

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

As you know, in April of this year, the World Bank will publish the second draft of your Environmental & Social Framework. This important document lays out the safeguards the Bank and its funding recipients need to meet when funding development projects. It is these safeguards that help to ensure the Bank is not contributing to human rights abuses, environmental damage, and/or further economic development that is not sustainable. Safeguards are meant to benefit people, and we need these safeguards to have real meaning and real impact – not just words on paper.

The first draft of the Framework was released in July of last year - with glaring omissions. For one, there are no built-in safeguards for women and girls. Strong safeguards for women and girls are fundamental to ensuring democratic, sustainable, and equitable development for all. This fundamental safeguard is long overdue, as the Bank will soon mark its 75th year. In truth, women and girls around the world continue to experience discrimination on a much larger scale than their male counterparts - including higher levels of sexual and other violence – on top of earning an average of roughly 20% less than men.

As women from across the globe, we know full well the value of and need for a stand-alone gender safeguard from the World Bank. When faithfully and fully executed, it could prevent and mitigate the negative societal impacts and project externalities that can result from many Bank projects. Negative impacts, whether social, economic, or environmental, affect women and girls at a much higher rate. This is especially true among marginalized populations and people living in poverty. And in most countries - including where the Bank finances projects and development - women and girls are often overrepresented among the poorest and most marginalized. It is all but impossible to combat poverty and exclusion without effective safeguards that target woman and girls.

The data on gender inequality is well known to you and both inside and outside the World Bank. We believe the Bank is committed to promoting gender equality, and it needs to take action to back up its commitment to confronting this problem. Strong safeguards tackling women's needs and interests are a piece of the puzzle and a real part of the solution. And it would ensure women and girls do not get systematically cut out of the economic development the Bank is entrusted to generate. Now, in 2015, it's time the Bank makes good on its promise to ensure women are not harmed by but rather can contribute to and benefit equally from World Bank financed development projects.

To meet this goal, the new draft Environmental & Social Framework must at minimum include a stand-alone gender safeguard. Without this critically important step, we cannot continue to believe that the World Bank is taking its commitment to gender equality seriously. And that would be a true catastrophe, not just for women and girls, but for a safer environment and a more democratic and just world.

We trust that neither the Bank nor you want to miss this rare opportunity to make such an important step forward for women and girls across the globe. The eyes of the world are upon you Dr. Kim and we do not believe you will disappoint nor shrink from this just cause.

Sincerely,

Gloria Steinem

Writer and Feminist Activist

Winnie Byanyima

Executive Director of Oxfam International

Member of the World Bank Advisory Council on Gender and Development

Marcela Tovar-Restrepo

Board Chair of Women's Environment and Development Organization