as measuring the number of women participating in training, without measuring the quality or effects of such interventions. Most projects (about 80%) did not apply an intersectional lens to targeting (i.e., women tended to be treated as a homogeneous group). The key differentiators for "high EGM"

⁴⁷ ADB. 2023. *Framework for Integrating Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in the Asian Development Bank's South Asia Operations*, ADB. 2023. *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Analysis to Inform ADB's Country Partnership Strategies and Project Designs in South Asia: A Guidance Note*; ADB. 2023. *Developing Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategies for Sector Agencies in South Asia: A Guidance Note*; ADB. 2023. *Evaluating the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Impacts of ADB-Financed Projects in South Asia: A Guidance Note*. ADB. Forthcoming. *Engaging, DMCs at the Policy Level by Supporting GESI-Responsive Policy and Legal Reforms*

projects were their comprehensive strategies that attempted to address root causes of gender inequality and their creation of new opportunities for women in non-traditional sectors. The evaluation did not find any strong patterns of high or low EGM ratings across years or sectors. Nor was there significant variation between infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects. The analysis therefore showed that gender mainstreaming can be implemented effectively across all sectors and types of projects. Section B, Appendix 3 elaborates on the evaluation's analysis of EGM projects.

52. ADB's ongoing review of the gender categorization system is necessary. According to the evaluation's staff perception survey, while 68% found the categorization system useful, 32% found it less useful or were unaware of it (Table A5.1, Appendix 5). Staff emphasized the need for clarity and simplicity in the system, recommending a focus on qualitative outcomes and flexibility to adapt to specific contexts. In short, although the current system has become well established and accepted by staff, and it has promoted a high level of gender mainstreaming across ADB operations, the near 100% gender mainstreaming at-entry attainment rate suggests a need to raise the bar for at-entry criteria to maintain relevance and focus on meaningful gender outcomes.

C. Comprehensive Tool Kit for Mainstreaming Gender

53. ADB's portfolio of sovereign investment projects is dominated by infrastructure investments, in which gender tends to be mainstreamed through low-impact activities, with unclear links to overall project outcomes (as outlined in the analysis of EGM projects in paras. 50–52). Gender outcomes tended to be more explicit and deeper in social sector investment projects (e.g., in education and health), which also tended to have a higher share of GEN projects. ADB also financed stand-alone gender-focused projects, usually through grant funding. ADB staff respondents reported that grants funded by TA, the Japan Fund for Prosperous and Resilient Asia and the Pacific (JFPR), and ADF 13, to support gender activities (often alongside infrastructure investments) have been valuable incentives for government investments. However, the Gender and Development Cooperation Fund, established in 2003, has not been replenished since 2017 and all the remaining funds have been committed, leaving a gap in dedicated funding for ADB's support for gender equality, particularly in Group B and C countries.⁴⁸

1. Asian Development Fund Has Been Crucial for Gender-Focused Interventions

54. The ADF has been a crucial source of funding for ADB's gender-focused interventions, since competing priorities, limited capacity, and the need for immediate crisis response often affect the prioritization of gender issues in ADF grants to eligible countries, particularly those in FCAS and SIDS. ADF grants present a significant opportunity to integrate transformative gender considerations into projects for Group A and Group B DMCs. Notably, 69% of projects in FCAS and SIDS were categorized as GEN and EGM (Table A2.4, Appendix 2), reflecting the potential to advance gender mainstreaming even in complex and vulnerable contexts.

55. ADF 13 (2021–2024 cycle) adopted a two-pillar resource allocation approach: country-based allocations and theme-based components. The strategic area of SDG 5's transformative gender agenda was established under the thematic pool, comprising 20% of the total thematic pool allocation. Unique among MDBs, the thematic pool represents the first earmarked funding initiative within comparable grant programs dedicated to SDG 5 and is fully aligned with OP2's transformative gender agenda. Currently, it is also ADB's sole trust fund earmarked specifically for gender equality, since the Gender and Development Cooperation Fund has not been replenished. In 2021–2023, 16 sovereign projects were funded under ADF 13 with a gender focus (a list of ADF 13-funded projects is in Table A2.19, Appendix 2).⁴⁹ Of these, 11 projects (69%) were categorized as GEN, indicating the importance of stand-alone

⁴⁸ IED's 2017 Evaluation of ADB's Support for Gender and Development recommended continuing to seek funding for the Gender and Development Cooperation Fund (footnote 14).

⁴⁹ ADF 13's thematic window included climate change adaptation (40%) and regional cooperation and integration including regional public goods (40%).

funding such as the SDG 5 thematic pool to incentivize GEN projects. The remaining five projects (31%) were categorized as EGM. The thematic window for achieving the SDG 5 transformative gender agenda will continue to be available under ADF 14 (2025–2028).

56. Implementation of the ADF 13 thematic pool started off slowly as DMCs were emerging from the COVID-19 crises, but has since gained momentum, with most projects under the SDG 5 thematic pool being implemented in 2023 and 2024. Although projects were small, the thematic pool was well regarded by stakeholders as a well-designed arrangement that effectively incentivized attention to projects with a focus on underserved ADF priority themes, such as gender equality.⁵⁰ The availability of this thematic grant funding also makes any attached loan-financing more attractive, thus encouraging much-needed investment. Earlier project designs, in some cases, tended to incorporate the thematic pool for the SDG 5 strategic area as stand-alone add-on project components with unclear links to the overall project outcomes (e.g., the construction of a domestic violence shelter added to the Dushanbe Water Supply and Sanitation Project).⁵¹ More recent designs show greater integration of ADF 13 SDG 5 funding into project designs (e.g., the integration of multiple activities to tackle gendered social norms in the Senior Secondary Education Project in Solomon Islands).⁵² This demonstrates the strong potential for ADB to support and deliver gender transformative change in countries with greater development challenges, including FCAS and SIDS, through leveraging the ADF thematic pool.

2. Using Technical Assistance to Drive Gender-Focused Policy Dialogue and Capacity Development

57. TA resources are crucial for carrying out dialogue with government counterparts and for building capacity to design and implement gender-focused projects, yet current allocations are insufficient. Lack of government or client capacity or interest was the most frequently cited barrier faced by staff in incorporating gender equality in their work, according to the evaluation's staff perception survey.⁵³ While the majority of government counterparts met during evaluation country missions appreciated ADB's support for gender equality, some took the view that "gender is a foreign concept" that is "imposed by donors". Against this backdrop, the increase in the number of sovereign TA projects categorized as GEN, EGM, or SGE from 2016–2019 to 2020–2023 is important (Table A2.7, Appendix 2); however, gender-focused institutional regional TA accounted for only a fraction (less than 1%) of all TA resources committed during 2016–2023.

58. The strategic use of TA in support of gender outcomes can build institutional capacity, inform policy development, and support implementation of gender-responsive strategies. In Mongolia, TA bolstered implementation mechanisms for the Law on Promotion of Gender Equality and supported the National Committee on Gender Equality, as it facilitated the government's development of a Mongolia gender situational analysis and comprehensive sectoral analyses, which informed gender sector strategies.⁵⁴ Consequently, this created an enabling policy environment for ADB sector projects, which benefited from sector-specific research, regular civil society consultations on the National Gender Equality Law, and continued support to the National Committee on Gender Equality in collaboration with other development partners. Overall, successive and targeted TA initiatives enabled the ADB Mongolia Resident Mission to adopt a holistic approach to gender support in the country.

⁵⁰ IED. 2023. *Corporate Evaluation: Navigating through the Polycrisis: ADF 12 and 13 Support to Vulnerable Countries*.

⁵¹ ADB. 2018. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Grant for the Dushanbe Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Tajikistan: Gender Action Plan*.

⁵² ADB. 2023. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan, Grant, and Administration of Grant Solomon Islands: Senior Secondary Education Improvement Project*.

⁵³ Survey responses were evenly spread across staff categories and between headquarters and resident missions; however, gender experts put more emphasis on the lack of resources for funding gender experts, and for TA resources followed by lack of time or internal incentives.

⁵⁴ ADB. 2019. *Technical Assistance to Mongolia for the Moving Gender Equality Forward through Civil Society Engagement*. TA project funded through Japan Fund for Prosperous and Resilient Asia and the Pacific (JFPR) to support the legal and policy framework for gender equality in Mongolia.

59. ADB's TA projects for private sector clients, though limited, can support capacity development of private sector actors to adopt gender-inclusive policies and practices, particularly in financial inclusion, MSME development, renewable energy, e-mobility, agribusiness, health and education. The Private Sector Operations Department (PSOD) has utilized a gender-focused transaction TA to support and reinforce gender mainstreaming in NSO, but this allocation is restricted compared to those in other departments and subject to cost recovery. Additionally, the potential applications of TA in NSO are fewer, leading to limited experience in leveraging TA as a tool, particularly in advancing gender equality within NSO. The Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative is a good example of a long-running series of sovereign TA projects being used to support localized private sector initiatives and chambers of commerce and to engage women in leadership roles in business, thereby building capacity for increased gender equality impact of NSO in the region.⁵⁵

60. Each regional department has utilized regional TA to support gender mainstreaming, while the Gender Equality Division manages a limited number of important knowledge TA projects to support events and knowledge generation, notably in relation to OP2's transformative gender agenda.⁵⁶ TA has also been used to support gender mainstreaming in subregional programs including the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Program. However, during the evaluation period there were only a handful of such regional gender-focused TA projects, despite their importance in supporting the implementation of ADB's gender mainstreaming efforts.

3. Leveraging a Range of Financing Modalities and Instruments

61. Apart from investment projects, ADB has other modalities that it can use to support gender interventions. Results-based lending (RBL) programs use the same categorization for gender mainstreaming as other modalities. IED's 2017 corporate evaluation examined gender disbursement-linked indicators (DLIs) in RBL programs and concluded that use of substantive gender DLIs enhances the visibility and likelihood of the gender impact of such programs, although it also noted that many DLIs and gender targets were inadequate.⁵⁷ While there were few completed RBL operations with at-exit gender assessments, there were good examples of gender mainstreaming through RBL programs—for instance, in the education sector in Nepal and Sri Lanka, and in the health sector in India.⁵⁸ Lessons from project completion reports (PCRs) show that, while RBL programs do not require a GAP, gender and social equity-related activities, performance indicators, and targets can be meaningfully integrated into RBL program DMFs, DLIs, and program action plans, particularly for GEN RBL programs. Dedicated support by gender specialist consultants during implementation was noted as a key factor for successful implementation of the gender actions and achievement of gender-related targets.

62. Policy-based lending (PBL) has long been cited as a potentially key instrument for removing structural barriers and as the basis for policy dialogue on gender-related issues.⁵⁹ However, while more PBLs have been categorized as EGM or GEN, the use of the instrument to advance meaningful gender-related policy reforms remains limited. Out of a total of 199 PBLs (2016–2023), 124 were categorized as GEN or EGM (Table A2.5, Appendix 2). The share of EGM and GEN PBLs has increased in recent years, from 34% of all PBLs in 2016–2019, to 78% in 2020–2023. Most of these were categorized as EGM, with the share of GEN PBLs increasing from 1% in 2016–2019 to 5% in 2020–2023. According to interviews with ADB staff, a major constraint on increasing the share of GEN PBL operations is the lack of dedicated

⁵⁵ ADB. 2019. *Technical Assistance for the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Phase IV*.

⁵⁶ ADB. 2018. *Technical Assistance for Promoting Transformative Gender Equality Agenda in Asia and the Pacific*; and ADB. 2021. *Technical Assistance for Advancing the Transformative Gender Equality Agenda in a Post-COVID-19 Asia and the Pacific*.

⁵⁷ IED. 2017. *Corporate Evaluation: Results-Based Lending at the Asian Development Bank: An Early Assessment*.

⁵⁸ ADB. 2020. *Completion Report: Education Sector Development Program in Sri Lanka*; ADB. 2021. *Completion Report: Supporting National Urban Health Mission in India*; and ADB. 2023. *Completion Report: Supporting School Sector Development Plan in Nepal*.

⁵⁹ See for instance ADB. 2007. *Gender Action Plans and Gender Equality Results Rapid Gender Assessments of ADB Projects*; IED. 2017. *Thematic Evaluation: ADB's Support to Gender and Development, 2005–2015*.

gender-focused TA resources to facilitate capacity development and policy dialogue on formulating gender-related policy actions. IED's 2018 corporate evaluation of PBLs 2008–2017 found that, overall, PBLs had not aimed for improvements in areas such as gender equality.⁶⁰

63. There have been some promising examples of gender mainstreaming in PBL operations in recent years that can provide good practice models, such as the PBL for the Papua New Guinea State-Owned Enterprises Reform Program, which embedded advancement of gender outcomes as a measure of value-for-money, and set clear gender targets as part of the evaluation of tenders, introducing gender-responsive procurement principles in a revised procurement framework, modeled on ADB's 2017 Procurement Policy Framework.⁶¹ Another notable example was the first GEN public financial management program, the Private Sector Growth PBL in Fiji, which exceeded expectations for integrating gender considerations (Box 6).⁶²

Box 6: Achieving Gender Equality Reforms through Policy-Based Lending in the Pacific

A recent study of gender actions in World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) budget support operations in the Pacific found that most were based on an opportunistic approach rather than on strategic planning.^a The study highlighted the work on gender responsive budgeting in Fiji, led by the Ministry of Economy with ADB and World Bank support. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) financing gave an entry point for additional gender actions in the policy action matrix. Bilateral technical assistance support (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) worked closely with ADB technical assistance to bring gender equality issues into existing dialogues with central agencies and economic ministers.

In this instance, gender mainstreaming adopted a gradual approach and took place over time and in several sectors, using a combination of policy-based lending, technical assistance, and policy dialogue. The ADB Private Sector Growth Policy-Based Loan subprogram 1 had no gender elements (NGE). Subprogram 2 included some gender-based policy actions, such as strengthening recruitment methods and merit-based appointments for state-owned enterprise directors, with a focus on increasing women's representation on boards; and extending maternity leave and introducing parental leave. It was categorized as effective gender mainstreaming (EGM). Gender-responsive budgeting was added within ADB's subprogram 3, which was categorized as gender equity theme (GEN), as was support for women's consumer rights and access to finance and establishing a COVID-19 gender working group. Targeted unemployment benefits (particularly for women in the informal sector) and support for women-led small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were introduced. Gender-responsive budgeting was implemented by seven ministries and ten government programs in the budget process for fiscal year 2022, exceeding the targeted four programs. This methodology is now being institutionalized in the government. However, Fiji was a conducive context, and the intervention may not be replicable in other Pacific countries.

^a ADB. 2022. *Completion Report: Sustained Private Sector-Led Growth Reform Program (Subprograms 1, 2 and 3) in Fiji*; and B. Warner. 2022. *Gender and Budget Support in the Pacific and Timor-Leste*. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

64. Gender bonds, a recent introduction, are designed to raise funds to finance sovereign projects and NSO and strategies that advance gender equality objectives.⁶³ In Georgia, ADB's Crystal Gender Bond Project invested approximately \$7 million in the first certified gender bond issuance in the South Caucasus and in the Georgian Stock Exchange, targeting rural women-owned MSME that found it difficult to access loans due to lack of collateral. In Kazakhstan, ADB raised approximately \$32 million in the second gender bond issued in the country, with proceeds used to finance the second disbursement to the partner bank

⁶⁰ IED. 2018. *Corporate Evaluation: Policy-Based Lending 2008–2017: Performance, Results, and Issues of Design*.

⁶¹ Targets included mandating an increase in the representation of women on state-owned enterprise boards (and establishing a database of qualified women for potential director appointments), strengthening reporting on gender indicators (including reporting on gender diversity in corporate plans), and carrying out gender analysis for new investments for essential services such as water and energy supply (payments for which are largely the responsibility of women, due to prevailing social norms). ADB. 2022. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Policy-Based Loan for Subprogram 3 Papua New Guinea: State-Owned Enterprises Reform Program*.

⁶² ADB. 2022. *Completion Report: Sustained Private Sector-Led Growth Reform Program (Subprograms 1, 2 and 3) in Fiji*.

⁶³ ADB. 2023. *ADB Briefs: Gender Bonds: From Incidental to Center Stage*. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/861396/adb-brief-243-gender-bonds-incident-center-stage.pdf>

so it could offer affordable residential mortgage loans to rural women borrowers.⁶⁴ In the Philippines, ADB has provided TA to support ASA Philippines to issue the first social (gender) bond in the country.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, ADB has integrated gender-lens investing in NSO and through the 2X Challenge, a gender financing scheme with established criteria for gender lens investing, in partnership with development finance institutions and private sector investors.

D. Strengthening Implementation Arrangements and Building Partnerships

65. A practical challenge for implementation is the budget allocated for gender equality actions, which is not always agreed to at project approval. ADB's categorization system does not explicitly require a minimum budget allocation for implementing and monitoring gender activities, although the Gender Equality Division assesses the adequacy of budget allocations when determining the appropriate categorization for each project.⁶⁶ While this evaluation was unable to systematically assess the adequacy of the budgets for gender equality actions, feedback from ADB gender specialists, and recurring lessons in PCRs indicate that budget provisions for gender activities—either the provision of gender experts or budgets for gender-focused projects—often fall short. In addition, while project designs may include plans for hiring a gender consultant at inception, there have been cases where this position was dropped or merged with other roles during implementation, or recruitment was delayed, with consequent negative impacts on GAP implementation.⁶⁷

66. It may also be that, in certain contexts, other development partners may have distinct comparative advantages in bringing about gender transformative changes (Box 7). In such cases, ADB must (i) recognize that suitable partners may be better placed to implement gender transformative approaches, and (ii) coordinate gender-responsive interventions so there is complementarity between the approaches of different development partners operating in different spheres of influence. ADB has multiple instruments and modalities to allow for a more programmatic approach within the framework of the CPS, or in partnership with other development agencies and actors.

67. In Tajikistan, for example, ADB partnered with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and local nongovernment organizations (NGOs) to implement a more transformative approach to raising awareness of women's maternal health at the community level. Building on UNICEF's clear framing of gender transformative actions for maternal health, local NGOs were contracted to work directly with pregnant women, their mothers-in-law (who in many cases had become de facto heads of household in the context of male out-migration), and male community leaders to bring about behavioral change, and to change attitudes toward sharing of household duties and responsibilities, expectations of unpaid care-work, and general awareness-raising of the needs of pregnant women within their households and communities. ADB could not operate with such complexity at the community level, so partnering with UNICEF and its network of local NGOs was an appropriate solution in this case.

68. ADB has formed important partnerships with other international organizations and development institutions, jointly preparing knowledge products (for example with UN Women and the International Labour Organization), and actively engaging in knowledge exchange (for example, through the MDB

⁶⁴ ADB. 2019. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan and Technical Assistance Grant Housing Construction Savings Bank of Kazakhstan Promoting Gender Equality in Housing Finance Project*.

⁶⁵ ASA Philippines Foundation Inc. Social (Gender) Bond Framework. https://storage.googleapis.com/asa_files/FS/Social-Bond-Frameworks_ASA-Phils_online_w-paginations.pdf

⁶⁶ In contrast, UNDP mandates that all new projects identify at least one stand-alone gender-specific component at the design stage and allocate at least 15% of the total budget to this component. Similarly, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and IFAD consider the allocation of gender-related budgets and resources a key criterion in their quality-at-entry assessments. IADB also requires tier 3 and tier 2 projects, i.e., projects with gender equality as their principal and significant objective respectively, to document a clearly identifiable amount of gender and diversity investment in project reports at the design stage. Source: IED internal study of MDB best practices.

⁶⁷ For example, this is seen in ADB. 2023. *Completion Report: Greater Mekong Subregion Flood and Drought Risk Management and Mitigation Project in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam*; and ADB. 2023. *Completion Report: Greater Mekong Subregion East-West Economic Corridor Towns Development Project in in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam*.

Working Group on Gender). ADB has also secured two grants from the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi), with \$22.7 million for supporting women-owned SMEs in Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, and the Pacific. This support was particularly relevant in supporting women entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic. We-Fi and ADB have partnered in establishing the Women Finance Exchange in 2021, a platform aiming to provide digital solutions to financial institutions for gender-responsive and sustainable finance.

Box 7: Partnerships for Gender Outcomes: Aligning with Client Needs and Local Context

In 2018, ADB extended a \$30 million nonsovereign loan to ASA Philippines Foundation, a well-established nonprofit microfinance organization, under the Fostering Women's Empowerment Through Financial Inclusion in Conflict-Impacted and Lagging Provinces Project. Categorized as gender equity theme (GEN), this initiative provided debt financing for on-lending to women borrowers, facilitating business loans for microenterprises, as well as loans for micro housing, water supply, and sanitation. The design and monitoring framework (DMF) indicators were specifically designed to track these financial products and the number of connected financial accounts, ensuring effective monitoring of the impact on beneficiaries' livelihoods.

ASA Philippines Foundation had already developed tailored Islamic financial products to meet the needs of the Muslim community in Marawi City, Mindanao during the post-2017 siege reconstruction. Its strong track record, extensive presence, high governance standards, and efficient reporting made it one of the country's largest microfinance providers, focusing on low-income women borrowers. By evolving their financial products through local branch involvement, ASA ensured these met the community's needs, proving that Islamic microfinance was essential for financial inclusion where traditional banking fell short. This case highlights how ADB's strategic alignment with a relevant partner that already had successful products and approaches in place can lead to important community impact and successful gender mainstreaming outcomes.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department). Country Case Report for the Philippines.

E. Ongoing Efforts in Gender Mainstreaming at Country and Regional Levels

69. At the country level, the CPS is intended to define ADB's operational focus. It is tailored to the country context and development agenda and based on analytical and diagnostic work.⁶⁸ Following the recommendation of IED's 2017 evaluation, ADB has taken steps to update gender-focused country knowledge products and to integrate gender dimensions into new CPS documents. However, overall, the current evaluation found inconsistent integration of gender in CPSs. Most CPSs recognized gender equality either as a driver of change or as a corporate-level objective, but they often lacked concrete strategies and actions. Out of 40 CPSs reviewed, 93% reflected gender equality as an overarching thematic priority of ADB (for example, by referencing OP2), but only 30% included it among the core objectives of the CPS (for example, through explicitly framing gender equality as a strategic pillar of the CPS, or through applying a gender equality lens to the achievement of broader CPS objectives).⁶⁹

70. The quality of CPS gender outcome indicators varied across regions (Appendix 4). The integration of gender analysis into CPSs was inconsistent and was often constrained by outdated analysis. Some country gender assessments (CGAs) were over 10 years old, although more recent gender assessments from other MDBs and national gender assessments were sometimes used to fill these gaps.⁷⁰ In some cases, ADB conducted country-level gender diagnostics in preparation for a CPS, but these were not published, which constrained opportunities for knowledge sharing. Many CPSs lacked explicit articulation of intent to undertake policy dialogue on gender issues with key ministries. In lieu of overall CGAs, some

⁶⁸ ADB. 2024. *Staff Instruction for Preparing the Country Partnership Strategy and Managing the Country Program* (internal).

⁶⁹ The evaluation reviewed 40 ADB CPSs for 28 DMCs and the Pacific Approach, ADB's overall partnership strategy for smaller Pacific Island Countries, all of which were circulated during the evaluation period 2016–2023. Eleven of these DMCs had two CPSs each, while the remaining 18 DMCs had only one CPS each (Appendix 4).

⁷⁰ The gap between CGAs and CPSs ranges from 5 to 10 years for the People's Republic of China (2006 CGA), Philippines (2008 Joint CGA), Papua New Guinea (2012 CGA), and exceeds 10 years for Mongolia and Kyrgyz Republic (2005 CGA), Fiji (2006 CGA), and Thailand (1998 country briefing paper). The CPS cycle is usually 5 years.

countries produced sector-specific CGAs; for example, the 2021 Viet Nam gender equality profile focused on the agriculture, water and urban development sectors. The average age of the CGA in other Southeast Asian countries is 9 years old. In 2020, Nepal prepared gender equality and social inclusion diagnostics for agriculture and natural resource management; energy; skills development; transport; urban development; and water, sanitation, and hygiene sectors.

71. Country partnership strategies often fell short of fully integrating gender within a larger programmatic framework, limiting the transformative potential of ADB's gender initiatives. Evaluation missions revealed that institutional knowledge of gender equality primarily resided with the national gender staff at the resident mission or the regional focal point within the Gender Equality Division. Although gender staff were generally consulted and involved in CPS preparations when time allowed, they lacked the time and resources to monitor and extract lessons from projects. As a good practice example, ADB's gender-related initiatives in Mongolia reflected a commendable effort to adopt a more holistic programmatic approach to gender, driven by the proactive and dedicated involvement of resident mission staff, gender specialists, and social development specialists during CPS preparation and backed by the strategic use of TA. Project level poverty and social analysis (PSA) also played a crucial role in highlighting gender-related issues of concern amongst communities.

72. ADB has produced gender strategies for the CAREC and the GMS programs.⁷¹ While these contain clear guidelines for mainstreaming gender in subregional programs, recent evaluations have highlighted slow progress on gender mainstreaming, with missed opportunities to integrate gender equality initiatives into projects.⁷² Issues of intersectionality were not discussed in the CAREC Gender Strategy 2030, and were only briefly referred to in the GMS Gender Strategy in relation to the SDGs and "leave no-one behind." The GMS Gender Strategy does explicitly mention the transformative gender agenda and encourages a focus on shifting gender norms that entrench gender inequality, yet it does not articulate how this will be put into practice and in some instances adopts an efficiency argument, justifying participation of women on the grounds that this will improve growth and sustainability. The launching in 2024 of an implementation plan to accompany the GMS Gender Strategy is expected to provide greater clarity on approaches and activities to promote the objectives of the strategy.

F. Corporate Monitoring of Gender Mainstreaming

73. Collecting sex-disaggregated data is central to understanding disparities and providing a comprehensive understanding of a project's impact on gender equality outcomes. A lack of sex-disaggregated data at the country level is a persistent challenge for project design, since ADB requires that gender equality indicators for baselines and targets be based on sex-disaggregated data. While collecting such data is required in the gender analysis and in the reports and recommendations of the President for GEN- and EGM projects, most gender-related indicators in project DMFs and GAPs focused primarily on counting the number of women and girls reached.⁷³ If data on all genders had been collected, a project's contributions to gender equality could have been better assessed and the closing of gender gaps could be monitored over time. The limited current evidence base, compounded by a lack of impact evaluations of GEN and EGM projects at the time of writing,⁷⁴ restricts learning opportunities and the replication of innovative gender interventions.

74. At the country level, gaps in the M&E of gender actions in CPSs have persisted. The Strategy 2020 Operational Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment highlighted that gender actions and

⁷¹ ADB. 2021. *CAREC Gender Strategy 2030: Inclusion, Empowerment, and Resilience for All*; and ADB. 2022. *Greater Mekong Subregion Gender Strategy*.

⁷² IED. 2021. *Thematic Evaluation: ADB Support for the Greater Mekong Subregion Program, 2012–2020: Performance and Results*; and ADB. 2023. *Thematic Evaluation: ADB Support for the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program, 2011–2021*.

⁷³ ADB. 2021. *Guidelines for Gender Mainstreaming Categories of ADB Projects*.

⁷⁴ The ADF thematic window for SDG 5 in ADF 13 and in ADF 14 (transformative gender agenda) requires "all projects to include a dedicated component for impact evaluation to showcase results," however, no such component had been completed in ADB projects at the time of the evaluation.

targets often did not align with the country context (footnote 20). Similarly, OP2 emphasized the need to integrate gender indicators into CPS results frameworks and to improve the monitoring and reporting of gender equality outcomes (footnote 23). This evaluation's review of CPSs revealed that many interventions' intended outcomes were not being adequately tracked or monitored (Appendix 4).

75. At the corporate level, while the CRF (2019–2024) level 2 indicators included gender-related indicators across the pillars of OP2, these primarily quantified outputs, such as the number of women and girls reached, without assessing ADB's effectiveness in closing gender gaps or in addressing changes in men's behaviors and attitudes (Table A2.27, Appendix 2).⁷⁵ For instance, the indicator on “child and elderly care services established or improved (number)” implicitly assumed that women—as the main care-providers—will benefit, instead of looking at what outcomes or benefits actually occurred and whether there were any more systemic shifts in the root causes of these gendered patterns. The emphasis on aggregating the number of women reached also fails to take into account different groups of women and how gender intersects with other characteristics. Aggregation is based on expected targets and targets reached on a yearly basis. However, given that there is wide variation in targets from year to year, it is not possible to observe gradual progress towards higher level outcomes. It is understandable that the CRF relies on proxy indicators, and cannot comprehensively measure all aspects of ADB's support. At the same time, systemic and transformative changes and shifts in social norms occur over longer timeframes than could be feasibly measured in a CRF cycle.

76. There has been a gradual increase in committed operations (sovereign and NSO) categorized as GEN, EGM and SGE, and these projects now account for about 99% of ADB operations. This already far exceeds the ADB Strategy 2030 target of 75%, a target which was viewed as ambitious when it was set in 2018. The evaluation's analysis has shown that, while project designs generally met the requirements for each gender category, they did so only at a minimal level, and the surpassing of corporate targets has not therefore been achieved through the design of high-impact gender-related activities. The incentive to achieve corporate targets may have led to the EGM category becoming a “catch-all” category for projects, many of which displayed only a basic level of gender mainstreaming. As observed during the country missions for this evaluation, a few transformative gender projects (mostly grant-funded and categorized as GEN) may in fact suffice if they are used strategically to leverage and enable the implementation of gender actions in other sectors.

⁷⁵ A new corporate results framework covering the second half of Strategy 2030 (2025–2030) has been approved in October 2024. ADB. 2024. *Steering ADB's Corporate Strategy to Success: Corporate Results Framework, 2025–2030*.

Varying Contributions to Gender Equality Outcomes

77. The evaluation sought to identify ADB’s contributions to outcomes identified in the theory of change, which were the same as the strategic operational priorities of OP2: women’s economic empowerment increased, gender equality in human development enhanced, gender equality in decision making and leadership enhanced, women’s time poverty and drudgery reduced, and women’s resilience to external shocks strengthened. The picture that emerged was uneven, and further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation noted an increase in ADB’s focus on women’s economic empowerment and on GBV, both of which were identified as areas for improvement in IED’s 2017 evaluation (footnote 14). In contrast, outcomes in reducing women’s time poverty and drudgery were often not fully measured, despite this being the most likely contribution of ADB’s infrastructure investments. Finally, ADB’s contributions to women’s decision making and leadership, and women’s resilience to external shocks have been limited.

A. Challenges in Measuring Contributions to Outcomes

1. Operational Priority Tagging Systems Indicate ADB’s Intended Contribution

78. Tracking contributions to OP2 pillars remains a challenge. While project teams tag OP2 pillars and subpillars at project preparation, there are issues with the practice of tagging, as noted in IED’s thematic evaluation of OP5.⁷⁶ An analysis undertaken by the Gender Equality Division in 2023 highlighted inconsistencies, with many missed opportunities for tagging.⁷⁷ Interviews for the evaluation also raised questions as to the purpose and utility of this tagging exercise given that there does not appear to be any monitoring of trends in the tagging of OP2 pillars and subpillars at the portfolio level, except as a means of aggregating individual CRF indicators.

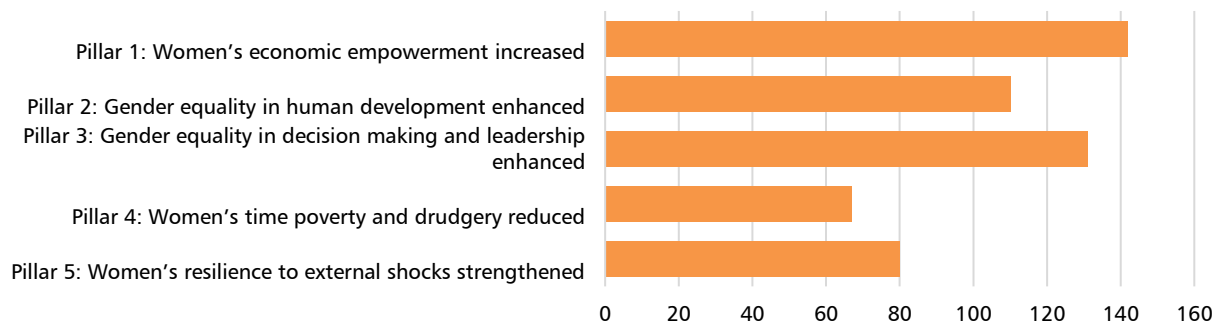
79. Notwithstanding these constraints, the tagging gives an indication of the most frequently targeted pillars. The evaluation reviewed 284 sovereign projects in 2021–2023 in the GEN, EGM, and SGE categories. Of these, 281 were tagged as OP2, but only 259 had data on OP2 indicators (Table A2.18, Appendix 2). The remaining 22 projects lacked data in ADB’s eOperations DMF database.⁷⁸ Indicators contributing to OP2 pillar 1, women’s economic empowerment increased, were most frequently tagged (142 of 259 projects, 55%); followed by pillar 3, gender equality in decision making and leadership enhanced (131, 51%); and pillar 2, gender equality in human development enhanced (110, 42%). The least frequently tagged were pillar 5, women’s resilience to external shocks strengthened (80, 31%) and pillar 4, women’s time poverty and drudgery reduced (67, 26%)—Figure 3. Yet these data represent only the number of times that OP2 pillars were tagged. The scale of the interventions and pillar measurements are not comparable, since the number of beneficiaries varies from a handful to several thousands.

⁷⁶ The evaluation noted that “the tagging systems are crude... and fail to capture the intended purpose of the investment.” IED. 2024. *Thematic Evaluation: ADB Plan for Operational Priority 5: Promoting Rural Development and Food Security, 2019–2024*.

⁷⁷ ADB. 2023. *Midterm Review of ADB’s Operational Priority 2: Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, 2021–2024* (internal).

⁷⁸ A project may be tagged to multiple pillars and subpillars. Hence, the total number of tagged pillars and subpillar exceeds the number of projects.

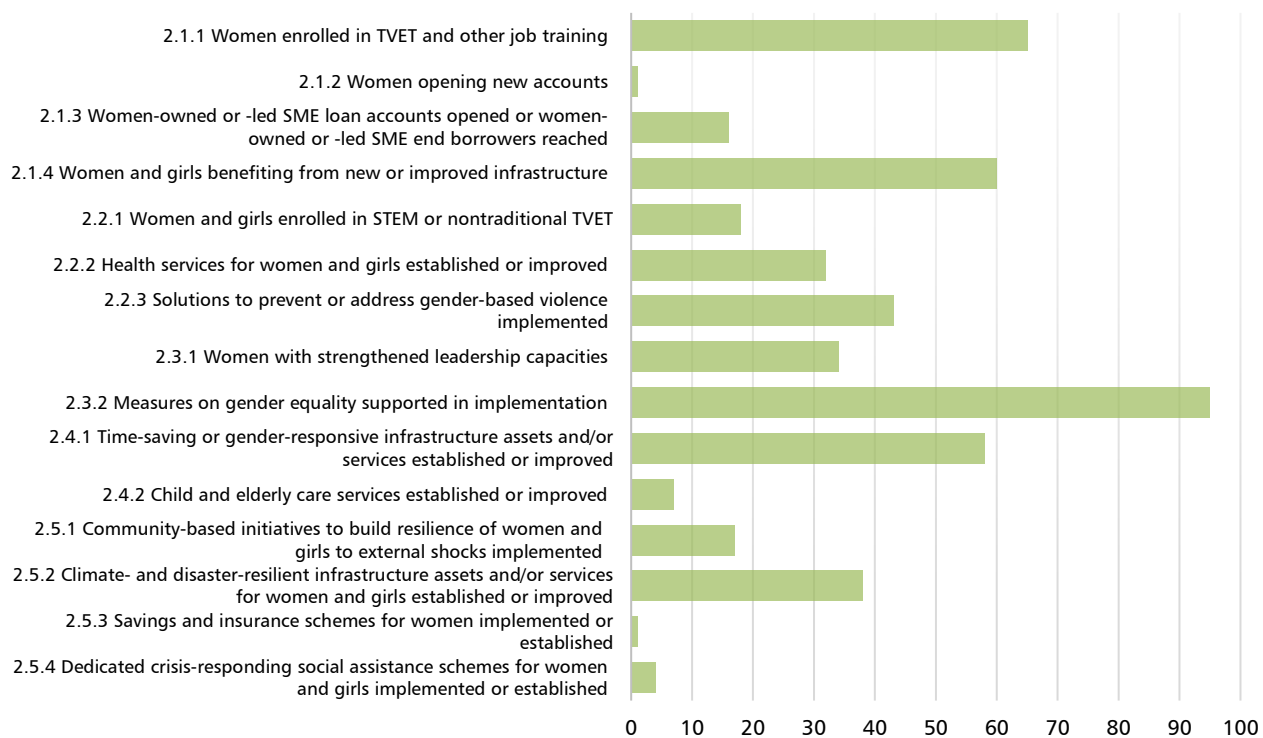
Figure 3: OP2 Pillars Tagged in Design and Monitoring Frameworks of Sovereign Projects in Gender Equity Theme, Effective Gender Mainstreaming, Some Gender Elements Categories (number of projects), 2021–2023



OP = operational priority.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department) estimates using Asian Development Bank eOperations database; operational priorities indicators tab.

Figure 4: OP2 Subpillars Tagged in Design and Monitoring Frameworks of Sovereign Projects in Gender Equity Theme, Effective Gender Mainstreaming, Some Gender Elements Categories (number of projects), Categories, 2021–2023



OP = operational priority. SME = small and medium-sized enterprise, STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, TVET = technical and vocational education and training.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department) estimates using Asian Development Bank eOperations database; operational priorities indicators tab.

80. Of the OP2 subpillars, the most frequently tagged indicator in sovereign operations was 2.3.2, measures on gender equality supported in implementation, tagged in 95 of the 259 OP2-tagged projects (37% of OP2 sovereign projects)—Figure 4. The evaluation’s analysis of GEN and EGM projects observed that many gender-related activities and output indicators included in GAPs and DMFs related to project implementation. ADB’s 2022 Guidelines for the At-Exit Assessment of Gender Equality Results of ADB Projects distinguish between project management support activities (such as recruiting project consultants and appointing a gender focal point), and results that more substantially narrow gender gaps or benefit women and girls or promote women’s empowerment. Moreover, while GEN and EGM projects should include such project management support indicators, they do not contribute to the categorization. This is in line with the approach of the World Bank. Results that do not last beyond the project period would not qualify for the World Bank’s gender tag. For World Bank projects, actions related to a project’s monitoring unit or implementation arrangements, such as hiring gender specialists for the project implementation unit; or training subcontractors on prevention of sexual violence, do not qualify for the gender tag. Likewise, actions that are part of the project’s due diligence, citizen engagement, and social safeguards requirements do not qualify, as these are seen as a basic requirement of universal project design.

81. The next most frequently tagged subpillars were 2.1.1, women enrolled in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and other job training (25% of OP2 projects); 2.1.4, women and girls benefiting from new or improved infrastructure (23% of OP2 projects); and 2.4.1, time-saving or gender-responsive infrastructure assets and/or services established or improved (22% of OP2 projects). These indicators reflect where the emphasis of ADB’s contribution lies, given the predominance of investments in infrastructure, and the inclusion of livelihood training in many infrastructure projects.

2. Improved Gender Success Rates of Completed Effective Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Equity Theme Projects

82. ADB is unique among MDBs in applying an at-exit assessment of achieving gender actions for projects categorized as EGM and GEN. The self-assessed gender success rate for gender-mainstreamed sovereign projects completed during 2016-2023 has improved, with ADB rating 216 out of 263 completed projects *successful*, thereby achieving an overall self-assessed gender success rate of 82% (Box 8). Despite the more rigorous requirements, GEN projects overall had only a slightly lower success rate than EGM projects (19% *unsuccessful* for GEN, versus 18% for EGM, Table A2.21, Appendix 2). ADB’s self-assessed gender success rate for gender-mainstreamed NSO was 71% (Table A2.23, Appendix 2). A recurring reason for projects not achieving GAP targets, and therefore being rated *unsuccessful* for gender results, was a lack of sex-disaggregated data, budget, and capacity to monitor and report GAP implementation. PCRs flagged how the absence of a gender specialist or delays in hiring a gender consultant to support and monitor GAP implementation was a key factor in projects failing to collect sex-disaggregated data and monitor GAP implementation.⁷⁹ This underlines the importance of having a dedicated gender specialist on board to monitor the achievements of all GAP targets, particularly for GEN projects.

83. The gender success rates of public sector management (PSM) interventions were lower than those in other sectors, primarily due to the lower performance of public expenditure and fiscal management projects. This can be attributed to constrained institutional capacity and challenges in policy implementation as well as to limited monitoring and evaluation. For CPRO operations, in particular, a lack of sex-disaggregated data on women-owned or women-led MSMEs was a recurring factor in projects that failed to meet GAP targets. The education sector had a lower share of projects rated *successful* for gender results on completion, although this sector also had a higher share of GEN completed projects (55%).

⁷⁹ For example, ADB. 2022. *Completion Report: District Capitals Water Supply Project in Timor-Leste*.

84. Few completed operations were committed during the evaluation period (2016–2023), and even fewer that were committed under the OP2 timeframe (2019–2024), which limited the evaluation's opportunity to measure the achievement of outcomes and OP2's transformative gender agenda (Table A2.24, Appendix 2).⁸⁰

85. Guidelines for the at-exit assessment of gender equality results (Box 8) outline the criteria and requirements for the assessment and rating. Some form of qualitative assessment for sovereign operations should be included as a dedicated appendix in the PCR (and extended annual review report for NSO). However, the actual rating ultimately relies on the achievement of gender performance indicators specified in the project's DMF, GAP, or other reporting frameworks (i.e., the project is rated *successful* if at least 80% of activities are implemented and completed and 80% of quantitative targets are achieved). The emphasis on meeting numerical targets may inadvertently overshadow the quality and sustainability of gender equality initiatives as it is not clear how qualitative evidence could be incorporated in the application of ratings.⁸¹ Qualitative aspects such as changes in attitudes, social norms, and long-term impacts might therefore not be adequately reflected. Additionally, the rating does not provide a sufficient basis to measure outcome achievement, as in many cases the indicators refer to output level targets (as described in Chapter 3). Consequently, assessing whether a project's gender features have achieved meaningful results and impact, particularly in fostering transformative change, remains challenging.

86. While project completion reports for GEN and EGM projects rate the gender success of GAP implementation and the achievement of gender-related DMF targets, these ratings remain self-assessments by ADB and are not validated by IED, except as part of the overall narrative and validation of ratings for evaluation criteria applied in IED PCR validation reports (PVRs).

Box 8: Criteria for At-Exit Assessments of Gender Equality Results of ADB Projects

A separate assessment of a project's gender performance and development impact is conducted on project exit—referred to as “completion” for sovereign operations and “evaluation” for nonsovereign operations—for all ADB projects categorized as gender equity theme (GEN) or effective gender mainstreaming (EGM). Such projects are rated *successful* or *not successful* for gender, based on whether the following attributes are observed:

- (i) reported results using sex-disaggregated data;
- (ii) reported successful achievement of activities in the project or program gender action plan (measured as at least 80% of activities implemented and completed), and quantitative targets (either at least 80% of targets fully met, or at least 80% of the numerical value of each target achieved); and
- (iii) justifications as to why the gender equality results are achieved if an overall project completion report (PCR) and extended annual review report rating is *less than successful* or *unsuccessful*.

Source: ADB. 2022. *Guidelines for the At-Exit Assessment of Gender Equality Results of ADB Projects*.

3. Independent Evaluations Do Not Systematically Capture Gender Equality Outcomes

87. This evaluation included a meta-evaluation of 20 IED evaluation reports. Some good practices were observed, such as the 2021 Bangladesh country assistance program evaluation (CAPE) which included gender equality at the level of development impact in the evaluation's theory of change; and the 2023 Georgia country assistance program review validation, which assessed the program's contribution to gender transformative change. However, many IED evaluations fell short in reporting on gender equality outcomes. Across the OP2 strategic priorities, gender-related climate change and

⁸⁰ Completion ratings exist for 40 projects committed in 2016–2023. Most of these were PBL and CPRO projects in public sector management (32 out of 40)—Table A2.25 and A2.26.

⁸¹ All PCRs and extended annual review reports (XARRs) for projects categorized as GEN or EGM must include an appendix dedicated to the self-assessment of gender equality results. This narrative analysis should provide a concise overview of the project's gender performance, supported by sex-disaggregated data and qualitative evidence collected throughout project implementation until completion for sovereign projects (ADB. 2022. *Guidelines for the At-Exit Assessment of Gender Equality Results of ADB Projects*).

women's resilience issues were the least reported. Key concepts such as intersectionality or the transformative gender agenda were rarely addressed. The uneven treatment of gender equality in evaluation reports was partly due to gaps in existing evaluation guidance (Box A1.1, Appendix 1).

B. Uneven Contributions to Outcomes

88. While conclusive data on outcome achievement were unavailable, the evaluation drew evidence from country case assessments, existing IED evaluations, and country consultations, to gauge the level of contribution across the five OP2 pillars.

1. Emphasis on Women's Economic Empowerment via Livelihoods and Job Opportunities

89. The CRF 2019–2024 target for increasing women's economic empowerment focuses on creating skilled jobs for women, and OP2 explicitly refers to an intention for ADB to shift its focus to supporting more high-quality jobs and economic opportunities requiring higher skills and incomes. The OP2 pillar 1 indicator 2.1, skilled jobs for women generated, was the most frequently tagged of the five pillar-level indicators (tagged in 142 projects, 55% of all OP2-tagged projects).⁸² The sectors most frequently tagged for this indicator were ANR, TRA, and WUS. According to ADB's CRF annual reporting, since 2019, cumulatively 1,478,748 skilled jobs for women have been generated, although it is not clear how many of these jobs were related solely to project implementation, and how many represented more long-term sustainable employment that has endured after project completion, given that the indicator captures both temporary and long-term work (Table A2.27, Appendix 2).

90. The evaluation's analysis of EGM projects found that, particularly in civil works projects, many targets for skilled (and unskilled) employment related to temporary construction work during project implementation. There were notable examples, however, where targets for longer-term skilled employment creation for women (beyond project implementation) had been included in GAPs. These included the Chennai Metro Rail Investment Project, which included targets for female employment in the newly created metro stations and the Digitize to Decarbonize-Power Transmission Grid Enhancement project in Uzbekistan, which included targets for skilled women employees in the substations modernized under the project.

91. The evaluation also observed promising cases where ADB's longer-term engagement in certain sectors had promoted permanent employment of women in skilled jobs in government ministries, e.g., in the energy sector in Nepal and in the Ministry of Health and the State Agency for Hydrometeorology in Tajikistan, and had introduced workplace training and gender standards. This approach is likely to produce significant and sustainable economic empowerment for the individuals involved and provides a useful model for replication. Internships supported through sovereign and nonsovereign operations have also been a valuable entry point that provides women with professional experience, although the number of such internships is small.⁸³

92. For infrastructure projects, evaluation country case assessments and the review of GAPs revealed an emphasis on temporary, unskilled jobs, particularly during project implementation and infrastructure construction. Many civil works contracts included GAP targets for women's unskilled labor, offering women short-term cash benefits but not longer-term economic empowerment, as noted in PVRs from Cambodia, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam, and confirmed during project site visits to Nepal and Solomon

⁸² Indicator definition: total number of skilled jobs created for women, through direct employment, under ADB projects. A "skilled job" refers to a job requiring special skill, training, knowledge, and/or ability. "Direct employment" refers to employment directly for an employer and paid directly by that employer. For the purpose of this indicator, short- and long-term, part- and full-time jobs are counted and reported. ADB. 2024. *Results Framework Indicator Definitions*.

⁸³ ADB. 2020. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan and Technical Assistance Grant India: Madhya Pradesh Urban Services Improvement Project: Gender Action Plan*.

Islands.⁸⁴ The ability of projects to meet labor targets is context-specific, depending heavily on cultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, alternative employment opportunities, and women's own labor preferences. Many contractors and implementing agencies complained that they struggle to meet these targets and questioned their relevance in certain socially conservative contexts. In some cases, projects have found creative ways to crowd in short-term female laborers before project closure to meet the target,⁸⁵ or have counted future involvement of female laborers in ongoing maintenance work with casual contracts (but for which financing is uncertain).⁸⁶

93. The evaluation found little evidence that unskilled and construction labor targets were based on an analysis of labor market demands or preferences. Project completion reports rated *unsuccessful* for gender results at completion frequently highlighted how baselines and targets for women's construction labor did not reflect the context-specific constraints, or as in the case of Cambodia, the presence of increasingly numerous and available alternative job opportunities in manufacturing that offered long-term employment prospects and benefits.⁸⁷ In some countries, for instance in the Pacific, there was a serious shortage of skilled labor, and respondents reported it was unlikely that female engineers and supervisors could have been sourced in-country. There appears to be insufficient learning between projects, with the same targets routinely appearing in GAPs to meet ADB expectations, despite previous projects not having met similar targets (or targets having been downgraded at midterm), as well as their questionable relevance.⁸⁸ Many ADB staff interviewed for the evaluation recognized this problem, but found themselves struggling to identify more meaningful ways to employ women, particularly in infrastructure projects.

94. ADB has tried to identify ways of achieving gender equality outcomes in infrastructure projects beyond the inclusion of unskilled labor targets.⁸⁹ In the transport sector, for example, opportunities for gender mainstreaming included: better design of train or bus systems to reduce risks of sexual harassment (e.g., the many gender-responsive design features included in the Chennai Metro Rail Investment Project and in the Mumbai Metro Rail Systems Project⁹⁰) and gender-sensitive design of roads and street lighting.⁹¹ Gender responsive infrastructure, including public spaces, sanitation, housing, water and sanitation systems, tourism, street lighting, and healthcare facilities, influences women's ability to access services and participate in the workforce. Such initiatives are not yet widespread, however. The IED assessment of 18 EGM transport sector projects from 2020 to 2023 found that only six were "high EGM" with more substantial gender-related activities. The energy sector has been slow to incorporate

⁸⁴ IED. 2019. *Validation Report: Rural Roads Improvement Project in Cambodia*; IED. 2020. *Validation Report: Comprehensive Socioeconomic Urban Development Project in Viet Tri, Hung Yen, and Dong Dang in Viet Nam*; and ADB. 2020. *Completion Report: Port Vila Urban Development Project in Vanuatu*.

⁸⁵ Such as a landscape gardening company instructed to bring female laborers only for the final days of planting around a newly constructed education facility (evaluation findings from project site visit).

⁸⁶ The midterm review of the Mekong Subregion Flood and Drought Risk Management and Mitigation Project accepted that there were few women interested in construction work, and the target for employment of women was achieved only by adding the ongoing short-term work of cleaning and maintenance of canals. ADB. 2023. *Completion Report: Mekong Subregion Flood and Drought Risk Management and Mitigation Project in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam*.

⁸⁷ Also noted in IED. 2023. *Validation Report: Cambodia Country Partnership Strategy Final Review, 2019–2023*; and ADB. 2021. *Cambodia: Water Resources Management Sector Development Program*.

⁸⁸ Lessons from project evaluations tagged for gender mainstreaming in IED's EVA Lessons Database underline that GAP targets for employment or participation of women, particularly in infrastructure and construction projects, do not reflect such factors as the reality of gender dynamics in the labor market, social and cultural norms, nor socioeconomic conditions in the project area. EVA is not an acronym.

⁸⁹ Analysis of EGM projects during 2020–2023 by IED has shown a gradual increase in the proportion of infrastructure projects that could be described as "high EGM," with an overall 20% recorded as "high EGM."

⁹⁰ ADB. 2022. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Multitranches Financing Facility and Technical Assistance Grant India: Chennai Metro Rail Investment Project*; ADB. 2019. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Mumbai Metro Rail Systems Project*.

⁹¹ The IED assessment of EGM projects from 2020–2023 found that, of the 18 transport projects analyzed, only six were considered "high EGM."

gender elements, but showed marked improvement during 2016–2023 in the share of EGM and SGE.⁹² Information and communication technology has also made only slow progress and had no gender mainstreaming in sovereign operations for 2016–2023.

95. Livelihood training and small business grants are often attached to infrastructure projects. Such training was appreciated by the participating women, who reported improved financial literacy and knowledge of taxation and of business planning, which in turn increased their self-confidence, the respect they received from their families, and their economic activities in the community.⁹³ However, such activities tended to be piecemeal, with small budgets and scale, and essentially they reflected a “women in development” approach, seen as add-on activities to larger infrastructure projects.⁹⁴ For instance, in Tajikistan, training in business plan development was provided to women near road construction projects, with start-up grants offered on a competitive basis. However, the country case assessment found that these grants were so few, small, and delayed that their impact was minimal.⁹⁵ An IED evaluation also found that many grant proposals were in already largely saturated markets, and the COVID-19 pandemic forced some recipients to use their revenues for household expenses.⁹⁶

96. ADB’s support for TVET was well-targeted and relevant for training young women for the workforce. Stipends increased women’s enrollment in TVET in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) in Cambodia and Tajikistan.⁹⁷ In Tajikistan, sustained investment by ADB through a series of TVET projects has allowed for improvements in design and the incorporation of lessons in each new project. The hiring of female teachers and administrators, the construction of dormitories and women’s toilets in TVET institutions, and, crucially, the provision of childcare services for participants all had an impact on women’s enrollment. On completion of the Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training Project, 69.1% of female graduates were employed.⁹⁸ Recognizing the high rate of youth migration, the most recent TVET project in this series now includes innovative activities to improve the quality of opportunities for potential migrants (male and female), and awareness-raising on working conditions and job opportunities abroad.⁹⁹

97. Microfinance is a traditional and successful means of economically empowering women globally, and often has a high percentage of female clients. ADB’s NSO were mainly in financial inclusion and included engagements with several private sector financial institutions, supporting interventions in affordable housing, microfinance and credit.¹⁰⁰ However, such interventions did not always meaningfully measure the microloans’ impact on women’s livelihoods. Analysis of 16 GEN NSO projects (2019–2023) found that they lacked transformative actions, or intersectional analysis. None of the projects included outcome indicators to measure the effects of the loans on women’s lives (or their families). While the challenges of integrating gender actions in NSO DMFs differ from those for sovereign projects (para. 48), setting DMF indicators that track the number of accounts opened or loans provided to women does not provide relevant information on how the loans were used, whether women were actually empowered,

⁹² ADB. 2020. *ADB Sector-wide Evaluation of ADB Energy Policy and Program, 2009–2019*. The evaluation found “of the 215 energy sector projects approved in the evaluation period, none was categorized as “gender equity” and 55% contained “no gender elements”. However, the proportion of projects with gender components started to improve in 2016.” (p.33).

⁹³ For example, a female entrepreneur in Nepal, interviewed by the evaluation team, had utilized the training she had received related to milk processing, and had subsequently opened a dairy shop selling processed milk products, whereas previously she had sold only raw, unprocessed milk.

⁹⁴ The 1998 Gender and Development Policy characterizes this approach as “add women and stir.”

⁹⁵ For instance, in Tajikistan, under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Corridors 2, 3, and 5 (Obigarm-Nurobod) Road Project, 561 women received business training, yet only 10 grants for \$1,000 each were expected to be offered, out of total grant funds from ADF of \$95.5 million.

⁹⁶ IED. 2023. *Project Performance Evaluation: Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Corridor 3 (Dushanbe–Uzbekistan Border) Improvement Project in Tajikistan*.

⁹⁷ IED. 2023. *Validation: Cambodia Country Partnership Strategy Final Review, 2019–2023*.

⁹⁸ ADB. 2023. *Completion Report: Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Tajikistan*.

⁹⁹ ADB. 2020. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Grant and Administration of Grant: Skills and Employability Enhancement Project in Tajikistan*.

¹⁰⁰ IED. 2022. *Sector-Wide Evaluation. ADB Finance Sector Operations, 2011–2021*.

or whether the loans and accounts contributed to private sector development.¹⁰¹ Some women borrowers interviewed for the evaluation were using microfinance loans to develop their own small businesses, but others reported using the loan finance only for consumption and household expenses. Overall, there appears to be a mismatch between the robust ex ante gender analyses that identified such barriers as gender stereotypes, lack of childcare facilities, and women's large domestic burdens, and the GAP activities in many finance NSO. Understandably, given the limitations of what can be achieved in the short timeframe of an NSO, few of these projects targeted such barriers, and none explicitly addressed discriminatory social norms. Yet nor did any of the reviewed NSO address unpaid care work, or the engagement of men and boys on gender issues. In this regard, there is potential for greater complementarity between NSO and sovereign finance-sector projects, where sovereign operations can help establish the legal and regulatory environment that allows gender mainstreaming in NSO to thrive, which can pave the way for private sector investments that have gender transformative actions.

98. There has been a sharp increase in the share of NSO targeting improvements in workplace gender equality standards in recent years (from 4% in 2017 to 79% in 2020).¹⁰² This increased focus aligns with the increase in the share of EGM NSO for the same period. The evaluation's analysis of a sample of EGM NSO showed that most GAP outputs were focused internally on improving the client's gender equality standards, such as revising a human resource policy or promoting internal career development programs for female staff members. While such internally-focused gender actions are important when aligned with broader gender equality objectives, few measures focused on the external impacts of the client's activities on gender equality in an industry, or on diagnosing what was needed within that industry and context to improve gender equality.

99. Agriculture, natural resources and rural development sovereign projects reached 100% of the GEN or EGM projects approved in 2022 and 90% over the period 2016–2023. However, of the 13 ANR sector EGM projects reviewed for the evaluation, only two were considered "high EGM." There is scope to enhance women's roles as decision makers in agribusinesses and agricultural value chains, rather than only as laborers and agricultural producers, especially given the feminization of agriculture across Asia and the Pacific.¹⁰³ In Mongolia, an NSO is building on ADB's sovereign assistance program to increase value addition in the country's livestock and agricultural resources while, at the same time, increasing women's incomes through the targeted sourcing of milk from women's microbusinesses in herding communities; however, there is opportunity to further support women's productive capacity to expand their businesses and advance within the value chain, which could unlock greater economic potential and empowerment.¹⁰⁴ A more promising approach was observed in Nepal, where the Rural Enterprise Financing Project is offering enterprise finance to women-operated small businesses via cooperatives. Rather than the typical model focusing on the very poor (who would not be able to borrow the minimum loan size), their clients tended to be already-established female entrepreneurs who had the potential to take their businesses to scale, but faced difficulties in accessing bank financing.¹⁰⁵

100. Economic empowerment for women was often hampered by structural issues such as land ownership, which typically favors men. Land ownership may be required to access loans. For instance, in the Philippines, rural finance or resettlement compensation often goes to men because of land ownership patterns; evaluation project site visits revealed that resettlement compensation related to the Malolos Clark Railway Project was mainly received by men.¹⁰⁶ Analysis of the five GEN projects in the ANR sector

¹⁰¹ IED. 2023. *Project Performance Evaluation: Jana Small Finance Bank Limited in India* (formerly known as Janalakshmi Financial Services Private Limited).

¹⁰² IED. 2022. *Thematic Evaluation: Additionality in the Asian Development Bank's Nonsovereign Operations*.

¹⁰³ As noted in IED. 2024. *Thematic Evaluation: ADB Plan for Operational Priority 5: Promoting Rural Development and Food Security, 2019–2024*.

¹⁰⁴ ADB. 2019. *FAST Report: Loan. Milko Limited Liability Company. Gender Inclusive Dairy Value Chain Project in Mongolia*.

¹⁰⁵ ADB. 2019. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan and Technical Assistance Grant Nepal: Rural Enterprise Financing Project*.

¹⁰⁶ ADB. 2019. *Report and Recommendations of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Multitranches Financing Facility Republic of the Philippines: Malolos–Clark Railway Project*.

found that, although project documents often referred to challenges to women's increased role in agriculture and water management (such as lack of time and additional labor burdens), the project designs did not challenge these structural barriers.

2. Human Development Initiatives Have Impact but Face Barriers

101. The strong gender focus of ADB's education projects has contributed to human development outcomes.¹⁰⁷ In Cambodia, for example, sustained investment in the education sector through a series of sector development programs has improved female enrollment at the lower secondary level (footnote 97). In Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia, improved infrastructure and teaching quality, social marketing, and other measures have encouraged girls to attend and stay in school.¹⁰⁸ In Nepal, where earlier ADB support had struggled to achieve targets for the percentage of female teachers in primary and secondary levels, a marked improvement was reported in ADB's more recent support.¹⁰⁹

102. The education section had a high share of projects rated *not successful* for gender results at completion. The reasons were varied: in some cases, the rating related to implementation arrangements, such as not having dedicated gender specialists for supporting and monitoring GAP implementation; while in others it was because of difficulties in meeting ambitious GAP targets in socially conservative contexts or problems caused by deeply entrenched social norms, particularly for GEN projects.

103. In Cambodia, despite achievements in female enrollment, girls still leave upper secondary education early and have lower overall education attainment than boys.¹¹⁰ In most countries, female student enrollment in STEM remains low. In Mongolia and the Philippines, retaining boys in school is a significant issue. The education-related indicators under OP2 refer only to women and girls, although indicators in the DMFs and GAPs of some projects referred to boys too (as well as boys and girls from disadvantaged groups, such as persons with disabilities or disadvantaged castes or ethnicities). Some education projects targeted boys and girls based on identified gender gaps, yet failed to address the root causes of these gaps, such as family engagement, community involvement, or social norms. Nevertheless, more inclusive language in school curricula—as in the case of Mongolia—may indirectly influence social norms over time, potentially leading to transformative change.¹¹¹

104. There were promising examples where ADB has recognized the different challenges faced by girls and boys. For instance, in the Philippines, ADB has financed a series of RBLs and several PBLs in education and employment in recent years.¹¹² While the overall target is to address education and the work transition for boys and girls, one overarching theme is to address the high rate of girls trapped in the “not in education, employment, or training” category, despite their strong participation rate in school. These initiatives also aim to keep boys from poorer households in school. The Senior Secondary Education

¹⁰⁷ The education sector (36 projects) and health sector (13 projects) had the highest numbers of GEN sovereign projects during 2016–2023.

¹⁰⁸ ADB. 2017. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Grants and Administration of Grant Republic of the Marshall Islands and Federated States of Micronesia: Improving the Quality of Basic Education in the North Pacific Project*.

¹⁰⁹ The School Sector Program in Nepal failed to meet its targets for number of female teachers and was rated *not successful* for gender results on completion in 2017. However, the more recent Supporting School Sector Development RBL reported a marked improvement. It achieved its female teacher targets, and was rated *successful* for gender results on completion. ADB. 2017. *Completion Report: School Sector Program in Nepal*, and ADB. 2023. *Completion Report: Supporting School Sector Development Plan in Nepal*.

¹¹⁰ World Economic Forum. 2022. *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*.

¹¹¹ ADB. 2022. *Revised Gender Action Plan for the Support for Inclusive Education Project in Mongolia*.

¹¹² ADB. 2019. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Results-Based Loan Republic of the Philippines: Secondary Education Support Program*; ADB. 2024. *Completion Report: Facilitating Youth School-to-Work Transition Program (Subprogram 1, 2 and 3 in the Philippines)*.

Improvement Project in the Solomon Islands has taken an intersectional approach, by specifically encouraging teenage mothers to return to school, with ADF 13 SDG 5 thematic funding.¹¹³

105. In some countries, girls and women face cultural and logistical challenges to participating in education. For instance, in conflict or remote areas, or contexts with restrictive social norms, girls may be restricted from traveling to school or to training locations, despite the availability of female-friendly facilities supported by ADB—an issue raised in interviews in Mindanao, the Philippines; and Solomon Islands. The Second Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project in Bangladesh was unable to boost the proportion of female educators and students in rural secondary schools significantly because of the barriers they faced, which included insecurity, harassment, low mobility and expectations that they would marry young.¹¹⁴ In Solomon Islands, it is hoped that young women will be encouraged to continue to higher education if they can stay in safe accommodation and have the opportunity to study in their own country.¹¹⁵

106. Conditional cash transfers and social protection programs are important tools for empowerment as they often channel money into the hands of women. ADB's support for the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in the Philippines has helped increase school attendance and improve health care, and has incorporated mandatory training on good parenting and GBV. However, by placing much of the responsibility on mothers, such programs also run the risk of reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes.¹¹⁶

107. ADB has increased its investments in health since COVID-19, and many such projects were categorized as EGM or GEN. A good example is a maternal and child health project in Tajikistan,¹¹⁷ which is adopting a holistic and potentially transformative approach to community outreach, working with the government, UNICEF, and local NGOs. However, an assessment of the 10 GEN projects in the health sector (both sovereign and nonsovereign projects, 2019–2023) found that, while they were more likely to address sexual and reproductive health and rights (six of the 10 projects) and elimination of violence against women (three of the 10 projects), most fell short of adopting gender transformative approaches. For projects responding to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., the Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility), activities and indicators were understandably narrowly designed to ensure access to vaccines, particularly among women. A good example of a more transformative approach to tackling GBV violence was observed in Nepal (Box 9).

Box 9: A Potentially Gender Transformative Approach to Tackling Gender-Based Violence in Nepal

The design of the Strengthening Systems to Protect and Uplift Women Project in Nepal demonstrated a potentially gender transformative approach by addressing gender-based violence (GBV) across various spheres of influence and dimensions. While the project is still in the early stages of implementation, it aims to enhance the agency of GBV survivors through long-term rehabilitation services, life-skills training, and psycho-social counseling. It also engages men and boys in GBV awareness campaigns, with a view to shifting power dynamics and promoting gender equality. Training police personnel in survivor-centric investigation and case handling may lead to more equitable power relations in law enforcement. The project aims to work at individual, household, community, organizational, and macroenvironmental levels. The design included constructing new “Women, Children, and Senior Citizen Service Centers” with gender-sensitive facilities, establishing GBV response-coordination committees, and raising community awareness through outreach programs. These efforts, funded through the ADF 13 SDG 5 thematic pool, aimed to transform formal and informal social institutions and to create a supportive framework for addressing GBV that is aligned with national policies and contributes to systemic change.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

¹¹³ ADB. 2023. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan, Grant, and Administration of Grant Solomon Islands: Senior Secondary Education Improvement Project*. It might not have been feasible to include this activity without the ADF 13 funds, as government stakeholders had expressed skepticism.

¹¹⁴ IED. 2021. *Validation Report: Second Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project in Bangladesh*.

¹¹⁵ ADB. 2016. *Higher Education in the Pacific Investment Program—Tranche 2 (with additional financing): Gender Action Plan*.

¹¹⁶ ADB. 2022. *Completion Report: Social Protection Support Project in the Philippines*.

¹¹⁷ ADB. 2018. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Grant Republic of Tajikistan: Maternal and Child Health Integrated Care Project*.

108. ADB has renewed its focus on GBV with targeted support, with an increase in stand-alone projects on GBV through ADF 13 SDG 5 thematic funding. ADB's support for domestic violence shelters and rehabilitation centers in Mongolia, Nepal, and Tajikistan demonstrates a strong focus on addressing GBV—a previous weak point identified in IED's last gender evaluation. In Mongolia, ADB's efforts have transitioned from responsive to preventive measures, demonstrating a shift to long-term solutions in combating GBV.

109. The introduction and piloting by ADB of guidelines on sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment for contractors and project teams is a positive step¹¹⁸ and was observed in the case countries for this evaluation (e.g., in the Malolos–Clark Railway project in the Philippines and the Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Solomon Islands).¹¹⁹ ADB has provided TA to build country capacity to address sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment; support evidence and tools development; and design new projects and activities.¹²⁰

3. Decision-Making and Leadership Targets Can Be More Ambitious

110. ADB projects in ANR and WUS frequently included targets for women's representation in infrastructure users' and management committees.¹²¹ An analysis of PCRs found that water sector projects had been particularly successful in involving women in water users' committees (reflecting the social norm in most countries, where women have the main responsibility for water supply and hygiene). For instance, in the Third Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Nepal, women reported that they had gained considerably in confidence, and some had been elected to local government based on this experience.¹²²

111. The evaluation project site visits indicated that there was little gender equality in decision-making and leadership in the areas covered by ADB projects. Project completion reports validated by IED highlighted how deeply entrenched social norms have been recurring barriers for achieving women's leadership targets in management committees, for example in the Neighborhood Upgrading and Shelter Project in Indonesia (Phase 2).¹²³ Current targets for women's participation in committees in most countries are minimal and need to be more ambitious—and supported with capacity development—to foster leadership. Setting quantitative targets for women's participation in committees is necessary, but the current levels are not sufficient. Targets for participation open the door for women to gain experience and confidence in decision-making roles, but, if the targets reflect only a minimum standard, they will not foster deep engagement or ownership. For instance, in Nepal, ADB projects are setting the same target of 33% participation of women in infrastructure management and/or users' committees as the default government requirement,¹²⁴ while in Tajikistan, the target for the Water Resources Management in the Pyanj River Basin Project¹²⁵ was only 30%, despite the fact that in rural communities in both countries relatively few men remained as a result of migration. Such low targets may also reflect women's lack of land ownership rights, or competing responsibilities such as unpaid care work, which may affect their ability to participate in committees.

¹¹⁸ ADB. 2023. *Good Practice Note on Addressing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in ADB-Financed Projects with Civil Works*.

¹¹⁹ ADB. 2019. *Report and Recommendations of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Multitranchise Financing Facility Republic of the Philippines: Malolos–Clark Railway Project*; ADB. 2019. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan, Grant, and Administration of Grant Solomon Islands: Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project (Additional Financing)*.

¹²⁰ ADB. 2022. *Technical Assistance: Addressing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in ADB Operations*.

¹²¹ Women's representation in decision-making structures and processes was the second most frequently tagged pillar under OP2.

¹²² ADB. 2022. *Completion Report: Third Small Towns Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project in Nepal*.

¹²³ IED. 2022. *Validation Report: Neighborhood Upgrading and Shelter Project (Phase 2) in the Republic of Indonesia*.

¹²⁴ ADB. 2017. *Tapping the Unreached. Nepal Small Towns Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Projects: A Sustainable Model of Service Delivery in Nepal*.

¹²⁵ ADB. 2018. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Grant and Administration of Grant for Additional Financing Republic of Tajikistan: Water Resources Management in the Pyanj River Basin Project, Gender Action Plan*.

112. Still, there have been positive examples that can be replicated. The Asia Women Leaders Program provides capacity development to senior women government officials to strengthen their knowledge, skills, networks, and confidence. The Private Sector Development Initiative TA in the Pacific has developed women's business leadership programs that aim to increase women's leadership roles in businesses and state-owned enterprises (footnote 55). These programs go beyond minimal participation; they aim to enhance women's leadership skills and opportunities. Nonsovereign operations often included indicators for women's leadership on company boards, and incorporation of gender-sensitive human resources policies to promote women's leadership. Another way of strengthening leadership is via support for national gender equality institutions and mechanisms. In all the case study countries, the national gender institutions, such as women's ministries, are under resourced, lack capacity, and are overloaded with multiple development partner initiatives. In Mongolia, for example, ADB has creatively used grant and TA resources to address policy-level reforms promoting women's leadership that can then be implemented through the investment portfolio (Box 10). Lessons from PCRs indicate that having a gender specialist on board during reconnaissance and fact-finding missions is crucial to ensuring adequate discussion with local utilities and communities on the relevance of such decision-making leadership targets, e.g., the Water Supply and Sanitation Investment Program (Tranche 1) in Azerbaijan.¹²⁶

Box 10: Working to Strengthen Local Gender Institutions in Mongolia

In Mongolia, ADB has supported the national gender machinery, helping to develop policies and frameworks that promote women's leadership and participation in various sectors. Technical assistance resources from the Japan Fund for Prosperous and Resilient Asia and the Pacific (JFPR) are supporting sector gender-responsive policies and strategies for 2017–2024 in education, culture and science; labor and social protection; construction and urban development; and food, agriculture and light industry. Any gains made can then inform sector-specific gender mainstreaming efforts through investment projects. JFPR grant support was also provided for civil society engagement, to enable participatory monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of local gender equality programs.

Sources: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department), Mongolia country case study visit. ADB. 2020. *Gender-Responsive Sector and Local Development Policies and Actions: Technical Assistance Completion Report*; ADB. 2023. *Moving Gender Equality Forward through Civil Society Engagement: Technical Assistance Consultant's Report*.

4. Impacts on Time Poverty and Drudgery Reduction are Often Not Measured

113. Although mainstay ADB infrastructure projects in water supply, transport, and electrification have the potential to reduce time poverty for women significantly, they are often not designed with explicit time-saving objectives, and thus the impacts are not adequately measured.¹²⁷ It is normally assumed that such projects will indirectly benefit women as part of the general population, yet indicators rarely focus on specific gender gaps related to time poverty.¹²⁸ For example, transport projects often estimate time savings in terms of reducing commuting and travel times, but these benefits are generally shared by both women and men, and therefore do not necessarily address gender disparities. In several cases, time savings were assumed rather than measured.

114. Water and sanitation projects tended to go further in actually measuring time savings for women, who in many contexts are traditionally responsible for water collection. For instance, the evaluation team visited some promising examples in water supply, such as the Third Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Nepal, which included an indicator on reductions in time and labor for collecting water; based on prevailing social norms, this was the time and labor of women and girls (footnote 122). However, in Sri Lanka, the preconception that women were disproportionately burdened with fetching water was found

¹²⁶ ADB. 2019. *Completion Report: Water Supply and Sanitation Investment Program (Tranche 1) in Azerbaijan*.

¹²⁷ Subpillar indicator 2.4.1 (timesaving or gender-responsive infrastructure assets and/or services established or improved) was tagged only 58 times (22%) in 2021–2023.

¹²⁸ For example, ADB. 2022. *Completion Report: Town Electrification Investment Program—Tranche 1 in Papua New Guinea*.

to be untrue by a project's impact assessment, which found men tended to undertake this task using bicycles or motorcycles if the water was collected from far away.¹²⁹

115. Moreover, while many PCRs reported time savings for women, they tended to assume the time saved would be used productively for income-generation and economic empowerment. Some included two or three anecdotal narratives of women who had used their newly acquired free time to take on gainful employment. Such assumptions and findings were rarely based on time-use studies. In contrast, an IED impact evaluation of small-town water supply in Nepal found that women's and girls' time that was saved was instead used to carry out additional household chores.¹³⁰ Several PCRs noted the same phenomenon, but, rather than drawing the lesson that restrictive social norms and gendered imbalances in responsibilities for unpaid care work needed to be addressed, they reported that women could now "take better care of their children and other family members."¹³¹

116. These assumptions about how women will use time savings overlook important social and gender customs and norms. It has long been established that improvements in water infrastructure close to homes can, in many contexts, decrease the time devoted to housework and increase female employment.¹³² Yet women's ability to pursue economic opportunities depends on social and gender norms and existing paid work opportunities. A reduction in the physical and time-intensive tasks of unpaid care work (such as collecting water) does not automatically lead to a more equitable distribution among household members.¹³³ In some contexts, even where time savings have been made as a result of infrastructure provision, it may not be socially acceptable for women to pursue employment opportunities outside the home or there may not be sufficient opportunities in the labor market.

117. Time poverty objectives may also conflict with assumptions about women's economic empowerment. For instance, when ambitious targets for women's participation in the workforce are set without also addressing underlying barriers for women entering the workforce or for upscaling their productive capacity. Interviews during the evaluation's project site visits indicated that women's increased involvement in meetings and training, or their increased participation in the workforce, is viewed positively within the household (and by the women themselves), but it does not necessarily change household labor divisions, or address the care economy dimension of OP2 (i.e., women often still carry the burden of care and domestic responsibilities in addition to the new tasks). Some newer projects have offered childcare for participants (e.g., a TVET project in Tajikistan),¹³⁴ but this remains rare and requires significant TA to minimize risks and to ensure quality, affordable, accessible childcare. The Gender Equality Division has undertaken a study on investments in childcare for gender equality, which produced important lessons and policy recommendations for informing future operations.¹³⁵

118. ADB has taken important steps to improve data collection related to women's time use, including a time-use survey in rural Tajikistan, a study to measure the value of unpaid care work in Bhutan, and a study on gender and the total work of older workers in Asia (Box 11). However, these efforts are costly and not yet widespread. In the Dushanbe Water Supply and Sanitation Project, a time-use survey was included for women and girls and household chores, but changes in time use were not included in the

¹²⁹ ADB. 2016. *Completion Report: Secondary Towns and Rural Community-Based Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Sri Lanka*.

¹³⁰ IED. 2018. *Impact Evaluation: Impact of Cost-Shared Water Supply Services on Household Welfare in Small Towns Ex-Post Impact Evaluation of a Project in Nepal*.

¹³¹ For example, ADB. 2017. *Completion Report: Urban Sanitation and Rural Infrastructure Support to the PNPM Mandiri Project in Indonesia*; and ADB. 2021. *Completion Report: Second Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project in Cambodia*.

¹³² For example, a global metasynthesis found that water and sanitation improvements freed up time for other income-generating activities as well as leisure. B.A. Caruso et al. 2022. Water, Sanitation, and Women's Empowerment: A Systematic Review and Qualitative Metasynthesis. *PLOS Water* 1(6): e0000026. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pwat.0000026>

¹³³ G. Ferrant, L.M. Pesando and K. Nowacka. 2014. *Unpaid Care Work: The Missing Link in the Analysis of Gender Gaps in Labour Outcomes*. OECD Development Centre Policy Brief.

¹³⁴ ADB. 2023. *Completion Report: Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Tajikistan*.

¹³⁵ International Labour Organization and ADB. 2023. *Investments in Childcare for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific*.

DMF.¹³⁶ Resources should be allocated to ensure that such data collection initiatives be replicated and integrated into the design and evaluation of future projects.

Box 11: Valuing and Measuring Unpaid Care Work

Two ADB studies provide important insights on the distribution of unpaid care work and its economic impact. A study *Valuing Unpaid Care Work in Bhutan* found that women spent over 4 hours per day on unpaid care work—more than twice the time spent by men. This labor, when monetized, was estimated to contribute approximately 10%–16% to Bhutan's gross domestic product, despite being excluded from national accounts. Another study, *Gender and the Total Work of Older Workers in Asia*, found that older women in Bangladesh, India, Mongolia, and Thailand remained heavily engaged in unpaid care work even as their participation in the formal labor market decreased with age. The study noted that older women's involvement in tasks such as childcare and elder care is nearly universal, indicating a persistent gender gap in time use. This suggests that policies aimed at increasing older people's participation in the labor force may be ineffective if they do not account for the substantial unpaid care work already performed by older women. Both studies underlined the importance of incorporating time-use surveys and valuations of unpaid care work into project designs and national planning to ensure accurate measurement and consideration of these contributions. As noted in the Bhutan study, the first step toward achieving the goal of an equitable recognition of unpaid care work is to measure it as frequently and as accurately as possible.

Sources: C. Dorji and V. Mercer-Blackman and A. Hampel-Milagrosa and J. Suh. 2020. Valuing Unpaid Care Work in Bhutan. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. 10. 2139/ssrn.3785080; and G. Donehower. 2023. Gender and the Total Work of Older Workers in Asia. *ADB Economics Working Paper Series 687*, Asian Development Bank.

5. Enhancing Women's Resilience to External Shocks Remains a Challenge

119. Women are disproportionately affected by climate change and disasters—both physically and economically, but ADB projects generally have yet to emphasize gender-related climate issues.¹³⁷ There is a positive and statistically significant correlation between projects that have been tagged with an OP2 pillar and those tagged OP3 (climate)—Table A2.16, Appendix 2. However, within OP2, there has been limited tagging of OP2 subpillar indicators relating to women's resilience.¹³⁸ For instance, only one project contributed to the CRF indicator on establishing savings and insurance schemes for women (in 2020).

120. The 2021 IED thematic evaluation of ADB support for action on climate change assessed 61 completed projects and found that 10 of them (16%) had gender-related climate indicators.¹³⁹ However, recent project designs addressing climate change adaptation and mitigation under the Climate Change Action Plan 2023–2030 have had a greater focus on gender.¹⁴⁰ ADB is also at an early stage of supporting innovative TA knowledge work on the growing impacts of heat stress on women and other vulnerable persons. This is being applied to urban design, training for women in agricultural work, and making social protection programs more adaptive.¹⁴¹ As ADB positions itself as Asia and the Pacific's climate bank, in line with the climate shift of ADB's new operating model, it is imperative that gender equality and social inclusion remain central to climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. Good practice

¹³⁶ ADB. 2018. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Grant Republic of Tajikistan: Dushanbe Water Supply and Sanitation Project*.

¹³⁷ The need to increase the attention that ADB staff pay to gender, and climate issues was recognized at the November 2023 ADB Gender Forum, which featured presentations on Women in the Energy Transition and Green Economy, and Gender-Responsive Approaches to Climate Change Adaptation.

¹³⁸ The only significant tagging to indicators in OP pillar 5 in 2021–2023 was subpillar indicator 2.5.2: climate- and disaster-resilient infrastructure assets and/or services for women and girls established or improved, which featured in 38 projects (15% of the total). See Table A2.18, Appendix 2.

¹³⁹ IED. 2021. *Thematic Evaluation: ADB Support for Action on Climate Change, 2011–2020*.

¹⁴⁰ "The Community Resilience Partnership Program was established in 2021 to help developing member countries and communities to scale up investments in climate adaptation, especially those that explicitly target the nexus of climate change, poverty, and gender. Implementation is through close partnership with a wide array of stakeholders, including women's groups and civil society, to ensure that resilience solutions enjoy local ownership, are economically and socially just, and inspire further action" (ADB. 2023. *Climate Change Action Plan 2023–2030*, p.13).

¹⁴¹ ADB. 2023. *Technical Assistance: Strengthening Women's Resilience to Heat Stress in Asia and the Pacific*.

examples are being piloted under the Energy Transition Mechanism in Southeast Asia, ensuring just transition socioeconomic assessments are gender responsive and socially inclusive. Such practices should be scaled up and replicated as ADB's climate finance increases.

121. COVID-19 was the biggest global external shock in recent times. ADB's CPRO was developed to provide quick-disbursing support to finance governments' countercyclical economic stimulus packages targeting the poor and vulnerable (Box 12). CPRO operations were all categorized as EGM at entry. Performance was variable, and projects were generally unlikely to include transformative elements, although several addressed GBV. The rapid implementation of these operations meant that they often lacked gender analysis, as was seen in Solomon Islands, where there was inadequate gender targeting and many women working in the informal sector missed out on support.¹⁴²

122. Nevertheless, ADB has reacted quickly and effectively to provide gender-sensitive support to women's resilience to external shocks in some post-conflict settings. The response in Marawi, the Philippines was successful in combining private-sector lending on microfinance tailored to local women's needs with sovereign operations, including infrastructure reconstruction, and with an NGO-implemented grant project providing training programs for women and youth to be involved in local conflict resolution councils. Traditionally, these councils have been the jurisdiction of men, but now women are being empowered to engage in decision-making in them.¹⁴³

Box 12. Gender Mainstreaming in ADB's COVID-19 Pandemic Support

COVID-19 exacerbated existing gender inequalities and socioeconomic barriers in the region. As part of its comprehensive coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic response, ADB introduced the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Option (CPRO) under the Countercyclical Support Facility to provide crucial budget support to 27 member countries (totaling \$10.4 billion). Programs incorporated measures to mitigate the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on women's health, food security, and livelihoods. These included health measures (such as support for front line health workers; access to maternal and child health programs and reproductive health services); social protection measures (cash grants, distribution of food packages, and support to prevent or respond to gender-based violence [GBV], particularly in the Pacific); and economic measures (such as targeted support and tax relief for to women-owned or women-led micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises).

All CPROs were categorized effective gender mainstreaming (EGM). They did not exclusively target women; but included gender-related targets to ensure that women benefitted equitably from governments' COVID-19 response programs. This required collection of sex-disaggregated data, which proved challenging. Gender mainstreaming for CPROs was found to be inconsistent due to the limited time for preparation and policy dialogue. Of the 12 CPROs reviewed for this evaluation as part of a sample of EGM projects, four were considered "high EGM"; the rest were considered "low EGM". High EGM CPROs adopted an inclusive approach, addressing multiple areas of need (for instance, providing not just cash assistance, but cooking gas cylinders and refills); and incorporated intersectional analysis targeting different groups of women (including elderly women, and female healthcare workers).

Out of the 27 approved CPROs, 25 have completion reports that include assessments of gender-related achievements and results appendixes. Seven CPROs were deemed *not successful* in delivering gender results at exit; the rest were assessed successful for gender results. A recurring issue was the difficulty in collecting sex-disaggregated data, which constrained the assessment of achievement of gender targets.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

¹⁴² ADB. 2022. *Completion Report: COVID-19 Rapid Response Program in Solomon Islands*.

¹⁴³ ADB. 2018. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan ASA Philippines Foundation, Inc. Fostering Women's Empowerment Through Financial Inclusion in Conflict-Impacted and Lagging Provinces Project in the Philippines*.: ADB. 2017. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan Republic of the Philippines: Improving Growth Corridors in Mindanao Road Sector Project*. and ADB. 2018. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loans and Administration of Grants Republic of the Philippines: Emergency Assistance for Reconstruction and Recovery of Marawi*.

CHAPTER 5

Strengthening Institutional Capacity

123. ADB's institutional capacity constrains the achievement of its gender equality objectives, particularly those related to gender transformative change. ADB is well regarded for its gender equality expertise by internal stakeholders and peer MDBs, with country partners commending its proactive role in setting standards and providing guidance. However, although ADB has increased its resources for gender mainstreaming, its gender expertise is stretched thin. While there is strong internal support and commitment to gender equality initiatives among staff, a lack of mandatory training and conceptual clarity leads to an inconsistent application of gender approaches. Many staff expressed confusion and showed a lack of awareness of key concepts and approaches for gender mainstreaming, suggesting a heavy reliance on gender experts to drive all aspects of gender mainstreaming.

124. The years since 2019 have seen strong growth in gender expertise and an expanded scope of work at ADB's Gender Equality Division. A recent shift toward integrating gender as a core component of "One ADB" teams, facilitated by the introduction of the new operating model (NOM), is a positive development. It also mirrors the important work that the Gender Equality Division undertakes, and the fact that, through its efforts, gender mainstreaming has become institutionalized and an accepted—and expected—aspect of ADB's support to DMCs. The NOM has the potential to foster a more coherent approach under the Gender Equality Division, but some risks and initial administrative hurdles need to be addressed if ADB is to fully grasp this potential.

A. Adapting to Changes Introduced by the New Operating Model

125. The NOM has important implications for gender mainstreaming. While it offers an opportunity to pool gender expertise and distribute it across ADB, it also risks disconnecting gender experts from operations. When this evaluation was conducted, the NOM was at an early stage of implementation, making it too early for a conclusive assessment to be made. However, the consolidation of gender staff from operations departments into the Gender Equality Division should enhance peer review and learning among gender team members and ensure a more even distribution of staff time to meet operational needs. The goal is for gender expertise to be integrated throughout the entire project cycle, moving beyond retrospective compliance checks. Early feedback from Gender Equality Division staff suggests that the goal is being met, since staff from the division now participate throughout the design and consultation process rather than being involved only toward the end.

126. Concerns were raised frequently in staff interviews over the consolidation of gender staff into a single Gender Equality Division, with some arguing that detaching gender experts from their respective departments, where they worked directly with sector, thematic and country-based colleagues, might hinder collaboration. The reorganization risks leaving sectors and regional departments without dedicated gender expertise, potentially leading to a loss of institutional memory, which would limit ADB's ability to leverage contextual knowledge to identify and capitalize on opportunities for initiative focused on gender equality initiatives. These concerns were particularly acute in relation to the Private Sector Operations Department (PSOD), which only recently established a cadre of in-house gender experts prior to the changes instituted under the NOM.

127. The transition to the NOM has caused challenges in some resident missions, particularly concerning the reporting structures for staff working on gender issues. The lack of clarity in the policy framework has exacerbated ambiguity, especially in resident missions in South Asia. Some national gender officers now focus on gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), guided by subregional GESI strategies (notably the South Asia Department’s GESI framework) and, in some cases, mandated by national policies (footnote 47). This shift has led to inconsistencies in administrative requirements that currently do not allow for such regional adaptations. There is a disconnect between the overarching guidelines in the NOM, and the adaptations needed at regional and national levels. Without conceptual clarity on these issues, staff find it difficult to deal with government counterparts who have different requirements for framing gender equality issues, or in contexts where there are “reverse gender gaps” where men or boys are disadvantaged. A holistic approach, integrating the strategic priorities of OP1 and OP2, and recognizing synergies while clarifying distinctions, is essential if ADB is to address these issues and align ADB’s approach more closely with government counterparts’ varied perspectives on gender equality. This would also be more in line with the differentiated approaches for FCAS and SIDS (among other country groupings) that ADB has committed to under Strategy 2030.

128. The NOM has also affected business processes during project conceptualization, design and approval. Before the NOM, gender and social inclusion were both addressed in the initial poverty and social analysis during the project design phase, with the document containing specific sections for gender mainstreaming. Under the NOM, the project concept note template requires an indication of the project’s alignment with one of the OP2’s five pillars, three of which target women’s empowerment.¹⁴⁴ In the report and recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors, the summary poverty reduction and social strategy, which previously included social inclusion and gender issues, was removed. There is now a separate and mandatory gender assessment and action plan, focusing solely on gender equality issues, which was added to ensure that gender analysis would not be overlooked in the preparation of ADB projects.¹⁴⁵ While the gender assessment should, where relevant, address intersectional issues that may compound other gender inequalities, there are concerns among some staff that separating gender equality issues in a stand-alone appendix risks overlooking broader social inclusion considerations and how these intersect with gender inequality. Forthcoming updates and enhancements to the poverty and social analysis methodology are expected to address some of these concerns.¹⁴⁶

129. Under the NOM, the Gender Equality Division is one of five thematic divisions within the Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department (CCSD). CCSD’s thematic divisions support country programs by creating tools, engaging in policy dialogue, providing training, and leading TA processing. However, they cannot lead project processing or project management, which are undertaken by the Sectors Group.

130. Some staff in the Gender Equality Division viewed the inability to process projects as a limitation, especially for specialized projects aligned with OP2 objectives. By contrast, the IADB enables its Gender and Diversity Team both to advise on gender approaches and to manage gender-focused projects, keeping gender staff closely embedded in operations (Box 13). There were workload implications when this approach was adopted at ADB: the dual mandate of providing cross-portfolio support along with managing gender-focused grant projects was found to strain the already-stretched resident mission gender staff when additional TA resources were secured for gender initiatives.

131. Yet, with improved cross-departmental collaboration, this situation may also present an opportunity to leverage the diverse expertise of staff working in the Social Development and Public Sector

¹⁴⁴ These are: (i) women’s economic empowerment increased (ii) gender equality in human development enhanced, (iii) gender equality in decision making and leadership enhanced, (iv) women’s time poverty and drudgery reduced, and (v) women’s resilience to external shocks strengthened.

¹⁴⁵ Staff Instructions for Promoting Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in ADB Operations, Staff Instructions, 30 June 2023, paras. 12–14 (internal).

¹⁴⁶ As expressed to the evaluation team during interviews and in the optional comments field in the evaluation’s staff perception survey.

Management sectors. An example can be found in recent climate response PBLs, where collaboration among various sector staff with the Gender Equality Division has facilitated integration of gender actions to address the disproportionate impacts of climate change.¹⁴⁷

Box 13: The Inter-American Development Bank Shifts to a More Inclusive Approach, Addressing Root Causes of Inequality

The Gender and Diversity Sector Framework (2022) of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) addresses deep-rooted inequities, unequal treatment, and weak institutional capacity for gender and diversity policies, and focuses on women, indigenous peoples, people of African descent, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals. An action plan integrates gender equality as a cross-cutting theme. To avoid isolating gender and diversity issues, the Gender Division has expanded, and specialists for minority groups have been hired. Of the 12 people composing the IADB Gender Division Team at headquarters, two specialize in indigenous peoples, two in people of African descent, one in social inclusion more generally, and five are gender specialists (with specific sector expertise). The team is supported by a wide network of 20 staff in-country, and 16 full-time consultants. A key goal since the framework was approved is that all staff are fully aware of both gender and inclusion. In other words, inclusion specialists need to fully understand gender issues and gender experts need to understand and regularly consult with inclusion specialists, promoting integration and lesson-sharing to enhance transformative approaches. The Gender and Diversity Team supports institution-wide efforts, while managing gender- and inclusion-targeted projects, and maintaining close ties with operations and country contexts. A strong focus on learning and lesson-sharing has been important to break down siloed expertise and foster approaches that have transformative potential.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

B. Challenges in Mainstreaming Gender Knowledge and Expertise

1. Strengthening Links between Knowledge Generation and ADB Operations

132. ADB is recognized for its strong expertise in gender equality by internal stakeholders and peer MDBs. Country partners in case countries commended ADB's proactive role in setting standards and providing guidance on gender issues. During the evaluation period, ADB produced a substantial array of knowledge products and organized numerous events aimed at accelerating gender equality in the region. While this knowledge work is highly regarded, there is ambiguity regarding its internal utilization.

133. Thematic divisions, such as the Gender Equality Division, are intended to position ADB as a "global thought leader." They are responsible for developing policies, strategies, operational plans, guidelines, and knowledge products (footnote 29). This role includes creating tools and analysis to inform country programs, supporting resident missions to engage in policy dialogue, and providing training for all staff (footnote 23). Many of these publications were produced with important inputs from ADB sector experts, for instance with inputs from the Human and Social Development Sector Office on issues relating to disability inclusion.¹⁴⁸

134. Since 2016, ADB has published over 50 gender equality-focused publications offering in-depth lessons from country contexts and broader perspectives on various topics, including gender and climate change, disability inclusion, domestic violence, legal status of sexual and gender minorities, green growth, and gender and taxation.¹⁴⁹ ADB also produced 12 gender tool kits and sector-specific tip sheets, addressing issues such as gender integration in the private sector, climate resilience, and gender-

¹⁴⁷ ADB. 2022. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Programmatic Approach and Policy-Based Loan for Subprogram 1 for the Climate Change Action Program in the Republic of the Philippines*; and ADB. 2023. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Programmatic Approach, Policy-Based Loan, and Partial Administration of Loan for Subprogram 1 for the Climate-Resilient Inclusive Development Program in Bangladesh*.

¹⁴⁸ ADB. 2024. *Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion Guidelines to Address the Specific Needs of Women and Girls with Disabilities*.

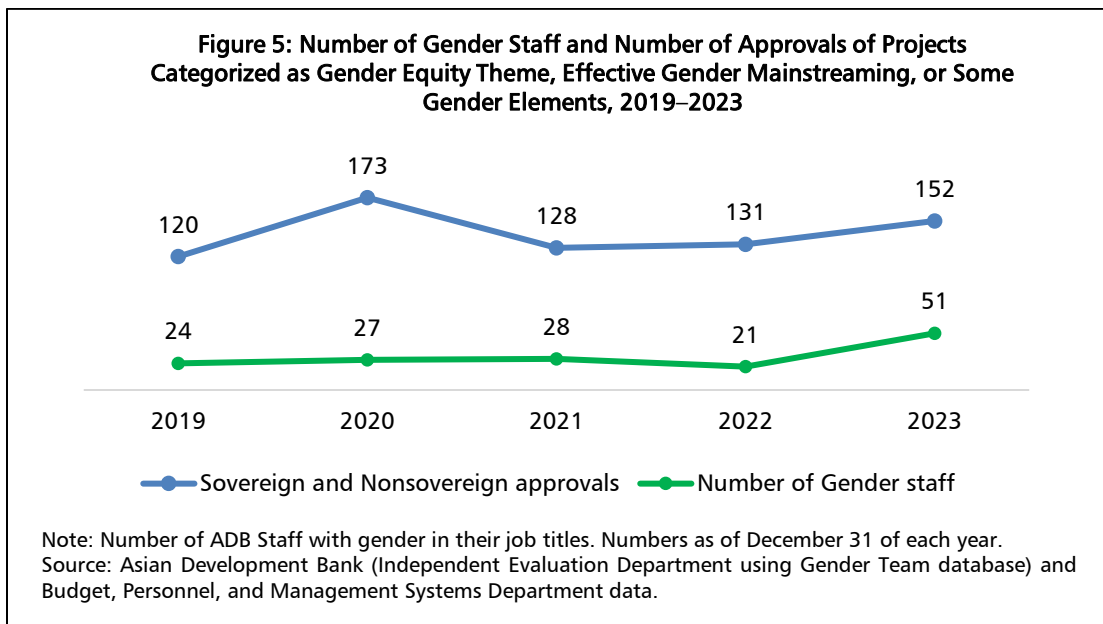
¹⁴⁹ Until July 2024. Full list available here: https://www.adb.org/search0/subject/gender-equality/type/institutional_document/type/publication

responsive procurement in Asia and the Pacific. An active blog series on gender equality and 13 videos further disseminate insights into gender operations. Several publications were produced jointly or in cooperation with other international organizations, further expanding their relevance to international audiences. The fact that ADB is seen as a respected and referenced knowledge resource on gender in Asia and the Pacific was confirmed by the evaluation when consulting external partners and peer MDBs during country visits, and during consultations with gender departments of other MDBs at their headquarters.

135. While many of these centrally produced gender-focused publications are geared towards informing ADB’s role in supporting DMCs through policy dialogue, building national capacities and in establishing partnerships with others, they seem to have had less impact on internal policies and institutional mechanisms for implementation. For instance, many of the insights that are well documented in ADB’s gender publications and featured during ADB gender events are less well covered in ADB’s own policies and frameworks, such as the innovative work on assessing the legal status of sexual and gender minorities (Box 3).

2. Gender Expertise is Thinly Stretched

136. ADB’s mandate to mainstream gender in operations and produce relevant knowledge products and events means that gender expertise remains thinly stretched. Even with the recent growth in the number of gender positions at ADB, this challenge persists, particularly at resident missions, where gender officers are responsible for GAP implementation of large numbers of projects simultaneously, with notable constraints observed in the Pacific subregion. By the end of 2023, ADB had 51 gender staff at headquarters and resident missions, 30 of which had been added since the introduction of OP2 in 2019, with the biggest increase seen from 2022 (Figure 5). Gender staff are engaged in all phases of the project cycle, from design to implementation, which can often span more than 6 years depending on the project’s nature, and in conducting a gender assessment at project completion. Additionally, these staff manage standalone TA initiatives. In interviews for the evaluation, some gender staff reported overseeing around 80–100 projects with GAPs that need monitoring, in addition to providing ongoing support and assessment at completion and being involved in peer reviewing of other projects.



137. Concerns about the NOM changes reflect the heavy reliance on gender experts to drive all aspects of gender mainstreaming, as observed in both country case assessments and key informant interviews at ADB headquarters. Despite the increase in the number of gender staff, relying solely on gender experts for gender mainstreaming is unrealistic. There is already an overdependence on gender experts, including

consultants, and centralizing gender expertise in one division may risk reinforcing the perception that the responsibility for achieving meaningful gender results lies solely with that division rather than with ADB as a whole. Skills and responsibilities should be more widely disseminated across the organization.

138. The 1998 GAD Policy laid the groundwork for this approach by assigning primary accountability for policy implementation to a single unit without clearly defining other internal accountability mechanisms. Similarly, while OP2 provides more details on internal coordination mechanisms, it designates the Gender Equity Thematic Group Secretariat (now the Gender Equality Division) as the main unit responsible for its implementation. In contrast, some UN agencies have more clearly articulated accountability mechanisms involving management at all levels and drawing on external expertise.¹⁵⁰

139. As gender team members are expected to be increasingly embedded in project formulation and management under the NOM, their time commitment per project is likely to rise. This is particularly true as more projects qualify for the EGM and GEN categorization, requiring the development and monitoring of project-specific GAPs driven by numerous gender indicators. However, country cases undertaken for this evaluation observed that gender staff at resident missions are often overstretched, focusing on project-specific support rather than strategically monitoring gender equality commitments within the CPS across the country portfolio. This issue was especially pronounced in countries where the resident mission had prioritized gender equality as a theme in country programs, and where additional TA resources had been attracted to adopt more transformative approaches as a complement to gender mainstreaming across sectors.¹⁵¹

140. During the evaluation missions, it was clear that national gender officers provide critical support to both the country director and sector managers in policy dialogue with country partners on gender equality. However, there are no specific guidelines on conducting such dialogues, defining responsible parties, or communicating ADB's gender positions—especially in contexts or sectors where gender equality is not prioritized by clients and where there is resistance to funding gender equality initiatives. Rather, the success of these interactions often hinges on the individual country director, and the dedication and hard work of national gender staff.

141. Some staff have suggested increasing the presence of international gender staff at resident missions, leading to a leaner central structure and therefore diverging from the current NOM. This would help to embed support in local contexts and provide additional layers of assistance to resident mission staff. While ADB is already based in the region (unlike the World Bank), there remains a perceived shortage of country-tailored support. Several key informants indicated that the support from a central team located in the Gender Equality Division can sometimes lack alignment with local conditions, highlighting the need for more context-specific assistance.

142. As ADB seeks to incorporate an intersectional lens through diagnostics, analysis, and enhanced targeting in its operations, cross-departmental collaboration remains crucial for leveraging social development expertise. The evaluation notes, however, that the Human and Social Development Sector Office has few staff and limited resources, which therefore constrains ADB's ability to holistically address intersecting vulnerabilities and marginalities. Meanwhile, enhancing the relevance of gender mainstreaming and targeting through more in-depth analysis and diagnostics requires additional resources such as TA. Gender and social development specialists highlighted that they are expected to achieve greater depth and breadth of gender mainstreaming, adopting transformative and intersectional approaches, but without the necessary commensurate resources and funds for conducting such work.

¹⁵⁰ See UNDP. 2022. *Gender Equality Strategy 2022–2025*.

¹⁵¹ Evaluation country case assessments.

3. Staff Have Misconceptions and Lack Awareness of Gender Issues

143. Conceptual confusion and the absence of mandatory training have resulted in inconsistent internalization and application of gender approaches beyond basic requirements. IED's 2017 Evaluation of ADB's Support for Gender and Development recommended strengthening the technical capacity of ADB staff to support the integration of gender work in projects and country and sector work. It recommended that responsibility for gender mainstreaming should not be left only to gender specialists.¹⁵² Some efforts have been made to extend gender skills throughout the organization and the Gender Equality Division has conducted sector-specific training workshops. However, the updated eLearning module on gender mainstreaming in ADB operations, launched in 2022, remains optional for staff and project task team leaders.¹⁵³ In contrast, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the African Development Bank, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development mandate gender training, ensuring that all new staff are familiarized with gender mainstreaming concepts.

144. Awareness of gender transformative change and intersectional analysis in ADB operations is low, with few staff trained in these concepts. Those with greater awareness often gained such knowledge before joining ADB. The evaluation's staff perception survey revealed a lack of knowledge of gender transformative change, with only 37% familiar with the concept (Figure A5.8, Appendix 5). Among gender-focused staff, 62% indicated familiarity with gender transformative change, with newer staff being more familiar than those with over 11 years at ADB. Additionally, one-third of respondents were aware of intersectionality, with newer staff showing higher awareness, likely due to prior experience (Figure A5.11, Appendix 5).

145. Staff misconceptions and lack of familiarity with the transformative gender agenda referenced in OP2 highlight the shortcomings of the 2021 revised guidelines for gender mainstreaming categories (footnote 73). The guidelines did not incorporate transformative approaches or their application across categories, and did not introduce or include the concept of intersectionality either in the guidelines or in the tipsheet for project categorization. This omission has led to varied levels of understanding among staff, as evidenced by survey responses and interviews, underscoring the need for increased awareness, clarity, and training.

146. For instance, many staff members, except those in CCSD, mistakenly believe that GEN projects automatically aim to achieve gender transformative goals. According to the staff perception survey, 47% believed the transformative gender agenda related to the GEN category in ADB's system, whereas 48% did not know (Figure A5.9, Appendix 5). During staff interviews, a common misconception emerged that adding a GBV component would automatically categorize a project as GEN and apply a gender transformative approach.¹⁵⁴

4. Perceived Inconsistencies in Management Support Undermine Staff Incentives to Move Beyond a Compliance Focus

147. Incentive structures for all staff to internalize gender concepts as part of regular project management are weak. Achieving gender equality results beyond simple compliance with requirements often relies on personal motivation rather than staff incentives and institutional mechanisms, especially with regard to conducting policy dialogue with government and private sector clients. The perception among staff is that the organization lacks a clear corporate vision on instituting gender equality and this weakens their personal motivation.

¹⁵² ADB management agreed to ensure participation in such training by relevant non-gender staff from operations departments (particularly project task team leaders) at both headquarters and resident missions.

¹⁵³ Accessible at <https://elearn.adb.org/>

¹⁵⁴ In the evaluation's staff perception survey, 56% agreed with this, while 37% were unsure or unaware.

148. In the evaluation's staff perception survey, personal commitment was ranked highly overall as an important motivating factor for staff to incorporate gender mainstreaming in operations. Country-level key informant interviews also indicated that the incorporation of gender analysis during project design relied heavily on the project team leader's willingness to incorporate gender aspects, and/or their knowledge or awareness of gender-related concerns. Notably, there is no mandatory training or orientation for project team leaders on integrating gender equality priorities and approaches into operations as outlined in OP2.

149. Compliance with requirements remains an important factor in incentivizing staff to incorporate gender equality considerations into ADB operations. According to the staff perception survey, the need to comply with ADB internal guidelines for the sake of project approval was found to be an important motivating factor for staff in integrating gender equality in operations, with 26% rating it "very important" and 41% "important." Satisfying Board expectations on gender categorization of projects was also a key motivator for 66% of overall respondents, and for 83% of those primarily working with gender issues (Figure A5.15, Appendix 5).

150. While ADB has institutionalized mechanisms for incentivizing gender mainstreaming in project operations (e.g., the gender mainstreaming categorization system, and the numeric CRF targets), the incentive structure for ensuring policy dialogue at the country level is less clear. Staff perceive policy dialogue with governments and dialogue with private sector clients as being weaker than other areas of ADB's support for gender equality (Figure A5.13, Appendix 5). Case studies for the evaluation revealed ADB's uneven performance in policy dialogue, which was largely dependent on the personal commitment of country directors and individual project staff, and on the involvement of gender focal points in resident missions, who often do not see this as their primary task.

151. Despite the generally high level of personal motivation among staff for incorporating gender equality in operations, staff expressed frustration about perceived bottlenecks. Implementation challenges were a recurring theme in the survey feedback, suggesting the need for clearer guidelines, timely advice, and realistic gender targets to move beyond the perception of gender mainstreaming as a "box-ticking" exercise. There was some dissatisfaction that projects adhering to existing guidelines were still critiqued during Board discussions for not being sufficiently transformative, which suggests a need to update the existing guidelines. Some staff felt that ADB needs a clearer, more realistic vision for accelerating gender equality, potentially addressed through informal workshops linked to developing a new corporate-wide ADB Gender Policy. The perceived lack of resources—financing and dedicated gender staff in the field—was frequently cited as a major barrier, while involving gender staff from the start of project discussions and considering context-specific cultural and social norms in gender analysis and interventions were deemed crucial for effective gender mainstreaming. Survey respondents also complained about the lack of career progression opportunities for gender specialists, which affects motivation. Respondents highlighted the need for ADB to identify and create career progression pathways for gender and social development specialists, through creating opportunities for skills development and experience-building across ADB departments.

152. Within the organization, ADB has taken important steps to improve gender equality. Notably, ADB was the first international financial institution to attain the EDGE Move Certification (level 2) in 2019, a business certification standard that accredits organizations with high levels of gender equality and diversity. ADB has undertaken gender pay gap studies, and made continuing efforts to increase gender parity among staff. There has also been an improvement in diversity among ADB Board appointments (executive directors, alternate executive directors, and director's advisors).¹⁵⁵ However, as of 2024, ADB is no longer part of the EDGE certification system which sends conflicting signals and may undermine some of these efforts. Yet, despite strong management support for gender issues, there remains a perception among staff that gender equality as an outcome is neither sufficiently internalized at the corporate level nor sufficiently embedded in the culture of the organization. Survey respondents

¹⁵⁵ ADB. 2024. *Report to the Board of Governors on Gender Diversity at the ADB Board of Directors: Annual Meeting 2024*.

highlighted what they perceived to be a gap between ADB's gender equality rhetoric and practice, e.g., the lack of childcare facilities in ADB offices. Although this evaluation did not cover workplace gender issues at ADB, the perception that ADB is falling short on these issues may affect staff motivation to take gender mainstreaming seriously beyond compliance with requirements. A forthcoming ADB Gender Pay Gap Study by ADB'S Economic Research and Development Impact Department will provide important insights into ADB's internal corporate gender issues.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Recommendations for Enhancing ADB's Gender Equality Impact

153. ADB has long been a leader among MDBs in institutionalizing gender mainstreaming, largely because of the efforts of its dedicated staff gender experts. ADB has strong achievement against corporate targets, and it can now revise its systems and processes to enhance the depth of gender mainstreaming, and to remain at the forefront of efforts to accelerate progress in gender equality. ADB's transformative vision of accelerating progress in gender equality demands a multifaceted approach. Key areas of focus include ensuring coherence between policies and strategies, aligning institutional gender mainstreaming systems, adopting a programmatic approach, enhancing monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and building staff capacity to foster a culture of accountability and innovation for accelerating progress in gender equality.

A. Conclusions

154. Since the 1990s, the context for gender equality in Asia and the Pacific has evolved markedly. While notable strides have been made in areas such as education and health, many gender gaps persist, and new challenges have emerged. The region has seen economic growth and development, yet this has not been translated into equitable benefits for all genders. Critical structural inequalities and social norms continue to constrain progress. To address these multifaceted and context-specific challenges, a more transformative approach is required—one that tackles the root causes of gender inequality, shifts entrenched gender norms, and adopts an intersectional perspective to ensure that no one is left behind. ADB should now move beyond traditional gender mainstreaming strategies to more comprehensive, inclusive, and adaptive frameworks that can respond effectively to the diverse needs and realities of all individuals in the region. Against this backdrop, ADB's 1998 GAD Policy—which was focused primarily on women—has become outdated. It promoted gender mainstreaming as an end in itself, and failed to incorporate intersectional perspectives or to recognize gender diversity. Further, the 1998 GAD Policy went beyond principles, providing procedural guidance, which has since changed or lost relevance.

155. The introduction of the “transformative gender agenda” under OP2 signifies ADB's commitment to a deeper, more impactful approach to gender equality. ADB has aligned this agenda with the targets of SDG 5, focusing on eliminating violence against women and girls, redistributing unpaid care work, promoting women's health and leadership, and ensuring access to resources and legal protections. The transformative gender agenda introduced in OP2 aims to address the root causes of gender inequality and to challenge unequal power relations. While this goal is commendable, OP2 lacks specific demonstration of how ADB will tackle societal-level structures that discriminate against women and girls, it does not adequately reflect the complexity and context-specific interventions required for transformative change, and it does not account for the extended timeframes and scale of intervention.

156. As the operational plan for OP2 is due to expire in 2024, ultimately, the 1998 GAD Policy remains the official guiding document for ADB's support to gender equality. The discrepancy between the 1998 GAD Policy and ADB's current operational plan creates confusion and misalignment, sending a message of stagnation and incoherence both internally and in policy dialogues with external partners.

157. ADB's longstanding focus on gender mainstreaming and the efforts of ADB's gender specialists have led to an increase in the attention that ADB has paid to incorporating gender equality objectives in projects since 2016. However, while the number of GEN and EGM projects has increased, the quality of the gender actions within these categories remains inconsistent. The near 100% gender mainstreaming at-entry attainment rate, which far surpasses CRF targets, suggests that staff have focused on complying with guidelines and paid less attention to deep impactful activities, as can be seen in the sharp increase in EGM projects that exhibit a low level of mainstreaming. Given the success in expanding gender-mainstreaming efforts across the ADB portfolio, there is now scope to update the categorization system, laying greater emphasis on the depth of gender mainstreaming through transformative change and intersectionality in gender actions. The NOM has consolidated ADB gender experts together in one division at ADB headquarters, but early feedback indicates ADB must carefully manage the potential trade-offs in disconnecting gender experts from operations.

158. ADB has been recognized for establishing a deeply institutionalized system for gender mainstreaming. To date, it has primarily adopted a project-by-project approach in country operations. However, given the scale, complexity, and longer timeframes required, it is unrealistic to expect a single project to bring about transformative changes. The evaluation found few examples of cases where a CPS outlined a holistic programmatic approach for achieving gender equality outcomes. Achieving ADB's transformative vision of accelerating progress in gender equality will require a coordinated and multifaceted approach with greater use of instruments such as PBLs for policy reforms, complemented by TA projects to shore up capacity and demand in DMCs, with ADB working in partnership with other development institutions and local actors based on a clear identification of their respective comparative advantage.

159. ADB has taken important steps to improve M&E of gender mainstreaming efforts, and is currently the only MDB applying an at-exit rating for achievement of gender actions for all projects categorized as EGM and GEN. However, the current approach does not effectively capture and measure the achievement of gender equality outcomes. The reliance on quantitative metrics—such as the number of women reached and the number of projects categorized as GEN, EGM, and SGE—does not adequately track progress toward the achievement of meaningful intermediate outcomes, nor does it sufficiently capture the depth and transformative potential of gender mainstreaming initiatives.

160. ADB is well known for its gender expertise by internal and external stakeholders, yet gender staff remain overextended, despite the recent growth in the number of positions, reflecting ongoing challenges in distributing gender mainstreaming responsibilities. There is a notable reliance on gender experts for all aspects of gender mainstreaming, rather than a broader distribution of responsibilities across the organization. Consolidating staff in a single Gender Equality Division may reinforce the perception that gender mainstreaming is solely this division's responsibility. Despite robust internal support for ADB's gender equality initiatives, there remains substantial ambiguity regarding the practical implementation of gender concepts, with limited awareness among staff of concepts such as transformative change and intersectional analysis. This ambiguity, compounded by a lack of mandatory training, has led to an inconsistent application of gender approaches beyond the basic requirements.

B. Recommendations

161. ADB should:

Recommendation 1: Modernize the 1998 Gender and Development (GAD) Policy to ensure ADB has a coherent and up-to-date policy to guide and inform its gender equality initiatives. ADB needs an updated policy that provides a renewed vision and direction that will enable it to continue being a leader in supporting gender equality across the region. The new policy should outline high-level principles to guide ADB's gender equality efforts. These principles should be aligned with the concepts and objectives introduced in the OP2, while ensuring ADB's policies and practices continue to follow international legal and normative frameworks and standards, notably the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The new policy should also be aligned with the cross-cutting gender dimensions of the forthcoming revised safeguards policy and related implementation guidance

notes, and with the ongoing reforms to ADB's policy architecture. The new gender policy should balance clearly articulated corporate objectives and guiding principles with the need for these to be adapted at subregional and country levels. The policy should use up-to-date terminology, definitions, and methodologies, reflecting the latest thinking and the increasing complexities associated with achieving gender equality. The policy should have an explicit review period to ensure it remains current. A new policy, with greater internal coherence and clearer and updated objectives, definitions, and guiding principles, would allow ADB to address gender inequalities more comprehensively and to tackle intersectional issues, reinforcing its commitment to gender equality and leaving no one behind. Unlike the 1998 GAD Policy, the new policy should articulate in a succinct manner ADB's high-level strategic objectives over the medium to long term and avoid procedural details. Such detailed guidance should instead be outlined in periodic management operational plans that can be regularly updated. The new policy, which should have a greater focus on gender equality objectives, should also inform results monitoring and reporting and prioritize fewer but more meaningful targets and gender transformative approaches to programming, in contrast to the current overemphasis on quantitative targets in gender mainstreaming categories. The process of updating the 1998 GAD Policy should be consultative, and sufficiently resourced across relevant departments, and should not detract from the existing gender support to operations provided by the Gender Equality Division.

Recommendation 2: Promote more gender transformative approaches, ensuring adequate resourcing and incentives are in place for the required changes in collaboration and ways of working, including by revising the gender mainstreaming categorization system and its application. ADB's achievement of near 100% gender mainstreaming at-entry attainment rate suggests the bar for qualifying criteria needs to be raised to maintain the relevance of the criteria and their focus on meaningful gender outcomes. Revised gender categories should distinguish between a project's direct contributions to closing a particular gender gap, and the more indirect benefits from the project that may accrue to women as a share of the general population. Only those projects that directly target and measure the narrowing of particular gender gaps should be considered to be effectively mainstreaming gender, or adopting a gender theme. Lower-level categories should be used to indicate projects that have only indirect gender benefits. The revised categories should distinguish between long-term impacts related to identified gender gaps, and those that relate solely to project implementation, or to good practice in project design features, with results that are not likely to extend beyond the project period. ADB Management and the Board of Directors should recognize the neutrality of gender mainstreaming categories: the categories should be seen as useful descriptors of different types of operations, not as elements of a ranked scorecard. ADB should incentivize gender transformative, intersectional approaches and project designs by recognizing meaningful efforts and progress in staff performance appraisals. Integrating such concepts more formally into institutional systems would address the current lack of clarity among staff. Adequate TA and human resources should be allocated to allow for transformative approaches to be piloted, adopted, and scaled up. Finally, fostering cross-departmental collaboration would ensure greater consideration is paid to intersectionality, climate change, and other cross-cutting issues in the design of gender initiatives and in the preparation of poverty and social analysis.

Recommendation 3: Adopt a programmatic approach to higher-level gender equality outcomes by more comprehensively framing gender equality objectives in country- and sector-level strategies, which are underpinned by updated diagnostics, analysis, and sex-disaggregated data and complement the existing project approach to gender. If ADB is to achieve transformative gender equality objectives, it needs to adopt a cohesive, programmatic approach in its CPSs and to devote sufficient resources for the design, implementation and monitoring of such an approach. Rather than measuring the participation of women project-by-project, ADB should strategically leverage a few transformative gender-themed projects to enable gender actions to be implemented across several sectors as part of a coordinated program of support. At the country level, anchoring these strategies in the CPS, and assigning them clearly defined indicators backed up by updated analysis, would help ADB achieve more holistic and sustained impact, recognizing the need for differentiated and context-specific approaches, including in FCAS and SIDS. The inclusive and sustainable growth assessment (ISGA) should be better leveraged to ensure a more holistic and intersectional approach to gender equality and social development. Adequate TA resources should be made available to facilitate capacity development and policy dialogue as part of the implementation

of these strategies. As ADB moves to position itself as the climate bank of Asia and the Pacific, potential synergies with activities outlined in ADB's Climate Change Action Plan, 2023–2030, such as developing gender-sensitive climate country plans, and socially inclusive and gender-responsive just transition assessments, should be maximized. Meanwhile, sector-level gender analysis and strategies, requiring collaboration between gender specialists and sector specialists, can frame longer-term support within specific sectors, setting longer-term objectives and ambitions for expected progression towards gender transformative results addressing the structures, institutions, and social norms that underpin gender inequality. ADB should coordinate its gender-responsive interventions to ensure they complement those of its development partners.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems for gender equality and place greater emphasis on higher-level outcomes, intersectionality, and transformative impacts. ADB already has established M&E mechanisms in place, such as the at-exit gender assessment for GEN and EGM projects. With the forthcoming Gender Equality Management System (GEMS), steps can now be taken to enhance M&E systems to better capture comprehensive gender equality results and outcomes, both quantitative and qualitative, in line with ongoing reform efforts to strengthen ADB's development impact. M&E efforts should include producing meaningful indicators that go beyond quantitative metrics to capture qualitative changes and the depth of gender equality outcomes. The indicators should draw a distinction between results that actively narrow an identified gender gap, and results that are assumed to benefit women indirectly as a part of a targeted population. Results frameworks should continue to ensure gender mainstreaming is present in project implementation processes, but they should also distinguish between gender equality results that are more likely to endure beyond the lifetime of the project, and those that relate more narrowly to standard good practice and safeguarding procedures for project implementation. Data collection is needed for all genders, for example so that ADB can design interventions when boys are falling behind in school participation rates in certain countries. A more robust M&E approach should track progress toward achieving the new gender policy's higher-level substantive objectives to accelerate progress toward gender equality, providing the evidence for exploring synergies across country programs and sector-specific insights from different contexts. Sufficient resources should be allocated to measuring gender equality outcomes, for example through time-use surveys, replicating existing good practice examples. ADB should conduct more impact evaluations of its interventions to assess the effectiveness of innovative and transformative gender equality initiatives; these impact evaluations would provide insights into what works and facilitate learning that can be applied in the design of future gender actions. Independent evaluations should then be used to systematically capture gender equality outcomes and lessons learned.

Recommendation 5: Ensure that operations and country staff have sufficient skills in gender analysis and mainstreaming by investing in training and capacity development for staff working in specific contexts and sectors. Following the consolidation of gender expertise in the Gender Equality Division under the NOM, ADB must make gender mainstreaming a shared responsibility across all departments and integrate gender considerations into project design, implementation, and monitoring, thereby alleviating the disproportionate burden placed on gender experts and promoting a more comprehensive approach. Sector-specific training on incorporating gender transformative approaches should be strengthened and replicated, with tailored and context-specific guidance for the differentiated requirements of FCAS and SIDS. Such training and skills development should promote integrated thinking, drawing inputs from across relevant ADB departments, through, for example, focusing on the nexus between gender and climate, setting relevant and measurable design and monitoring framework indicators, or ensuring poverty and social analyses (PSA) integrate a gender intersectional lens to facilitate achievement of corporate results framework targets on gender equality and inclusiveness. Mandatory training on gender mainstreaming should be provided for new staff and for staff involved in project processing, with certification requirements for project team leaders, and periodic assessments of the uptake and application of knowledge. Refresher courses should be offered to update project staff on emerging issues such as gender-responsive climate action. In implementing the NOM, ADB should continue to ensure that adequate staff skills and resources are dedicated to gender equality efforts, particularly at the country level.

Appendixes

APPENDIX 1: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

1. Gender has been a thematic priority of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for decades and the Independent Evaluation Department (IED) has undertaken periodic assessments of ADB support for gender and development.¹ The current evaluation aimed to provide a strategic assessment of ADB's positioning and contribution to accelerating progress in gender equality in Asia and the Pacific.

2. The overarching evaluation question was: How well positioned is ADB to deliver effective, and potentially transformative support for accelerating progress in gender equality in Asia and the Pacific under its current institutional, policy, and operational frameworks? The evaluation had three subsidiary questions: (i) How relevant are ADB's corporate policies and strategies in providing a coherent and inclusive vision for ADB's efforts to accelerate progress in gender equality in Asia and the Pacific?; (ii) How effective are ADB's operations in contributing to the achievement of gender equality outcomes and gender transformative change?; and (iii) How well positioned is ADB institutionally for delivering transformative gender results? The evaluation approach paper elaborated specific subquestions across each of these strands in an evaluation framework. These questions and the evaluation framework provided the analytical direction for the evaluation's enquiries, data collection, and analysis.²

3. The evaluation assessed ADB's strategies and operations (both sovereign and nonsovereign) during the period 2016–2023 to follow up on the findings of IED's 2017 gender evaluation.³ It carried out assessments at the organizational, country, and project levels, covering the full range of ADB activities and operations, including investment projects, policy-based lending, technical assistance, and knowledge products; loans, equity investments and engagement with private sector clients for nonsovereign operations (NSO); policy dialogue at country and regional levels; country-level engagement through country partnership strategies (CPS); and ADB's role as a convenor and coordinator among development partners.

A. Evaluation Approach

4. **The evaluation used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the evaluation questions.** Data sources included ADB corporate documents, project documents and portfolio reports, databases, and country and regional reviews on specific issues, IED evaluation reports, and development literature.

5. **Structured literature review.** A review of current development literature on gender equality in Asia and the Pacific region was undertaken to identify emerging issues and approaches to addressing gender inequality. The review covered the following topics:

- (i) developments in feminist and gender theory, concepts, and definitions in the context of gender and development, with reference to the concept of gender transformative change, and a review of advances in feminist and gender theory related to the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities;
- (ii) contextual trends and developments in Asia and the Pacific and its subregions with regard to gender equality, mapping progress, possible backsliding, and the impacts of events such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, among others;

¹ IED has conducted three previous evaluations of ADB's support for gender and development. These were: (i) IED. 2001. *Special Evaluation Study on Gender and Development*; (ii) IED. 2009. *Special Evaluation Study on the Asian Development Bank's Support to Gender and Development. Phase 1: Relevance, Responsiveness, and Results to Date.*; and IED. 2010. *Special Evaluation Study on the Asian Development Bank's Support to Gender and Development. Phase 2: Results from Country Case Studies*; (iii) IED. 2017. *Thematic Evaluation: Asian Development Bank Support for Gender and Development (2005–2015)*.

² IED. 2024. *Evaluation Approach Paper: Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality*.

³ IED. 2017. *Evaluation of ADB's Support for Gender and Development (2005–2015)*.

- (iii) gender strategies and approaches of other multilateral development banks (MDBs) and international development organizations, including a review of gender evaluations and definitions of gender transformative approaches of other international financial institutions and development partners; and
- (iv) the strategic relevance of ADB's policy, strategies and approaches to accelerating progress toward gender equality, assessing the definitional and conceptual clarity and inclusiveness, in light of the structured review of theoretical and contextual developments.

6. **Review of ADB corporate documents.** The evaluation reviewed the 1998 Gender and Development Policy (taking into consideration the evaluative findings of IED's Evaluation of ADB's Support for Gender and Development in 2017), operational plan for operational priority 2: Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, 2019–2024 (OP2) and its midterm review, ADB guidance documents, frameworks and guidelines across ADB regional departments, knowledge products, and other corporate reports on ADB's gender performance (e.g., development effectiveness reviews), and country-level documents, including CPSs and country gender assessments (CGAs).

7. **Structured review of country partnership strategies.** CPSs were examined to identify gender gaps, the level of gender mainstreaming, and the prioritization of gender equality in CPS documents across countries. This involved mapping the extent to which gender equality indicators had been included in CPS results frameworks. The evaluation examined the relevance of ADB's CPSs in terms of their alignment with OP2, and with developing member country (DMC) government commitments, objectives, and national strategies on gender equality. The extent to which gender equality had been prioritized in CPS documents was assessed through a desk review of 40 CPSs approved during the evaluation period for 29 DMCs.⁴ The relevance and quality of CGAs and other analysis referenced in CPS documents was also considered for a sample of countries, including the evaluation's case study countries (Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Solomon Islands and Tajikistan). Key findings from the CPS review are in Appendix 4.

8. **Portfolio review and analysis.** The portfolio review examined ADB's sovereign and nonsovereign operations committed during 2016–2023 with regard to gender mainstreaming (covering all four gender mainstreaming categories) to identify trends across years, sectors, and modalities. A summary of the review is presented in Appendix 2. The portfolio analysis involved an assessment of project design documents of all gender equity theme (GEN) sovereign and nonsovereign operations during 2020–2023 to determine the extent to which these projects had adopted a gender transformative approach. A sample of effective gender mainstreaming (EGM) sovereign and nonsovereign operations was also assessed according to a number of criteria to identify illustrative examples of EGM projects that may be considered "high EGM" or "low EGM" based on a review of project documents. A summary of the results of the portfolio analysis is in Appendix 3.

9. **Review and synthesis of evaluation findings.** The evaluation reviewed completed IED evaluations, including country assistance program evaluations (CAPEs) and validations of country partnership strategy final reviews (CPSFRVs) covering country programs during 2016–2023; corporate, thematic, and sector-wide evaluations circulated during 2017–2024; IED annual evaluation reviews; and project performance evaluation reports (PPERs) and project completion report (PCR) validation reports (PVRs). These evaluation documents were examined for their findings and lessons on gender as a thematic or crosscutting priority and ADB's approach to mainstreaming gender at the organizational, country, and project levels.⁵ Pertinent evaluation findings are referenced throughout the main report.

10. **Key informant interviews.** Structured and/or semi-structured interviews with ADB management and staff and ADB project officers were undertaken to understand their perception of ADB's approach

⁴ Since CPSs usually cover a 5-year period, some DMCs had two CPSs during the evaluation period.

⁵ The team reviewed 23 country evaluations, 28 corporate, thematic, and sector-wide evaluations circulated during 2017–2023; and drew on project-level lessons from on gender mainstreaming from IED's EVA lessons database.

to gender mainstreaming in ADB operations, gather data or information on approaches that have worked and those that have not, as well as lessons on how ADB can improve its support for addressing DMCs' gender equality gaps and challenges, especially under the new operating model (NOM). Semi-structured interviews were held with staff from other MDBs and international development organizations, academia, the private sector, civil society organizations, as well as DMC government representatives and officials and affected stakeholders in case study countries (para. 11).

11. **Country case assessments.** Independent evaluation missions were undertaken to Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Solomon Islands and Tajikistan during February–April 2024. These countries were chosen because of their gender mainstreaming portfolios and to reflect the regional distribution of the overall ADB portfolio, the sector distribution of projects, and the use of different modalities. The missions were preceded by a structured desk review of CPSs and underlying diagnostic studies (such as CGAs), and project documents. A portfolio review examined the extent to which gender equality was being pursued and what results had been achieved or were emerging. For each country, the evaluation team identified 8–10 gender-mainstreamed projects across sectors and modalities in consultation with concerned gender specialists, to inform the discussions with government counterparts and/or private sector clients. The missions involved consultations with ADB resident mission staff and with stakeholders at different levels of ADB's engagement, including government counterparts, implementing and executing agencies, development partners, nongovernment and civil society organizations (including women's rights and women-led organizations), decentralized government departments and agencies, private sector clients (in Mongolia and the Philippines), and project beneficiaries.

12. **ADB staff perception survey.** The evaluation team administered an online perception survey to ADB operations staff and operations support staff.⁶ The survey aimed to understand staff perceptions of ADB's approach to gender mainstreaming in its operations. The survey was administered from 28 May to 17 June 2024 to 2,609 ADB staff in headquarters and resident missions. A total of 610 valid responses were received (23%).⁷ Survey results are presented in Appendix 5.

13. **Institutional assessment.** In answering subsidiary evaluation question 3—How well positioned is ADB institutionally for delivering transformative gender results?—the evaluation examined ADB's gender architecture, taking into consideration recent changes as a result of the NOM. The assessment used ADB staff interviews and a perception survey, a comparative review across MDBs, a review of ADB corporate documents, and portfolio analysis. It also incorporated elements of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Guidance on Evaluating Institutional Gender Mainstreaming.⁸

- (i) The evaluation assessed the continued relevance of ADB's gender policy, OP2, and the gender mainstreaming categories of ADB projects, in light of the findings from the portfolio analysis. This was complemented by benchmarking against partner organizations, the staff perception survey, and stakeholder interviews.
- (ii) The evaluation assessed the level of resources dedicated to achieving ADB's vision for gender equality, and the implementation of OP2, in terms of human resources, with regard to the number of gender staff positions, and any observable changes over time.
- (iii) The organizational structure of ADB's gender architecture was assessed through the staff perception survey and interviews. Staff were selected for interviews to ensure the interviewees included a mix of operations staff at resident missions and at headquarters.

⁶ Staff from the following departments or officers participated in the survey: Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department; Central and West Asia Department; Department of Communications and Knowledge Management; East Asia Department; Economic Research and Development Impact Department; Office of Market Development and Public-Private Partnership; Office of Safeguards; Office of the Special Project Facilitator; Pacific Department; Procurement, Portfolio, and Financial Management Department; Private Sector Operations Department; South Asia Department; Southeast Asia Department; Sectors Group; and Strategy, Policy and Partnerships Department.

⁷ Based on an estimated total population of 2,609 ADB international and national staff from the targeted departments, the total response is a representative sample of the population at 95% confidence interval and 4% margin of error.

⁸ UNEG. 2018. *Guidance on Evaluating Institutional Gender Mainstreaming*.

Staff were also selected according to their staff gender expertise. Staff were asked for their views on the clarity of their roles and responsibilities for implementing and monitoring ADB's OP2. The evaluation considered the relevance of reporting lines and whether appropriate incentives were in place, along with a conducive organizational culture, for staff to integrate gender equality objectives into project and program designs, thus ensuring gender-responsive performance management.

- (iv) The relevance of ADB's systems and processes for monitoring, reporting, and evaluating gender equality results was assessed at project, country and organizational levels. This was informed by the project- and country-level desk reviews and assessments, and a review of corporate results reporting during the evaluation period. Corporate guidance on evaluating and reporting gender equality results was reviewed, and a meta-evaluation on a sample of independent validations and evaluations was undertaken to assess the extent to which gender equality concerns were integrated into evaluation design and methods, and whether evaluation reports reflected a gender analysis (Box A1.1).
- (v) A structured comparative analysis was undertaken and this benchmarked ADB's gender mainstreaming systems and processes against those of other MDBs and United Nations agencies to identify commonalities and best practices. This included a review of comparator organizations' institutional monitoring and evaluation systems for capturing gender equality results. The evaluation also included a comparative review of gender strategies and policies of MDBs and international development organizations.

14. ADB's corporate activities on knowledge generation and communication on gender equality were assessed by identifying usage and download statistics for online knowledge products, participation rates in ADB training on gender equality, the extent of outreach through conference attendance and workshops, and engagement across social media platforms.

Box A1.1: Meta-Evaluation of IED Evaluations from a Gender-Equality Perspective

The evaluation conducted a systematic meta-assessment of 20 Independent Evaluation Department (IED) evaluation reports during the evaluation period to determine the extent to which they addressed gender equality in their methodologies, analyses, and reporting. Adapting the methodology of the United Nations System Wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Evaluation Performance Indicator^a and the related United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) UN-SWAP Meta Evaluation Scoring Tool,^b this meta-assessment was applied to a sample of project completion reports (PCRs), PCR validation reports (PVRs), project and program performance evaluation reports (PPERs), country assistance program evaluations (CAPEs), validations of country partnership strategy final reviews (CPSFRVs), and thematic and corporate-level evaluations.

The review assessed three main aspects: (i) the integration of gender equality within evaluation criteria, methods, and reporting; (ii) attention to OP2 priorities (including intersectionality and the transformative gender agenda, and the OP2 pillars of women's economic empowerment, human development, decision-making and leadership, time-poverty and drudgery reduction and resilience to shocks); and (iii) compliance with IED guidance. The review used a rating scale of 0–3 to measure performance across various dimensions. Evaluation guidelines from the World Bank Group, the Inter-American Development Bank, UNEG, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) were also reviewed and compared to the existing IED guidance for evaluators.

The review indicated an average score of 1.4 out of 3 for integrating gender equality. Areas for improvement included addressing gender transformation, and intersectionality. The comparative review also showed that ADB evaluation guidance could be better aligned with ADB gender strategies (notably with the priorities of operational priority 2: Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, 2019–2024 [OP2]); ADB provided fewer explicit instructions for evaluators than comparator agencies.

^a United Nations Evaluation Group. 2018. *UN-SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator Technical Note*. <https://www.uneval.org/document/download/2148>

^b UN WOMEN. 2018. *UN-SWAP 2.0 Performance Indicator 4: Evaluation*. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/How%20We%20Work/UNSystemCoordination/UN-SWAP/UN-SWAP-2-TN-PI04-Evaluation-en.pdf>

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

B. Theory of Change

15. IED developed a theory of change to guide the evaluation, building on the framework and narrative in the Strategy 2030 operational plan for OP2 and ADB's corporate results framework.⁹ The theory of change, as outlined in the evaluation approach paper, mapped the relationship between ADB's activities under the different operations areas and the outcomes they aspired to achieve (Figure A1.1).

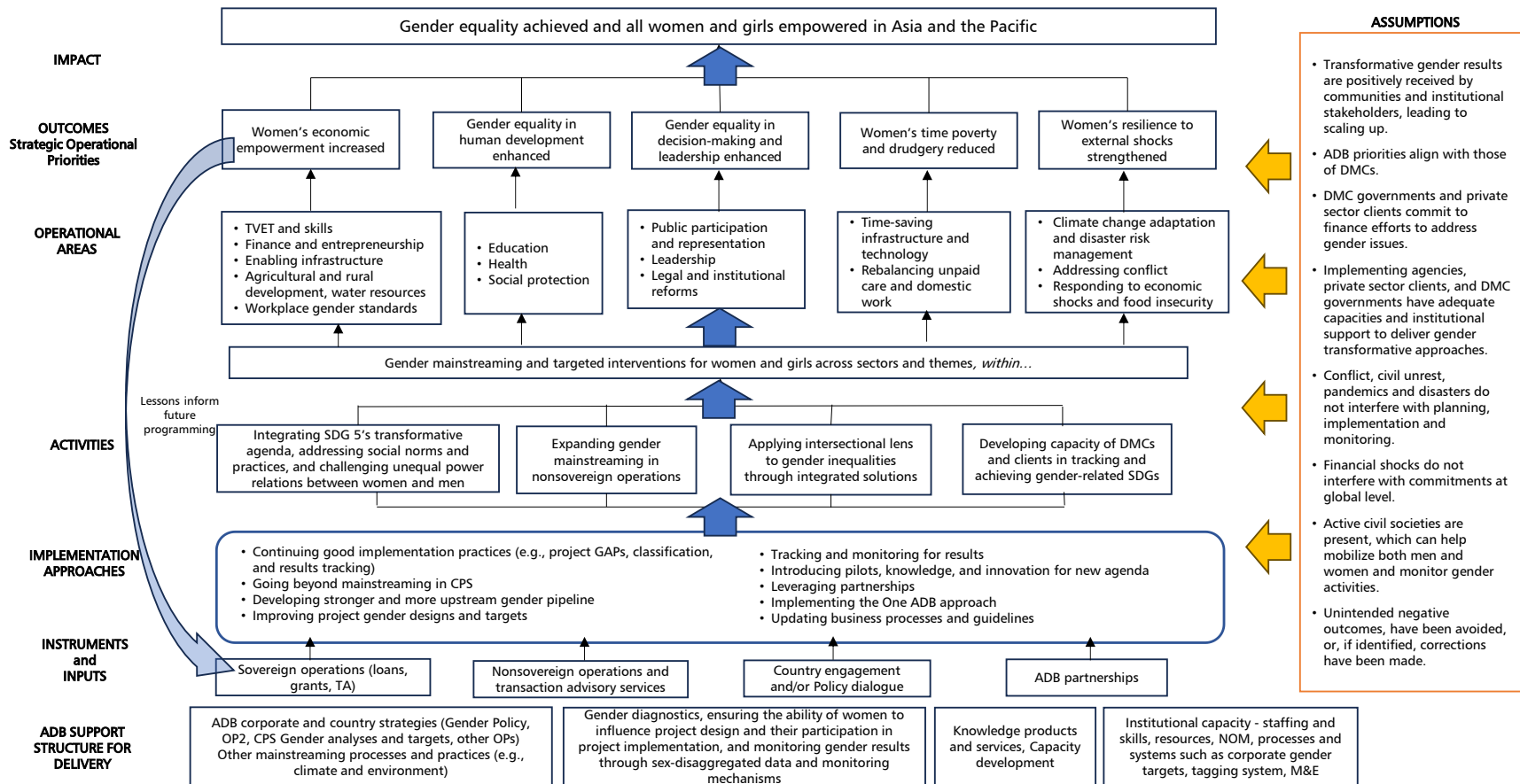
16. While this high-level theory of change was useful for mapping the five pillars of ADB's support,¹⁰ and for constructing a typology of the ADB activities that potentially contribute to these pillars, the theory of change does not identify causal pathways or change mechanisms for the achievement of these outcomes or impacts, nor does it outline in practical terms what is needed for transformative change to take place (i.e., in line with OP2's ambitious transformative gender agenda). Each pillar is presented as distinct, whereas, in reality, different operational areas contribute to multiple outcome areas, with cross-sectoral contributions required for any single outcome to be achieved. Nor is the hierarchy or interplay between pillars evident, such as the links between reducing women's time poverty and increasing women's economic empowerment.

17. The practical application of the theory of change during the evaluation also showed that aspects of complexity related to the implementation of the OP2 transformative gender agenda, including the necessary scale and depth of interventions, were not adequately reflected. Similarly, the theory of change does not adequately map how dimensions of transformative change (e.g., agency, power relations, social institutions) can be addressed at different spheres of influence, or societal levels, across socioecological frameworks, with targeted approaches for the individual, household, community, organization, and larger societal and/or national spheres (outlined in Figure A1.2). Context-specificity and relevance, different blends of instruments, approaches, implementation modalities, and partnerships need to be recognized to address the dimensions of transformative change at each level and to move along the causal pathways toward the achievement of outcomes.

⁹ ADB. 2019. *Strategy 2030 Operational Plan for Priority 2: Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, 2019–2024*; and ADB. 2019. *ADB Corporate Results Framework, 2019–2024*.

¹⁰ These are increased economic empowerment, enhanced gender equality in human development, enhanced decision-making and leadership, reduced time poverty and drudgery, and strengthened resilience to external shocks.

Figure A1.1: Theory of Change for the Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality

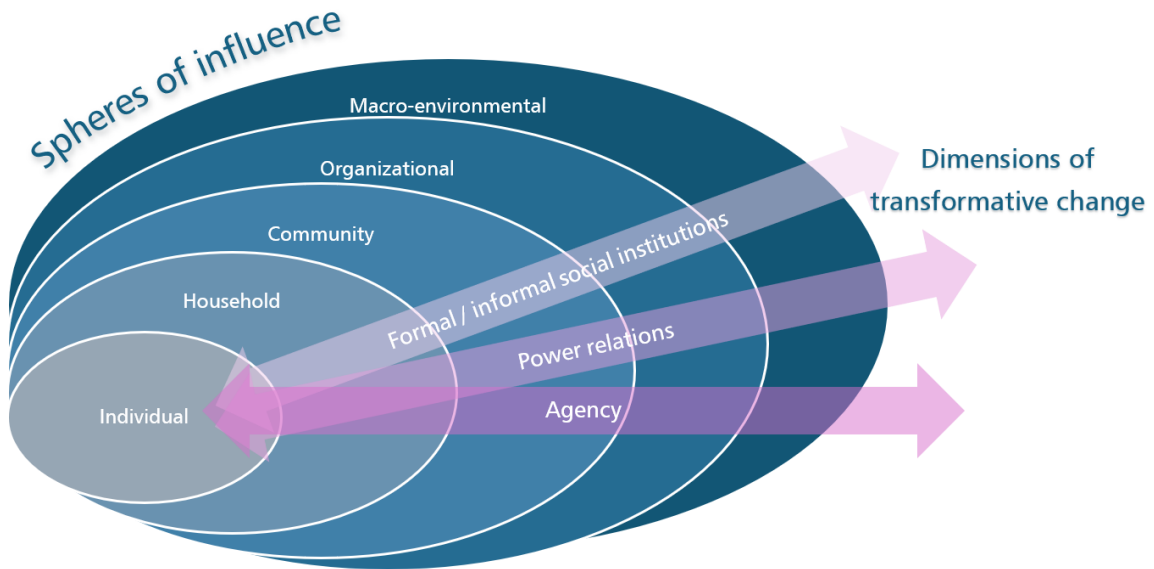


ADB = Asian Development Bank, CPS = country partnership strategy, DMC = developing member country, GAP = gender action plan, M&E = monitoring and evaluation, NOM = new operating model, OP = operational priority, SDG = sustainable development goal, TA = technical assistance, TVET = technical and vocational education and training.

Note: OP2 = Operational Priority 2: Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Figure A1.2: Mapping Dimensions of Transformative Change Against the Socioecological Framework



Source: Independent Evaluation Department adapted from Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Food Programme (WFP), Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Gender Platform 2023. *Guidelines for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture.*

APPENDIX 2: PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS

A. Gender Mainstreaming Portfolio, 2016–2023

1. Sovereign Operations

Table A2.1: Number of Committed Sovereign Projects by Gender Category, 2016–2023

Commitment Year	GEN		EGM		SGE		NGE		GEN+EGM		Total No.
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	
2016	7	7	28	29	31	32	32	33	35	36	98
2017	4	4	49	47	26	25	26	25	53	50	105
2018	12	10	68	55	20	16	23	19	80	65	123
2019	10	10	64	61	26	25	5	5	74	70	105
2016–2019	33	8	209	48	103	24	86	20	242	56	431
2020	10	8	98	74	23	17	2	2	108	81	133
2021	9	9	71	74	16	17	0	0	80	83	96
2022	13	14	70	75	9	10	1	1	83	89	93
2023	15	15	76	78	5	5	1	1	91	94	97
2020–2023	47	11	315	75	53	13	4	1	362	86	419
2016–2023	80	9	524	62	156	18	90	11	604	71	850

EGM= effective gender mainstreaming, GEN = gender equity theme, NGE = no gender elements, SGE = some gender elements.

Note: Sovereign projects include loan and grant operations committed in 2016–2023 with ADB funding i.e., Asian Development Fund (ADF), concessional ordinary capital resources lending (COL), ordinary capital resources (OCR).

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

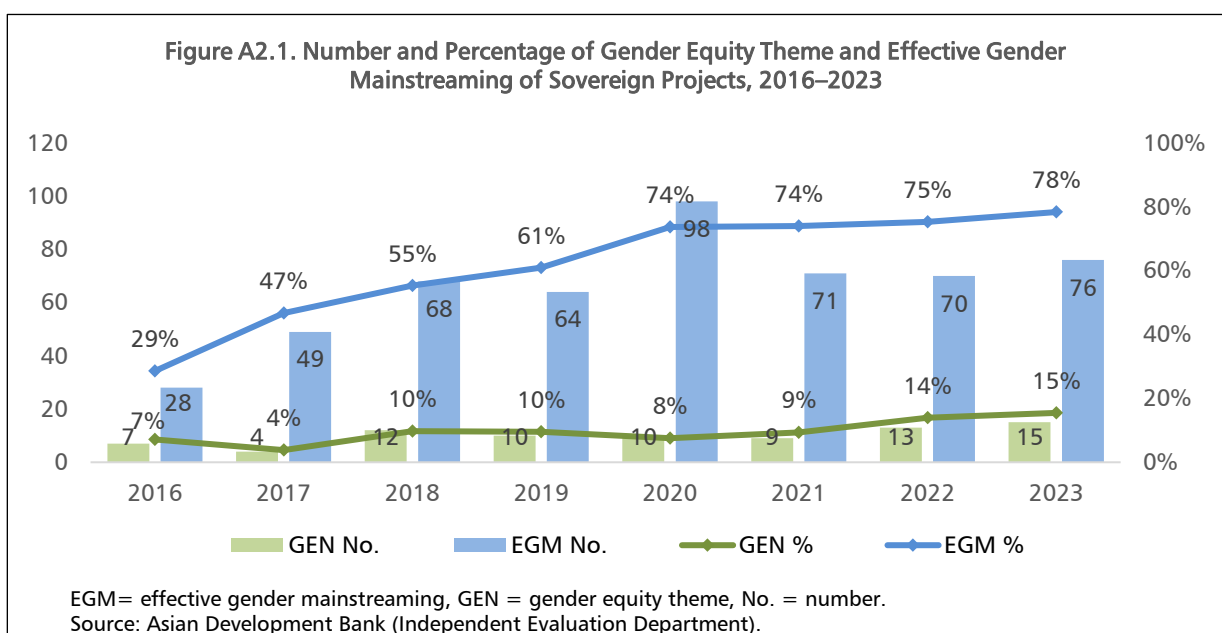


Table A2.2: Number of Committed Sovereign Projects by Sector and Gender Category, 2016–2023

Sector	GEN		EGM		SGE		NGE		Total	GEN and EGM	
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	No.	% of Total
Infrastructure	14	3	330	67	93	19	59	12	496	344	69
ANR	6	6	87	84	9	9	1	1	103	93	90
ENE	0	0	56	48	33	28	27	23	116	56	48
ICT	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	100	3	0	0
TRA	0	0	98	58	45	27	25	15	168	98	58
WUS	8	8	89	84	6	6	3	3	106	97	92
Non-infrastructure	66	19	194	55	63	18	31	9	354	260	73
EDU	36	64	18	32	2	4	0	0	56	54	96
FIN	8	12	29	45	18	28	10	15	65	37	57
HLT	13	20	50	76	3	5	0	0	66	63	95
IND	0	0	13	50	10	38	3	12	26	13	50
PSM	9	6	84	60	30	21	18	13	141	93	66
All sectors	80	9	524	62	156	18	90	11	850	604	71

ANR = agriculture, natural resources and rural development, EDU = education, ENE= energy, GEN = gender equity theme, EGM= effective gender mainstreaming, FIN = finance, HLT = health, ICT = information and communication technology, IND = industry and trade, NGE = no gender elements, No. = number, PSM = public sector management, SGE = some gender elements, TRA = transport, WUS = water and other urban infrastructure and services

Note: Includes primary sector classification of sovereign projects committed in 2016–2023 with ADB funding i.e., Asian Development Fund (ADF), concessional ordinary capital resources lending (COL), ordinary capital resources (OCR).

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.3: Number of Sovereign Projects by Country Classification and Gender Category, 2016–2023

Country Classification	GEN	EGM	SGE	NGE	GEN and EGM	Total	% GEN and EGM
Group A	30	154	46	21	184	251	73
Group B	30	223	71	36	253	360	70
Group C	17	139	38	31	156	225	69
Regional	3	8	1	2	11	14	79
Total	80	524	156	90	604	850	71

EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, GEN = gender equity theme, NGE = no gender elements, SGE = some gender elements.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.4: Percentage of Sovereign Projects in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations and Small Island Developing States by Gender Category, 2016–2023

Gender Category	FCAS		SIDS	
	Number	%	Number	%
GEN	12	9	12	9
EGM	82	60	82	60
SGE	26	19	27	20
NGE	16	12	15	11
Total	136	100	136	100

EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, FCAS = fragile and conflict-affected situations, GEN = gender equity theme, NGE = no gender elements, SIDS = small island developing states, SGE = some gender elements.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.5: Number of Sovereign Projects by Gender Category and Modality, 2016–2023

Modality	GEN	EGM	SGE	NGE	Total	% GEN and EGM
Policy-based lending	8	116	46	29	199	62
Sector development program	7	10	4		21	81
Investment project	57	382	101	61	601	73
Results-based lending	7	16	5	1	29	79
Total	79	524	156	91	850	71

EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, GEN = gender equity theme, NGE = no gender elements, SGE = some gender elements.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.6: Number of Policy-Based Lending Operations by Gender Category, 2016–2023

Sector	GEN	EGM	SGE	NGE	Total
Infrastructure		12	10	3	25
ANR		2	1		3
ENE		6	5	3	14
TRA		1	3		4
WUS		3	1		4
Non-infrastructure	8	104	36	26	174
EDU		1			1
FIN	3	12	12	8	35
HLT	2	8			10
IND		7	3	2	12
PSM	3	76	21	16	116
Total	8	116	46	29	199

ANR = agriculture, natural resources and rural development, EDU = education, ENE= energy, EGM= effective gender mainstreaming, FIN = finance, GEN = gender equity theme, HLT = health, ICT = information and communication technology, IND = industry and trade, NGE = no gender elements, PSM = public sector management, SGE = some gender elements, TRA = transport, WUS= water and other urban infrastructure and services.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.7: Number of Sovereign Technical Assistance Projects by Gender Category, 2016–2023

Commitment Year	GEN	EGM	SGE	NGE	GEN and EGM	Total	% GEN and EGM
2016	18	76	70	137	94	301	31
2017	20	68	83	122	88	293	30
2018	18	77	116	116	95	327	29
2019	23	66	121	102	89	312	29
2016–2019	79	287	390	477	366	1,233	30
2020	21	91	149	82	112	343	33
2021	21	95	133	53	116	302	38
2022	22	98	146	54	120	320	38
2023	23	105	133	56	128	317	40
2020–2023	87	389	561	245	476	1,282	37
2016–2023	166	676	951	722	842	2,515	33

EGM=effective gender mainstreaming, GEN=gender equity theme, NGE= no gender elements, SGE=some gender elements.

Note: Includes sovereign technical assistance projects committed in 2016–2023.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.8: Number and Share of Sovereign Technical Assistance Projects by Sector and Gender Category, 2016–2023

Sector	GEN		EGM		SGE		NGE		GEN and EGM		Total No.
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
ANR	13	4	128	41	111	35	64	20	13	4	316
EDU	49	30	82	51	22	14	8	5	49	30	161
ENE	5	2	58	18	140	42	127	38	5	2	330
FIN	14	5	58	22	87	34	100	39	14	5	259
HLT	21	18	48	42	37	32	9	8	21	18	115
ICT	1	4	1	4	8	31	16	62	1	4	26
IND	1	1	13	10	63	50	48	38	1	1	125
MUL	11	14	10	13	29	38	27	35	11	14	77
PSM	44	8	76	13	234	41	216	38	44	8	570
TRA	3	1	68	24	137	48	80	28	3	1	288
WUS	4	2	134	54	83	33	27	11	4	2	248
All sectors	166	7	676	27	951	38	722	29	166	7	2,515

ANR = agriculture, natural resources and rural development, EDU = education, ENE= energy, GEN = gender equity theme, EGM= effective gender mainstreaming, FIN = finance, HLT = health, ICT = information and communication technology, IND = industry and trade, MUL = multisector, NGE = no gender elements, PSM = public sector management, SGE = some gender elements, TRA = transport, WUS= water and other urban infrastructure and services

Note: Includes primary sector classification of sovereign technical assistance projects committed in 2016–2023.

2. Nonsovereign Operations

Table A2.9: Nonsovereign Operations by Gender Category, 2016–2023

Commitment Year	GEN		EGM		SGE		NGE		GEN and EGM		Total No.
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	
2016	1	6%	1	6%	4	25%	10	63%	2	13%	16
2017	4	14%	3	11%	4	14%	17	61%	7	25%	28
2018	3	9%	5	16%	14	44%	10	31%	8	25%	32
2019	6	16%	8	21%	17	45%	7	18%	14	37%	38
2016–2019	14	12%	17	15%	39	34%	44	39%	31	27%	114
2020	2	5%	16	42%	18	47%	2	5%	18	47%	38
2021	4	11%	24	69%	7	20%	0	0%	28	80%	35
2022	4	11%	25	69%	7	19%	0	0%	29	81%	36
2023	6	15%	34	85%	0	0%	0	0%	40	100%	40
2020–2023	16	11%	99	66%	32	21%	2	1%	115	77%	149
2016–2023	30	11%	116	44%	71	27%	46	17%	146	56%	263

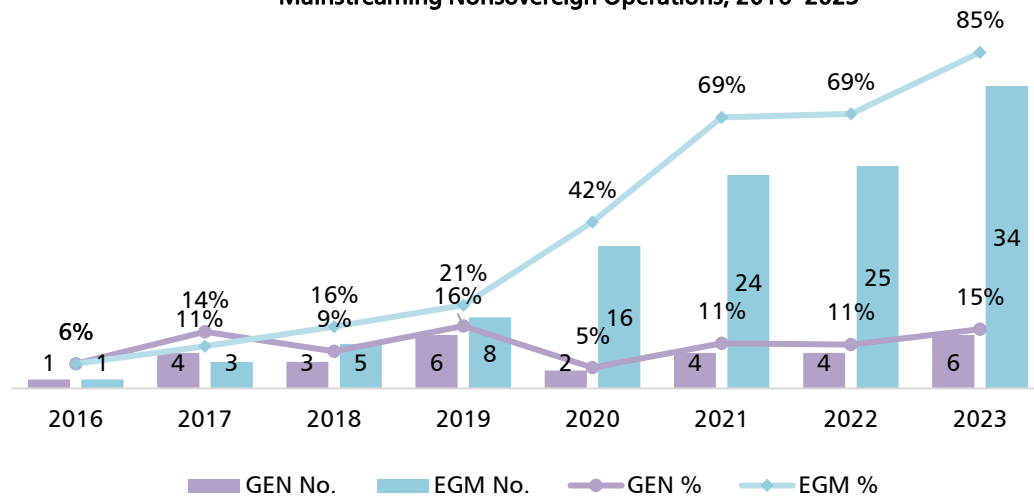
EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, GEN = gender equity theme, NGE = no gender elements, SGE = some gender elements.

Note: Includes nonsovereign investment projects committed in 2016–2023 with gender tagging.

Private sector programs (Microfinance Program, Trade Finance Program and Supply Chain Finance Program) were excluded from the table as were revolving funds issued to banks of developing member countries.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Figure A2.2: Number and Percentage of Gender Equity Theme and Effective Gender Mainstreaming Nonsovereign Operations, 2016–2023



EGM=effective gender mainstreaming, GEN=gender equity theme, No. = number, NGE= no gender elements, SGE=some gender elements.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.10: Nonsovereign Operations by Gender Category and Sector, 2016–2023

Sector	GEN		EGM		SGE		NGE		GEN+EGM		Total No.
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	
ANR	1	3	28	80	5	14	1	3	29	83	35
EDU	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	1	100	1
ENE	1	1	28	34	28	34	25	30	29	35	82
FIN	24	25	39	40	23	24	11	11	63	65	97
HLT	2	14	4	29	8	57	0	0	6	43	14
IND	0	0	2	100	0	0	0	0	2	100	2
ICT	1	14	3	43	1	14	2	29	4	57	7
TRA	1	8	6	46	4	31	2	15	7	54	13
WUS	0	0	5	42	2	17	5	42	5	42	12
Total	30	11	116	44	71	27	46	17	146	56	263

ANR = agriculture, natural resources, and rural development, EDU = education, ENE = energy, GEN = gender equity theme, EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, FIN = finance, HLT = health, ICT = information and communication technology, IND = industry and trade, NGE = no gender elements, SGE = some gender elements, TRA = transport, WUS = water and other urban infrastructure and services.

Note: Includes primary sector classification of nonsovereign investment projects committed in 2016–2023 with gender tagging. Private sector programs (Microfinance Program, Trade Finance Program and Supply Chain Finance Program) were excluded from the table as were revolving funds issued to banks of developing member countries.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.11: Number of Nonsovereign Technical Assistance Projects, by Gender Category, 2016–2023

Commitment Year	GEN	EGM	SGE	NGE	Total	GEN and EGM	
						No.	% of Total
2016	0	2	2	6	10	2	20
2017	0	1	1	4	6	1	17
2018	0	3	3	3	9	3	33
2019	2	5	4	4	15	7	47
2016–2019	2	11	10	17	40	13	33
2020	4	5	4	0	13	9	69
2021	5	14	3	4	26	19	73
2022	2	8	1	0	11	10	91
2023	2	11	1	4	18	13	72
2020–2023	13	38	9	8	68	51	75
2016–2023	15	49	19	25	108	64	59

EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, GEN = gender equity theme, NGE = no gender elements, SGE = some gender elements.

Note: Includes nonsovereign technical assistance projects committed in 2016–2023.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.12: Number of Nonsovereign Technical Assistance Projects by Sector and Gender Category, 2016–2023

Country	GEN	EGM	SGE	NGE	Total	GEN and EGM	
						No.	% of Total
ANR	0	22	0	4	26	22	34
ENE	1	2	2	10	15	3	5
FIN	14	14	7	6	41	28	44
HLT	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
ICT	0	5	0	0	5	5	8
IND	0	3	9	3	15	3	5
TRA	0	2	0	2	4	2	3
WUS	0	1	0	0	1	1	2
All sectors	15	49	19	25	108	64	100

ANR = agriculture, natural resources, and rural development, EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, ENE = energy, FIN = finance, GEN = gender equity theme, HLT = health, ICT = information and communication technology, IND = industry and trade, NGE = no gender elements, SGE = some gender elements, TRA = transport, WUS = water and other urban infrastructure and services.

Note: Includes primary sector classification of nonsovereign technical assistance projects committed in 2016–2023.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

B. ADB Sovereign Operations by Strategy 2030 Operational Priorities

1. Operational priority 2 (OP2): accelerating progress in gender equality; was the second most frequently tagged Strategy 2030 operational priority during 2016–2023, second only to OP6 (strengthening governance and institutional capacity).

Table A2.13: Tagging of Operational Priorities in Sovereign Projects Committed in 2016–2023

	OP1	OP2	OP3	OP4	OP5	OP6	OP7
Commitment Year	Poverty	Gender	Climate	Livable Cities	Rural Development	Governance	RCI
2016	55	66	56	25	25	88	28
2017	78	79	76	29	32	96	35
2018	97	100	94	38	41	113	32
2019	92	100	79	39	24	103	28
2020	130	131	90	35	32	133	52
2021	90	96	75	28	24	81	40
2022	83	93	88	33	36	86	28
2023	85	94	96	23	40	91	23
Total	710	759	654	250	254	791	266
% of total projects	79	85	73	28	28	88	30
Rank	3	2	4	6	5	1	5

OP = operational priority, RCI = regional cooperation and integration.

Note: (1) Includes all sovereign projects committed in 2016–2023 with ADB funding (Asian Development Fund [ADF], concessional ordinary capital resources lending [COL], ordinary capital resources [OCR]) and with or without “gender” category tagging (project design advance, project readiness financing, activity subgrant); (2) the total number of projects committed in 2016–2023 was 896; (3) a project may have multiple OP tagging hence the number of tagged OPs exceeds the total number of projects.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships Department) approvals and commitments database.

2. By sector, 100% of education and health projects and 93% of agriculture, natural resources and rural development (ANR) projects were tagged OP2. For transport, the percentage was 77%, while for energy it was 75%.

Table A2.14: Tagging of Operational Priorities in Sovereign Projects Committed in 2016–2023, By Sector

	OP1	OP2	OP3	OP4	OP5	OP6	OP7	No. of Projects	% Projects with OP2 tag
Sector	Poverty	Gender	Climate	Livable Cities	Rural Development	Governance	RCI		
ANR	108	104	110	17	112	93	15	112	93
EDU	56	56	29	2	5	50	6	56	100
ENE	65	88	112	34	26	102	22	118	75
FIN	44	55	32		8	59	10	65	85
HLT	66	66	29	9	9	51	34	66	100
ICT			1			3	3	3	0
IND	16	23	17	9	2	23	24	27	85
PSM	103	123	47	10	13	136	41	141	87
TRA	129	141	157	44	66	155	91	182	77
WUS	123	103	120	125	13	119	20	126	82
Total	710	759	654	250	254	791	266		
% of Total Projects	79	85	73	28	28	88	30		
Rank	3	2	4	6	5	1	5		

ANR = agriculture, natural resources and rural development, EDU = education, ENE = energy, FIN = finance, HLT = health, ICT = information and communication technology, IND = industry and trade, OP = operational priority, PSM = public sector management, TRA = transport, WUS = water and other urban infrastructure and services.

Note: (1) Includes all sovereign projects committed in 2016–2023 with ADB funding (Asian Development Fund [ADF], concessional ordinary capital resources lending [COL], ordinary capital resources [OCR]) and with or without Gender category tagging (project design advance, project readiness financing, activity subgrant); (2) the total number of projects committed in 2016–2023 was 896; (3) A project may have multiple OP tagging hence the number of tagged OPs exceeds the total number of projects.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships Department) approvals and commitments database.

C. Correlation of Operational Priority 2 (Gender) with Other Strategy 2030 Operational Priorities

1. Data and Methodology

3. To assess the relationship between operational priorities in ADB sovereign operations, statistical methods were utilized to analyze the association between two binary (dichotomous) variables, each with two categories: yes or no. Categorical data analysis was conducted to determine the independence or association between OP2 (gender) and other OPs in 850 sovereign projects committed during 2016–2023. Both parametric and non-parametric tests were employed to check the robustness of the results.

4. The tetrachoric correlation coefficient,¹ a parametric approach that estimates the correlation between two binary variables, assuming these are underlying continuous and normally distributed latent variables. This test assesses the statistical significance of the association between the variables while also measuring the strength and direction of the association. This correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to 1, with the magnitude indicating the strength of the relationship. A positive value signifies a positive association while a negative value indicates a negative association between the underlying continuous variables.

5. The Pearson Chi-Square Test is a non-parametric test that does not assume any underlying distribution for the two binary variables. This test also assesses whether there is a statistically significant association between the variables but does not measure the strength or direction. To determine the strength and direction, the phi coefficient (Cohen's w) was used. Although it is considered a parametric test, it is derived using the Chi-Square statistic estimated in the Pearson Chi-Square Test.²

6. Table A2.15 compares the test features.

Table A2.15: Comparative Summary of Test Features

Feature	Statistical Methods for Binary Data		
	Tetrachoric Correlation Coefficient	Pearson Chi-Square Test	Phi coefficient (Cohen's w)
Purpose	Assumes an underlying bivariate normal distribution and estimates correlation of underlying continuous variables	Test for significant association	Measure strength and direction of association
Output	Correlation coefficient (-1 to 1)	Chi-Square statistic, degrees of freedom, p-value	Correlation coefficient (-1 to 1)
Interpretation	Positive or negative and strength of underlying association	Statistical significance of association (p-value)	Positive or negative and strength of association
Calculation	More complex, assumes underlying normal distribution	Chi-Square formula with observed and expected frequencies	Simple formula with contingency table counts
Use case	Analysis of binary variables with underlying continuous traits	Hypothesis testing for significant association	Quick estimate of correlation
Strength of relationship	Yes	No	Yes
Direction of relationship	Yes	No	Yes

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

¹ StataCorp. 2021. *Stata Statistical Software: Release 17*. College Station, TX: StataCorp LLC.

² A. Agresti. 2013. *Categorical Data Analysis*. John Wiley. This is a comprehensive resource on categorical data analysis, including the use and interpretation of the Pearson Chi-Square Test and the Phi coefficient.

2. Results and Interpretation

7. The null hypothesis used was that there was no association between OP2 and other operational priorities. Failing to reject the null hypothesis using the 2-sided Fisher exact test and Pearson Chi-Square Test would indicate that the variables are statistically independent. The strength and direction of the relationship was assessed using both the phi and tetrachoric correlation coefficients.

8. The results indicated that, of the operational priorities, OP2 (gender) was significantly associated with OP1 (poverty), OP3 (climate), and OP5 (rural development) at a 1% level of significance. OP2 (gender) exhibits a positive association with all three OPs, with the strongest relationship observed with OP1 (poverty). The robustness of the results is demonstrated by the consistent statistical significance, as well as in the strength and direction of correlation coefficients in both parametric and non-parametric tests.

Table A2.16: Correlation Analysis of Operational Priorities

Operational Priority 2	Operational Priority			Results		
OP2 Gender	OP1 Poverty			Results:		
	No	Yes	Total	Tetrachoric correlation coefficient:	0.738	
	No	69	25	94	2-sided Fisher exact test:	p-value: 0.000
	Yes	113	643	756	Pearson Chi-Square Test:	p-value: 0.000
	Total	182	668	850	Phi coefficient:	0.447
OP2 Gender	OP3 Climate			Results:		
	No	Yes	Total	Tetrachoric correlation coefficient:	0.339	
	No	46	48	94	2-sided Fisher exact test:	p-value: 0.000
	Yes	186	570	756	Pearson Chi-Square Test:	p-value: 0.000
	Total	232	618	850	Phi coefficient:	0.171
OP2 Gender	OP4 Livable Cities			Results:		
	No	Yes	Total	Tetrachoric correlation coefficient:	0.197	
	No	79	15	94	2-sided Fisher exact test:	p-value: 0.018
	Yes	550	206	756	Pearson Chi-Square Test:	p-value: 0.019
	Total	629	221	850	Phi coefficient:	0.081
OP2 Gender	OP5 Rural Development			Results:		
	No	Yes	Total	Tetrachoric correlation coefficient:	0.254	
	No	80	14	94	2-sided Fisher exact test:	p-value: 0.002
	Yes	531	225	756	Pearson Chi-Square Test:	p-value: 0.002
	Total	611	239	850	Phi coefficient:	0.104
OP2 Gender	OP6 Governance			Results:		
	No	Yes	Total	Tetrachoric correlation coefficient:	0.145	
	No	16	78	94	2-sided Fisher exact test:	p-value: 0.089
	Yes	83	673	756	Pearson Chi-Square Test:	p-value: 0.085
	Total	99	751	850	Phi coefficient:	0.059
OP2 Gender	OP7 RCI			Results:		
	No	Yes	Total	Tetrachoric correlation coefficient:	-0.114	
	No	59	35	94	2-sided Fisher exact test:	p-value: 0.123
	Yes	534	222	756	Pearson Chi-Square Test:	p-value: 0.117
	Total	593	257	850	Phi coefficient:	0.054

OP = operational priority, RCI = regional cooperation and integration.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

D. Sovereign Operations by Tagging of OP2 Pillars or Subpillars

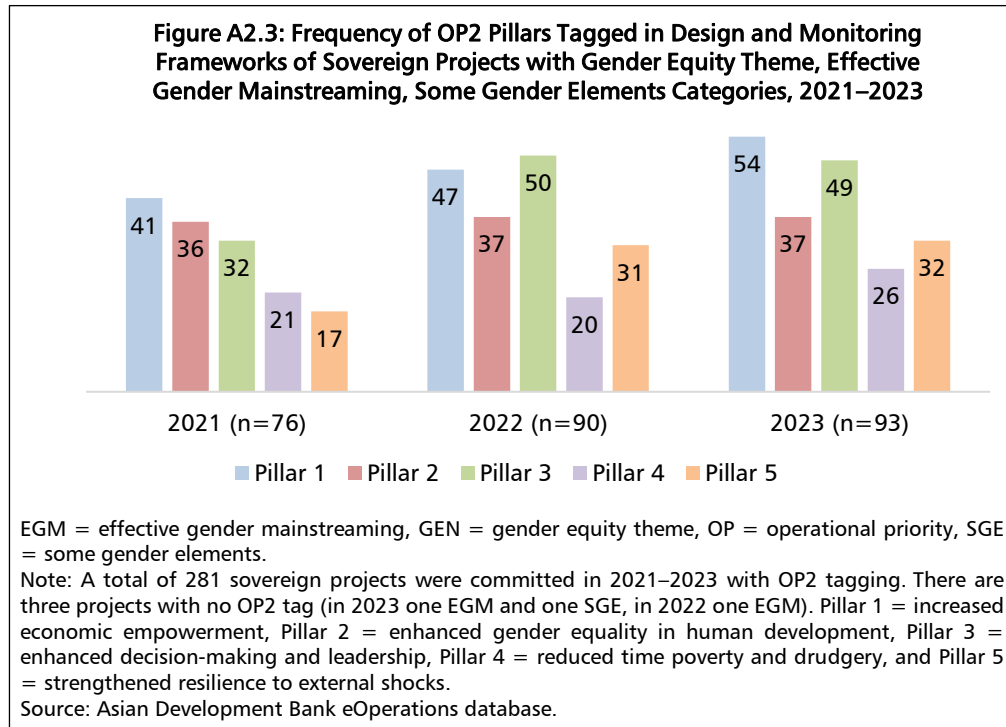


Table A2.17: Sovereign Projects with OP2 Tagging (Gender Equity Theme, Effective Gender Mainstreaming, Some Gender Elements): Frequency of OP2 Sub-Pillar Indicators Identified in Design and Monitoring Framework Outcome or Output Indicators by Sector, 2021–2023

Sector	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	Sub-Pillar	OP2 Sub-Pillars	
	2.1.1	2.1.2	2.1.3	2.1.4	2.2.1	2.2.2	2.2.3	2.3.1	2.3.2	2.4.1	2.4.2	2.5.1	2.5.2	2.5.3	2.5.4	No.	Rank
ANR	6	0	3	9	1	3	1	7	11	4	1	3	6	1	0	56	5
EDU	13	0	1	8	10	1	2	4	6	3	0	0	3	0	0	51	6
ENE	7	0	0	7	2	2	5	2	10	3	1	5	3	0	0	47	7
FIN	1	1	3	0	0	0	0	3	10	0	0	0	1	0	0	19	8
HLT	6	0	0	5	0	22	5	1	11	1	2	4	1	0	0	58	4
IND	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	10	9
PSM	5	0	8	3	1	2	9	4	19	2	1	0	3	0	4	57	3
TRA	10	0	0	12	2	0	15	2	11	28	0	2	12	0	0	94	1
WUS	15	0	1	15	2	2	5	10	14	15	2	3	9	0	0	93	2
Total	65	1	16	60	18	32	43	34	95	58	7	17	38	1	4		
% of Total Projects	25%	0.4%	6%	23%	7%	12%	17%	13%	37%	22%	3%	7%	15%	0.4%	2%		

ANR = agriculture, natural resources, and rural development, DMF = design and monitoring framework, EDU = education, EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, ENE = energy, FIN = finance, GEN = gender equity theme, HLT = health, IND = industry and trade, OP 2 = operational plan for priority 2, PSM = public sector management, SGE = some gender elements, TRA = transport, WUS = water and other urban infrastructure and services.

Note: Sub-Pillar 2.1.1 = Women enrolled in TVET and other job training; Sub-Pillar 2.1.2 = Women opening new accounts; Sub-Pillar 2.1.3 = Women-owned or -led SME loan accounts opened or women-owned or -led small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) end borrowers reached; Sub-Pillar 2.1.4 = Women and girls benefiting from new or improved infrastructure; Sub-Pillar 2.2.1 = Women and girls enrolled in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) or nontraditional technical and vocational education and training (TVET); Sub-Pillar 2.2.2 = Health services for women and girls established or improved; Sub-Pillar 2.2.3 = Solutions to prevent or address gender-based violence implemented; Sub-Pillar 2.3.1 = Women with strengthened leadership capacities; Sub-Pillar 2.3.2 = Measures on gender equality supported in implementation; Sub-Pillar 2.4.1 = Time-saving or gender-responsive infrastructure assets and/or services established or improved; Sub-Pillar 2.4.2 = Child and elderly care services established or improved; Sub-Pillar 2.5.1 = Community-based initiatives to build resilience of women and girls to external shocks implemented; Sub-Pillar 2.5.2 = Climate- and disaster-resilient infrastructure assets and/or services for women and girls established or improved; Sub-Pillar 2.5.3 = Savings and insurance schemes for women implemented or established. Sub-Pillar 2.5.4 = Dedicated crisis-responding social assistance schemes for women and girls implemented or established.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.18: Sovereign Projects with OP2 Tagging (Gender Equity Theme, Effective Gender Mainstreaming, Some Gender Elements): Frequency of OP2 Pillars and Sub-Pillars Identified in Design and Monitoring Framework Outcome or Output Indicators, 2021–2023

OP2 Pillar and/or Sub-pillar	2021 n=76	2022 n=90	2023 n=93	Total n=259	% of Total	Rank
OP2 Pillars						
Pillar 1: Women's economic empowerment increased	41	47	54	142	55	1
Pillar 2: Gender equality in human development enhanced	36	37	37	110	42	3
Pillar 3: Gender equality in decision making and leadership enhanced	32	50	49	131	51	2
Pillar 4: Women's time poverty and drudgery reduced	21	20	26	67	26	5
Pillar 5: Women's resilience to external shocks strengthened	17	31	32	80	31	4
OP2 Pillar Indicators						
2.1 Skilled jobs for women generated	41	47	54	142	55	1
2.2 Women and girls completing secondary and tertiary education, and/or other training	36	37	37	110	42	3
2.3 Women represented in decision-making structures and processes	32	50	49	131	51	2
2.4 Women and girls with increased time savings	21	20	26	67	26	5
2.5 Women and girls with increased resilience to climate change, disasters, and other external shocks	17	31	32	80	31	4
OP2 Subpillar Indicators						
2.1.1 Women enrolled in TVET and other job training	19	22	24	65	25	2
2.1.2 Women opening new accounts	0	1	0	1	0.4	14
2.1.3 Women-owned or -led SME loan accounts opened or women-owned or -led SME end borrowers reached	3	7	6	16	6	11
2.1.4 Women and girls benefiting from new or improved infrastructure	19	20	21	60	23	3
2.2.1 Women and girls enrolled in STEM or nontraditional TVET	4	6	8	18	7	9
2.2.2 Health services for women and girls established or improved	16	8	8	32	12	8
2.2.3 Solutions to prevent or address gender-based violence implemented	12	18	13	43	17	5
2.3.1 Women with strengthened leadership capacities	4	12	18	34	13	7
2.3.2 Measures on gender equality supported in implementation	29	34	32	95	37	1
2.4.1 Time-saving or gender-responsive infrastructure assets and/or services established or improved	19	18	21	58	22	4
2.4.2 Child and elderly care services established or improved	1	4	2	7	3	12
2.5.1 Community-based initiatives to build resilience of women and girls to external shocks implemented	6	4	7	17	7	10
2.5.2 Climate- and disaster-resilient infrastructure assets and/or services for women and girls established or improved	10	13	15	38	15	6
2.5.3 Savings and insurance schemes for women implemented or established	0	0	1	1	0.4	14
2.5.4 Dedicated crisis-responding social assistance schemes for women and girls implemented or established	0	4	0	4	2	13

DMF = design and monitoring framework, EGM= effective gender mainstreaming, GEN = gender equity theme, n = number of projects, OP2 = operational priority 2, SGE = some gender elements, SME = small and medium-sized enterprises, STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, TVET = technical and vocational education and training.

Source: Asian Development Bank eOperations database.

E. Sovereign Projects with ADF 13 SDG 5 Transformative Gender Agenda Thematic Pool Funding

Table A2.19: Sovereign Projects with ADF 13 Sustainable Development Goal 5 Transformative Gender Agenda Thematic Pool Funding, 2021–2023 (\$ million)

Approval Number	Signing Date	Country	DMC Group	Project Name	Amount-SDG 5	Primary Sector	Gender Category
0805 | 4124 | 4126 | 8405	01-Mar-22	Bangladesh	B	Dhaka Environmentally Sustainable Water Supply Project (Additional Financing)	5.00	WUS	EGM
0841	18-Oct-22	Tajikistan	A	Dushanbe Water Supply and Sanitation Project (Additional Financing)	3.00	WUS	GEN
0816 | 4160 | 8412	15-Dec-21	Pakistan	B	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project	5.00	WUS	GEN
0869 | 4270 | 8431 | 8432	22-Dec-22	Cambodia	A	Sustainable Coastal and Marine Fisheries Project	2.00	ANR	EGM
0856 | 4233	22-Dec-22	Cambodia	A	Greater Mekong Subregion Border Areas Health Project	1.35	HLT	EGM
0796 | 0797 | 9220	06-Aug-21	Palau	B	COVID-19 Response for Affected Poor and Vulnerable Groups Project	0.77	PSM	GEN
0825 | 0826 | 9227	10-Aug-22	Vanuatu	A	COVID-19 Response for Affected Poor and Vulnerable Groups Project	3.50	PSM	GEN
0812 | 4150 | 6858	23-Dec-21	Bhutan	A	Green and Resilient Affordable Housing Sector Project	4.00	WUS	EGM
0867 | 10006	21-Dec-22	Maldives	A	Strengthening Gender Inclusive Initiatives Project	5.00	WUS	GEN
0864 | 6998	27-Dec-22	Nepal	A	Strengthening Systems to Protect and Uplift Women Project	12.00	PSM	GEN
4344 | 0900 | 0901 | 0902 | 0903 | 0904 | 8454	13-Dec-23	Maldives	A	Accelerating Sustainable System Development Using Renewable Energy Project	5.00	ENE	EGM
0926	22-Dec-23	Tajikistan	A	Improving the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Secondary Education Project	8.00	EDU	GEN
0917	14-Dec-23	Kiribati	A	Climate-Resilient Health Infrastructure and Systems Project	2.00	HLT	GEN
0915 | 0916 | 9237	15-Dec-23	Tonga	A	Integrated Aged Care Project	5.50	PSM	GEN
0919 | 4403 | 0920	14-Dec-23	Solomon Islands	A	Senior Secondary Education Improvement Project	15.00	EDU	GEN
0933 | 4427 | 4428	15-Dec-23	Pakistan	B	Women Inclusive Finance Sector Development Program (Subprogram 1)	5.50	FIN	GEN

ADF = Asian Development Fund, ANR = agriculture, natural resources, and rural development, ADF = Asian Development Fund, DMC = developing member country, EDU = education, EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, ENE = energy, FIN = finance, GEN = gender equity theme, HLT = health, PSM = public sector management, WUS = water and other urban infrastructure and services.

Note: SDG 5 = Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower Women and Girls.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships Department).

F. Gender Success Rating of Completed Projects by Reporting Year³

1. Sovereign Projects

9. ADB's self-assessed gender success rate for gender-mainstreamed projects with project completion reports (PCRs) circulated in 2016–2023 was 82%, a significant improvement over the 65% success rate during 2005–2015 (Figure A2.4).⁴

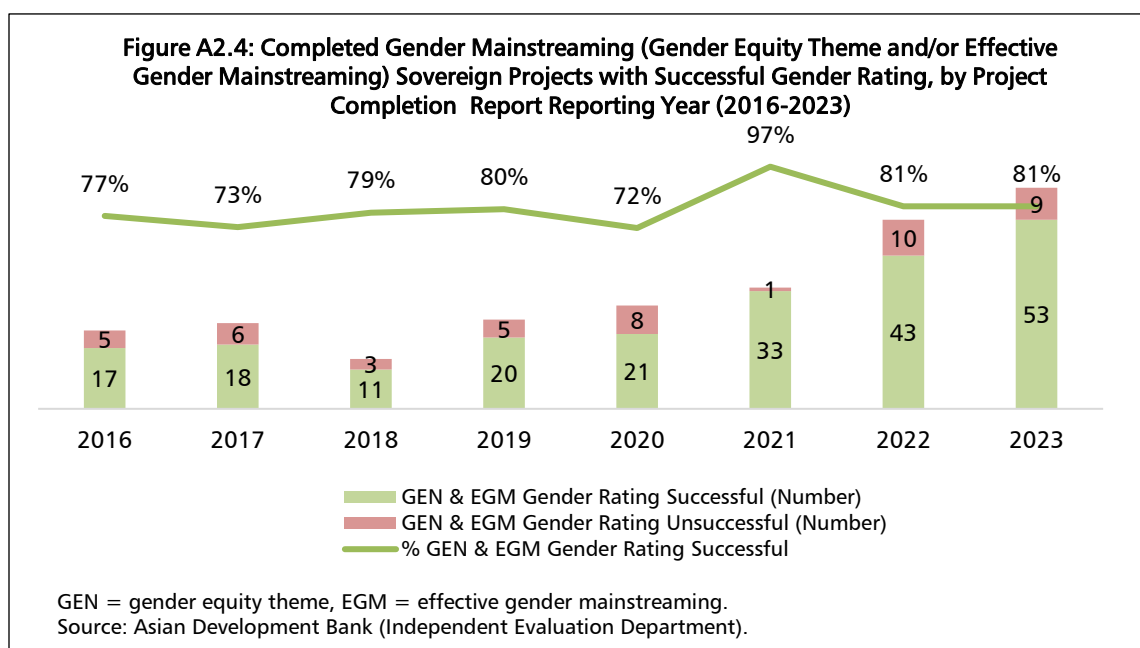


Table A2.20: Gender Success Ratings of Completed Sovereign Projects by Sector, (number and %, 2016–2023)

Sector	Successful		Not Successful		Total No.
	Number	%	Number	%	
ANR	45	92	4	8	49
EDU	24	77	7	23	31
ENE	11	79	3	21	14
FIN	14	82	3	18	17
HLT	13	87	2	13	15
IND	3	100	0	0	3
PSM	31	76	10	24	41
TRA	39	83	8	17	47
WUS	36	78	10	22	46
All sectors	216	82	47	18	263

ANR = agriculture, natural resources, and rural development, EDU = education, ENE = energy, FIN = finance, HLT = health, IND = industry and trade, PSM = public sector management, TRA = transport, WUS = water and other urban infrastructure and services.
Notes: (i) Includes primary sector classification of sovereign projects with project completion reports circulated from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2022 (reporting year 2016–2023).

(ii) Covers ADB funded projects only (Asian Development Fund [ADF], concessional ordinary capital resources lending [COL], ordinary capital resources [OCR]).

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

³ Reporting year for success ratings is based on the date that the project or program completion report was circulated. For a given year, reporting year covers completion reports circulated from 1 July to December 31 of the previous year and from 1 January to 30 June of the following year.

⁴ IED. 2017. *Thematic Evaluation: Asian Development Bank Support for Gender and Development (2005–2015)*.

10. The gender success rates varied across different sectors. The agriculture, natural resources, and rural development (ANR) sector had the highest gender success rate (92%), with the health (87%), transport (83%) and finance (82%) sectors also exceeding 80%. IND had a 100% rating but only for three projects.

11. In the ANR sector, GEN projects had an 89% gender success rate while EGM projects had a 92% gender success rating; education projects had higher success rates for EGM (83%) than GEN (74%) projects. Energy projects had a 79% gender success rate for EGM projects; there were no GEN energy projects. In the finance sector, all three GEN projects were *successful*, while 11 out of 14 EGM projects were self-assessed *successful*. While the success of gender-mainstreamed projects varied across sectors due to such factors as the sector's specific challenges, opportunities for gender mainstreaming, and the strategies employed, the high success rates of EGM projects overall indicate that the quantitative targets are being reached to some extent but it is not clear whether qualitative outcomes and long-term impacts, essential for mainstreaming gender in these sectors, are being achieved (Table A2.21)

Table A2.21: Gender Success Ratings of Sovereign Projects by Sector and Gender Category, 2016–2023

Sector	Successful				Not Successful			
	GEN (No.)	GEN (%)	EGM (No.)	EGM (%)	GEN (No.)	GEN (%)	EGM (No.)	EGM (%)
Agriculture, natural resources and rural development	8	89	37	93	1	11	3	8
Education	14	74	10	83	5	26	2	17
Energy	0	0	11	79	0	0	3	21
Finance	3	100	11	79	0	0	3	21
Health	7	88	6	86	1	13	1	14
Industry and trade	0	0	3	100	0	0	0	0
Public sector management	2	100	29	74	0	0	10	26
Transport	2	67	37	84	1	33	7	16
Water and other urban infrastructure and services	6	75	30	79	2	25	8	21
All sectors	42	81	174	82	10	19	37	18%

EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, GEN = gender equity theme.
Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

12. By gender category, GEN sovereign projects had a success rate of 81%, with 42 out of 52 projects rated *successful*. EGM projects had a slightly higher success rate of 82%, with 174 out of 211 projects rated *successful*. This is an improvement over the previous IED gender evaluation period of 2005–2015, during which the self-assessed gender success rate for gender-mainstreamed projects was 65% overall, and 68% and 63% respectively for GEN and EGM projects (footnote 4). GEN and EGM projects now have similar success rates.

Table A2.22: Completed Sovereign Projects with Successful Gender Rating by Gender Category, 2016–2023

Category	Total Number of Projects	Rated Successful	
		Number	Percent
GEN	52	42	81%
EGM	211	174	82%
Total	263	216	82%

EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, GEN = gender equity theme.
Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

2. Nonsovereign Projects

13. ADB's self-assessed gender success rate for gender-mainstreamed nonsovereign projects was 71%. Finance projects had a success rate of 73% for projects categorized as GEN and EGM. Energy had

100% gender success rate and agriculture 67%. Finance had straightforward pathways for gender integration, particularly for financial inclusion initiatives, compared with infrastructure sectors.

Table A2.23: Gender Success Ratings of Completed Nonsovereign Operations by Sector, 2016–2023

Sector	Successful	Not Successful	Total	% Successful
Agriculture, natural resources and rural development	2	1	3	67
Education	0	1	1	0
Energy	3	0	3	100
Finance	11	4	15	73
Information and communication technology	1	1	2	50
Total	17	7	24	71

Note: Includes gender mainstreamed (gender equity theme or effective gender mainstreaming) nonsovereign investment projects with extended annual review report (XARRs) circulated in 2016–2023.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

3. Gender Success Ratings of Completed Projects Committed During 2016–2023

14. Of the 604 gender-mainstreamed sovereign projects committed during 2016–2023, only 40 GEN or EGM projects have been completed and assessed for gender performance at-exit, and 33 of these (83%) were rated *successful* for gender results. Most of these (32 of 40) were policy-based loans, of which 27 (82%) were assessed *successful*. Most of these policy-based lending (PBL) operations were provided as coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic response option programs (Tables A2.25 and 2.26).

Table A2.24: Gender Success Rating of Completed Sovereign Projects Committed During, 2016–2023

Commitment Year	Not Successful	Successful	Grand Total	% Successful
2016	0	5	5	100
2017	0	2	2	100
2018	1	5	6	83
2019	0	1	1	100
2020	6	20	26	77
Grand Total	7	33	40	83

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.25: Gender Success Rating of Completed Sovereign Operations Committed During 2016–2023

Sector	Not Successful	Successful	Total	% Successful
ANR	0	1	1	100
ENE	0	2	2	100
FIN	0	1	1	100
HLT	1	2	3	67
PSM	6	24	30	80
TRA	0	3	3	100
Total	7	33	40	83

ANR = agriculture, natural resources, and rural development, ENE = energy, FIN = finance, HLT = health, PSM = public sector management, TRA = transport.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

Table A2.26: Gender Success Rating of Completed Sovereign Operations Committed During 2016–2023

Modality	Not Successful	Successful	Total	% Successful
Policy-based lending	6	27	33	82
Project	1	6	7	86
Total	7	33	40	83

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

G. Progress on S2030 Operational Priority 2 Targets, 2019–2023

Table A2.27: Strategy 2030 Operational Priority 2 Targets, 2019–2023 (ADB Overall)

Indicator	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved
2.1 (RFI) Skilled jobs for women generated (number)	57,404	58,798	296,023	317,077	651,502	655,851	363,748	404,021	20,409	43,001
2.2 (RFI) Women and girls completing secondary and tertiary education, and/or other training (number)	174,021	178,972	65,123	66,586	644,286	9,326,020	91,540	115,110	133,026	177,968
2.3 (RFI) Women represented in decision-making structures and processes (number)	12,311	13,638	97,001	114,691	15,157	15,985	58,228	64,537	3,631	4,477
2.4 (RFI) Women and girls with increased time savings (number)	2,087,626	2,083,713	996,796	996,796	5,588,709	7,184,290	208,451	208,451	2,011,954	2,017,954
2.5 (RFI) Women and girls with increased resilience to climate change, disasters, and other external shocks (number)	2,224,434	1,587,882	865	865			3,650,116	3,495,085	13,099,340	13,386,716
2.1.1 (TI) Women enrolled in TVET and other job training (number)	48,577	67,198	34,527	30,118	332,664	381,284	154,870	197,841	893,103	930,277
2.1.2 (TI) Women opening new accounts (number)	406,188	1,772,418	24,696	10,315	398,892	9,433,365	20,090,200	104,348	4,375,023	2,899,696
2.1.3 (TI) Women-owned or -led SME loan accounts opened or women-owned or -led SME end borrowers reached (number)	275,439	459,190	5,989	5,509	128,724	151,246	53,814	120,608	489,898	1,583,448
2.1.4 (TI) Women and girls benefiting from new or improved infrastructure (number)	1,092,843	962,913	24,187,617	24,187,113	7,055,269	8,490,286	4,157,718	1,702,867	458,903	458,903
2.2.1 (TI) Women and girls enrolled in STEM or nontraditional TVET (number)	662	216							71,826	73,274
2.2.2 (TI) Health services for women and girls established or improved (number)	2	2	1	1	1	1	9	9	6	6

Indicator	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved
2.2.3 (TI) Solutions to prevent or address gender-based violence implemented (number)	3	1	3	3			13	13	24	22
2.3.1 (TI) Women with strengthened leadership capacities (number)	2,625	2,755	361	361	2,279	3,416	2,861	3,283		
2.3.2 (TI) Measures on gender equality supported in implementation (number)	18	15	19	26	8	7	13	11	28	27
2.4.1 (TI) Time-saving or gender-responsive infrastructure assets and/or services established or improved (number)	31	32	42,242	31,565	68	65	400	402	306	278
2.4.2 (TI) Child and elderly care services established or improved (number)							2	2	2	2
2.5.1 (TI) Community-based initiatives to build resilience of women and girls to external shocks implemented (number)							7	7	6	6
2.5.2 (TI) Climate- and disaster-resilient infrastructure assets and/or services for women and girls established or improved (number)							154	154	9	9
2.5.3 (TI) Savings and insurance schemes for women implemented or established (number)			1	1			2	2	2	2
2.5.4 (TI) Dedicated crisis-responding social assistance schemes for women and girls implemented or established (number)	1	1	4	4	2	2	30	28	6	8

RFI = results framework indicator, SME = small and medium-sized enterprise, STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, TI = tracking indicator, TVET = technical and vocational education and training.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships Department).

Table A2.28: Progress on Strategy 2030 Operational Priority 2 Targets, 2019–2023 (Asian Development Fund and/or Concessional Ordinary Capital Resources Lending)

Indicator	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved
2.1 (RFI) Skilled jobs for women generated (number)	54,837	56,471	116,728	114,761	70,470	70,316	1,006	3,788	10,543	10,795
2.2 (RFI) Women and girls completing secondary and tertiary education, and/or other training (number)	4,177	9,128	65,123	66,586	112,286	164,822	133	133	23,085	33,124
2.3 (RFI) Women represented in decision-making structures and processes (number)	12,311	13,638	1,081	851	10,542	11,370	387	434	1,352	1,335
2.4 (RFI) Women and girls with increased time savings (number)	1,758,474	1,742,926	90,000	90,000	208,749	222,781			180,426	186,426
2.5 (RFI) Women and girls with increased resilience to climate change, disasters, and other external shocks (number)	2,224,434	1,587,882					1,001,623	1,001,702	1,120,960	1,137,940
2.1.1 (TI) Women enrolled in TVET and other job training (number)	45,697	60,320	11,233	16,290	240,672	286,573	26,807	81,955	21,921	34,043

Indicator	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved
2.1.2 (TI) Women opening new accounts (number)	2,994	2,994	1,200	1,200	87,892	87,892	42,307	72,681	16	16
2.1.3 (TI) Women-owned or -led SME loan accounts opened or women-owned or -led SME end borrowers reached (number)	311	382	5,977	5,497	125,093	129,005	6,362	57,631	80,277	80,383
2.1.4 (TI) Women and girls benefiting from new or improved infrastructure (number)	629,600	488,035	391,880	391,716	1,250,877	1,250,992	539,512	539,294	1,208	1,208
2.2.1 (TI) Women and girls enrolled in STEM or nontraditional TVET (number)	562	80							71,826	73,274
2.2.2 (TI) Health services for women and girls established or improved (number)	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	8	5	5
2.2.3 (TI) Solutions to prevent or address gender-based violence implemented (number)	2	-	3	3			9	8	14	12

Indicator	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved
2.3.1 (TI) Women with strengthened leadership capacities (number)	2,625	2,755	361	361	2,279	3,416	162	162		
2.3.2 (TI) Measures on gender equality supported in implementation (number)	15	12	11	18	3	3	7	6	21	20
2.4.1 (TI) Time-saving or gender-responsive infrastructure assets and/or services established or improved (number)	24	25	42,206	31,531	46	46	229	226	274	245
2.4.2 (TI) Child and elderly care services established or improved (number)							2	2	2	2
2.5.1 (TI) Community-based initiatives to build resilience of women and girls to external shocks implemented (number)							2	2	4	4
2.5.2 (TI) Climate- and							154	154		

Indicator	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved	RRP Target	Achieved
disaster-resilient infrastructure assets and/or services for women and girls established or improved (number)										
2.5.3 (TI) Savings and insurance schemes for women implemented or established (number)			1	1						
2.5.4 (TI) Dedicated crisis-responding social assistance schemes for women and girls implemented or established (number)	1	1			1	1	17	15	3	5

RFI = results framework indicator, SME = small and medium-sized enterprise, TI = tracking indicator, TVET = technical and vocational education and training.
Source: Asian Development Bank (Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships Department).

APPENDIX 3: ANALYSIS OF GENDER EQUITY THEME AND EFFECTIVE GENDER MAINSTREAMING PROJECTS

A. Portfolio Analysis of Gender Equity Theme Projects, 2020–2023

1. Analysis of Gender Equity Theme Projects Committed During 2020–2023

1. The evaluation examined all 57 sovereign and 16 nonsovereign projects committed between 2020–2023 that were categorized as gender equity theme (GEN). The assessment focused on their alignment with the pillars of operational priority 2 (OP2), specifically evaluating the integration of OP2's gender-transformative agenda and the consideration of intersectionality in project designs. The relevance of design and monitoring framework (DMF) gender-related results indicators was assessed in terms of their appropriateness for measuring contributions to gender equality outcomes. The gender action plans (GAPs) and design documents of all GEN projects were reviewed to identify trends in the inclusion of innovative and/or transformative approaches, and the extent to which an intersectional analysis had been applied.

2. For the purposes of the analysis, gender transformative approaches were defined as those which addressed systemic aspects of gender inequality and its root causes. Gender transformative approaches aim to create sustained shifts in informal and formal systems that disproportionately affect people's opportunities and developmental benefits based on gender characteristics. The objective of gender transformative approaches is gender equality. That means that benefits go beyond individual gains for a limited or targeted group to fundamentally shift attitudes, behavioral patterns and institutionalized practices toward those that create more gender equal outcomes for all.

3. Recognizing that some projects may address certain aspects of gender transformative approaches without fully adopting a holistic transformative approach, the analysis also sought to include elements of program and project design that had the potential to contribute to gender transformative change as part of a broader suite of interventions. In this regard, the analysis sought to identify elements of programming and/or policy dialogue that intentionally sought to address systemic aspects of gender inequality and its root causes—most often in combination with other programmatic or dialogue efforts. Such efforts go beyond providing equitable access to processes or services. Instead, they look at outcomes in terms of changes in attitudes, behaviors, and institutionalized practices that shift gendered patterns at scale.

4. Intersectionality refers to how multiple and/or different social identities (e.g., based on gender, race, age, culture, religion, geographic location, class, disability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, or ethnic identity) intersect to shape experiences of discrimination and oppression, thus exacerbating inequality. Viewing gender equality through an intersectional lens acknowledges that the experiences of individuals are not homogeneous within a given gender.¹ The projects' consideration of intersectionality was considered through a review of targeting mechanisms in the GAP to assess whether the differentiated needs of groups of women and marginal groups were considered; a review of design documents to assess whether evidence of intersectional analysis appeared in project design documents; and whether DMFs included disaggregation of data, not only by gender, but also by other characteristics.

5. The relevance of DMF gender-related results indicators was assessed in terms of their appropriateness for measuring contributions to gender equality outcomes. The GAPs and design

¹ Adapted from K. Crenshaw. 1989. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*. 1989 (1).

documents of all GEN projects were reviewed to identify trends in the inclusion of innovative and/or transformative approaches.

Box A3.1: Evaluation's Checklist for Assessing Gender Equity Theme Projects through a Transformative Lens

Checklist for transformative approaches in programming

- (i) Addresses the root causes of gender inequality, beyond equitable access to services or processes.
- (ii) Clearly articulates and addresses a specific gender gap.
- (iii) Provides a nuanced analysis of, and responds to issues where gender intersects with other characteristics.
- (iv) Explicitly aims to transform social norms and/or gendered power relations, including gender roles, stereotypes and biases.
- (v) Includes or engages with men and boys in shifting attitudes, behaviors and/or practices that reinforce gender gaps, with the aim of further advancing gender equality and/or women's empowerment.

Checklist for types of action or focus

- (i) Legal reform, policies, or practices that are owned by national clients, and institutionalized.
- (ii) Violence against women and/or girls.
- (iii) Unpaid care and domestic work.
- (iv) Sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- (v) Decision-making and participation.
- (vi) Economic resources and/or access to information and communication.

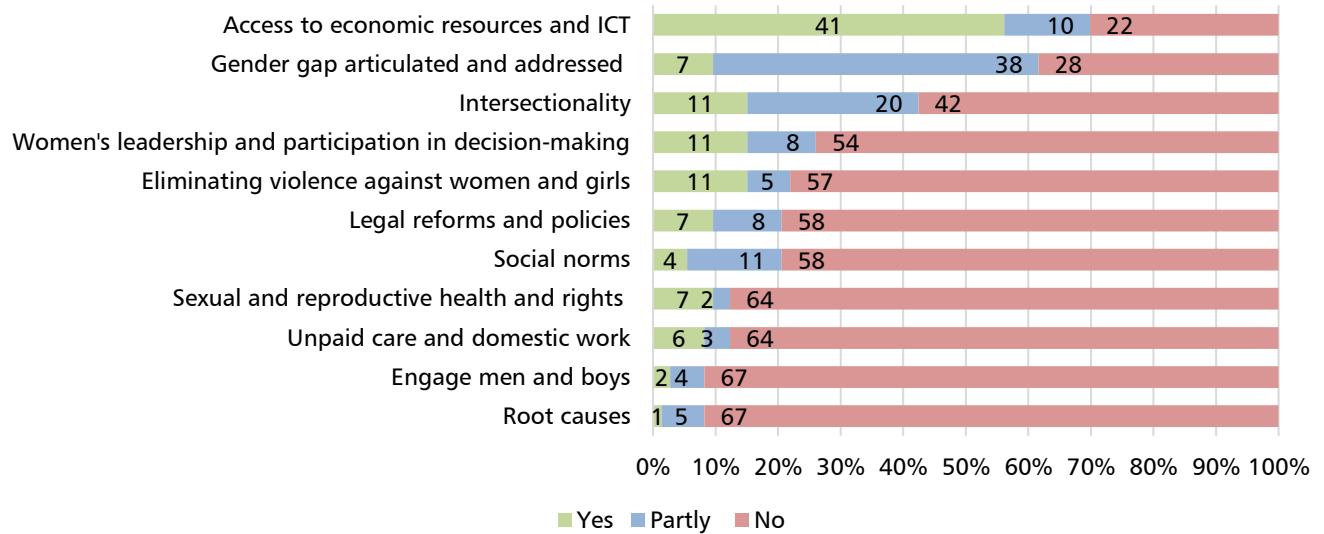
Checklist for intersectional analysis and application of intersectional approaches

- (i) Project design documents explicitly mention and address intersectional factors, i.e., gender combined with other identity characteristics (as per definition).
- (ii) Gender analysis used when discussing issues of social inclusion for marginalized groups, using gender disaggregated data or addressing the different needs of ethnic minority men, women, girls and boys (as applicable).
- (iii) Intersectional analysis clearly linked to the gender gap being addressed and aligned with overall program or project objectives.
- (iv) Proposed actions tailored to the country and sector context and meaningful in relation to changing underlying gender stereotypes and addressing differential needs (avoiding token analysis and approaches).
- (v) Evidence of a nuanced understanding of how these overlapping identities affect individuals' experiences and access to the project's developmental benefits.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

6. The assessment revealed that, of the 73 GEN projects, a high proportion aimed to promote women's access to economic resources fully (41 projects) or partly (10 projects). Some effort was made to articulate and address gender gaps (7 projects), or to address such gaps partly (38 projects), yet only 10% of projects clearly articulated a gender gap and then fully addressed that gap through targeted interventions. Overall, there was limited integration of transformative elements in project designs, and only a small proportion of projects aimed to: (i) address the root causes of gender inequality (1 project) or partly (5 projects); (ii) adopt intersectional analysis fully (11 projects) or partly (20 projects); (iii) address social norms (4 projects) or partly (11 projects); (iv) eliminate violence against women and girls fully (11 projects) or partly (5 projects); and (v) promote women's decision making and leadership (11 projects) or partly (8 projects). Few projects sought to (i) engage men and boys (2 projects), or partly (4 projects); (ii) support legal reforms and policies (7 projects) or partly (8 projects); (iii) address women's unpaid care and domestic work (6 projects) or partly (3 projects); and (iv) support women's reproductive health and rights (7 projects) or partly (2 projects). The results of the assessment are presented in Figure A3.1.

Figure A3.1: Integration of Transformative Elements in Gender Equity Theme Projects



ICT = information and communication technology.
 Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

7. Variations by sector illustrate that public sector management projects (PSM) and water and other urban infrastructure and services (WUS) projects tended to work holistically with transformative approaches with a mostly even distribution across the different categories of potentially transformative programming elements. Other sectors were clearly more specific to the issues addressed in the project. For instance, financial sector GEN projects nearly exclusively focused on women’s access to economic and productive resources, with only one project also addressing unpaid care work or decision-making and leadership, which are more structural barriers to women’s participation in the workforce.

8. Nonsovereign operations were the least transformative as outcomes did not focus on benefits for women beneficiaries, but rather on business practices and increases in the lending portfolio to women for financial institutions. Overall, there appeared to be a mismatch between the gender analyses of many financial sector projects—which often referred to gender stereotypes, the lack of childcare facilities, or the large domestic burden of women as key barriers for their inclusion in the workforce—and the proposed gender actions. Few financial sector projects prioritized efforts to promote a change in social norms or household work burdens, or engaged men and boys on gender issues. This presents an opportunity for incorporating more transformative gender actions, particularly when designed to complement other projects in the country portfolio that may address such issues.

9. South Asia projects that used the Framework for Integrating Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) tended to refer to “GESI-elements” instead of concrete gender actions linked to a specific gender gap. However, it is not clear what these GESI-elements are and whether women were targeted as one identified “vulnerable group” alongside others, or whether GESI-elements include an intersectional approach to gender and women’s empowerment.

B. Portfolio Analysis of Effective Gender Mainstreaming Projects, 2020–2023

10. The evaluation team reviewed a random sample of 105 sovereign and 25 nonsovereign project documents that were categorized as effective gender mainstreaming (EGM).² Given that the majority of sovereign projects were tagged EGM, sovereign EGM projects were stratified into infrastructure and non-infrastructure,³ then a random sample at a 90% confidence interval was drawn for each strata to ensure even coverage. Simple random sampling was used for nonsovereign projects. For the sampled EGM projects, the team considered the presence or absence of such elements as clear links between GAP outputs and project outcomes, potentially transformative elements, depth of engagement and participation during design and implementation, diverse and inclusive approaches, high-impact activities, robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and intersectional analysis, to understand the rationale for assigning projects as EGM and to identify illustrative examples of projects that may be considered “high EGM” or “low EGM.” The full list of characteristics for “high EGM” and “low EGM” are outlined in Table A3.1. The sample consisted of 105 sovereign operations and 25 nonsovereign operations (NSO) committed in 2020–2023. The rating method involved assessing the project report and recommendation of the President (RRP) and GAPs based on commonly agreed criteria, resulting in classifications of “high EGM” or “low EGM,” intersectionality as “yes” or “no,” and transformative change as “potentially” or “no.”

Table A3.1: Evaluation Guidance for Assessing Effective Gender Mainstreaming Projects

High Effective Gender Mainstreaming	Low Effective Gender Mainstreaming
Meets EGM Classification Criteria	Meets EGM Classification Criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meets the basic requirements for EGM classification without significant additional efforts or innovative approaches.
Complementarity and Integration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates how gender actions complement other project components or ongoing initiatives. Provides a coherent strategy showing the alignment of gender-related activities with the main project objectives. 	Lack of Clear Complementarity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides unclear explanations of how gender components complement each other or align with the main project objectives. Gender activities appear to be add-ons rather than integral parts of the project strategy.
Potentially Transformative Elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contains elements aimed at addressing the root causes of gender inequality with clear pathways from outputs to outcomes. Examples of transformative elements include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses violence against women and girls. Recognizes, reduces, and redistributes unpaid care and domestic work. Emphasizes sexual and reproductive health and rights. Encourages women’s participation in decision making and leadership. Creates access to economic and productive resources, ICT, and/or institutes legal reforms. 	“Add-On” Gender Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender components appear to be add-ons rather than integral parts of the project. Activities do not demonstrate a clear strategy for achieving gender equality. Minimal Gender Action Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender action plan lacks detail, with vague or unmeasurable targets. Unclear allocation of resources and responsibilities for gender activities.

² The following ADB documents were reviewed for each project: (i) report and recommendation of the President or the periodic financing request report (PFRR) for multitranches financing facilities; (ii) design and monitoring framework; (iii) summary poverty reduction, and social strategy, gender assessment or social assessment; (iv) GAP or gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) action plan; (v) contribution to ADB corporate results framework or contribution to Strategy 2030 operational priorities linked document for projects committed during 2016–2018); and (vi) project or program completion report (PCR) for completed projects.

³ Infrastructure includes agriculture, natural resources, and rural development (ANR); energy; information and communication technology; transport; and water and other urban infrastructure and services (WUS). See ADB’s Focus on Infrastructure. Non-infrastructure includes education, finance, health, and public sector management.

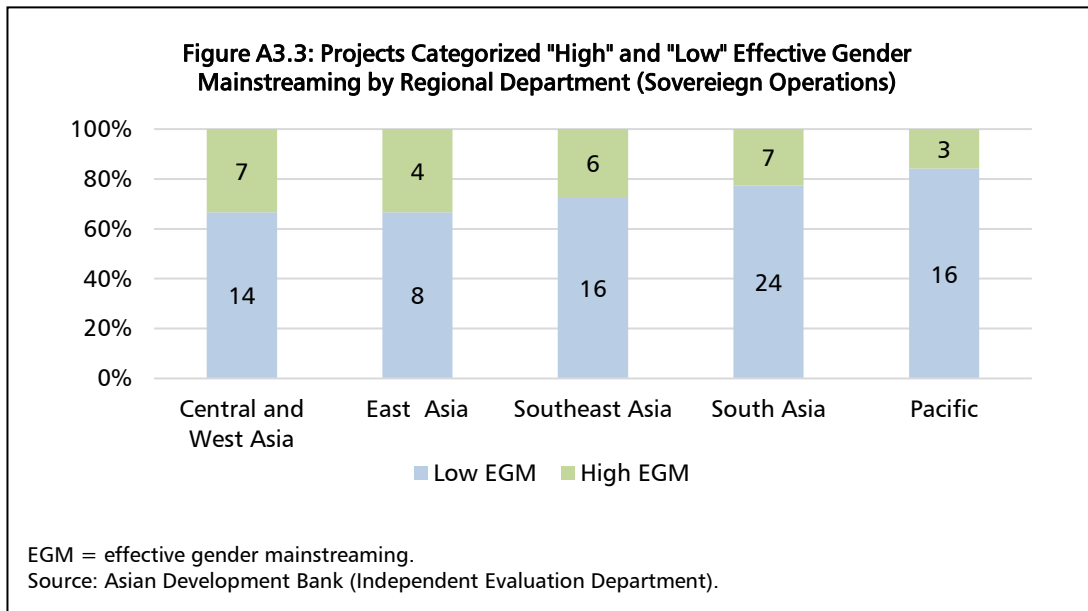
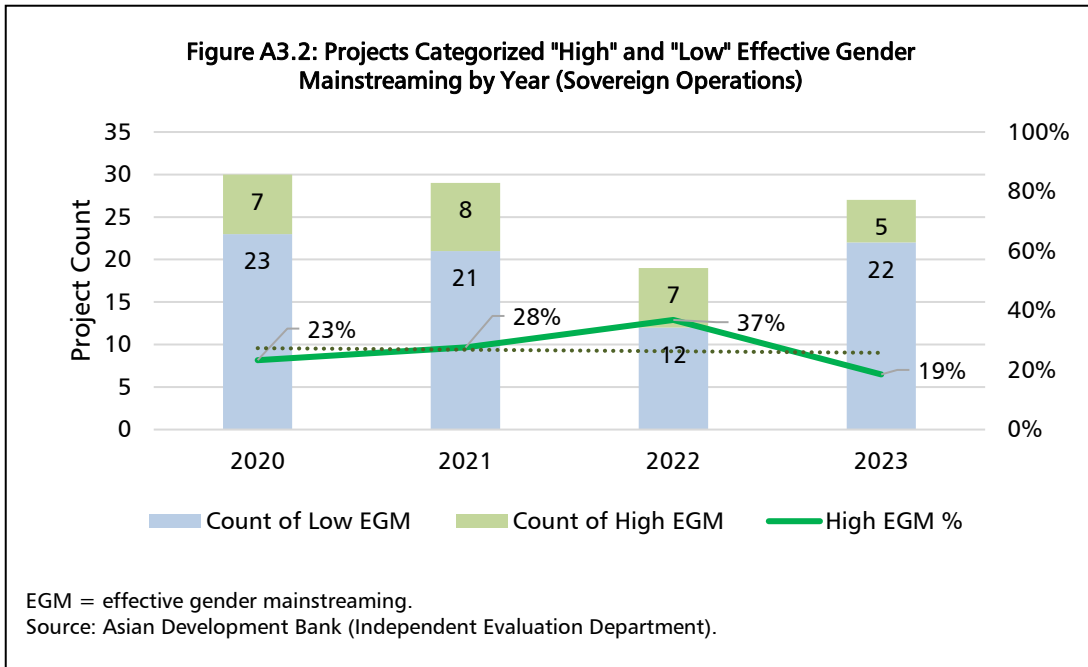
High Effective Gender Mainstreaming	Low Effective Gender Mainstreaming
Depth of Engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engages deeply with target communities to identify and address specific gender needs. Implements activities that involve active participation and empowerment of women. 	Surface-Level Engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited engagement with target communities, often relying on general or superficial gender assessments. Activities do not involve significant input or participation from women.
Diverse and Inclusive Approaches: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses a variety of approaches to promote gender equality, including capacity building, policy advocacy, and community mobilization. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures inclusivity by addressing multiple aspects of gender inequality (e.g., economic, social, legal). 	Narrow Focus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lacks a holistic approach to gender mainstreaming. Does not integrate gender considerations across multiple aspects of the project (e.g., economic, social, legal).
High-Impact Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on high-impact activities such as creating new opportunities for women in non-traditional sectors, leadership training, or substantial policy reforms. Demonstrates significant changes in gender dynamics or norms. 	Low-Impact Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities are low-impact, such as awareness sessions or basic training, without follow-up or deeper interventions. Minimal evidence of changing gender norms or significant outcomes.
Robust Monitoring and Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes strong monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress and impact on gender equality. Collects and analyses sex-disaggregated data. 	Weak Monitoring and Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate monitoring and evaluation processes. Indicators are predominantly quantitative (e.g., counting the number of women trained), with no mention of quality (e.g., of training), or how this reduces an identified gender gap. Lack of sex-disaggregated data or analysis.
Clear Linkages to Project Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows clear connections between gender action plan outputs and project log frame outcomes. Demonstrates how gender activities contribute to the overall project objectives and outcomes 	Limited Focus on Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Output indicators are input-oriented, focusing on the number of women trained or benefiting without explaining how this reduces identified gender gaps. Lacks detailed explanations of how gender-related outputs contribute to meaningful changes in gender equality.
Intersectional Analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If relevant, includes an analysis that considers multiple aspects of identity (e.g., race, class, disability) and their impact on gender outcomes. 	

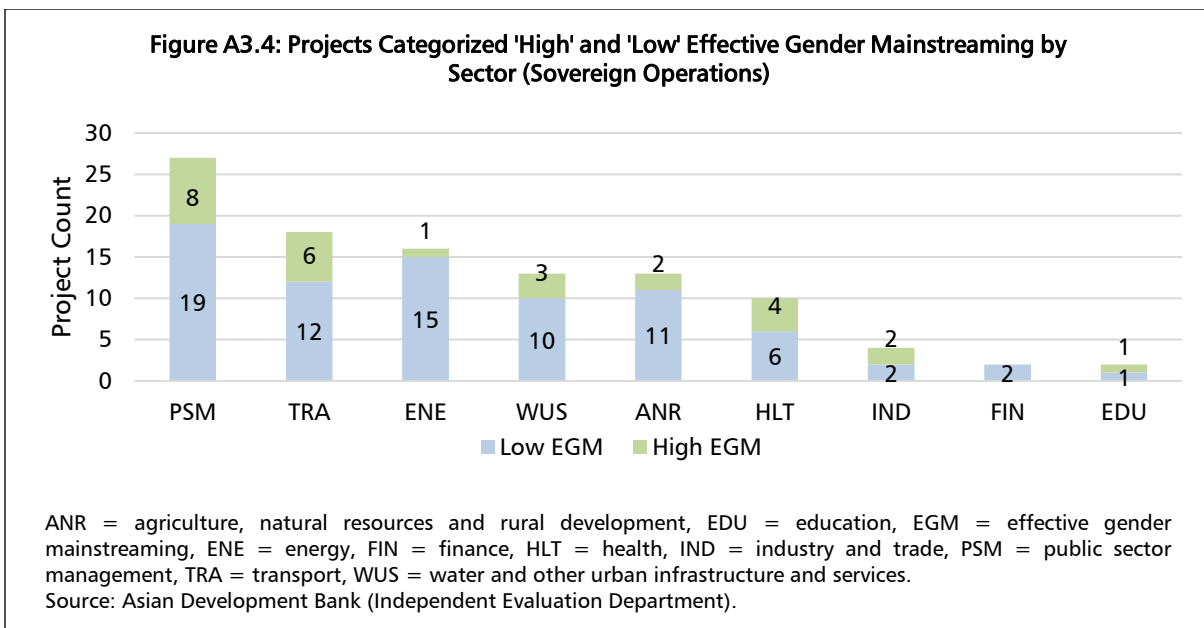
EGM = effective gender main streaming., ICT = information and communication technology.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

2. Assessing Effective Gender Mainstreaming Sovereign Operations

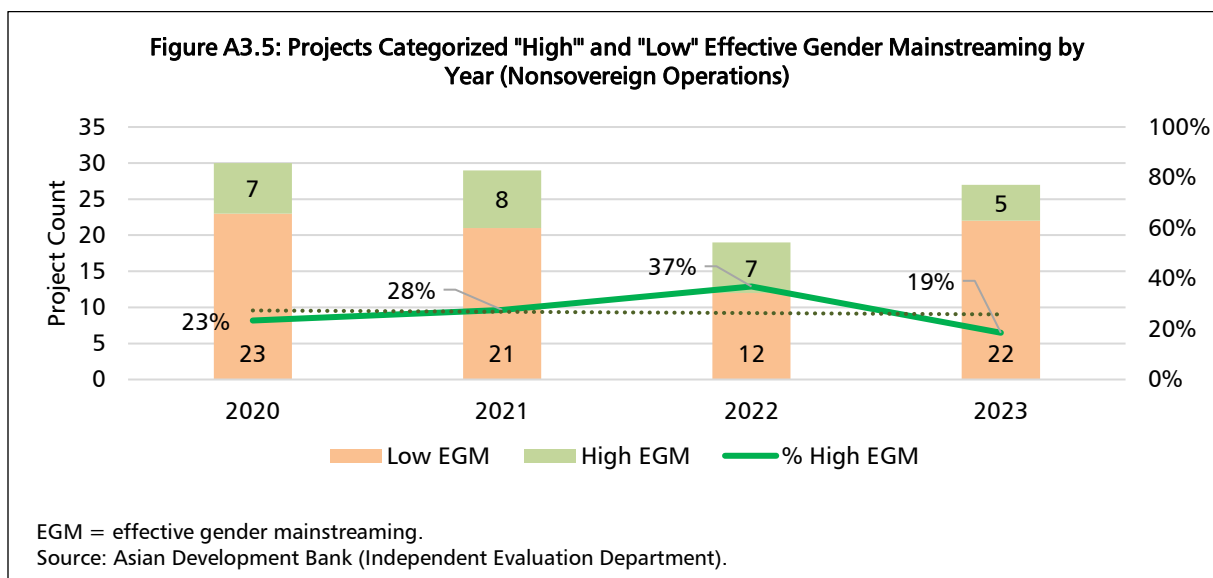
11. The assessment of 105 sovereign EGM projects revealed common features of low and high EGM projects. Of the projects, 27 were characterized as “high EGM” (26%), while 78 were characterized “low EGM” (74%). Projects characterized as “high EGM” projects adopted diverse and inclusive approaches (20 projects), integrated potentially transformative elements (18 projects), or included high-impact activities (18 projects). Conversely, projects assessed as being “low EGM” had a limited focus on outcomes (66 projects), involved low-impact activities (34 projects), had weak monitoring and evaluation systems (31 projects), lacked transformative elements (22 projects), or incorporated gender-related activities that appeared to be “add-on” activities, disconnected from the overall project outcomes and objectives (27 projects). There was no discernible improvement in the share of projects characterized as “high EGM” during the period 2020–2023, with the number of “high EGM” projects falling in 2023 (Figure A3.2). Across regional departments, Central and West Asia and Southeast Asia showed marginally higher shares of “high EGM” projects (Figure A3.3). No obvious trend was observed in terms of certain sectors having a distinctly higher share of “high EGM” or “low EGM” projects (Figure A3.4.), with the caveat that there were uneven numbers of sampled projects per sector.





3. Assessing Effective Gender Mainstreaming Nonsovereign Operations

12. The evaluation assessed a sample of 25 EGM nonsovereign operations (NSO), of which 6 were assessed “high EGM,” and 19 were found to be “low EGM.” No clear improvement in the share of “high EGM” NSO projects was observed during the period 2020–2023, the number of “high EGM” projects identified in 2023 (five projects) being lower than for the three previous years (Figure A3.5). For NSO EGM projects, the most common reasons for “low EGM” ratings were the limited focus on outcomes (17 projects), low impact activities (nine projects), weak monitoring and evaluation systems (10 projects), “add-on” gender activities (four projects), and lack of potentially transformative elements, (two projects). In contrast, projects with “high EGM” ratings frequently exhibited a diverse and/or inclusive approach (three projects), were potentially transformative (six projects), or carried out gender activities that demonstrated clear complementarity with overall project outcomes and objectives (three projects). No NSO demonstrated intersectional analysis or targeted activities based on considerations of intersectionality. Seven projects were found to have had potentially transformative elements.



APPENDIX 4: REVIEW OF COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIES

A. Overview

1. Country partnership strategies (CPSs) establish a strategic framework to guide the engagement of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) with its developing member countries (DMCs). A CPS outlines a DMC's development priorities and defines ADB's operational focus in that country.¹ Given the importance of CPSs in operationalizing ADB's strategic priorities at the country level, the evaluation team undertook a review of 40 CPSs circulated during 2016–2023 for 29 DMCs (Table A4.1).² It examined the relevance of analytical work, including the country gender assessment; the extent to which gender issues were covered in the CPS and the actions proposed; monitoring and evaluation of gender-related outcomes in the CPS results framework; and the inclusive and sustainable growth assessment (ISGA), which is a mandatory CPS annex.

B. Pertinent Findings from Earlier Studies

2. The 2013 Operational Plan (2013–2020) found that gender strategies were sometimes disconnected from the overall thrust of the CPS, gender analyses in the sector road maps were too generic, and some gender actions and targets did not align with the country context.³ It argued that gender-related policy dialogue, capacity development and knowledge products should be more explicitly integrated into the country gender strategy and the CPS results frameworks.

3. The Independent Evaluation Department's (IED) thematic evaluation study of gender and development found that, while country gender assessments (CGAs) were produced and updated, gender strategies in CPSs were not always explicitly identified and gender analyses were not discussed comprehensively.⁴ The evaluation recommended regular updates of CGAs and better integration of their findings into CPSs and results frameworks.

4. The Strategy 2030 Operational Plan for priority 2 emphasized the need to improve the integration of gender indicators in CPS results frameworks and to enhance the monitoring and reporting of gender equality outcomes.⁵

C. Main Findings of the Review

1. Relevance of Country Gender Analysis

5. The review covered 46 country analytical studies for 30 DMCs that had been prepared since 2004 (Table A4.2).⁶ Of these, 32 were CGAs with the remaining 14 were called country gender analysis, gender situation analysis, or gender equality diagnostic of selected sectors.

6. The CGAs for 12 DMCs had not been updated or replaced since their publication. Some were too old to be useful; eight studies were over 10 years old and the oldest was 14 years old. On average, 1.2

¹ ADB. 2023. Policies and Procedures Country Partnership Strategy. *Operations Manual*. OM Section A2.

² Eleven DMCs had two CPSs each during the period, while the remaining 18 DMCs had one CPS each.

³ ADB. 2013. *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Operational Plan 2013–2020: Moving the Agenda Forward in Asia and the Pacific*.

⁴ IED. 2017. *Thematic Evaluation: ADB Support for Gender and Development (2005–2015)*.

⁵ ADB. 2019. *Strategy 2030 Operational Plan for Priority 2: Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, 2019–2024*.

⁶ While this evaluation period covers 2016–2023, it also considered CGAs from when they were first prepared in 2004. This allowed for a more conservative approach, since the CGAs could be seen as baseline assessments that only needed updating. Country analyses were prepared for Fiji and Solomon Islands, which are both covered under the Pacific Approach; hence the number of country analyses exceeded the number of CPSs reviewed.

country analysis had been prepared per DMC since 2004, with up to three studies for some DMCs. However, the team did not find country-specific gender analysis for four DMCs: Afghanistan, Malaysia, Thailand, and Turkmenistan. About a third (15 of 46) of the gender analyses undertaken from 2004 to 2018 were prepared jointly with development partners, which is a positive finding.

7. The current ISGA was introduced in 2016 to streamline the process for preparing the CPS. It consolidates findings from sector, thematic and other underlying analytical work, including CGAs.⁷ In compliance with CPS business processes, 37 of the 40 CPSs examined by the evaluation annexed the ISGA as a source for gender-related information for the main text.

8. Fewer than half of these ISGAs (18 of the 37) referenced ADB studies or assessments for gender information; this was possibly because the information in these diagnostic studies was too dated. The others referenced information from country sources; e.g., the Mongolia CPS referenced general national statistics on gender but lacked detailed ADB-specific gender analysis, which led to a less tailored approach.

2. Capture of Gender Issues in Country Partnership Strategies and Inclusive and Sustainable Growth Assessments

9. Inclusive and sustainable growth assessments play a crucial role in informing the CPS by identifying gender constraints in the country. Although most gender issues in ISGAs were also included in CPSs, a significant number were not addressed. Specifically, out of the 217 gender constraints identified in the ISGAs,⁸ only 153 (70.5%) were identified as gender issues in the CPS main text. For instance, the ISGA for the Nepal CPS, 2020–2024 pointed out unequal access to education and health care for women as gender constraints. However, the CPS did not incorporate these findings into actionable plans.

10. OP2 pillars and subpillars correspond to the gender equality areas that ADB intends to address in DMCs. The most frequently tagged OP2 subpillars were job skills (36 mentions in the ISGAs, 28 mentions in CPSs), leadership (25 and 14 mentions), health services (24 and 17 mentions), access to infrastructure and services (22 and 15 mentions), and protection from gender-based violence (GBV) (22 and 10 mentions). Although women are more vulnerable than men to shocks, the OP2 pillar and subpillars on resilience to shocks were the least mentioned.

3. Proposed Actions and Accountability

11. Of the 40 CPSs examined, 37 (93%) recognized gender equality as a broad overarching development objective or cross-cutting theme but only 30% included gender among the CPS core objectives. For example, while gender was recognized as an important consideration in the Bangladesh CPS, 2021–2025, specific gender equality objectives were not clearly articulated in the main strategic goals.

12. Further, even if gender was recognized as important by the CPS, it was not consistently integrated into the core objectives or followed up with specific policy dialogue. Only 14 out of 40 CPSs (35%) indicated they had already engaged, or planned to engage, in discussions with governments on gender issues; and these statements were often worded in general terms without specific policy goals. The

⁷ The ISGA is one of the three mandatory CPS annexes, along with the CPS results framework and the development coordination matrix. It synthesizes and summarizes the findings of sector and thematic assessments and other analytical work undertaken for the CPS. Before ISGAs were introduced in 2016, sector analyses and key thematic assessments, including macroeconomic, poverty, gender and social development, environment, and private sector analyses had to be prepared for each CPS. (ADB. 2023. *Staff Instructions for Preparing the Country Partnership Strategy and Managing the Country Program* [internal]).

⁸ The number of constraints identified in ISGAs ranged from 1 to 11, or an average of 5.4 gender issue per ISGA.

Armenia CPS, 2019–2023 and Mongolia CPS, 2021–2014 were examples of CPSs that outlined how policy dialogue on gender would be undertaken with the government.

13. Further, most CPSs were not explicit on planned interventions to address the identified gender issues. Only a little over a third of the gender issues recognized in the CPSs were targeted with a course of action, or a specific intervention, in either the CPS main text or in the country knowledge plan, and/or noted for action by another development partner.

4. Country Partnership Strategy Results Framework Indicators

14. While CPSs identified a total of 153 OP2 subpillars for possible ADB intervention through knowledge support or specific activities, CPS results frameworks contained only 100 outcome indicators, suggesting that outcomes of interventions are not being tracked or monitored for achievement. Hence, regardless of whether or not these were targeted by interventions, only 65% of the gender constraints identified in the CPSs had corresponding indicators in the CPS results frameworks.

15. The quality of gender-related CPS outcome indicators was low. Only a third of the outcome indicators were sufficiently robust (with baseline data and/or targets) to measure progress toward gender equality outcomes effectively. The low quality of the indicators overall means that many CPSs are not tracking progress on gender equality effectively, making it harder to ensure accountability and improvement. This reduces the effectiveness and accountability of gender initiatives.

Table A4.1: Profile of the Country Partnership Strategies Approved from 2016 to 2023

Country Name	Country Partnership Strategy Period	Did the Country Partnership Strategy Identify Gender as a Priority?	Did the Government Identify Gender as a Priority?	Explicit Mention of Dialogue with Government on Gender?
Afghanistan	2017–2021	No	Yes	No
Armenia	2019–2023	Yes	Yes	Yes
Azerbaijan	2019–2023	Yes	Yes	No
Bangladesh	2016–2020	Yes	No	Yes
Bangladesh	2021–2025	Yes	No	No
Bhutan	2019–2023	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cambodia	2019–2023	Yes	Yes	Yes
People's Republic of China	2016–2020	No	No	No
People's Republic of China	2021–2025	Yes	No	No
Fiji	2019–2023	Yes	Yes	No
Georgia	2019–2023	Yes	No	No
India	2018–2022	Yes	Yes	Yes
India	2023–2027	Yes	No	Yes
Indonesia	2016–2019	Yes	No	Yes
Indonesia	2020–2024	Yes	No	No
Kazakhstan	2017–2021	Yes	Yes	No
Kazakhstan	2023–2027	Yes	Yes	No
Kyrgyz Republic	2018–2022	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kyrgyz Republic	2023–2027	Yes	No	No
Lao People's Democratic Republic	2017–2020	Yes	Yes	No
Maldives	2020–2024	Yes	Yes	No
Mongolia (case)	2017–2020	Yes	No	No
Mongolia (case)	2021–2024	Yes	Yes	Yes
Myanmar	2017–2021	Yes	Yes	No
Nepal (case)	2020–2024	Yes	Yes	No
Pacific Island Countries-11 (PIC 11)	2016–2020	Yes	No	No
Pacific Island Countries 12 (PIC-12)	2021–2025	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pakistan	2021–2025	Yes	Yes	No
Papua New Guinea	2021–2025	Yes	No	Yes
Philippines (case)	2018–2023	Yes	No	No
Sri Lanka	2018–2022	Yes	Yes	No
Tajikistan (case)	2016–2020	No	No	No
Tajikistan (case)	2021–2025	Yes	No	No
Thailand	2021–2025	Yes	Yes	No
Timor-Leste	2016–2020	Yes	Yes	No
Timor-Leste	2023–2027	Yes	Yes	Yes
Turkmenistan	2017–2021	Yes	Yes	Yes
Uzbekistan	2019–2023	Yes	Yes	No
Viet Nam	2016–2020	Yes	Yes	No
Viet Nam	2023–2026	Yes	Yes	No

Note: case = country case assessment for this evaluation, PIC 11 = 11 smaller Pacific Island countries, PIC 12 = 12 smaller Pacific Islands countries including Niue

Source: ADB country partnership strategies (CPSs) or the inclusive and sustainable growth assessments (SGAs) if policy dialogue was not mentioned in the CPS.

Table A4.2: ADB Gender Analysis Prepared, 2004–2021

Member Country	No. of Country Gender Assessments	No. of Other Gender Analyses ^a	Total No. of Gender Analyses	Average per DMC per subregion	Mean Time Gap ^b (years)	Latest Analysis Available	Age of Latest Analysis
CWRD (10)	17	0	17	1.7	9.3		5.1
Afghanistan	0	0	0		...	...	...
Armenia	2	0	2		4	2019	4
Azerbaijan	2	0	2		14	2019	4
Georgia	1	0	1		...	2018	5
Kazakhstan	3	0	3		6	2018	5
Kyrgyzstan	2	0	2		14	2019	4
Pakistan	2	0	2		8	2016	7
Tajikistan	2	0	2		10	2016	7
Turkmenistan	0	0	0		...	...	...
Uzbekistan	3	0	3		9	2018	5
EARD (2)	2	0	2	1	...		17.5
People's Republic of China	1	0	1		...	2006	17
Mongolia	1	1	2		...	2019	5
PARD (3)	3	0	3	1	...		12
Fiji	1	0	1		...	2006	17
Papua New Guinea	1	0	1		...	2012	11
Solomon Islands	1	0	1		...	2015	8
SARD (6)	3	9	12	2	4.7		7.3
Bangladesh	1	3	4		6	2018	5
Bhutan	0	1	1		...	2014	9
India	0	1	1		...	2013	10
Maldives	0	2	2		7	2014	9
Nepal	0	1	1		...	2019	4
Sri Lanka	2	1	3		1	2016	7
SERD (9)	7	5	12	1.3	8.5		9
Cambodia	1	1	2		8	2012	11
Indonesia	1	1	2		9	2015	8
Lao People's Democratic Republic	1	0	1		...	2012	11
Maldives	0	0	0		...	...	...
Myanmar	0	1	1		...	2016	7
Philippines	1	0	1		...	2008	15
Thailand	0	0	0		...	...	...
Timor-Leste	2	0	2		9	2014	9
Viet Nam	1	2	3		8	2021	2
Total (30)	32	15	47	1.2			

... = not applicable, CWRD = Central and West Department, DMC = developing member country, EARD = East Asia Department, PARD = Pacific Department, SARD = South Asia Department, SERD = Southeast Asia Department,

Note: ... = not applicable; in the context of mean time gaps, means either there was no analysis or there was only one (so there was no gap)

^a Titles include "country gender analysis," "gender situation analysis," and "gender equality diagnostic of selected sectors."

^b Time gap refers to the number of years elapsed from the previous analysis.

Sources: Asian Development Bank. Various country gender assessments and other documents related to gender.

Table A4.3: Number of Country-Specific Gender Constraints Mentioned in the ADB Inclusive and Sustainable Growth Assessment

Developing Member Country	CPS Period	Number of Subpillars Discussed by the ISGA	Number of Subpillars Discussed by the CPS	CPS Count	Developing Member Country	CPS Period	Number of Subpillars Covered by the ISGA	Number of Subpillars Covered by the CPS
Afghanistan	2017–2021	8	5	21	Maldives	2020–2024	5	7
Armenia	2019–2023	8	8	22	Mongolia 1	2017–2020	9	6
Azerbaijan	2019–2023	4	5	23	Mongolia 2	2021–2024	9	7
Bangladesh 1	2016–2020	5	4	24	Myanmar	2017–2021	3	1
Bangladesh 2	2021–2025	5	2	25	Nepal	2020–2024	5	2
Bhutan	2019–2023	3	2	26	Pacific Island Countries-11	2016–2020	3	1
Cambodia	2019–2023	7	5	27	Pacific Island Countries -12	2021–2025	5	8
People's Republic of China 1	2016–2020	8	4	28	Pakistan	2021–2025	5	5
People's Republic of China 2	2021–2025	1	4	29	Papua New Guinea	2021–2025	9	7
Fiji	2019–2023	7	6	30	Philippines	2018–2023	8	4
Georgia	2019–2023	3	1	31	Sri Lanka	2018–2022	4	1
India 1	2018–2022	4	2	32	Tajikistan 1	2016–2020	11	1
India 2	2023–2027	5	4	33	Tajikistan 2	2021–2025	5	4
Indonesia 1	2016–2019	5	2	34	Thailand	2021–2025	5	1
Indonesia 2	2020–2024	5	4	35	Timor-Leste 1	2016–2020	6	3
Kazakhstan 1	2017–2021	4	2	36	Timor-Leste 2	2023–2027	6	3
Kazakhstan2	2023–2027	4	2	37	Turkmenistan	2017–2021	2	4
Kyrgyz Republic 1	2018–2022	7	6	38	Uzbekistan	2019–2023	3	4
Kyrgyz Republic 2	2023–2027	7	4	39	Viet Nam 1	2016–2020	4	3
Lao People's Democratic Republic	2017–2020	6	5	40	Viet Nam 2	2023–2026	4	4
Total for 40 ISGAs and CPSs							217	153
Average for 40 ISGAs and CPSs							5.4	3.8

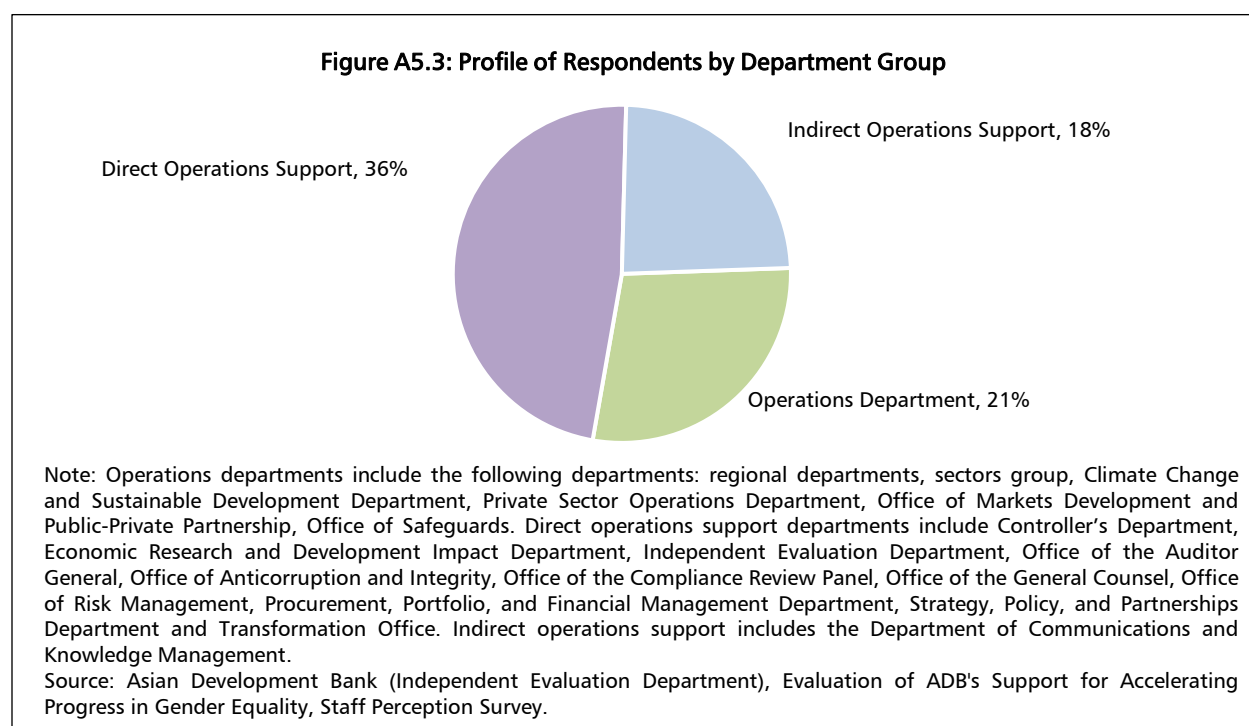
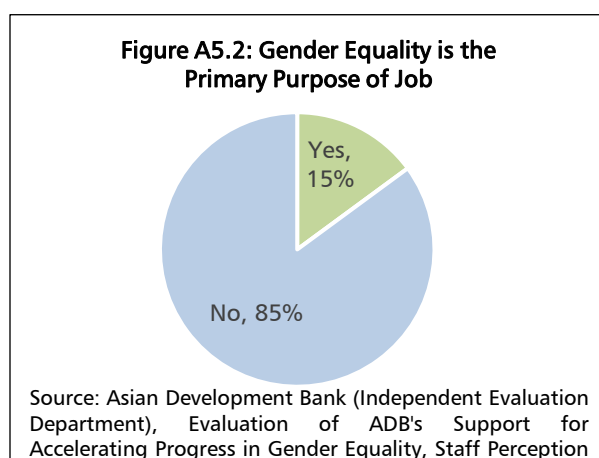
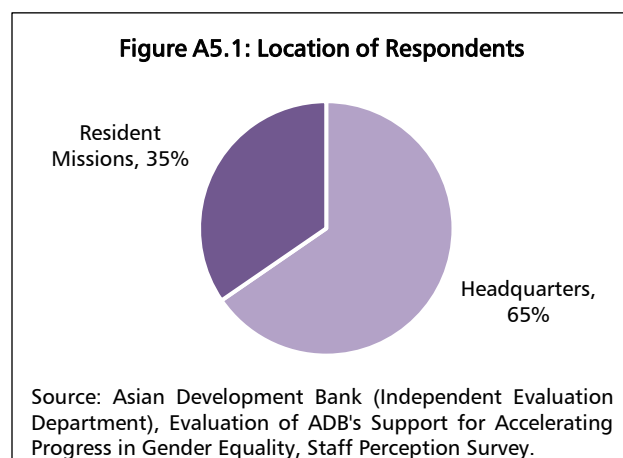
CPS = country partnership strategy, DMC = developing member country, ISGA = inclusive and sustainable growth assessment.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).

APPENDIX 5: ADB STAFF PERCEPTION SURVEY

A. Profile of Survey Respondents

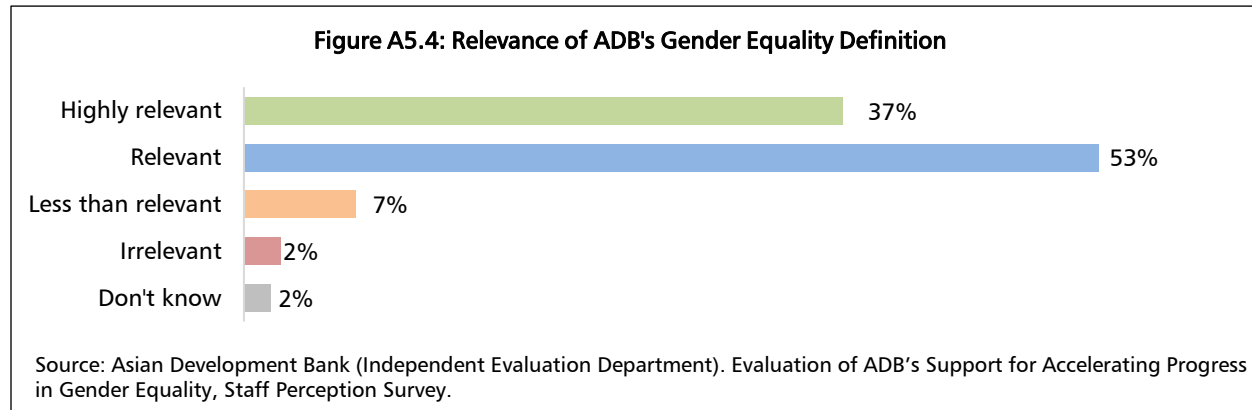
1. The evaluation team conducted an online survey among Asian Development Bank (ADB) staff at headquarters and resident missions from 28 May to 17 June 2024. The survey was designed to gather insights into staff perceptions of ADB's approach to gender mainstreaming in its operations. Of the approximately 2,600 staff members invited to participate, 610 completed the survey (23%).¹ The profiles of staff who responded to the survey are presented in Figures A5.1 to A5.3. Of the respondents, 15% indicated that working on gender equality was the primary purpose of their job. About 12% of these were from the Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department (CCSD) and 5% were assigned to the Gender Equality Division (CCGE).



¹ Based on an estimated total population of 2,609 ADB international and national staff from the targeted departments, the total response was a representative sample of the population at a 95% confidence interval and 4% margin of error.

B. Strategic Relevance and Positioning of ADB on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

2. Regarding the ADB definition of gender equality— “men and women having the opportunity to develop their full potential and make their own choices free from the limitations set by stereotypes, gender roles, or prejudices. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same but that their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female”— 90% of surveyed staff respondents found ADB's definition to be relevant, with more than one-third deeming it highly relevant (Figure A5.4 and Box A5.1).²



Box A5.1: Qualitative Feedback on the Relevance of ADB's Gender Equality Definition

While most staff found ADB's definition of gender equality to be relevant, several staff suggested expanding the definition to recognize non-binary and diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions, and sex characteristics, so the definition reflects a more inclusive understanding of gender. There were also calls for incorporating intersectionality, recognizing the diverse and overlapping social identities that affect how gender equality is experienced. Others noted how definitions may need to be adapted to local contexts, recognizing varying cultural and social contexts, while some highlighted the need for ADB to consider the definition's practical application, and whether an emphasis on measurable outcomes could make it more robust and effective in achieving its goals across different contexts.

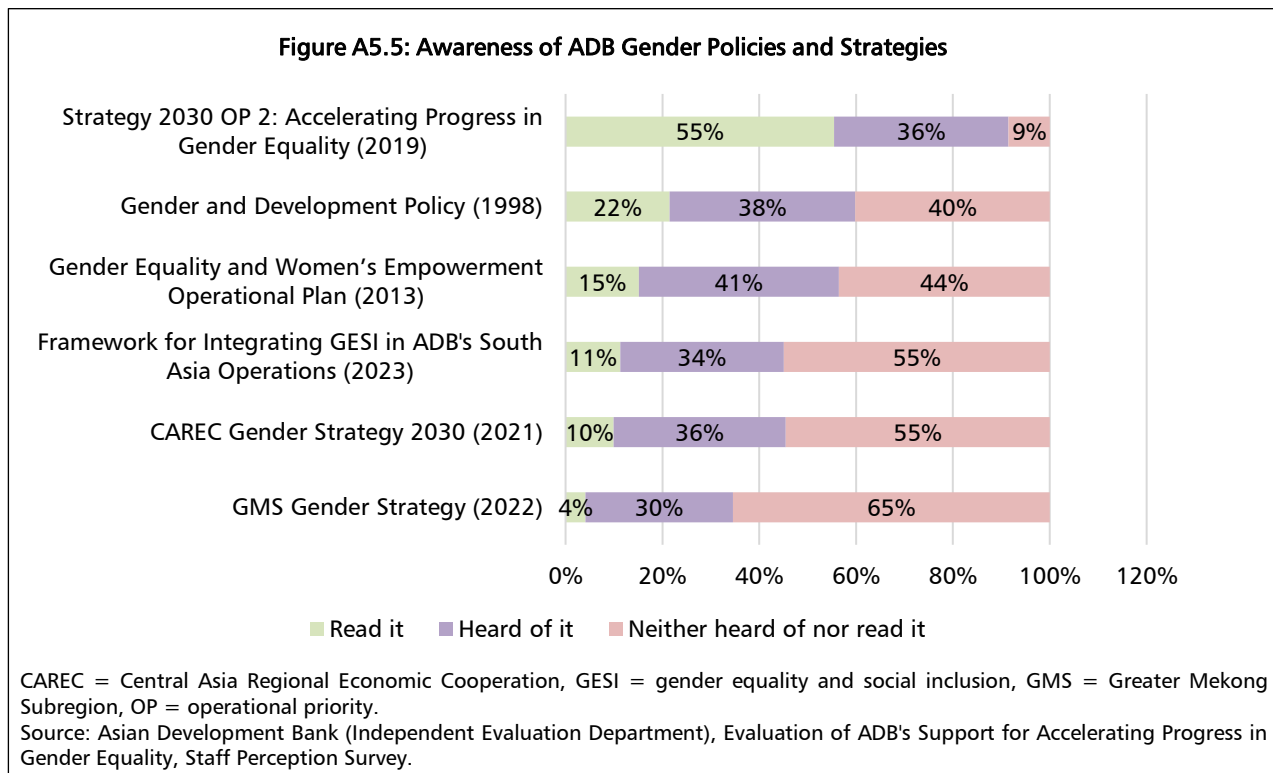
Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department), Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, Staff Perception Survey.

3. **Limited awareness of ADB's 1998 Gender and Development Policy among staff.** A considerable percentage of staff (40%) reported having neither heard of nor read ADB's 1998 Gender and Development Policy (Figure A5.5). Of the 105 staff members who had read the policy, 20% were from CCGE. Predictably, awareness of the policy increased with tenure, with higher awareness observed among staff with 11–15 years and over 16 years of service at ADB. Awareness was particularly pronounced among staff whose primary role focused on gender equality, with 47% having read the policy and 25% having heard of it. Across all categories, there was a high level of awareness of Strategy 2030 operational priority 2 (OP2), with 55% of respondents having read the document and 36% aware of its existence. More than half of the respondents (56%) were familiar with the earlier gender operational plan (2013–2020).

4. As for regional gender strategies or frameworks, most staff were unaware of them. Over half of the respondents (55%) had not heard of or read the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program gender strategy, for the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) gender strategy the figure was 65%,

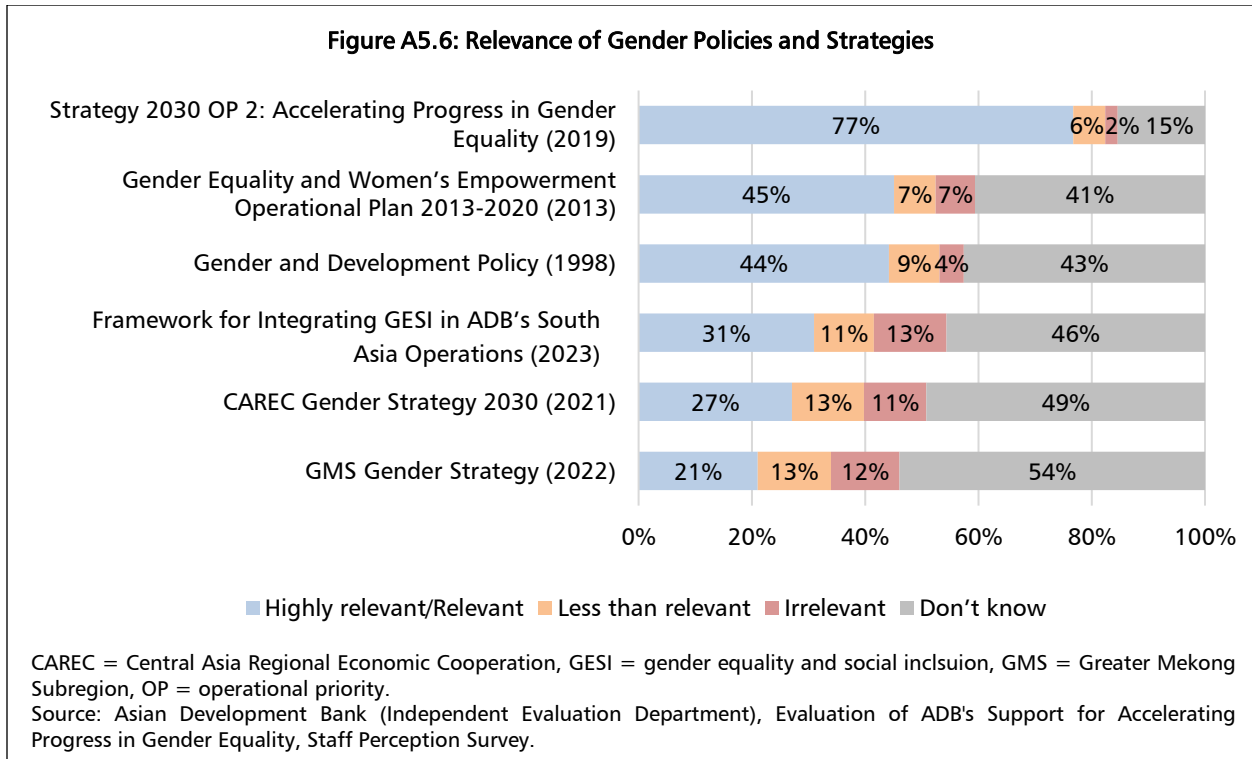
² ADB. 2021. *Guidelines for Gender Mainstreaming Categories of ADB Projects*.

and for the South Asia Department's (SARD) gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) framework the figure was 55%. As might have been expected, awareness of specific regional strategies and/or frameworks was generally high for staff in concerned regional departments and the gender team.



5. In qualitative comments, staff noted other guidance documents they had read or were familiar with. These included the gender equality tool kit, the public-private partnership (PPP) gender tool kit, guidelines for gender mainstreaming in ADB projects, tip sheets, and gender approaches.

6. Less than half (44%) of respondents found the 1998 Gender Policy relevant to their work, while a similar proportion (43%) were uncertain about its relevance. In contrast, a significant majority (77%), particularly among staff in operations departments, considered OP2 to be relevant or highly relevant. This aligns with interview findings, in which staff identified OP2 as the primary framework for ADB's gender operations, rather than the 1998 policy. Additionally, many respondents were unsure about the relevance of regional gender strategies, although a higher proportion recognized the GESI framework as relevant. Finally, 45% of respondents still found the 2013–2020 Gender Operational Plan relevant to their work, slightly more than those who did not comment on its relevance (41%) (Figure A5.6).



7. While ADB's gender policies and strategies were generally well-regarded, qualitative responses from staff emphasized the need for better communication and integration of gender policies into project planning from the earliest stages to ensure thorough assessment and resource allocation. Staff called on ADB to update outdated policies to reflect contemporary definitions, inclusivity, and intersectionality, ensuring they are relevant to the current contexts in DMCs (Box A5.2).

Box A5.2: Staff Call for a Clearer Hierarchy of Policies and Policy Objectives, More Clearly Communicated

Among the 610 responses to the evaluation's staff perception survey, there was a call for clarity on the hierarchy of policy and strategy documents in relation to "which ones are bank-wide, and Board and/or management approved" and which ones can additionally be used at subregional levels to adapt to country contexts.^a Several respondents expressed frustration that the 1998 Gender and Development Policy and some regional frameworks for promoting gender equality were outdated and called for a streamlining of efforts and tools. One in three respondents suggested that this should include an update of how gender is defined, replacing a strictly binary definition with one that is more inclusive of sexual and gender minorities. Additionally, it was suggested that the internal gender architecture and the policies and frameworks regulating it should be better communicated to staff, and should not refer to outdated policies and frameworks. ADB's approach should be up to date and forward-looking.

^a This was optional in the staff survey: 38 respondents (out of a total of 490 respondents to this question) chose to elaborate on their answers.
 Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department), Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, Staff Perception Survey

8. Concerns were also raised about spreading limited gender resources too thinly, suggesting that transformative action requires tailored solutions, large-scale projects and long-term engagement. Staff recommended streamlining efforts by consolidating strategies into a single, cohesive framework. There was a strong emphasis on the need for robust data and measurement mechanisms to track progress and link gender equality to broader social inclusion and safeguards. Additionally, staff highlighted the importance of clear strategic policies that address gender and sexual discrimination separately. ADB needs to communicate these policies to staff and member countries.

C. Gender Mainstreaming System

9. The gender categorization system was generally regarded as useful by staff. About 69% of respondents expressed this view, including 26% who found it very useful. However, a notable 32% of respondents found the system less useful or were unaware of the categories. Nearly a fifth of staff (17%), mostly from direct operations support departments, did not know of the gender categories. The proportion of staff who found the gender categorization system very useful or somewhat useful was in line with the numbers in the 2017 Gender Evaluation perception survey (Table A5.1).

Table A5.1: Usefulness of ADB's Gender Mainstreaming Categorization System

ADB Grouping	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not very Useful	Not at all Useful	Don't Know of the Categories	Total
Operations department	111	156	41	12	42	362
Direct operations support	16	49	16	1	39	121
Indirect operations support	0	6	2	0	4	12
Total	127	211	59	13	85	495
% of total	26%	43%	12%	3%	17%	100%

Note: Operations departments include the following departments: regional departments, Sectors Group, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department, Private Sector Operations Department, Office of Markets Development and Public-Private Partnership, Office of Safeguards. Direct operations support departments include Controller's Department, Economic Research and Development Impact Department, Independent Evaluation Department, Office of the Auditor General, Office of Anticorruption and Integrity, Office of the Compliance Review Panel, Office of the General Counsel, Office of Risk Management, Procurement, Portfolio, and Financial Management Department, Strategy, Policy, and Partnerships Department and Transformation Office. Indirect operations support includes the Department of Communications and Knowledge Management.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department), Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, Staff Perception Survey.

Box A5.3: Staff Views on ADB's Gender Categorization System

Several themes emerged from qualitative responses from staff regarding the gender categorization system.

Clarity and understanding. Many staff found the current system lacking in clarity and called for a more straightforward, numbered system and clearer explanations, reducing the reliance on acronyms.

Implementation and monitoring. There was concern that the system was often used as a box-ticking exercise rather than as a meaningful tool for advancing gender equality. Staff emphasized the need for more rigorous monitoring and support from the ADB gender team to ensure effective implementation.

Qualitative measures and impact. Respondents highlighted the importance of incorporating qualitative measures that capture nuanced gender outcomes and go beyond quantitative metrics. Suggestions included gender-sensitive budgeting and greater stakeholder engagement.

Improving definitions and training. There were calls for more inclusive definitions including all genders, refined categorization criteria, and enhanced training for project team leaders to ensure meaningful compliance rather than superficial adherence to guidelines.

Relevance and adaptability. Staff suggested that the system should be regularly updated to reflect emerging issues and be adaptable to different country contexts and intersectional factors such as race and disability.

Focus on meaningful impact. Concerns were raised that the system prioritizes categorization over projects that genuinely improve the lives of women and marginalized groups. Staff advocated for a shift towards a system that emphasized substantive gender impacts.

Integration with other policies. Some staff recommended integrating gender mainstreaming into broader policy frameworks, such as the safeguards policy, to ensure a comprehensive approach to gender equality.

Simplification and practicality. There was a strong call for simplifying the system to make it more user-friendly and practical, avoiding bureaucratic detachment from real project impacts.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department), Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, Staff Perception Survey.

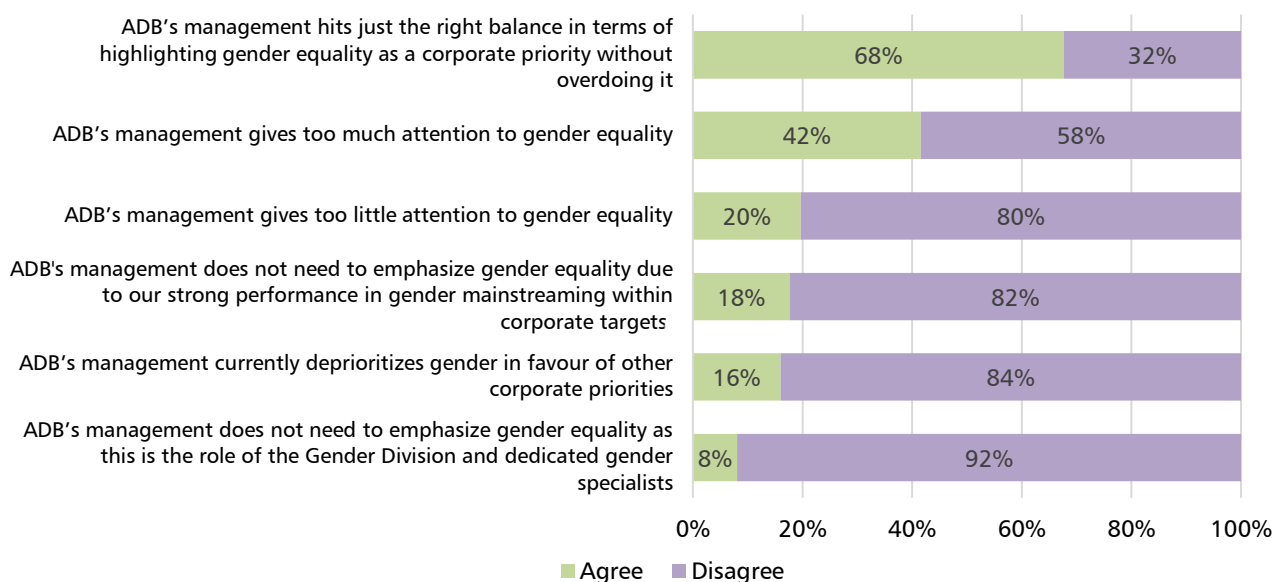
10. Despite finding the gender categorization useful overall, many staff survey respondents identified weaknesses in the system, citing its unclear terminology and confusing criteria. A significant number suggested simplifying the system to make it more practical and to avoid excessive bureaucracy being disconnected from real project impacts. Respondents also emphasized the need for updated criteria that better explained how transformative approaches to gender mainstreaming could be applied, noting that current practices often prioritized categorization over meaningful project alignment and outcomes. Concerns were raised about pressure from management to achieve specific categorizations, such as gender equity theme (GEN) or effective gender mainstreaming (EGM), even if these efforts were not aligned with project goals.

C. Role of Management in Supporting Gender Equality

11. Staff were of the view that ADB management struck the right balance in the attention it gave to gender equality. Despite the perceptions of adequate attention arising out of ADB's strong performance in achieving its corporate gender targets, there was strong support (82%) for maintaining or increasing the focus on gender equality. There was a clear preference for a "One ADB" approach to gender mainstreaming rather than delegating this responsibility solely to the Gender Equality Division.

12. Most respondents (58%) disagreed that ADB management gave too much attention to gender, although the opposite view was more common among longer-tenured and male staff. In the survey responses, 80% disagreed with the idea that management gave too little attention to gender, with 68% believing that management strikes the right balance. An overwhelming majority of respondents (82%) across categories did not agree that ADB management did not need to emphasize gender equality, given ADB's strong performance in its corporate targets for gender mainstreaming. Furthermore, 92% opposed the notion that gender equality should be solely the responsibility of the Gender Equality Division and dedicated specialists, indicating broad support for an integrated organizational approach. Lastly, 84% did not perceive management as deprioritizing gender relative to other corporate priorities (Figure A5.7)

Figure A5.7: Role of ADB's Management in Keeping Gender Equality on the Corporate Agenda

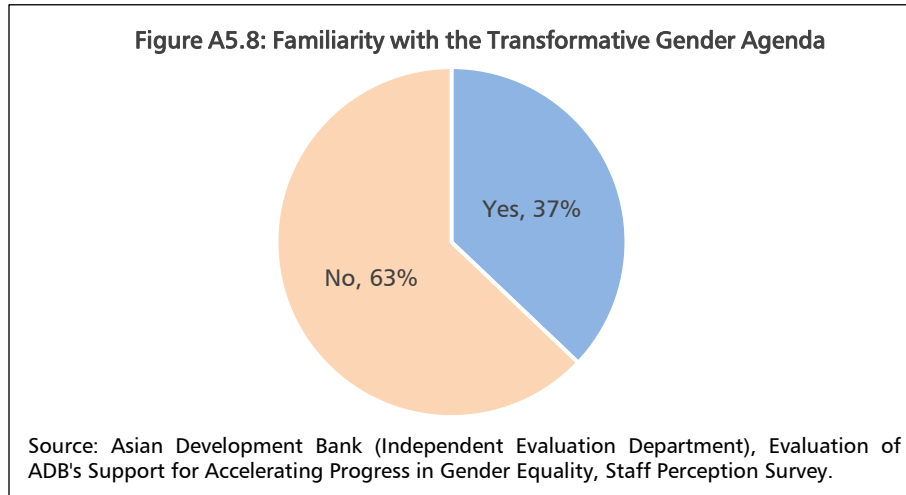


ADB = Asian Development Bank.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department), Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, Staff Perception Survey.

D. Awareness and Training

13. A significant gap in awareness exists regarding ADB's transformative gender agenda, with 63% of staff across various categories, excluding gender experts,³ reporting they were unfamiliar with it (Figure A5.8). During key informant interviews, staff underscored the need for increased awareness and clearer communication about ADB's transformative gender agenda.

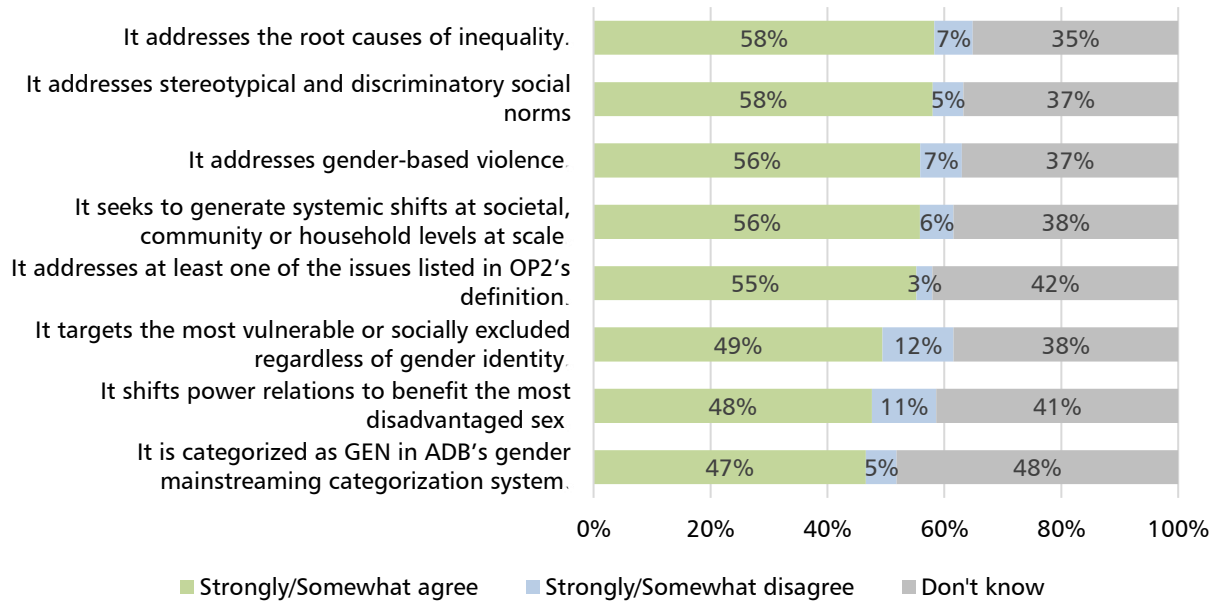


14. While most staff (58%) agreed that gender transformative approaches addressed the root causes of inequality, many (35%) remained unsure. Similarly, 55% believed gender transformative approaches were aligned with OP2's definition, but 42% were uncertain about the specifics. The responses indicated varied levels of understanding and confusion on whether the transformative gender agenda fitted within ADB's existing categorization system, which suggests that many staff may incorrectly assume that projects categorized as GEN automatically have transformative gender goals. There was mixed confidence in staff's understanding of whether gender transformative approaches addressed stereotypical and discriminatory norms, with 58% agreeing and 37% unsure. Additionally, only 49% agreed that such approaches targeted the most vulnerable groups, and 48% believed they shifted power relations to benefit the disadvantaged, but many remained uncertain.

15. Further, 56% of respondents agreed that a gender transformative approach addressed gender-based violence (GBV), yet 37% were unsure or unaware. This highlights the potential misconception that any project that addresses GBV activities can be considered transformative, which might not be the case. The most notable gap is in training and guidance, with only 12% of staff having received training on implementing the transformative gender agenda. There was some ambiguity on what constitutes the transformative gender agenda among staff as evidenced by the high proportion of staff who responded "don't know" to statements on what it is (or isn't). Most respondents (58%) agreed that the transformative gender agenda was about addressing the root causes of inequality, with about 22% strongly agreeing with the statement. However, over a third of respondents said they didn't know and therefore had no position on the statement (Figure A5.9).

³ Among gender experts, i.e., staff who indicated that gender equality is their primary job purpose), the majority (62%) indicated they were familiar with the transformative gender agenda.

Figure A5.9: Characteristics of a Gender Transformative Approach



ADB = Asian Development Bank, OP2 = operational priority 2, GEN = gender equity theme.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department), Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, Staff Perception Survey.

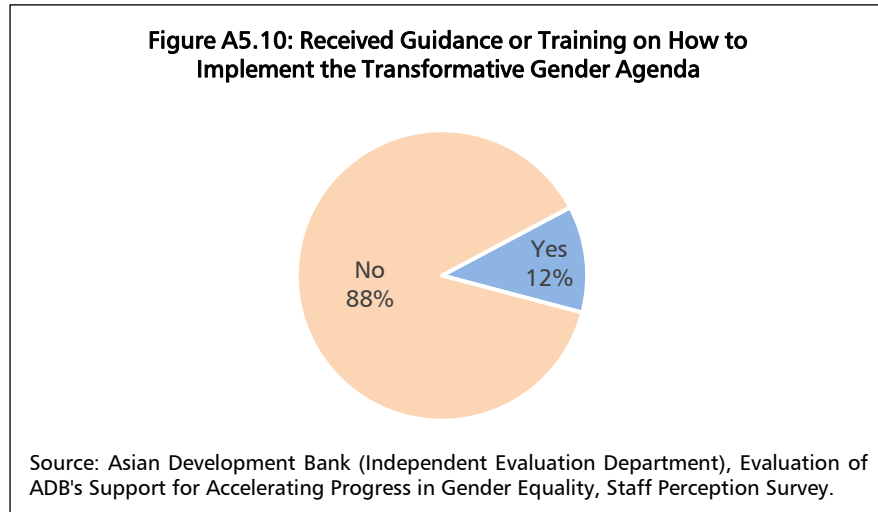
16. In open-ended responses, many respondents expressed a lack of familiarity with the concept of the transformative gender agenda, indicating a need to train staff on this topic. Some staff believed that ADB's current approach to gender transformation was detached from social inclusion, particularly in infrastructure projects. There was also skepticism about the practical implementation of the transformative gender agenda, with concerns about the imbalance between addressing the effects rather than the root causes of gender inequality. Cultural and societal norms were seen as significant barriers, and the current gender requirements in projects were perceived as add-ons rather than integral components.

17. Several responses aligned the transformative agenda with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) and the global gender equality agenda, emphasizing the importance of addressing intersectionality. However, the need for context-specific approaches and tailored solutions was highlighted, as well as the necessity for increased resources and capacity within ADB and executing agencies to implement transformative gender actions effectively. Some staff felt that the transformative agenda was too complex and subjective, requiring clearer definitions and guidelines. Overall, the responses suggested a demand for more comprehensive education on gender transformative approaches.

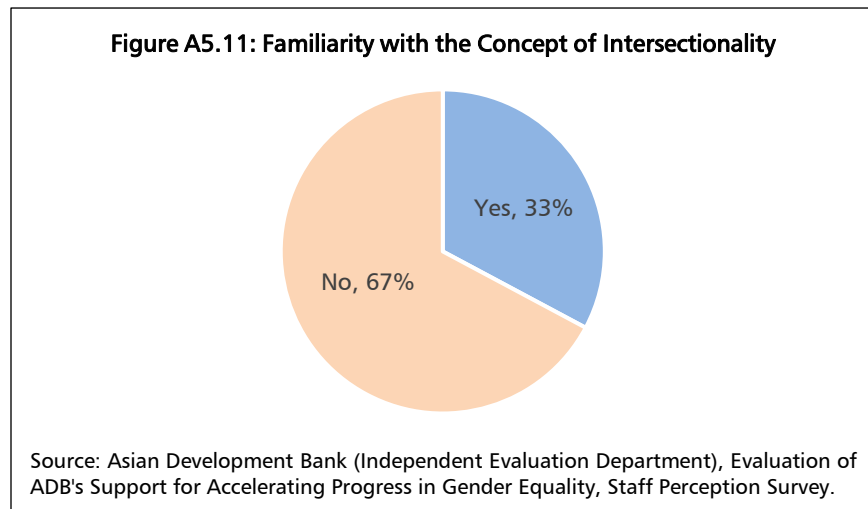
18. An important issue identified was the lack of guidance and training on implementing the transformative gender agenda, with 88% of respondents across categories reporting that they had not received any such training (Figure A5.10). Among gender experts, two thirds declared they had not received guidance or training to operationalize the transformative gender agenda. This lack of training likely contributed to the high proportion of respondents who answered "don't know" to statements related to the transformative gender agenda.

19. Many of the qualitative responses to this question called for additional training on how transformative change can be promoted as an integrated part of gender mainstreaming efforts and

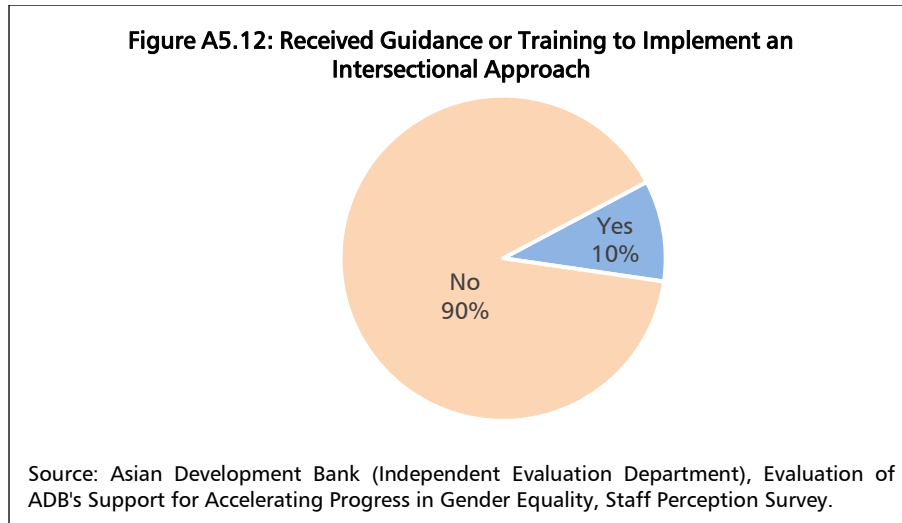
through additional gender-targeted programming. While clarity, guidance and training were frequently called for, the comments also underlined that this needs to include how to tailor and adapt such approaches to the local context since what will be transformative in one context may not work in another.



20. There is a significant gap in familiarity and training related to the concept of intersectionality among respondents. Only 33% of respondents were familiar with intersectionality, while 67% were not (Figure A5.11). However, 59% of gender experts reported familiarity with the concept. Most staff lacked an understanding of how intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination impact individuals.



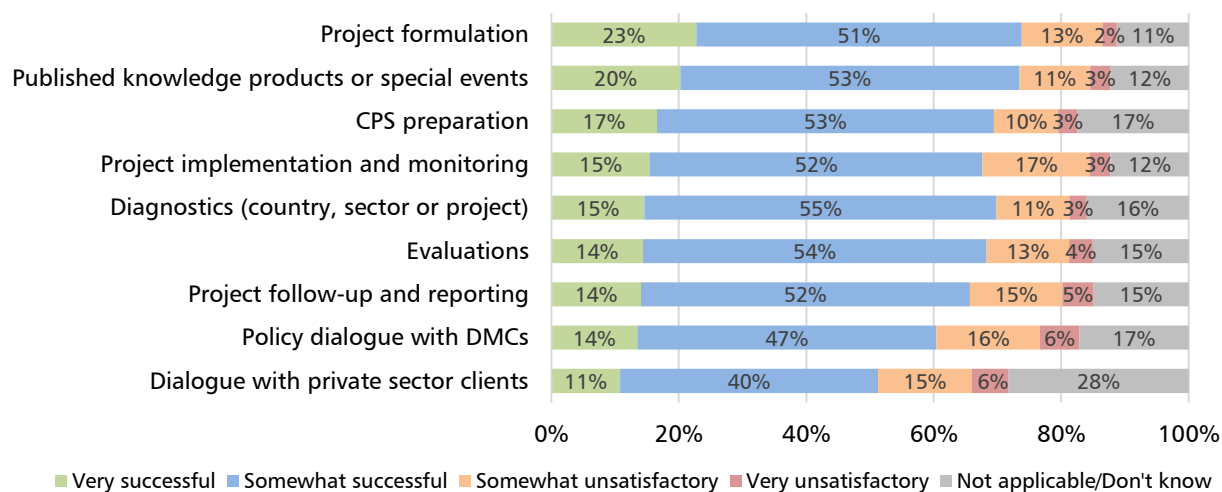
21. Across categories, a vast majority of respondents (90%) indicated they had not received guidance or training to implement or operationalize an intersectional approach (Figure A5.12). A higher proportion (32%) of gender experts have received such training. Lack of guidance or training on the intersectional approach may explain why few projects have adopted an intersectional lens based on this evaluation's portfolio analysis (Appendix 3).



E. Perceived Effectiveness in Achieving Gender Results

22. Most respondents (68%) reported not having attended ADB gender mainstreaming training, although 55% of gender experts had participated in such training. This indicates a need for expanded learning programs to foster broader ownership of gender mainstreaming within ADB. Among those who attended the training, 52% were uncertain about its usefulness. Only 27% found the training extremely or very useful, with an additional 17% rating it as somewhat useful. In contrast, over half of gender experts (53%) found the training beneficial, with 15% considering it somewhat useful.

23. A large majority of staff respondents considered ADB to be successful (very successful or somewhat successful) in promoting gender equality across its operations, including in analysis, country partnership strategy (CPS) preparation, project formulation, project implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation, dialogue and preparation of knowledge products. A higher proportion of gender experts were more positive about ADB's success in its operations. Of the various activities, staff perceived ADB to be most successful in project formulation. It was notable that the perceived success rate for dialogue with private sector clients was the lowest ranked activity (Figure A5.13).

Figure A5.13: How Well Does ADB Promote Gender Equality Across its Operations

CPS = country partnership strategy, DMC = developing member country.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department), Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, Staff Perception Survey.

F. Culture, Incentives, and Barriers

24. Only 29% of staff respondents indicated that gender equality was regularly discussed in their everyday work environment. Meanwhile, 40% reported that gender equality was occasionally a topic of discussion in their daily work, and over a quarter (26%) noted that it was rarely addressed in their work environment (Table A5.2).

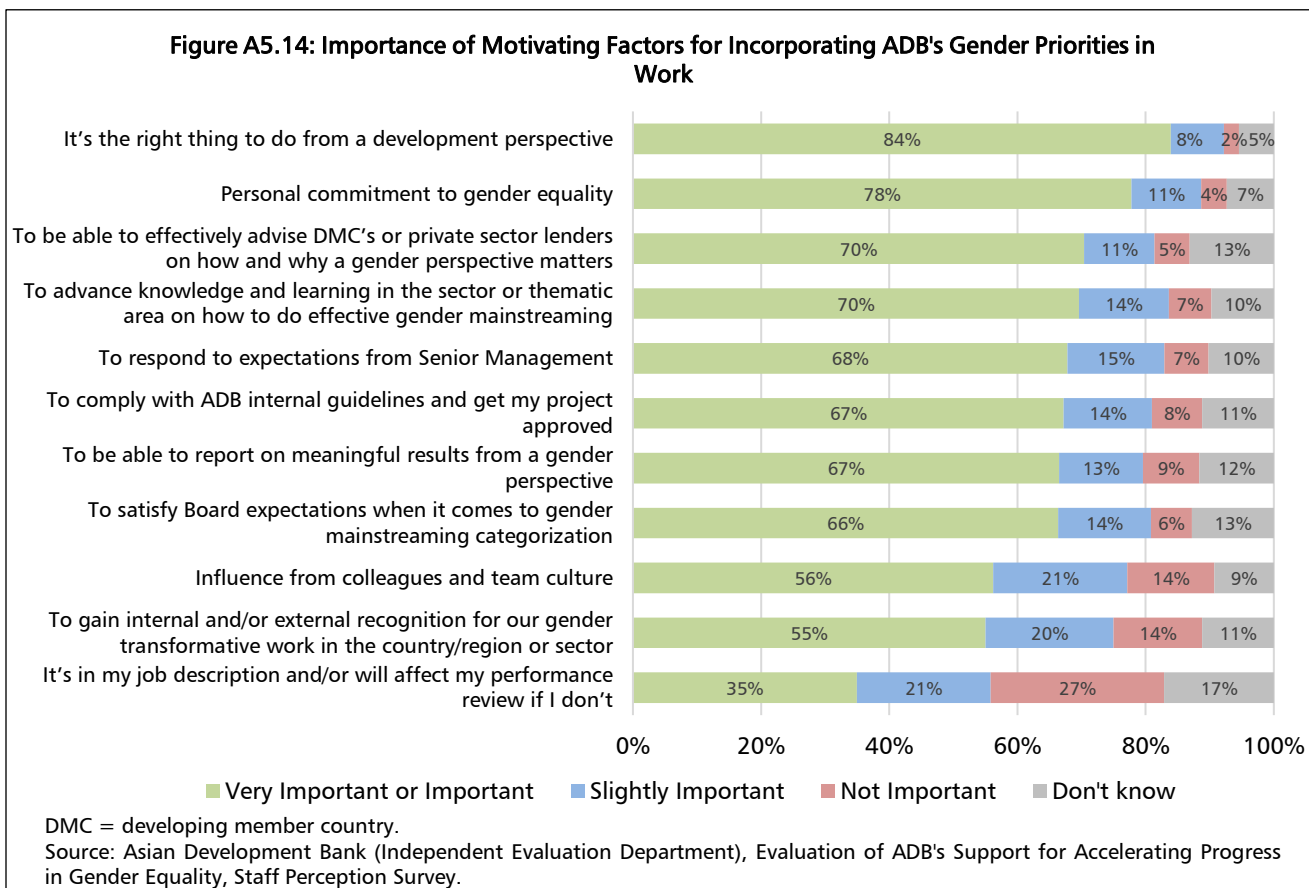
Table A5.2: Frequency of Gender Equality Discussion in Day-to-Day Work Environment

Category	Regularly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Grand Total
ADB Grouping					
Operations department	103	131	66	8	308
Direct operations support	17	38	43	9	107
Indirect operations support	3	2	3		8
Gender					
Female	72	77	80	13	242
Male	46	85	30	4	165
Prefer not to say	5	9	2	0	16
Total	123	171	112	17	423
% of total	29%	40%	26%	4%	100%

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department), Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, Staff Perception Survey.

25. The responses to the question, "how important are the following factors as motivations for incorporating ADB's gender priorities in your work?" revealed that personal and ethical commitments were key drivers for staff in integrating gender priorities. Notably, 84% of respondents view advancing gender equality as the right thing to do from a development perspective, with 49% rating it "very important" and 35% "important." Additionally, 70% of staff are motivated by a desire to advance knowledge and learning in their sector or thematic area, and an equal percentage are influenced by the need to advise DMCs or private sector clients on incorporating a gender perspective. This demonstrates that ADB staff are driven by their values, professional growth, and the impact they can have through their advisory roles.

26. On the other hand, compliance-related factors also played a critical role in motivating staff to prioritize gender considerations. The need to comply with ADB internal guidelines motivated 67% of respondents, with 26% rating it "very important" and 41% as "important." Reporting on meaningful results from a gender perspective motivated 67% of respondents. Responding to senior management expectations influenced 67% of staff, with 22% rating it "very important" and 46% "important," while satisfying Board expectations motivated 66% of staff, with 24% rating it "very important" and 42% "important." The influence from colleagues and team culture, and the need for recognition were moderate motivators, while job description and performance review impacts were less influential, motivating only 34% of respondents. Overall, while personal and ethical values were important, compliance-related factors were still significant motivators (Figure A5.14).



27. About two thirds of staff respondents (67%) considered responding to ADB management's expectations on gender tagging to be a very important or important motivating factor (with 22% considering this to be very important) for incorporating gender in their work. The majority of respondents (78%) considered their personal commitment to gender equality a very important or important motivating factor (with 42% considering this very important) for incorporating gender in their work.

28. **Primary barriers to incorporating gender equality into work.** The main barriers reported by respondents included a lack of government or client capacity or interest (181 mentions), lack of time or internal incentives (178 mentions), and lack of knowledge and skills (125 mentions). Lack of resources for funding gender specialists was cited 97 times. Other notable barriers included lack of clear internal policy or guidelines (99 mentions), lack of tailored tipsheets (106 mentions), and missing gender analysis (121 mentions). Less frequently mentioned issues included conflicting internal advice (68 mentions), lack of timely advice (71 mentions), and limited management support (50 mentions). Only 59 respondents reported facing no barriers. Responses varied slightly between headquarters staff and resident mission

staff. Headquarters staff most frequently cited lack of knowledge and skill (referring to internal ADB knowledge and skills) as the most important barrier, while for resident mission staff, the most frequently selected barrier was lack of government or client capacity or interest. A higher share of resident mission staff also saw the lack of complementary TA resources as being an important barrier than did headquarters staff.

29. The qualitative responses provided further insights into perceived barriers: many respondents highlighted a need for clearer guidelines, with some expressing frustration over the lack of specific advice on implementing gender policies. There were also concerns about the over-politicization of gender targets and the need for more practical, context-specific support. Some respondents noted that gender mainstreaming often feels like a box-ticking exercise rather than a substantive effort to address gender inequality. Additionally, there were calls for better training and resources, as well as more support from senior management to drive meaningful gender equality initiatives. The feedback also included comments on the need for greater engagement and understanding from government and client partners to successfully integrate gender perspectives into projects.

Table A5.3: Most Frequently Cited Barriers to Incorporating Gender Equality in Work

Barriers	Ranking (Most Frequently Cited)	Number of Responses		Total
		(Headquarters)	(Resident Mission)	
Lack of government or client capacity or interest	1	107	74	181
Lack of knowledge and skills	2	125	53	178
Lack of time or internal incentives	3	81	44	125
Missing gender analysis	4	87	34	121
Lack of tipsheets tailored to sectors and themes	5	79	27	106
Lack of a clear internal policy, framework or guidelines	6	79	20	99
Lack of resources for funding gender specialists, dedicated gender staff or consultants	7	67	30	97
Lack of complementary technical assistance resources	8	56	36	92
Lack of timely advice	9	46	25	71
Conflicting internal advice	10	49	19	68
No barrier	11	35	24	59
Limited support from ADB's management or immediate supervisor	12	36	14	50

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department), Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, Staff Perception Survey.

G. Open-Ended Feedback

30. The survey's final question provided respondents with an open-ended comment box for them to share additional views or concerns. This resulted in 75 detailed qualitative responses. A common theme among these responses was the perception that the current policy framework was outdated and not fully aligned with the transformative goals of SDG 5. Respondents called for more inclusive policies that would integrate social inclusion and address the challenges faced by all genders, not just women and girls. Specific suggestions included expanding the definition of gender beyond the traditional binary division and considering the intersectionality of various social factors. Respondents emphasized the need for enhanced internal capacity and continuous training. There were complaints that ADB did not follow through on its own policies and some staff suggested practical support measures such as providing day care facilities to support working parents, and comprehensive gender mainstreaming training that reaches all staff levels, ensuring that everyone, from project teams to management, understands and values gender equality.

31. Implementation challenges were a recurring theme in the feedback provided. Many respondents highlighted a significant gap between ADB's gender equality rhetoric and actual practice. Clearer guidelines, more timely advice, and realistic gender targets are needed to avoid the perception of gender policies as mere box-ticking exercises. The lack of resources, both financial and in terms of dedicated gender specialists, was frequently cited as a major barrier. Respondents stressed the importance of involving gender specialists from the start of project discussions to ensure a meaningful integration of gender perspectives. Additionally, staff felt that context-specific gender analysis and interventions that considered cultural and social norms were crucial for effective gender mainstreaming.

Box A5.4: Noteworthy Staff Quotes

The following quotes highlight respondents' sentiments.

- It is very important that gender specialists are involved from the very beginning in the project discussions, i.e., scoping, project readiness, upstream work, PPR preparation, etc. with the client.
- The politicization of gender has harmed our progress. As project officers, we spend so much time telling the story management wants to hear rather than what is possible within the project context.
- Gender mainstreaming is not very much applied in ADB. We advocate for it to government and the private sector, but internally we lack the application of those principles.
- A transformative gender programming approach has to be intersectional and inclusive of all genders and agender people. It should not just be about meeting targets but fostering real change.
- Gender-related educational events should be open to all staff members, regardless of position, to promote knowledge and inclusion within our workplace.
- The lack of clear guidelines and practical advice on gender integration leads to a box-ticking exercise rather than meaningful change.
- There is a significant gap between ADB's gender equality rhetoric and the actual implementation of initiatives.
- ADB is out of step and behind other MDBs with its current policy that focuses only on women and girls. The five pillars of OP2 are only small parts of the SDG 5 transformative agenda.
- Clarity on the mandate and availability of resources to change hearts and minds—to do the right thing—is crucial for real progress.

ADB = Asian Development Bank, MDB = multilateral development bank, OP2 = operational priority 2, SDG = sustainable development goals.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department). Evaluation of ADB's Support for Accelerating Progress in Gender Equality, Staff Perception Survey.